

ALIENATION AND THEATRICALITY  
IN  
BRECHT AND DIDEROT

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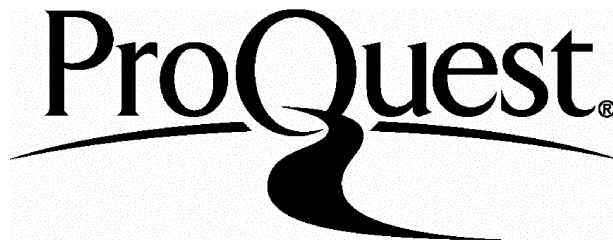
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## Description of the Practice/Theory Relation in this Project

This research project comprises a theoretical as well as a practical component. The theoretical component is contained in the form of a written dissertation, in vol. 1 of the submitted material.

The practical component implied the investigation of ‘alienation and theatricality’ in Denis Diderot’s *Neveu de Rameau* in directorial terms. This involved a process of several stages, culminating in a stage production of *Rameau’s Nephew*, performed for 4 weeks in October 1998 at the Citizens Theatre, Glasgow. Prior to the final staging at the Citizens, I translated *Le Neveu de Rameau* into English with my collaborator Nina Pearlman, and conducted an experimental workshop with actors. My role in the Citizens production was to direct rehearsals and design set and costumes.

The practical component of this project is represented in a video that documents the final staging of *Rameau’s Nephew*. However, I wish to stress that I did not have the resources to restage the piece in a film studio, which would have done better justice to the medium of film. The production was filmed in an extra run outside of performance time, adjusted to the requirements of camera work, which meant that spatiality, choreography and the visuality of the piece were slightly altered.

As documentary material of my practical experimentation with Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew* and its implicit concerns with ‘alienation and theatricality’, vol. 2 provides the video of the Citizens production and a copy of the translated adaptation of *Rameau’s Nephew*. The translation was undertaken specifically for the purpose of a staging. In this, the spoken and rhythmic dimension of the Diderotian idiom was of utmost importance and in order to preserve it we tried as much as possible to translate into English the highly specific punctuation of Diderot’s text.

## Abstract

My research re-evaluates the Brechtian concept of alienation through the dramaturgical and literary thought of Denis Diderot. This project consists of a theoretical dissertation as well as a theatre production of Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, performed at the *Citizens Theatre*, Glasgow, 1998, and documented in an attached video.

Although the Brecht-Diderot connection has been established in previous studies, most notably by Roland Barthes, my aim is to show that we can enlarge and differentiate our understanding of alienation as a dramaturgical concept by focussing on the conceptual shifts emerging from a comparison between both writers. Rather than interpret Diderot as a historical predecessor of Brecht, as it has been proposed in the past, I have explored conceptual difference and contrast in the framework of two separate historical contexts, thereby calling into question the ideological positivism underlying Brecht's concept of alienation.

The outcome of my examination suggests that Brecht's theory of acting as self-alienation does not necessarily lead to its intended effect of alienated detachment on the part of the spectator. In opposition, Diderot concludes from the actor's self-alienation an empathetic response in the spectator, placing this theory at the core of eighteenth-century bourgeois theatre ideology. Moreover, if Brecht's concept of alienation is explicitly antagonistic to the notion of subjectivity, an analysis of Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau* shows how alienation relies on subjective experience. Alienation leads to an effect of recognition once the spectator has recognised himself caught in a situation of aesthetic delusion. Contrary to Brecht's Marxist concept of alienation which aims to sharpen the spectator's political consciousness, thereby instigating resistance to the alienated conditions of capitalism, we can observe in *Le Neveu de Rameau* the strategic employment of alienation as an epistemological means of questioning the precepts of moralism, introducing a notion of critique dependent on ethical self-interrogation.

## Acknowledgements

This project has enjoyed the generous input of many *others*. Thanks to a highly stimulating environment created by the research community at the Slade School of Fine Art, the active engagement of my supervisors and discussions with friends, far from being lonely, the work on this PhD has been a process of continual communication and exchange.

Above all I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisors. In terms of *practice*, I wish to thank Philip Prowse for facilitating and supporting me in my directorial debut at the *Citizens Theatre*, the most exceptional theatre environment I could have hoped for. In terms of *theory*, I am most grateful to Marian Hobson for opening my mind to the thought of Diderot, the many inspiring discussions on Brecht, Diderot and the theatre, and for consistently accompanying me through every single step of this PhD. I wish to thank Michael Newman for his tutorial loyalty beyond institutions from the beginning to the very end of my PhD, for following both the practical as well as the theoretical side of my project, and providing me with much intellectual stimulation through seminars and dialogue. Moreover, I want to express my gratitude to Norman Bryson for his support in the writing-up period of my PhD, especially for his active presence and comments in the very final stages.

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Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the support of both the Graduate School at UCL and the University of London Research Fund for offering a grant which facilitated the production of the *Rameau's Nephew* video. My thanks go also to the Citizens Theatre for accommodating and facilitating the special requirements of shooting the video and generally their assistance during the production period of *Rameau's Nephew*.

For lack of space I can only mention a few of my friends who contributed with inspiration, discussion and practical support to my PhD. I especially wish to thank Aura Satz, for her most generous involvement in the final proof-reading and editing process. The same goes for Carolyn Deby and Miranda Wallace. I wish to thank my collaborator Nina Pearlman for making the translation of *Rameau's Nephew* a highly dynamic process, and Pablo Bronstein for pointing out to me the affinities between Diderot and Goya. For his beautiful work and countless weekends spent over editing the *Rameau's Nephew* video, I wish to thank Justin Badger; and Andrea Fredericksen in multiple roles as general PhD-advisor, technical sound assistant, friend and cousin. And thank you, person with a variation on the name of 'Rameau', for directorial advice during the *Rameau's Nephew* rehearsals and your assistance in helping me, from time to time, to alienate myself from 'Alienation and Theatricality'.

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## Reference System for Abbreviations and Translations

### Abbreviations:

BWSt6	<i>Bertolt Brecht: Stücke 6</i> (1988)
BWJ1	<i>Bertolt Brecht Werke: Journale 1</i> (1994)
BWP3	<i>Bertolt Brecht: Prosa 3</i> (1995)
BWS1	<i>Bertolt Brecht: Schriften 1</i> (1993)
BWS2	<i>Bertolt Brecht: Schriften 2</i> (1993)
BWS3	<i>Bertolt Brecht: Schriften 3</i> (1993)
BWB1	<i>Bertolt Brecht: Briefe 1</i> (1998)
BWB2	<i>Bertolt Brecht: Briefe 2</i> (1998)
BBP3ii	<i>Bertolt Brecht Plays</i> , vol. 3, part 2 (1987)
BBJ	<i>Bertolt Brecht Journals</i> (1993)
BBL	<i>Bertolt Brecht Letters</i> (1990)
DOE	<i>Diderot Œuvres IV: Esthétiques –Théâtre</i> (1996)
DOC	<i>Diderot Œuvres II: Contes</i> (1994)
DOP	<i>Diderot Œuvres I: Philosophie</i> (1994)
PsC	Diderot, <i>Paradoxe sur le comédien</i> , ed. Ernest Dupuy (1968)
NdR	Diderot, <i>Le Neveu de Rameau</i> , ed. Fabre (1950)
RN	Diderot, <i>Rameau's Nephew / D'Alembert's Dream</i> , trans. Leonard Tancock (1966)
PoA	Diderot, <i>The Paradox of Acting by Denis Diderot and Masks and Faces by William Archer</i> , trans. Harris Pollock (1957)

### Translations of Quotations:

All translations of French and German quotations are attached in the Appendix. Each Foreign language quotation is marked with a number in brackets, as for example (1), which corresponds to the respective translation in the appendix. Numbers restart with each chapter. I have only included translations of the main literary sources investigated, namely, Brecht, Diderot, Rousseau and Hegel. Otherwise I have quoted directly from the English translation.



## Introduction

### *Alienating Alienation*

*Alienation*, in German *Verfremdung* is a term which in the theory and practice of theatre has come to be inextricably linked with the name of Bertolt Brecht. As an aesthetic concept we identify it with Marxist politics and aesthetic notions of twentieth-century modernism. Anti-naturalism, fragmentation, minimalism and dialectics: these are the associations that inevitably come to mind in relation to the notion of alienation as a dramaturgical concept. The deduction of this aesthetic from a Marxist and Hegelian definition of *Entfremdung* and its historical inscription in twentieth-century modernism thus represent the contextual fixity of our understanding of *Verfremdung*.

However, alienation could be said to partake in the structure of the theatre itself producing a conceptual connection which has hardly been analysed. A strictly Marxist and modernist derivation of Brechtian alienation neglects the ways in which the term alienation might be profoundly embroiled with the notion of theatricality itself. It is the conceptual possibilities of a conjuncture between alienation and theatricality which has determined the research of the following investigation.

The starting point of this research project has been an interest in questions such as: how does the Brechtian *V-Effekt* function? Does it in fact work? If it does not work, would it be possible to establish an alternative notion of alienation relative to a theatre outside the Brechtian tradition? Can alienation still be seen as a viable category in the practice of theatre? It is in the writings of Denis Diderot, in particular his *Paradoxe sur le comédien* and *Le Neveu de Rameau* that this interrogation has found an answer. Not only do Diderot's writings offer a complex and rich source of both aesthetic and thematic issues on the subject of alienation, but Diderot's historical position between pre-modernism and modernism also facilitates an interpretation of aesthetic alienation

which precedes the Hegelian and Marxist determination of Brecht's *Verfremdung*. Here it becomes possible to reach aspects of alienation which Brecht did not sufficiently take into account. Moreover, it is in Diderot's thought that one can discover a strand in which theatre is considered as alienation and alienation as theatrical. In *Le Paradoxe sur le comédien*, alienation is implicated into the process of theatrical representation itself. In *Le Neveu de Rameau*, the notion of alienation is inherent to the social concept of the 'pantomime du monde'. The notion of alienation emanates from the structures of a *theatrum mundi*, not from a Marxist definition of alienation which would be situated extraneous to the structure of theatre itself.

Although this mutual reflexivity of both terms could also be extricated from the finer tunings of Brecht's theoretical writings, the way in which Brechtian alienation has been conceived of, applied and perpetuated both theoretically as well as practically, has nevertheless become entirely bound up with Marxist theory. This, as we will see in the comparison between the *Paradoxe* and Brecht's theoretical elaborations of the *V-effect*, has led to the subjugation of an awareness of the intricate traversing of alienation and theatricality to the primacy of aesthetic-political intents. It is precisely this problematic positivism in Brechtian alienation which I intend to bring into focus in the following examination. My attempt to analyse Brecht through the perspective of Diderot has been preceded by a number of publications based on the similarities of Brecht and Diderot. Before I show how difference rather than similarity has constituted the predominant methodological approach of this comparative study, I wish to present the main arguments of previous discussions on Brecht and Diderot.

### 1. THE BRECHT-DIDEROT CONNECTION

My dissertation has nothing original in establishing a connection between Brecht's and Diderot's dramaturgical theories. Most notably Roland Barthes' essay 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', first published in 1973, has exposed the conceptual similarities that can be drawn from both authors aesthetic theories.<sup>1</sup> At the basis of Barthes' comparison between Diderot, Brecht and Eisenstein one finds the *dioptric* determination of Western

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Responsibility of Forms: Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), pp. 89-97.

Theatre, namely ‘the link connecting geometry and the theatre’, an aesthetic practice, which ‘calculates the *observed* place of things’.<sup>2</sup> Such a theatre of a geometrical kind of visuality, he contends, has superseded an alternative possibility of representation, first stipulated by Pythagoras who drew a link between mathematics and acoustics. Barthes subsumes both Brecht and Diderot into this history of the set visual scene: Diderot as the theoretician of the tableau, Brecht as the theoretician of the *gestus* and the *epic*, which could be interpreted as a series of tableaux. Both the tableau and the *epic*, as stilled image, constitute according to Barthes a ‘fetish object’<sup>3</sup>, in that they posit a scene of political and moral signification, despite the fact that Diderot aimed to encourage the emancipation of the bourgeoisie, and Brecht called for the revolution of the working class. The *Tableau* as well as the *gestus* are located at the most *pregnant* moment of expression, comprising in themselves ‘the present, the past, and the future’, i.e., the historical meaning of the represented gesture.<sup>4</sup> Both aesthetics involve a process of ‘machination’,<sup>5</sup> whereby the actor surpasses his own subjectivity in view of a historical and political project. It is due to this self-ridding of subjectivity that representation becomes imbued with characteristic qualities and aesthetic gestures become socially critical and politicised. Finally, Barthes incorporates his aesthetics of the *dioptric* into an economy of the law:

In theatre, in cinema, in traditional literature, things are always seen from *somewhere*; this is the geometric basis of representation: there must be a fetishistic subject in order to project this tableau. This point of origin is always the Law, law of struggle, law of meaning. Every militant art, therefore, must be representative, legal.<sup>6</sup>

In order to conceptualise a political aesthetic based on the principle of the *dioptric*, Barthes thus undertakes an approximation of Diderot and Brecht, likening certain aspects of their theoretical thought, thoughts that are also relevant to the question of aesthetic alienation, which I will come back to when laying out the main points of my research project.

A concern with conceptual similarities in Brecht’s and Diderot’s thought can also be found in more specialised Brechtian scholarship. To this date there is however only one

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 89. For the term *dioptric* see p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 93. Barthes adopts the idea of the *pregnant moment* from Lessing’s *Laocoön*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

published comparative study devoted to the two authors, Theo Buck's *Brecht und Diderot: Oder über die Schwierigkeiten der Rationalität in Deutschland*.<sup>7</sup> Buck's intention is to establish a common ground on the basis of a shared politicised aesthetic of enlightenment. He interprets Brecht's plans to found a *Diderot-Society* (1935) for dramaturgical research and experimentation, as a tribute to the French Philosopher's commitment to the project of enlightenment and the public and reformist function of art.<sup>8</sup> Buck deduces from Brecht's turn towards Diderot the absence of a similar Enlightenment tradition in Germany. His comparison suggests that both Diderot and Brecht understood literature as pervaded with social implications. Both understood themselves as representatives of a new political system and conducted a clear analysis of the sociological transformations implied. From their political awareness follow their 'critical aggressiveness' and their commitment to a didactic project of theatre aiming at social progress.<sup>9</sup> On the basis of rationalism they pursued a concept of literature at the service of enlightenment, in which political and moral intentions are explicitly put forth.<sup>10</sup>

Buck's 'comparison' is strongly oriented towards Brecht. Thus he assimilates Diderot's theory of self-alienated acting into Brecht's theory of acting as alienation. Both acting systems supposedly become part of the Brechtian concept of a dramaturgy of intervention (*Dramaturgie des Eingreifens*) on the path towards political change.<sup>11</sup> Both propose a realism that *presents* rather than *represents*. Moreover, both dramatic theorists have in common that they developed innovative forms of expression in direct correspondence to social critique: Diderot attempted to replace the aristocratic *tragédie classique* by the *drame bourgeois*; Brecht's aesthetic revolution consisted in 'deconstructing' bourgeois naturalism by means of the *epic* drama. Their respective materialism in combination with a concrete kind of political realism is a motivation for

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<sup>7</sup> (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> On the project of the *Diderot-Society*, see pp. 11-2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3 and pp. 20-6. Raymond Joly, in his study of Diderot's *genre sérieux*, also alludes to this affinity between the Brecht of the *Kleines Organon für das Theater* and the Diderot of the *Entretiens* and the *Discours*, with more awareness of the differences that separate the two theatre theoreticians: the dramaturgical principles attacked by Brecht are exactly those which Diderot aimed to establish in order to create a theatre for the bourgeois class. See *Deux études sur la préhistoire du réalisme: Diderot / Rétif de la Bretonne* (Quebec: Presses de l'université Laval, 1969), pp. 38. Likewise, Daniel Mortier, in a short article on the reception of Brecht in France in the 1950s, points to the problems of conflating Brecht and Diderot, but without further investigation. In 'Brecht et Diderot', *Obliques*, no. 20-21 (1979), pp. 101-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

both of them to propagate a dramaturgical theory of the protagonist as social construct: Diderot, in the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*,<sup>12</sup> aims to deduce the *dramatis personae* from their condition; Brecht counts as the dramaturgical inventor of the social *gestus*.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of a similarity of literary forms, Buck compares Brecht's dialectical and open form of the epic theatre to Diderot's narrative dialogism. What is characteristic of both forms, he argues, is the interruption of narrative or dramatic unity through reflection and commentary. The process of narration, opened up to commentary, provocation and irony becomes a process of enlightenment itself. Buck concludes from this a 'dialectisation' (*Dialektisierung*) of narration and the overcoming of a form of narrative temporality which re-presents a past through a kind of narrative that remains self-present. Temporal escapism is replaced by an effort to render tangible the notion of concrete time and history, implicitly in Diderot, more explicitly in Brecht's concept of historisation (*Historisierung*).<sup>14</sup> Brecht's actual inspiration from Diderot's dialogical anti-novelistic literature is in fact documented in his diary entry of October 1st 1940:<sup>15</sup>

Ich las in Diderots 'Jakob der Fatalist', als mir eine neue Möglichkeit aufging, den alten Ziffel-Plan zu verwirklichen. Die Art, Zwiegespräche einzuflechten, hatte mir schon bei Kivi gefallen. Dazu habe ich vom 'Puntila' noch den Ton im Ohr. Ich schrieb probeweise 2 kleine Kapitel und nannte das Ganze 'Flüchtlingsgespräche'.<sup>16</sup> (1)

A definite connection between Brecht's *Flüchtlingsgespräche*<sup>17</sup> and Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste et son maître*<sup>18</sup> can thus be established. Buck concludes that the self-reflective form of dialogue and dialectics at work in both authors' style stands at the service of moral and political enlightenment. Buck furthermore draws attention to a linguistic aesthetic of masking language in both authors, resultant from their insistence on a literature of enlightenment in disguise. Historical context forced both of them to operate amidst and against a highly oppressive political system. Buck compares here the highly precarious censorship situation of Diderot's *Encyclopédie* project to Brecht's early publishing practice under nazism.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> DOE, pp. 1131-1189.

<sup>13</sup> Buck (1971), pp. 12-20.

<sup>14</sup> On narrativity, pp. 31-40.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> BWJ1, p. 430.

<sup>17</sup> BWP3, pp. 195-327.

<sup>18</sup> DOC, pp. 713-919.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-71.

The Brecht-scholar Reinhold Grimm concludes from Brecht's reference to the *Diderot Society* in his 1939 London edition of the *Svendborger Gedichte*,<sup>20</sup> and his lecture on *Über experimentelles Theater*<sup>21</sup> the same year, in which Brecht allied himself explicitly with the Enlightenment figures of Lessing and Diderot, that Brecht must have been familiar with the dramaturgical theories of Diderot and his contemporary Francesco Riccoboni. Their dramaturgical systems must therefore have exerted a direct influence on Brecht's method of acting.<sup>22</sup> Grimm sees as common ground between all three theorists their critique of an acting technique based on empathy (*Einfühlung*). What distinguishes them is that Diderot and Lessing aimed to intensify empathetic responses in the auditorium in consequence of a non-identificatory technique of alienation, whilst Brecht employs non-identification in the actor in order for the spectator to be liberated from empathy.<sup>23</sup> Grimm thus interprets Brecht's *Diderot-Society* as both homage as well as an attack on Diderot.

In his afterword to the 1964 edition of *Denis Diderot: Das Paradox über den Schauspieler*,<sup>24</sup> Grimm identifies Brecht as the single theoretical successor of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. According to Grimm, Brecht consciously adapted principles of Diderot's acting theory and goes as far as to suggest that Brecht's innovations would perhaps not have been possible without Diderot. Judging from the formal as well as thematic similarities between Brecht's *Dialog über die Schauspielkunst*<sup>25</sup> in 1929 and the *Paradoxe*, Brecht's preoccupation with Diderot must have started early. Nonetheless, reliable references to Brecht's interest in Diderot can only be dated back to the above-mentioned reference to the *Diderot-Society* and the lecture on acting in 1939. During his exile in Denmark, Brecht aimed to address other prominent dramatists and filmmakers who shared a politics of Marxist resistance as well as formal innovativeness and experimentalism. Potential members were to be Pär Lagerkvist, Jean Renoir, Erwin

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<sup>20</sup> Brecht commits the publication of his book to the patronage of the Diderot-Gesellschaft: 'Dieses Buch ist herausgegeben unter dem Patronat der Diderot-Gesellschaft und der American Guild for German Cultural Freedom.' (2) *Bertolt Brecht: Svendborger Gedichte* (London: Malik-Verlag, 1939).

<sup>21</sup> BWS2, pp. 540-57.

<sup>22</sup> 'Verfremdung: Beiträge zu Wesen und Ursprung eines Begriffs', *Revue de littérature comparée*, vol. 35, no. 2 (1961), pp. 207-36.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>24</sup> Trans. Katharina Scheinfuß (Frankfurt: Insel, 1964), pp. 71-9.

<sup>25</sup> BWS1, pp. 279-82.

Piscator, W. H. Auden, and others.<sup>26</sup> Grimm also indicates the formal and in part even thematic parallels that can be drawn between, on the one hand, Brecht's *Flüchtlingsgespräche* and *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*,<sup>27</sup> and on the other, Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste et son maître*. Grimm interprets the similarity in title between these two plays as an explicit reference to Diderot, but he also suggests that apart from Brecht's sympathy for Diderot's 'master-slave dialectic'<sup>28</sup> the former would have been inspired by Diderot's labyrinthine way of thinking.

Grimm determines in the concept of alienation both the remarkable affinity as well as the sharp contrast between the two acting theorists: for Diderot *aliénation* signifies loss of self through an excessive devotion to *sensibilité*; for Brecht alienation means consciousness, rationality and distance.<sup>29</sup> In this Grimm puts his finger on a problem which will be essential for this dissertation. However, he does not go into any further depths of this apparent divergence. Moreover, I will show that his linguistic fixation of Diderot's employment of *alienation* is one-sided. Grimm's epilogue to the *Paradoxe* is thus, despite being much shorter, far more differentiated than Buck's *Brecht und Diderot* book. He nevertheless also historicises Diderot by clearly interpreting him as a historical and theoretical predecessor to Brecht: Diderot's *Paradoxe*, as he argues, becomes more illuminating if read from the perspective of Brecht. Whilst Diderot serves here as historically the 'first' to establish a tradition in the sense of Brecht, he comes to be 'secondary' in that we are faced with a notion of history which necessarily had to lead up to Brecht.

Far more loyal to the aesthetics of Diderot is Marianne Kesting's chapter on 'Brecht und Diderot oder das *Paradis Artificiel* der Aufklärung'.<sup>30</sup> Kesting's starting-point is also Brecht's *Diderot-Society* and his inherent fraternisation with the Enlightenment idea, but she anticipates her discussion with the remark that Diderot's aesthetic of an imitation of nature has to be understood as fundamental to a subjective aesthetic of modernity, whilst Brecht operates with a notion of realism that is deeply embedded in

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77. Other members were to be Archibald MacLeish, Nordahl Grieg, Sergej Tretjakow, S. M. Eisenstein, Hans Eisler and Slatan Dudow. See Theo Buck (1971), pp. 12-3.

<sup>27</sup> *BWSt6*, pp. 283-374.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>30</sup> In *Entdeckung und Destruktion: Zur Strukturumwandlung der Künste* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1970), pp. 207-22.

the notion of Marxist 'scientificity' (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*).<sup>31</sup> Using the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* and the *Paradoxe*, she demonstrates how Diderot develops an understanding of art that becomes more and more detached from the classical concept of an imitation of nature, to one where the artist is to imitate an ideal model of nature. Art is equipped with a status superior to nature.<sup>32</sup> In this, she argues, Diderot already enunciates the premises of a modern anti-naturalist aesthetic. With the superiority of art over nature a possibility of control comes to be tangible: art can be employed in order to perfect nature, and in particular the 'nature' of society. The artist thus takes on the role of educating humanity. The idea of the ideal model is blended together with the idea of social progress.<sup>33</sup>

In relation to Brecht she shows how his early rebellion turns against an idealising kind of expressionism, but even more so against naturalism and its anti-realist subjective and psychologising tendencies. Instead, Brecht calls for a realism which by means of rational distance, criticality and provocation would contribute to a re-institution of reality.<sup>34</sup> In Marx he finds this new social reality analysed and envisaged, a reality which could no longer be grasped by means of a photographically-functioning naturalism.<sup>35</sup> Against naturalism he demands an art form constituted by artifice, a kind of realism that would represent artificial models of social reality constructed from the point of view of the science of Marxism. In parallel to Diderot, Brecht opts here for a form of art which masters reality, with the difference that this art form is no longer naturalist but realist, in the sense that it would aid society to transform on its path towards a Marxist Utopia. Theatre, society and artistic ingenuity are thus brought into unison in both Diderot and Brecht. The new purpose of the socially oriented art would constitute, what he calls, 'pedagogics'.<sup>36</sup> Moral, political and aesthetic aims naturally amalgamate in Brecht's and Diderot's artificial utopianism which involve a turn towards the technical and 'artificial' aspect of theatre, a theatre which can be constructed and re-constructed in the same manner as society can be reformed and shaped. Finally, like Barthes, Kesting stresses both authors' turn towards the visual dimension of theatre. Moreover, she is responsible for coining the idea (later taken up

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 218.



by Buck) of a first enlightenment propagated by Diderot, and a second one represented by Brecht. But whilst Diderot is here again collapsed into the Brechtian project, Kesting also implies that Brecht perfected the Diderotian approach in line with the demands of his time, namely his Marxist realism.

Finally, I wish to mention a study which contributed much to answering the outstanding question of Brecht's direct indebtedness to Diderot: Chetana Nagavajara's *Brecht and France*.<sup>37</sup> Buck, Grimm and Kesting's speculative interpretations of the Brecht-Diderot connection is here substantiated by Nagavajara's research into Brecht's correspondence and his library at the *Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv* in Berlin. Nagavajara provides evidence of a letter to Johannes Becher in December 1934 where Brecht mentions the idea of a dramaturgical encyclopedia with international contributors such as H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw and André Gide.<sup>38</sup> This idea is replaced by the project of the *Diderot-Society* which Brecht articulates in several letters to Piscator, Jean Renoir and Max Gorelik. The society's objective would have been to collect reports of dramaturgical experimentation and to develop a technical vocabulary. The name is explained in a letter to Max Gorelik (19/3/1937) where Brecht writes:

Ich würde vorschlagen, ihr den Namen Diderot-Gesellschaft zu geben. Dieser große Enzyklopädist hat über Theater sehr philosophisch und materialistisch-philosophisch geschrieben. Natürlich vom bürgerlichen Standpunkt aus, aber doch revolutionär-bürgerlichem.<sup>39</sup> (3)

But this new project was not realised either, most likely because of lack of commitment on an international basis. Brecht continued however to come back to the idea of an international dramaturgical society even until the year of his death.<sup>40</sup>

Nagavajara then proceeds to fill in the 'rapports de faits' still missing in Grimm, Buck and Kesting's publications on the similarity between Brecht's acting method and Diderot's *Paradoxe*. Brecht's private library holds a copy of Diderot's *Erzählungen und Gespräche*.<sup>41</sup> The volume belonged to the actress Käthe Reichel with whom Brecht also discussed Voltaire's work. The chapter that contains the greatest number of pencil

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<sup>37</sup> (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), pp. 77-84.

<sup>38</sup> BWB1, p. 471.

<sup>39</sup> BWB2, p. 760.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>41</sup> *Denis Diderot: Erzählungen und Gespräche*, trans. Katharina Scheinfuß, intro. Viktor Klemperer (Leipzig: Dietrich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953)

markings is 'Das Paradox des Schauspielers'.<sup>42</sup> The library also contains a French volume entitled *Pages Choisies des Grands Ecrivains: Diderot* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1932). The markings in it are indicative of the Brechtian way of thinking but cannot be assigned to Brecht himself with certainty. The titles marked give evidence of typical Brechtian interests: 'Le Théâtre moral', 'Les Contrastes', 'Les Mœurs sociales propres à la poésie', 'Le Comédien doit être insensible'. The chapter 'De l'instruction' contains frequent marginal markings documenting the parallel Brechtian interest in pedagogics.<sup>43</sup> Neither of the two books belonged directly to Brecht himself. Reading groups were however an established custom in Brecht's house, where his friends and collaborators would read and discuss literature. Moreover, as Nagavajara mentions, most of Brecht's pre-exile books were lost or destroyed in the war years and it can therefore be assumed, given the many parallels between Brecht and Diderot, at times even in style, that Brecht might have come in touch with the same or even other Diderot texts at a much earlier stage. This applies especially to the *Paradoxe*.

## 2. AIMS OF THIS DISSERTATION

The main problem with the above publications (Barthes, Buck, Grimm and Kesting) is their strong leaning towards a Brechtian perspective on Diderot. This becomes especially conspicuous in their 'historical' contextualisation of Diderot. Although none of the writers advocate an ultra-Marxist position, they all have in common the assumption of a historical trajectory of political-aesthetic theory that is first initiated by Diderot – in a first enlightenment, or a first revolution – and then perfected and historically adjusted by Brecht in a second enlightenment or revolution. Diderot is thought to be re-incarnated by Brecht in the new historical context of twentieth-century modernism and Marxism. This approach is of course inscribed in the historical context of those writers themselves. The above reviewed texts were published between 1961 and 1973, in a decade in which the affirmation of a political enlightenment function of art became paramount. It is not my intention to disqualify the political engagement implied in these studies or to critique the way in which they appropriate the work of Diderot in the name of Brecht, but their arguments are nevertheless permeated by an

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80. I will mention some of these markings in the discussion of the *Paradoxe*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

attitude of progressivist positivism which closes their eyes to aspects in Diderot's thought that shift away from the Brecht-Diderot connection. Characteristically, none of the authors question why Brecht never refers to a Diderotian legacy in relation to his acting methods when he is otherwise very explicit about his inspirational models.

Although the starting-point of this investigation is also located in the remarkable similarity of Brecht and Diderot's dramaturgical postulates, which are at times almost similar to the point of identical formulation, the focus here has turned towards Diderot. The aim of this research-project has been to unearth beyond the already recognised similarities between Brecht and Diderot, differences, and in particular subtle differences precisely regarding the issue of *alienation*. Instead of relying on the *selective affinities*, I have been interested in the ways in which Diderot projects in his thoughts on theatre and theatricality notions of alienation that are discontinuous with Brechtian alienation. This can perhaps help us to develop a better understanding of the complex psychological, sociological and philosophical implications when we speak of alienation in relation to the theatre as well as its instrumentalisation in aesthetic practice.

This refocusing on Diderot does not mean that I intend to claim for this dissertation a higher degree of 'historical correctness', or even a more 'objective' approach in interpreting the thought of Diderot – this presents itself already as an impossibility with regard to the inexistence of alienation as an aesthetic category in Diderot. Instead of establishing a historical line from Diderot to Brecht, or rather, from Brecht to Diderot, I have used their different historical contexts in order to extricate from their theoretical cross-overs the emergent conceptual deviations of Diderot from Brecht. Instead of reading Diderot only from the point of view of Brecht, I have attempted to read backwards. This method of interpreting Brecht from the perspective of Diderot can no longer support the contentions of Barthes, Buck, Grimm and Kesting, which I have discussed above. It brings into focus not only discontinuities between Brecht and Diderot's notions of alienation, but also calls into question some of the axiomatic assumptions involved in Brecht's concept of alienation itself: Brechtian alienation thus becomes alienated through Diderot. It is thanks to their historical gap that conceptual differences in relation to the notion of alienation can be put into clearer relief, and the juxtapositions between minute differences in the formula of alienation become more obvious. I have thus used the distance in their respective historical contexts not in order

to pin down their emergent dissimilarities to their inscription into different historical contexts, but to render more complex a definition of aesthetic alienation (*Verfremdung*) that has been given to us by Brecht.

This comparative study of Brecht and Diderot is more specifically concerned with the problem of alienation, whereas previous studies pursued a more general approach. The outcome of this research suggests a very different picture from the one described above in relation to Barthes, Buck, Grimm and Kesting. My analysis of a Diderotian aesthetics of alienation has been determined by the fact that his is a project of naturalism, even if his kind of naturalism is not the one which Brecht rebelled against in his innovation of the epic theatre. Whereas Brecht offers a method which aims to be 'destructive' of figuration, Diderot suggests a desire for the depiction of a world. Whereas the Brechtian stage bears the modernist stamp of minimising expression to its absolute essentials, there is in Diderot an attempt to say everything, to render expression as rich and complex as language will allow. Whereas subjectivity and psychology and also psychoanalysis are swearwords not only in Brecht's theory but also in his practice, Diderot could be situated at the beginnings of an exploration of the more unknown layers of the subject and even the unconscious.

Alienation for Brecht is a tool which serves to disempower all these features of naturalism: its depictive tendencies, its striving for figuration, its 'expressionism', its subjectivity and its psychology. As I have shown with regard to the aforementioned studies, his form of expression is an explicitly visual one, *dioptric* in the sense that it represents contents from a specific point of view to an audience. Furthermore, Brecht's approach to temporality is one which categorically avoids the re-presentation of a fictitious past, instead 'historising' actions into distance, it opens them up from the historical perspective of the here and now.

In opposition to Brecht, we can observe with Diderot the way in which alienation comes to be linked to an aesthetic that is not adverse to the great Brechtian enemies: identification, empathy and illusion. Furthermore, we will see how alienation comes to traverse the issue of subjectivity, no longer being reserved for bringing into relief the scientifically objective recognitions of Marxism, but as integral to the protagonist's very subjectivity. Whereas alienation in Brecht is tied to a kind of de-temporalisation of

dramatic time, we can observe in Diderot how the *experience* of time itself becomes pivotal for the way in which alienation as an instrument for recognition is operated. Finally, the visual quality associated with alienation in Brecht is replaced in Diderot by a sense of alienation that derives from the sounds of the voice. Alienation is relocated in the medium of acoustics.

All these aspects have been important in my attempt to reformulate an aesthetic of alienation measured to the thought of Diderot, although I have not been able to do equal justice to all of them. Priority has been given to the way in which alienation is thematised in two specific choices of Diderot's text, *Le Paradoxe sur le comédien* and *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Here alienation undergoes constant changes of signification, always in relation to theatre. The consultation of *Le Neveu de Rameau* is yet another point in which this study differs from the former ones. Whereas previous studies have capitalised on Diderot's earlier and much more positivistic dramaturgical writings, the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*,<sup>44</sup> and *De la poésie dramatique*,<sup>45</sup> and the core anti-sensibility doctrine of the *Paradoxe*, thus focussing on explicit Enlightenment features, I have been more interested in a kind of Enlightenment negativity that is pronounced in the *Paradoxe* and brought into full exposition in *Le Neveu*. An investigation of the problem of alienation from the point of view of these two texts, *Le Paradoxe* and *Le Neveu de Rameau*, not only 'negates' some of the given precepts of Brecht's concept of alienation, it also, as I have suggested already at the very beginning, proposes a notion of alienation emanating from theatre itself. Here one can discover a kind of sensibility which is theatrical, not in the sense of exposing the framing conditions of the theatre, the way in which Brecht's work has for example been characterised as theatrical,<sup>46</sup> but in the sense that we are encountering a theatricality which is alienating in an uncanny way.

At this point I should like to discuss Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality*, a publication which is closest in title, yet paradoxically also furthest removed from the

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<sup>44</sup> DOE, pp. 1131-1190.

<sup>45</sup> DOE, pp. 1273-1350.

<sup>46</sup> See Reinhold Grimm, 'Alienation in Context: On the Theory and Practice of Brechtian Theatre', in *A Bertolt Brecht Reference Companion*, ed. Siegfried Mews (Westport: Greenwood, 1997), p. 39.

propositions articulated in my dissertation.<sup>47</sup> The contradictions that emerge between the Diderotian motive of *Absorption and Theatricality* and the one of *Alienation and Theatricality* are perhaps more indicative of the paradoxical stretch of Diderot's thought itself and the scope and variety of interpretations that can therefore be drawn from his work at large. Fried focuses on Diderot's writings of the *Salons* and, like the above mentioned Brechtian scholars, on his earlier dramaturgical writings such as *De la poésie dramatique* and the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, in which one of Diderot's chief intentions is to propagate an aesthetic of contemplative stillness. Composition in drama as well as in painting is to pursue the aim of absorbing the beholder into a state of mind. The beholder is to become entirely immersed in meditation of the image as well as removed from the passing of time. In order to achieve this, Fried argues, the figures of the painting, or the actors on stage, must not disrupt their own absorption in the actions which they represent. No contact between the beholder and the objects of representation must be introduced. Representation must remain non-theatrical in that it omits any self-consciousness as to its own performance to the gaze of the beholder.

However, Diderot proceeds to qualify his claim of the actor's or the artwork's self-absorption in his later dramaturgy of the *Paradoxe*. Self-awareness and performative self-consciousness are also central to *Le Neveu de Rameau*, not only thematically, but in terms of its dialogical form. In these writings the *topos* of theatricality becomes an important issue, albeit a highly controversial one, thereby anticipating one of the major aesthetic concerns of Romanticism and Modernism. The opposite outcomes between *Absorption and Theatricality* and this study are therefore partly connected with interpreting a different section of Diderot's writing and more importantly, they are fuelled by different motivations. This becomes evident in the ways in which Fried applies the notion of theatricality in the context of twentieth-century art.

In his essay 'Art and Objecthood', he spells out a critique of minimalism, also termed literalism, on the basis of its inherent theatricality,<sup>48</sup> a kind of theatricality founded on theatre's essential condition of existing for an audience.<sup>49</sup> In opposition to modern art which defeats theatricality, minimalism celebrates a re-theatricalisation of the art work

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<sup>47</sup> *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980)

<sup>48</sup> In *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (London: Studio Vista, 1968), pp. 116-47.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

and thus, in Fried's opinion, the negation of art. The theatrical is characterised 'in terms of a particular relation between the beholder *as subject* and the work *as object*, a relation that takes place in time, that has duration.'<sup>50</sup> Minimalism, like theatre, is concerned with the actual circumstances in which it *stages* itself. Its spatiality and scale, its particular setting in relation to the view-point of the beholder, which aims to include the beholder, become paramount issues and are the principles upon which its subjectivist appeal is founded. Furthermore, these are works which have an almost auratic presence, confronting the beholder and asking for his complicity in an almost disquieting way. What is uncanny about them is that the subjectivity involved is not of a real person but that of a surrogate, a kind of statue, which hides its subjectivist appeal in its objecthood.<sup>51</sup>

Most importantly, one can draw an analogy between Fried's appreciation of an atemporal experience of time in the eighteenth-century (the beholder is made to forget the passing of real durational time by being absorbed into the painting) and his appreciation of a-durational time in modernism. In opposition, the temporality involved in Minimalism is of an experiential circularity, by means of which the artwork never seems to exhaust itself. 'The experience in question *persists in time*, and the presentment of endlessness that, I have been claiming, is central to literalist art and theory is essentially a presentment of endless, or indefinite, *duration*.'<sup>52</sup> This temporal sensibility, Fried suggests, is diametrically opposed to modernism, where one's temporal experience of the artwork '*has no duration* [...], because *at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest*.'<sup>53</sup> Since the modernist work of art is involved in undoing its own conditions, it is self-conscious, and the experience of it is concomitantly one of *instantaneousness*: 'a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.'<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly, at this point Fried makes a concession to the dramatists of modernism, Brecht and Artaud, who can be exempted from the 'bad theatricalities' connected with

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

subjectivism, durational temporality and presence.<sup>55</sup> Brecht, Fried speculates, may have aimed at the self-conscious presentness typical to modernism, and this is what might have made him propagate his non-illusionistic theatre, in which the material and technical framing of the theatrical structure was opened up to the inspection and criticality of the spectator.<sup>56</sup>

Here we encounter a strange conjuncture of two seemingly conflicting suppositions. Fried's anti-theatricality of absorption formulated in relation to Diderot's eighteenth-century aesthetics comes to be connected with the self-framing presentism of modernist art, including Brecht's distinction between the 'time of the performer' and the time of 'historised' representation. Eighteenth-century illusion-based absorption comes to be linked with both Brecht and modernism's claim for self-present instantaneousness. It is this self-contradiction based on a kind of unconscious desire for self-identity inherent in modernism and also in Brecht, which I hope I can begin to make tangible in my dissertation.

The present dissertation is divided into two parts. The first examines the figure of the actor within Brecht and Diderot's dramaturgical discourse in relation to the structure of alienation; the second part discusses the way in which alienation relates to the question of subjectivity and objectivity. In the first part I will outline parallels and differences between Brecht's writings on alienation in Chinese theatre and Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. My decision to focus the discussion of Brechtian alienation on his essays on Chinese acting has been determined by the fact that here Brecht focuses for the first time on acting methodology's relation to alienation.

In the second part I will examine the ways in which alienation is communicated from the text to the addressed spectator or reader, thus investigating the process in which alienation, as in *Entfremdung*, constitutes both an issue at the level of thematic material as well as signifying *Verfremdung* as an aesthetic means of recognition. Whereas with

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<sup>55</sup> For an interesting discussion of Fried's concept of anti-theatricality in the context of post-modernism and performance art see Philip Auslander, 'Presence and Theatricality in the Discourse of Performance and the Visual Arts', in *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 47-57.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.



Brecht the concept of epistemological *Verfremdung* is separated from a kind of alienation inscribed in the figure, and removed from the idea that this alienation might have been subjectively experienced, with Diderot a continuum surfaces between subjectively experienced, objectively diagnosed alienation as in *Entfremdung*, and epistemologically employed *Verfremdung*.

I have organised the dissertation so that each part begins with a chapter dedicated to Brecht, since he initiated our thought concerning the idea of alienation as a dramaturgical issue. Chapter 2 and 4 problematise through the perspective of Diderot the notion of alienation which we have received from Brecht. I also wish to draw attention to an asymmetry in the second part. My starting-point has been to investigate the dramaturgical claims expressed by Brecht in his theoretical writings and not in his literary *œuvres*. This is due to the fact that I have been mainly interested in the general claims of representation which Brecht issues with his concept of alienation. In the second part I balance the Brechtian discussion with an analysis of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, a text which oscillates between literature and theory, and which I ‘dramatised’ in my practical exploration of theatrical alienation in a staging of *Rameau’s Nephew* at the *Citizens Theatre*. In a sense, the shift from Brechtian theory to Diderotian literature was possible because of *Le Neveu’s* ambiguous literary status, proposing a theoretical exposition of the problem of alienation at the level of a genre which shifts between dialogical philosophical discourse and theatre. Moreover, *Le Neveu* could be defined as presenting the most immediate point of connection between Brecht, Diderot and the concept of alienation. It is here where Hegel incorporates into his *Phänomenologie* Diderot’s thematisation of alienation in the *Neveu*, the only time throughout the *Phänomenologie* that he quotes another literary text. Here Diderot’s *aliénation* meets *Entfremdung*. Likewise here is situated the origin of the philosophical tradition of *Entfremdung* which will finally lead to Brecht’s concept of *Verfremdung*.

### 3. TERMINOLOGIES OF ALIENATION: ENTRFREMUNG, VERFREMUNG, ALIÉNATION

I wish to briefly clarify the terminology of alienation applied in this dissertation, given the fact that this text will shift between three languages, and that the Brechtian concept of alienation, *Verfremdung*, does not have an equivalent term in Diderot.

Brecht's concept of alienation derives from the terminology of Hegel and Marx; from the term *Entfremdung*, which in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*,<sup>57</sup> signifies the self-projection of consciousness into different forms of externalisation in its process towards absolute knowing. Although alienation is a state from which humanity must finally be liberated, it also constitutes a necessary form of mediation by means of which the subject enriches its consciousness. In order for consciousness to know itself, it must project itself out of itself, and from this position of self-alienation reflect back upon itself. Alienation in this process involves both a movement away from the self, as well as identification with externality, a process which is inevitable before consciousness can return to itself, deepening its levels of understanding and experience.<sup>58</sup>

Marx reinterprets the Hegelian concept of alienation in socio-political terms. Alienation now comes to signify the political situation under capitalism, in which the working classes are alienated from the products of their labour, from productive as well as political power. 'Workers constantly produce wealth in the form of capital, an alien power which dominates and exploits them. Capitalists necessarily treat human labour as a mere commodity.'<sup>59</sup> Alienation is employed as a term symptomatic of the social disorders generated by the opposition between working classes and bourgeoisie. For Brecht the earlier definition of alienation in *Die deutsche Ideologie*,<sup>60</sup> is also central. Here alienation in the sense of ideology describes a state of consciousness which is embroiled in the illusion of freedom in modern society, a society which is in fact based on social division, enslavement, reification and dehumanisation.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 35-8.

<sup>59</sup> See Terrel Carver, *A Marx Dictionary* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987), p. 41.

<sup>60</sup> In *Karl Marx: Die Frühschriften: Von 1837 bis zum Manifest der kommunistischen Partei 1848*, ed. Siegfried Landshut (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1971), pp. 339-485.

<sup>61</sup> On alienation in Marx see István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin Press, 1970). On the importance of *Die deutsche Ideologie* for Brecht's notion of alienation see Matthias Johannes

Brecht's concept of alienation derives from both Hegel and Marx. Brecht adopts from Hegel the importance of dialectical negativity involved in epistemological processes. His alienation-effect, or *V-Effekt*, signifies precisely the moment of astonishment in which we do not understand the things, which we believed we had understood, a moment which ultimately leads to further insight. However, more relevant for the Brechtian project is Marx's dialectical materialism and its utopian dimension of looking towards a form of society which has become un-alienated on the basis of resolved material and social conditions. Here Brecht's concept of aesthetic alienation is situated in its context proper. Aesthetic alienation is employed in the theatre for the purpose of de-familiarising the representation of social actions that have become habitual and automatic under the alienated conditions of capitalism. Aesthetic alienation thus becomes a utopian category of social liberation: it un-alienates what has become alienated and obscured by a bourgeois kind of reality that appears unalterable and natural, but is in fact riddled by illusion and disintegration. Brechtian alienation thus participates in a project of unmasking the real social conflicts that underlie capitalism. However, in order to differentiate the consciously applied aesthetic form of alienation from the idea of alienation as social disorder, in the mid-thirties Brecht replaces the term 'to alienate' (*ent-fremden*) with the term *verfremden*. Marxist *Entfremdung* becomes Brechtian *Verfremdung*. Aesthetic *Verfremdung* now signifies an aesthetic which implies the process of 'making strange', 'distanciating', 'de-familiarising' and 'astonishing'. What it does not imply is the Hegelian concept of alienation as identification with another object. On the contrary, Brechtian alienation is defined as antagonistic to identification, incorporation, and illusion. Throughout this thesis I have translated the Brechtian term *Verfremdung* as alienation rather than estrangement, for the former preserves in its translation the dialectical constitution of *Verfremdung* as well as its important derivation from the Hegelian and Marxist concept of alienation (*Entfremdung*).

With Diderot, we are re-located in the period of the second half of the eighteenth century, on the cusp of the emergence of a concept of alienation. Alienation is here still a pre-categorical term and at times a notion expressed in other words. Despite the fact

that alienation already becomes a central category in Rousseau's *Contrat Social*,<sup>62</sup> and plays a crucial role throughout his socio-anthropological writings as well as his novels, 'alienation' here does not yet have the same conceptual stringency and centrality it has in Hegel and Marx. However, we can find in Rousseau a systematic kind of application of terms such as *aliénation* and *éloignement*, often foreshadowing the Marxist definition of the term. In this he makes a significant move from appropriating the predominantly legal application of the term, which preceded the nineteenth century, to one where alienation becomes part of a phenomenology of consciousness, entering the theoretical terminologies of sciences such as psychology, sociology, philosophy and politics.<sup>63</sup> Rousseau's understanding of alienation is predominantly a negative one, in that it figures in his thought as a problem specific to modern civilised society. Alienation, according to Rousseau, expresses the phenomenon of social estrangement, i.e. the disintegration of the social community as well as the individual's loss of self, who becomes 'other' in conforming to social conventions: the 'natural' self is replaced by another self.<sup>64</sup>

In opposition to Rousseau, Diderot's notion of alienation is a far more flexible one. On the one hand, it is also applied in the sense of 'loss of self'. As we will see in the discussion of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, where the notion of *l'aliénation d'esprit*, describes the loss of self through mental alienation, a definition which anticipates the psychiatric language of the nineteenth century at the same time as establishing an important link to Hegel, who will incorporate *Le Neveu* in his *Phenomenologie des Geistes*, specifically referring to the passages where Rameau's Nephew becomes 'mentally alienated'. On the other hand there is also a very positive notion of alienation at work in Diderot's thought. In *La réponse à la lettre de Mme Riccoboni*, alienation is endowed with very positive connotations, interestingly in the context of dramaturgical debate. Rather than describe the loss of self, alienation promises here self-empowerment:

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<sup>62</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social. Ecrits Politiques*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

<sup>63</sup> Alienation in the eighteenth century, shown as for example in the relevant entry of the *Encyclopédie*, refers as a legal term to the expropriation of properties and rights. See the article *Aliénation* in Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Cramer, 1772), p. 264. From now on abbreviated as *Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert*.

<sup>64</sup> See N. J. H. Dent's definition of alienation in *A Rousseau Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 28.

Vous avez bien l'esprit. Moi! On ne peut pas en avoir moins; mais j'ai mieux: de la simplicité, de la vérité, de la chaleur dans l'âme, une tête qui s'allume, de la pente à l'enthousiasme, l'amour de bon, du vrai et du beau, une disposition facile à sourire, à admirer, à m'indigner, à compatir, à pleurer. Je sais aussi m'aliéner, talent sans lequel on ne fait rien qui vaille.<sup>65</sup> (4)

Diderot speaks here explicitly of alienation as a tool of reason, complementing and directing the faculties of sensibility and enthusiasm. Alienation becomes a crucial moment on the way towards expression and action, without which one can do nothing of value. Self-alienation is instrumentalised as a mode of self-abstraction, which actively seeks detachment in order to rationalise and judge one's own action.<sup>66</sup>

Contrary to Rousseau who largely uses the verb 'to alienate' in its transitive form, as in 'aliéner quelqu'un', thus implying the idea of a passive uncontrolled movement of alienation, Diderot's use of 's'aliéner' as a reflexive verb suggests the idea of a controlled kind of alienation. Otherness becomes included in the self, supporting the self in its movement towards externalisation. It is precisely this definition of alienation which becomes relevant in Diderot's theory of acting postulated in the *Paradoxe*, although here it is no longer explicitly named in this way. It is however this very structure upon which my comparison between Diderot's and Brecht's concept of self-alienated acting will be based.

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<sup>65</sup> *Diderot: Œuvres complètes*, vol. 10, ed. and annot. Jacques Chouillet and Anne-Marie Chouillet (Paris, Herman, 1980), p. 446. For a discussion of the letter see Jay Caplan, 'Acting like a Woman: Diderot's *Lettre à Mme Riccoboni* and the status of Theatrical Illusion', in *Women in French Literature*, ed. Michael Guggenheim (Saratoga: Anna Libri, 1988)

<sup>66</sup> For a definition of alienation in relation to the respective quote see Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1956), p. 308. Here Diderot's use of the verb *s'aliéner* is paraphrased as *s'abstraire*.

PART 1  
ACTORS OF ALIENATION



Francisco Goya. *The sleep of reason produces monsters* (Caprichos Plate 43)

## Chapter 1

### *Alienation in Brecht's Theory of Acting*

Alienation in Brecht's dramaturgical system is one of the key categories, if not the one that has come to encompass his form of expression at its most characteristic. It is deeply connected and, in part, even overlaps in terms of structure and effect, with other Brechtian key categories such as the *epic*, *gestus*, *anti-aristotelianism* and *dialectics*.<sup>67</sup> Brecht's theoretical discussions of alienation also extend into the areas of stage-design, music, lighting, but I will be focussing on the role of the actor who represents the central agent in transmitting dramatic literature to the stage, not only for Brecht but also for Diderot, and therefore attracts special attention in both authors' dramaturgical writings. Moreover, it is in the context of acting that the question of alienation becomes most acute.

The idea of alienation in relation to acting can already be found in Brecht's very earliest writings. In journal entries as early as 1920, Brecht articulates a preference for a kind of acting that will later become linked with the term alienation, *Verfremdung*. Here he shows himself in favour of a style of acting which remains faithful to its aesthetic condition: acting should display itself as acting and not pretend to be being.<sup>68</sup> During his so-called anarchic phase between 1920 and 1926, Brecht's theoretical reflections on acting are chiefly predicated on his rebellion against bourgeois naturalism and its concomitant model of acting based on empathy (*Einfühlung*) and illusion. From about 1926, Brecht begins to assimilate his earlier interest in revolutionising the forms and contents of the bourgeois theatre into the context of Marxist critique. His main influences from a theoretical point of view become Fritz Sternberg and Karl Korsch.

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<sup>67</sup> See Peter Brooker, 'Key words in Brecht's theory and practice of theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 185-200.

<sup>68</sup> See BWJ1, p. 133 (7/8/1920): 'Es ist schön zu sehen, wie die Bi spielt: ganz menschlich, ganz einfach. Eine Königin, das ist eine Königin, ein Erschrecken, das ist ein Erschrecken, und die Bi, das ist die Bi. Sie hat Stil, aber sie erreicht nie die Wirkunge der Natur. [...] Sie imitiert nicht die Natur: Sie spielt!' (1).

His theatrical practice is now incorporated into a cultural practice of dialectical materialism. Theatrical practice becomes subordinated to the project of social reconstruction and criticality. His earlier anti-naturalism is reformulated as a revolutionary practice supporting class struggle. In 1930, for the first time, Brecht spells out the term alienation in relation to acting: the actor should alienate (*entfremden*) his acting in order to present the protagonists and their actions in an astonishing light:

*Die Schauspieler müssen dem Zuschauer Figuren und Vorgänge entfremden, so daß sie ihm auffallen. Der Zuschauer muß Partei ergreifen, statt sich zu identifizieren.*<sup>69</sup> (2)

The emergence of this new technical term has been linked to both the aesthetic appropriation of a Marxist vocabulary as well as an interest in the Hegelian theory of recognition.<sup>70</sup> Acting becomes instrumental to epistemological process. Criticality, astonishment and recognition become the central aims of a style of acting which alienates. The spectator will no longer be able to accept what he or she perceives as familiar. Situations that are abusive yet have come to appear natural and familiar can thus be opened up to recognition and change.

Key to Brecht's period of politicisation is a new emphasis on the spectator. Theatre as social practice envisions the spectator as a key figure between aesthetic political provocation and political intervention. Spectators in this sense should be educated as political actors. The didactic plays and Brecht's emphasis on 'pedagogics' imply the idea that the spectator no longer uncritically identifies with the dramatic events but that he will observe them with an analytical and rational mind. He will apply a way of thinking which becomes active and intervening. For Brecht thinking in this sense becomes practice.

One could say that at this stage alienation, despite the fact that it was still awaiting its reformulation into the concept proper of *Verfremdung*, had already been equipped with all its fundamental characteristics. It was opposed to a form of acting connected with empathy and identification. It was to defeat naturalism's illusionistic spell. In terms of

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<sup>69</sup> *Die grosse und die kleine Pädagogik*, BWS1, p. 396.

<sup>70</sup> According to Ernst Schumacher, Brecht's principle of aesthetic alienation could be said to follow Marx's idea that social alienation must become a power so unbearable that revolution will be inevitable. As quoted in Matthias Johannes Fischer, (1989), p. 260; q.v. p. 259-64 for a discussion of the interrelation between *Entfremdung* and *Verfremdung*.



its political meaning, it can be seen as dialectically related to Marxist alienation. If from a Marxist point of view reality was riddled by different forms of social alienation, alienation in terms of acting was to play a pivotal role in the process of un-alienating these conditions. By means of aesthetic alienation the spectator should begin to doubt and question a kind of capitalist reality that had come to appear natural, constituted by a social practice of acceptance and habituation. Alienation thus comes to play a vital role in Brecht's aesthetic practice of political interruption and intervention (*Dramaturgie des Eingreifens*).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the emergence of a dramaturgical theory of alienation did not happen in isolation. It has been well documented that Brecht's concept of alienation coincides with what the Russian formalist Šklovski called *ostranenie* (estranging), which in poetics would de-familiarise accustomed forms of expression and show things in a new and original light.<sup>71</sup> In linking his theory of alienation to an understanding of reality that no longer derives from a naturalistic conception of the world according to which representation can mirror the causalities of reality, Brecht corresponds with other modernist manifestos, such as those voiced by F. T. Marinetti and the Dada movement.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Brecht explicitly associates himself with the principle of montage applied in Piscator's theatre, a principle which is relevant for the epic dimension of the concept of alienation.

It is however only in the mid-thirties that Brecht turns with more focus to the methodological problem of acting, now relating it specifically to the question of alienation. It is here where for the first time he articulates the concept *Verfremdung*, drawing a distinction between social *Entfremdung* and aesthetic *Verfremdung*. In the year 1936, during a visit to Moscow, Brecht went to see several performances of the Chinese actor Mei Lan-fang. Fascinated as he had always been by Asian Art, Mei Lan-fang's acting became the point of departure for an extensive series of texts describing the characteristics of 'Chinese' acting. Moreover, Brecht devoted himself here, for the first time, to an in-depth examination of the problem of acting, whilst at the same time

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<sup>71</sup> See Renate Lachmann, 'Die *Verfremdung* und das *Neue Sehen* bei Viktor Šklovski', in *Verfremdung in der Literatur*, ed. and intro. Hermann Helmers (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), pp. 321-351.

<sup>72</sup> See Richard Sheppard: 'The Problematics of European Modernism', in *Theorising Modernism*, ed. Steve Giles (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 14-18.

he assembled all the elements leading to a coherent acting methodology of alienation. What Mei Lan-fang seemed to offer to Brecht is the model of an already accomplished technique of alienation, one that could be ‘transported’ into his Marxistically operating *epic* theatre.<sup>73</sup> Brecht then proceeded to investigate more specifically how, in the concrete, the actor needs to act in order to produce the desired effect of alienation. This marks the inception point of both terms *verfremden* and *V-effect*, ‘making strange’ and ‘alienation-effect’. Two essays are situated at the core of the complex of writings concerned with Chinese acting. The first one is entitled *Bemerkungen über die chinesische Schauspielkunst*,<sup>74</sup> while the second embraces in its title the newly founded term: *Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst*.<sup>75</sup>

Although the mid-thirties do not represent the last stage of Brecht’s theorising on the art of acting - there are yet to follow subtle yet important qualifications of his acting method in the forties and fifties in *Der Messingkauf* and *Das Kleine Organon*, where Brecht introduces notions such as the importance of entertainment and the necessity of emotional expression in acting - nevertheless the 1930s represent the most radical and systematic phase in which Brecht combines a theory of acting with the effect of alienation. Therefore I will now proceed to examine the main strata of the Brechtian form of acting in relation to his essays on Chinese acting.

### 1.1 DUAL FORMS OF ACTING: BRECHT’S METHOD OF SELF-ALIENATION

In the essays on Chinese acting Brecht suggests that the effect of alienation is not only the result of observing a non-Western art form, but an intentional technical device. Not only is Chinese acting marked by an appearance of strangeness, but the actor *wishes* to appear strange and bewildering.<sup>76</sup> This assumed intentionality makes it possible for Brecht to draw methodological conclusions for his own purposes and ‘transport’, in his words, certain technical devices from Chinese theatre to German epic theatre.

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<sup>73</sup> See BWS2, p. 206.

<sup>74</sup> BWS2, pp. 151-164.

<sup>75</sup> BWS2, pp. 200-210. From now on abbreviated as *Verfremdungseffekte*.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

Fundamental to this possibility of ‘appearing strange’ is an exploitation of the layered structure of acting, which can engender a twofold, at times even threefold process of representation. What Brecht seems to discover in the performances of Mei Lan-fang is that the difference between the persona of the dramatic figure and the persona of the actor is left intact: the actor does not become the dramatic figure. No magical incarnation into the *dramatis personae* occurs; the actor remains evidently alienated from the role he presents.

The strategy of separating the actor from the role is inextricably linked with the textual structure of epic drama, which is organised in fragments rather than in linear form. It evolves in an alternating movement of narrative comment, dramatic dialogue, and song, weaving a whole which is nevertheless governed by the principle of ‘open form’.<sup>77</sup> The fragmented constitution of the epic structure was to provide the intermediary spaces in which critical intervention could occur.<sup>78</sup> Analogous to this principle of fragmentation, Brecht suggests that the actor should always think of the character in the third person, thus interjecting distance between himself and the role he is portraying. The ‘I’ of his own person and the ‘he’ or ‘she’ of the *dramatis persona* remain different, perhaps even antagonistic. Whilst rehearsing a new part and even when presenting a character on stage, the actor should never impersonate the role, but narrate or ‘cite’ it in order to prevent identification, that is, to submerge with the very being of the role.<sup>79</sup>

In *Über ein Detail des chinesischen Theaters*, Brecht conveys to us his acute fascination with the dual form of acting crafted by Mei Lan-fang in his enactment of a female protagonist:

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<sup>77</sup> Furthermore the open structure of epic drama signifies an aesthetic which gestures beyond its frame into the realm of reality, where in the sense of a Marxist politics, the perception of art is to be completed with action. On ‘open form’ see Volker Klotz, ‘Geschlossene und offene Form im Drama’, in *Episches Theater*, ed. Reinhold Grimm (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972), pp. 378-82.

<sup>78</sup> On the notion of the *epic* see Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, intro. Stanley Mitchell (London: NLB, 1973), p. 19. For a chronological account of the term in Brecht’s work see Werner Hecht, ‘Der Weg zum epischen Theater’, in *Brecht’s Theorie des Theaters*, ed. Werner Hecht (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 45-90; on the relation between epic theatre and naturalism, see Reinhold Grimm, ‘Naturalismus und episches Drama’, in *Episches Theater*, ed. Reinhold Grimm (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972), pp.13-35; on the relation between the terms epic and dialectical, see ‘Dramatisches, episches und dialektisches Theater’, *ibid.*, pp. 154-96.

<sup>79</sup> Benjamin (1973), stresses the importance of this connection between the *epic* and *quotability*: ‘*Making gestures quotable* is one of the essential achievements of epic theatre.’ See ‘What is Epic Theatre [Second Version]’, p. 19. On Citation as a phenomenon of modernism and post-structuralism, see Claudette Sartillot, *Citation and Modernity: Derrida, Joyce, and Brecht* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press).

Er demonstriert, im Smoking, gewisse weibliche Bewegungen. Das sind deutlich zwei Figuren. Eine zeigt, eine wird gezeigt. Am Abend zeigt die eine Figur, der Doktor (Familienvater, Bankier) noch mehr von der zweiten, auch ihr Gesicht, auch ihre Kleidung, auch ihre Art, erstaunt zu sein, oder eifersüchtig, oder frech, auch ihre Stimme. Die Figur im Smoking ist fast ganz verschwunden. Vielleicht sähe man sie überhaupt nicht mehr, wenn man nicht so gut von ihr Bescheid wüßte, wenn sie nicht so berühmt wäre, mindestens vom Stillen Meer bis zum Ural.<sup>80</sup> (3)

What impresses Brecht is the clear demarcation between two different figures, one who shows and another who is being shown. The obvious sexual difference between the portrayed female and the male performer highlights the actual fact that the performer is not identical with the role. In a highly skilled manner, Mei Lan-fang renders specific gestures which capture the characteristics of femininity. This is done so convincingly that the aesthetic impression of a woman almost comes to supersede the actual reality of the performer's sex. Despite the fact that he is not even costumed in a woman's dress, his movements have become so feminine that the reality of the man dressed in an evening suit almost disappears. However, Mei Lan-fang's reputation as a celebrated actor always overshadows the products of his acting, making sure that fact will never subside to fiction. Actor and role are thus brought into a relation of consistent duality. Actor and figure never become entirely identified with each other, but they are brought into an inter-play of mutual communication and opposition. Two instances, two figures, two roles, caught in an act of dialectical simultaneity: she cried into her sleeve, and he played as if he had found it wet.<sup>81</sup>

Duality is thus theorised in combination with an interest in dialectical opposition, contrast and otherness and as a precondition for both rational detachment as well as unemotional non-identification. The role is to be treated by the actor as a neighbour (*Nachbar*) or as an other (*ein anderer*). In relation to this neighbour, the actor can allow himself to be critical. He remains free to judge and evaluate the actions of his role and confer his value-judgements in the process of aesthetic creation. Integral to such rational distance from the role is an entirely non-emotional approach to acting. Emotions can become subject to the actor's examination of the role, they can become attached to the presentation of the character, just as the Chinese actor uses the gesture of

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<sup>80</sup> *Über ein Detail des chinesischen Theaters* (1935), BWS2, p. 127.

<sup>81</sup> With reference to Brecht's description of Mei Lan-fang: 'Sie weinte also in ihren Ärmel, und der Mann griff an den Ärmel und spielte, als habe er ihn naß gefunden.' In *Theater*, BWS2, p. 129. (4)

biting into his hair in order to express anger, but the actor does not exert his own emotions when in performance.

Brecht complements the notion of an alienated form of dual acting by another instant of alienation. Where there is a difference between actor and figure, there is also a difference between acting and the process of mediation itself. It is this process of translation (*Übersetzungsprozeß*) which highlights the ontological difference between reality and aesthetics. The residues of the work of representation are exposed as an intermediary between actor and role. In *Das doppelte Zeigen*, Brecht describes the way in which differentiation divides a homogeneous character on stage into two and even three separate entities:

Die Chinesen zeigen nicht nur das Verhalten der Menschen, sondern auch das Verhalten der Schauspieler. Sie zeigen, wie die Schauspieler die Gesten der Menschen in ihrer Art vorführen. Denn die Schauspieler übersetzen die Sprache des Alltags in ihre eigene Sprache. Sieht man also einem chinesischen Schauspieler zu, dann sieht man nicht weniger als drei Personen gleichzeitig einen Zeigenden und zwei Gezeigte.<sup>82</sup> (5)

The Chinese actor not only presents a character, but he also presents his artistic achievement in enacting a role. From here emerge one subject and two objects of performance. We see an actor, we observe him present a character, and we see him perform this very process of presentation itself. What Brecht appreciates about the Chinese Art of acting is this celebration of aesthetic representation itself, which in another place he also characterises as a ceremonial or ritual quality of Chinese acting.<sup>83</sup>

## 1.2 BRECHT'S ART OF SHOWING: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING AND ACTING

As a result of this dual form of acting a difference between 'being' and 'showing' emerges, or rather, showing comes to be more than being.<sup>84</sup> The being of the persona of the actor stands out in contrast to the aesthetic construct of the dramatic figure. Both states, the state of the acting subject and the state of written fiction, remain conceptually

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<sup>82</sup> *Über das Theater der Chinesen, 'Das doppelte Zeigen'*, BWS2, p. 126.

<sup>83</sup> *Bemerkungen über die chinesische Schauspielkunst*, BWS2, p. 152.

<sup>84</sup> See the title of Brecht's comments on Raimund Schelcher's acting in *Kreidekreis: Zeigen ist mehr als Sein*, BWS3, p. 315.

separated in order to induce dialectical modes of perception. The one who shows is overtly dis-identical with the one who is shown. Actor and figure are performed in contrast and contradiction.

Brecht suggests that the modality of presentation, or showing, whereby the actor remains continually alienated from the role, can be stressed in the following ways. The actor can for example observe his own actions in such a manner that this process becomes obvious. He observes his own movements to then take up eye contact with the spectators in order to communicate a moment of contemplating his own actions. He thus transmits an attitude of astonishment, thereby conjuring up Brecht's desired alienation-effect (*V-effect*):

Etwa eine Wolke darstellend, ihr unvermutetes Auftauchen, ihre weiche und starke Entwicklung, schnelle und doch allmähliche Veränderung vorführend, sieht er mitunter nach dem Zuschauer, als wolle er sagen: Ist es nicht genau so?<sup>85</sup> (6)

By interrupting the flow of representation he directs the attention to the operation of representation itself, from which questions of agreement and judgment can arise. He presents the audience with the possibility of evaluating both status and quality of his representation. At the moment the actor steps out of character, the aesthetic representation of the cloud is put to test by the very real eye contact between the actor and his audience. This separation between actor and enacted can also be understood as a separation between face and gesture. The actor is perceived to detach himself as a person from that which is considered to be his performance: his organic body is being distinguished from his aesthetic body.

This emphasis on the constructed inorganic essence of theatre, the continual explication that theatre should not be mistaken for life, is recurrently expressed by Brecht in his demand to treat acting as a mechanical activity. The actor only repeats the actions of another persons, actions which in turn have been repeated innumerable times through generations, traditions, and history. To approach acting in a mechanical way facilitates two effects, which Brecht wants to see in the *epic* theatre. On the one hand, a mechanical quality of acting would appear alienating since it dispels 'nature' and

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<sup>85</sup> *Verfremdungseffekte*, BWS2, p. 201.

highlights the constructed artifice of the performance. On the other hand, it is precisely the artificial technology behind the theatre which will help the spectator to perceive it as model of social experimentation. Social action has a logic which can be analysed and restructured, just the way mechanics can be. The dialectical relation between alienation and mechanics is described by Brecht as follows:

Das Hineinlöffeln der Handlung geschieht nicht mehr unbewußt, gleitend, mechanisch, sobald der V-Effekt auftaucht, der 'Bann' bricht, die Kunst hat versagt. Aus dem Vorgang ist die Absicht der Darstellung frech hervorgetreten, im primitiven Fall hervorgestolpert. Nun, wo das mechanische Hineinlöffeln unterbrochen wurde, trat das Mechanische der Handlung in Erscheinung, es wird stracks als so beschimpft. Man hat eben verstanden und nun soll man nicht verstanden haben?<sup>86</sup> (7)

Disbelief is the response to an interrupted flow of dramatic action in which the spectator can no longer trust the authorial perspective set out at first. Once performance is disguised to be of the order of a construct, it appears disappointingly mechanical. The spectator feels that he has been trapped in the mechanisms of a cunning plot. But it is really only at this moment that the spectator has awoken to self-conscious criticality. In order to sustain this sceptical way of viewing theatre, Brecht must hold the performance at the level of the mechanical.<sup>87</sup> The skeleton of all theatrical trickery remains unmasked. The alienating power of an aesthetic of mechanics is inextricably linked with notions of death. The organic body of real life has become transformed into an aesthetic machine. This also manifests itself directly in the relation between dramatic figure and actor. Subverting one of the main tenets of naturalistic theatre, that performance be like life, Brecht avoids a confusion between the dead matter of the dramatic figure and the actor. Both obviously depend on each other and create meaning through their mutual communication, but they never collapse into that which Brecht contemptuously calls the magic of theatre, in which the actor, by employing a miraculous act of transubstantiation,<sup>88</sup> infuses the dead aesthetic matter of the written *dramatis persona* with the organic and psychic life of his own flesh and soul. As Brecht's understanding of an image-like, static version of acting tends to withdraw the

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<sup>86</sup> *Der V-Effekt auf dem Theater*, BWS2, pp. 214-215.

<sup>87</sup> Mechanisation plays also an important role in Brecht's understanding of the collective gesture: 'Die Mechanisierung ist zu betonen, weiterzubetreiben – bis zur Gestik. Die individuelle Geste erliegt der Mechanisierung, welche zur kollektiven Geste werden muß.' (8) In *Die Gestik*, BWS1, p. 357.

<sup>88</sup> See for example *V-Effekt (1)*: 'Die Magie des "Worts", die Transsubstantiation des Schauspielers, "das Schicksal" des Helden, die "Entrücktheit" des Zuschauers, der den Vorgängen "gebannt" folgt, all das soll verschwinden: die Kunst ist nicht an derlei gebunden.' (9) In BWS2, p. 212.

movement of life from representation in theatre, so does his formulation of a mechanical kind of aesthetic.

### 1.3 THE ACTOR'S SELF-ALIENATION AS A WEAPON AGAINST ILLUSION

A dual, mechanical and non-identificatory method of acting creates a form of theatrical representation that is model-like in overtly demonstrating its constructed and re-constructable nature; but furthermore, the central Brechtian argument of the method of self-alienated acting is the spectator's non-identification with the performed actions. This desired effect is closely intertwined with Brecht's aesthetic of a non-illusionistic anti-naturalism. If the actor is not identified with his role, in other words, if he does not subject himself to the illusion of becoming the protagonist during the performance, the illusionistic spell of the performed production at large will be broken, and the spectators maintain a detached and analytical attitude towards the represented actions.

This desired distance and criticality in the spectator is in turn the only condition upon which theatre can pursue its political project. If naturalism had attempted to convince the spectator of a bourgeois kind of reality by producing photographic-like depictions of reality, this reality for Brecht has become alienated itself, its naturalistic presentation fetishistic. The only way of penetrating the veil by means of which capitalism masks itself is to tighten all strategies of criticality. Brecht's insistence on the spectator's rational and scientifically inquisitive attitude thus involves the notion of an activation of the spectator: the spectator as 'scientist', or as 'politician' is to become an active agent in collecting new insights in the constitution of social reality and to draw his political conclusions in the political realities outside the theatre. It is in this respect that Brecht's political dimension of the *V-effect* becomes relevant. If social reality and a system of naturalism are pervaded by social alienation, an aesthetic of *Verfremdung* attempts to de-familiarise those conditions in order to provoke the spectator out of an acceptant position. Aesthetic alienation can thus contribute to the negation of social alienation, and the actor has an important role to play in this strategy.

The split between actor and role is in fact interpreted as the foremost mode of alienation, and serves as a powerful agent in the logic of interrupting the suspense of disbelief that has become established both in the theatre as well as in reality. Brecht



admires the Chinese actor for the fact that at no moment does he submit to a trance-like state of self-transformation on stage. In this Brecht critiques all Western acting methodology exploring psychological and identificatory techniques of acting, but most prominently the Stanislavskian system. Brecht is suspicious of the naturalistic claim that the illusion of a 'truth on stage' can only be obtained if the actor transforms himself completely into the role (*restlose Verwandlung*), if he becomes the 'other'. According to Brecht's explication of naturalistic acting methodology, this act of transformation - which he also equates with the Christian practice of transubstantiation, thereby clearly denouncing the irrational, anachronistic and socially unaware context in which the Stanislavski system operates - this total transformation must indeed occur subconsciously, ignited by the actor's *Einfühlung*. In diametrical opposition to Brecht's propagation of a theatre based on reason, Brecht sees in a belief-based system of acting only madness:

Denn sich einzubilden, man sei ein anderer, als man ist, und dies auch anderen suggerieren zu wollen, ist eben Wahnsinn, und gerade dies tun sie, und sie werden um so besser bezahlt, desto besser ihnen der Wahnsinn gelingt.<sup>89</sup> (10)

Empathy enables the actor to merge with his role. In order to sustain this state of subconscious *becoming*, his awareness of the technically and aesthetically constructed nature of theatre must be held at bay, for otherwise his own state of illusion together with the illusion created in the eyes of the audience will break. The Stanislavskian actor can therefore only act successfully as long as he believes himself to be subject to the illusion he produced. A passive, intuitive state of consciousness is assumed in which the actor is becoming possessed by the soul of the character. His knowledge of the contrived nature of his actions, which are rooted in the writings of the text and the work of the rehearsal, must be suppressed for the time he is in performance. This is what Brecht describes as trance. Sheltered behind what Brecht, in reminiscence of Diderot, calls 'the fourth wall of illusion', the actor himself believes that the staging he is involved in is real. If in the presence of the performance the presence of the role as an aesthetic construct is erased, the illusion is perfect and the spectator will in turn come to identify with the actor who has now become the character.

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<sup>89</sup> *Magie und Aberglaube*, BWS2, p. 177.

Brecht compares to the Western machinery of illusion the pragmatic and rationalist approach of the Chinese actor:

Welcher westlicher Schauspieler [...] könnte wie der Doktor Mei Lan-fang mit einem Smoking angetan, in einem Zimmer ohne besonderes Licht, umgeben von Sachverständigen die Elemente seiner Schauspielkunst zeigen? [...] Er würde wirken wie ein Jahrmarktzauberer, der seine Tricks zeigt - wonach niemand je wieder das Zauberkunststück sehen wollte. Er würde lediglich zeigen, wie man sich verstellt. Die Hypnose fiel weg, und es blieben ein paar Pfund schlecht verrührte Mimik übrig, eine schnell zusammengemischte Ware für einen Verkauf im Dunkeln, an eilige Käufer. Natürlich würde kein westlicher Schauspieler solch eine Schaustellung veranstalten. Wo bliebe die Heiligkeit der Kunst? Die Mystik der Verwandlung? Er legt Wert darauf, daß was er macht, unbewußt ist. Es verlöre sonst an Wert. Ein Vergleich mit der asiatischen Schauspielkunst zeigt das Pfäffische, in dem unsere Kunst noch befangen ist.<sup>90</sup> (11)

Mei Lan-fang is shown to be in conscious control of his acting without ever depending on the 'magic' of the 'fourth wall'. His is an acting technique that fully acknowledges the facticity of the theatre. No costume or scenery is needed to convince him into taking on the character. He knows very well that what he is showing is preconceived and it is this treatment of art as a technical craft which secures for Brecht the high status of an art form. If the actor attempts to emulate his role to the point of absorbing it into the nature of his own being, the status of art is at risk:

Ist die *restlose Verwandlung* gelungen, hat sich seine Kunst so ziemlich verausgabt. Ist er einmal der darzustellende Bankkassierer, Arzt oder Feldherr, so hat er ebensowenig Kunst nötig, wie der Bankkassierer, Arzt oder Feldherr 'im Leben' sie nötig hat.<sup>91</sup> (12)

If naturalism demands a kind of immersion into the role which undermines the difference between nature and art, Brecht can find in this only the cheapest form of magic - obvious tricks that don't even fulfil their task of deluding the audience. If naturalism argues for the most successful achievement of illusion by virtue of the actor's investing the role with his own *soul*, his personal feelings, memories and thoughts, Brecht's aesthetic of alienation always remains conscious of the division between nature and art, between the here-and-now of the actor and the historical conditions of the role. Mei Lan-fang can be interrupted within the process of acting at any time. For he does not rely on the trance-like 'presence' sustaining his own belief.

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<sup>90</sup> *Verfremdungseffekte*, BWS2, p. 204.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

Es ist nicht der mystische Augenblick der Gestaltung, in dem wir ihn stören: als er auf die Bühne trat war er mit der Gestaltung schon fertig.<sup>92</sup> (13)

The performance for him consists of a pattern of gestures, segments and phrases, all of which can be interrupted without disturbing the production of acting at its very core. For the fundamental motor of acting is reliant on rational control. Consciousness thus reigns over the process of rehearsal and composition as well as over the process of performance, an approach, Brecht claims, that is used for the production of rational actions as well as emotional ones. The Chinese actor can portray the most passionate actions without declining into sentimental melodrama. This is done in such a way that the actor only shows the external signs of a certain emotion without incorporating the actual feelings that go with it. Brecht identifies this mode of acting as constituent of gestures and signs:

In Augenblicken tiefer Erregung der dargestellten Person nimmt der Artist eine Haarsträhne zwischen die Lippen und zerbeißt sie. Aber das ist wie ein Ritus, alles Eruptive fehlt ihm. Der Artist zeigt: dieser Mensch ist außer sich, und der deutet die äußeren Zeichen dafür an.<sup>93</sup> (14)

Choosing and presenting the right kind of signs for emotional expression, the performer's art form remains one controlled by the mind. Memory, intelligence, experience and knowledge overrule the stimulation of emotions from his personal emotional or psychological disposition. If this language of performance consists of a system of externally fixed signs, one which performs the signification of socio-historically inscribed gestures like rites, Brecht wishes the actor to merely 'cite' those.<sup>94</sup> Acting as 'citation' has for Brecht, on the one hand, the advantage of clearly demonstrating the very 'dis-identity' of self and role, and on the other, the effect of emptying gestures and language of its emotionally affective aspect. In opposition, Brecht deplores the technical poverty of Stanislavski's emotionally inflamed process of acting:

Dem Schauspieler gelingt es nämlich für gewöhnlich nicht lange, sich wirklich als der andere zu fühlen, bald beginnt er erschöpft nur noch gewisse Äußerlichkeiten in der Haltung und im Stimmfall des andern zu kopieren, worauf die Wirkung beim Publikum sich erschreckend abschwächt. Dies kommt zweifellos daher, daß die Kreierung des

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<sup>92</sup> *Bemerkungen über die chinesische Schauspielkunst*, BWS2, p. 153.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153.

<sup>94</sup> *Verfremdungseffekte*, BWS2, p. 202-3.

andern ein 'intuitiver', also dunkler Akt war, der im Unterbewußten vor sich ging, und das Unterbewußtsein ist sehr schwer zu regulieren: es hat sozusagen ein schlechtes Gedächtnis.<sup>95</sup> (15)

Identification relies on the stimulation of the actor's own emotions which soon leads to his own exhaustion and the deterioration of the play. Thus, self-alienation is implied to provide the technical basis upon which the creation of performance as a work of art comes to be possible.

Yet, Brecht is not only critical of the technical shortcomings of the acting system based on 'Einfühlung'. His main interest is to refute a method asserting the Western principles of Aristotelian theatre: identification, emotional absorption, illusion and finally, catharsis. His critique involves the idea of reforming the stance of the spectator. Instead of a passively empathetic audience, Brecht wants to stimulate a critically active one.

#### *1.4 THE ACTOR'S SELF-ALIENATION IS IDENTICAL WITH THE SPECTATOR'S ALIENATION*

Emotionally infectious, the Stanislavskian system represents in Brecht's view an unstable system, easily deteriorating into an involuntary performance that produces a collapse between art and reality and hence the destruction of the work of art. The audience become disillusioned in their capacity to believe because the actor's efforts to *become* his role are impossible to achieve without the support of a consciously applied technique, that is, without the control of mind and memory. On the contrary, as exemplified by Mei Lan-fang, the Brechtian system acknowledges a fundamental alienation between character and actor. The character is the construction of a consciously technical program which facilitates performance as a reliably artistic pursuit. The actor remains detached from his role for purely technical reasons. The process of performance is made a predictable, stable and coherent activity.

However, one may argue, and I will do so with Diderot in mind, that this system of acting uses alienation as a technical condition of acting without necessarily obstructing

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-4.

a naturalistic aesthetic. What Brecht suggests is not an aesthetic of alienation but a naturalism all the more skilfully natural. Illusion is kept under control by refusing to abandon it to the uncontrollable energies of the sub-conscious, but it is not necessarily broken. Yet what Brecht claims is that the avoidance of an identificatory technique can be employed in such a way that theatrical illusion is disrupted and the alienation-effect sets in. Depending on the extent to which the actor can exert the alienating quality inherent to the mechanical and purely technical aspect of acting, he will produce alienation-effects. Hand in hand with the quality of *mechanicity* that springs from self-alienated acting, the very difference between actor and his aesthetic role must be thrown into dialectical juxtaposition. It has to be made obvious that the actor merely cites his role that he himself disagrees with and differs from. Alienation then is not merely based on the fact that the actor is detached from his role for technical purposes, but his actions have to demonstrate the difference between signifiers of action and signifiers of self-referentiality. Actions and the framing of these actions must to be shown to clash. Yet Brecht does not account for these differences, which consist perhaps in variations of the degree of alienation, or possibly in the differentiation of internal technical self-alienation and external alienation. Instead, he is more concerned with the polemical polarities between the Stanislavskian method and his own innovation of acting as *Verfremdung*, represented by the contrast between Western Aristotelian theatre and the art of the Chinese actor. *Verfremdung* becomes a monolithic term cancelling out the difference between the actor's method of rational and self-distanced self-alienation and the effect of estrangement.

The transition from an aesthetic of naturalism based on alienation to an *epic* type of alienation remains fluid within the argument of the Chinese essays. If the actor chooses to approach his role with a rational and technical stance, he does so by composing a character consisting of a diversity of disembodied signs. This pattern of highly specific signs and gestures functions independently from the actor's own personal emotional state, and for that reason can be assessed by his rational faculties. Brecht claims that this method of acting is not merely neutral or natural because it is technically highly skilled, but that it carries with it precisely the quality of ritualistic strangeness described above. This then raises the crucial question whether Chinese acting is in fact really antagonistic to an identificatory and emotionally contagious (*emotionale Ansteckung*) *Aristotelian theatre*. Is it simply deprived of a kind of emotional hysteria detested by

Brecht in bourgeois naturalism or does it in fact produce a heightened expression of alienation which actively inhibits illusionism?

However, the difference between a kind of alienation, which is employed in the name of technique and art, and one which disturbs the captivating energy of illusion, is subsumed into one argument. This is clearly demonstrated by the following passage:

Es ist für den Schauspieler schwierig und strapaziös, jeden Abend gewisse Emotionen oder Stimmungen in sich zu erzeugen, dagegen einfacher, die äußeren Anzeichen vorzutragen, die diese Emotionen begleiten und anzeigen. Allerdings gilt dann nicht so ohne weiteres die Übertragung dieser Emotionen auf den Zuschauer, die *emotionelle Ansteckung*. Der Verfremdungseffekt tritt ein, und zwar nicht in der Form *keiner* Emotionen, sondern in der Form von Emotionen, die sich mit denen der dargestellten Person nicht zu decken brauchen. Beim Anblick von Kummer kann der Zuschauer Freude, bei dem von Wut Ekel empfinden. Wenn wir hier von einem Vortrag der äußeren Anzeichen der Emotionen sprechen, so meinen wir nicht einen solchen Vortrag und eine solche Auswahl der Anzeichen, daß die emotionelle Ansteckung doch erfolgt, weil der Schauspieler die darzustellenden Emotionen doch noch in sich erzeugt hat, indem er nämlich die äußeren Anzeichen vortrug: durch ein Anschwellenlassen der Stimme und ein Anhalten der Atmung zusammen mit einem Zusammenziehen der Halsmuskeln, wodurch das Blut in den Kopf schießt, kann der Schauspieler leicht in sich Zorn erzeugen. In diesem Fall tritt der Effekt natürlich nicht auf.<sup>96</sup> (16)

Brecht suggests that the sign language employed by the actor not only means that he himself is free from the turmoil and volatile nature of passions; also the spectator is free to think and feel independently from what the presentation shows. He is not manipulated into re-enacting feelings and thoughts identical to those of the character. In order to produce the desired effect, the actor avoids producing emotions in himself and instead renders the emotions of the character. As a consequence, the spectator remains emotionally and intellectually un-hypnotised. He is allowed to react to the representation freely and independently. Identification is shown to lead to a different end:

Der Zuschauer fühlt sich in den Schauspieler als in einen Betrachtenden ein: so wird eine betrachtende Haltung kultiviert.<sup>97</sup> (17)

On the basis of Brecht's theories spelt out in the essays on Chinese acting, one could then postulate the following formula: if the actor identifies with his role and succeeds in

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-5.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

producing a highly charged emotional performance, the spectator will come to identify with the character accordingly. Yet, if the actor remains alienated from his role, he can prevent the spectator from losing his rational distance, thereby becoming absorbed into blind identification with the character. The achievement or 'failure' of illusion therefore rests entirely on the actor's state of consciousness. His own 'self-alienation' causes the spectator to contemplate theatrical representation with distance:

Das sich-selber-Zusehen des Artisten, ein künstlicher und kunstvoller Akt der Selbstentfremdung, verhindert die vollständige, d.h. die bis zur Selbstaufgabe gehende Einfühlung des Zuschauers und schafft eine großartige Distanz zu den Vorgängen.<sup>98</sup>  
(18)

Brecht's theory of alienation thus posits the antithesis to Stanislavskian methodology at the level of the effect. Where Brecht desires to oppose Stanislavski is in producing an external aesthetic of estrangement, distance and alienation. But where Brecht comes to resemble Stanislavski is in the way in which he equates method and effect.

'Identification causes identification and alienation causes alienation' would be the short form of the logic behind Brecht's theory of acting. If the actor treats his role as someone else (*einen anderen*), the spectator, too, will be redeemed from the magic spell of identification. Yet this equation does not account for the very difference between technique and external form. Strangely, Brecht ignores the possibility that the actor might be using methodological tools in order to hold firm control over a highly strung emotional performance, thereby seducing the audiences into illusion and emotional submissiveness. When Brecht interprets the quality of Chinese acting as cold, he refers to both the technical approach as well as the final external aesthetic observed by the audience. Both aspects are believed to function in identity and simultaneity. Even the rational and critical attitude which Brecht wants to see the spectator maintain is only a result of the actor's exemplifying a critical attitude by the means of his acting:

Die Durchkältung kommt daher, daß der Schauspieler sich in der erwähnten Art von der Figur, die er darstellt, distanziert. Er hütet sich, ihre Empfindungen zu denen der Zuschauer zu machen. Niemand wird von dem Individuum vergewaltigt, das er darstellt: es ist nicht der Zuschauer selber, es ist sein Nachbar.<sup>99</sup> (19)

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

The actor induces in the spectator an attitude of critical detachment. He functions for the spectator as a model of detached and non-identificatory (re-)acting. But in this sense, the spectator does little else but identify with the command of not becoming emotionally affected.

In short, I wish to suggest that Brecht's technique of alienated acting is then less connected with liberating the audience than with manipulating them into a different mode of perception. Brecht is still caught within a definition of acting which is based on a mirroring relation between actors and spectators. If the actors cry, so do the spectators. If the actors are rationally self-detached, the spectators, too, will be rational and detached. Brecht is not that dissimilar to Stanislavski after all.

Up to this point I have attempted to expose the characteristics of acting as *Verfremdung* as expounded by Brecht in the essays on Chinese acting. Furthermore, I have suggested some of the problematics involved in the Brechtian method, thereby already anticipating and implying some of Diderot's principles of *Le Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, which I will dissect in more detail in the following chapter on Diderot. In the remaining sections of this chapter I will discuss specific consequences of Brecht's aesthetic of alienation which could be said to originate in the art of acting but which reach out into the dimension of a Brechtian aesthetic at large. Core issues in this will be the questions of visibility as well as temporality, both intimately intertwined with each other and paramount for what we would recognise as alienating in Brechtian representation.

### 1.5 THE GEOMETRY OF THE DUAL FORM AND ITS VISUAL DIMENSION

One finds in the Chinese essays the idea of a dual, or, multi-layered system of acting interwoven with the concept of a theatre determined by visibility. The title of the essay *Über die Zuschaukunst*<sup>100</sup> indicates how highly the idea of a theatre which is to be *looked at* rather than to be *felt* ranks. It is precisely this visual dimension of Chinese theatre which for Brecht induces a critical mode of perception. This is how the idea of a theatre based on vision is interlocked with the idea of the character on stage as a dual entity: if the concept of the layered character is supposed to be recognised by the

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<sup>100</sup> *Über die Zuschaukunst*, BWS2, pp. 124-125.



spectator, it is essential that these different layers do not merge into one. What therefore seems to be paramount is that divisions remain intact and that the coexistence of different layers in the stage representation is made visible. The most appropriate mode of composition for contrasting different signifiatory elements is the principle of *montage*, in which on a two-dimensional plane different territorialised surfaces are set against each other. Brecht finds this concept of arranging different elements next to each other realised in the compositions of Chinese paintings:

Auf ihren Bildern sind mehrere Dinge einander nebengeordnet, sie verteilen sich auf ein Blatt, wie Einwohner ein und derselben Stadt sich auf diese Stadt verteilen, nicht etwa unabhängig voneinander, aber nicht in einer Abhängigkeit, welche die Existenz selbst bedroht. [...] Das Auge kann auf Entdeckungen ausgehen. Die dargestellten Dinge spielen die Rolle von Elementen, die selbständig existieren können, dennoch sind sie in der von ihnen auf dem Blatt eingegangenen Verbindung ein Ganzes, wenn auch kein unteilbares. Man kann diese Tafeln auseinanderschneiden, ohne daß sie sinnlos werden, aber nicht ohne daß sie sich ändern.<sup>101</sup> (20)

Brecht is intrigued by the idea that each pictorial object can be isolated as an independent signifier. What is entirely reliant on this lateral form of composition is the possibility of juxtapositional thinking, the condition upon which dialectical thinking can occur. On the basis of a dual and lateral mode of representational organisation, oppositions can be thrown into contrast, and dialectical forms of thinking can ensue.<sup>102</sup>

However, this lateral mode of composition is more easily accomplished within the static nature of a visual field of representation. The nature of acting as a time-based medium which always tends to dissipate in movement, renders the realisation of a juxtapositional form of representation more difficult, since it can at the very best distinguish contrasts in time, by showing one state after another, by exaggerating as much as possible the distinct characteristics of each separate unit. Thus, acting has to adopt image-like forms of representation, freezing its flow of time in order to produce a series of images rather than a sequence of undifferentiated movements.

As with Benjamin's dialectical image, temporal standstill becomes the condition upon which contrasts can best be recognised. At the moment of dialectical understanding, we

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<sup>101</sup> *Über die Malerei der Chinesen*, BWS2, pp. 133-4.

<sup>102</sup> On the idea of contrast as an aspect of Brechtian alienation see Reinhold Grimm, *Brecht: Die Struktur seines Werkes* (Nürnberg: Erlanger Beiträge zur Sprach- und Kunstwissenschaft, 1968), pp.19-25.

isolate certain signifiers from their natural temporal context and arrest them within their correct synthetic constellation: a dialectical relation falls into place, into a compositional arrangement creating an event of meaning.<sup>103</sup> This configuration is neither arbitrary nor fluid, but absolute and fixed. Objects which might not have seemed to connect immediately are now brought into relations on one plane. This implies an operation of freezing the flowing quality of time, whilst with the explicit image-like dimension, *epic* theatre is endowed with an extended field of complexities. An otherwise linear movement of action, which precipitates forward, is interrupted and re-assembled in stilled relationships. In the same way that the alienation-effect produces the possibility of distance, this stilled and laterally organised visuality allows us to gain insight ‘at a distance’ from the flow of time.

#### 1.6 VISUALITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE TEMPORAL ORDER

This image-like form of representation, the very visuality of Brechtian aesthetics, goes hand in hand with a specific temporal structure and quality. What predicates this stilled visuality is the important role of utopianism inherent in Brecht’s Marxist politics. The notion of utopia has an immediate impact on the form of temporality which determines Brechtian representation.

Brecht opposes the kind of dramatic timing theorised by Schiller, one which *re-presents* a fictional past in a manner that the spectator becomes fixated upon an ever-accelerating *presence* that culminates towards the end of the play. By the same token, the spectator becomes more and more absorbed into the illusion of the play, forgetting ‘his own time’, his own presence in a specific socio-historical context.<sup>104</sup> In opposition to Schiller, who aimed to lure the spectator into ‘another’ past thereby making him oblivious to his own present, Brecht is only interested in heightening the spectator’s

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<sup>103</sup> On Benjamin’s concept of the dialectical image see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989)

<sup>104</sup> Michael Fried, in his essay ‘Art and Objecthood’, refers to Brecht precisely because of his ‘alienated’ approach to temporality. Brecht falls outside of Fried’s accusations of theatrical presentism in the way he uses a temporal system that opposes Schiller’s demand: ‘Schiller’s distinction is no longer valid: that the rhapsodist has to treat his material as wholly in the past: the mime his, as wholly here and now. It should be apparent all through his performance that “even at the start and in the middle he knows how it ends” and he must “thus maintain a calm independence throughout.” He narrates the story of his character by vivid portrayal, always knowing more than it does and treating “now” and “here” not as a pretence made possible by the rules of the game but as something to be distinguished from yesterday and some other place, so as to make visible the knotting together of the events.’ As quoted by Fried (1964), p. 146.

awareness of his own historical situation prompting a break within the continuities of a capitalist present. His project is thus on the one hand entirely directed towards a political utopia, that is, profoundly insistent on possibilities of change, whilst on the other hand he is interested in putting into relief the historical condition of actions.<sup>105</sup>

Characteristic of Brecht's utopian aesthetics is a certain emptiness of representation. The spectator is presented with social scenarios that are situated in space that has been evacuated of the movements of time. Brecht's utopianism does not articulate itself in an impatience of rhythm and time found for example in Ernst Bloch's philosophical poetic.<sup>106</sup> There is no precipitation of a better future to come and there is no attempt to represent it, for any idealisation would only compensate for rather than change a socially disordered reality. What is typical for Brecht's productions is a sense of arrest and standstill, the sense of a temporal vacuum. It is however this un-representability which can be indicated. The notion of utopia can be made tangible precisely in its 'no-where' quality. The stages of Brecht's designer Kaspar Neher introduced a certain kind of de-concretisation of space, rendering it more abstract. The milieu-oriented stage of naturalism was transformed by Neher into a more or less empty space: grey and unbounded, his stage would have the imaginative potential to open up into different social possibilities. On these stages Brecht sets a kind of theatre that would understand itself as a socio-scientific experiment, placed in an improvised interim, drawing attention to the re-constructable condition of social action. The stage's only fixity was to be social process itself, rather than a naturalistic kind of milieu that would cement sociology into the given and unalterable context of a place:

Unsere Abbildung eines Ortes gibt dem Zuschauer mehr als der Anblick des wirklichen Ortes, indem sie Merkmale gesellschaftlicher Prozesse hat, die jenem fehlen, jedenfalls in dieser Deutlichkeit fehlen; unsere Abbildung gibt dem Zuschauer andererseits weniger als der Anblick des wirklichen Ortes, indem der *Augenschein* in ihr aufgehoben ist.<sup>107</sup> (21)

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<sup>105</sup> On the notion of utopianism in Brecht, see Barbara Buhl, *Bilder der Zukunft: Traum und Plan. Utopie im Werk Bertolt Brechts* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1988).

<sup>106</sup> In opposition to Brecht, Bloch advocated an expressionist utopian aesthetic saturated with the tone of impatient optimism. On the relation of the two writers see: Christina Ujma, 'Der strenge und der schwärmende Ton: Notes on Bloch and Brecht in the Twenties and Thirties', trans. Jonathan Long, in *Bertolt Brecht: Centenary Essays*, ed. Steve Giles and Rodney Livingstone (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 33-48.

<sup>107</sup> *Unsere Abbildung eines Ortes*, BWS2, p. 255.

*Re-presentation*, that is the making present of past actions, thus becomes a highly suspicious aesthetic. ‘Utopia’ articulates itself in terms of the artwork taking over an instrumental position in a process of recognition and political intervention. The Utopian aspect of the work of art as a process of political work is a highly mediated one. Art configures itself in a way that will affect the process of history and participate in an active way in building the future. According to the Brechtian principle of ‘open structure’, this aesthetic world is posited in flux without any cohesive causality between prior and after: it is rather the structure of sociological power relations which decide over temporal ordering.<sup>108</sup> *Historisation* and *gestus* are two closely connected terms which explain most clearly the particularities of a specific kind of Brechtian temporality and they will also allow us to return to Brecht’s aphoristic essays on Chinese acting.

### 1.7 HISTORISATION (‘HISTORISIERUNG’) AND GESTUS

*Gestus* signifies a gesture displayed by the actor, which characterises the political and sociological inscription of a figure, in other words, its socially determined physical typology:

Unter sozialem Gestus ist der mimische und gestische Ausdruck der gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen zu verstehen, in denen die Menschen einer bestimmten Epoche zueinander stehen.<sup>109</sup> (22)

Identities are in this way being performed in their culturally and sociologically determined origin rather than their psychological differentiation. However, the *gestus* is also characterised by a specific kind of temporality, for it is not to be confused with gestures as movement. *Gestus* signifies the *instilling* of social meaning in an action. *Gestus* is a gesture that has become static. With the image of ‘Durchkältung’, Brecht explains the way in which gestures in Chinese acting ‘freeze’ the fluid qualities of psychological expressiveness:

Der Artist zeigt: dieser Mensch ist außer sich, und er deutet die äußeren Zeichen dafür an. [...] Jedenfalls sind unter vielen möglichen Zeichen besondere ausgewählt, sichtbar

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<sup>108</sup> On the legacy of utopianism in a post-Brechtian theatre see Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, *Critique du théâtre: De l’utopie au désenchantement* (Belfort: Circé, 2000)

<sup>109</sup> *Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt*, BWS2, p. 646.

mit großer Überlegung. Zorn unterscheidet sich natürlich von Unmut, Haß von Abneigung, Liebe von Sympathie, aber die unterschiedlichen Bewegungen des Gefühls werden sparsam dargestellt. Die Durchkältung kommt daher, daß der Schauspieler sich in der erwähnten Art von der Figur, die er darstellt, distanziert.<sup>110</sup> (23)

Here the method of 'freezing' gesture into *gestus*, thereby minimising the oscillating movements of emotions, is directly linked with 'distanciation'. It is made possible by the self-alienation of the actor. The expression of emotions comes to equal a chain of different gestures, each gesture typifying a specific emotion, like a sentence that can be dissected into words. These gestural embodiments of emotion are not heart-felt. They do not permeate the emotional body of the actor; they are cited with rational and unaffected calculation. They communicate a language of pure sociological typology rather than transport to the outside of the body its emotional conditions. *Gestus* in this sense is expression without self-expression.<sup>111</sup>

The image of the frozen constitution of the gesture is inevitably bound up with the way in which action is timed. Gestures, invested with emotional expressiveness, have an irregular and 'eruptive' quality, which is associated with spontaneity and psychological impulse. The kind of gesture envisioned by Brecht is stripped of the jerky rhythms of psychologically charged movement. *Gestus* arrests the fluidity of emotional movements and freezes them into typical signs. This link between fluidity, emotions and temporality is succinctly expressed in *Den Fluß der Begebenheiten verfremden*:

Der Fluß der Begebenheiten, die Aufeinanderfolge von Repliken, Bewegungen, Reaktionen hat etwas Undeutliches, Unverfolgbares, da man nicht dazwischenkommt mit dem Prüfen, indem immerfort ein Fluß von Stimmungen und gefühlsmäßigen Notierungen jenen Fluß begleitet.<sup>112</sup> (25)

The fluctuating motions of emotion would make it impossible for the spectator to fulfil his task of maintaining a critical and examining attitude. Gestures in motion only create a diffuse and blurred image. Pure movement in this sense is non-significatory, preceding the meaning of historical or social time. On the contrary, halted temporality

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<sup>110</sup> *Verfremdungseffekte*, BWS2, p. 203.

<sup>111</sup> Giorgio Agamben, with reference to Benjamin, defines the gesture in the following way: '*Was in jedem Ausdruck ohne Ausdruck bleibt, ist Geste.*' (24) 'Noten zur Geste', trans. Elisabetta Fontana-Hentschel, ed. Alexander García Düttmann, in *Postmoderne und Politik*, ed. Jutta Georg-Lauer (Tübingen: Diskord, 1992), p. 105. For an abbreviated English version of the essay see 'Notes on Gesture', in *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 135-40.

<sup>112</sup> BWS2, pp. 221.

in the *gestus* facilitates analysis, that is, the breaking up of movement into specific states.

As Walter Benjamin observed, the Brechtian *gestus* entails several great advantages: the clarity of a definite beginning and end, that is its framed character, and its inherent truthfulness: it cannot be falsified. Benjamin also praises the gesture for the fact that it can be interrupted at any moment in time, since it is being performed according to an organised path. The more often a gesture is interrupted, the more 'images' present themselves, the better analysis can dissect realities in flux.<sup>113</sup>

One particular *gestus* defined by Brecht demonstrates very clearly the way in which he attempts to defeat the hypnotising impact of theatrical 'presence': the *gestus of historisation* (*Gestus der Historisierung*). In opposition to Schiller's demand for the actor to become the protagonist and implicitly to bring into 'presence' a non-existent, purely fictive double, Brechtian *historisation* means to project actions into the past, to play them 'as if they were history'. *Historisation* also counts as one of the means to produce an alienation-effect, for the gaze which treats actions as historical events interjects distance between the 'here and now' of the spectator and the 'then' of the aesthetic material. *Historisation* detracts from an intensification of 'presence', evoking the illusion that what is being presented is absolute and inflicted by an eternally valid law:

Der Schauspieler muß die Vorgänge als historische Vorgänge spielen. Historische Vorgänge sind einmalige, vorübergehende, mit bestimmten Epochen verbundene Vorgänge. Das Verhalten der Personen in ihnen ist nicht ein schlechthin menschliches, unwandelbares, es hat bestimmte Besonderheiten, es hat durch den Gang der Geschichte Überholtes und Überholbares und ist der Kritik vom Standpunkt der jeweiligen darauffolgenden Epoche aus unterworfen. Die ständige Entwicklung entfremdet uns das Verhalten der vor uns Geborenen.<sup>114</sup> (26)

The use of *historisation* thus involves a move against the universalising tendencies of idealist drama. Historical awareness shows how relative actions are to their specific socio-historical situation and therefore transitory and changeable. An alienation-effect

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<sup>113</sup> Benjamin (1973), 'What is Epic Theatre [First version]', p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> *Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt*, BWS2, p. 646.

is produced because stage actions perceived with historical distance are taken less for granted. De-familiarised, they appear less natural and universal. Instead of being absorbed into the hypnosis of naturalist 'presentism' the audience will now look at the performance through the eyes of historians with an interest in the causalities of historical changes.<sup>115</sup> Once more, *historisation* serves the function of a Marxist-oriented scientific theatre, one which facilitates change by activating the spectator's analytical capacities.

Both *gestus* and *historisation* are means of alienation (*Verfremdung*) which allow the spectator to look at dramatic action with more distance. They highlight the socially determined specificity of events, whilst counteracting a universalist humanising approach inherent in naturalist illusionism. In relation to the problem of alienation, they involve a temporal displacement from a dramatic intensification of 'presence' to an emotionally and subjectively de-charged rationalisation of time. Brecht's aesthetic of visual stillness, which becomes particularly acute in his concept of the *gestus*, entails a curtailment of the fluid, rhythmic and unpredictable dimensions of temporal experience. One might say that this suggests a break not only with Schiller's idealist notion of dramatic temporality, one in which the actor creates an illusion of transporting fictive past actions into the present, but it also 'freezes away' the chaotically driven twitches of subjective time, a kind of timing that inscribes itself in the body's movement by way of its drives, pressures, and desires. The result of the concept of the *gestus* is an almost monotonous, measured aesthetic of time. As Barthes states in his essay on 'Brecht, Diderot, and Eisenstein', Brechtian theatre like the entire Western tradition of theatre, opposes a musical potential of theatre characterised by the link between mathematics and acoustics.<sup>116</sup> Following the idea of the *gestus*, transitions and gradations occurring within the movement of a gesture are omitted, although it is precisely here in the involuntary, seemingly insignificant seconds of a movement, that meaning might perhaps germinate. An aesthetic that goes against both the *re-presentation* of past time as well as the dramatic fetishisation of a hypnotic kind of presence, enables us to observe the evacuation of 'natural' time as a source of expressiveness. Entirely in line with his anti-naturalistic philosophy, Brecht posits a drama in which the subject is never

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<sup>115</sup> Brecht draws this comparison in *Über die epische Schauspielkunst: 'Schauspieler: Du sagtest, der Schauspieler muß den Wechsel der Dinge zum Ausdruck bringen. Was heißt das? Zuschauer: Das heißt, euer Zuschauer ist auch ein Historiker.'* (27), BWS2, p. 670.

<sup>116</sup> Barthes (1991), p. 89.

under the impact of time. On the contrary, the spectator is situated in an a-temporal theatrical 'laboratory' where time has come to a standstill, and a sociological kind of reflection and experimentation is supposed to begin, in which the chaos of natural time has been rationalised and tamed by the gaze of the distanced historian.

In sum, in the preceding chapter I have been trying to lay out the key elements that characterise Brecht's conceptual conjunction of acting and alienation, as theorised in his essays on Chinese theatre. Brecht articulates a technique by means of which the actor alienates himself from his role, thereby producing an effect of alienation for the spectator. The actor's very self-alienation, that is, his becoming double in the process of performing, involves the notions of rational control and artistic creation, securing theatre's success as an aesthetic activity. The result of this method is both an aesthetic of coldness as well as one of distance. Brecht claims that the actor's self-alienation must necessarily lead to an effect of spectatorial detachment. Astonishment, a questioning and scientific stance, these are the reactions which Brecht concludes from his speculations on acting methodology. However, I have also suggested that there is a logic of identification at work in Brecht's methodological logic. By basing spectatorial alienation on the actor's self-alienation, he paradoxically seems to apply a logic of identification. The actor becomes identified with the spectator's self-detachment. Furthermore I have shown the consequences of Brecht's visually oriented art of 'showing' (*Zuschaukunst*). The idea of *gestus*, itself representing a means of alienation, involves the evacuation of time from its more processual, unpredictable and jerky qualities. Temporality is frozen into socio-historically determined gestic signifiers. Alienation and distance inscribe themselves in a kind of temporality which has become arrested for the purpose of political reflection to intervene with the continuities of a present steeped in the alienated conditions of capitalist society. In the following chapter on Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* I will proceed to unravel both the surprising similarities of Brecht's and Diderot's methodological precepts regarding an acting technique based on alienation, as well as the differences.



## Chapter 2

### *Diderot's Mimetic Alienations in 'Le Paradoxe sur le comédien'*

Two hundred years before Brecht's development of an acting system based on alienation, Diderot, in the context of bourgeois emancipation, formulated his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. To the reader, familiar with the Brechtian theories, it comes as a surprise that here Diderot spells out a program of acting which in its technical aspects, and sometimes even in its formulations, echoes or, to be historically correct, foreshadows Brecht's modernist innovations. However, although the similarities between the two theorists are striking, Diderot and Brecht, as I will show in the following chapter, have opposite ends in mind.

I have already commented in my introduction on the fact that Brecht is perhaps more compatible with the politically positivistic Diderot of the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique* than the more sceptical Diderot of the *Paradoxe*. Whereas in the first two texts written in 1757 and 1758, theatre clearly epitomised the Enlightenment art form per se, intending to bring to the ascendant bourgeois class values such as humanitarianism, morality, sensibility and social harmony, the *Paradoxe*, written between 1770 and 1778, strikes a far more cynical tone with regard to the Enlightenment project of theatre. Although Diderot still purports to write in the name of an aesthetic measured to the interests of the bourgeoisie, he begins to propose a theory that seems at constant risk of undoing its politically oriented project. What emerges from the argument of the text is a discussion of what one might call the logic of theatre, or the logic of mimesis.

Here, the *Paradoxe* comes to differ radically from Brecht's aphoristic theoretical writings, which, despite their fragmented nature, always keep a very clear aesthetic and political agenda in mind. Whereas the *Paradoxe* allows itself the freedom to engage in

a series of self-contradictions and impasses, throwing into question the moral project of the theatre without relinquishing the theatre at large, Brecht's theoretical corpus, which stretches over nearly 40 years, remains more or less consistent in the way aesthetics are aligned with political ends.<sup>117</sup> Whilst Brecht undoubtedly figures as the more politically consistent theatre theoretician, Diderot's method of theorising in the *Paradoxe* opens up a phenomenology of theatre which seems difficult to tame by politics, an order which has its own law and its own specific powers, not necessarily congruous with the moral ideas of the bourgeois philosopher. Alienation in this context comes to emanate as a consequence of acting itself, thus opposing Brecht's teleological project of *Verfremdung* which derives first of all from the idea of un-alienating social alienation.

I have structured the following chapter so that I will first present the Diderotian parallels to Brecht's idea of a self-alienated, 'frozen', and aesthetically self-conscious aesthetic. I will then contrast these technically similar precepts and make tangible their divergence in terms of their opposing motivations. Finally, I will show that there is not only a 'silent' methodology of alienation at work in Diderot's concept of acting, but that one can deduce from his thought process in the *Paradoxe* an aesthetic of alienation that becomes externalised, whilst presenting an alternative to Brecht's 'alienated' modernism.

## 2.1 DUAL FORMS OF ACTING: APPROXIMATING DIDEROT TO BRECHT

Diderot wrote the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* in several stages in the context of an eighteenth-century dramaturgical debate centred on the art of acting. The main subject of this polemical discussion was the question of what mental disposition would guarantee excellence of acting, a kind of acting which would facilitate the Aristotelian demands of empathy and catharsis, or rather, in the awakening spirit of the ascendant bourgeois class, the stimulation of sentiment and sensibility. Here, for the first time in history, theatre developed its own acting methodology, both replacing as well as attacking the rhetorical tradition, as well as rebelling against a style of acting that had

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<sup>117</sup> There is a difference of course between an early Brecht, a mature Brecht and a late Brecht, but these differences do not call into question the main orientations of his politically engaged realism. For a discussion of Brecht's late theoretical and dramatic works in comparison to his earlier ones see Walter Hinck, *Die Dramaturgie des späten Brechts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

become associated with the artifice of the monarchic system and the *tragédie classique*. Just as the Enlightenment had disputed the order of absolute monarchy with the idea of nature as the only binding law, now also in acting 'nature' became a prime value to be searched for. The *Paradoxe* emerged directly from this context of eighteenth-century naturalistic acting methodologies.

In 1770 Diderot published in Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* an early version of the later *Paradoxe*, under the title *Observations sur une brochure intitulée Garrick ou les Acteurs anglais*.<sup>118</sup> Here, Diderot presented a critique of a concept of acting based on sensibility which had been put forth by the Italian actor Antonio Sticotti in 1769.

Sticotti's main thesis comprised the idea that in order to affect the spectator's sensibility, the actor must play from his own emotional resources. To act naturally, he must remain an un-divided self; and to transport the spectator into the desired aesthetic illusion, the actor must delude himself. Acting was thus constructed as an extended form of improvisation, in which the actor was to become penetrated by the emotions of the role in which place he would act, thereby entirely extinguishing any consciousness of himself. Acting as a gift from nature, which could create the illusion of nature, had to eliminate all consciousness of its artistic constitution. However, the *brochure* in question represented a plagiarised version of another Italian actor's theories: Luigi Riccoboni's *Pensées sur la déclamation*, published in 1738.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, L. Riccoboni's acting method based on the principles of *sensibilité* and *enthousiasme* had been followed by Rémond de Sainte-Albine's *Le Comédien*, who, in turn, suggested that good acting depended on the actor's skill to transport himself into a state of delusional trance, into a *délire heureux*.<sup>120</sup>

However, if the preceding theoreticians had argued for an acting method that would enable the bourgeois celebration of tears and sentiment on the basis of cultivating the

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<sup>118</sup> Antonio-Fabio Sticotti, *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglais, ouvrage contenant des observations sur l'art dramatique, sur l'art de la représentation, et le jeu des acteurs; avec des notes historiques et critiques, et des anecdotes sur les différents théâtres de Londres et de Paris* (Paris, 1769).

<sup>119</sup> Luigi Riccoboni, *Pensées sur la déclamation, par Louis Riccoboni* (Paris: Briasson, 1738). On Sticotti's plagiarism of L. Riccoboni see Patrick Tort, *L'origine du 'Paradoxe sur le comédien': La partition intérieure* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1980), p. 19.

<sup>120</sup> Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine, *Le Comédien, ouvrage divisé en deux parties, par M. Rémond de Sainte-Albine* (Paris: Desaint et Saillant, Vincent Fils, 1747).

actor's emotional capacity,<sup>121</sup> François Riccoboni, Luigi Riccoboni's son, stirred up the polemics with his publication *L'Art du théâtre*.<sup>122</sup> It was the younger Riccoboni's 'anti-sensibilist' position that Diderot attached himself to in the *Paradoxe*, despite his earlier postulates of an acting method based on 'enthousiasme' in the *Entretiens* and *De la poésie*. Paradox here, in the sense of the eighteenth-century, means the contestation of the generally accepted doctrine of the actor who acts by means of sensibility in order to animate the role.<sup>123</sup> In 1773 Diderot reworks the earlier version of his *Observations* into the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, which undergoes a final revision in 1778. At this point Diderot passes on the script to his editor Naigeon, who however does not include it in the posthumous publication of Diderot's works in 1798. The *Paradoxe* as we know it thus only appears in the 1902 edition of Ernest Dupuy.<sup>124</sup>

## 2.2 ACTING COLD OR HOT?

Diderot's answer to the question how the actor may best render his role into a character of flesh and blood was a theory based on artifice rather than nature. This opposition of art and nature was complemented by further dichotomous pairs that fuelled the controversy revolving around the theory of sensibility. Against the idea of heated enthusiasm he set the idea of coldness; the idea of sensibility was opposed by the idea of rational control; the anatomy of the heart, the soul and the diaphragm was replaced by the brain. A theory of acting based on these polemical binaries places Diderot into the immediate proximity of Brecht. Both authors develop as part of their refutation of an acting method based on sensibility (in Diderot's case) and identification (in Brecht's case) the idea of the actor's self-alienation, that is a system of acting based on dualities.

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<sup>121</sup> The origins of this identificatory kind of mimesis date back to Horace's *Si vis me flere dolendum est primum ipse tibi*. See Tort (1980), p. 14.

<sup>122</sup> Antoine François Riccoboni, *L'Art de théâtre, à Mme \*\*\**, par François Riccoboni (Paris: C.-F. Simon et Giffart Fils, 1750).

<sup>123</sup> See Sabine Chaouche's introduction in her edition of *Diderot: Paradoxe sur le comédien* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 2000), p. 24. I will however qualify this definition of 'paradoxe' at a later stage.

<sup>124</sup> For further details of the genealogy of the *Paradoxe* and its history of publication see: Patrick Tort (1980). For the different versions of the *Paradoxe*, see the edition of Ernest Dupuy (1969). For a discussion of the diverse positions in eighteenth-century dramaturgical discourse see Marian Hobson, *The Object of Art: The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), pp. 139-208.

As the key gesture of the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, Diderot postulates through the voice of the dominant interlocutor (called ‘the first’, or the ‘man with the paradox’) the hypothesis that excellence of acting depends on the faculties of reason: judgement, observation, memory and analysis are made out to be indispensable attributes for great acting:

Moi, je lui veux beaucoup de jugement. Il me faut dans cet homme un spectateur froid et tranquille. J’en exige, par conséquent, de la pénétration et nulle sensibilité; l’art de tout imiter, ou, ce qui revient au même, une égale aptitude à toutes sortes de caractères et de rôles.<sup>125</sup> (1)

This is the main doctrine which in slight variations pierces programmatically through an otherwise more ambiguous and slippery argument. Coldness is the main characteristic of the ‘first’s’ favoured actor. He is to be without any sensibility, as it is repeated throughout. From this verdict of coldness springs at first sight the paradoxical causality which gives the title to Diderot’s theory of acting.<sup>126</sup> It is because of and despite his cold state of mind that the actor’s play radiates warmth. Whilst he remains internally cold his role comes to life as if aroused by passions. From this it follows that the representation of feeling must not be confused with an actual event of real feeling:

C’est qu’être sensible est une chose, et sentir est une autre. L’une est une affaire d’âme, l’autre une affaire de jugement. C’est qu’on sent avec force, et qu’on ne saurait rendre...<sup>127</sup> (2)

Only the cold actor, who feels nothing, knows how to create perfect representations of emotion. His convincing representation of despair is the result of having imitated the most convincing signs that express despair. The representation of emotional expression is derived from careful observations in nature, recomposed and recombined in order to be performed in its most potent modulation on stage.

Moreover, the actor’s intellectual investment in the process of creating a role becomes even more crucial on stage. After having fixed the choreography of movement and tone, the actor abides strictly to the pre-rehearsed setting, thus creating a mode of

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<sup>125</sup> PsC, p. 92. This is precisely one of the passages marked in the volume at the private Brecht library, p. 285.

<sup>126</sup> I will discuss the question of the paradoxical status of the text in more detail in the third section of this chapter.

<sup>127</sup> PsC, p. 169.

performance which is reliable and in control; a stable model which in the course of the run of a play can gradually be perfected. Each time he now enters the stage he only has to recall the choreographic sequences previously selected. The actor's mind and memory will secure that day after day his performance will be equipped with the same measure of emotional intensity.

In opposition, the actor of sensibility produces mediocre and unreliable performances. His rehearsals are less informed by knowledge and experience, whilst on stage he remains unpredictable, one moment enthused, the other distracted and weak. Since his attempt is to feel the same emotions as those encapsulated by the dramatic figure, he can easily exhaust his own emotional reservoirs. Playing from the energies of his own soul, or his own nature, his performance varies according to his spontaneous personal disposition:

Ce qui me confirme dans mon opinion, c'est l'inégalité des acteurs qui jouent d'âme. Ne vous attendez de leur part à aucune unité; leur jeu est alternativement fort et faible, chaud et froid, plat et sublime. Ils manqueront demain l'endroit où ils auront excellé aujourd'hui; en revanche, ils excelleront dans celui qu'ils auront manqué la veille.<sup>128</sup> (3)

Although the actor of sensibility may be capable of exciting the audience with a role portrayal impassioned by his own feelings, this soul-filled approach to acting entails inevitable pitfalls. The very fact that the actor has to warm himself up in order to get to a stage where he can be carried along by the dynamics of his own passions means that a process of cooling will necessarily ensue. The play will soon exhaust its source of blood and spirit. Diderot's call for unity in acting does not only involve the individual's performance; more importantly, it concerns the production at large. The actor is not alone on stage, throwing himself into a solipsistic trance of highly individualised emotion. Instead, his own part contributes to the intricacies of the larger composition brought together by the ensemble of actors. If the actor plays according to his own spontaneity, he can no longer function as a reliable member within the ensemble. As a result, the set aesthetic of the dramatic production will suffer.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>129</sup> This became especially important at a time when demands shifted from an improvisation-based style of acting to one informed by regularity. See Wolfgang F. Bender, 'Vom *tollen Handwerk* zur *Kunstübung*: Zur Grammatik der Schauspielkunst im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Schauspielkunst im 18. Jahrhundert: Grundlagen, Praxis, Autoren*, ed. Wolfgang F. Bender (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1992), pp. 11-50.

In his rejection of a kind of acting which is fuelled by the subjective psychic energies of the actor, who is transported in a form of trance, Diderot is situated in closest proximity to Brecht. If Diderot articulates his persistent anti-motto in the formulae of sensibility, enthusiasm and heat, Brecht rearticulates this critique as posited against acting that is psychological, empathy-based, trance-like and hypnotic. Both literally promote a method of acting that is ‘cold’ in Diderot’s words (*l’acteur froid*) and frozen (*durchkältet*) in Brecht’s. Both defend a rigorous elevation of the brain over the heart in terms of their technical understanding of acting. Sensibility and emotion, for this matter, are symptoms of weakness, leading to the rapid exhaustion of the actor and the concomitant decline of theatre as a poetic project.

### 2.3 THE LAW OF NATURE VERSUS THE LAW OF ART

In relation to Dumesnil’s style of acting, Diderot demonstrates how the discourse of cold and heat weaves into that of nature and art:

Elle monte sur les planches sans savoir ce qu’elle dira; la moitié du temps, elle ne sait ce qu’elle dit, mais il vient un moment sublime. Et pourquoi l’acteur différerait-il du poète, du peintre, de l’orateur, du musicien? Ce n’est pas dans la fureur du premier jet que les traits caractéristiques se présentent, c’est dans des moments tranquilles et froids, dans des moments tout-à-fait inattendus. On ne sait d’où ces traits viennent; ils tiennent de l’inspiration; c’est lorsque, suspendus entre la nature et leur ébauche, ces génies portent alternativement un œil attentif sur l’une et l’autre. Les beautés d’inspiration, les traits fortuits qu’ils répandent dans leurs ouvrages, et dont l’apparition subite les étonne eux-mêmes, sont d’un effet d’un succès bien autrement assurés que ce qu’ils ont jeté de boutade. C’est au sang-froid à tempérer le délire de l’enthousiasme.<sup>130</sup> (4)

The difficulty met by the actor going out on stage consists in a conflict of timing. From natural time, which is dispersive and open, the actor has to submit to the linear temporal order of aesthetic time. If the openness of natural time allows for spontaneity, aesthetic time cannot accommodate the bouts and drifts of ‘enthousiasme’. The actor has to submit to the fixed direction of the shooting arrow of time determined by the play. His presence cannot afford to fluctuate, but it must be reliably situated at exactly that point where the author has fixed the presence of the play. This self-alignment with the temporal linearity of the play is complicated by the fact that the actor always has to be one step ahead, ‘presenting’ a future entirely dictated by the text, measuring himself against the closures herein prescribed. This is not a presence which opens up

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<sup>130</sup> PsC., p. 96.

eccentrically, but one which is always already past. The temporality of art thus differs from the temporality of nature.

The actor's self-controlled adjustment to the dictates of dramatic temporality is rooted more generally in a profound separation between aesthetics and nature. The translation from nature to stage goes hand in hand with an ontological shift. The truth of the theatre is not the same as the truth expressed in real life, the man with the paradox continuously maintains. Nothing that happens on stage happens in the same way as it would in nature. Theatrical being is not the same as natural being:

Réfléchissez un moment sur ce qu'on appelle au théâtre *être vrai*? Est-ce y montrer les choses comme elles sont en nature? Aucunement. Le vrai, en ce sens, ne serait que le commun.<sup>131</sup> (5)

Diderot then suggests that theatrical truth does not merely mirror the conditions of nature. It is in fact not enough to reproduce or to unfold on stage the communication of every day life, but the artist has to bridge the phenomenological gap pulling apart reality and its representations. What conveys a sense of reality or truth on stage corresponds to the framework provided by an overriding aesthetic concept. It is here that Diderot places the actual locus of aesthetics under the name of an ideal model (*modèle idéal*). Rather than present a perfect imitation of the image of nature, and treat the mimetic project of the theatre as a continuation of the mimetic production in reality, the production of art involves a necessary process of abstraction relative to an ideal model.<sup>132</sup>

If the actor was only copying the signs imprinted in natural communication, his art would be sullied by the imperfect and accidental implications of nature. Here, Diderot proposes a critique of the idea that art's function is to copy nature, breaking with the concept of *Belle nature* dominating the aesthetic discourse at the time.<sup>133</sup> Whilst the

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<sup>131</sup> PsC, p. 105.

<sup>132</sup> On the formation of Diderot's concept of the ideal model see Jacques Chouillet, *La formation des idées esthétiques de Diderot 1745-1763* (1973: Armand Colin), pp. 18-23. See also Gregor Sauerwald, *Die Aporie der Diderotschen Ästhetik (1745-81): Ein Beitrag zur Untersuchung des Natur- und Kunstschönen als ein Beitrag zur Analyse des neuzeitlichen Wirklichkeitsbegriffs* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975).

<sup>133</sup> The idea of *Belle nature* provided the prevalent aesthetic influence at the time, first spelt out in *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* by the abbé Batteux (1746), a concept suggesting that the function of art consisted in re-assembling the most beautiful elements found in nature. See Marc Buffat, 'Le Paradoxe et le travail de rupture', in *Etudes sur Le Neveu de Rameau et Le Paradoxe sur le comédien*



idea of acting charged by the artist's own nature was analogous to an aesthetic based on the re-composition of principles found in nature, Diderot's understanding of art as a sphere separated from reality finds its logical conclusion in the actor's rational coldness. In Platonic terms, nature itself cannot be regarded as an original order, but stands as a secondary order derived from the universal law of the ideal model. In the transcription from ideal order to natural law, mistakes can occur, disqualifying 'nature' as a model for mimesis. And vice versa, if the artist copies the beauty generated by a fleeting moment in nature, he might spoil what nature has already achieved best (again the difference in timing seems crucial).<sup>134</sup> The artist, provided he is sufficiently ingenious, must have recourse to the prime order of the ideal model. His imagination resources the more abstract and general patterns of the ideal model comparing them to the accidental patterns disseminated in nature; thus he conjures up an art work that creates both the perfect illusion of nature as well as reaching beyond it, into the realm of universals, of genius and of the sublime.<sup>135</sup>

Two processes of representation are thus involved in the production of art. Theatrical mimesis in the first instance sets out as an imitation of natural signs. The artist observes and imitates what he finds in nature. This resultant mimetic difference from the original to the copy is however overridden by another and more fundamental incision, which consists in the relation of the copy to the more abstract ideal fabricated in the mind of the artist. This is the pivotal moment of alteration. Diderot proposes an almost unbridgeable gap between reality and aesthetics, a daring suggestion in the context of acting, where the artist himself is the artwork and therefore posits an immediate proximity to the realm of the natural. Cutting the continuity between art and nature, aesthetic production comes to rely on an entirely abstract entity conceived by the ingenuity of the artist, whose desire is for perfection, a perfection which he may have experienced in nature, but which he will re-compose according to an ideal. In order to perfect the gift of nature the artist must resort to *techne*.<sup>136</sup>

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*de Denis Diderot. Actes du colloque organisé à l'Université Paris VII les 15 et 16 novembre 1991, Georges Benrekassa, Marc Buffat and Pierre Chartier, eds., Cahiers Textuel 11 (Paris: Revue de l'U.F.R, Sciences des textes et documents, 1992), p. 76.*

<sup>134</sup> See PsC, p. 108; PoA, p. 24.

<sup>135</sup> On the Diderotian sublime in relation to postmodernity see: Jean-François Lyotard: 'Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation: Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity', in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 181-195.

<sup>136</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe refers in this respect to two concepts of *mimesis* in Aristotle's *Poetics*: 'Aristotle says first (194a) that in general 'art imitates nature': *he tekhnē mimētai ten phusin*. Then a little further on

The man with the paradox postulates a truth on stage which is different from the truth in real life. This entails not only a demand for endowing aesthetics with the values of an ideal model, but also that perception in the theatre functions differently to perception in real life. If the signs produced in theatre are to have any effect at all, they will have to obey to specific conditions that rule the way in which communication unfolds in the theatre. The most natural imitation of gestures, facial expression and tone, the most genuine expression of feeling will ultimately fail when presented in the theatre:

vous faites un récit en société, vos entrailles s'émeuvent, votre voix s'entrecoupe, vous pleurez. Vous avez, dites-vous, senti et très vivement senti. J'en conviens, mais vous y êtes-vous préparé? Non. Parlez-vous en vers? Non. Cependant vous entraînez, vous étonnez, vous touchez, vous produisiez un grand effet. Il est vrai. Mais portez au théâtre votre ton familier, votre expression simple, votre maintien domestique, votre geste naturel, et vous verrez combien vous serez pauvre et faible. Vous aurez beau versez des pleurs: vous serez ridicule, on rira. Ce ne sera pas une tragédie, ce sera une parade tragique que vous jouerez.<sup>137</sup> (6)

No matter how natural and authentic emotion is, it will appear inadequate and weak on stage: it will decline to a 'parade tragique'. This inadequacy articulates itself mainly as a problem of scale. What appears natural in nature appears unnaturally small in the theatre. One of the major alterations occurring from life to stage is a process of growing and exaggerating: without 'l'agrandissement théâtrale', communication from stage to auditorium will not succeed and the spectator will remain unaffected.<sup>138</sup> The actor must reckon with the distance between his expressive actions and their perception in the auditorium. If he wants his gesture to 'touch' the audiences, he must reach out.<sup>139</sup>

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(199a), he specifies the general relation of *mimesis*: 'On the one hand, *techne* carries to its end [accomplishes, perfects, *epitelei*] what *phusis* is incapable of effecting [*apergasasthai*]; on the other hand it imitates.' These two definitions imply on the one hand the idea of *mimesis* as a reproduction of nature, an on the other, *mimesis* as *supplement*, which goes beyond the given, supplementing a certain deficiency in nature. 'It accomplishes, carries out, *finishes* natural production as such.' See 'Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis', in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, intro. Jacques Derrida, ed. and trans. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), pp. 255-6.

<sup>137</sup> PsC, p. 102.

<sup>138</sup> On the mutually excessive disproportion of reality and stage and the resultant 'gigantisme' of Diderot's paradoxical aesthetic see Buffat (1992), pp. 80-5.

<sup>139</sup> It could be argued that this new demand for an enlargement of theatrical action depended on the introduction of new customs of spectatorship, introduced at the time. The audience which formerly had also sat on stage, were now moved into the auditorium, viewing stage action from further distance, from behind the proscenium. A clear divide between stage and auditorium now came to bear its influence on the style of acting. In Habermasian terms, one might suggest, the introduction of this new stage/auditorium configuration was prompted by an emergence of the growing gap between public and private. With a growing demand to be transported into an interior world behind the stage, the spectator had to be physically removed from the stage. A privatised pleasure of illusion could not be realised if the

The otherness interjected between theatre and reality also applies to language. Literary language demands a delivery incongruous with the one employed in the every day. The stylisation implied in poetic language calls for a more stylised tone of voice, whereas everyday language delivered in theatrical tone would ridicule itself as exaggerated and pompous; it would degrade the speaker as devious and strange.

On se demanderait à l'oreille: 'Est-ce qu'il est en délire? D'où vient donc ce Don Quichotte-là? Où fait-on de ces contes-là? Quelle est le planète où l'on parle ainsi?'<sup>140</sup>  
(7)

The theatrical tone is likened to the 'alien' tone of another planet. The stage thus demands a shift from the 'familiar' to the unknown tone of poetry. Although the code of poetic language might seem less familiar or even strange, it allows for more universal and more public themes. Diderot recognises this discrepancy between everyday and dramatic language as implicit to stage convention: 'c'est un protocole de trois mille ans.'<sup>141</sup> (8) Although the dialogue at this point remains ambivalent as to whether or not this stage convention has to be accepted as an absolute law or whether it constitutes merely a tradition which has come to fade away the nearer it drew to modernity, the first interlocutor nevertheless categorically insists that all poetic language depends on a kind of diction which has become de-familiarised and estranged.<sup>142</sup> The language prescribed by the dramatic text derives from the heightened imagination of the poet:

C'est celui d'Homère, c'est celui de Racine, c'est celui de la poésie;  
et ce langage pompeux ne peut être employé que par des êtres inconnus, et parlé que par  
des bouches poétiques avec un ton poétique.<sup>143</sup> (9)

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spectators were seated on stage among actors. In relation to Brecht, one could then conclude that the attempt to open up the stage to the auditorium (for example by substituting the proscenium curtain by a semi-curtain (*Brecht-Gardine*), aims at eliminating the privatised and subjective illusionistic space created by bourgeois theatre. On the removal of audience seats from the stage (Lauraguais reform, 1758) see Marian Hobson (1982), p. 194. On the division between private and public in the eighteenth century see Jürgen, Habermas: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992).

<sup>140</sup> PsC, p. 104.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>142</sup> In this he re-expresses the Aristotelian demand for a de-familiarised language of poetry: 'On the other hand, an impressive diction, one that escapes the ordinary, results from the use of strange words, metaphors, expanded words, and whatever departs from normal usage.' See *Aristotle's Poetics*, intro., trans. and annot. James Hutton, preface Gordon Kirkwood (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 69.

<sup>143</sup> PsC, p. 105.

The coldness of the actor who does not play from his own natural emotions but who instead presents expression that has been artificially contrived is thus doubled by a similar structure at the level of what one may call the law of theatricality. This theatricality is inextricably linked with a phenomenon of strangeness, a process of alteration, of exaggeration and inflation, establishing an almost insurmountable gap between nature and art. Although this fracture inherent in Diderot's artificial naturalism is partly the result of the call for an art that reaches beyond pure copy towards the notion of an ideal or a sublime, it is also declared incompatible with communication. Theatrically aggrandised expression implanted in real life would be just as ineffectual as every day expression transferred on stage.

Whereas Brecht could be said to compare to Diderot in that he, too, favours an aesthetic that is aware of its ontological difference to nature, he argues that the artifice involved in acting is always already externalised, thus producing the desired alienation-effect. For Diderot theatre is in essence other. It can only communicate 'naturally' if it recognises that it is ruled by conditions that differ from the ones that govern communication in real life. One could then say that Diderot bases theatricality on the very condition of alienation, but this might not necessarily mean that an alienation effect emerges. This causality is turned around in Brecht's theory. Here the idea of a theatre based on artifice is argued for because it counteracts an aesthetic of naturalism thereby producing an actual effect of alienation. However, before I will focus more closely on the different systems of alienation in both dramaturgical systems, I will lay out the structure of the double, another parallel element between Brecht and Diderot. From the duality of sensibility and coldness, and that of art and nature, follows the doubled consciousness of the actor.

#### *2.4 THE ACTOR AS A PRODUCER OF DOUBLES: 'CETTE INCOMPREHENSIBLE DISTRACTION DE SOI D'AVEC SOI'*<sup>144</sup>

Hand in hand with the split between a sphere of 'natural' communication in private and one which belongs to the public realm of the theatre, we find another instance of

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<sup>144</sup> PsC, p. 107. (10)

separation.<sup>145</sup> This concerns the figure of the actor, who splits into two different entities during the process of acting. From the first interlocutor's insinuations of a 'ton inconnu', the doubling of the actor emerges, his separation of self from self. Once the actor has formed the ideal model of a stage character on the basis of the model provided by the dramatic figure, he appears altered. The truth of the ideal model alienates the actor's personality beyond recognition:

Qu'est-ce donc que le vrai de la scène? C'est la conformité des actions, des discours, de la figure, de la voix, du mouvement, du geste, avec un modèle idéal imaginé par le poète, et souvent exagéré par le comédien. Voilà le merveilleux. Ce modèle n'influe pas seulement sur le ton; il modifie jusqu'à la démarche, jusqu'au maintien. De là vient que le comédien dans la rue ou sur la scène sont deux personnages si différents qu'on a peine à le reconnaître. La première fois que je vis Mademoiselle Clairon chez elle, je m'écriai tout naturellement: 'Ah! mademoiselle, je vous croyais de toute la tête plus grande.'<sup>146</sup> (11)

Again, the miraculous transformation exerted by the actor seems in the first place to evidence itself in size. Clairon in private appears 'dis-identical' with her stage-personality. But far from maintaining that the actress would indeed have become someone-else, once she is entangled in the dramatic energies of the play, Diderot supposes the opposite. The self-multiplication which makes it easier for the actress to portray a personality other than herself convincingly, is a fiction produced only for external eyes. During the time of her play the actress does not function as a host to the parasitic spirit of the dramatic figure, as Brecht would have put it. The actor's personality does not become replaced by the role's personality. Rather than undergo a process of alienation, in the sense that he becomes really transformed, the actor undertakes an operation of self-alienation marked by rationality, one which coincides with the Brechtian structure of acting. Clairon remains alert to remaining herself whilst contriving the projection of a character for the eyes of an audience.

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<sup>145</sup> The already mentioned categories of 'private and public' belong of course to the critical discourse initiated by Habermas. Although not explicit in the *Paradoxe* - and it remains to be researched whether the *Paradoxe* does not in fact draw on a definition of the public-private dichotomy which is associated with the aristocratic system rather than that of the bourgeoisie - Diderot distinguishes systematically between a sphere of public representation, power and expressiveness, and a private sphere of domestic emotional rapport and sensibility. For an interesting sociological interpretation of the *Paradoxe*, concerning the discourse of public and private see Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp. 89-122. Sennett diagnoses in the *Paradoxe* a method of 'acting in public' which would empower the individual in the sphere of an ever-growing and estranged milieu of mid-eighteenth-century Paris to develop forms of communication and sociability. For a Habermasian interpretation of Diderot's *drame bourgeois* see Julie Candler Hayes: *Identity and Ideology: Diderot, Sade, and the Serious Genre* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

This is precisely the definition of self-alienation which I have described in the terminological introduction with reference to the *Lettre à Mme Riccoboni*, where Diderot claimed for himself: ‘je sais aussi m’aliéner.’<sup>147</sup> In the same way Clairon uses a technique of dividing herself into a cerebral or even psychic ‘self’ (‘the soul’), which fulfils the function of control, and ‘another’ which comes to embody the external signs necessary for the creation of a character.<sup>148</sup>

It is here, in the technical device of self-alienation, that the talent of the cold actor is hidden. He, or in most cases of the *Paradoxe*, an actress, will conduct her play like a puppet on strings. The expressiveness of her body is not animated by the impulses and emotions of her very own self, but by the commands of a mind that is placed at a distance from the movements of her limbs. It is upon the surface of this externalised body, an acting body devoid of any interiority, that she projects the figments of the dramatic figure.

Mlle Clairon’s way of rehearsing is described by Diderot as a process in which the actress comes to be face to face with the ideal model, but never identical. In order to compose a character, to shape and perfect it, and finally to learn by heart all those intricacies fixed in the process of creation, the actress needs distance in order to critically observe the construction of what Diderot calls the ‘vast spectre’ of her imagination: ‘...ce modèle le plus haut, le plus grand, le plus parfait [...], un grand fantôme.’<sup>149</sup> (12) In the process of this creation the actress comes to discard a series of concepts until she has found the most perfect ‘fantôme’ to represent and equal the ideal model of the dramatic figure inscribed in the text. The final result of her work is never herself. It is always greater and larger than the limitations of her own personality. Whilst she appears to outgrow the confines of her own nature when acting, she remains dual, with her mind as a hidden projecting and controlling organ, and her body as an enlarged marionette performing the choreographed actions of the dramatic character.

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<sup>147</sup> See pp. 27-8.

<sup>148</sup> On ‘La partition intérieure’ see elsewhere, Tort (1980), pp. 45-70.

<sup>149</sup> See PsC, p. 94.

Once the struggle of rehearsal and composition is over, acting on stage seems effortless, for she needs only to let her memory unfold and with it the chain of images previously developed:

mais la lutte passée, lorsqu'elle s'est une fois élevée à la hauteur de son fantôme, elle se possède, elle se répète sans émotion. Comme il nous arrive quelquefois dans le rêve, sa tête touche aux nues, ses mains vont chercher les deux confins de l'horizon; elle est l'âme d'un grand mannequin qu'elle enveloppe: ses essais l'ont fixé sur elle. Nonchalamment étendue sur une chaise longue, les bras croisés, les yeux fermés, immobile, elle peut, en suivant son rêve de mémoire, s'étendre, se voir, se juger, et juger les impressions qu'elle excitera. Dans ce moment, elle est double: la petite Clairon et la grande Agrippine.<sup>150</sup> (13)

Clairon's memory of the text can uncoil itself with ease in the process of performance without the spontaneous presence of her own self interfering, because she has made herself two. Internality and externality have become further pulled apart. A concentration of consciousness in the inside and an elusive phantom of imagination on the outside, the actress is simultaneously 'two': soul and marionette.<sup>151</sup> If this theatrical state of being double anticipates Brecht's notion of an acting technique determined by duality, so does the idea that distance facilitates the process of acting. Distance lies between a locus reserved for sending out the right impulses of motion and the locus where the actual performance is materialised. Were it not so, the self of the actress and the self of the role would become confused and bring spontaneous disorder into the set aesthetic patterns of the play. The unpredictability of nature would come to disrupt the ideal fixities of the work of art.

At the basis of this concept a Cartesian understanding is situated in which body and soul represent two different entities, connected only by some minor tissues.<sup>152</sup> Since consciousness as the animating and directing organ of matter is retracted homunculus-

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<sup>150</sup> PsC., p. 95. This is again one of the passages marked in the volume at the private Brecht-library, p. 287.

<sup>151</sup> On the dramaturgical metaphor of the marionette in eighteenth-century discourse of acting see Tort (1980), specifically his reference to Louis Racine's pejorative definition of the cold actor as marionette, *nervis alienis mobile lignum* (in *De la déclamation théâtrale des anciens, par M. Racine, Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, vol. XXI, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1748). This negative judgement of the marionette is re-evaluated by Diderot who replaces the actor's hallucinatory self-delusion by the dislocation of gesture, voice and tone from the source of their production and uses the trope of the marionette in order to focus on the technical and mechanical production of theatre. See pp. 59 and 64.

<sup>152</sup> Although Diderot saw consciousness as integral to physiology, and from this point of view the Cartesian body-mind duality would be incorrect, the actor's case seems to present a special one, in which duality becomes a practical necessity. The actor has to make himself more dual and mechanical in order to free himself from the dominance of sensible dispersion and affect. On Diderot's 'organicist' concept of the human body see Timo Kaitaro: *Diderot's Holism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995).

like into a separate locus of the soul, this leaves the body mechanical and dead. A distant organ inside, the soul commands the motions which are transferred to the outer limbs<sup>153</sup> The body's movements are now operated technically and mechanically like a machine. In comparison to the 'sensibility' doctrine this means that the representation of the text through the actor has become more technically predictable. Performance, that is the communication of the play, can be regulated like a machine.<sup>154</sup> For the sake of acting this means that the body is freed from psychological determination. It is freed from personal characteristics, free to be shaped into whatever possible shape, free to become other, without putting the self at risk of metamorphosing without control.

Diderot's self-alienated acting technique is thus one of liberation, one in which the mind is endowed with uncompromised voluntarism and authority in order to realise the poetic project of the text. The extreme extent of aesthetic freedom enjoyed by the actor means intellectual mastership of the mind and technical slavery of the body. No longer is the body forced to unwillingly externalise the motions inspired spontaneously by the heat of enthusiasm. Rather, the privileged isolation of the soul turns the exteriorised body into a site for artificial sign language, a de-sensualised and de-psychosomatised corpse, which functions independently from the involuntary contractions of a sensitive diaphragm. The aesthetic body of Clairon is 'un fantôme', or 'un grand mannequin', spectral and mechanical at the same time. Like a screen-like surface her body becomes subject to the projections of her mind. Like a marionette on strings it exerts only those motions which have been authorised by the soul in the service of the aesthetics of the text. Clairon splits herself into two discrete functions, and whilst splitting herself she becomes double: the little Clairon and the great Agrippina.

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<sup>153</sup> This is not dissimilar from De La Mettrie's description of the body as machine constructed by a conglomeration of springs, in which the mind masters and directs the body like a marionette in mechanical manner: 'I wish to speak of this impetuous principle that Hippocrates calls (soul). This principle exists and has its seat in the brain at the origin of the nerves, by which it exercises its control over all the rest of the body. By this fact is explained all that can be explained, even to the surprising effects of maladies of the imagination [...] His eyes protrude from their sockets, the eyebrows are raised with the muscles of the forehead. Why? Because the brain is in travail and all the body must share in such a laborious deliverance. If there were not an internal cord which pulled the external ones, whence would come all these phenomena?' See Julien Offray De La Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, annotated and translated by Gertrude Carmen Bussey (La Salle: Open Court, 1912), pp. 132-3 and p. 135.

<sup>154</sup> Interestingly, the idea that sensibility could be stimulated by mechanical impulses is also implicit in the definition of communication given in the *Encyclopédie*. The entry of *Communication*, defines communication as the communication of movement effected by one body hitting another. In *Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert*, vol. 3, p. 727.



From the idea of an ‘alienation of self from self’, to the idea of the marionette, that of distance, of ‘mechanicity’ and coldness, Diderot and Brecht seem to propose identical theories. Each invoke a theory of acting which is subject to the superior demands of the theatrical realisation of the poetic text. Acting is not an aesthetic in itself, but is at the service of the poetic project of the text according to which the actor must instrumentalise his actions. From the demand of regulation ensues the idea of rationalisation, which in turn implies the splitting between mind and body. Dis-identity governs the relation between the self of the actor and his role: being becomes different from acting.<sup>155</sup> This self-instrumentalisation entails that the actor must objectify his or her body and treat it like a mechanical puppet, one which will perform each evening in turn the vision of the poet with utmost accuracy. But the actor does not only become the puppet of the author, he is also elevated to the status of an almost philosophical kind of artist: his self-alienation is connected with the idea of self-reflection, judgement and self-criticism. However, here the similarities between Brecht and Diderot could be said to end. With the idea of the gaze as part and parcel of the idea of acting as self-alienation, the convergence between Brecht and Diderot shifts apart.

## 2.5 WITH THE EYES OF THE OTHER

The internal duplication facilitating the actor’s embodiment of the ‘modèle idéal’ is complemented by yet another instance of self-alienation: Clairon also becomes dual in that the intervention of her gaze perfects the dynamics and effects of her performance: ‘elle peut, en suivant son rêve de mémoire, s’étendre, se voir, se juger, et juger les impressions qu’elle excitera.’ Clairon is able to step outside of herself and look at herself with external eyes. She becomes an audience to herself, on the one hand actively involved in producing motions, whilst on the other, passively observing the effects of those motions. But not only does she scrutinise her own play in a way that she compares it to the fixities of her concept, her gaze is further exteriorised by

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<sup>155</sup> In this respect see Kesting (1970), p. 220, in relation to Brecht on Laughton: ‘Dies, daß der Schauspieler in zweifacher Gestalt...’ (14), in *Das kleine Organon*, BWS3, p. 83. In comparison the *Paradoxe*, p. 105: ‘De là vient que le comédien dans la rue ou sur la scène sont deux personnages si différents qu’on a peine à le reconnaître.’ (15)

becoming identified with the eyes of the spectator, establishing a rapport of expectation and fulfilment, of response and adjustment.<sup>156</sup>

...l'acteur s'est longtemps écouté lui-même; c'est qu'il s'écoute au moment où il nous trouble [...]. Les gestes de son désespoir sont de mémoire, et ont été préparés devant une glace.<sup>157</sup> (16)

The actor uses the voyeuristic gaze of the audience in order to regulate his actions, thereby identifying partly with the spectator's perspective, partly remaining himself. In the same way in which he mirrors his action in the spectator's eyes, he also rehearses his comportment in front of a mirror in order to choreograph to perfection those gestures which will trigger the most empathetic responses.

The introduction of the concept of the gaze, which makes the actor judge himself from an exterior point of view, entails a powerful technique of self-distanciation. This technique is also present in Brecht's thought. The Chinese actor, too, was supposed to observe himself, thereby dividing himself into two. But the concept of the gaze and its identificatory implications that can be observed in the *Paradoxe* makes it obvious that for Diderot there are different aims involved. The actor identifies with the spectator's gaze in order to establish for himself a high degree of self-consciousness. He identifies with the other in order to become self-alienated. However this psychological mechanism is only put to use in order to make the spectator identify with the actions of the play. As I will show in the second section of this chapter, which will focus on the question of illusion, Diderot's conjunction of gaze and self-alienation opens up a theatre at the level of a Lacanian-like mirror-stage, a theatre from which Brecht of course wanted to escape.

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<sup>156</sup> See Marian Hobson's discussion of the implications the gaze in the *Paradoxe*, in *The Object of Art* (1982) pp. 204-5. She suggests that at the extreme point of exteriorisation, when the actor becomes one with the gaze of the spectator, alienation is sublated into identification: 'The actor completes and reverses the process of alienation; instead of being conscious of watching eyes on him, and responding to their projection, he watches the audience to appraise their reaction to his projection on to them.' See also Hobson's article 'Sensibilité et spectacle: le contexte médical du *Paradoxe sur le comédien* de Diderot', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 82, no. 2 (1977), pp. 161-164. Referring to the Lacanian concept of the gaze, Hobson suggests that, at the same time as the gaze of the spectator helps the actor to organise his actions, it also allows him to hide behind his role as the object of the audience's gaze. The gaze of the other thus initiates the actor's schism. The actor is fixated under the gaze of the spectator but this gaze also facilitates his 'dédoublement'.

<sup>157</sup> PsC., p. 99.

## 2.6 COMMUNICATION AS ALIENATION

Hand in hand with the principle of the gaze, which provides the actor with the gift of self-alienation, the system of theatrical communication is marked by a further moment of alienation. As a whole, the production of stage communication is an externalised system of expression, in which the self is never transmitted into its utterances, but only serves to regulate the most efficient modes of sign production. This is a form of perfected communication which preconceives the signs which will strike the most incisive effect in the eyes and ears of the spectator, a method which calculates minutely at which level, at which speed, and at which scale a gesture will arouse the desired impressions. It is based on a definition of communication in which signifiers are defined to be entirely independent from the signified. In order for a sign to have an effect no indexical link between emotion and sign is necessary.<sup>158</sup> No emotion must be felt in order to produce emotional expression. What is more important is to keep a check on the mediation of signs and the recipient's reactions. Communication itself is thus declared a system of alienation:

Qu'est-ce donc que le vrai talent? Celui de bien connaître les symptômes extérieurs de l'âme d'emprunt, de s'adresser à la sensation de ceux qui nous entendent, qui nous voient, et de les tromper par l'imitation, de ces symptômes, par une imitation, qui agrandisse tout dans leurs têtes et qui deviennent la règle de leur jugement; car il leur est impossible d'apprécier autrement ce qui se passe au-dedans de nous. Et que nous importe en effet qu'ils sentent ou qu'ils ne sentent pas, pourvu que nous l'ignorions?<sup>159</sup>  
(17)

The actor will excel in his play if he will know how to read and interpret the external appearance, the outer 'symptoms' of things. Rather than examine their depth, he will have to focus on their intelligible surface. Both transparency and authenticity of expression are here called into question. What is more, the focus on the external imprint of the sign seems to have practical advantages. Too much concern with the internal status of things would complicate the operation of imitation. This applies especially to the representation of emotion. Instead of having to feel emotions, or even understand their motivation, the actor will only have to study the catalogue of their

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<sup>158</sup> See Ursula Geitner, *Die Sprache der Verstellung: Studien zum rhetorischen und anthropologischen Wissen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1992), p. 315.

<sup>159</sup> PsC, pp. 153-4.

physical manifestations in face, gesture and tone. The actor's approach to language thus resembles the way in which one might learn a foreign language, a sign language which is assumed to work from the outside in, rather than from the inside out.<sup>160</sup> Fragmented into characteristic signs, physical expression also comes to be more language-like. But by means of this 'linguistification', the body takes on the status of a foreign body, one which has been described above as the marionette which is operated mechanically by the actor's self. In the intrinsic alienation of an emotional language lies the freedom to compose expression voluntarily: here emerges the possibility of pretending and lying, not only in words but also in facial and gestural expression. To simulate an exterior symptom of despair will suffice to stimulate empathetic reactions. No one will ever be aware of the difference, since heart, soul and diaphragm as the authentic sources of emotional production remain masked.

At the foundation of Diderot's system of communication is the idea that expression itself is always already mediated through convention. A language of emotional exchange - although it might appear spontaneous and heart-felt - is predicated on a contract between the producer and the receiver of signs, between 'what has been felt' and the social effects of those feelings. Self-consciousness, for Diderot, is thus already at work in the most impulsive instances of emotional expression. Whilst emoting we have already become self-conscious, judging our sensations and expressions with our internal eye, or, as it were, the gaze of the other.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, if 'natural' every-day affectivity relies on convention, it is even more appropriate for the actor as an imitator of emotion to utilise the set archives of emotional expression. Indeed, Diderot's final argument for the 'cold actor' relies on the relocation of theatrical acting within social communication: 'Ne dit-on pas dans le monde qu'un homme est un grand comédien? On n'entend pas par là qu'il sent, mais au contraire qu'il excelle à simuler, bien qu'il ne sente rien.'<sup>162</sup> (18)

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<sup>160</sup> See Geitner (1992), pp. 305-6, with reference to Lessing.

<sup>161</sup> For a Diderotian definition of self-consciousness in the eighteenth century see Catherine Glyn Davies, *Conscience as Consciousness: The Idea of Self-Awareness in French Philosophical Writing from Descartes to Diderot* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1990). Davies characterises Diderot's use of a notion of self-consciousness as bound to an experience of sociality. P. 96. Furthermore, Diderot's tropes of self-consciousness, listed in her chapter on 'The Method of Analogy', encompass some of the metaphorical attributes applied to the actor in the *Paradoxe*: the eye, the mirror, the automaton. See Davies, p. 115.

<sup>162</sup> PsC, p. 178.

Diderot's understanding of expression is then entirely deprived of psychology and subjectivity.<sup>163</sup> In the process of communication the motions of the soul remain invisible to the spectator, relegated to the remotest inside, whilst the process of expression is stretched out on the exterior, the space of the public where the laws of communication and sociality reign. Communication evolves between reproducing the most appropriate exterior symptoms and observing how these echo in emotional repercussions.

In underlying the theatrical system of expression with a system of communication based on the signs decreed by convention, Diderot again anticipates Brecht's idea of the gestic sign, a sign which captures the most characteristic social symptoms. However, for Diderot, as I have just shown, the sign-character of theatrical communication is also immanent to the communication at work in the every-day. The actor does what man does in nature with more expertise. The effect of such a sign language employed in theatre is thus one of naturalism and not of alienation. Brecht in opposition, is interested in the sign-character of the *gestus* because it implies a 'freezing' of emotion, alienating away the emotional saturation of the natural gesture. The sign character of theatrical communication is thus constructed in opposition to an emotionally 'incarnated' form of communication in the every day, an opposition which in the flux of Diderot's paradoxical argument begins to oscillate.

## 2.7 ALIENATION AS VERSATILITY

Diderot judges the self-alienation of the actor as fundamental to his skill of taking on more than one role.<sup>164</sup> In the *Paradoxe*, Diderot promises that the actor's capacity to distance himself from his own self will enable him to create characters other than

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<sup>163</sup> The terms psychology and subjectivity, belong of course to a post Enlightenment era. Diderot is still relying on such terms as the soul and sensibility. It is Richard Sennett's merit to have shown the problematics of a form of public communication based on the transparency of the internal state of the 'actor'. Sennett's critique of a psychologisation of the public sphere starts off with an analysis of eighteenth-century theories on acting. The *Paradoxe* serves him as an example of a 'non-psychological' form of expression responsible for the emergence of an extremely communicative and socially interactive public sphere in mid-eighteenth century Paris. See 'Speech as Sign' in Sennett (1986), pp. 73-87.

<sup>164</sup> Behind the demand of versatility stands the transition from a commedia dell'arte style of acting in which the actor would have been practically married with one role for his whole life to an ensemble-based organisation of acting, where one actor would have had a repertoire of different roles. See Wolfgang Bender (1992), p. 14.

himself. The possibility of theatrical character multiplication hinges on the actor's talent for self-alienation. But this logic is thought in further extremes. The actor undertakes a process of self-alienation not only in order to play characters other than himself, but primarily in order to find a way of expressing himself. If 'nature' is what constitutes the notion of the self, and if nature is mainly constituted by emotion, this world of emotion is also accountable for keeping the self in its place, for keeping the 'self' a 'self', and preventing it from transgressing into states of otherness.

Emotion and sensibility, in the *Paradoxe*, seem to render stable, or rather, static the confines of the personality. The one who is afflicted with highly-strung despair, will also remain passive, and stopped from rising out of the impasses of an apathetic state. Emotional apathy, or more generally, all states of emotional affliction ranging from fear, to traumatic shock, depression, melancholia, to the over-energised emotional state of hysteria, all present an obstacle to seeking relief in the outside world, expressing one's concerns adequately, and coming up with the right actions that will overcome the problems that cause the self to suffer. Emotion is thus deemed an inactivating state, whilst expression, and this again applies especially to aesthetic expression, is equated with action. Creative imagination, Diderot claims, starts with the self's possibility of alienating itself from the confines of feeling:

Est-ce au moment où vous venez de perdre votre ami ou votre maîtresse que vous composerez un poème sur sa mort? Non. Malheur à celui qui jouit alors de son talent! C'est lorsque la grande douleur est passée, quand l'extrême sensibilité est amortie, lorsqu'on est loin de la catastrophe, que l'âme est calme, qu'on se rappelle son bonheur éclipsé, qu'on est capable d'apprécier la perte qu'on a faite, que la mémoire se réunit à l'imagination, l'une pour retracer, l'autre pour exagérer la douceur d'un temps passé, qu'on se possède et qu'on parle bien. On dit qu'on pleure, mais on ne pleure pas lorsqu'on poursuit une épithète énergique qui se refuse; on dit qu'on pleure, mais on ne pleure pas lorsqu'on s'occupe à rendre son vers harmonieux: ou, si les larmes coulent, la plume tombe des mains, on se livre à son désespoir et l'on cesse de composer. Mais il en est des plaisirs violents ainsi que des peines profondes, ils sont muets.<sup>165</sup> (19)

To this logic of a temporal divorce between emotion and expression - the prior of feeling and the after of putting feelings into form - Diderot adds another qualification, a kind of zooming into the differentiation between nature and art. At the moment the actor modifies the expression coming straight from his heart, where consciousness

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<sup>165</sup> PsC, p. 125-6.

interferes with the natural 'cri de nature', nature has already switched into representation:

L'homme sensible obéit aux impulsions de la nature, et ne rend précisément que le cri de son cœur; au moment où il tempère ou force ce cri, ce n'est plus lui, c'est un comédien qui joue.<sup>166</sup> (20)

Here something curious occurs. Despite his earlier separation between nature and art, Diderot seems now to reduce the territory of nature. Nature comes to be relegated to the seconds of impulses in which the subject is overpowered by experience, not yet having re-established his control. As a result, the actor who refuses to play from sensibility, becomes 'de-natured'. To act true to one's nature thus means not to act at all, leading the concept of a natural kind of acting *ad absurdum*.

But not only is the actor, and action as such, exiled from nature; by the same token, the actor is emptied of all properties. It is on the basis of this dispossession that the actor becomes qualified to take on the character feats of other personalities. His own 'nothingness' preconditions his talent to portray 'everything'.<sup>167</sup> The more someone is weighted down by 'nature', by the weight of the self, the less he is suited to represent others. Flexibility and malleability are thus determined by the actor's lack of character, or subjectivity. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe shows, the actor's gift of nature consists in not having any properties at all. It is here where Lacoue-Labarthe situates the paradoxical status of the actor as governed by a *law of impropriety*: 'the paradox is reduced to this lapidary verdict – as if the paradox had no other purpose than the re-distribution of the requisite qualities of the actor, when in fact it is concerned precisely with the absence of any *proper* quality in one who intends to take up (or proves suited for) representation and production. [...] The paradox itself bears upon the art of 'imitating everything,' [...]. In other words, the absence or suppression of any property.'<sup>168</sup> The actor must thus be a subject-less subject. De-subjectified, he becomes pure medium, a channel for the aesthetic demands of the poet, the phantom shape which can be shaped into anything. An empty mirror, he can now reflect whatever features are

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<sup>166</sup> PsC. P. 127.

<sup>167</sup> Giorgio Cerrutti describes this disposition of the actor as 'ascetic'. See 'Le Paradoxe sur le comédien et le paradoxe sur le libertin: Diderot et Sade', *Revue des sciences humaines* (April-June 1972), pp. 245-6.

<sup>168</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe (1998), pp. 257-8.

required.<sup>169</sup> Amorphous and ethereal, his imagination can now form him into anything:

L'âme d'un grand comédien a été formée de l'élément subtil dont notre philosophe remplissait l'espace, qui n'est ni froid, ni chaud, ni pesant, ni léger, qui n'affecte aucune forme déterminée, et qui, également susceptible de toutes, n'en conserve aucune.<sup>170</sup> (21)

Lack of character, or lack of self, thus becomes the necessary condition on which great acting is based. The more the actor loses himself, the more he can also alter himself, the more swiftly he can transmute from one emotional expression to the other. Garrick is the widely celebrated star-actor of such eighteenth-century expressionist gymnastics:

Garrick passe sa tête entre les deux battants d'une porte, et dans l'intervalle de quatre à cinq secondes, son visage passe successivement de la joie folle à la joie modérée; de cette joie à la tranquillité; de la tranquillité à la surprise; de la surprise à l'étonnement, de l'étonnement à la tristesse; de la tristesse à l'abattement; de l'abattement à l'effroi; de l'effroi à l'horreur, de l'horreur au désespoir, et remonte de ce dernier degré à celui d'où il était descendu. Est-ce que son âme a pu éprouver toutes ces sensations et exécuter, de concert avec son visage, cette espèce de gamme?<sup>171</sup> (22)

As already mentioned, Diderot applies this analysis not only to the professional characteristics of the actor, but also to a theory of communicative action as such. I already pointed out earlier that in this he reduces the realm of nature in favour of an ever increasing realm of social action typified by artifice and convention. Furthermore, Diderot stretches this idea to a notion of self, in which the subject can never know itself and which, similar perhaps to the idea of the unconscious, can never be instrumentalised for any kind of action.

At this extreme point of reducing the self to total passivity, Diderot's separation between nature and art begins to falter. Whereas the separation between a sphere of aesthetics and a sphere of nature at the outset was suggested to be fundamental to his critique of acting from nature, action has now become artificial in any case, and the notion of a natural self has become redundant: 'On est soi de nature; on est un autre d'imitation: le cœur qu'on se suppose n'est pas le cœur qu'on a.'<sup>172</sup> (23) What enters the realm of communicability and social interaction, that is, a sphere in which mutual

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>170</sup> PsC, p. 141.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 153.



understanding is based on social convention, has always already attained a theatrical status. Expression springing from enthusiasm or sensibility can thus no longer count as nature, but is always already art, even in the most private niches of sociality.

If at the outset of the argument the soul and the heart had been declared part of the sphere of 'nature', and 'playing from nature' had been understood as a possibility, even if it was accused of producing bad acting, further 'psychological' analysis seems to show that no correlation can be established between the nature of the heart and the ways in which expression is formed. The heart resists any *cardiognostic* science: it remains always other and discontinuous with the externalising processes of expression. The heart one supposes for oneself is disparate from the heart one has objectively. This is an organ not only blind to itself but also one which blinds others, a blind-spot within communication, because it never seems congruous with the expressions that are associated with it.<sup>173</sup> Thus, to associate the heart with nature, with a source of indexical externalisation, thus becomes impossible. At the moment of communication, the 'natural' self is left behind in a realm of dumb nature, whilst the communicating person has always already entered the sphere of mimesis, a place of mediation and otherness. The soul, the heart and the diaphragm, which had played such an important role in inspiring the 'enthusiastic' actor with natural energies, become irrelevant for processes of communication. Analogously, the self becomes exiled from the zone of sociability, reduced to a form of static vegetation, always the same, always inside, never out.

Yet, with the self being thrown into contradiction with communication, and the realm of communication being emptied of any natural essence, Diderot's aesthetics of the *Paradoxe* begin to announce an alienation that seems to transgress purely methodological questions. Exceeding in externality, Diderot's understanding of psychology and sociology comes to verge on a *horror alieni* hand in hand with a *horror vacui*<sup>174</sup>: the communicating subject, striving outwards in order to communicate,

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<sup>173</sup> Similarly, Geitner (1992) describes Lessing's theory of acting as suspicious of the transparency of a language of the heart. The non-presence of the soul in communication seems here to become a problem of localisation, p. 306.

<sup>174</sup> I am adopting the term *horror alieni* from Michael Landmann, *Alienatory Reason*, trans. David J. Perent, intro. Zoltan Tor (Illinois: Applied Literature Press, 1978), p. 135. *Horror vacui* is derived from Ursula Geitner's interpretation of Lessing's use of the idea of acting as 'Nachäffung'. Geitner (1992), p. 307.

necessarily needs to void itself of all subjective contents. It is able to act only *despite* itself.

For Brecht's methodology of self-alienation, Diderot's artificial expressionism involves a critique in so far as the *Paradoxe* produces an exchange of the categories of nature and artifice. Since for Brecht, the *V-effect* relied on a contrast between 'natural', every-day communication and the artificial, de-incarnated, frozen sign language of the stage, the interpenetration of 'nature' and 'artifice' are no good news. For if communication in reality relies on a process of self-alienation, this reduces the chances that self-alienation on stage will in fact produce the *V-effect*. By theatricalising the sphere of 'natural' communication, whilst at the same time 'naturalising' the theatre, Diderot has recourse to the trope of the *theatrum mundi*, which I will come back to in more detail at a later stage. However what is evident already at this point, is that the invasion of the theatre in real life, complicates the logic of Brecht's *V-effect*.

## 2.8 'L'ILLUSION N'EST QUE POUR VOUS': THE DELUDING EFFECTS OF SELF-ALIENATION

If in the preceding sections I have shown that Brecht and Diderot can be compared on the grounds of an acting methodology which demands an operation of self-alienation, a modality of consciousness which is dual, and a process of compartmentalisation which turns the body into a field of gestic signification, the intentions behind these two technically kindred systems will now be shown to be radically different, if not contradictory.

Whereas Brecht's conclusion from the technical approach of cold acting was the spectator's coldness of response, Diderot's notion of technical coldness ignites emotional heat once it has reached the recipient. Diderot's logic of spiritual transport is one of inversion. Because the actor suppresses in himself the process of emotional arousal, he can render a perfect sign system of emotional expression, a language which powerfully stirs up the spectator's feelings. The actor's skill of self-alienation as a mechanism of control not only serves to instrumentalise his own play, it becomes a tool for controlling the spectator. Yet this control, as opposed to Brecht's understanding of

self-alienation, is aligned with the induction of emotion, hand in hand with the force of illusion.

Although Diderot postulates a theory of self-alienated acting, the actor's cold mind now leads him to pull his spectator into Brecht's abhorred state of identification.

Overpowered by the persuasiveness of the actor's emotional acrobatics, the spectator identifies and emotes. Brecht's theory of acting implied that the actor's self-alienation would keep the spectator alienated, in the sense of rational distance; Diderot's paradoxical proposition, on the other hand, destines self-alienation to become identification on the part of the spectator:

singerie sublime dont l'acteur garde le souvenir longtemps après l'avoir étudiée, dont il avait la conscience présente au moment où il l'exécutait, qui lui laisse, heureusement pour le poète, pour le spectateur et pour lui, toute la liberté de son esprit, et qui ne lui ôte, ainsi que les autres exercices, que la force du corps! Le socque ou le cothurne déposé, sa voix est éteinte, il éprouve une extrême fatigue, il va changer de linge ou se coucher; mais il ne lui reste ni trouble, ni douleur, ni mélancolie, ni affaissement d'âme. C'est vous qui emportez toutes ces impressions. L'acteur est las, et vous triste: c'est qu'il s'est démené sans rien sentir, et que vous avez senti sans vous démener. S'il en était autrement, la condition du comédien serait la plus malheureuse des conditions; mais il n'est pas le personnage, il le joue, et le joue si bien que vous le prenez pour tel, l'illusion n'est que pour vous; il sait bien, lui, qu'il ne l'est pas.<sup>175</sup> (24)

The actor's unemotional motions trigger emotion in the spectator's soul. Dis-identity with the role leads to identification with the role. The actor's detachment means attachment for the beholder. 'The illusion is only for you'. Brecht's hypothesis that the self-observation of the artist will prevent the spectator from empathising, 'creating a magnificent kind of distance to the action', is severely questioned.

The most striking reference towards illusion delivered by Diderot is a metaphor familiar from the Brechtian vocabulary. Brecht found in the trope of the 'fourth wall' an anti-image for his own theories, the epitome of a theatrical practice of hypnosis, deception and identification. Diderot can be acknowledged to be the originator of this term. In *Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst*, Brecht aims to liberate Western theatrical tradition from the tyranny of illusion, an illusion facilitated by the concept of the 'fourth wall':

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<sup>175</sup> PsC, p. 100.

Der chinesische Artist spielt vor allem nicht so, als existiere außer den drei Wänden, die ihn umgeben, auch noch eine vierte Wand. *Er bringt zum Ausdruck, daß er weiß, es wird ihm zugesehen.* Das entfernt sogleich eine bestimmte Illusion der europäischen Bühne. Das Publikum kann nicht mehr die Illusion haben, ungesehener Zuschauer eines wirklich stattfindenden Ereignisses zu sein. Eine ganze reiche entwickelte Technik der europäischen Bühne, vermittels derer es verborgen werden kann, daß die Szenen so angelegt sind, daß sie vom Publikum bequem eingesehen werden können, wird damit überflüssig.<sup>176</sup> (25)

In the *Paradoxe*, Diderot's postulates that the gaze is a structure that both self-alienates the actor as well as makes him identify with the desires of an audiences who in turn will desire to become absorbed into the actions of the play. In opposition, Brecht claims that the eye contact between actor and spectator conjures up a 'dis-illusioning' effect, a kind of inter-subjective confrontation. The voyeuristic perspective of the bourgeois box-stage is broken. Rather than view through the frame of the proscenium arch an imaginary world of fiction, the spectator is hit by the actor's gaze, a gaze which is as real as it is alienating and is not allowed to forget that it is the framing conditions of theatrical representation that constitute the reality of the production.

However, it was in fact Diderot who constructed the concept of the 'fourth wall', which Brecht aimed to destroy. In *De la poésie dramatique*, Diderot inaugurates the idea of theatre as seen through a voyeuristic kind of perspective. The European stage is being equipped with its ultimate illusionist set-up. The actor is called upon to divert his 'alienating' gaze to the enclosures of an interior world of illusion. The sphere of the stage and the sphere of the auditorium must remain entirely separated from each other. If the actor thus imagines a fourth wall in place of the proscenium arch, he can contribute to perfecting the desirable power of illusion.

Soit donc que vous composiez, soit que vous jouiez, ne penser non plus au spectateur que s'il n'existait pas. Imaginez sur le bord du théâtre un grand mur qui vous sépare du parterre; jouez comme si la toile ne se levait pas.<sup>177</sup> (26)

In *De la poésie dramatique*, illusion is lauded as an entirely passive and involuntary state of mind, and no voluntary self-consciousness must disturb this delicate state of absorption. The spectator must be thrown into uncompromised oblivion by the technical conditions of a stage production. He is to be unconscious of the process of

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<sup>176</sup> BWS2, p. 201.

<sup>177</sup> DOE, p. 1310.

theatrical representation, its technological functioning and its very materiality. His consciousness is to be abducted into an unconditional belief in and identification with the object of representation:

L'illusion n'est pas volontaire. Celui qui dirait: 'Je veux me faire illusion', rassemblerait à celui qui dirait: 'J'ai une expérience des choses de la vie à laquelle je ne ferai aucune attention.'<sup>178</sup> (27)

Although this passage documents how radically Diderot revised his understanding of acting methodology from *De la poésie dramatique*, and the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*<sup>179</sup> to the *Paradoxe*, from a self-absorbed and hallucinatory mode of writing and acting to one which is driven by externality and self-alienation, what remains consistent in both episodes of writing is the intention to lock the audience into absorption. In the *Paradoxe*, Diderot does not relinquish his aim of deluding the spectator. Rather, the one-way relation between 'deluder' and 'deluded' becomes polarised as active and passive. The one-way flow in which illusion is directed becomes more perfectly organised, widening the hierarchical gap. The spectator's passive absorption into illusion comes to hinge on the actor's rational and active self-alienation.

The *Paradoxe*'s emphasis on hierarchy announces of course another radical shift away from Brecht's didactic project of a theatre, in which spectators were supposed to become actors and even statesmen, representing activated and empowered protagonists within the socio-psychological relations of the theatrical event.

By the same token, just as the actor is empowered by the process of self-alienation, the spectator is dis-empowered. Diderot complements his concept of an activating self-alienation with the idea of a 'passifying' spectatorial alienation. The dichotomy of rational coldness and sensitive enthusiasm is relocated in the polar relation between actors and spectators. The actor's self-alienation serves to conjure up a highly-hypnotic illusion, to which in response the spectator becomes identified, 'alienated' beyond his

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 1297.

<sup>179</sup> In the *Entretiens* Diderot postulates a similar 'fourth wall' paradigm: 'Dans une représentation dramatique, il ne s'agit non plus du spectateur que s'il n'existait pas. Y a-t-il quelque chose qui s'adresse à lui? L'auteur est sorti de son sujet, l'acteur entraîné hors de son rôle. Ils descendent tous les deux du théâtre. Je les vois dans le parterre; et tant que dure la tirade, l'action est suspendue pour moi, et la scène reste vide.' See DOE, p. 1145 (28).

control, involuntarily absorbed into the illusions of fiction, as Diderot demands in both *De la poésie dramatique* and the *Paradoxe*. As Lacoue-Labarthe shows in ‘Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis’, it is here that a form of alienation appears which juxtaposes the paradoxical actor’s self-alienation:

L’homme sensible est l’être *affecté* ou *ému*. Aliéné par conséquent, et mis hors de soi, mais sur le mode de la passivité ou de la passion.<sup>180</sup> (29)

Moreover, Lacoue-Labarthe defines this form of passive alienation as a form of imitation deprived from the instance of a splitting and altering self, an instance which via the possibility of a *decision* could arrest the overpowering drives of the passions. The subject experiencing a manic form of alienation, hysteria, madness, excessive delirium, has become possessed. It has, in the mode of a passive form of alienation, become subject to alienation, and thereby become truly a *subject*: ‘it is the monstrous, dangerous form of a *passive mimesis*, uncontrolled and unmanageable. It is bad theatre. The theatre of life, the ‘comedy of the world.’ [...] This is the aberrant spectacle of an alteration without force or energy, [...] the spectacle of a role taken on passively – in the worst of cases, under the effect of a contagion, a sort of ‘epidemic disease,’ as Diderot says.’<sup>181</sup> In the many allusions to the *theatrum mundi*, Diderot points at a theatre of madness, of uncontrolled mimesis and alienation. The text is interjected with references to the stage of the world, upon which the fools are defined by the fact that they are always on stage exhausting their energies in an unproductive form of mimesis, whilst the wise, namely the great poet and the great actor, proceed to copy them, and the powerful, namely the king, the great minister, the great commander and the great advocate proceed to regulate them:

Les hommes chauds, violents, sensibles, sont en scène; ils donnent le spectacle, mais ils n’en jouissent pas. C’est d’après eux que l’homme de génie fait sa copie.<sup>182</sup> (30)

Theatre, as located within a *theatrum mundi*, reverses the relation between acting and observing. Whereas in ‘real life’, the actors offer a ‘scene’ of unmanaged mimesis, of an uneconomical and uncontrolled form of emotive exhaustion and self-alteration, the

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<sup>180</sup> ‘Diderot, le paradoxe et la mimésis’, *Poétique*, vol. 11, no. 43 (1980), p. 263. As an exception I am quoting the above passage in the French original since the English translation seems to invoke less of a sense of passivity. (29)

<sup>181</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe (1989), p. 263-4.

<sup>182</sup> PsC, p. 97.

stage offers a mastered copy of those scenes via the poet's and the actor's gift of self-alienation:

Dans la grande comédie du monde, celle à laquelle j'en reviens toujours, toutes les âmes chaudes occupent le théâtre; tous les hommes de génie sont au parterre. Les premiers s'appellent des fous, les seconds, qui s'occupent à copier leurs folies, s'appellent les sages.<sup>183</sup> (31)

In the distinction between a controllable and an uncontrolled mimetic alienation lies, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, the ethical and political potential of theatre, which prevents a total collapse with the Platonic concept of the theatre, a theatre that must be exorcised because of its demonic power of uncontrollable metamorphosis. The possibility of possessing self-alienation, rather than being possessed by a passive form of alienation implies also, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, the renunciation of *catharsis*, the extreme of *sensibilité*, as it were, of terror and empathy.<sup>184</sup>

Here, one might suggest that Lacoue-Labarthe evokes the possibility of re-approximating Brecht and Diderot, since a Diderot, who liberates the theatre from *catharsis* on the basis of a controlled mimesis of self-alienation, would be absolutely identical with Brecht. Diderot would have indeed anticipated Brecht's concept of *anti-aristotelianism* and its utopian perspective of political liberation from alienation.

What seems to complicate this equation is the fact that the *Paradoxe* presents not only an opposition between passive and active alienation, it also presents a polar relation according to the *theatrum mundi*. It is precisely because those on stage possess the secret of self-alienation that those in the auditorium abandon themselves in passive alienation, *catharsis*, fear and pity. Diderot says:

Remplissez la salle du spectacle de ces pleureurs-là, mais ne m'en placez aucun sur la scène.<sup>185</sup> (32)

The relation between spectator and actor is an almost symbiotic one, at the very least one marked by polar dependency:

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp. 97-8.

C'est l'œil du sage qui saisit le ridicule de tant de personnages divers, qui le peint, et qui vous fait rire, et de ces fâcheux originaux dont vous avez été la victime, et de vous-même.<sup>186</sup> (33)

The actor's work is the spectator's pleasure. Active self-alienation thus belongs to the wider psychological economy of the theatre, representing the cause of an effect of passive alienation or identification on the part of the spectator. It is put into practice not only in the Brechtian sense, in order to alienate the spectator, but in order to make him identify. The rationally contrived sign language of the *paradoxical* actor functions as a means to stimulate passionate responses and cathartic reactions in the spectator, or even the effects of comedy, responses so strong that he will become oblivious as to where he is and that he has indeed become subject to manipulation.

## 2.9 BRECHT: 'AN IDENTIFIER' IN THE TRADITION OF SENSIBILITY?

Brecht's rationalist view-point seems at first sight aligned with Diderot's 'enlightened' technique of acting. Both dramaturgists do indeed elevate self-conscious rationality in the actor as the only principle which will allow them to endow aesthetics with the incisive socio-political role of theatre they envision. The actor, as an extension of the poet's mind, must remain self-alienated, so that he can remain in firm authority over the ideological intents transmitted.

However, they fall apart once it comes to the desired consciousness they intend to propel in the viewer. Whereas Diderot puts the actor's state of alienation in charge of stimulating intense emotional responses in the viewer, Brechtian *Verfremdung* is supposed to continue to alienate when it hits the spectator. Whilst Diderot's momentum of self-alienation regulates the hierarchical rapport between actors and spectator, Brecht intends more democracy in the theatre by introducing the method of *Verfremdung*. The spectator is to play a role in the theatre just as active as that of the actor. In opposition, Diderot's concept of alienation goes hand in hand with a deactivation of the spectator. A great part of the *Paradoxe* constructs an opposition between a form of acting that emanates from the diaphragm and one that rises from the mind, and this opposition is relocated and stabilised in the hierarchical relation between actor and spectator. Integral

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., pp. 98.



to Diderot's demand of 'nulle sensibilité!' is both the sensibilisation and the absolute passivity of the spectator. The actor's 'active' way of acting induces the spectator's passive way of feeling and empathising. Reversing the Brechtian logic, the actor's alienation becomes here the spectator's illusion. The idea that actors play, and audiences cry in catharsis, renders the cold actor a powerful manipulator. The more alienated and powerful the actor, the more deficient the spectator in his initiative to take critical distance and act himself.

Whilst this differentiation between a passive and an active form of alienation is highly reminiscent of Brecht's distinction between an alienation imposed by the capitalist order and an aesthetic of liberating alienation, the dialectical relation established between *Entfremdung* and its negation by means of *Verfremdung* does not correspond to the logic of the *Paradoxe*. Although Diderot poses, as Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, the liberating possibility of a mimesis in which decision taking is facilitated through the skill of self-alienation, a mimesis without catharsis and empathy, this special gift is cemented into the polar economy of doing and being done to. Whereas the actor is freed from an unconscious bondage to the mimetic dictate, the spectator is enslaved. Far from ridding a system from alienation, alienation posits an important aspect of communication, which remains instrumental to the circulation of the system at large.

One could then say that alienation in Diderot occupies a position far more 'natural' and intrinsic than in Brecht, who cannot think of 'alienation' except as a secondary concept to Marxist *Entfremdung*, which will always remain extrinsic, unnecessary and parasitic. Diderot allows the individual who is talented enough to make mimetic interjections in the play of the 'comédie du monde' to emancipate himself, but his dramaturgical intentions do not arrest the system of a theatricalised universe per se. Or rather, this depends on interpretation. If one is to take his cynical depictions of excessive sensibility seriously, one might well end up with a conclusion that would involve a Brechtian renovation of not only the status of the actor but also of the spectator. But the *Paradoxe* resists being treated as a programme. It remains unresolved, even if negativity is suggested as a prophetic warning, thereby gesturing perhaps at a Brechtian aesthetic. Diderot does not purify the theatre of illusion, nor of empathy, nor of passive alienation. He proposes a concept of alienation far more alienated than Brecht's.

This brings us back to the propagators of identification, of sensibility, the soul, the heart and the diaphragm, of both the eighteenth century as well as the Stanislavski of the twentieth century. Here the comparison with Diderot puts into relief a strange affinity between the ideologues of 'nature' and Brecht. Whereas Diderot sardonically evokes the idea that man's conscious self-alienation can be the other's deluded alienation, Brecht suggests the preservation of the actor's self-alienated consciousness in the spectator's mind. Alienation is passed on through identification. Dissimulation is not a task which is to be fulfilled by an individual in isolation; instead, the revelatory rationality which allows the individual to rise above an alienated world can be assisted by an aesthetic of *Verfremdung*. This paradoxically involves a communion of self-alienated consciousness, which brings actors and spectators together in a homogenous state of rationality.

Brecht's demand for self-alienated acting is then far from being congruous with Diderot's precepts. Instead, he comes to be associated with a logic of identification which brings him closer to the proximity of Stanislavski and the bourgeois idea of a communalised consciousness in theatre. The consciousness of the actor is transported into the soul of the spectator just as Sticotti had contended in *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglais*, the same brochure against which the *Paradoxe* will turn. The only difference is that instead of identifying with an emotionalised state of mind the spectator identifies with a rationalised state of mind. Mirror-relations are constituted in both cases.

Diderot's *Paradoxe* falls outside of this logic of identification, and shows far more consequently the difficulty involved in the potentialities of self-alienated liberation. His idea of self-alienation switching into illusion not only calls into question the Brechtian political idealism projected into the actor's consciousness, it locates clearly where utopian potentiality degrades into a programme. No less naively than Stanislavski, Sticotti, Sainte-Albine, L. Riccoboni and others, Brecht introduces the idea of an aesthetic automatism between the performer's consciousness and an external effect, a kind of mirror-like, mechanical understanding between internality and its effects on the external surface. In his construction of a theory of acting, interiority celebrates a triumph. Transparency re-enters through the back door. This situates him in the mainstream rather than in an avant-garde line of modern dramaturgical thought, grouping him together with Stanislavski and the eighteenth-century 'believers' of acting

method. With different intentions in mind, this avant-garde technique of acting promised nothing that different from what had been initiated two hundred years before as part of bourgeois naturalism.

### 2.10 THE VISUAL QUALITY OF ILLUSION

Although it could be argued that the Diderot of the *Paradoxe* revises his call for an involuntary form of illusion in favour of a concept of illusion to which the spectator willingly subscribes, it is still nevertheless true that the *Paradoxe's* power of illusion largely articulates itself in terms of the visual medium, gesture and pantomime, thereby drawing on aesthetic postulates formulated in *De la poésie dramatique* and the *Entretiens*.<sup>187</sup> Since for the purpose of this dissertation it is more important to draw a distinction between illusion and alienation rather than draw on the subtle differentiations of illusion theorised in the eighteenth century, I shall move back once more to the *Entretiens* and *De la poésie dramatique*, in order to clarify the importance of a visual language in Diderot's dramaturgical theory and its implicit illusionistic quality.

In his earlier dramaturgical writings, Diderot prescribes a mode of representation in which the audience is to become absorbed into the scene as if contemplating a painting. The meditative silence and stillness of painting make it a model to be emulated by the theatre. Nothing is to disturb the one-way suction imposed by the scene. In being hypnotised by the meditative qualities of the theatrical composition, the spectator forgets his own presence as a viewing subject by way of which the events on stage may become real.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> On the development of the pictorial element in Diderot's dramaturgical writings see Stéphane Lojkine, in *Etudes sur Le Neveu de Rameau et Le Paradoxe sur le comédien de Denis Diderot. Actes du colloque organisé à l'Université Paris VII les 15 et 16 novembre 1991*, Georges Benrekassa, Marc Buffat and Pierre Chartier, eds., Cahiers Textuel 11 (Paris: Revue de l'U.F.R, Sciences des textes et documents, 1992), pp. 88-91. Lojkine argues that from the *Entretiens* to the *Paradoxe*, pictorialisation becomes more mediated.

<sup>188</sup> It is this modality of an absorptive way of viewing art which in Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality* (1980) becomes the prototypical concept of illusion in Diderot's aesthetic thought. Marian Hobson's *The Object of Art* (1982) demonstrates instead that Diderot oscillates at least between two concepts of illusions: on the one hand a form of illusion which extinguishes all self-awareness and on the other, a form of 'bimodal' illusion which is voluntary and which therefore allows for self-consciousness in the viewing subject.

Diderot's concept of representation is indeed marked by a high degree of visuality. The *lectic* medium subsides to a persuasiveness that only images seem to possess. Hand in hand with the renunciation of the oral dimension of theatrical production Diderot develops a theory of the *tableau*, which was meant to put an end to the practice of the *coup de théâtre* associated with classical tragedy. *Coup de théâtre* signifies for Diderot a clumsy kind of artifice, or as Brecht would have seen it, precisely the involuntary 'alienation-effect of the old theatre'.<sup>189</sup> A sudden unexpected shift in the action comes to disturb the meditative and seamless closure of illusion:

Un incident imprévu qui se passe en action, et qui change subitement l'état des personnages, est un coup de théâtre.<sup>190</sup> (34)

In contrast, the moments in which action melts into tableaux-like compositions are the moments in which theatre's ultimate potential of expressing truth and beauty is achieved. Whereas the *coup de théâtre* is 'forcé', the *tableau* is natural and true. Yet Diderot argues that theatre in comparison to painting should be able to come even closer to the ideal of an all-encompassing visual illusion, for its material consists of real bodies rather than the mere *shadows* of bodies. The new *drame bourgeois* was to move the spectator through a succession of images, which would construe the illusion of reality in an entirely seamless manner, almost foreshadowing the vision of cinematographic illusion. The idea of ridding illusion from any spatial or temporal interruption is also implied in Diderot's scenographic demands:

...si nous avions des théâtres où la décoration changeât toutes les fois que le lieu de la scène doit changer! (...) Le spectateur suivrait sans peine tout le mouvement d'une pièce; la représentation en deviendrait plus variée, plus intéressante et plus claire.<sup>191</sup>  
(35)

## 2.11 GESTURALITY AND ITS AFFECTS

If the question of locus is here thought of as belonging to the domain of vision, Diderot conceptualises action in similarly visual terms. Pantomime, as the most corporeal form of drama, is supposed to unearth the power and immediacy that Greek tragedy

<sup>189</sup> See *Der V-Effekt auf dem alten Theater*, BWS2, pp. 214-5.

<sup>190</sup> *Entretiens*, DOE, p. 1136.

<sup>191</sup> *Entretiens*, DOE, p. 1132.

possessed and seventeenth-century French drama lost. Alongside other eighteenth-century dramaturgical theorists, Diderot saw in the gesture the medium for a universal kind of language, more touching and more immediate than the language of words.<sup>192</sup> In his *Lettre sur les sourds et les muets*,<sup>193</sup> Diderot's experiments on the question of communication had led him to the conclusion that gestic language could to a large extent assume the function of verbal communication. What is more, it seemed to be more readily comprehensible, since, unlike verbal language, it utilised a form of expression embedded in the nature of the body. Diderot saw a naturalism based on the gesture already accomplished in the form of Greek tragedy. Here the origins of a universal theatrical language could be established. It is indeed the very lack of civilisation and modernity which brought to the fore a language of pantomimic action, which was at once violent and primitive, but by the same token poetic and expressive.<sup>194</sup> Communication in the theatre should return to such 'natural language' of gesture. Pantomimic action would enhance both clarity and expressiveness of dramatic representation. The eloquence inherent in movement and gesture would not only appeal to the sense of vision, but would even invoke the sound of words: 'Je ne te vois pas seulement; je t'entends. Tu me parles des mains.'<sup>195</sup> (36) Gesture is thus claimed to address the spectator's senses in the most encompassing and evocative way. The visuality of the gesture is preverbal; at the same time it complements spoken communication. Verbality alternates with gesturality. Spoken words are followed by silences that speak through gesture. Tears respond as gestures to words. This use of gesture resides somewhere within an impressionistic unconscious. Strong passions can be reawakened and released by means of impressions, tableaux and gestures. This is where the ritual of cathartic transformation will be enacted.

Pantomime thus entailed the possibility of silence as a powerful aesthetic tool. Silence, in which a visual world of movement and gesture comes to tell the story, would bring Diderot's dramatic poetic into infinite proximity to painting. This is the concept of an

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<sup>192</sup> The philosophical background to these dramaturgical theories was prepared by Condillac's notion of an original 'langage d'action'. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotik des Theaters II: Vom 'künstlichen' zum 'natürlichen' Zeichen – Theater des Barock und der Aufklärung*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1995), p. 116.

<sup>193</sup> *Lettre sur les sourds et muets à l'usage de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent adressée à M\*\*\**, in DOE, pp. 5-50.

<sup>194</sup> See for example *De la poésie dramatique*, DOE, pp. 1130-1.

<sup>195</sup> *Entretiens*, DOE, p. 1144.

extended form of realism, in which representation had to account not only for verbal communication, but also for all those scenes, where it was more natural to move rather than to talk:

...il y a des scènes entières où il est infiniment plus naturel aux personnages de se mouvoir que de parler [...] Il n'y a rien de ce qui se passe dans le monde, qui ne puisse avoir lieu sur la scène.<sup>196</sup> (37)

From the eloquent gesture it was a small step away to arrive at what again, at first sight, seems to closely resemble Brecht's concept of *gestus*. Diderot privileges the gesture as a carrier for the inscription of social characteristics. But the motivation of an aesthetic of gestures is here less to do with a method of de-individualising the character on stage and more related to creating universal patterns from which identification can evolve precisely because these models belong to a general order of signification rather than a private or personal one.<sup>197</sup> Diderot's '*gestus*' thus serves as a means to establish identification rather than to counteract it. Social class, not individual personality, demarcates the identificatory scope of the dramatic figure of the *drame bourgeois*:

...ce ne sont plus, à proprement parler, les caractères qu'il faut mettre sur la scène, mais les conditions. Jusqu'à présent, dans la comédie, le caractère a été l'objet principal, et la condition n'a été que l'accessoire; il faut que la condition devienne aujourd'hui l'objet principal, et que le caractère ne soit que l'accessoire. [...] Il me semble que cette source est plus féconde, plus étendue et plus utile que celle des caractères. Pour peu que le caractère fût chargé, un spectateur pouvait se dire à lui-même, ce n'est pas moi. Mais il ne peut se cacher que l'état qu'on joue devant lui ne soit le sien; il ne peut méconnaître ses devoirs. Il faut absolument qu'il s'applique ce qu'il entend.<sup>198</sup> (38)

Brecht's notion of the *gestus* had come to signify the *dramatis persona* as a configuration of features derived from the totality of collective interaction. Diderot's interest in bringing to the stage 'conditions' rather than 'characters' is similar in structure but opposite in motivation or argument: if individual specifics offer too little common ground for the spectator to relate the represented figure to himself, the portrayal of general conditions embraces a larger collective caught in familiar social situations. Diderot's understanding of the dramatic figure being derived from collective

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<sup>196</sup> *De la poésie dramatique*, DOE, p. 1337.

<sup>197</sup> For a discussion of the search for universal patterns of expression in eighteenth-century dramaturgical discourses, see Erika Fischer-Lichte (1995), p. 110. On gesture in general in German eighteenth-century dramaturgical theory see her chapter 'The Theatrical Gesture as a Norm', in *The Semiotics of Theatre*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Bloomington: Indiana UP), pp. 145-69. (Abridged version of vol. 2 of *Semiotik des Theaters*.)

<sup>198</sup> *Entretiens*, pp. 1176-7.

structures is then working towards identification rather than alienation. A '*gestus*' based on conditions is employed for the purpose of communalisation and empathetic affection.

Whereas the gesture had provided Brecht with an element which would alienate verbal expression, in the sense that it could be dialectically opposed to language, for Diderot pantomimic action complements the word, weaving a visual and verbal texture that alternates between expressive gesture and verbal exchange. 'Moved' silence and verbal interaction contribute to the overall unity of a naturalism that seeks to absorb the spectator into illusion. Whilst Diderot claims that it is 'the painting of movements' which exerts a charm in *Pamela*, *Sir Charles Grandisson* and *Clarissa*,<sup>199</sup> Brecht on the other hand will attribute to the choreographic element an innovative potential to revolutionise bourgeois naturalism. The gesture adds the entity of alienation which can transform naturalism back into a representation of reality.<sup>200</sup>

In sum, what emerges from a comparison between Brecht's and Diderot's dramaturgical theories is an extreme disparity in the socio-political aspect of their aesthetic intentions. This contrast in intention applies not only to the idea of an acting technique based on alienation, but can from there on be extended to the notions of gestuality and visuality. For Brecht, *gestus* and the theatre of showing (*Zuschaukunst*) are determined by the prefix of *Verfremdung*, and a dialectical process of undoing social alienation. For Diderot, it is the positive connotations of identification, illusion and empathy which decide the moral and political destination of the gesture.

In Diderot's imagination the gesture is at the service of naturalism, speaking of a world that can be sensually expressed. It retraces the most characteristic and eminent motions of the body, generating a body language that produces expression in privacy as well as communication with others. Its timing and energy must at least in part replicate the dynamics put into action in real life. Brecht, on the contrary, withdraws from the *gestus* those dynamics of an *imitatio naturae*. Neither the rhythm of spoken communication, nor the metric dimension of gestural expression, which can be found in real life, lend

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<sup>199</sup> *Poésie dramatique*, DOE, p. 1338.

<sup>200</sup> *Das kleine Organon*, BWS3, p. 96; 'A Short Organum for the Theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre* (1978), pp. 203-4.

timing to the *gestus*. Quite the opposite: the temporal structure of the Brechtian *gestus* is entirely regulated by the idea of political potentiality. The Marxist work of art, or at least the Brechtian rendition of such, does not fulfil itself in its own production, in the flow of a gesture that externalises itself in movement. Rather than perpetuate the dynamics of real life, it signals interruption to the continuities of timing instilled in the realities it seeks to overcome. The stasis of the Brechtian *gestus* gestures towards the end of capitalism. Image-like, it arrests the motions of a life dynamic, which the subject is immersed in and affected by. By the same token, it causes alienation. In its operation of arrest, it allows for distance and for vision.

The Diderotian gesture is instead a gesture of dynamic movement, of communal reciprocity, of temporal experience; the Brechtian *gestus*, a movement imaged, highly mediated and impregnated with political potentiality.

In his essay 'Kommerell, or on Gesture', Giorgio Agamben concludes from Kommerell's *Jean Paul* that, with the bourgeoisie evolving from class (*Stand*) to a state of disorder (*Mißstand*), exteriority becomes isolated from interiority, thus experiencing the demise of an aesthetic of the gesture. Agamben writes:

But an epoch that has lost its gesture is, by the same token, obsessed by them; for, men from whom all authenticity had been taken, gesture becomes destiny. And the more gesture lost their ease under the pressure of unknown powers, the more life became indecipherable. And once the simplest and most everyday gestures had become as foreign as the gesticulations of marionettes, humanity - whose very bodily existence had already become sacred to the degree that it had made itself impenetrable - was ready for the massacre.<sup>201</sup>

Agamben, after Kommerell, situates the temporal vertex of a loss of the gesture in a literary context between Goethe and Jean Paul. Brecht clearly would belong to an era in which the concern with gesturality would already have become 'obsessive'. The *gestus* is central to his dramaturgical theory in that it is politically liberating by virtue of being overtly alienated from corporeal expression. But it is also nostalgic for a kind of original language. This becomes apparent for example when he explicates the notion of

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<sup>201</sup> In *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed., trans., and intro. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 83.



the linguistic *gestus* with the archaic language of the bible.<sup>202</sup> The aesthetic of the gesture in his stage production (for example the ones documented by Syberberg),<sup>203</sup> are inextricably linked with a strange kind of folkloristic naivety, devised under the heading of *historisation*, but nevertheless folkloristic in appearance.

But on which side is Diderot situated? According to Agamben clearly in a pre-Jean-Paul-era, a period which is still in touch with an abstracted form of gestural expression. Diderot's system of gesture and sign, which can be learnt like a 'foreign' language whilst evoking intimacy and communal feelings, confirms this view. What we now can discern in the *Paradoxe* as alienating, was then clearly understood as a means of furthering communication rather than obstructing it. If we now find it strange that a play like Lessing's *Miß Sara Sampson* kept its audiences in tears for three and a half hours despite its bewildering language of melodramatic gesturality, this is because the eighteenth century was still capable of conceiving of the possibility that emotions could be affected by a conventionalised language of signs.<sup>204</sup> A gesture would suffice to transmit emotional meaning.

## 2.12 'HORROR ALIENI': MONKEYS, MONSTERS, AND MIMESIS

In the preceding sections I have attempted to isolate the moments in which alienation plays a purely positive role in the aesthetics of the *Paradoxe*. I have also shown how Diderot's technique of self-alienated acting is identical with the Brechtian system yet begins to depart from the Brechtian system in terms of the intended effect of illusion and catharsis. This radical break between Brecht and Diderot does not only concern the question of acting. It extends into the theory of dramatic visuality, a theory based on the image and the gesture. Whereas Brecht deduces from the stilled visuality of the

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<sup>202</sup> See the fragment *Über gestische Musik*, BWS2, p. 329, where Brecht explicates the idea of the *linguistic gestus* with the tone of the New Testament: 'Gestisch ist eine Sprache, wenn sie auf dem Gestus beruht, bestimmte Haltungen des Sprechenden anzeigt, die dieser andern Menschen gegenüber einnimmt. Der Satz *Reiße das Auge, das dich ärgert, aus* ist gestische ärmer als der Satz *Wenn dich dein Auge ärgert, reiße es aus.*' (39) This example relates to *Matthew* 5, 29.

<sup>203</sup> Hans Jürgen Syberberg, *Syberberg filmt bei Brecht* [video] (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 1993).

<sup>204</sup> See Alexander Kosenina, *Anthropologie und Schauspielkunst: Studien zur eloquentia corporis' im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1995), p. 1. Kosenina recalls K. W. Ramler's descriptions of the play, which became the century's greatest success of tears: The spectators listened for three and a half hours, stilled like statues, and cried.

*gestus* the notion of detachment and alienation, Diderot presents us with a theory of absorption and emotional immersion.

However, up to this point I have only offered an ‘arrested’ perspective on the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. The *Paradoxe* is not for nothing entitled a paradox.<sup>205</sup> Far from presenting a programme fixed in its precepts and intentions, its main strategy is movement, a movement which leads to the paradoxical collapse and to the perversion of rationalist positivism. In the last sections of this chapter I will be retracing some of the negations which the *Paradoxe* undertakes, in order to attempt the description of an aesthetic of alienation which reaches beyond the analogies to Brecht. If I have already demonstrated that commonality between Brecht’s and Diderot’s acting technique of alienation begins to falter once Diderot’s search for illusion is taken into account, this final section will outline the ways in which an alienation immanent to acting becomes externalised into an aesthetic structure that differs from Brecht’s propositions.

### 2.13 THE MARIONETTE AT COURT: PRESENCE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN THE PARADOXE

As it has been demonstrated in section 2 of this chapter, Diderot’s idea of alienated acting is meant to stand in the service of the *drame bourgeois*. The actor’s self-alienation makes a play ‘believable’ and evokes the spectator’s empathetic and cathartic response in which the Enlightenment dramaturgists are so interested. If these are the values which Diderot attempts to defend, these positives are soon undermined by a paradoxical shift into negativity. Amongst the *Paradoxe*’s many anecdotes, exemplifying its hypothesis of cold acting, the most appropriate ones seem to refer to French classical tragedy. Here, the *Paradoxe* opens up self-contradiction since the

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<sup>205</sup> Much discussion has revolved around the question whether the *Paradoxe* constitutes a paradox or not, and where the paradox should be located. Yvon Belaval intimated that Diderot uses the form of the paradox in the eighteenth-century sense in order to contest a conventionally accepted opinion about acting which is in fact absurd; see *L’esthétique sans paradoxe de Diderot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 168. Marian Hobson shows that the *Paradoxe* is based on a system of ‘endossement’ in which aesthetic propositions are simultaneously inscribed with positive and negative values, a system which at a certain point begins to undermine its original set of antitheses. She thereby affirms that the ‘paradoxe est un paradoxe’. See ‘Le *Paradoxe sur le comédien* est un paradoxe’, *Poétique*, vol. 4, no. 15 (1973), pp. 320-339. In his chapter ‘Stages of paradox in *Le Paradoxe sur le comédien*’, Walter E. Rex retraces a similar argument; in: *Diderot’s counterpoints: The Dynamics of Contrariety in his major work* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), pp. 119-138. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1998), holds accountable for the paradoxical status of the text the already discussed logic of acting as de-subjectification, p. 285.

seventeenth-century code is the very code which the Enlightenment attempts to overcome. For instance, as I have already mentioned earlier, Diderot insists on a tradition of stage convention, implying the notion of pronounced otherness, a 'ton inconnu' and the idea of 'agrandissement théâtral'. Yet, amongst the role models of Greek tragedy, Shakespeare and Voltaire, also Racine and Corneille have to be acknowledged to have realised a language of the unknown:

Croyez-vous que les scènes de Corneille, de Racine, de Voltaire, même de Shakespeare, puissent se débiter avec votre voix de conversation et le ton du coin de votre âtre?<sup>206</sup>  
(40)

'L'agrandissement théâtral' seems to be contextualised *par excellence* in the works of Corneille and Racine. Apart from guaranteeing Diderot's desired effect of a theatrical aesthetic that exceeds the measure of 'nature', 'exagération' on stage seems only ever one degree apart from deteriorating to a seventeenth-century aesthetic of artifice. What is permanently at stake is that Diderot's Enlightenment naturalism could elide with the aesthetic system of the baroque world.<sup>207</sup> The self-alienating artifice attached to the technique of acting seems to surface in an external aesthetic of pompous baroque 'bombast'. The original 'neutralising' precept that, 'Sur les planches tout a changé: ici il fallait un autre personnage, puisque tout s'était agrandi' (41) falters.<sup>208</sup> What was artificial in construction is no longer natural in appearance. Alienation and artifice flow over from inside out.

Yet the presence of the seventeenth century also enters from another argument. This is the trope of the *theatrum mundi*. Here again Diderot performs the reversal of original contentions, this time much more fundamentally in terms of the logic of the text's reasoning: the statement that art must establish for itself a sphere separate from the domain of nature is undone. Opposites are dissolved. Social nature is in fact never purely of the order of nature, but is always already contaminated by artifice in the form of social convention. Here, perhaps lacking the concept of 'culture', Diderot hyper-naturalises art and hyper-idealises nature. To 'act' is a pertinent concern in real life, which entails that the theatre, or the theatrical 'modèle idéal', is perhaps never very

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<sup>206</sup> PsC, pp. 102-3.

<sup>207</sup> Chaouche (2000), shows how closely Diderot's form of cold acting is derived from the rhetorical tradition. See the section 'Le retour aux sources de l'art: Une esthétique classique', pp. 28-34.

<sup>208</sup> PsC, p. 159.

dissimilar from the nature of society. Nature continually moves towards art and vice versa.

But this approximation also heralds the arrival of an all-pervasive form of mimesis, the thoroughly mimetic world of the *theatrum mundi*, in which life itself is always already impregnated by the theatre. In the most positive instance this means empowerment of the public individual who knows how to rise above the afflictions of sensibility, fright and even madness. At the worst, a mimetic universe also implies the implementation of the lie, the integration of falsity and corruption, and even the instalment of tyranny and madness. The cold-minded come here to control the 'virtuous', or those identified with the values of the bourgeoisie: sensibility and communal family values. If the stage had formerly been declared exempt from the sphere of ethics due to its 'ideal' status, the introduction of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor does indeed oppose mimetic prowess with mimetic corruption. Another sphere beyond art and politics is touched upon. This is the sphere of ethics. In the final passages of the text the recourse to the initially positive reference to the 'comédie' du monde has become contaminated:

Les comédiens font impression sur le public, non lorsqu'ils sont furieux, mais lorsqu'ils jouent bien la fureur. Dans les tribunaux, dans les assemblées, dans les lieux où l'on veut se rendre maître des esprits, on feint tantôt la colère, tantôt la crainte, tantôt la pitié, pour amener les autres à ces sentiments divers. Ce que la passion elle-même n'a pu faire, la passion bien imitée l'exécute.<sup>209</sup> (42)

The lauded skill of being able to imitate everything by being nothing becomes uncanny, since it is not restricted to the institution of the theatre where it can serve the didactic intentions of the author, but it unleashes into social reality where it benefits the abusive and selfish individual. *Horror alieni* of an uncontrolled, literally 'unauthorised', uncontrollable theatrical kind of alienation seizes social reality. The very essence of the theatre, 'theatricality', thrives upon a mimeticised society: 'C'est surtout lorsque tout est faux [...] que le spectacle est le plus épuré.'<sup>210</sup> (43) The citizen enters the theatre corrupt and leaves unchanged. Theatre comes to perpetuate the falsities and self-deceptions of social life.

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<sup>209</sup> PsC, p. 178.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

It is difficult to determine where this sensibility of alienation originates, whether it in fact anticipates Hegel's diagnosis of modernity in the *Phänomenologie* in relation to the *Neveu de Rameau*. If one focuses solely on the arguments of the *Paradoxe*, one may hold responsible for a certain sense of *horror alieni* the presence of the seventeenth century in the text. The very last passage of the *Paradoxe* concludes indeed with a reference to the 'old courtier', closing the circle of the *theatrum mundi* set up at the very beginning of the text: '...crois t-on que sur la scène l'acteur soit plus profond, plus habile à feindre la joie, la tristesse, la sensibilité, l'admiration, la haine, la tendresse, qu'un vieux courtisan?'<sup>211</sup> (44) The courtier thus comes to represent the ultimate negativity of the 'cold actor'. Frivolous and always gay, under the volatile gaze of the monarch, he fulfils *par excellence* the characteristics ascribed to the cold actor: he has no character or principles and excels in playing all. His acting instead of functioning as a tool for emancipation, becomes thus about enslavement. Within the moral codex of the new bourgeoisie he comes to be seen as mediocre, polished, cold and untrustworthy:

Celui qui dans la société se propose et a le malheureux talent de plaire à tous, n'est rien, n'a rien qui lui appartienne, qui le distingue, qui engoue les uns et qui fatigue les autres. Il parle toujours et toujours bien; c'est un adulateur de profession, c'est un grand courtisan, c'est un grand comédien.<sup>212</sup> (45)

Diderot's equation 'actor'/'courtier' casts doubt on the concept of the cold actor, but it also shifts the positive aspects of an acting method based on mind, judgement and observation into the proximity of the rhetorical tradition, which in the seventeenth century had solely served as a system of acting methodology. The demand of cold and self-alienated acting has not only for Brecht a precursor in Diderot, but also for Diderot in Balthasar Gracián. Indeed, the technique of cold acting as a method of mastering the art of a dangerous and competitive social life at court is one of the main instructions in Gracián's *Oraculo manual, y arte de prudencia* (1653).<sup>213</sup> Here self-awareness, an acknowledgement of the constant gaze of the other, the importance of intelligence, artifice and observation, make up for a very similar acting method to the *Paradoxe*, this time not on the stage of the theatre, but on the embattled scene of the court:

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>213</sup> *The Courtiers Manual Oracle, or the Art of Prudence*. Written originally in Spanish, by Baltazar Gracián. And now done into English. London, Printed by M. Flesher, for Abel Swalle, at the Sign of the Unicorn, at the West End of St. Paul. 1685.

Man's life is a conflict with the malice of man himself. An expert man for Weapons uses the stratagems of intention. He never does what he seems to have a mind to do. He takes an aim, but that is to deceive the Eyes that look upon him. He blurts a word in the air, and then does a thing that no body dreamt of. If he came out with a saying, it is to amuse the attention of his Rivals, and whilst that is taken up in considering what he drives at, he presently acts what never came into their thoughts.<sup>214</sup>

Gracián advises his reader to adopt forms of acting that are profoundly self-conscious in their tactics. Whilst concealing true motivations, he must cunningly calculate the effects he will exert on his partners of communication. Disguised action, which nevertheless is highly sociable, is the rule; as in the case of the *Paradoxe*, nature must be perfected by the principle of art. Being and appearing are two strictly distinguished domains; action is always devised through the viewpoint of external eyes.<sup>215</sup> The Graciánian instructions of prudence seem to anticipate in structure and motivation Diderot's mimetic war of the private individual against a mimetic social universe.<sup>216</sup>

Yet the tone of the *Oraculo* is far darker than that of the *Paradoxe*. As opposed to Gracián, whose clear purpose is to armour the individual within an inexorable system of life at court, Diderot's meditation on the concept of the cold actor is accompanied with laughter at the very point where his method becomes assimilated into the seventeenth century. The ironic laughter at the *actor-courtier-monkey* who is caught in the vacuities of social choreography causes distance at the same time as it expresses the discomfort of too much closeness. Courtly behaviour is identified with 'singerie' as an automatic process of repeating social convention, de-humanising the individual and alienating the community.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>215</sup> I do not have the space to go into the details of the text, but some of the titles of the *Oracle* may disclose the similarity to Diderot: *Nature and Art: Matter and the Artist*, p. 9. *The Thing and the Manner of the Thing*, p. 11. *To do all things, as in the presence of witnesses*, p. 269. *Never to act in passion*, p. 260. *Not to lose ones self with another*, p. 259.

<sup>216</sup> Interestingly, Gracián also plays a role in Brecht's thought. It is Benjamin who gave Brecht a copy of Balthasar Gracián's *Handorakel und Kunst der Weltklugheit*. See Helmut Lethen and Erdmut Wizisla, 'Das Schwierigste beim Gehen ist das Stillstehen: Benjamin schenkt Brecht Gracián. Ein Hinweis', in *Drive b. brecht 100*, ed. Marc Silberman, The Brecht Yearbook 23 (Berlin: International Brecht Society, 1998), pp. 142-6. Brecht thoroughly works through the book, documented by the many markings in the volume. Gracián's influence is for example reflected in 'Regeln für Margarete Steffin', BWS2, p. 7, and according to the authors of the quoted article in the poem: 'Verwisch die Spuren'. Gracián holds an interesting key to the psychological backdrop of an aesthetic of alienation which emerges during a time where fascist persecution had come to dominate the consciousness of all those concerned. The situation of exile and persecution could be seen as absolutely significant for many aspects of the alienation effect.

<sup>217</sup> Diderot calls the inexperienced cold actor 'automate', see PsC, p. 111; PoA, p. 28.

But does this ultimately mean that Diderot re-institutes a non-ambivalent law of ‘natural naturalism’? Does he entirely dispense with the technique of cold acting? Does sensibility celebrate a comeback, in both a de-mimeticised social universe as well as a performance principle of identification?

To affirm this question, would mean to linearise the labyrinthine system of contextual differentiation, through which the *Paradoxe* traces its logic. It would in fact relinquish, both a certain kind of ‘realist’ relativity, which relies on subtle difference from situation to situation, as well as the reader’s task of interpretation. Rather than recoiling upon itself in total, the *Paradoxe* announces warnings, alluding to the worst scenarios, if certain instructions are taken to their ultimate consequence, without any regard for context. It seems to suggest that mimetic alienation can turn into ‘systemic’ alienation in very specific situations. Although techniques of self-alienation may very well border on aristocratic decadence or on the slavish conformism of mediocrity, if applied with *prudence* it can become productive.

It is precisely at this point, that the *Paradoxe* shows affinity with an attitude towards action articulated in the *Oraculo*, a point in which it seems so utterly different from both the programmatics of Brecht as well as the propagation of naivety in the methods of sensibility and identification which were to become more and more strongly implemented with the course of the nineteenth century. In both the *Paradoxe*, as well as the *Oraculo*, it becomes paramount to instruct about a reality organised by the principle of mimesis already at the level of textual interpretation. The reader is being confronted with both the complexities as well as the obscurities of a mimetic universe. This necessarily entails a paradoxical or an *oraculous* style, resisting linearity of argument at the same time as avoiding any simple solutions to the question of *how to act*. This becomes especially evident in the formal organisation of the texts. Oracle in the first case, paradox in the second, neither of the authors seem willing to formulate a system of acting in obvious terms. Only the reader who is prepared for the task of interpretation, who has already arrived at a stage of wisdom where he or she is willing to commit to the task of interpretation, will be initiated into the school of mimetics. Thus the author of the first English translation of the *Oraculo* can write in his preface:

Oracles are the glimmerings of a supernatural light, which do rather dazzle than illuminate those who are not both attentive and sharp sighted. (...) It's an old saying; A word's enough to the Wise; and he that cannot crack the shell, and taste the kernel of a sentence, though he may be wise in his own Eyes, will never be reckoned so in the judgment of Sages.<sup>218</sup>

Furthermore, the introduction warns that instruction is a difficult task since it has 'great affinity with the answering and not answering a fool in his folly, according to Solomon, and all the world are satisfied, that there is a vast number of more than ordinary fools, and mad men amongst us at present.'<sup>219</sup> Whilst presenting an instruction of an art of self-alienation, the title prefigures Diderot's *theatrum mundi* theme of alienation as foolery or madness. The *Manual Oracle* wisely resorts to a style that 'glimmers like supernatural light'. The mystified reader's task of self-orientation comes into play, assuming that *acting* will never be simple. Against this backdrop it should not be forgotten that both authors share not only similar theory and style, but also an education by Jesuit religion. It is perhaps from this angle that one can trace the idea of an actor placed in a universe which is in and of itself an alienated one. Caution in terms of interpretation and action will always remain in command. No doctrine and no Enlightenment could ever simplify or resolve those tasks. From here might derive the style of an oscillating paradox and that of a glimmering oracle, which consciously resist a pedagogic of demagogy, of linear doctrine. Alienation exists here as a force that the subject will never be able to possess. The *Paradoxe* then can be understood not as inconclusive but as strict, not as text which opens up into frivolous circularity, but as a method which keeps things difficult, which resolves neither the problem of living in an alienated world, nor the question of how to interpret the world with the knowledge that one is given.

#### 2.14 'THE POET HAS ENGENDERED A MONSTER, CLAIRON MADE IT ROAR':<sup>220</sup> FROM PUPPET TO MONSTER

If the *Paradoxe* moves into 'historical negativity' in order to import into its argument both formality and depravity of the courtly protocol, it slides simultaneously into a kind of theatrical monstrosity. It is here that aesthetic possibilities emerge, even if they

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<sup>218</sup> Gracian (1685), translators preface (no page number indicated).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> PoA, p. 43.



might be connoted with a questioning, or even pejorative tone. Here one can observe the appearance of an aesthetic of alienation, which could perhaps be said to present an alternative to Brecht's dialectical approach to alienation. From the figure of the courtier as a vain and frivolous opportunist, the second interlocutor concludes to the figure of the puppet, which in turn is likened to the actor:

Un grand courtisan, accoutumé, depuis qu'il respire, au rôle d'un pantin merveilleux, prend toutes sortes de formes, au gré de la ficelle qui est entre les mains de son maître.<sup>221</sup> (46)

Once more, Diderot rehearses his argument of a hierarchically organised mimetic society. Marionettes and marioneteers continuously exchange position, yet the overriding principle of authority and submission remains the same. The one who objectifies his own alienation controls the other's alienation. If at times the actors are pulling the strings of the spectator's sentiments, and their imagination empowers them to take the *modèle idéal* to degrees of ideality, surpassing even the poet's concepts, this logic is counteracted by a reverse argument. Actors are indeed at the mercy of the roles which the poets inflict on them:

Un grand comédien est un autre pantin merveilleux dont le poète tient la ficelle, et au quel il indique à chaque ligne la véritable forme qu'il doit prendre.<sup>222</sup> (47)

The actor's authority is indeed greatly degraded by this argument, for Diderot begins now to classify the entire acting profession into a scheme of inferiority and submission. Their 'desubjectification', necessary for playing everything, stigmatises the entire stage profession as 'une ressource, jamais un choix.'<sup>223</sup> (48) Their profession is stamped with the mark of inferiority, for actors do nothing else but prostitute themselves for the delectation of a scrutinising audience.<sup>224</sup> 'Libertinage', lack of education and poverty are the only reasons which make the 'involuntary choice' of the stage understandable:

Ils sont excommuniés. Ce public qui ne peut s'en passer les méprise. Ce sont les esclaves sans cesse sous la verge d'un autre esclave. Croyez-vous que les marques d'un

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<sup>221</sup> PsC, p. 142.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>224</sup> Here finally Diderot also inverts the original hierarchy of cold-minded actors on stage and sobbing spectators in the auditorium. The spectators are now cold observers, the actors mad enough to display themselves to the public eye.

avilissement aussi continu puissent rester sans effet, et que, sous le fardeau de l'ignominie, une âme soit assez ferme pour se tenir à la hauteur de Corneille?<sup>225</sup> (49)

Social competition for authority over the other continues from here, destroying the ideal of a civilised and democratic theatrical community, in which each member intelligently considers the vision of the artwork at large. Since actors are both despised as well as tyrannised, they in turn take revenge on the authors. The puppet of the poet is a rebellious one.

However, what is more interesting in the figure of the puppet is its affinity to the notion of monstrosity. For in the process of the ever-growing ideal model, one can begin to perceive the contours of an aesthetic of theatricality. Diderot's aesthetic of theatrical otherness becomes inevitably connected with the notion of death when he likens the actor to the gladiator's 'performance' of 'another death' ('une autre mort'), a death died at the service of art.<sup>226</sup> But the idea of theatre as an aesthetic borderline experience of death also enters via the figure of the puppet. The idea of theatrical puppetry is used to push the concept of the *modèle idéal* to its extremes, or one might even say, over the edge of its own conceptual boundaries.

Actors such as Clairon may appear as 'automated' at a young age,<sup>227</sup> producing motions which still lack the experience that will endow their representation with the illusionist effect of naturalisation, exposing technicality where it should be hidden and instrumental. Yet, maturity of experience soon leads to the desired result of an 'ideal model', which is greater than nature without declining into artifice. The creation of the role, which is proportioned according to 'l'agrandissement théâtral', implies a 'vast spectre', a 'huge figure', 'a mighty shape', a 'great Homeric shape' which accords to the expansion of the imagination.

But such perfection of a self-alienated naturalism always runs the risk of disproportional exaggeration. The very spectrality of the concealed model threatens to grow beyond measure. For the soul of the actor seems to be filled with nothing but ethereality. This

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<sup>225</sup> PsC, pp. 151-2.

<sup>226</sup> PsC, p. 106; PoA, p. 23.

<sup>227</sup> 'De nos jours, la Clairon et Molé ont, en débutant, joué à peu près comme des automates...' Ibid., p. 111 (50).

ethereal insubstantiality of the actor's subjectless soul could always inflate to an extent that the 'material' fiction of the role is exploded. Both uncanniness and ridicule come to dominate the aesthetic experience of such hyper-idealisation. Gradually, in the process of conceptualisation from nature, to poetry, to the actor's representation, the dramatic figure dematerialises itself, becoming too conceptual for its own, or rather, for the author's good:

Ce dernier [the ideal model] monte sur les épaules du précédent et se renferme dans un grand mannequin d'osier dont il est l'âme; il meut ce mannequin d'une manière effrayante, même pour le poète, qui ne se reconnaît plus, et il nous épouvante, comme vous l'avez fort bien dit, ainsi que les enfants s'épouvantent les uns les autres en tenant leurs petits pourpoints courts élevés au-dessus de leur tête, en s'agitant et en imitant de leur mieux la voix rauque et lugubre d'un fantôme qu'ils countrefont.<sup>228</sup> (51)

Theatre deteriorates to the play of children whose hunger for frightful plays makes the question of an empathetic illusion redundant. The roughest forms of imitation and only scarce mechanical props and devices are enough to give to children their voluntary chills, to stimulate in them a jouissance of the theatrical. Spectrality emerges far too readily in the children's search for a pleasure of dis-embodiment. Here a *horror alieni* concerning the fear of social disintegration clashes with a desire for the purely theatrical event and a monstrous kind of spectrality. It is monstrous in a sense that it represents merely another degree of turning the screw of an ever-alienating ideal model that originally had stood in the function of an aesthetic of bourgeois values. The institution of theatre now has come to be a hideous ghost show performed by children at a graveyard where passers-by are frightened off with white sheets and uncanny groans:

Rien, à vous entendre, ne ressemblerait tant à un comédien, sur la scène ou dans ses études, que les enfants qui, la nuit, contrefont les revenants sur les cimetières, en élevant au-dessus de leurs têtes un grand drap blanc au haut d'une perche, et faisant sortir de dessous ce catafalque une voix lugubre qui effraye les passants.<sup>229</sup> (52)

Interestingly, it is in the context of this monstrous form of theatricality that reference is made to the rough material of the voice. In comparison to gesture and visibility, even the 'bouche de théâtre', which articulates an estranged poetic language, the voice appears to be only a rough organ of illusion. The children produce croaking lugubrious sounds, whilst Clairon's contribution to the poet's monster is to make it roar. Perhaps

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

the voice is too closely linked to the diaphragm and to the 'cry of the heart' to participate in the more superior register of self-controlled mimesis. Here again, Diderot undertakes a paradoxical exchange. The ideal model is perverted into the instinctual mimetic games of children. For a moment the child comes to play the symbolical representative of the actor:

Mais, par hasard, nauriez-vous pas vu des jeux d'enfants qu'on a gravés? N'y auriez-vous pas vu un marmot qui s'avance sous un masque hideux de vieillard qui le cache de la tête aux pieds? Sous ce masque, il rit de ses petits camarades que la terreur met en fuite. Ce marmot est le vrai symbole de l'acteur; ses camarades sont le symbole du spectateur.<sup>230</sup> (53)

Yet the question of how to evaluate such phantasmagoria does not resolve itself in any straightforward way. Although the phantom represents the negativity of a positive construct of the ideal model, this does not mean that 'hyper-idealisation' as an excessive state of aesthetic alienation is to be rejected in total. 'Hyper-idealisation' does not purely echo the Platonic warning against a kind of mimetic appearance which threatens to replace reality, installing falsity and vacuity within the realm of the real. Diderot's descriptions of an ideal model that has become phantasmagoric alludes to the enjoyment involved in children's theatrical games. It is precisely from the 'infantilisation' of the theatrical profession that a certain kind of anthropological justification of the theatre emerges. All participants in the graveyard game seem immune against any sophistication and hence technification of illusion at all: both their desire for the effects of the theatrical as well as their exuberant imagination make the question of an all absorbing skill of illusion redundant.

Yet, more importantly, the notion of terror, and perhaps also the reference to masks, points at an understanding of theatre Diderot had already suggested in the *De la poésie dramatique*, where he remarks on the shaking effect of theatre.<sup>231</sup> Diderot associates here a poetic of terror and violence with a return to Greek tragedy. In the *Paradoxe*, Greek tragedy, despite its archaic brutality which seems so adverse to the bourgeois ideal of civilisation, is identified as the epitome of the theatrical arts. Hand in hand with the allusion to the fear felt by children caught in a game, the *Paradoxe* corrects the idea

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., pp. 173-4.

<sup>231</sup> DOE, p. 1284.

that enjoyment in the theatre could best be understood in the modality of a domesticated kind of sensibility.

In response to Burke's and Shaftesbury's theories of agreeable terror and the notion of the sublime, Diderot announced in the *Salon de 1767* that 'tout ce qui imprime un sentiment de terreur conduit au sublime.'<sup>232</sup> (54) And in his translation of Shaftesbury's essay *Principes de la Philosophie morale ou Essai sur le Mérite de la Vertu par Mylord S\*\*\**, Diderot declares the principle of a 'beautiful' kind of monstrosity:

Il n'est point de monstre odieux qui, par l'art imité, ne puisse plaire aux yeux; quelque difforme que soit un être (si toutefois il y a difformité réelle), il plaira pourvu qu'il soit bien représenté.<sup>233</sup> (55)

But the return to an anarchic and pure form of frightful catharsis, as well as the aesthetic pleasure of a dark sublime, do not come without ambivalence. Purifying on the one hand, they remain hideous on the other. It is here that I would locate a specific sensibility of the 'theatrical' voiced in Diderot's aesthetics of the *Paradoxe*. It emerges from a humour experienced in view of the deformations into which the author sees his theories and concepts mutate. A sense of irony and of surprise arise in consequence of experiencing the motions of a mimetological body which appears to have the qualities of a *perpetuum mobile*, an ever metamorphosing monster in itself.

Here theory comes to surprise the theoretician, or art comes to surprise the artist, performing movements which seem to spring out of its own body rather than the conceptual operations undertaken by the author. They seem to organically transmute into their various extensions. A phenomenology of the theatre, or perhaps a conceptual *theatrum mundi* comes to life, which, in certain moments of its unfolding, surpasses the concepts of its originator, pushing him into a position outside of his own creation. In the face of this disempowerment, indeed, his very alienation from his creation, the subject can only resort to laughter, a laughter mixed with both surprise and a pleasant kind of fright. At this very moment we arrive at the point where mimesis has become

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<sup>232</sup> Denis Diderot: *Salons*, ed. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar, vol. 3: 1767 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 165; as quoted by Carsten Zelle, *Angenehmes Grauen: Literaturhistorische Beiträge zur Ästhetik des Schrecklichen im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987), pp. 191-2.

<sup>233</sup> *Principes de la Philosophie morale ou Essai sur le Mérite de la Vertu par Mylord S\*\*\** [Shaftesbury]. *Traduit de l'Anglais* (1745), in Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol.1, ed. Jean Assézat (Paris: 1875), p. 34 (footnote by Diderot); as quoted by Zelle (1987), p. 116.

animated and self-perpetuating, producing appearances without political or ethical framework. Yet the authorial subject concerned is not a subject who has full-heartedly submitted to this mimetic alienation. He remains an observer of the apparition of a phantasmagoric world. He observes, perhaps in the same manner as in Goya's *The Sleep of Reason produces Monsters*, the deviation of his consciously devised concepts, the transformation of reason itself into unreason and nightmare. He notices his own avidity for the frightful pleasures of such spectral self-animation with ambivalent humour.

Finally, to conclude this chapter, what is essential to such an aesthetic of a mimesis that constantly oscillates between passive and active alienation, that never can quite be contained, is the temporal structure involved. The *Paradoxe*'s aesthetic of an alienating kind of monstrosity is closely bound up with the paradoxical movements of its arguments, its fluctuations between idealisation and deviation, and its game between subjection and objectification. Yet far from delineating the arrow-like trajectory of an absorbing and 'presencing' movement (exactly the problem Brecht had with an idealist conception of dramatic temporality), this is a temporal structure which continually undermines its own linearity. Whilst at times the programmatic assertions of the first interlocutor's theories seem to suggest linearity and presence, at other times the subject can only be overcome by the temporary monstrosities emerging. It witnesses, mostly with a sense of belatedness, the fluxes and shifts of a gradually evolving structure, in which the ephemera of its manifestations, like ether, as Diderot says, reject the subject's sense of systematic orientation. This is a kind of temporality, which is at once marked by a system of gradation as well as by an unpredictable influx of a logic which continually 'degrades' its previous presuppositions. Whilst the *Paradoxe* seems at first sight incredibly systematic in the way in which it builds the ideal model of the actor by removing it degree by degree, further and further away from nature, this system of hierarchically organised degrees is made to explode from within, unexpectedly and without any authorisation. Pockets of monstrous time seem to be enveloped within the progressive timing of the *Paradoxe*'s affirmative arguments. Eccentrically, they explode the flow of linear presence when least expected. Interestingly, Diderot proposes himself a definition of the monster which is entirely bound up with the question of temporality. In the article *Eléments de physiologie*, Diderot defines the

monster not as a deviation from an absolutely fixed and normative natural order but as a being which is out of sync with the temporality of an existing order.<sup>234</sup>

L'ordre général de la nature change sans cesse: au milieu de cette vicissitude la durée de l'espèce peut-elle rester la même? non: il n'y a que la molécule qui demeure éternelle, et inaltérable. Le monstre naît et meurt: l'individu est exterminé en moins de cent ans.<sup>235</sup> (56)

Diderot proposes a model of nature which is constantly in flux and in which a notion of normativity can only be reduced to a relative point in time within the system. The monsters of yesterday might be the norm of today and the norm of today might represent the monsters of the future. Similarly, the *Paradoxe* constitutes a system in which we can observe the process from ideal to monster as a matter of *time*, a time which cannot be controlled by linearising it but which has to be accepted as a force beyond the subject's control. Alienation might jump at us in time, out of nowhere and even out of the patterns which we have identified as natural and normal, and we will never know when.

However, despite the fact that this conjunction of alienation and temporality presents an alternative to an idealist model of dramatic temporality, a Diderotian 'monstrous' kind of timing applied to dramatic production would nevertheless also be far removed from Brechtian temporality. It still would mean that we could at times identify and absorb ourselves in the presence of the play, but it would also mean that these identifications would gradually grow into monsters. Rather than being rationally detached from the performance at all times, our attachments would gradually become undermined from within their own constitution. The image we had indulged in would grow out of proportion and turn against us. Time would be re-imbued with its unpredictable and jerky spasms and we would find ourselves in a situation where alienation is far less determinate than in Brecht, far less predictable, and far more profound. The idea of a form of alienation that oscillates with identification leads us to the second part of this

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<sup>234</sup> See Marie-Hélène Huet on 'Diderot's *Felicitous Audacity*', in *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1993), pp. 82-95. Huet describes with regard to Diderot, in particular *Le Rêve d'Alembert* the transition from a concept of the monster as devious in absolute term to a notion of monstrosity that is relative to temporality. On the notion of the monster in Diderot's thought see also Erita Hill, 'The Role of 'le monstre' in Diderot's thought in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 97 (1972), pp. 147-261.

<sup>235</sup> *Eléments de physiologie*, DOP, p. 1275-6. See also Huet (1993), p. 89.

dissertation, where I will examine the differing approaches of Brecht and Diderot to the question of objectivity and subjectivity in the context of alienation.



PART 2

ALIENATION BETWEEN SUBJECTIVITY AND  
OBJECTIVITY

## Chapter 3

### *No Subject of Alienation: Brechtian Alienation towards Objectivity*

One of the major characteristics of Brecht's theory of alienation is its pronounced anti-subjectivity. Brecht's aversion to a drama informed by the bourgeois desire to indulge in the mirror image of its own ego, becomes first of all manifest in his construction of the dramatic figure. Even more fundamentally, Brecht deduces the representation of the character from a very particular understanding of the way in which the protagonist is inscribed in the tissue of reality. Shifting backwards within the theatrical chain of representation from the enactment on stage to the concept of the *dramatis persona*, I will examine in the first section of this chapter the sources of Brecht's 'realist' concept of character, a character who is devoid of subjectivity at the same time as he is constructed according to 'objective' sociological laws.

The discussion of the protagonist will then shift to the question of spectatorship, for it is here that the proper role of the Brechtian theory of alienation is situated. One might argue that even though Brecht aims to rescue the dramatic figure from any subjective inscription, there is always a danger that the protagonist's alienation might become identificatory and we might identify with him as a stranger. But for Brecht, an identificatory form of alienation is a contradiction in terms: alienation is defined as rational analysis and as detachment. Brecht's abnegation of both an experience of alienation and the pre-figuration of an alienatory stance in the dramatic figure entails that a theory of alienation remains more or less detached from the level of the *subject* matter. The site proper of a theory of alienation becomes the question of representation itself, a site which could be said to sit on top of the subject matter like loose skin on a

body, and which can be treated aesthetically with a certain kind of autonomy.<sup>236</sup> It is this layer of representation which decides the ways in which the spectator will view the actions of the play. It is here that the epistemological destination of alienation originates.

Alienation is then predominantly a theory devised for the spectator. As I will show in the second section of this chapter, Brecht's theory of alienation has been said to utilise a Hegelian logic of recognition, a process in which the notion of subjectivity is paramount.<sup>237</sup> However, Brecht's major interest is in showing a world according to an objective understanding of Marxist analysis. It follows that although Brecht deduces the idea of alienation from Hegelian epistemology, he aims to circumvent the question of subjectivity, heading directly towards objectivity. We can thus observe in Brecht's intention to construct an aesthetic that is objective in the sense of 'scientificity' (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) a constant reduction of the sphere of subjectivity in favour of what is objective in a Marxist sense.

In opposition to Brecht's theory of alienation which aims at ridding itself entirely from any subjectivity and puts all its emphasis on the notion of objectivity, I will show in the fourth chapter that one can find in Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau* a concept of alienation that is not opposed to the notion of subjectivity, but which breaks down the schism between objectivity and subjectivity by constantly meandering between both states. In

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<sup>236</sup> Although Brecht never formulates the idea of an alienation-effect from the point of view of the stranger, a kind of approximation of representational questions and the configuration of dramatic material and character can be observed in his theoretical writings of the nineteen-twenties. Brecht's earliest theorising on alienatory modes of representation is closely intertwined with the subject matter of the plays. For instance, the concern for alienated subjectivity and sociology in the plays, *Baal* and *Im Dickicht der Städte*, coincides with the first calls for non-identificatory modes of representation: 'Einen großen Fehler sonstiger Kunst hoffe ich, im *Baal* und *Dickicht* vermieden zu haben: ihre Bemühung, mitzureißen. (...) Die Splendid isolation des Zuschauers wird nicht angetastet, es ist nicht sua res, quae agitur, er wird nicht beruhigt dadurch, daß er eingeladen wird, mitzuempfinden, sich im Helden zu inkarnieren und, indem er sich gleichzeitig betrachtet, in zwei Exemplaren, unausrottbar und bedeutsam aufzutreten. Es gibt eine höhere Art von Interesse: das am Gleichnis, das am Andern, Unübersehbaren, Verwunderlichen.' (1) (10/2/1922), BWJ1, p. 271. During this period questions of representation still slide into questions of subject matter, critique of alienation elides with its celebration. The idea of liberation from alienation, invested in a methodology of perception, seems to occupy almost the same place as the chains of alienation in which the protagonists of *Im Dickicht der Städte* are caught. For an interesting reading of the question of social alienation in Brecht's early plays and corresponding theoretical work, see Jörg-Wilhelm Joost, Klaus-Detlef Müller and Michael Voges, *Bertolt Brecht: Epoche - Werk - Wirkung*, ed. Klaus-Detlef Müller (München: C. H. Beck, 1985), pp. 90-125.

<sup>237</sup> See for example Jan Knopf, 'Verfremdung', in *Brecht's Theorie des Theaters*, ed. Werner Hecht (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 96; and Hermann Helmers' introduction to *Verfremdung in der Literatur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), pp. 4-5.

the latent manifestation of the phenomenon of alienation in Diderot's pre-Marxist 'novel', the treatment of aesthetic alienation takes a different shape. If for Brecht the distinction between Marxist socio-economic alienation, *Entfremdung*, and the concept of aesthetic alienation, *Verfremdung*, could be said to determine the above described split between alienation implicit in subject matter and alienation as a means of representation, the appearance of alienation in Diderot's writings traverses the dialectical difference of those two related, yet qualitatively opposed terms.

The Brechtian separation between representation and subject matter begins to collapse in the face of Diderot's aesthetic of alienation. Here, a theory of alienatory perception seems to emanate directly from the text: alienation is not only inscribed in the characters and their world but also imposes itself through a structure of aesthetic relations between text and reader. The different figurations of alienation include both moments of subjectivity as well as objectivity. Concomitantly, and perhaps more importantly, Brecht's antithetical understanding of alienation and identification is dissolved.

### 3.1 BRECHT'S ALIENATING 'DIVIDUALISM'

It was in fact not until 1926 that Brecht began to systematically incorporate the principles of Marxist analysis into his dramaturgical theory. With regard to the question of character, it was the Marxist sociologist Fritz Sternberg who gave definition to Brecht's understanding of the dramatic figure.<sup>238</sup> Sternberg's progressivist analysis of a dialectical history of drama largely confirmed Brecht's tendency to de-subjectify the characters of his plays. In Sternberg's thought, Brecht discovered the theoretical references which would politicise his earlier anarchic, anti-bourgeois attack on a drama celebrating the cult of emotional excess and the inflation of the self. From here he derived the notion that dramatic practice could become scientific. If naturalist theatre had only served a bourgeois need to see itself narcissistically reflected as well as aggrandised at a level where its own social position and impact remained disguised,

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<sup>238</sup> Furthermore Karl Korsch became a strong Marxist influence on Brecht's thought. On Korsch and Sternberg see Klaus-Detlef Müller: *Die Funktion der Geschichte im Werk Bertolt Brechts: Studien zum Verhältnis von Marxismus und Ästhetik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967), pp. 22-7. On Brecht's assimilation of Marxism see Joost (1985), pp. 201-207. On Korsch see Douglass Kellner, 'Brecht's Marxist Aesthetics: The Korsch Connection', in *Bertolt Brecht: Political Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. Betty Nance Weber and Hubert Heinen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980), pp. 29-42.

Brecht's epic theatre intended to show objectively the social processes inherent in a society determined by bourgeois dominance.

Sternberg had explained the inefficacy of contemporary drama by declaring the theme of individual conflict to be anachronistic. The idea of the 'great individual', he argued, belonged to the period of the Renaissance, with Shakespeare achieving the ultimate transposition of the theme of heroic individuality:

das Individuum war geboren worden als Individuum, als ein Nichtteilbares, Nichtvertauschbares. [...] Und so wurde das Shakespearische Drama zum Drama des mittelalterlichen Menschen wie des Menschen, der sich immer mehr als Individuum zu entdecken begann und als solches in dramatische Situationen zu seinesgleichen wie zu übergeordneten Gewalten geriet.<sup>239</sup> (2)

Sternberg intimated that the Shakespearean exploration of the individual had anticipated three hundred years of capitalism, but in an era where capitalism had already arrived at its point of decline, in which in fact pre-revolutionary tendencies had become the dominant social force, such a tradition has lost its strength and hence its potential to aesthetically satisfy and stimulate. Contemporary theatre attempting to copy the sociological structures of Shakespearian drama would fail to have any incisive effects. This critique was mainly directed against naturalist nineteenth-century playwrights who had attempted to grasp the intensity of the heroic experience with comparatively weak subject matters, such as, for example, the relationship between women and men.

In the discussion *Neue Dramatik*,<sup>240</sup> Sternberg criticises the notion of eternal aesthetic values. Each period had to fabricate its aesthetic values, and these should be predicated on its own specific sociological conditions. According to this *scientific* historical definition of aesthetic value, Brecht introduced the categories of 'right' and 'wrong'. 'Right' and 'wrong' would decide with the weight of scientific objectivity over the political productiveness of an artwork within its specific historical context:

Der Soziologe weiß, daß es Situationen gibt, wo Verbesserungen nichts mehr helfen. Die Skala seiner Schätzung liegt nicht zwischen 'gut' und 'schlecht', sondern zwischen 'richtig' und 'falsch'.<sup>241</sup> (3)

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<sup>239</sup> Sternberg transcribed by Brecht in *Neue Dramatik*, BWS1, p. 271-2.

<sup>240</sup> BWS1, p. 270-75.

<sup>241</sup> *Sollen wir nicht die Ästhetik liquidieren*, BWS1, p. 203. See also Klaus-Detlef Müller's comments on the influence of scientific methodology in Brechtian aesthetics; (1967), p. 24.

What counted for Sternberg as symptomatic of the period of late capitalism, in other words, as historically 'right', was the theme of mass culture and its inherent motions of collective struggle. The notion of the individual thus became superseded by the Marxist concept of a class-system, whilst the conflict between individual and society was substituted by the conflict between mass entities. Nations and classes, rather than heroic individuals advanced as significant protagonists in the making of historical progress. Brecht demanded that collective powers, such as economical and technical quantities, and, more problematically, the mass conflicts inherent in war, should constitute the material of contemporary drama. By replicating the trajectories of these forces, theatre was going to render objective representations of reality.

Der Krieg zeigte die Rolle, die dem Individuum in Zukunft zu spielen bestimmt war. Der einzelne als solcher erreichte eingreifende Wirkung nur als Repräsentant vieler. Aber sein Eingreifen in die großen ökonomisch-politischen Prozesse beschränkte sich auf ihre Ausbeutung. Die 'Masse der Individuen' aber verlor ihre Unteilbarkeit durch ihre Zuteilbarkeit. [...] Die materielle Größe der Zeit, ihre technischen Riesenleistungen, die gewaltigen Taten der großen Geldleute, selbst der Weltkrieg als ungeheure 'Materialschlacht', vor allem aber das Ausmaß von Chance und Risiko für den einzelnen - solche Wahrnehmungen bildeten die Pfeiler dieser jungen Dramatik, die eine völlig idealistische und völlig kapitalistische war. Die Welt, wie sie ist, sollte gezeigt und anerkannt, ihre eigene Schonungslosigkeit als ihre Größe schonungslos aufgewiesen werden: ihr Gott sollte sein 'der Gott der Dinge, wie sie sind'.<sup>242</sup> (4)

The definition of a subject determined by external social forces is of course one of the central tenets of Marxist theory. In *Thesen über Feuerbach*,<sup>243</sup> Marx had posited the concept of an individual derived from social relations rather than its very own being or human essence:

Aber das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen Individuum inwohnendes Abstraktum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist es das Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse.<sup>244</sup> (5)

Character results from the social conditions into which an individual is embedded. Economic, social and cultural relations classify the individual's identity, rendering its constitution, or type (*Typus*), as Brecht would call it. This view of an individual always already caught within reciprocal dependency on the social body led Brecht to remove

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<sup>242</sup> *Die Dialektische Dramatik*, BWS1, p.436.

<sup>243</sup> In *Karl Marx: Die Frühschriften*, ed. Siegfried Landshut (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1971), pp. 339-341

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

the ego-driven subject from its central position within dramatic conflict. Subordinated to a wider scheme of social movement, it would be placed at the receiving end of social struggle rather than at the point where conflict was instigated.

Hand in hand, individual autonomy, subjective motivation and psychology were made redundant as part of an obsolete scheme of expression characteristic of bourgeois culture. Again, in keeping with Marx, Brecht's critique of the bourgeois subject was directed against a state of consciousness, which falsely believes itself atomic and independent from all external forces, an existence which for the reason of its self-illusion contaminates all further social relations with alienation. Marx claimed that the bourgeois individual's egoism (*Selbstsucht*), subjects all personal and material relations to its own projections thus turning subjects as well as objects outside itself into reified objects of consumption.<sup>245</sup> If naturalist theatre had nurtured the fantasies of such individualistic grandeur, at the same time as thematising the painful fragmentation of an ego which self-deceivingly believes itself to be indivisible, Brecht was going to bring to the fore the realities of the socially constructed subject. The 'capitalist' dramatic figure literally was to be divested of its properties and of its 'private' subjectivity:

Es erfolgt hier also, auch hier, eine Aufhebung des Eigentümlichen, des Eigentums, des Privaten, des Privateigentums.<sup>246</sup> (6)

Brecht's antidote to the subjective implications of bourgeois naturalism was encapsulated in the term *dividual*, describing an individual who is always already divided through its affiliations to different collective groups.<sup>247</sup> No sense of loss or psychological pain is associated with the notion of the *dividual*. The protagonist as a collective construct is not deprived of individuality, or marked by psychological pain over an internal split, but merely the result of an altered point of view. Political and sociological interests replace an interest in subjective interiority. Rather than represent a being caught in a subjective state of alienation, as in the case of *Faust*, where the protagonist exposes the suffering of an internal split, the *dividual* is the conceptual product of sociological abstraction, in which experience and emotion become more or

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<sup>245</sup> 'Die Heilige Familie', *ibid.*, p. 324,

<sup>246</sup> *Die dialektische Dramatik*, BWS1, p. 436.

<sup>247</sup> A similar term, *transindividual*, can be found in the vocabulary of Kojève, Simondon and Lacan. See Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1995), p. 30.

less irrelevant aspects. The *dividual* comes to document structures of social process. At the same time as reflecting social process at the most microcosmic level, it becomes key to how one can understand the laws behind social process, a process which can be analysed as well as modified. Here the theory of the *dividual* functions in support of the didactic enterprise of Brecht's theatre. The sociological re-functioning (*Umfunktionierung*) of theatre would open up to the objective knowledge of the causalities inherent in social life. Where the individual is inconsistent and volatile by virtue of its singularised status and its fluctuating emotional structure, the *dividual* is logically deduced from the structures of collective activity:

Unser Massebegriff ist vom Individuum her gefaßt. Die Masse ist so ein Kompositum; ihre Teilbarkeit ist kein Hauptmerkmal mehr, sie wird aus einem Dividuum mehr und mehr selber ein Individuum. [...]

Was soll über das Individuum auszusagen sein, solange wir vom Individuum aus das Massenhafte suchen. Wir werden einmal vom Massenhaften das Individuum suchen und somit aufbauen.<sup>248</sup> (7)

The dramatic figure had to be developed backwards: from its social class dependency as the dominant and most consistent determinant, to the more individual configuration of the self as an unstable entity fluctuating between different collective affiliations. From this Brecht arrived at the notion of the 'type' (*Typus*), a dramatic figure which would expose typical patterns of behaviour within specific social scenarios. A network of collective causalities now came to constitute the protagonist proper, directing the motions of the dramatic figure. The individual figure itself was only interesting in so far as it showed typical reactions within wider sociological processes. Action becomes displaced into the domain of sociological logistics. Effects recede before causes. Far from presenting omnipotent actors, individuals are to be presented as 'reactors'.

In other words, it is the search for causalities and objectivity which motivated Brecht's shift from the individual to the *dividual*. As a result, the theory of the de-subjectified protagonist is interlaced with Brecht's argument for a scientific kind of theatre (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*), in which the spectator, comparable to the scientist in a planetarium, observes the performance in a disinterested way.<sup>249</sup> Hand in hand with such a mode of objective observation Brecht introduces the idea of alienation:

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<sup>248</sup> *Individuum und Masse*, BWS1, p. 359.

<sup>249</sup> See for example *Die dialektische Dramatik*, BWS1, p. 440. The importance of *Wissenschaftlichkeit* in



Die dialektische Dramatik setzte ein mit vornehmlich formalen, nicht stofflichen Versuchen. Sie arbeitete ohne Psychologie, ohne Individuum und löste, betont episch, die *Zustände* in *Prozesse* auf. Die großen Typen, welche als möglichst fremd, also möglichst objektiv (nicht so, daß man sich in sie hinein fühlen konnte) dargestellt wurden, sollten durch ihr Verhalten zu anderen Typen gezeigt werden.<sup>250</sup> (8)

If lack of psychological individuality and the focus on social process rather than state brings forth a new drama of objective interest, the kind of objectivity attached to the protagonists is at the same time a mark of strangeness, which in the mid-thirties Brecht would develop further into the concept of the alienation-effect. But, even at this point in time, when Brecht is more concerned with the configuration of the dramatic figure than the actor's task of representation, the desired effect of such objectifying strangeness is the same. The spectator is made to become interested in the performance from a scientific point of view. No longer does he succumb to the magic of a theatre which lures him into identification with the protagonists, but he remains distanced and examines with detached fascination the theatrico-sociological experiments unfolding in front of his eyes.

Brecht then exploits the structure of an alienating kind of objectivity in two ways: on the one hand, identification can no longer function because the lack of subjectivity in the dramatic figure deprives the spectator of any empathetic reference points. The abdication of the individual who stands in the function of identification thus leads to an effect of alienation. Unlike individualised actions, 'processes' are impossible to identify with, since they depend on a multiplicity of relations describing the movements of quantities. The lack of a central perspective is perceived as alienating. The viewer is not invited to enter into the dramatic substance through a clearly defined single viewpoint.

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Brecht is not confined to social science and Marxist theory but also makes use of concepts borrowed from the natural sciences, especially physics. The concept of naturalism, for example, is called into question from the perspective of post-Renaissance science and its methodology of examining the relations of mechanical forces. Mimesis can no longer imitate the outer appearance of things but must penetrate into the laws within existence. In terms of the *dramatis personae* this entails precisely the concept of the *dividual* described above. *Typus* represents the consequence of an almost statistical approach to the construction of the dramatic figure. On *Wissenschaftlichkeit* in Brecht see Gerd Irrlitz, 'Philosophiegeschichtliche Quellen Brechts', in *Brechts Theatertheorie*, ed. Werner Hecht (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 11-31.

<sup>250</sup> *Die dialektische Dramatik*, BWS1, p. 439.

One could however argue that the higher degree of abstraction involved in Brecht's 'scientific' form of representation might translate in exactly that sense in which it has been conceived: as information from the standpoint of objective knowledge. In this, Marxist sociology is always already cemented into the material itself with the result that the spectator is in fact hindered from fulfilling the task of interpretation himself. The conditions of theatre as a sociological experiment have been fixed *a priori*. What remains to be done for the spectator is to observe *dividuals* within social situations which have been rendered objective according to the author's political tendency. Such objectivity all too easily slides back into a new form of identification and into yet another ideological programme. Although Brecht strikes an unambiguously provocative tone in the following quotation, the passage nevertheless clearly demonstrates a problem of confusion and collapse:

Nunmehr wurde die Subjektivität der möglichen Sachlichkeit entdeckt: die Objektivität als Parteilichkeit. Das, was hier als Tendenz erschien, war die Tendenz der Materie selbst.<sup>251</sup> (9)

The distinction between objectivity and subjectivity collapses. The reproach that Brecht's work might be politically biased is dismissed. Brecht's drama is identified with the theory of historical materialism to the point that it has become objective. Marxist objectivity and the author's subjectivity have become identical. As a consequence, the theory of alienation becomes self-contradictory, since the spectator is then expected to identify with objective knowledge. With the disappearance of a distinction between objectivity and subjectivity a problem of ideology emerges. Everything is claimed at once: the audience is expected to receive objective knowledge - to identify, as it were, with the subjective objectivity of Marxism, without identifying with the given dramatic material – at the same time as it is supposed to develop its own point of view. 'Dis-identification', which had previously been assumed to be the result of objectivity, declines into identification. The question of objectivity within Brecht's theory of the *dividual* is thus a highly precarious one.

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 443.

### 3.2 ALIENATION AS EPISTEMOLOGICAL TECHNIQUE: BRECHT'S DILEMMA BETWEEN HEGELIAN AND MARXIST DIALECTICS

It is perhaps within the turn towards epistemology (*Erkenntnistheorie*) that Brecht explored the purest form of an aesthetic of alienation. With this I mean that here he could afford to focus entirely on the effects of aesthetics in the spectator, or even more fundamentally, on the ways in which knowledge, or moments of recognition, evolve in the subject's consciousness. The shift towards the viewing subject and its consciousness, in this sense, necessarily ignores a clear analysis of the object of representation and the ways in which alienation might be mediated through the dramatic figure. Therefore when Brecht begins to talk about the laws of *Erkenntnis* it is mainly in abstract terms without regard to the question of *what* is being shown.

The starting point of Brecht's inclusion of epistemology into his aesthetics can be said to coincide with the development of the *Lehrstück* at the end of the twenties. In the theory of the didactic play one can observe how the spectator's consciousness now becomes a central issue for dramatic aesthetics. The *Lehrstück* dramaturgy of an activated spectator, interchangeable with the actor himself, introduces in the theatre a mode of perception similar to that of reality. This is an aesthetic which is meant to stimulate the urge for analysis, interpretation, recognition and decision-taking whilst claiming to break down a distinction between theory and political practice. Perception is no longer thought of as passive state, but as active intervention. To induce 'critical activity' in the spectator becomes the prime aim for theatrical aesthetics. Theatre determines its function as a pedagogical one: the education of the social subject that acts with political astuteness and responsibility becomes the central issue as well as the main site for utopian projection.

Yet whilst aesthetics begins to concern itself more with the ways in which consciousness gains insight and knowledge, the representation of its objects, as for example the rendition of the dramatic figure and the way in which the represented subject relates to the viewing subject, shifts into the background. With the accent being relocated to what one could almost term *pure methodology*, a whole new rhetoric emerges, a rhetoric which propagates the empowerment of the subject through recognition whilst entailing a split within the continuity of a theory of representation as such and a theory of representing objects. Representation comes to be ungrounded,

sitting like a layer of loose skin on top of the representation of dramatic material. On this surface is located the site of perceptive liberation, where the spectator is equipped with the tools of criticality. *Representation* is the site which enables independence and distance from the events of the dramatic narrative. Alienation becomes one of the main agents of this heightened interest in representation and methodology.

It could however be said that this inclination towards methodology borders on a form of 'allegorical idealism', an idealism which derives from the very structure of theatrical aesthetics, that is to say, it derives the potentiality of change directly from theatre's experimental playfulness. If Brecht discovers in the spectator a new tool for political revolution and therefore increases his preoccupation with methodological issues, in particular the question of how to liberate the spectator from his traditional position of passivity, there is also a danger involved in overestimating this new site for aesthetic discovery. In other words, although it is true that Brecht was perhaps most innovative in his inventions of new dramaturgical principles and in the ways in which he relayed those with political functions, it is important not to idealise this dimension of methodology. This is particularly true for those interpreters of Brecht who are seduced by the author's allegorical 're-structuralism' (*Umfunktionierung*), which is assumed as an innate quality of theatre itself. If it seems justified for Brecht to imbue his project with political vision, it is not so for his critiques. Reviewing Brechtian methodology with hindsight makes a distinction necessary between utopian allegoricity and political potentiality, if the political aspect of the theory is to matter at all. Brecht's intensive attempt to inscribe the various folds of theatre's *mediality* with meaning has to be observed with caution.<sup>252</sup>

What I will attempt in the second section of this chapter is to delineate the conjuncture between dialectics and a theory of alienation. It is in this context that Brecht imbues the

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<sup>252</sup> I am pointing here specifically to Frederic Jameson's *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998). Jameson argues for a non-dogmatic Brecht by excavating the importance of Brecht's extensive preoccupation with method, namely a methodology of the decentred subject, of change, process and experimentality. However, although it is true that these terms are key to Brecht's rhetoric of dramaturgy and Jameson is right in contending that these have to be understood as allegorical signifiers in Brechtian representation, it is precisely this allegorisation which is problematic. For a symbolical reading of method, or an allegorical reading of Brechtian theatricality, carries with it yet another risk of identification. The spectator will identify with the allegory of a theatre of continual restructuring and political freedom his very own power of liberation. Far from liberating the percipient from unconsciously accepted structures of oppression, such an interpretation of the Brechtian aesthetic affirms the subject in its illusions of power and freedom.

principle of alienation with a power directly oriented towards the spectator. Alienation in the context of a theory of knowledge comes to take on the position of an important methodological tool. Its fundamental structure of negativity, attached to it from its earliest renditions - for example in the notion of an unbelievable strangeness that opens up new ways of seeing by way of negating conventional points of view - is now reconsidered in the context of dialectics, the play of contradictions and opposites.<sup>253</sup> The structure of recognition is made out to hinge on both, the notion of opposition as well as the strange:

Beim Erkennungsvorgang hat der Intellekt außer dem Organisieren des Erfahrenen oder der (erst zu tätigenden) Erfahrung noch die Funktion des Auffälligmachens der Vorgänge, einer Konfrontierung derselben mit einer gedachten Negation. Das 'Es ist so' wird *staunend* aufgenommen als ein 'Es ist also nicht anders'.<sup>254</sup> (10)

I will now demonstrate how this concept of an alienating negativity can be assigned to the heritage of Hegelian dialectics. In a second movement of the argument I will show, how the Hegelian idea of a radical restructuring of concepts through the confrontation of negatives and the effect of astonishment is softened by a Marxist dialectic.<sup>255</sup>

Two aspects of critique permeate the structure of this chapter: on the one hand I wish to show that Brecht's theory of alienation only comes into its own when articulated in isolation from the subject of the *dramatis personae*. As I have already explicated in connection with the concept of the *dividual*, the epistemological aspect of an alienation theory tends to become submerged beneath an identificatory representation of information. The radicality of a singular moment (the realisation that it is precisely so and no different), when the subject is struck with the recognition of a negation of conventional knowledge, is thus cancelled out, and the authority of preconceived theory is given free reign, even if this theory represents correctly the diverse alienations imposed by the capitalist order. Furthermore, the radicality demanded by Hegelian dialectics cannot be sustained within the Brechtian rendition of dialectics since

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<sup>253</sup> As early as 1920 Brecht puts special emphasis on the notions of the strange (here still in the sense of the miraculous). In *Aus einer Dramaturgie* he argues that an effect of the strange could be conjured up by stage events which remain un-interpretable within the overall meaning (*Sinn*) of the text. BWS1, p. 71.

<sup>254</sup> [*Über den Erkennungsvorgang*], BWS1, p. 410.

<sup>255</sup> On the similarity between Brecht's theory of alienation and Hegel's method of recognition see elsewhere Jan Knopf's chapter 'Die Tradition Hegels: *Entfremdung*', in Jan Knopf, *Bertolt Brecht: Ein kritischer Forschungsbericht. Fragwürdiges in der Brecht-Forschung* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1974), pp. 21-7.

dialectical opposition with concrete application to reality is for Brecht mediated through Marxist theory.<sup>256</sup> If this account is to touch upon the problem of an ideologised theory of alienation, one which comes to depart from a radical Hegelian claim of recognition, I will show in the following Diderot chapter how both the notion of a *subject of alienation* and the play of dialogics, rather than dialectics, conspire to a theory of alienation untouched by the problem of objectivity.

### 3.3 THE HEGELIAN POWER OF THE NEGATIVE: ALIENATION AS A CONDITION FOR RECOGNITION

Einen Vorgang oder einen Charakter verfremden heißt zunächst einfach, dem Vorgang oder dem Charakter das Selbstverständliche, Bekannte, Einleuchtende zu nehmen und über ihn Staunen und Neugierde zu erzeugen.<sup>257</sup> (11)

Brecht's definition of alienation, not only as a preventative of empathy, but also as stimulating an effect of astonishment, is rooted in the Hegelian dictum 'Das Bekannte ist darum, weil es *bekannt* ist, nicht erkannt.'<sup>258</sup> (12) It is the very 'knownness' of the known which opposes knowing. In the preface to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel states that recognition is based on a method of undoing the forms of the known, 'das Aufheben der Form ihres Bekanntseins.'<sup>259</sup> The way in which things are generally known to common sense does not allow the subject to penetrate into the truth of an object. Common sense rather figures as an obstacle to knowledge, presenting objects at the level of deception. What allows consciousness to reach beyond appearance is a process of negation. If the subject is to gain real understanding into the nature of an object, knowledge has to be dissected into its less familiar components. Negation comes into play precisely at the moment when a concept is located into a less familiar context, retied to a different set of causalities. If this negation of the familiar context changes the thing, at the same time the subject's consciousness becomes changed. For with the altered status of the thing, the subject itself acknowledges its transformed state

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<sup>256</sup> On alienation as a method of dialectical materialism see Käthe Rüllicke-Weiler, 'Verfremdung als Kunstmittel der materialistischen Dialektik: Parteilichkeit als Ausgangspunkt der Entfremdung (1966/1968)', in *Verfremdung in der Literatur*, ed. and intro. Hermann Helmers (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), pp. 302-320.

<sup>257</sup> *Über Experimentelles Theater*, BWS2, p. 554.

<sup>258</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996), p. 35.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

of consciousness. The process of negation is thus not only a method of coming closer to the truth of a thing, it is bound to an incisive experience of subjectivity, in which the subject becomes aware of its own implication within the determination of realities.<sup>260</sup>

But recontextualisation also means the segmentation of an object into its subcategories. Because of their isolated and fragmentary nature, and the fact that they are no longer seen against their habitual backdrop, these appear strange and unusual to common sense understanding.

Hegel calls the power which breaks up thought into its various components, the very force which liquidises concepts that have become fixed in common sense conventions, as 'Zauberkraft', as 'die Kraft und Arbeit des *Verstandes*, der verwundersamsten und größten oder vielmehr der absoluten Macht.'<sup>261</sup> (13) This is the power of the mind or of subjective consciousness, the very dynamic of the movement behind the construction and reconstruction of categories. In the very movement of negation, the subject witnesses a process of alienation which is only reversed once the unmediated common sense categories return to themselves as conscious properties of the self. The initial negation of 'unknown knowness' is cancelled out and reality and truth of an object become reconstituted in the consciousness of the subject. The movement from negation to the negation of the negation becomes inscribed in consciousness as an experience.<sup>262</sup> Thus it is only when the subject has realised its own power of thinking beyond convention by way of questioning and breaking down preconceived categories that alienation becomes undone. Negativity thus opens up a space of critique and emancipation.

Yet the effect of astonishment arising in the subject at the moment where a fragment of thought is perceived in its bewildering strangeness can only be prompted by the power of the negative which separates elements of thought from their primary preconceived category:

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<sup>260</sup> See Andreas Graeser's commentary on the preface to the *Phenomenology* in *G. W. F. Hegel: Einleitung zur Phänomenologie des Geistes*, annot. Andreas Graeser (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam, 1988), p. 168. Graeser emphasises that the reconstitution of an object is 'active' on the part of the subject. Its unconscious subjectivity is being revealed whilst being liberated from an anonymous responsibility of action. P. 168.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>262</sup> See *Phänomenologie*, p. 39; *Phenomenology*, p. 21.

Aber daß das von seinem Umfange getrennte Akzidentelle als solches, das Gebundene und nur in seinem Zusammenhange mit anderm Wirkliche ein eigenes Dasein und abgesonderte Freiheit gewinnt, ist die ungeheure Macht des Negativen; es ist die Energie des Denkens, des reinen Ichs.<sup>263</sup> (14)

Although the subject can rise to critique by dwelling (*Verweilen*) in the intermediary spaces of negativity, Hegel stresses the enormous strength required in order to fulfil this task. The state in which the negating subject casts itself in order to realise this ‘dwelling’ is described as ‘death in life’. The deconstruction of preconceived objects, their decline into non-actuality, occurs only when the subject finds itself in absolute disintegration (*Zerrissenheit*) of consciousness, a state which interestingly will resurface again in the chapter on culture in Hegel’s analysis of negativity in *Le Neveu de Rameau*.<sup>264</sup> Only the mind which holds tightly onto the fragmenting force of negativity, who dares look negativity in the face,<sup>265</sup> can transform abstract immediate knowledge into real knowing, incorporating mediation into its very own being. The acquisition of knowing is thus explicated as a situation of crisis. Only at the risk of self-destruction can subjectivity realise its very own being. ‘Despair’ rather than ‘Doubt’ (*Verzweiflung* rather than *Zweifel*)<sup>266</sup> marks such method of unearthing knowledge.

To return to Brecht, it is true that the alienation-effect follows the structure of negation in that it refuses the spectatorial subject the acquisition of readily absorbable knowledge by way of re-contextualisation and fragmentation. *Einfühlung* is denied and the immediacy of representation is circumvented. Confronted with a form of representation that throws obstacles into the path of perception, the spectator’s mind is forced to take a detour in gaining understanding. What Hegel suggests in terms of philosophy, Brecht proposes to work out at the level of aesthetics: Hegelian *Entfremdung* becomes Brechtian *Verfremdung*. Set into a different nexus an object appears strange and causes astonishment and surprise in the viewer. The bewildered stance implies a degree of distance from the object. Unimmersed, the subject can contemplate the represented material in a mindset which is curious yet critical. Epistemology gives here a different dimension to Brecht’s definition of *Wissenschaftlichkeit*. If Brecht’s Marxist

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<sup>263</sup> *Phänomenologie*, p. 36.

<sup>264</sup> In the preface, p. 36. In the section on ‘Bildung. 1. Die Welt des sich entfremdeten Geistes’, p. 382. Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> *Phänomenologie*, p. 36; *Phenomenology*, p. 19.

<sup>266</sup> See Introduction, *Phänomenologie*, p. 72; *Phenomenology*, p. 49.



sociological notion of science had led him to define character in the fixity of the *dividual*, *scientificity* announces now the radical application of negativity in the relation set up between the spectator and the object of representation on stage and in reality:

Was nicht fremd ist, findet befremdlich!  
Was gewöhnlich ist, findet unerklärlich!  
Was da üblich ist, das soll euch erstaunen.  
Was die Regel ist, das erkennt als Mißbrauch  
Und da wo ihr den Mißbrauch erkannt habt  
Da schafft Abhilfe.<sup>267</sup> (15)

And at the very end of his life Brecht still deduces from the intrinsic self-contradictions within situations and within subjects a utopian possibility of change:

Die Veränderbarkeit der Welt besteht in ihrer Widersprüchlichkeit. In den Dingen, Menschen, Vorgängen steckt etwas, was sie so macht, wie sie sind, und zugleich etwas, was sie anders macht. Denn sie entwickeln sich, bleiben nicht, verändern sich bis zur Unkenntlichkeit. Und die Dinge, wie sie eben jetzt sind, enthalten in sich, so unkenntlich, Anderes, Früheres, dem jetzigen Feindliches.<sup>268</sup> (16)

But if such Hegelian claims can be easily detected in the theoretical programme of Brecht, for instance in his many conceptual propositions of the V-effect, or in the open form of the epic drama or the didactic play, the question remains how dialectical thinking can be instigated in the viewer. The problem is one of mediation: how to make the leap from a philosophical proposition of a methodology of pure thought to one of an aesthetic which needs to mobilise yet another methodology of transforming philosophical precepts into aesthetics. In short, the question arises how to get the spectator involved in dialectical thinking. In this I would suggest it might not be enough to merely alienate an object, but the text or the artwork itself must situate itself in a very specific relation to the spectator. The question of how to involve others in dialectical negation, one might argue, remains unanswered in Hegel's *Phänomenology*. Hegel is here concerned with the process of consciousness' movement through different states of alienation, but not with a *pedagogy* of negativity. In his discussion of the *Socratic method* he comes however to represent a method which is both concerned with negation as well as with the question of how to *subject* the other to a process of dialectical self-interrogation.

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<sup>267</sup> Epilogue to *Die Ausnahme und die Regel*, BWSt3, p. 260.

<sup>268</sup> In *Brecht Schriften zum Theater*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1964), p. 317; as quoted by Käthe Rüllicke-Weiler (1984), p. 303.

### 3.4 SOCRATES' DIALOGICAL NEGATIVITY: TOO CLOSE TO THE DISTURBING EFFECTS OF AN ELECTRIC EEL

One answer to the problem of how to implant negativity in aesthetics might lie with the relation between dialectics and dialogics. The dialogical dimension of dialectics implies that negativity appears not only with regard to the self, but as a method of triggering negativity in the other by means of dialogue. Socrates is of course not only an important figure for Brecht and Hegel but also for Diderot and provides thus an important key to the more subtle differences in terms of negativity. Socrates not only appears in many of Brecht's literary works (and represents the main character in *Der verwundete Sokrates*), but the alienation-effect has also been connected with Socratic methodology; however less because of its dialogical framework than due to the structure of negation.<sup>269</sup>

In his chapter on 'Sokrates' in *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*,<sup>270</sup> Hegel examines the Socratic method as at once dialectical and dialogical. Here once more the question of subjectivity in the framework of the dialogue becomes paramount. Addressing questions of morals, customs and laws, Socrates employed philosophy at the service of social life. This social dimension entailed a strong pedagogical orientation, that is, the stimulation of inquiry in his fellow citizens, not only in himself. Feigning ignorance Socrates would entangle the citizens of Athens in discussions of moral, political and philosophical issues. This feigned ignorance is what Hegel acknowledges as Socratic irony and as constitutive of the subjective aspect of dialectics:

Dieses ist dann die Seite der berühmten *Sokratischen Ironie*. Sie hat ihm die subjektive Gestalt der Dialektik, sie ist Benehmungsweise im Umgang; die Dialektik ist Gründe der Sache, die Ironie ist besondere Benehmungsweise von Person zu Person.<sup>271</sup> (17)

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<sup>269</sup> *Der verwundete Sokrates*, illustrations Frans Haacken (Berlin/Dresden: Kinderbuchverlag, 1949). On Socrates and Brecht see Jürgen Werner, *Der Stückeschreiber und der Sohn der Hebamme: Brecht und das Erbe. Der Fall Sokrates* (Leipzig: Verlag der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, 1998). Werner shows that Socrates makes an appearance in *Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner*, *Der verwundete Sokrates*, *Mutter Courage* and *Flüchtlingsgespräche*. On Socratic methodology in Brecht see Hermann Helmer's introduction *Verfremdung in der Literatur*, ed. Hermann Helmers (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), pp. 5-7.

<sup>270</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999)

<sup>271</sup> 'Philosophie des Sokrates' in G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), p. 458.

Assuming that truth is always already implanted in consciousness, Socrates devotes himself to what he calls his art of midwifery, the stimulation of a quest for truth in others. As described by Hegel, part and parcel of this method is its dialogical functioning, a method of knowledge which only functions in the context of the dialogue. It is sociable as well as socio-critical. Essential to the Socratic dialogue is its ironical 'ignorance', for without the cunning subjection of the other to his dialogic skills, there can be no progress in terms of philosophical insight.

The dialogue evolves as follows: Socrates evokes responses and statements in the other in order to determine the principles behind his actions. The statements to which the subject commits himself serve as a basis for dialectical discourse. What the other utters as a general category of common sense reason, Socrates will juxtapose with contradictions thereby elaborating the negative in the positive. Alternatively, he uses concrete examples which contradict the assumed contingency between general category and concrete object. By continually confusing set preconceptions, Socrates activates the other to think in less obvious and habitual avenues.

Similar to the method of recognition proposed in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel describes here a process which transforms conventional and immediate knowledge into mediated knowledge. Ossified concepts are being liquefied into malleable thoughts. The subject is made aware that it can shift those into different contexts and connections, transforming the original precept altogether. The main effect of these proceedings on the subject is confusion and in fact astonishment. The other becomes astonished that an entirely unexpected and contradicting notion is accommodated in a category that was believed stable and well known. Once more, Brecht's theory of alienation which intends to cause astonishment by bringing together contradictions, finds a precursor not only in Hegel's method of recognition, but also in Hegel's analysis of the Socratic method.

Despite the fact that this comparison holds true in terms of dialectical methodology, that is, in terms of the desired effect of astonishment and the liquefaction of knowledge into process, it fails with regard to the subjective and dialogical side which Hegel emphasises in the Socratic technique. Brecht does not *subject* his spectator to the

extremes of a prolonged treatment of negativity. Hegel illustrates the subjective discomfort associated with this treatment of negativity with regard to Socrates' encounter with Menon. Here, the main emphasis is on Socrates' effect of an almost tortuous kind of confusion, in fact the kind of despair mentioned above. Like a *magician* Socrates deprives his interlocutor of all sense of orientation. Intentionality, direction and purpose of the discussion become obscured for the one who undergoes Socratic questioning:

‘Ich habe früher, ehe ich selbst dich kennen lernen, von dir gehört, daß du selbst in Zweifel seiest [...] und auch andere darein bringest (verwirrst). Und jetzt behext du auch mich [...], so daß ich voll von Verlegenheit bin [...]. Und du scheinst mir, wenn ich scherzen darf, jenem Meerfisch, dem Zitteraal, ganz ähnlich; denn von diesem wird gesagt, daß er den sich ihm Nahenden und Berührenden narkotisch mache [...]. So hast du mir es angetan; denn ich bin narkotisch an Leib und Seele geworden, und ich weiß dir nicht mehr zu antworten, ob ich gleich zehntausendmal so viele Unterredungen [...] mit sehr vielen und, wie mir schien recht gute gehabt habe über die Tugend. Jetzt aber weiß ich ganz und gar nicht, was ich sagen soll. Du berätst dich daher gut, daß du nicht in die Fremde reist; sie würden dich leicht totschiessen als einen Zauberer.’ Socrates will wieder ‘suchen’. Jetzt sagt Menon: ‘Wie kannst du suchen, was du behauptest, du wissest es nicht? Wenn du es es zufällig findest, wie wirst du erkennen, daß es das ist, was du gesucht, da du gestehst, es nicht zu wissen?’<sup>272</sup> (18)

Menon comes to experience his becoming conscious as disempowerment, as the state of despair which for Hegel in the *Phenomenology* characterises the search for knowledge. But he also suspects confusion in his interrogator. He assumes an excess of negativity in Socrates which he feels threatens by. Socrates' game of questioning appears to him as pure game without any guarantee of encountering truth on its erratic path. In this observation lies not only a questioning of his interrogator's authority, even more importantly Menon acknowledges that he has in fact become subjected to Socrates' power. By the same token, feeling an increase in confusion, he becomes more and more of a subject, the subject of Socrates' radical inquiries. The reason he loses ground and control of any stable knowledge is founded in Socrates' superior dialogic capacity. Menon's reaction to Socrates' intrusive method is discomfort to the point of violence. His consciousness is stirred not by his own will power but in reaction to Socrates' opaque questioning. Menon's reaction goes far beyond astonishment, affecting him with the force of electric shocks. The effect of these electric shocks is experienced in flesh and soul. The kind of enlightenment facilitated by Socrates then hinges on an extended journey through a profoundly disturbed consciousness: paralysis, deprivation

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 466.

of control, darkness and a deep sense of being entered by someone else's power of manipulation mark Menon's experience.

Hegel supports the extremely authoritarian implications of such pedagogical methodology. Without masking his own position Socrates could not lead his interlocutor into confusion. Without confusion there is no dissection of unmediated knowledge, no encounter with subjectivity. The oscillating power of the electric eel as an instigation of the search into the deeper and more complex layers of knowledge is thus the condition for recognition. Negativity has to go far, even if this is only intermittent:

Diese Verwirrung hat nun die Wirkung, zum Nachdenken zu führen; und dies ist der Zweck des Sokrates. Diese bloße negative Seite ist die Hauptsache. Es ist Verwirrung, mit der die Philosophie überhaupt anfangen muß und die sie für sich hervorbringt; man muß an allem zweifeln, man muß alle Voraussetzungen aufgeben, um es als durch den Begriff Erzeugtes wiederzugeben.<sup>273</sup> (19)

Yet confusion on a mental level and shame (*Beschämung*) on a psychological level as the disturbing effects of dialogical negativity hardly belong to the Brechtian vocabulary. If for Hegel the subjective side of negation, the undergoing of a perplexing experience with physical and psychic consequences, is inevitable for the process of cognition, for Brecht this remains part and parcel of the bourgeois-idealist horizon of Hegel. Recognition must not be 'suffered'. Even in its process it has to be untainted from any such notions as 'experience', 'despair', or 'passivity'. Whilst Hegel argues in favour of the narcotic effects inflicted by an authoritarian kind of negativity, Brecht's understanding of processes of recognition categorically exclude both hierarchy as well as subjectivity. The Brechtian spectator should not become more subjective, but less so. Brecht's rationalism is a pure one, intolerant of the intermittent traumas inflicted by Socrates on his interlocutors. His Enlightenment is lighter and more immediate. His spectator gains insights whilst retaining a detached attitude. There is no dialogical absorption of the subject into a dialogical process of negativity. The unfolding of dialectical thought evolves within an independent liberated subject that participates in a purely democratic event of performance.

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 466.

Here one might argue that Brecht's polemical anti-subjectivist *anti-aristotelianism* draws a limit to an all too exceeding power of the negative. For Brecht narcosis as an ultimate extension of passivity will always remain associated with an aesthetic of empathy and identification. Narcosis as a means towards recognition seems too closely related to the kind of hypnosis rejected by Brecht as part of an illusionist theatre. Negativity in the new dialectical theatre of Brecht is propagated as an entirely active and independent process; the passive experience of becoming a subject of negation is denied. The desperate confusion which Hegel placed at the beginning of philosophy and which was valued as a main principle (*Hauptsache*), becomes diffused. What stands at the beginning of Brecht's philosophical theatre is a spectator who is always already an enlightened and 'activated' *statesman* who will interfere critically with situations of exploitation once he has penetrated the true conditions behind a veil of illusion.<sup>274</sup> In opposition, Socrates' technique relies strongly on personal communication. Socrates' questions are specifically tailored to the preconceptions of his individual partners of communication digging into the depths of his interlocutor's subjectivity. For Brecht the hierarchical implications of this one-sided dialogue are unacceptable, for he claims equality between spectator and actor. Spectators are to become actors, not subjects.

*3.5 MARXIST DIALECTICS: VERSTEHEN – NICHT VERSTEHEN – 'VERSTEHEN'*

From Brecht's rejection of a subjective kind of negativity, it follows that he also pays less attention to the mechanism which prompts the spectator to embark on an exercise of negation. It is also clear that Brecht's understanding of dialectical negation is less concerned with sustaining its negative extreme than with making available the dialectical processes observed by Marxist theory. That is to say that even if Brecht assembles dialectical contradictions and these appear astonishing, an overriding affirmative synthetic framework of such negativity is already presupposed. The method of negation put into practice cannot be pushed to the extremes suggested by Hegel. Socrates' excessive form of negation is replaced by one that relies on the coming moment of the negation of the negation, the moment of *Aufhebung*, when contradictions come to be re-synthesised in a new category. What has been shown as confusing or

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<sup>274</sup> See *Die große und die kleine Pädagogik*, BWS1, p. 396.

alienating can in fact be proved to be subject to the causalities of capitalism. Negation as a methodological tool to enable recognition is already complemented by its reversal. If understanding is followed by *not* understanding, this intermediary step will soon be overcome by *new* understanding. In *Dialektik und Verfremdung*, Brecht sums up the main aspects of a dialectical kind of *Verfremdung* as follows:

- 1) *Verfremdung als ein Verstehen* (verstehen - nicht verstehen - verstehen), Negation der Negation.
- 2) *Häufung der Unverständlichkeiten, bis Verständnis eintritt* (Umschlag von Quantität in Qualität).
- 3) *Das Besondere im Allgemeine* (der Vorgang in seiner Einzigartigkeit, Einmaligkeit, dabei typisch).
- 4) *Widersprüchlichkeit* (dieser Mensch in diesen Verhältnissen! Diese Folgen dieser Handlung!). [...]
- 6) *Das eine verstanden durch das andere* (die Szene, im Sinn zunächst selbständig, wird durch ihren Zusammenhang mit andern Szenen, noch als eines andern Sinns teilhaftig entdeckt).
- 7) *Der Sprung* (saltus naturae, epische Entwicklung mit Sprüngen).
- 8) *Einheit der Gegensätze* (im Einheitlichen wird der Gegensatz gesucht. Mutter und Sohn - in 'Mutter' - nach außen hin einheitlich, kämpfen gegeneinander des Lohnes wegen). [...] <sup>275</sup> (20)

Despite the fact that Brecht is interested in a concept of alienation in which contradictions coexist in infinite proximity, thus setting into motion a process of negation, his main emphasis is on a dialectic determined by Marx. The importance of starting off philosophy by means of 'narcotic' oscillation is replaced by a dialectical approach which oscillates little and which is marked by a set of contradictions that is clearly bound and predetermined in its dialectical conclusion.

In the first chapter I explained how juxtaposition comes to regulate Brecht's concept of alienated acting.<sup>276</sup> The organisation of such contrasting couplets is in principle of a dialectical nature. The clear contrasts and oppositions that govern Brecht's system of representation are closely connected to the rhetorical figure of the 'not-but' (*nicht-sondern*). Here the logic of a Brechtian application of dialectics can be most succinctly observed.

Brecht extrapolates the 'not-but' as one of the features of the alienation-effect. Apart from the 'not-but' as a linguistic rhetorical figure, acting, too, can bring forth the

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<sup>275</sup> BWS2, p. 401.

<sup>276</sup> See section 1.5 'The Geometry of the Dual Form and its Visual Dimension', pp. 47-9.

negative effect of this configuration. This is done when the actor's play catches not only the precise meaning of actions that can be accounted for as typical, but when he also evokes an alternative. What the dramatic figure thinks is negated by what the actor thinks, a contradiction which becomes tangible in the actor's representation.

Der Schauspieler soll seine Rolle in der Haltung des Staunenden und Widersprechenden lesen. Nicht nur das Zustandekommen der Vorgänge, von denen er liest, auch das Verhalten seiner Rollenfigur, das er erfährt, muß er auf die Waagschale legen, in ihrer Besonderheit begreifen; keine darf er als gegeben, als eine die 'gar nicht anders ausfallen konnte', die 'bei dem Charakter dieser Person erwartet werden müßte' hinnehmen. Bevor er die Worte memoriert, soll er memorieren, worüber er gestaunt hat und wobei er widersprochen hat. Diese Momente hat er nämlich festzuhalten in seiner Gestaltung. Geht er auf die Bühne, so wird er bei allen wesentlichen Stellen zu dem, was er macht, noch etwas ausfindig, namhaft und ahnbar machen, was er nicht macht, das heißt er spielt so, daß man die Alternative möglichst deutlich sieht, so, daß sein Spiel noch die anderen Möglichkeiten ahnen läßt, nur eine der möglichen Varianten darstellt. [...] Das was er nicht macht, muß in dem enthalten und aufgehoben sein, was er macht. So bedeuten alle Sätze und Gesten Entscheidungen, bleibt die Person unter Kontrolle und wird getestet. Der technische Ausdruck für dieses Verfahren heißt: *Fixieren des Nicht-Sondern*.<sup>277</sup> (21)

The actor's own readiness to be alienated, his attitude of disbelief towards his role, allows him to make manifest a dialectical representation of the dramatic figure. The spectator's freedom of interpretation is rooted in the fixation of different possible interpretations. A positive is always accompanied by its negative.

In his article on the concept of the 'non-but', Alfred Bergstedt analyses both the linguistic implications of that structure as well as its Marxist relevance.<sup>278</sup> This demonstrates that dialectics in Brecht do indeed have to be read in the context of an argument leading to closure. Facing a form of dialectical synthesis that has already been pre-empted, the spectator is hardly challenged to engage in a Hegelian kind of desperate negativity.

Bergstedt emphasises that the 'non-but' evokes a multiplicity of choices for both the

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<sup>277</sup> *Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt*, BWS2, p. 641.

<sup>278</sup> Alfred Bergstedt: 'Der Begriff des 'Nicht-Sondern' in den Schriften Bertolt Brecht's und seine inhaltliche Problematik', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*, vol. X, no. 4 (1961), pp. 1013-1022.



actor as well as the spectator.<sup>279</sup> He goes on to examine how Brecht applies the same principle in terms of literary writing. In particular, he focuses on the Marxist rendition of the dialectical alienation effect with regard to the *Horst-Wessel-Legende*.<sup>280</sup> Here he illustrates how profoundly the ‘non-but’ is interwoven with the structure of Marxist analysis:

Die Arbeit der Jännicke war unehrlich. Etwas Schmutziges war an ihrem Beruf. Nicht die sie mit Schmutz bewarfen, sondern sie war schmutzig. Nicht die das Stück Brot hatten und es ihr hinhielten gegen einen Beischlaf waren unehrlich, sondern sie war es, die das Stück Brot nicht hatte und es nahm. Nicht, die die Lust kauften und verspürten waren unzüchtig, sondern sie war, die die Lust verkaufte und nicht verspürte. Handelte es sich nicht um leichte Mädchen. Ihr Leichtsinns bestand darin, daß sie nicht, wie andere Mädchen ihrer Klasse, an Tuberkulose in den Kellerwohnungen sterben wollte - sondern an Syphilis in der Charité. Sie wollten sich nicht an Fabrikanten anstellen, wo schon so viele standen, sondern es war soviel angenehmer, die Liebesfledderer über sich zu haben, an denen übrigens ebenfalls Mangel war.<sup>281</sup> (22)

Bergstedt shows how according to the ‘non-but’ principle, two social positions are being brought together. The structure of the ‘non-but’ articulates their radical irreconcilability and demarcates the contours of their difference: one is organised as the negative of the other. The ‘nicht’ designates a position of moral judgment held by the exploiting bourgeois class, the ‘sondern’ points at those who have to prostitute themselves out of need. The ‘nicht-sondern’ not only elaborates negation, it also conjures up a scheme of moral evaluation. Moral judgment demands a univocal voice, yet the ‘not-but’ suggests two positions.

However, Bergstedt is incorrect in arguing that the reader is left with an open situation.<sup>282</sup> Instead, what seems clear from the outset is that irony is in play, revealing at once the double standard of the exploiters. As Bergstedt correctly states, choice is foreclosed for the prostitute since underpaid labour as well as prostitution ultimately leads to her death. Both choices are presented as impasses.

I would therefore argue, that the moral point of view of the ‘not’ position is prematurely

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 1014.

<sup>280</sup> Bertolt Brecht: ‘Die Horst-Wessel-Legende’, in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, vol. V, no. 6, Berlin 1957, p. 50. As quoted by Bergstedt (1961), p. 1015.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 1015.

<sup>282</sup> Bergstedt argues that prostitution under capitalism is viewed from two positions of moral judgement: from the point of view of the exploiters as well as from that of the exploited. Both positions are right and wrong depending from which class angle they are seen. Ibid., p. 1015.

disclosed as a morally self-righteous one, so as to trigger a process of questioning in the audience. Instead, a revelatory logic is applied which discloses the alienated distortions of morality under capitalism. Brecht wanted to show precisely this self-contradicting condition of morality under capitalism, in all its forms of alienation<sup>283</sup>

Even though this analysis might be correct, Bergstedt's assumption that the reader will come to face a situation of choice seems somewhat naive. All that is in fact left for the spectator is to re-draw a conclusion from the set of juxtapositions that already imply the conclusion. Although the spectator may disagree with Brecht's ironic explication of the problem of prostitution, the choice lies not in the dialectic of the 'not-but'. A univocal judgement is hidden behind the formal structure of the 'not-but': *not* prostitution, *but* the system, which forces women into prostitution, is morally guilty. Such synthesis builds up rapidly towards the culmination of the prostitute's pseudo-choice between dying from tuberculosis or syphilis, spiralling towards conclusiveness so fast that there is little time for the reader to intervene with the stringently argued provocation.

To return to the question of Brechtian negativity at the service of recognition: although it is true that in the above example Brecht throws the capitalist's moral judgment on prostitution into negativity, this operation of negation can only be received passively by the reader. Despair and confusion as the mental states integral to the process of Hegelian negation do not partake of the figure of the 'not-but'. Bergstedt freely admits, contradicting his former argument of the spectator's freedom of choice between a 'not' and a 'but', that the solution of the problem of how to assess the problem of prostitution cannot depend on subjective opinion:

Die Lösung dieser Frage ist aber nicht unentschieden offengelassen worden; ihre richtige Beantwortung kann für einen Marxisten schließlich keine subjektive Ansichtssache sein, wenn die objektive Wahrheit über den Tatbestand gesagt werden soll, der Brecht offensichtlich Ausdruck verleihen will. <sup>284</sup> (23)

If the rhetorical figure of the 'not-but' is politically stimulating, it is not by getting the reader or the spectator involved in the throes of negativity, where alienation from

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<sup>283</sup> Bergstedt refers in this respect to an explicit connection between aesthetic alienation and social alienation in Brecht's theoretical statements: 'der gegensatz zwischen dem, was die moral verlangt und dem, was die soziale lage gestattet, zwischen dem anspruch der moral, für alle gültigkeit zu haben und ihrer abhängigkeit von den interessen weniger, muß dem befremden ausgeliefert werden.' Archiv-Manuskript, Mappe 327 (Philosophische Notizen), as quoted by Bergstedt (1961), p. 1015.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

previously stable patterns of thought could be experienced. Instead, the spectator is informed by a critique of the social conflicts intrinsic to a society dominated by bourgeois exploitation. Alienation, *Entfremdung*, rather, is shown to be an objective manifestation of social crisis. By emphasising the illusory nature of truth comprised by the bourgeois moral system, Brecht makes use of a technique of alienation (*Verfremdung*). But if the alienatory impact of this technique is located in the 'nicht-sondern' and the provocative juxtaposition of two truths, alienation in the form of ideological premises held by the bourgeoisie is always already assumed to be responsible for the exploitation of the worker or the prostitute. Methodology of recognition and the results of social analysis thus collapse into one. What appears to have been true is demonstrated to be false and ideological. The negation of the negation contributes to the sole purpose of conveying that which Marxist theory has determined as objectively true. The 'not-but' explicates the origin of prostitution in the system of capitalism.

## Chapter 4

### *Diderot: Alienation via the Subject*

In the previous chapter I have shown that in Brechtian terms the concept of alienation (*Verfremdung*) is inextricably linked with a striving towards objectivity. With the introduction of the dramatic figure as *dividual*, Brecht announces a radical refusal of subjectivity. What replaces the classical dramatic hero is the dramatic figure as social ‘composite’. The effect of strangeness is directly derived from the realist objectivity inscribed in the figure.

This intertwining between Brechtian alienation and objectivity seems to collapse in view of Brecht’s Hegelian assimilation of a theory of cognition, a theory in which the subject plays a key role. A link between alienation and cognition is of ultimate importance to the political dimension of Brecht’s work, in which the spectator is to experience an emancipation from her or his passive consumer position. Yet if for Hegel a methodology of recognition hinges on the notion of subjectivity, this is not the case with Brecht. In relation to the Brechtian figure of the ‘not-but’, it becomes clear how Marxist politics predetermine the use of negativity. Instead of leading the subject to a state of *Zerrissenheit*, Brecht’s dialectical materialism lays out contradictions which are originally caused by capitalism. Dialectics are relocated into the movements of social relations and their history as analysed by Marxist theory. One could therefore argue that it is with Marxism’s particular framing of such capitalist contradictions, that the percipient is given not only the contradictions but also its particular analytic framing and hence a ‘positivity’.

The profound involvement of the subject’s consciousness, its very subjection to a process of negation, is broken, and the spectator is provided with positive knowledge rather than process. The function of alienation is thus rooted in the objective

representation of capitalistically alienated conditions rather than the use of alienation as a tool of provocative negativity.

With this last chapter on Diderot I have the following aims in mind: in the first section I intend to show a form of alienation which becomes manifest within a subject, the figure of Rameau's Nephew, who could be defined as a *subject of alienation*. His social situation is typified by marginalisation, his character is described as eccentric and his psychological state borders on mental alienation. However, far from representing the bourgeois super-individual attacked by Brecht, his identificatory charms are highly ambivalent. Although we tend in parts of the text to empathise and admire him, we are also put off by his blatant theatricality and his nihilistic cynicism. Through the figure of the Nephew a dynamic of seduction and disenchantment is conferred upon the percipient, reintroducing a process of alienation, but an alienation of a different kind than that suggested by Brecht.

The second section will juxtapose Brecht's dichotomous understanding of subjectivity and objectivity with Diderot's layered approach to levels of alienation and subjectivity. I will show that the Nephew-figure is not only inscribed with qualities that make him subjective, but that he configures in himself an external state of alienation in the world. In his speeches and pantomimes we can see him articulate a germinal theory of alienation, of *Entfremdung*. We are thus confronted with an *objective* representation of his world, a world that is riddled with alienation, and it is through the figure of the Nephew that we come to experience the implication of this state of being. Summing up the contents of section 1 and 2 one could then say that the Nephew is a figure who *integrates* and *extegrates* the manifestations of alienation. This process of *integration* and *extegration* makes *Le Neveu de Rameau* entirely incompatible with the ways in which Brecht redeems the notion of *Verfremdung* from any subjective features. Diderot, on the contrary, brings subjectivity and objectivity together and it is from a method of integration that the provocative and explosive energy of the text is ignited.

In the third section I will move on from the theme of alienation as subjective-objective manifestation to the question of the spectator. I will attempt to develop an epistemological method of alienation that in opposition to the Brechtian concept of *Verfremdung* depends on and delays an intermittent process of deluding the spectator in

order to stir up an alienation-effect in the addressee's consciousness. It is in this Diderotian technique of alienation (*Verfremdung*) that one might argue that Diderot is much closer to Hegel's emphasis on subjectivity than Brecht. Moreover, what brings Diderot into closest proximity to Hegel's description of the Socratic method is indeed the dialogical organisation of the text. One might suggest that the dialogue between Nephew and Philosopher transgresses into the relation between *Lui*, the Nephew, and *Moi*, the reader. The reader is pushed here into a scenario of subjectivity. It is from this angle that he will experience the Nephew's game of seduction and disenchantment, his very expertise in turning his own alienation into that of the percipient. The outcome is that the reader himself will find himself in a situation in which an experience of alienation is intensified: he will become a subject of alienation himself.

What is pivotal to *Le Neveu de Rameau's* exposition of the theme of alienation on all these three levels, figurative subjectivity, objectivity and spectatorial subjectivity, is that alienation becomes connected with the notion of theatricality. Diderot extrapolates an analysis of alienation in *Le Neveu* which derives from a critical equation between sociality and the theatre. Here we are returning to the *theatrum mundi* trope already discussed in relation to the *Paradoxe*. Both texts were written in the same time span and cross-influences are complex and rich.<sup>285</sup> Whereas in the *Paradoxe* the emphasis is on alienation as a productive and emancipatory form of mimesis, *Le Neveu* becomes more concerned with its passive counterpart tracing the excesses of an alienation that has come to be out of control. Theatricality has become a state of mind, a state of society and a state of madness. The situation of the Nephew is crucial in this, for he embodies at once all the different variations of alienation that can be found in a *theatrum mundi* which oscillates between the world of the baroque and the alienations of an awakening modern bourgeois culture. He is at once the fool of his patrons, he is the wise fool who unmasks the 'pantomime du monde', a performer, an artist, a case of

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<sup>285</sup> Diderot worked on *Le Neveu* from 1761 to his death in 1784 (*Paradoxe*: 1770-1778). After his death his manuscripts together with his private library were sent to Leningrad and became part of the library of Catharina II. *Le Neveu* does not appear in Naigeon's edition of *Œuvres de Diderot* in 1789 for reasons that are unknown. *Le Neveu* therefore remains unknown to the France of the eighteenth century. However, a copy of the Leningrad manuscript of *Le Neveu* fell into the hands of a so-called Maximilien Klingler who had the text transcribed. It is Schiller who in turn found this transcription, passed it on to Goethe, who in turn translated it into German. In 1805 *Rameau's Neffe* appeared for the first time in German. The German translation was then re-translated into French and published in France in 1802. It was only in 1890 that the original script was discovered in a bookstall in Paris to be finally published in its original in 1891. For a detailed account of the genesis, dating and history of publication of *Le Neveu* see Jean Fabre's introduction in NdR, pp. VII-LXIII.

mental alienation, and an analyst of a world that has been contaminated by both theatricality and alienation.

I am aware that in this chapter I am responding with an analysis of a literary text to what in chapter 3 I introduced in purely theoretical terms. There are two reasons for this. The first is that I will be constructing a theory of *Verfremdung* which overcomes the subject-object divide in Brecht. This is a theory for a practice of representation which is not spelt out by Diderot, but which nonetheless is systematically applied in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Secondly, *Le Neveu* represents an important philosophical link between Brecht and Diderot in that Hegel derived from this text his analysis of the alienated world of modern culture. Here we have one of the earliest documents of socio-aesthetic expression that led Hegel to give definition to his concept of *Entfremdung*. Moreover, the ambiguous genre of the text, which ranges between philosophical dialogue, drama, novel and satire, could in itself be said to be the consequence of the author's preoccupation with alienation. Its distinct and idiosyncratic formal solution once more represents a *pendant* to Brecht's concept of the *epic*, but, again, one which at a closer look departs from similarity. *Le Neveu de Rameau* presents us with an opportunity to reframe and analyse the question how we form an aesthetic of *Verfremdung* in reaction to a social problematic of *Entfremdung*.

Hegel's appropriation of *Le Neveu de Rameau* in the *Phänomenologie* cannot be discussed in any productive way within the limited structure of this dissertation. Nevertheless, since Hegel left us with the most important interpretation of the notion of alienation in *Le Neveu* (an interpretation which even preceded the publication of *Le Neveu*) I will sum up some of the key points of the 'self-alienated spirit of culture'.<sup>286</sup>

Hegel diagnoses the state of the spirit of culture as a consciousness that has broken apart into a doubled world, a world of reality and the world of pure consciousness. Because

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<sup>286</sup> For a discussion of the relation between *Le Neveu* and *Die Phänomenologie*, between Diderot and Hegel, see James Hulbert, 'Diderot in the Text of Hegel: A Question of Intertextuality', in *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 22 (1983), pp. 267-291; Herbert Dieckmann, 'Diderots *Le Neveu de Rameau* und Hegels Interpretation des Werkes', in *Diderot und die Aufklärung*, ed. Herbert Dieckmann (Munich: Kraus International Publications), pp. 161-94; Bernhard Lypp, 'Die Lektüren von *Le Neveu de Rameau* durch Hegel and Foucault', in *Diderot und die Aufklärung*, ed. Herbert Dieckmann (Munich: Kraus International Publications), pp. 137-160; Hans Robert Jauss, '*Le Neveu de Rameau*: Dialogique et dialectique (ou: Diderot lecteur de Socrate et Hegel lecteur de Diderot)', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 2 (1984), pp. 145-81.

consciousness is divided into these two forms it also has a doubled form of judgement, which become apparent in its relation to *state power* and to *wealth*. One of these relations is that of the *noble* consciousness (*edelmütiges Bewußtsein*), which respects authority as a benefactor; its other relation is defined as *ignoble* (*niederträchtig*), and it experiences itself as disparate, hating and rebelling against sovereign power. Like the Nephew, this side of consciousness merely pretends to respect the sovereign and is always on the edge of revolt. Flattery and gratitude are thus combined with a feeling of profound indignation. Whilst experiencing such disruption (*Zerrissenheit*), it looks at itself, recognising that in this state of disintegration all identities, all law, and anything of value is destroyed. Opposite this doubled consciousness is situated the spirit of wealth which is not aware of the disruption within the other, a consciousness which in *Le Neveu* is represented by Bertin and the class of ‘the great’ as the Nephew calls them:

...er übersieht die vollkommene Abwerfung aller Fessel, diese reine Zerrissenheit, welcher, indem ihr die *Sichselbstgleichheit* des Fürsichseins selbst zerrissen ist und die daher die Meinung und Ansicht des Wohltäters am meisten zerreißt. Er steht unmittelbar vor diesem innersten Abgrunde, vor dieser bodenlosen Tiefe, worin aller Halt und Substanz verschwunden ist; und er sieht in dieser Tiefe nichts als ein gemeines Ding, ein Spiel seiner Laune, einen Zufall seiner Willkür; sein Geist ist die ganze wesenlose Meinung, die geistverlassene Oberfläche zu sein.<sup>287</sup> (1)

Hegel juxtaposes disrupted consciousness with honest consciousness, thereby undoubtedly pointing at the relation between Nephew and Philosophy. Disrupted consciousness, which is conscious of its alienation, articulates itself in endless chains of negative judgements (*zerreißendes Urteilen*). This for Hegel is the language of truth representing in highly spirited speech the state of culture. Honest and calm consciousness, on the other hand, does not recognise its situation of alienation and therefore attempts to posit unity where there is negativity. The language of disruption appears to it as ‘Faselei von Weisheit und Tollheit’,<sup>288</sup> (2) as mixture of true and at the same time entirely false ideas. Here Hegel quotes directly from *Le Neveu*, from the Philosopher’s reactions to the Nephew’s stories and pantomimes. The simple consciousness of the Philosopher has nothing to add to or to critique in the Nephew’s speech, since the Nephew only spells out what the Philosopher already knows yet does not dare admit. Consequently its speech remains monotonous (*einsilbig*). It is indeed

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<sup>287</sup> Hegel (1986), p. 384.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 387.



the Nephew who shamelessly negates the status of all categories and realities and who can therefore spell out the greatest truth:

Die ihrer selbst bewußte und sich aussprechende Zerrissenheit des Bewußtseins ist das Hohngelächter über das Dasein sowie über die Verwirrung des Ganzen und über sich selbst; es ist zugleich das sich noch vernehmende Verklingen dieser ganzen Verwirrung. – Diese sich selbst vernehmende Eitelkeit aller Wirklichkeit und alles bestimmten Begriffs ist die gedoppelte Reflexion der realen Welt in sich selbst... <sup>289</sup> (3)

I also wish to draw attention to Julia Kristeva, who in ‘La musique parlée’ and *Strangers to Ourselves*,<sup>290</sup> considers the Nephew as a representative of the Enlightenment stranger in the role of the cynic. Her interpretation is influenced both by the Hegelian reading of *Le Neveu* as well as by a Menippean satirical definition of the text that derives from Bakhtin and his concept of dialogical polyphony. In the following paragraph I will sum up the main points of her ‘historical’ contextualisation of *Le Neveu* in ‘La musique parlée’, for I believe that she here draws a picture of the Enlightenment situation which is highly illuminating with regards to the questions asked in *Le Neveu*.

The ironical component in *Le Neveu*, expressed by a subject which returns to itself as other, is explicated as symptomatic for the Enlightenment state of mind which has taken negativity to its ultimate extremes, thereby calling into question a feudal system determined by theocracy and absolute monarchy. The absolute concentration of power in the hands of the King absolves the aristocrat from his obligations towards the King, a situation which leads to the subject’s self-affirmation in taking its rights to an excess: this is the aristocratic libertinage foreshadowing the coming revolution, and most explicitly expressed in the work of Sade. The Law of God and the King are now in the process of constant attack, a process, which however does not abolish this law but remains at the level of permanent negativity and transgression. The divine law is now replaced by the natural law of the subject’s desire. Anything immoral can be permitted as long as the subject obeys its natural drives. In place of a theocratic ethical order, the

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>290</sup> ‘La musique parlée: Ou remarques sur la subjectivité dans la fiction à propos du *Neveu de Rameau*’, in *Langues et langages de Leibniz à l’Encyclopédie*, ed. Michèle Duchet and Michèle Jalley (Paris: Inédit, 1977), pp. 152-206. *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans., Leon S. Roudiez (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991). See specifically the section ‘Rameau’s Nephew between Diogenes and Myself’ in the chapter on ‘Strangers and the Enlightenment’, pp. 134-140.

Enlightenment can only attempt to posit a value system of normativity. What remains a far stronger logic is the logic of a materialism taken to its ultimate consequence. The 'materialist' egoism of a subject, which wants absolute freedom and *jouissance*, is now in constant combat with a necessity for social reconciliation. It is exactly these problems which are at issue in the Nephew's incessant embattlement with the law of society, fuelling his negation of ideological codes, and prompting his attacks on a pseudo-logical system of bourgeois virtue and morals.

#### 4.1 RAMEAU'S NEPHEW: SUBJECT OF ALIENATION

I will now lay out some of the key structures which capture the Nephew as a subject of alienation. His drive towards otherness could be said to be linked to mimesis. By wanting to be others he comes to enact otherness and is stripped of his individuality and of his very nature. The desire for mimesis, identical to a desire to become inscribed in an economy of the social law, is thus counteracted with negativity. As the wise fool, the Nephew is a stranger to society, and in his very otherness unmasks and parodies the foolishness of social normativity. This however is not enough. The Nephew's negativity towards the mimetic constitution of society and the impossibility to be unbound from its laws takes the Nephew to the point of mental alienation.

##### 4.1.1 ORIENTATION TOWARDS OTHERNESS

The principle of a destabilised notion of self, already announced through the Philosopher's voice in the opening passage, is further developed in the Nephew's own utterances. What formerly was declared to be a curious eccentricity is now expressed as an internal force, at once more powerful and daunting. The Nephew is possessed by a desire to be someone else. At the close of his initial discussion with the Philosopher he reverses his standpoint against geniuses and reveals in an impassioned confession that the true motive behind his disapproval with geniuses is pure jealousy:

Tout ce que je sçais, c'est que je voudrais bien être un autre, au hazard d'être un homme de génie, un grand homme. Oui, il faut que j'en convienne, il y a quelque chose qui me le dit. Je n'en ai jamais entendu louer un seul que son éloge ne m'ait fait secrètement enrager. Je suis envieux. Lors que j'apprends de leur vie privée quelque trait qui les dégrade, je l'écoute avec plaisir. Cela nous rapproche. J'en supporte plus aisément ma médiocrité. [...] J'ai donc été ; je suis donc fâché d'être médiocre. Oui, oui, je suis médiocre et fâché. Je n'ai jamais entendu jouer l'ouverture des *Indes Galantes*; jamais entendu chanter, *Profonds abymes du Tenare, Nuit, éternelle nuit*, sans me dire avec douleur: voilà ce que tu ne feras jamais. J'étois donc jaloux de mon oncle; et s'il y avoit eu à sa mort, quelque belles pièces de clavecin, dans son porte-feuille, je n'aurois pas balancé à rester moi, et à être lui.<sup>291</sup> (4)

In spite of the 'originality' repeatedly assigned to the Nephew by the Philosopher, this does not apply to the way in which he sees himself. In terms of his professional activities as a musician, his achievements are fickle and mediocre. Rameau's Nephew is not Rameau, the famous composer, but only his Nephew, two degrees removed from

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<sup>291</sup> NdR, p. 15.

ingenuity. He can never be the real thing but is only the distant offspring of the real source of creative production and of true ingenuity. However, he does not accept this fate. His inability to become reconciled with his own limitations leads him not only to intense jealousy and critique of those privileged with the gift of genius; his own negativity towards himself as a musician represents also one of the starting points for his self-dividing tendencies. All he knows is that he would like to be somebody else. Yet this desperate escape from the self, from the limitations of his own identity, is not a movement towards real transformation, it is in fact an orientation towards alienation. 'To be himself and to be his uncle, too,' involves both an internal division as well as fraudulent plagiarism.

This concern with others, captured here in the desire to become somebody else, has an echo in many more of the Nephew's speeches where the term 'autre' seems to be given special emphasis. However his avidity to become others is not rooted in a desire to emulate an appreciated model, it stems instead from an extremely competitive attitude, in which the idea of community seems almost non-existent. The Nephew's world is divided into 'me' and 'others'.<sup>292</sup> 'I' relates to 'others' only in the mode of comparative rivalry. Rather than take responsibility over his successes and failures, his focus is always on the other, projecting and expropriating to the full his own dissatisfactions and frustrations. Self-reflection and integrity are thus almost entirely excluded from this consciousness caught in a constant movement of eccentricity.

This orientation towards otherness is not only the driving force behind his angry jealousy, but determines the way in which he relates to the world at large. The Nephew becomes others with hardly any distance from himself. His life project, which is entirely played out in the sphere of externality, lies in the realm of public life and sociability. It is 'others' who exert powerful forces upon him, and who determine his actions. Although the Nephew has made himself a master in the interpretation of the laws of sociability, and in this sense is situated on the side of the 'controllers', it is nevertheless the dictate of the 'other' which delivers the reference-points for his own ambitions and actions. The mantra of the 'other' hammering into his consciousness is perhaps most poignantly expressed at the beginning of the story of the 'Pimp and the

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<sup>292</sup> See for example the Nephew on his dignity: 'Chacun a la sienne; je veux bien oublier la mienne, mais a ma discretion, et non a l'ordre d'autrui.' (5) NdR, p. 47.

Girl':

...est ce que tu ne scaurois pas flatter comme un autre? est ce que tu ne scaurois pas mentir, jurer, parjurer, promettre, tenir ou manquer comme une autre? est ce que tu ne scaurois pas te mettre à quatre pattes, comme un autre? [...] est ce que tu ne scaurois pas favoriser l'intrigue de Madame, et porter le billet doux de Monsieur, comme un autre? est ce que tu ne scaurois pas encourager ce jeune homme a parler a Mademoiselle, et persuader a Mademoiselle de l'ecouter, comme un autre?<sup>293</sup> (6)

Aided by the repetitive syntax of such serialised sentences, 'autre', as in the previous passage, falls as the last word of the sentence pulling the 'I', which is no longer an 'I' but already a 'you', further and further into alienation. The consequence of this 'auto-alienation' is the transition from soliloquy to story telling. A shift in format is prompted. Reflection turns into fiction. The story to follow is not told in epic style but very soon becomes dramatised. It is as if the overpowering refrain of the 'other', chanted in obsessive repetitiveness, releases within the Nephew a mimetic mechanism. Each 'autre' propped up at the end of the sentence makes the Nephew become more other. Here we arrive back at a form of alienation which Diderot denounces in the *Paradoxe*. The Nephew seems to alienate himself by means of his overheated enthusiasm. Mimesis is activated by a form of self-hypnosis, in which the rhythmic automatism of an enthused language causes alteration, an alteration that is trance-like and intoxicates the reader with illusion.<sup>294</sup>

Before I expand on the motive of a theatrical form of alienation, I will first show how the theme of the Nephew's orientation towards otherness is complemented by its own negation. As part of his paradoxical character, none of the Nephew's enunciations are closed within themselves. Each statement is coupled with a negation. Thus the loss of self implicit in the Nephew's continual desire to become others is ramified in a paradoxical kind of self-assertion. In keeping with the motto: 'rien ne dissemble plus de

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>294</sup> Leo Spitzer was the first to analyse this kind of rhythmic automatism as a characteristic stylistic means in Diderot's linguistic expression. He elaborates a prototypical structure of Diderot's 'enthused' speech which is marked by short breathless sentences, spoken in palpating breathlessness, in short a 'style coupé', which Diderot himself admired in the work of Seneca. Delirium and confusion are symbolically transferred into a language that delivers the libidinal state of the speaking subject. The driven impatient nature of these staccato sentences is heightened by specific temporal keywords such as 'alors' and 'aussitôt' and 'moment'. See 'Der Style of Diderot', in *Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1949), pp. 135-191. For a critical discussion of Spitzer's focus on the purely hallucinatory use of the linguistic sign see Norman Bryson's chapter 'Diderot and the Word', in *Word and Image: French Painting in the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), pp. 154-78.

lui meme que lui meme’, the Nephew’s tendency to ‘unself’ himself becomes ‘unselfed’ in the way in which he seeks stability in his unstable identity. Rather than feel shame for his lack of genuine self, he defends his overt hypocrisy as genuine and authentic. The attempt to be honest or even ‘honnête’ would mean to take on a character which would be strange to himself. He thus can shrug off the Philosopher’s objection to his unstable, unreputable position as ‘fool-servant’ as ‘la plus conforme a mon caractere de faineant, de sot, de vaurien.’<sup>295</sup> (7)

...il seroit bien singulier que j’allasse me tourmenter comme une ame damnée, pour me bistourner et me faire autre que je ne suis; pour me donner un caractere etranger au mien; des qualités tres estimables, j’y consens, pour ne pas disputer; mais qui me couteroient beaucoup a acquerir, a pratiquer, ne me meneroient a rien, peut etre a pis que rien, par la satire continuelle des riches aupres des quels les gueux comme moi ont a chercher leur vie.<sup>296</sup> (8)

Not to be himself - to lie, flatter and pretend – is to be himself, whereas honesty and sincerity are social dictates that would alienate him into a character that he is not. Alienation has become second nature. The value of a ‘first’ nature is extinguished.

The Nephew’s subjectivity is thus informed by a never-exhausting drive towards otherness. His very desire to act like others, to be like others, and to be other than himself constitutes both his deeply seated obsession with mimetics as well as his paradoxical character: his very dis-identity gives stability to his identity.

#### 4.1.II ALIENATION OF A THEATRICAL KIND

The theme of the theatre is touched upon from the very outset of the text. We are led to the ‘café de la Regence’ and the ‘Palais Royal’<sup>297</sup> which were situated in immediate proximity to the old opera house. The ‘café de la Regence’ presents a venue which would have been frequented before or after a visit to the opera house.<sup>298</sup> The

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<sup>295</sup> NdR, p. 44.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>298</sup> The Nephew marches off to the Opera to hear a piece by Dauvergne at the very end of the text. For an analysis of spatiality in *Le Neveu* and the location of the Café de la Régence as a site of spectacle see the section ‘Le café de la régence et l’univers spectacle’ in Jean Terrasse, *Le Temps et l’espace dans les romans de Diderot* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999), pp. 81-5. On the cafe as the site of a new public sphere in the eighteenth century, accommodating the spectacle of a world and an ‘impure’ kind of

metaphorically charged scene of *Le Neveu de Rameau* will not only host many discussions on music theory and the acting professions, the Nephew himself is a professional in the musical arts and earns his living as a music teacher.

I have already suggested that the Nephew's tendency to become 'other' leads him to a kind of mimetic compulsion that can be compared with the passive alienation of the *Paradoxe*. I will now show the full scope of this link between alienation and theatrical activity. We have already seen how the Nephew's obsession to enact is perhaps most subtly shown in the transitions from soliloquy to storytelling. The story of the 'Pimp and the Girl', which is also the first story told, puts most clearly into relief the process of transformation from epic to dramatic speech. It is in the most abrupt manner that the Nephew begins to impersonate the different characters of his story. Three different stages are passed within this transition. From the mode of an integrated 'I' ('Si je le connois [le sentiment]'),<sup>299</sup> (9) he almost immediately splits himself into the mode of an internal monologue, addressing himself as you: 'Comment, Rameau, il y a dix milles bonnes tables a Paris, a quinze ou vingt couverts chacune, et de ces couverts la, il n'y en a pas un pour toi!'<sup>300</sup> (10) Then follow the hypnotically repetitive self-accusations quoted above, in which the final 'autre' prompts the Nephew to become other. The breaking into dramatic impersonation comes as a release. His theatrical absorption is almost complete. The Nephew *is* the girl and he is also the pimp. Through this double act of impersonation the mimetic skills of the Nephew are first demonstrated in all their accomplishment. But whether the Nephew at this stage becomes immersed into his role to the point of forgetting himself in a state of alienation, or whether he cunningly feigns a passive form of alienation is unclear. There is no clear separation between a methodology of cold acting and one of sensible acting. All the reader can experience are the actual effects of a technique which in any case remains masked.<sup>301</sup>

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philosophy associated with the theatre see Stéphane Pujol, 'L'espace public de *Neveu de Rameau*, *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 93, no. 5 (1993), pp. 669-84

<sup>299</sup> NdR, p. 22.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> It has generally been argued that *Le Neveu* represents the anti-thesis of the *Paradoxe*. If the *Paradoxe* presents an actor who possesses the gift of alienation, that is, he is in control of his own acting in the wider arena of social life, the Nephew on the contrary seems to be seized by the power of alienation, not knowing how to constructively employ his mimetic gift within the games of society. I would instead argue that the two modes of mimetic alienation, one being obsessive and the other possessed, seem to coincide with the stories and also the pantomimes. For although the linguistic expressiveness of the Nephew's stories indicates a certain degree of compulsiveness, and his enactments appear self-absorbed without any awareness for his surroundings, this, as the end of the story reveals, is not at all the case. As

What is typical of the non-musical pantomimes is that in most cases they are inspired by the intensity of imagination. They involve a desire, an idea, a wish or plan, which immediately puts a spell onto the Nephew, transporting him into the hallucination of acting out this dream in gestural action. The Nephew seems to be led by a compulsion to materialise his thoughts and desires. By acting out a pantomime which mimes the actions linked to a specific material object, an object that fuels the imagination of the pleasure principle, he brings himself closer to the satisfaction of those desires which in reality are denied to him. His response to the idea of achieving ingenuity and fame is the enactment of a daydream:

Tu aurois une bonne maison (et il en mesuroit l'étendue avec ses bras), un bon lit (et il s'y entendoit nonchalamment), de bons vins (qu'il goutoit en faisant claquer sa langue contre son palais), un bon équipage (et il levoit le pié pour y monter), de jolies femmes (a qui il prenoit déjà la gorge et qu'il regardoit voluptueusement); cent faquins me viendroient encenser tous les jours (et il croyoit les voir autour de lui; il voyoit Palissot, Poincinet, les Frérons pere et fils, La Porte; il les entendoit; il se rengorgeoit, les aprouvoit, leur sourioit, les dedaignoit, les meprisoit, les chassoit, les rapelloit...<sup>302</sup> (11)

The expanse of the Nephew's imagination exerts a certain magical charm by conjuring up in front of our eyes the materiality of a body acting out the fulfilment of his desires. These are the charms of the imaginative child. However, not only are we faced with the uninhibited creative talent of the child enacting fantasies in the form of the play, we are also observing the Nephew as someone who can only compensate himself with the illusion of realising his dreams and who in the long run remains frustrated. The economy of his libidinous mimetic hallucination is however taken to the very end. Exhausted from his daydream, the Nephew drops into real sleep: 'Après avoir goûté quelques instants la douceur de ce repos, il se reveilloit, bailloit, se frottoit les yeux, et cherchoit encore autour de lui ses adulateurs insipides.'<sup>303</sup> (12)

Despite this form of mimesis in which the Nephew appears driven by desire and

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I will show in the final section of this chapter, all the stories, even if they appear frenetic and possessed, are constructed with much awareness on the part of the storyteller. As I will demonstrate, this indeterminacy is intentional and part of a wider rhetoric. The stories are highly self-conscious and reveal the Nephew as a powerful strategist in the game of social interaction. Hence it would be more correct to say that the polarity between cold acting and acting from sensibility in *Le Neveu* is dispersed into different situations, whilst the theme of a theatrical kind of alienation is amplified and refracted in all its anthropological facets.

<sup>302</sup> NdR, p. 16.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



imagination, the Nephew is also a cold actor who knows how to make use of his mimetic talent. His expertise in the skill of acting and entertaining leads him to take on positions in aristocratic houses as at once servant, teacher and fool, most eminently in the house of Bertin-Hus where he has just been made redundant at the very moment he encounters the Philosopher. In his position as house fool, the Nephew is shown to exploit the acting methods of the *Paradoxe* in order to skilfully manipulate his employers' thoughts and emotions. He is equipped with flattery on the one hand and vicious parody on the other, despite his subaltern position acquiring a degree of influence and power in the games of social mimesis. This second relation to mimetic activity, his art of 'bouffonnerie', is treated with professionalism and even virtuosity. In order to manipulate the emotional responses of others, he takes it upon himself to study and perfect the craft of rendering positions, gestures and facial expressions. Masking his real thoughts and motivations whilst displaying the performance of an external language of expression, the Nephew has become a master in exactly that science of duplicity proposed by the *Paradoxe*, with the major difference that he applies it in society rather than the theatre:

Sois hypocrite, si tu veux; mais ne parle pas comme l'hypocrite. Garde des vices qui te sont utiles; mais n'en aie ni le ton ni les apparences qui te rendroient ridicule. Pour se garantir de ce ton, de ces apparences, il faut les connoître. [...] Je suis moi et je reste ce que je suis; mais j'agis et je parle comme il convient. [...] Peut être vaudroit-il mieux être un insolent que d'en avoir la physionomie; l'insolent de caractère n'insulte que de temps en temps; l'insolent de physionomie insulte toujours. Au reste, n'allez pas imaginer que je sois le seul lecteur de mon espèce. Je n'ai d'autre mérite ici que d'avoir fait par système, par justesse d'esprit, par une vue raisonnable et vraie, ce que la plupart des autres font par instinct. De là vient que leurs lectures ne les rendent pas meilleurs que moi; mais qu'ils restent ridicules, en dépit d'eux; au lieu que je ne le suis que quand je veux, et que je les laisse alors loin derrière moi...<sup>304</sup> (13)

Like the cold actor of the *Paradoxe*, the Nephew follows a system of acting based on an alienation of body and mind, external appearance and internal invisibility. Actions in this do not materialise from a union between body and soul, but from careful control over a physical sign system. They emanate at the level of pure externality, shielding the motivations at the back of the actor's mind, skilfully moulded for the eyes of the other. They derive their success from the other's narcissistic disposition by seducing him with gestural patterns that please rather than show the disconcerting fractures within communication.

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-1.

Mimetic expertise becomes for the Nephew part of a programme of survival. His deception and abuse of others become an acceptable means of subsistence. His position as music teacher does not stand in the service of aesthetics but has declined into pure satisfaction of material need. He uses art to attract attention and make himself important. It becomes the means to an end, just as anybody and anything in the Nephew's social environment has become the means to social careerism.<sup>305</sup>

But the Nephew excuses his fickleness with a mimetological analysis of society: he is not alone but only representative of general lack of the norm. Yet, as opposed to the 'average-communicator', the Nephew stands out in utilising a fully conscious system of deceptive communication. He has perfected his skills to the level of an art form. It is here where he finds pride and dignity, where he can compensate for his failures in the profession of the musical arts. In order to compensate for his failures as an artist, the Nephew thus shifts social mimesis onto an equal level with aesthetic mimesis.

However, the Nephew's pride in the art of social acting belongs to the cynical and nihilistic side of the Nephew's mutating register of tones. As the tormented 'jealousy-passage' has already shown, the Nephew experiences insurmountable pains in the face of his artistic failures. He is well aware that his position within the arts is situated at the lowest end of the mimetic scheme. He has neither achieved fame as a composer nor as an interpreter of the violin or harpsichord. Music serves him, and this only very badly, as a source of material income. From the level of ingenious mimesis, where creativity produces originality, he is lowered down to the level of musical interpretation where mimesis is only imitative with a limited scope for artistic improvisation.<sup>306</sup> And even worse, as an expert in social mimesis, he humiliates himself to a state where mimesis has become both uncreative and unproductive. As a result, he is considered amoral, abject and despicable. He embodies exactly those acting qualities pronounced in the *Paradoxe* which are considered monstrous and destructive. He imports the mimetic

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<sup>305</sup> See Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow, 'Der Triumph der Verworfenheit: Zu Diderots *Neveu de Rameau*', in *Denis Diderot oder die Ambivalenz der Aufklärung*, ed. Dietrich Harth and Martin Raether (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1987) p. 149.

<sup>306</sup> For a more detailed character study of the different mimetic aspects of the Nephew see Herbert Joseph, *Diderot's Dialogue of Language and Gesture: Le Neveu de Rameau* (Ohio: Ohio State UP, 1969); in particular the chapters 'Rameau: Parasite, Moralist, and Mime', 'Rameau: Musician and Mime', 'Rameau: Beggar and Mime', pp. 107-201.

skills of the corrupt actor into the realm of social reality, thus deepening the rifts of social alienation.

One could also say that his source of income depends on his employers' need to be entertained by the Nephew's fooleries on the account of others, but this nevertheless does not earn him any social respect. The social need of others to indulge in laughing at the ridicules of others can only satisfy his need for bread and a bed. His mimetic skills thus only serve him to parasite the affluence of other's economical productivity. In the houses of the 'great', the Nephew is forced to put into practice the art of aping others, 'la singerie sublime'. Whatever role he is asked to take, he will have to comply, thus undermining his own dignity, his thoughts and individuality, continually morphing from one shape into another. The worst prophesy of the actor as marionette or puppet has become true. Here the soulless and dehumanised inferiority of the mimetic body is complemented with that of the animal. The Nephew as a monkey is a pet loved and tolerated in a patronising way:

J'étois leur petit Rameau, leur joli Rameau, leur Rameau le fou, l'impertinent, l'ignorant, le paresseux, le gourmand, le bouffon, la grosse bête. Il n'y avoit pas une de ces epithetes familiares qui ne me valut un sourire, une caresse, un petit coup sur l'épaule, un soufflet, un coup de pié, a table un bon morceau qu'on me jettoit sur mon assiette, hors de table, une liberté que je prenois sans consequence; car moi je suis sans consequence.<sup>307</sup> (14)

In the same way a pet would be treated, the Nephew is alienated into indiscrete intimacy. Respectful distance is broken down and his employers relate to him like a child to a doll. It is thanks to his 'self-evacuation' that others can allow themselves to project their every emotion and whim onto him. His social mimeticism is not only a dead-end strategy in terms of his ambitions in the musical arts, the 'singeries' of his bread earning profession confuse his capability to produce anything of worth. The Nephew's mimetic skills are thus connected with the loss of autonomy and the submission to a master-slave relation for the benefits of economical subsistence.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> NdR, p. 18.

<sup>308</sup> This is however a master-slave relation which is different from that of Hegel. Whereas the Hegelian slave in opposition to the master becomes human by becoming productive through his work, the Nephew, despite the fact that he depends on a master, is just as unproductive as the one who employs him. The product of his work is nothing substantial but consists in nothing but the vacuity of his mimetic skill.

In sum, the kind of mimesis the Nephew specialises in is situated at the opposite end of creative production and at the lowest of social esteem. The Nephew's social inferiority is described by both the philosopher as well as the Nephew himself as 'abjection', a term which resurfaces in the text with reliable frequency. The Philosopher pities him: 'Ah, malheureux, dans quel état d'abjection, vous êtes né ou tombé.'<sup>309</sup> (15) And the Nephew admits freely: 'Je veux bien être abject, mais je veux que ce soit sans contrainte'<sup>310</sup> (16) The Philosopher is nevertheless adamant to discover a soul behind the Nephew's self-proclaimed abjection: 'car en dépit du rôle misérable, abject, vil, abominable que vous faites, je crois qu'au fond, vous avez l'âme délicate.'<sup>311</sup> (17) The Nephew in turn qualifies his abjection, but not in the Philosopher's sense: 'Je suis à vos yeux un être très abject, très méprisable, et je le suis aussi quelquefois aux miens; mais rarement.'<sup>312</sup> (18) His abjection is so ingrained in him that it constitutes the prime quality he wants his son to inherit: 'Avant que la molécule paternelle n'eût repris le dessus et ne l'eût amené à la parfaite abjection où j'en suis, il lui faudrait un temps infini; il perdrait ses plus belles années.'<sup>313</sup> (19)

The Nephew's socio-moral depravity goes hand in hand with his mimetic talent: it is precisely his character as idler, fool, and good-for-nothing which qualifies him to entertain his patrons.

La vertu se fait respecter; et le respect est incommode. La vertu se fait admirer, et l'admiration n'est pas amusante. J'ai à faire à des gens qui s'ennuient et il faut que je les fasse rire. Or c'est le ridicule et la folie qui font rire, il faut donc que je sois ridicule et fou.<sup>314</sup> (20)

The lowest form of theatrical representation is then directly linked with the notion of social alienation or abjection. A close network is constructed between different forms and levels of alienation. The Nephew is caught in a vicious circle of alienation and theatricality. The kind of acting put into practice is not done at the service of aesthetics but as a desperate means to alleviate his state of destitution. Self-humiliation and a loss of human dignity is involved in these mimetic self-prostitutions, which in turn invoke

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<sup>309</sup> NdR, p. 25.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-2.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-5.

the notion of abjection. It is however the Nephew's status as fool that enables him to say the impertinences otherwise self-censored. Such 'folies' are fooleries rather than 'madness', consciously applied insults geared at the system of social etiquette, but in the chain of the Nephew's alienation, they seem again only a fraction removed from the highest degree of alienation: 'l'aliénation d'esprit', which I will discuss below.

It is with regard to his abjection that the Nephew's potential as an ironical cynic comes into play. Precisely because he is an outlaw in society, he is capable of studying the ridicules of a self-complacent establishment, attacking and playing the parody of a hypocrite culture. He has nothing to lose, his whole frustration is to turn inside out, only to win the laughter of others.<sup>315</sup> A failure in establishing any professional standing, he is alienated from what in society represents the middle ground, a stability that is marked by mediocrity as well as security. It is here that his role as a wise fool comes into play, for it is because of his position as an outsider to the norms of society that he can also abstract from them. Alienated from society, thanks to his technique of self-alienation he can in Kristeva's words parody the 'other of reason'.<sup>316</sup> This reason has become nothing else but the bureaucracy of modern normality. Whereas society remains self-alienated in the way in which it determines the individual by abstract convention, the Nephew as a stranger is a figure who unmasks the foolishness and distortion of what has become established as the reasonable norm: 'c'est un grain de levain qui fermente et qui restitue a chacun une portion de son individualité naturelle.'<sup>317</sup> (21) In his cynical attacks on society, the Nephew's distanced viewpoint endows him with a position which comes close to the *Paradoxe*'s concept of the philosophical self-alienation.

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<sup>315</sup> Interestingly, one could establish a clear continuity between the Nephew's abjection and Julia Kristeva's *Essay on Abjection*. She does not refer in the latter *Essay* to *Le Neveu*, nor does she have recourse to the notion of abjection in her discussion of the figure of the Nephew in *Strangers to Ourselves*, but what is common to both, is a concern with the 'unclean', 'the perverse or artistic', and the cynical. In the *Essay on Abjection* she defines the abject in words reminiscent of the Nephew's cynical negativity. The abject is something that 'neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life – a progressive despot; it lives at the behest of death – an operator in genetic experimentations; it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit – a cynic (and a psychoanalyst); it establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss – an artist who practices his art as a 'business.' Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialised appearance of the abject.' *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), pp. 15-6.

<sup>316</sup> Kristeva (1991), p. 137.

<sup>317</sup> NdR, p. 5.

Or as Kristeva puts it, the stranger comes to function as the *alter ego* of the philosopher. He becomes a figure attributed with the ironical spirit of Enlightenment philosophy. He becomes the philosopher's mask, a double of our own consciousness. If we could realise for ourselves the metaphorical distance which he embodies, it would be possible to instigate social change and transformation.<sup>318</sup> The Nephew's detached ironical stance towards an unselfconscious conventional society is also at the root of his affinity with Socrates and Socratic irony, and furthermore the cynical tradition which Diderot gestures towards repeatedly in *Le Neveu*.<sup>319</sup> The Nephew's irony is directed against each of the Philosopher's positivistic and self-complacent statements of a pseudo-materialistic kind of virtue. His paradoxical negations produce exactly the effect that the 'electric' Socrates had on Menon: an anti-enlightenment of confusion and narcosis. Like Socrates, the Nephew entangles the Philosopher in an irresistibly captivating but also overwhelming dialogue. The Nephew's negativity thus also produces a shift from theatre to theory.<sup>320</sup> Or rather, an affinity between theory and theatre emerges, in that both are concerned with *showing*. Diderot's spectacle of ideas is however more than just a spectacle of compulsive negativity; it is concerned with a fundamental analysis and self-critique of the Enlightenment system.

Thus, the Nephew articulates a kind of consciousness which by means of ironic self-reflection realises its own inscription into a mimetically determined social cosmos. This miming has become part of a professional activity. The Nephew's cynical pride in his skill of aping others becomes here the critique of a society which automatically replicates its given system of social codes. For instance, the idea of 'la pantomime du monde' is immediately put into practice by the Nephew who proceeds to mime all the different figures caught in the mimetic dependencies of society:

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<sup>318</sup> Kristeva (1991), pp. 133-4.

<sup>319</sup> For a discussion on Diderot's indebtedness to the cynical tradition, specifically the role of Diogenes in the text and the impact of Menippean satire, see Jean Starobinski: 'Diogène dans le *Neveu de Rameau*', *Stanford French Review*, vol. 8, no. 2-3 (1984) pp. 147-65. For an interpretation of the Nephew as the Socrates of Plato's *Republic*, see Donal O'Gorman: *Diderot the Satirist* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 110-11.

<sup>320</sup> For an interpretation of *Le Neveu* as a theatre of philosophy, or virtual theatre, see Evelyn Gould, *Virtual Theatre: From Diderot to Mallarmé* (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins UP, 1989), pp. 1-20. Gould shows how *Le Neveu*'s dialogical structure can be seen as both a demonstration of the theatricality of ideas – thereby correcting Platonic idealism – as well as a Freudian kind of fantasm: 'a double scene in which a divided subject is infinitely re-figured in imaginary self-representations.' See p. 7.

Je suis excellent pantomime; comme vous en allez juger. Puis il se met a sourire, a contrefaire l'homme admirateur, l'homme suppliant, l'homme complaisant; il a le pié droit en avant, le gauche en arriere, le dos courbé, la tete relevée, le regard comme attaché sur d'autres yeux, la bouche entrouverte, les bras portés vers quelqu'objet; il attend un ordre, il le reçoit; il part comme un trait; il revient, il est executé; il en rend compte.<sup>321</sup> (22)

The *theatrum mundi* philosophy, announced prior to the pantomime, endows the Nephew's grotesque mimetic obsession with reason and meaning. He demonstrates all the different positions of humiliation which the individual is forced to take on if he wants to succeed in the struggles of the 'pantomime du monde'. Far from tending towards 'mad alienation', this pantomime reveals the ridiculous manifestations of the *theatrum mundi* on human body and soul. The Nephew's mechanical impulse to reproduce the positions of the servants, and the mechanical gestures which are visualised for the reader, speak far beyond the subject of the Nephew, about the decline of the human body which becomes machine-like once it is caught in the wheels of conventions and social pressures. The Nephew embodies as an aesthetic figure the compulsion to submit to the mechanics of the larger apparatus of the *theatrum mundi*. He symbolises the individual's readiness to become incorporated into a larger mimetic social body with the gestures, tones, and facial expression that make the system as a whole run smoothly.

But if the Nephew's satirical pantomimes can be considered as rational and analytical accounts of society, the reasonable element in this is 'estranged' by a certain kind of obsessiveness. When the Philosopher suggests to the Nephew a series of apologetic gestures that might seduce his former employer Bertin to take him back, the Nephew cannot stop himself from immediate action:

Ce qu'il y a de plaisant, c'est que, tandis que je lui tenois ce discours, il en executoit la pantomime. Il s'etoit prosterné; il avait collé son visage contre terre; il paroissoit tenir entre ses deux mains le bout d'une pentoufle; il pleuroit; il sanglotoit; il disoit, oui, ma petite reine; oui, je le promets; je n'en aurai de ma vie, de ma vie.<sup>322</sup> (23)

Here too, the pantomime has to be understood as critical caricature. By concisely doubling the Philosopher's well-meaning instructions, these are ridiculed. At the same time, the Nephew's mimetic interlude appears grotesque and uncanny in its

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<sup>321</sup> NdR, p. 104.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-1.

compulsiveness. One could say that the more rational the Nephew's concern with imitation, the more verbal he remains, and the less he communicates in opaque gestures. Different degrees of madness articulate themselves according to the degree of gestural visibility. When the Nephew is most sane, we see nothing: there is scant indication that miming happens at all. So, for example, when he shows off his repertory of flattery, the text follows the repetitive staccatto structure of the other pantomime, but he is still capable of description himself:

Personne n'a eu cet art comme moi. Mais où je suis surprenant, c'est dans l'opposé; j'ai des petits tons que j'accompagne d'un sourire; une variété infinie de mines aprobatives; là, le nez, la bouche, les yeux, le front entrent en jeu; j'ai une souplesse de reins; une manière de contourner l'épine du dos, de hausser ou de baisser les épaules, d'entendre les doigts, d'incliner la tête, de fermer les yeux, et d'être stupéfait, comme si j'avois entendu descendre du ciel une voix angelique et divine. C'est là ce qui flatte. Je ne sais si vous saisissez bien toute l'énergie de cette dernière attitude-là. Je ne l'ai point inventée; mais personne ne m'a surpassé dans l'exécution. Voyez. Voyez.<sup>323</sup> (24)

The last two words suggest that there is in fact something to see, although the representation of this pantomime is still transmitted at the level of words. After having experienced the Nephew as a mimic already in several other instances, the execution of his own descriptions seems to visualise itself automatically. The mechanical style and the repetitive syntax in which the gestures are described is identical with that of the musical pantomimes in which the Nephew becomes too self-absorbed to communicate in the form of words. The less rational the Nephew becomes, the less he becomes capable of verbalising his own gestures, the more his body takes over and the Nephew's actions become in fact the Philosopher's words. This is where mimetic expressiveness surpasses the cynical demonstration of the skills required within a *theatrum mundi*. The Nephew's ironical self-alienation, his objectification of ridiculous social patterns, turns at this point into passive alienation. Alienation goes so far that 'folies' of the type of the 'bouffonerie' do indeed transgress into an alienation of the mind. The less he manages to objectify the social manifestations of alienation, the more he becomes a *subject of alienation*.

The situation of being subject and object at once is fundamental to Hegel's analysis of alienation in the world of culture. The Nephew is simultaneously caught in the circuits

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., p. 50.



of flattery and self-negation as well as being self-conscious and negative about this situation. This self-conscious alienation and the desire to spell out the hypocrisies of the world of his patrons, is what separates him from the monotonous voice of the positivistic philosopher. Abjection, or in Hegel's translation 'Verworfenheit', and compliance with a system of flattering authorities which are no longer acceptable as true symbolical powers, lead the Nephew into a state which was diagnosed by Hegel as *Zerrissenheit*, a state in which the subject is infinitely torn between negation and affirmation:

Die Sprache der Zerrissenheit aber ist die vollkommene Sprache und der wahre existierende Geist dieser ganzen Welt der Bildung. Dies Selbstbewußtsein, dem die seine Verworfenheit verwerfende Empörung zukommt, ist unmittelbar die absolute Sichselbstgleichheit in der absoluten Zerrissenheit, die reine Vermittlung des reinen Selbstbewußtseins mit sich selbst. Es ist die Gleichheit des identischen Urteils, worin eine und dieselbe Persönlichkeit sowohl Subjekt und Prädikat [sind] schlechthin *gleichgültige Seiende*, die einander nichts angehen, ohne notwendige Einheit, sogar daß jedes die Macht einer eigenen Persönlichkeit ist.<sup>324</sup> (25)

This constant oscillation between rebellious negation of the dictates of a false consciousness and compulsive re-enactment of 'gestural' convention makes it impossible to get a grasp of the Nephew's elusive character. Since he is in his actions entirely identified with a system of social communication, whilst extricating his consciousness from such gestural conformism, he remains forever duplicitous and opaque. We can never quite determine whether he presents or represents, whether we are to witness him as a subject torn by the stresses of social convention or whether he confronts us with an objectified mirror image of the world of 'the great'. Performativity and expression of alienation remain indistinguishable.

#### 4.1.III 'ALIENATION D'ESPRIT' AS THEATRICAL ENACTMENT

It is however in the musical pantomimes, when the Nephew seems transported beyond social responsiveness, that we experience the Nephew most fully as a subject and most alienated. Here, his satirical pantomimes take on another tone, transforming into a true theatre of madness. Mental alienation, or psychosis, joins theatricality at its most intense and expressive. The *theatrum mundi*, 'la pantomime du monde' formerly parodied, becomes madness which seeks its outlet in the expression of a theatre of

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<sup>324</sup> Hegel (1986), pp. 384-5.

music and gestures. At the core and culmination of the dialogue, Diderot employs the term 'alienation d'esprit'<sup>325</sup> and it is this passage which Hegel has recourse to in the *Phänomenologie* in order to explicate the *Zerrissenheit* of the eighteenth-century mind.

But forms of behaviour that are suggestive of mental alienation also emerge in other places in the text. One is in relation to the Nephew harming himself physically; the other concerns his penchant towards splitting his voice into dialogic monologues. The pluralised voice is a practice which is not only performed by the Nephew but which originates in the initial 'Je' narrator, who splits himself into 'Moi', the Philosopher and 'Lui', the Nephew. It is thus the author-narrator who opens up his subjectivity to a chain of eternal self-splitting, thereby delegating parts of his internal otherness to an animated enactment within a fictional character. Thus, a theatre is created which constantly borders on a theatre of psychosis, releasing and celebrating the liberation of the subject from the strictures of an institutionalised law of normativity.<sup>326</sup> Against the ideological constitution of the *one* universal moral law, the Nephew, and through him Diderot, posits the eternally breaking and splitting process of subversive self-refraction. His voice splits up, and it is this *other* within himself which comes to gain authority over him. Different parts of his consciousness become dissociated from his personality speaking to him from elsewhere:

Le quelque chose qui est là et qui me parle, me dit: Rameau, tu voudrais bien avoir fait ces deux morceaux là...<sup>327</sup> (26)

And later it is the voice of dignity who addresses him from outside:

(*Et mettant sa main droite sur sa poitrine, il ajoutoit:*) Je me sens la quelque chose qui s'élève et qui me dit, Rameau, tu n'en feras rien. Il faut qu'il y ait une

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<sup>325</sup> NdR, p. 83.

<sup>326</sup> In 'La musique parlée: Ou remarques sur la subjectivité dans la fiction à propos du *Neveu de Rameau*', Julia Kristeva shows how the polyphonic dialogical structure of the text fundamentally undermines the institution of a universal law of morality projected by the Enlightenment and represented by the Philosopher. Both the structure of psychosis as well as art, transgress the absolute law of a symbolical order. However, whereas in the instance of psychosis the subject's narcissism cuts all connection to the real, the artist who subverts and re-organises the semiotic structure of an ideological meta-language, revives and restructures productively the signifying chains. Thereby a 'pluralised subject' (sujet pluralisé) consolidates itself not as a narcissistic subject but as 'sujet non assujéti.' In *Langues et langages de Leibniz à l'Encyclopédie*, ed. Michèle Duchet and Michèle Jalley (Paris: Inédit, 1977), p. 166.

<sup>327</sup> NdR, p. 16.

certainne dignité attachée a la nature de l'homme, que rien ne peut etouffer.<sup>328</sup>  
(27)

Every time a voice rises within the Nephew, it is signalled that the Nephew is not at all a mimetic machine, but that he is governed by an intense internal life. The voices that come to speak to him are of an emotional and ethical origin. They belong to the dimension of the soul, his conscience and his unconscious. But the form in which this internal dialogue emerges suggests a psychological constitution which tends to fragment the entity of the self. This is no longer the chosen voice multiplication that functions at the service of miming others, but 'something' within the self that appears separated off and controls as an alien force the Nephew's thoughts and decisions. It would be going too far to define such a split voice phenomenon as schizophrenic, but the self-automatisation of another voice within consciousness seems to evoke the sense that rationality has become perforated and opened up to forces of the unconscious which are transgressive. These voices command and seduce, evoking the uncanny effect of an unconscious that disposes over energies that can be more energetic, impulsive and violent once they are liberated from the restraints of rationality and social convention.<sup>329</sup> The dynamic of voice arrangement in *Le Neveu de Rameau* is overpowering and whilst the grotesque character of the pantomimes can be witnessed by the reader in the safety of the eye's distance, the voices of the text protrude out of the medium of textual visuality with uncanny presence. Strangeness becomes an acoustic experience.

Overall, the Nephew's 'alienation d'esprit' is exposed in the visual dimension of gestural affect. We are first made aware of the psychic pain suffered by the Nephew at the moment when his despair becomes released in the form of self-inflicted physical violence. After the genius discussion, after having demonstrated his skills as a fraudulent impersonator in the story of the 'Pimp and the Girl', after the story of his redundancy from the Bertin house, the Nephew all of a sudden strips off all frivolity and shows yet another face. His obvious torment opens up yet another dimension of his character, one which indicates to the philosopher and the reader that he does indeed have a soul, masked behind the face of the crook, the idler and the fool. It is thus in

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>329</sup> In this sense the Nephew's internal voices are not too dissimilar from the speaking voices of the Jewels in Diderot's *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, DOC, pp. 25-216. On a discussion of the ventriloquised voice in *Les Bijoux*, see Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), pp. 191-208.

connection with his psychic suffering that the Nephew is disclosed as a subject and as a person haunted by conscience. His alienated behaviour seems to erupt out of nowhere, reported to us via the voice of the philosopher:

Et tout en disant cela, de la main droite, il s'etoit saisi les doigts et le poignet de la main gauche; et il les renversoit en dessus, en dessous; l'extrémité des doigts touchoit au bras; les jointures en craquoient; je craignois que les os n'en demeurassent disloqués.

MOI. – Prenez garde, lui dis je; vous allez vous estropier.

LUI. – Ne craignez rien. Ils y sont faits; depuis dix ans, je leur en ai donné bien d'une autre façon. Malgré qu'ils en eussent, il a bien fallu que les bougres s'y accoutumassent, et qu'ils apprissent a se placer sur les touches et a voltiger sur les cordes.<sup>330</sup> (28)

If the Nephew otherwise presents himself as a dexterous contortionist in the 'pantomime of the world', bending into whatever shape required, in the metaphor of playing musical instruments the truth of his consistent pains and strains is revealed. If he wants to maintain both suppleness and virtuosity in the mimetic game he must inflict violence on himself, to the extent where he may maim himself. It is in the musical pantomimes that this crippled body, this body corrupted by alienated gestures, comes to take revenge. Or rather, it is here that the lies, which have gradually inscribed themselves, become revealed, and an incorrupt layer of authentic being is disclosed in the form of psychotic behaviour and in the form of music.

It is at the culmination of the text, the great operatic pantomime, that the theme of mental alienation comes to be represented with unequivocal explicitness. In Artaud-like mania,<sup>331</sup> the Nephew exerts all his enthusiasm, sensibility and 'chaleur d'imagination' in order to sing and mime the opera of all operas. Alienation that possesses rather than is possessed, is now brought to the stage in an almost celebratory manner. The Nephew's pantomime opens with a citation from the air 'Ile des Fous', and the Philosopher understands: 'bon; voila la tete qui se perd, et quelque scene nouvelle qui se prepare...' <sup>332</sup> (29) The stage now opens up not to a conventional piece of performance but to the performativity of madness. In the form of pantomimic action madness discharges itself of its explosive nervous energies. Mental alienation thus becomes inextricably linked with theatrical representation. Finally, the Nephew can release the

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<sup>330</sup> NdR, pp. 26.

<sup>331</sup> Kristeva (1977), sees in the serialised linguistic syntax of the musical pantomimes an anticipation of the theatre of Artaud. Both Diderot and Artaud reinvigorate and create a productive confrontation between meta-language and poetic language; p. 182.

<sup>332</sup> NdR, p. 82-3.

excesses of his nervous energies through a newfound form, language and rhythm. Catharsis of the strains of social alienation becomes manifest in the expressiveness of mental alienation. Whilst he becomes less and less aware of his social environment, the Philosopher becomes more and more aware of the seriousness of the Nephew's alienation:

On faisoit des éclats de rire a entrouvrir le plafond. Lui n'apercevoit rien; il continuoit, saisi d'une alienation d'esprit, d'un enthousiasme si voisin de la folie, qu'il est incertain qu'il en revienne; s'il ne faudra pas le jeter dans un fiacre, et le mener droit aux Petites Maisons.<sup>333</sup> (30)

In the obsessive manner of the megalomaniac he attempts the impossible, representing an entire opera, a whole orchestra, 'se divisant en vingt roles divers, [...] avec l'air d'un energumene, etincelant des yeux, ecumant de la bouche. Il faisoit une chaleur a perir...' <sup>334</sup> (31) It is once more his reawakening that is indicative of the severity of his alienation, the extent of how far he was removed from us. Sleep-like trance has made him disappear into a different sphere altogether. Temporarily, he had left the time and space of the cafe:

Sa tete etoit tout a fait perdue. Epuisé de fatigue, tel qu'un homme qui sort d'un profond sommeil ou d'une longue distraction; il resta immobile, stupide, etonné. Il tournoit ses regards autour de lui, comme un homme egaré qui cherche a reconnoitre le lieu ou il se trouve. Il attendoit le retour de ses forces et de ses esprits; il essayoit machinalement son visage. Semblable a celui qui verroit a son reveil, son lit environné d'un grand nombre de personnes; dans un entier oubli ou dans une profonde ignorance de ce qu'il a fait, il s'ecria dans le premier moment.<sup>335</sup> (32)

The moment has come where the Nephew's possessed capability of alienation turns around and transmutes into passive alienation, passive in the sense that it becomes driven by the energies of the unconscious.<sup>336</sup> No longer does the Nephew with superior irony parody the gestures of flattery, obedience and humiliation, enacted in the 'pantomime du monde' and perfected by himself. If the Nephew otherwise has

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>336</sup> It would however be incorrect to say that the Nephew loses all awareness of his mimetic production. Although he is alienated in a frenzy of gestures, he continues, as Marian Hobson points out to observe and judge himself while performing the great pantomime. The *Paradoxe's* dichotomy of active and passive mimesis has become complicated by a system in which controlled and uncontrolled alienation continually slide into one another. See 'Pantomime, spasme et parataxe: *Le Neveu de Rameau*, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, no. 2 (1984), pp. 209-13.

proclaimed pride in his superiority over the mimetic games of society, this social system of gestural positions now seems to turn him into the jumping jack of its endless register of positions.

If earlier on his expertise consisted in bending himself into all the permutations of bodily expressiveness, the diversity of his whole repertory now unwinds, never stopping, working on him like a *perpetuum mobile* to the point of utter physical exhaustion. The former parasite who entertained and pleased his superiors by means of his mimetic craft becomes parasited by mimesis itself. The belief of having a choice over the diverse mimetic positions and their purpose – whether to flatter or satirise his employers – is now revealed as illusory. Foolery has indeed turned into ‘folie’ and instead of playing roles, roles now play him. Play, in its childlike innocent dimension, as in the notion of ‘jeu’ as ‘game’, which supposedly was to remain without consequence, turns into an acute crisis of mimesis.<sup>337</sup> The Nephew’s self-perpetuating pantomimic action has become automatic, dislocated from a social context in which the different gestures could produce signification.

In the great pantomime, the Nephew is urged to become ‘thirty arias’, or ‘twenty different parts’ at once. All sense of self is lost, and the disintegration of the self is taken to an extreme. Apart from the movement of self-diversification, what equally stands out is the Nephew’s oscillation between contrasting forms of expression: ‘Ici c’est une jeune fille qui pleure et il en rend toute la minauderie; là il est pretre, il est roi, il est tyran, il menace, il commande, il s’emporte; il est esclave, il obeit.’<sup>338</sup> (33)

Such lack of equilibrium is inscribed into his character from the very outset of the text. Whilst his fluctuations between impoverishment and hedonism, between conformism and rebellion are part of his characteristics as an eccentric ‘individual’, the Nephew’s attempt to seek unity in his many self-contradictions in the aesthetic form of a quasi-operatic performance piece shows that his *Zerrissenheit* has in fact suffered an enormous cleavage.<sup>339</sup> Torn between knowing the truth but nevertheless committing

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<sup>337</sup> See ‘la crise du jeu’, in Yoichi Sumi: *Le Neveu de Rameau: Caprices et logiques du jeu* (Tokyo: Librairie-Éditions France Tosho, 1975), pp. 247-251.

<sup>338</sup> NdR, p. 83.

<sup>339</sup> It is therefore not for nothing that the greatest pantomimic ‘fit’ follows the Nephew’s greatest ethical

himself to living a lie, thrown between depravity and ethical awareness, between assimilation and rebellion, mediocrity and ingenuity, destitution and luxury, such tension between opposites now channels itself in the excessive frenzy of the 'great pantomime'. The repressed nervous energies of a life lived under social stricture results in the fragmented mechanical and alienated movements of the great pantomime. As Marian Hobson shows, the chains of pantomimic gestures performed by the Nephew are conveyed by the text in the form of parataxis. The alienated status of the Nephew's imposed social gestures is alienated once more in the musical pantomimes in the form of dislocated, discontinuous and convulsive gestures. If the pains and pressure of social mimesis make the Nephew's body erupt in spasms, linguistically, this spastic quality of the twice-alienated gesture becomes parataxis. The strange effect of the pantomimes, which seems at once clear and opaque, consists in the fact that at the level of the sign the gestures remain recognisable, whilst at the level of the symptom they remain obscure.<sup>340</sup>

But whilst in the context of 'normal life', the Nephew's body and mind are constantly alienated, in the state of total alienation, body and soul have perhaps never been closer together. If the Nephew's jerky movements of madness are senseless because they no longer communicate and they can no longer be rationalised, they nevertheless create an aesthetic experience which is structured and complete in itself. It is rhythm, transmitted to us in the language of the Philosopher's description, which re-integrates the body of the alienated Nephew with the energies of a soul in pain. Rhythmical structure, repetition and serialisation, evoke two effects: they express the abrupt, spastic kind of energy behind the movement, but they also transfer to the reader the dance-like pace in which the pantomimic event takes place. The repetitive rhythm of the movements have a hypnotic effect and invoke to the inner eye a clear kinaesthetic experience of the event.

According to Kristeva, it is precisely *Le Neveu's* polyphonic structure of language, taken to extremes in the musical pantomimes, which prevents a diagnosis of the Nephew as schizophrenic. Such a diagnosis would precisely derive from another discourse of meta-language. The form of the pantomimes derives from the Nephew's

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challenge, the story of the 'Jew and the Renegade'.

<sup>340</sup> Hobson (1984), pp. 197-213; see specifically p. 211.

rebellion against an institution of language that has become purely ideological. By breaking up the code of an alienated symbolical inscription of the body and reconfiguring it, the Nephew, or rather Diderot, re-imbues language with energy and *jouissance*. The drive behind the Nephew's impersonation of operas and orchestras is thus (in the context of the author-reader relation) not a confrontation with psychosis but with the process of restructuring the symbolical order.<sup>341</sup>

The great pantomime is then not only an event of alienation, an event in which the Nephew's acute psychological alienation also alienates his surroundings; it is also represented to us as an event of integration, and a strange mixture of laughter and catharsis. As the Nephew takes the idea of an alienated 'pantomime du monde' to excess, he also opens up, liberates, and in a peculiar way creates an experience of community; all at the price of his own sanity. This kind of integration is first of all transmitted by the change in textual format from dialogue to the Philosopher's narrative voice through which the reader can now experience the scene of the Nephew's pantomime, and which allows us to feel the rhythmic repercussions of the Nephew's every gesture. Moreover, the Nephew's behaviour is so disruptive that he attracts the attention of an otherwise anonymous and indifferent cafe clientele: 'Tous les poussebois avoient quitté leurs échiquiers et s'étoient rassemblés autour de lui. Les fenêtres du café étoient occupées, en dehors, par les passants qui s'étoient arrêtés au bruit. On faisoit des éclats de rire à entrouvrir le plafond.'<sup>342</sup> (34)

While the Nephew slides into mental alienation, the dialogue's hermetic closure explodes into the domain of the public. The roaring of laughter, so loud that it breaks open the ceiling, symbolises a pressure from within, which retraces a radical transformation in both structure and experience of the text. For a moment, conflict-ridden dialectics between Philosopher and Nephew are dissolved and replaced by the linearity of the Philosopher's account which is orchestrated towards culmination and release. Instead of being torn back and forth, the Nephew has now found a form which allows him to move forward, to put himself into productive order. He has finally arrived at a point where he can be situated *in* rather than outside his actions. While he is in his movement, the Philosopher is in his experience of the pantomime and so is the

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<sup>341</sup> Kristeva (1977), pp. 157.

<sup>342</sup> NdR, p. 83.



reader. Empathy arises for the first time, as the Nephew's evidently felt stress and pain. The event of the great pantomime thus not only alienates, it also produces a process of identification between performer and the witnesses of the pantomime. Such empathetic identification is however not entirely pure but in the manner of the satire, a genre which Diderot defined not only as an attack on morals but also in the sense of *satura*, as a piece saturated with different forms of emotional expression, including the experience of the grotesque:

Tout y étoit, et la délicatesse du chant, et la force de l'expression; et la douleur [...] s'emparant de nos âmes, et les tenant suspendues dans la situation la plus singulière que j'aie jamais éprouvée... Admirois je? Oui, j'admirois! étois je touché de pitié? j'étois touché de pitié; mais une teinte de ridicule étoit fondue dans ces sentimens, et les dénatureroit.<sup>343</sup> (35)

The Nephew's possession migrates into the souls of his observers who experience with him an experience bordering on the sublime, sublime in the sense that the Nephew realises a form of expression which transgresses conventional conceptions of the beautiful whilst putting at risk his mental sanity. The aesthetic result is one of utmost singularity in which both violence and harmony of nature are captured: 'c'étoit l'ombre et le silence; car le silence même se peint par des sons.'<sup>344</sup> (36) Imagination becomes so enhanced that even the unrepresentable, stripped of light and sound, grows into an aesthetic experience. It is at this point that the Nephew, on the basis of his theatrical alienation, is re-associated with what he had formerly been denied: the sphere of genius.

There is however an ambivalence to such ingenious expression which not only touches but penetrates, throwing his spectators into confusion and crisis. Although the Nephew manages to create an aesthetic which re-establishes for himself but also for everybody who is equally involved in the fragmenting machinery of the 'pantomime du monde' a sense of 'unity', this is done in an attempt to reconstruct totality in the form of representing the totality of an opera.<sup>345</sup> The notion of the grotesque is therefore inevitable.

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., pp. 83-4.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>345</sup> Elisabeth Fontenay interprets the Nephew's great pantomime as a consequence of his 'obsession with totality': 'The musician's pantomime – that ruinous effort to restore the simultaneity of instruments and the unity of the various parts, in order to speak, like an orchestra, with twenty mouths at once, [...] partakes in the same obsession with totality.' See the chapter 'A Fugue Will Never Console the Nephew', in *Diderot: Reason and Resonance*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlmann (New York: George Braziller, 1982), p. 202.

Diderot resists the temptation of indulging in the closure of an entirely unifying experience of absolute identification and trance. Empathy and jouissance of the sublime moment are only temporary stages until the ridiculous and satirical image of the Nephew's helpless attempt to mimic the different wind instruments breaks the lyrical interpretation of Jomelli's *Lamentations*. The pantomime is thus the most condensed and energetic expression of the different themes of alienation that permeate *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Whilst alienation at its most extreme paradoxically shifts into its opposite, into an experience of aesthetic identification, empathy and absorption never last and are broken up again into disillusion and distance. If finally the 'true nature' of the Nephew and simultaneously a 'nature' unalienated by mimetic representation seemed to reveal itself, such an experience is immediately counteracted by becoming 'denatured'. I will discuss the mechanism of such an oscillation between identification and alienation with more focus in the last section of this chapter.

#### 4.2 LE NEVEU'S WORLD OF ALIENATION

The Nephew's mental alienation is not a phenomenon treated in isolation; it is inextricably linked with an analysis of alienation as a wider social phenomenon. Subjective expression and objective manifestation of the phenomenon of alienation go hand in hand. Like a sponge the Nephew figure soaks up the alienated behavioural patterns of social life. Like a broken mirror he refracts what he sees, contorting and aggrandising the alienated distortions of reality. The Nephew's escape into an excessive performance piece of operatic pantomime is therefore not an escape act into psychosis. His subjective response to an unbearable situation functions at a more abstract level of textual understanding as a condensed aesthetic configuration of the grotesque madness implied in the realities of a world outside. The Nephew only *integrates* the theatrical alienations experienced in order to *extebrate* them, thereby provoking his interlocutors into confrontations with their dismissed alienated status.

Such a realist method of philosophy and of literature belongs to the repertory of the cynic; not of the nihilistic type dissected by Peter Sloterdijk in the *Critique of Cynical Reason*<sup>346</sup>, but to the tradition of Socrates and Menippean satire. The Nephew, and thus Diderot, is still concerned with undermining power structures, their ideological hypocrisy. What comes under attack in the Nephew's tirades of negativity are the taboo zones of social convention, the narcissism of a bourgeois moralism, and the self-contradictory character of a new system of values. The question pushed to an extreme in *Le Neveu* is how a materialist and naturalist conception of man can still integrate a notion of morals; how sociality and a subject of unlimited drives can be reconciled.

In the following section I will discuss a critique of alienation that is spelt out in *Le Neveu*, its different aspects, its definition and its connection to Rousseau's concerns with the problem of alienation. Here we have a new awareness of alienation as a social phenomenon which becomes condensed in the mind of Rousseau to a specific object of critique. As opposed to Marxist *Entfremdung*, the problematic of alienation is mediated mainly through the Nephew's preoccupation with the metaphors and themes of the

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<sup>346</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, foreword Andreas Huyssen, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Sloterdijk's project is a critique of cynicism as failed ideology critique.

*theatrum mundi*. However, the characteristics of this *theatrum mundi* are not entirely dissimilar from a Marxist analysis of alienation. The major difference is that the very starting point is displaced: alienation in *Le Neveu* derives first of all from a critique of sociality *per se*, a kind of sociality that seems haunted by the unrealities of role play and illusion.

It has repeatedly been pointed out that the Nephew figure bears certain features of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>347</sup> Such a comparison I believe is incorrect, but it is true that *Le Neveu* could be understood as an extension of Diderot's discussion with Rousseau. Rousseau's critique of the contaminating influences of the theatre as an institution of delusion and narcissistic desire; his disquiet with the alienating forces arising from the inequalities inherent in sociality; the theme of self-contradiction arising in a socialised human subject that is torn between culture and nature, are widely reflected in the issues elaborated in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. The theoretical connection between alienation and theatricality, played out in the arguments of the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* and the anthropological thought of Rousseau, could be said to find a fictional stage in *Le Neveu de Rameau*.

Rousseau represents a philosophical figure, who, more than Diderot, can be seen as a direct predecessor of Marx. It is through Rousseau's anthropological preoccupation with the question of alienation that this term enters the socio-philosophical thought of Hegel and from there becomes a central concept in Marx's critique of the world of the bourgeois subject. Despite the fact that alienation, as in *Entfremdung*, first appears as a category, that is, as a proper scientific term, in the vocabulary of Hegel, Marx explicitly refers to Rousseau when first including the term into his linguistic repertory. Alienation describes Rousseau's differentiation between the pre-historical or pre-institutional human being as 'existence physique et indépendante' and the 'existence partielle et morale' of the socialised human being.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> See for example, Donal O'Gorman (1971), pp. 136-84.

<sup>348</sup> Marx, 'Zur Judenfrage', in *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1957), p. 370; as quoted by Friedrich Müller, *Entfremdung: Zur anthropologischen Begründung der Staatstheorie bei Rousseau, Hegel, Marx* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1970), p. 26.

#### 4.2.1 ALIENATION AS 'LA VILE PANTOMIME DU MONDE'

The idea of the *pantomime du monde* represents perhaps the most eminent concept circumscribing the Nephew's world of alienation. Although the trope of the *theatrum mundi* is more appropriate to the world of a political system governed by the monarchy and the church, and is emblematic of the baroque, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, interestingly, is situated at an epistemological point in time, where the idea of the *pantomime du monde* begins to transcribe itself into an experience of alienation, an experience which will signify the cognitive and sensible concerns of modernity, especially in the work of Hegel and Marx. The transitional status of *Le Neveu* causes the strange amalgamation of modern and pre-modern characteristics that are difficult to locate. The concept of the *theatrum mundi* is tied to the world of the *ancien régime*, and yet the Nephew's theories and reactions to it seem to reflect the sensibilities of the modern reader. The theme of the *pantomime du monde* discussed by the Nephew and the Philosopher is an experience which the modern subject would identify as alienation, but eighteenth-century perception of the problem of alienation is in fact more concerned with the ways in which such a system is re-enacted and propelled rather than its sensibilities and effects.

As both Nephew and Philosopher agree: every social being acts according to the expectations of another. Nobody is themselves, but everyone wears the mask of the other's desires and projections. All sense of a true self becomes effaced, and the individual becomes disfigured: 'il saute, il rampe, il se tortille, il se traine; il passe sa vie a prendre et a exécuter des positions.'<sup>349</sup> (37) Such a system in *Le Neveu* seems situated outside the hierarchical powers of man, but is inscribed in the order of sociality itself. Here the Philosopher voices an even more bleak analysis of social existence. Whereas the Nephew believes that it is specifically the economically needy man who is forced to play and contort his body for the sake of survival, the Philosopher corrects him in this assumption. *La pantomime du monde* is far more universal, even the King will as a result of social dependency have to put on an act from time to time. Such social dependency is inescapable. A truly individualist and independent state is impossible.

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<sup>349</sup> NdR, p. 104.

External determination defines the identity of the individual who is implicated in the game of the *pantomime du monde*:

MOI. – Mais a votre compte, dis-je a mon homme, il y a bien des gueux dans ce monde cy; et je ne connois personne qui ne sache quelques pas de votre danse.

LUI. – Vous avez raison. Il n’y a dans tout un royaume qu’un homme qui marche, c’est le souverain. Tout le reste prend des positions.

MOI. – Le souverain? Encore y a-t-il quelque chose a dire? Et croyez vous qu’il ne se trouve pas, de tems en tems, a coté de lui, un petit pié, un petit chignon, un petit nez qui lui fasse faire un peu de pantomime? Quiconque a besoin d’un autre, est indigent et prend une position. Le roi prend une position devant sa maitresse et devant Dieu; il fait son pas de pantomime. Le ministre fait le pas de courtisan, de flatteur, de valet ou de gueux devant son roi. La foule des ambitieux dansent vos positions, en cent manieres plus viles les unes que les autres, devant le ministre. [...] Ma foi, ce que vous appelez la pantomime des gueux, est le grand branle de la terre.<sup>350</sup> (38)

The dancer of the *pantomime du monde* becomes decentred. Like the courtier-marionette of the *Paradoxe*, his actions evolve only relative to the other. The other condones what is right and wrong, what is beautiful and ugly and what is good and what is bad. Such an overpowering effect of the other who is always there to scrutinise, to expect and to desire, puts the individual under the constant pressure of self-contradiction. The Nephew must either lose his dignity or be asocial. Since the latter is no option, he is locked in constant imbalance and fragmentation.

Such socially imposed self-disintegration is most poignantly explored in the works of Rousseau who radicalises the contradiction between a self that is genuinely self because it is natural and a social self that is no longer a self because it is shaped through social influences: ‘Le Sauvage vit en lui-même; l’homme sociable toûjours hors de lui ne sait vivre que dans l’opinion des autres, et c’est, pour ainsi dire, de leur seul jugement qu’il tire le sentiment de sa propre existence.’<sup>351</sup> (39).

This Roussauian kind of ‘*Zerrissenheit*’ is even more fundamental than the *Zerrissenheit* and *Verworfenheit* identified by Hegel in the Nephew. Rousseau describes not only a particular state in the history of consciousness, but a fundamental

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p. 105

<sup>351</sup> ‘Discours sur l’origine et les fondemens de l’inégalité parmi les hommes’, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social. Ecrits politiques*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 193. From now on abbreviated as *Inégalité*.

internal rupture that afflicts history and social culture at large. The Nephew performs this internal split in excess, giving rise to both his internal restlessness as well as his cynical negativity. The Nephew knows only too well that once he performs a step in the *pantomime du monde*, he enters a system of externalised value.

What Rousseau invoked in his theoretical texts on the connection between alienation, sociality, and the theatre, has a profound presence in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. The theoretical utterances of the Nephew echo in large parts the theoretical concepts of Rousseau. For this reason I want to continue this investigation of the Nephew's 'world of alienation' by means of an excursion into Rousseau's analysis of alienation, which could be said to prefigure or at least to parallel the Nephew's vision of a world drowning in alienation and theatricality. However, as I will show in the last section of this chapter, the radicality of the Rousseauian critique of alienation cannot be applied to Diderot's thought at large. As the *Paradoxe* has already shown, alienation in Diderot connotes a positive attitude towards communication and social action, and is affirmed in *Le Neveu* as a more complex aesthetic.

Rousseau's discussion of the issue of alienation starts off with the utopia of a natural essence of man. Such nature is seen in opposition to culture, or rather in opposition to the socialised status of man. Social interdependence signifies the end of autonomy and freedom and the departure into the dynamics of mutual enslavement and exploitation. Social ties represent avenues for utilitarian interest and egotism. Sociability is only the mask for an unscrupulous exploitation of particularised interests. For Rousseau, there is no social body as natural community, but, as he demonstrates in the *Contrat social*, society can only survive through exterior laws and regulations that keep a check on a situation of eternal conflict. With the end of natural solitude, humanity has always already lost its most stable and happy condition, thus entering a process of civilisation which becomes inextricably linked with the phenomenon of alienation.

Rousseau defines natural man as a being which entirely isolated lacks any social attachments. Original consciousness is marked by an 'amour de soi' which functions as a natural instinct for survival within a non-social world ruled merely by the law of

nature. It is at this non-social stage that humanity finds utmost happiness, for everything it needs is provided by nature. Its physical state is healthy and robust and its condition is 'unalterable', independent from 'ces changemens brusques et continuels, qu'y causent les passions, et l'inconstance des Peuples réunis.'<sup>352</sup> (40) The isolated yet natural individual only needs to rely on an 'amour de soi' which is entirely focused on the subject alone. Happiness is guaranteed in this state of unbroken wholeness.<sup>353</sup>

Moreover, in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Rousseau argues that the state of nature is also pre-linguistic and pre-communicative. Since individuals are indifferent to one another, they lack language and any conception of abstraction and generality that accompanies the substitution of particulars for words. Abstraction from particular objects to general concepts is deemed a painful and unnatural process. The Nephew's music theory as 'cri animal de passion',<sup>354</sup> as a form of expression liberated from the frivolous decorum of wittiness and mannerism that emanate with the human decline into civilised society, points in the direction of Rousseau. Such natural communication occurs without rational mediation or reflection, speaking only 'le pur mouvement de la Nature'.<sup>355</sup> (42)

Rousseau's concept of communication stands in diametrical opposition to the *Paradoxe's* system of expression which is built on both rationality and mediating alienation. Rousseau, instead, only tolerates a mode of communication which is purely identificatory. The self expresses itself directly, unselfconsciously stimulating the other's natural 'pitié'. No selfish gain is expected from such expression of pure need. And in turn, no benefits are reflected upon in the face of helping the other in pain. Nor does compassion amongst 'l'homme de la nature' break the subject's unity. For the kind of compassion which Rousseau sees ignite from an innate human capacity of sensibility, is so complete that one individual comes to identify entirely with another's

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<sup>352</sup> *Inégalité*, p. 136.

<sup>353</sup> See Müller (1970), p. 26.

<sup>354</sup> 'C'est au cri animal de la passion, a nous dicter la ligne qui nous convient.' And at the end of the paragraph: 'Il nous le faut plus énergique, moins manieré, plus vrai. Les discours simples, les voix communes de la passion, nous sont d'autant plus nécessaires que la langue sera plus monotone, aura moins d'accent. Le cri animal ou de l'homme passionné leur en donne.' NdR, p. 86-7. (41)

<sup>355</sup> *Inégalité*, p. 155.



pains and fears. Such talent for identification, Rousseau contends, was more highly developed in the state of nature than in the state of reason:

C'est la raison qui engendre l'amour propre, et c'est la réflexion qui le fortifie; C'est elle que replie l'homme sur lui-même; c'est elle qui le sépare de tout ce qui le gêne et l'afflige: C'est la Philosophie qui l'isole; c'est par elle qu'il dit en secret, à l'aspect d'un homme souffrant, peris si tu veux, je suis en sureté.<sup>356</sup> (43)

Once the individual forms part of a community, the individual's 'amour de soi' becomes replaced by 'l'amour-propre', a form of 'self-love' which imports its selfish motivations into the communication and interaction with others. Once the human being has become part of social culture, it is decentred from its 'happy' self-sufficient condition. Its consciousness transforms into the mode of 'moi relative', a form of self which only exists in relation to others and is by virtue of its dependency always already alienated. I have already demonstrated in the previous section the Nephew's obsession with the dictates of the other. As Rousseau will surmise in *Emile*, 'amour-propre' will be responsible for the fact that this 'moi relative' will forever measure itself against the other.<sup>357</sup>

In the *Discours sur l'inégalité* Rousseau vividly sketches such changes for the worse in the example of the first communal dances. It is the domain of art which for Rousseau becomes equated with the domain of 'luxury'. With the first communal settlements, intimacies but also competition and jealousy arise. Sociability now becomes a habit and a dependency, seeking habitual outlets for its 'addiction'. The forum for such doomed leisurely congregations are the dances which would bring the first settlers together. Here, in a culture of leisurely pass-time, the early settlers developed the first notions of public esteem. This for Rousseau is the first step towards inequality, for each dancer will mirror himself in the gaze of the other and compare himself to the others and their social success. Rousseau is mainly concerned with the skills of sociability: eloquence, grace, and attractiveness of song and dance. Sociability becomes performance.

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>357</sup> See Müller (1970), p. 27.

*Le Neveu de Rameau* is permeated with many variations of this theme of an aestheticised corrupt sociality. The Nephew's cynical motto is that of an exchange between art and social grace. His profession as music teacher is key to the exploration of the motive of vanity epitomised by the arts, and often combined with the Rousseauian contempt for femininity. The position as music or dance teacher, as the Nephew's parody of his music lesson demonstrates, is to teach children social skills, manners which will advance their career in the realm of a public thriving on vanity and conventions of flattery. Social grace rather than artistic expression, is brought to perfection. Although such education is considered a superfluous luxury, it becomes indispensable for any success in a social domain where etiquette is precisely associated with affluence. The highlight of the Nephew's exemplary music lesson is the transaction of money by means of a polished arm movement taught by one of the Nephew's colleagues, the dancing teacher: 'Mon ecoliere me presentoit le petit cachet, avec la grace du bras et la reverance qu'elle avoit apprise du maitre a danser. Je le mettois dans la poche, pendant que la mere disoit: Fort bien, mademoiselle. Si Javillier étoit la, il vous applaudiroit.'<sup>358</sup> (44) The purpose of the music lessons consists essentially in turning out pretty, amusing and attractive girls, and equally the Nephew's role in society is to please, and as a fool to be unreasonable for the entertainment of his patrons. The Nephew's identification with the realm of femininity and representation reaches so far that his preference is for a daughter rather than a son, for here he could find a student measured with perfection to the teachings that he can provide best: 'Si c'étoit aussi bien une fille!'<sup>359</sup> (45) he exclaims when pondering over the corrupt future he envisions for his child. The intrinsic hysterical femininity of the Nephew also works in reverse. If the Nephew is identified with the role of the fool, with unreason and submissiveness, this role describing otherness within a system of male authority also reflects the role of women. The inherent falsity in the crawling flattery of the Nephew delineates the falsity attributed to women.

For Rousseau falsity and hypocrisy as an implication of social institutions become a theme adjacent to the problem of alienation. His distrust of the arts is expressed even

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<sup>358</sup> NdR, pp. 34-5.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

more sharply in the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*,<sup>360</sup> where he deplores the loss of human relations based on friendship and compassion on account of a social cosmos corrupt with artifice. The loss of transparency is mourned as the major price paid by modern society:

Avant que l'Art eut façonné nos manières et appris à nos passions à parler un langage apprêté, nos mœurs étoient rustiques, mais naturelles; et la différence des procédés annonçoit au premier coup d'œil celle des caracteres. La nature humaine, au fond n'étoit pas meilleure; mais les hommes trouvoient leur sécurité dans la facilité de se pénétrer reciproquement, et cet avantage, dont nous ne sentons plus le prix, leur épargnoit bien des vices.<sup>361</sup> (46)

Rousseau criticises modernity for annulling natural difference and replacing it with a difference resultant from culture. The individual is made to conform with fashions, ceremonies and conventions. For Rousseau, the artificial milieu of the public sphere is associated with an intrinsic experience of illusion or unreality. The self-subjection to the gaze of the other implies that one can no longer be what one is. Neither can one know the true self of the other. Even friendship is to be mistrusted, for everyone only ever plays for the other, enacting the other's desire, whilst secretly promoting their own personal interests.<sup>362</sup> This in turn leads to an increase in paranoia. Modern man comes to live in constant anxiety of the realities behind a friendly mask:

Plus d'amitiés sinceres; plus d'estime réelle; plus de confiance fondée. Les soupçons, les ombrages, les craintes, la froideur, la reserve, la haine, la trahison se cacheront sans cesse sous ce voile uniforme et perfide de politesse, sous cette urbanité si vantée que nous devons aux lumieres de notre siècle.<sup>363</sup> (47)

Behind the pretension of sociability lies an order which is cruel and destructive both for the individual as well as for the communal body as a whole. With the social realm becoming flawed by play-acting and sham, a world riddled by appearance arises. The subject is now caught in a constant conflict between being and appearing:

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<sup>360</sup> In Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social. Ecrits politiques*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 1-107. From now on abbreviated as *Sciences*.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>362</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the Rousseauian theme of a replacement of social transparency by a world of appearance, see Jean Starobinski: *La transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

<sup>363</sup> *Sciences*, pp. 8-9.

Il falut pour son avantage se montrer autre que ce qu'on étoit en effet. Etre et paroître devinrent deux choses tout à fait différentes et de cette distinction sortirent le faste imposant, la ruse trompeuse, et tous les vices qui en sont le cortége. D'un autre côté, de libre et independant qu'étoit auparavant l'homme, le voilà par une multitude de nouveaux besoins assujéti, pour ainsi dire, à toute la Nature, et surtout à ses semblables dont il devient l'esclave en un sens, même en devenant leur maître; riche, il a besoin de leurs services; pauvre, il a besoin de leurs secours, et la médiocrité ne le met point en état de se passer d'eux. Il faut donc qu'il cherche sans cesse à les intéresser à son sort, et à leur faire trouver en effet ou en apparence leur profit à travailler pour le sien...<sup>364</sup>  
(48)

For Rousseau inequality articulates itself as a problem of sociality. The state of sociability subjects any subject to slavery. In the same way in which *Le Neveu* spells out a theory of 'La pantomime du monde', enslaving even the sovereign, for Rousseau, the relations of men in the state of culture have become pervaded by mutual dependency and continual chains of master-slave interaction. Public opinion now comes to alienate the individual's self. The individual's consciousness is entirely shaped by the opinion of others. Exteriority determines its moral and psychological status, de-centring it from 'being for itself' ('être pour lui-même'), and transporting it into a situation where it loses both stability and reality. Such self-displacement functions both temporally as well as spatially. The sense of being 'hors de soi-même' goes hand in hand with a feeling of not living in the present. The subject's place, position, and identity are constantly put into question.<sup>365</sup>

Rousseau's embattled sociality becomes associated with what one would now call narcissism. Again, the metaphor of the modern subject as 'social artist' becomes pertinent. 'Tout Artiste veut être applaudi'<sup>366</sup> (49) and so does the actor of the public sphere, who only establishes relations to others in order to nourish his need for self-gratification. Self-deception and the deception of others thus become a norm. Contrary to the state of natural self-sufficiency, the individual's survival and progress now depend on a career through the games of society. Fundamental to this career is the

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<sup>364</sup> *Inégalité*, pp. 174-5.

<sup>365</sup> For a discussion of the question of 'lost identity' in Rousseau, see Alain Grosrichard, 'Ou suis-je?', 'Que suis-je?: Réflexions sur la question de la place dans l'œuvre de J.-J. Rousseau, à partir d'un texte des *Rêveries*', in *Rousseau et Voltaire en 1978: Actes du colloque international de Nice, Juin 1978* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1989), pp. 338-65.

<sup>366</sup> *Sciences*, p. 21.

individual's enslavement to the other's narcissism. 'L'amour propre' represents the socialised form of a self, which is avid for confirmation since it has already tasted the enjoyment of another's reassuring flattery and can no longer live without. Always anxious to be hurt and always hungry to be reaffirmed, the modern self manipulates the other's vulnerable yet greedy narcissistic disposition.

Rousseau engineers an equation between a scenario of constant social conflict and the notion of illusion. Sociality finds itself in a constant state of war, but this is not a war fought in the open, but a war fought in disguise. As a kind of superstructure of the dynamics of competition, hatred and jealousy, the illusion of a culture of friendly sociability comes to shroud the reality of social struggle. This world of appearance is intertwined with the struggle of material survival itself. Civilised man depends on an economy which is composed of a highly specialised scheme of production, a scheme which makes all participants dependent upon one another. The modern subject is forced to play sociable in order to materially survive. Relations that are anonymous and impersonal, based on a system of lies and appearance in which neither skills nor talents are cultivated, come to constitute Rousseau's concept of society at large.<sup>367</sup> In his conclusion to the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Rousseau reduces sociality to a mere world of appearance, in which the values of friendship and virtue are nothing but pretences: 'tout devient facticité et joué'.<sup>368</sup> (50)

There is no sociality without profound alienation. And there is no sociability without 'art and mummery', without 'frivolous and deceitful appearance'. The theatre is situated at the apex of such a civilisation of deluding sociability. For Rousseau, theatre is not only representative of interaction in the public sphere but also in essence the place where a world of deluding appearance is celebrated. It is the site where a world of phantasmagorical otherness is staged.

Rousseau's *Lettre sur les spectacles*, or *Lettre à M. d'Alembert* poignantly expresses the condemnation of theatre as the culmination of the malice stemming from an expanding

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<sup>367</sup> See Bronisław Baczko: *Rousseau: Solitude et Communauté*, trans. Claire Brendel-Lamhout (Paris: Mouton, 1974), specifically the chapter 'Le monde de l'aliénation', pp. 16-24.

<sup>368</sup> *Sciences*, p. 193.

public sphere in the eighteenth century. Here his critique of an alienated sociality is combined with an iconoclast attack on the theatre. Rousseau's scepticism is raised by theatre's institutionalisation as a forum for public forms of behaviour. This leads him to measures which strike one as astoundingly radical as well as totalitarian. Similar to the *Paradoxe*, but with a very different agenda, Rousseau's analysis of the theatre is most interesting at the crossover of a critique of public sociability and a Platonic examination of the ontological status of theatre. The prime motivation of the *Lettre sur les spectacles* is to protect the social well-being of the city of Geneva against the corrupting influences of the theatre, influences which, as Rousseau had been able to observe in Paris, would impose disorder and frivolity onto the social network of the city.

Rousseau deems theatre a culturally unnecessary pursuit, since it stands in opposition to the responsibilities and duties of work performed by the citizen. It destroys their love for work and cannot be framed in any utilitarian context. Even worse, as an activity of leisurely pass-time, it is both seductive as well as corrupting for those enduring the hardships and boredom of continual work. Theatre precisely undermines the purity of the Calvinist work ethic by alienating the subject's 'soi-meme' from its contentment with natural and simple 'tastes'. Frivolity begins to compete with duty and takes the individual out of the basics of a minimal economy.<sup>369</sup>

Theatre exacerbates a problem of alienation not only because it presents an 'alien' amusement, a leisure which does not belong to the traditional culture of Geneva; more importantly, it furthers an exteriorisation of the self. Rousseau states: 'Je n'aime point qu'on ait besoin d'attacher incessamment son cœur sur la Scène, comme s'il étoit mal à son aise au dedans de nous.'<sup>370</sup> (51) Theatre distracts and disperses the mind. Discontent

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<sup>369</sup> See Richard Sennett (1993); Sennett describes Rousseau's anxiety over the theatre as a forum for public leisure as follows: 'It is the place where rich men enjoy their fortunes through leisure activities and poor men imitate them; the very concentration of capital means a few people have genuine leisure and many people out of envy become 'idle' – that is, sacrifice their material interests for the sake of having a leisure 'style'. [...] In a state of leisure, men and women develop the *mœurs* of actors. The seriousness of losing independence is masked because people are at play: they experience pleasure in losing themselves. [...] The theatre, rather than licentious books or pictures, is a dangerous art form because it promotes the vices of men and women who do not have to struggle to survive. It is an agent of loss of self.' Pp. 117-8.

<sup>370</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Écrits sur la musique: La langue et le théâtre. Textes historiques et scientifiques*, vol. V, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 15. From now abbreviated as *Lettre*.

within his own inner self would lead the Genevan to attach himself to the exteriority of the theatrical scene. Alienation in this way proceeds from within to the outside, it makes the subject forget itself and become absorbed into an object which is strange and exterior to itself. The subject's natural interiority, its innermost happiness, is lost and replaced by a licentious and eccentric entity, an entity entirely determined by otherness. This new self will not only forget its true essence, it will cease to care for its most intimate and immediate relations. It will become part of the anonymous masses of a spectatorship that, just like the nature of drama itself, is concerned with the unrealities and vanities of appearance.

Rousseau feared that the citizens of Geneva would visit the theatre not only to indulge in dramatic fictions, but in order to become actors themselves in the fictions of the public gaze. Here they would find a forum perfectly measured to the need of displaying a self which is purely about representation, the representation of social status, economic power and social influence. However, this paradoxically involved that whilst the public actor would be under the illusion of being at his most sociable, he would in fact be at his most isolated:

L'on croit s'assembler au Spectacle, et c'est là que chacun s'isole; c'est là qu'on va oublier ses amis, ses voisins, ses proches, pour s'intéresser à des fables, pour pleurer les malheurs des morts, ou rire au dépend des vivans.<sup>371</sup> (52)

Alienation then becomes a twofold problem: it makes the subject spend emotion and interest on fictitious characters whilst erasing from consciousness the importance and presence of real associates. Interest in the theatre is directed to beings made out of nothing but fantasy, 'des Etres si gigantesque, si boursoufflés, si chimériques.'<sup>372</sup> (53)

Strikingly similar to Brecht, Rousseau is critical of the cathartic function of the theatre, which makes the subject waste empathetic energies in the name of illusion. The empathy felt in the face of tragedy is nothing but a fleeting sensation that will pass with the fading of theatrical illusion. No acts of humanity or pity arise from an emotion

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<sup>371</sup> *Lettre*, p. 16.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31. As already shown, in the *Paradoxe*, Diderot will go into great depth in exploring the phantasmagorical dimension of the theatre.

wasted in the theatre. On the contrary, theatrical illusion *sterilises* the potential for pity in the face of real suffering. Theatre, instead of drawing the human community closer together, increases distance and coldness: ‘on ne l’approche pas de nous, on l’en éloigne.’<sup>373</sup> (54) Such theatrical disruption in the social body seems at first sight to conflict with Brecht’s claim that ‘everyone should take distance to each other’, but in the end, both Brecht and Rousseau share the condemnation of the deluding force of theatrical empathy and catharsis. Both are critical of a mechanism of identification, which annuls interest in the real realm of social relations. To emote in identification with the fate-ridden hero is to emote in response to a situation from which we are quite comfortably exempted.

For Rousseau, the process of identification becomes even more precarious when the spectator absorbs himself in the representation of the villain character. In opposition to his denial of positive theatrical identification, he suggests that the representation of villainy leaves a corrupting imprint on reality. Theatre becomes in his mind attributed with demonic powers: ‘le théâtre, qui ne peut rien pour corriger les mœurs, peut beaucoup pour les altérer.’<sup>374</sup> (55). Alteration is always an alteration for the worse.

Contrasting Diderot’s dramaturgical theories, which advocated the spectator’s illusion, with Rousseau, an eighteenth-century theory of anti-identification begins to take shape. Rousseau and Brecht’s theories are almost identical, with the difference that Rousseau’s critique of identification is more directly linked to the problem of alienation. The subject erases itself, and becomes other by identifying with the character. It is literally decentred and ‘de-selfed’. Brecht, in opposition, is more concerned with the inflation of an ego supplementing the process of identification. The Rousseauian emphasis on the importance of the empathetic heart is not at all in keeping with the Brechtian ideological precepts. Nevertheless both share an iconoclast position in relation to theatrical illusion; both defend the sphere of real human action and socio-political responsibility and despise theatre’s inherent lure into emotional identification in the name of rationality.

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<sup>373</sup> *Lettre*, p. 24.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.



Rousseau recasts this problem of an alienating identification, an identification that alters the subject, in the acting profession itself. The actor embodies the principle of alienation, a theme, which will be unravelled more positively in the many layers of the *Paradoxe*'s cold actor. The actor falsifies himself, and appears different from what he really is. He costumes himself in the characteristics of the other. In keeping with Rousseau's theory of 'sociable competition' (and indeed the Nephew's desire to make himself 'other') his self-alienation brings him to take the other's place. He is an impostor, a trickster and a liar. Equipped with such talents the actor will no doubt make use of them not only on stage but also in real life.

But Rousseau's contempt for the actor's innate fraudulence has yet another twist. The actor's activity in simulating others makes him a soul-and-heart-less person. No authenticity of feeling can be expected from the public actor. Acting erases his very being and makes him an emotionless monster.

Mais un Comedien sur la Scène, étalant d'autres sentimens que les siens, ne disant que ce qu'on lui fait dire, représentant souvent un être chimérique, s'anéantit, pour ainsi dire, s'annule avec son Heros, et dans cet oubli de l'homme, s'il en reste quelque chose, c'est pour être le jouet des spectateurs.<sup>375</sup> (56)

If in the *Paradoxe* Diderot praises the actor's ability to annihilate his very own self in order to succeed in the tasks of public communication, for Rousseau this feature is unequivocally the symptom of a monstrous kind of psychology adhering to the process of acting. The actor becomes a toy within the devouring gaze of an audience, a slave, a servant such as the Nephew figure, a prostitute, or a criminal exposed to public humiliation on the scaffold. Such self-alienation inevitably involves the loss of dignity, a loss which is most painfully experienced and expressed by the Nephew. Rousseau moralises the actor's position as prostitute. Only the insincere man will sell his soul to the public for money: 'J'adjure tout homme sincère de dire s'il ne sent pas au fond de son ame qu'il y a dans ce trafic de soi-même quelque chose de servile et de bas.'<sup>376</sup> (57) It is precisely this kind of 'trafficking with the 'soi-même' to which the Nephew has

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

subjected himself, from which he makes a living but also suffers, because he knows that his status is no more than that of a commodity.

Rousseau thus inflates the idea of the *theatrum mundi* with new anxieties and worries. The stage no longer doubles the role games of the real world, but theatricality extends directly from the mimetic activity of actors on stage worsening the theatricalisation of a growing public sphere. Alienation is one of the key characteristics of the theatre, contributing severely to the degeneration of modern society. Theatrical alienation incorporated into social life gives birth to human monsters, who will unscrupulously betray and exploit each other while feigning sympathy and friendliness. Apart from having sacrificed their true selves in their hunts for pleasure and recognition, such monsters will also be apes, devoid of any originality and inventiveness. With the rise in leisure culture and the increase in surplus capital, work will fall into contempt. Sloth and frivolity will spread in epidemic dimensions. With the introduction of democratic principles everybody will try to gain the privileges of a leisurely life without work. Career in such a system depends to a large extent on the social status of the individual and especially its self-representation. Corruption, disorder and chaos were the new crises attributed by Rousseau to the modern cosmopolitan city. In order to preserve trustful relations within the city of Geneva, in order to protect the transparency of the community and make it politically governable, Rousseau decreed the censorship of the theatre.<sup>377</sup>

The *Lettre à d'Alembert* had been Rousseau's response to d'Alembert's article on Geneva in the *Encyclopédie*. Interestingly, his response marked the breaking point between the Encyclopedists and Rousseau.<sup>378</sup> Diderot was to adhere to the theatre, whilst Rousseau would move on to celebrate the authenticity of an isolated self. Diderot remained interested in the theatre, even if he did not close his eyes to the

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<sup>377</sup> On Rousseau's antitheatrical prejudice see elsewhere Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981), in particular the chapter 'The Case of Jean-Jacques Rousseau', pp. 256-294. On the *Lettre à d'Alembert* in the context of the eighteenth-century debates around the social and moral status of the theatre, see M. M. Moffat, *Rousseau et la querelle du théâtre au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Boccard, 1930).

<sup>378</sup> On the break between, Rousseau on the one hand, and Diderot, Grimm, Mme d'Épinay and Voltaire, on the other, see Norman L. Torrey, 'Rousseau's Quarrel with Grimm and Diderot', in *Essays in Honor of Albert Feuillerat*, ed. Henri Peyne, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1943), pp. 163-82.

problems that had been raised by Rousseau. Both the *Paradoxe* and *Le Neveu* thematise and analyse the ambivalence attached to the theatre. Both texts are concerned with the connection and exchangeability between the social actor and the actor on stage that had unnerved Rousseau. Yet, as I will show in the final section, neither of the texts sacrifices a celebration of theatricality for the sake of Rousseau's extreme anti-theatrical puritanism. In *Le Neveu*, theatricality will become an important aesthetic tool.

#### 4.2.II THE CONJUNCTURE BETWEEN SOCIAL AND MATERIAL ALIENATION

Rousseau proposed that with the arrival of social life, the sociable subject is not only forced to continually alienate itself in relation to others, but such inner conflict is aggravated by an increase of external conflict. In conjunction with the process of socialisation, the subject begins to move within an order of competition. If inequalities between individuals isolated from one another in the primeval state of nature were more or less neutralised, they would still create incisive changes within the sphere of social life. Differences in terms of possessions, and strength and talent bear no consequences on the development of humanity when dispersed and separated. But in society, differences become structural. They result in hierarchies and institutions of powers. Now the struggle for power begins within a system constructed out of masters and slaves.

The advanced state of alienation is thus marked by an entwinement of sociality, material inequality and the division of labour. As soon as one man owns more than what he requires the logic of alienation is further propelled. Social and material inequalities lead to jealousy and competition and inevitably exacerbate the war of sociality. With an increase of material power on the one side and an implementation of social interdependence on the other, the dynamics of a master-slave sociology fall into place. He who possesses more and who requires extra hands in order to fully harvest the profits of his productivity will have to make use of the labour of another. Inequality now becomes the natural law of society.

Here one can identify another source of alienation, one which slightly differs from Rousseau's initial analysis of alienation. Alienation based on sociality grows into an alienation based on material inequality. Such a difference – the distinction between alienation as a universal principle of sociality and an alienation caused by material inequality - is also expressed in the previously quoted passage of the *pantomime du monde* where despite the bewildering agreement between the two interlocutors one incongruity remains.<sup>379</sup> Whilst the idealist Philosopher universalises the idea of the *pantomime du monde*, as an inevitable anthropological condition of social life, the Nephew is more interested in the pantomime of beggars. For him, it is poverty which forces him to contort body and soul for the sake of his patron's entertainment. It is 'hunger', the most primeval force of nature, which, as a result of an unequal society, leads the Nephew to 'de-nature' himself in twists and bends:

Mais s'il est dans la nature d'avoir appetit; car c'est toujours a l'appetit que j'en reviens, a la sensation qui m'est toujours presente, je trouve qu'il n'est pas du bon ordre de n'avoir pas toujours de quoi manger. Que diable d'oeconomie, des hommes qui regorgent de tout, tandis que d'autres qui ont un estomac importun comme eux, et pas de quoi mettre sous la dent. Le pis, c'est la posture contrainte ou nous tient le besoin. L'homme necessiteux ne marche pas comme un autre; il saute, il rampe, il se tortille, il se traine; il passe sa vie a prendre et a executer des positions.<sup>380</sup> (58)

Such words strike one as profoundly Marxist. But the Nephew's analysis of a social economy is also one which voices one of the most fundamental principles of an enlightened humanitarianism. If nature makes every human being equal, why should human economy be unequal to the extent that some cannot fulfil their natural needs whilst others overindulge in luxury? If nature decrees that every human being is free, why do some have to bow before others? How can the most natural needs lead to enslavement? All the Nephew can see amongst mankind is masters and slaves: 'Je ne vois d'un pole a l'autre que des tyrans et des esclaves.'<sup>381</sup> (59) Each is the other's wolf. The principle of society is that of a violent law of the fittest: 'Dans la nature, toutes les especes se devorent, toutes les conditions se devorent dans la société. Nous faisons justice les un des autres, sans que la loi s'en mêlé.'<sup>382</sup> (60) Materialism is here thought

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<sup>379</sup> See p. 173.

<sup>380</sup> NdR, p. 103-4.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p. 37-8.

through to its ultimate conclusion. Justice and equality do not come ‘naturally’ with nature. The Marxist analysis of a war of the classes is here already recognised. For Rousseau, too, the problem of human enslavement remains unresolved. In the *Contrat social*, he can only deliver an analysis of the structural principles of society, offering possibilities of legitimising, rather than resolving a social crisis of alienation:

L’homme est né libre, et par-tout il est dans les fers. Tel se croit la maître des autres, qui ne laisse pas d’être plus esclave qu’eux. Comment ce changement s’est-il fait? Je l’ignore. Qu’est-ce qui peut le rendre légitime? Je crois pouvoir résoudre cette question.<sup>383</sup> (61)

This could also be said to be the starting point for Marx, in his case, not to legitimate an alienated distribution of material power within society, but to correct it and by means of insurrection to restore material equality and realise man’s potential of ‘species-being’. But for Rousseau such ‘un-alienation’ of society would still not resolve a problem far more difficult to remedy: Rousseau’s primary understanding of alienation as a result of sociality.

#### 4.2.III FETISHISM: THE NEPHEW’S HYMN TO GOLD

Although it would be incorrect to interpret the Nephew as an unequivocal voice of proto-Marxism when he deplores the contortions of slavery inflicted by poverty,<sup>384</sup> his critique of material inequality extends to another analysis which strikes one as fundamental to an insight into the psycho-sociological constitution of a society which is beginning to be dominated by the power of capital. This critique is articulated in the Nephew’s hymn on ‘gold’. Here one has the sense that *Le Neveu’s* alienated society is indeed one and the same which half a century later will prompt Marx’s critique of capitalism.<sup>385</sup> In this the Nephew represents the symptom of the irresolvable conflicts

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<sup>383</sup> ‘Du Contract social; ou principes du droit politique. Par J. J. Rousseau, citoyen de Geneve’, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes III: Du contrat social. Ecrits politiques*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 351.

<sup>384</sup> See Elisabeth Fontenay (1982), ‘Stomach Monsters’, p. 172. Fontenay points out that the Nephew craves for more than just the satisfaction of needs, his desire is for what the aristocrat enjoys, for luxury.

<sup>385</sup> Marx was indeed fascinated by *Le Neveu*; see his letter to Engels of 15/4/1869, ‘Wegbereitende Stimmen: Frühe Urteile über Diderot. Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Hegel, Michelet, Marx, Rosenkranz, Taine, Barbey d’Aurevilly, Hofmannsthal’, in Jochen Schlobach, *Denis Diderot* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), pp. 24-5.

inflicted by capitalism, the proletarian voice, even if he is also identified with the typology of the ascendant bourgeoisie. *Le Neveu* is situated at a point in time where monarchy still persists, but the new bourgeois democratic implying a new ideal of freedom is beginning to establish itself. If such an order had been construed by the Enlightenment in opposition to the monarchic system precisely for the virtue of reason, for Marx, Slavoj Žižek writes, ‘this *irrational* element of the existing society, was, of course, the proletariat, *the unreason of reason itself*, the point at which the Reason embodied in the existing social order encounters its own unreason.’<sup>386</sup>

The Nephew praises the ‘quasi-divine’ role of money in a kind of incantation. His devotion to the sacred coin is embedded in the wider discussion on pedagogics. The charm exerted on him by gold is the prime value which he aims to transmit to his son:

De l’or, de l’or. L’or est tout; et le reste, sans or, n’est rien.<sup>387</sup> Aussi au lieu de lui farcir la tete de belles maximes qu’il faudroit qu’il obliât, sous peine de n’etre qu’un gueux; lors que je possede un louis, ce qui ne m’arrive pas souvent, je me plante devant lui. Je tire le louis de ma poche. Je lui montre avec admiration. J’eleve les yeux au ciel. Je baise le louis devant lui. Et pour lui faire entendre mieux encore l’importance de la piece sacrée, je lui begaye de la voix; je lui designe du doigt tout ce qu’on en peut acquerir, un beau fourreau, un beau toquet, un bon biscuit. Ensuite je mets le louis dans ma poche. Je me promene avec fierté; je releve la basque de ma veste; je frappe de la main sur mon gousset; et c’est ainsi que je lui fais concevoir que c’est du louis qui est la, qui nait l’assurance qu’il me voit.<sup>388</sup> (62)

Enthralled with the magical power of money, the Nephew does not speak but sing the formula of gold. The fourfold repetition of the word ‘gold’ and the juxtaposition of the extreme alternatives ‘everything’ or ‘nothing’ create a religiously hypnotic tone. The Nephew’s conjuration of the innate powers of money almost seems to demonstrate in the most literal sense what Marx meant by the fetishisation of capital. Money in capitalism takes on a role which formerly had been associated with religion. As if to animate the superior power of money, which Marx defined in its potential to *be*

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<sup>386</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) p. 23. In this he is in agreement with Michel Foucault who elaborates exactly this dialectic of ‘unreason within reason’ in relation to *Le Neveu* in *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), pp. 199-220.

<sup>387</sup> Jean Fabre remarks in an annotation, that this line is a variation of the *Barbier de Séville*: ‘Figaro, lorsqu’il s’écrie: “De l’or, mon Dieu! de l’or, c’est le nerf de l’intrigue” (*Barbier de Seville*, I, 6) parle en valet de comédie; Rameau, à la fois abjet et puéril, en illuminé et en poète.’ NdR, p. 229.

<sup>388</sup> NdR, p. 92.

exchange value rather than to *have* it,<sup>389</sup> the Nephew sings his charm with quasi-religious fervour, paying tribute to the one element which determines the rest of a universal order, perhaps the key symbol that stands for a new *theatrum mundi* no longer ruled by absolute monarchy but by the power of capital.

This fetishistic explication of money seems to follow a structure that is associated with the notion of theatricality: with regard to exchange value, it *appears to be* rather than to *have*. In a strange way, it almost surpasses the kind of appearance produced by the theatre by performing a trick which theatre itself is incapable of. It transgresses theatricality itself by being *supra-theatrical*. If the actor, or the Nephew, as a subject of constant self-alienation, is always split between being and appearing, such an internal fracture seems healed in the status of money, and offers itself as the perfect fetish within an otherwise broken universe. Whilst the Nephew stagnates at the level of an unfulfilled kind of theatricality, therefore suffering constant frustration, the illusion of theatricality implied in money seems to be fully consummated. Money does not play at *having* an exchange value, but once it is brought into use it *is* value.

Accursed and sacred at once, money thus demonstrates a power of theatricality which enchants the Nephew as one who is entirely identified with the principle of enactment, even if such enchantment is not immune to a slight sense of hysteria and cynicism. Whereas the Nephew instrumentalises his skill of self-alienation for the purpose of bettering his social status, but in fact humiliates himself to the most inferior and abject levels of alienation, the teleology of money moves in the opposite direction. Here the illusion of being becomes so deluding that illusion itself appears negated and transgression onto another level of reality occurs. At the level of economical practice the illusory status of money seems overcome and it is not only treated as value, but as absolute value, a value which even supersedes the value of real goods. For the Nephew, who is locked in a universe haunted by appearance and theatricality, money as a quasi-

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<sup>389</sup> See Etienne Balibar (1995), p. 59: ‘...the whole world of human objects produced or consumed seem to *have* and exchange-value, money, for its part, seems to *be* exchange-value itself, and by the same token intrinsically to possess the power to communicate to commodities which ‘enter into relation with it’ that virtue or power which characterizes it. That is why it is sought for its own sake, hoarded, regarded as the object of a universal need attended by fear and respect, desire and disgust (*auri sacra fames*: ‘the accursed thirst for gold’, wrote the Latin poet Virgil in a famous line quoted by Marx, and in Revelation money is clearly identified with the Beast, i.e. with the devil.)

theatrical agent itself attains divine qualities. This is not because it doubles the situation of the theatrical subject but because it appears to overcome it. Thus money produces a kind of *supra-theatre* in which illusion becomes reality, in which a breakthrough into real transformation seems to have been performed.

This kind of *supra*-theatricality of money, its simultaneously accursed and sacred quality, is of course what for Marx makes it such a dangerous agent in capitalism. Its status of abstraction becomes subdued in the process of exchange. As Žižek writes with reference to Sohn-Rethel's analysis of the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism:

during the act of exchange, individuals proceed *as if* the commodity is not submitted to physical, material changes; as if it is excluded from the natural cycle of generation and corruption; although on the level of their 'consciousness' they 'know very well' that this is not the case. The easiest way to detect the effectivity of this postulate is to think the way we behave towards the materiality of money: we know very well that money, like all other material objects, suffers the effects of use, that its material body changes through time, but in the social *effectivity* of the market we none the less *treat* coins as if they consist 'of an immutable substance, a substance over which time has no power, and which stands in antithetic contrast to any matter found in nature.'<sup>390</sup>

Žižek explains the strange illusory status of money in correspondence to the functioning of the symbolical order. Money's 'exchange abstraction *is not* thought, but it has the form of thought.'<sup>391</sup> In order for commodity exchange to work effectively the real abstraction of money must be eclipsed from consciousness. The moment the exchange of the commodity is realised, it is at its most 'real', and this reality comes to occupy the blind spot of the exchange agents. 'One could say that the abstractness of their action is beyond realisation by the actors because their very consciousness stands in the way. Were the abstractness to catch their minds their action would cease to be exchange and the abstraction would not arise.'<sup>392</sup> Theoretically they know, practically they do not know. Žižek deduces from here a definition of ideology based not on 'false consciousness', an illusory representation of reality that is based on false knowledge that could in fact be easily unmasked, but an understanding of ideology which is all-

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<sup>390</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 18. Žižek compares the consciousness involved in commodity fetishism with the Freudian formula of 'fetishistic disavowal': 'I know that Mother has not got a phallus, but still...[I believe she has got one].' P. 18.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>392</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel: *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 26-7. As quoted by Žižek (1989), p. 20.



pervasive of reality itself. Such an illusion ingrained in reality itself can be theoretically known by the subject, but for this reality to be reproduced it must knowingly ignore its illusory basis:

This is probably the fundamental dimension of 'ideology': ideology is not simply a 'false consciousness', an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological' – *'ideological' is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence – that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals 'do not know what they are doing. 'Ideological' is not the 'false consciousness' of a (social) being but this being itself in so far as it is supported by false consciousness.'*<sup>393</sup>

A fetishistically constituted reality goes beyond the dichotomies between reality and illusion and introduces the idea of a field of reality which in itself is supported by illusory agencies. The Nephew's figuration at large could be said to be situated in such a fetishistic context. Time and again he demonstrates that he is conscious of the mechanisms behind the pantomimic enslavement of social action, and yet it is also clear that when he acts out his pantomimes his theoretical knowledge escapes him. Despite his theory of pantomimic enslavement, he succumbs too easily to the automatic enactments of luxury daydreams, luxuries that are inevitably associated with wealth.

This eclipse of theory by practice contributes to the 'schizophrenic' disposition of the Nephew, to both his cynicism as well as his suffering when he slides into mental alienation. Although he is conscious and he tells the secrets behind the social facade more bluntly than the average person, he will participate in the social charade at the very point he feels he needs to thus representing precisely the very average of society. The symbolical order, which ties together the pleasure principle and the gratification of desire by means of self-contortion, automatically produces the appropriate kind of actions when demanded. As the Philosopher concludes with frustration at the close of the text: 'Vous dansez, vous avez dansé et vous continuerez de danser la vile pantomime'<sup>394</sup> (63) At the very point when destitution or desire take over, he will without scruple forget his knowledge and 'buy' into the symbolical structuring of the pantomime of the world.

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<sup>393</sup> Žižek (1989), p. 21.

<sup>394</sup> NdR, p. 107.

What is interesting in money's fetishistic relation between reality and illusion, is a kind of temporal 'seriality', which is also characteristic of the structure of the Nephew's movement through the text. Theoretically the agents of commodity transaction know about the true functioning of the social relations abstracted in the coin, but at the moment of exchange they cannot know because this knowledge would obstruct the movement of exchange itself. Such a structure is divided into temporal duality. At the moment I know, I cannot do. At the moment I do, I must not know. A logic of temporal succession governs the relation between consciousness and action. It can only be one or the other which surfaces at a time. The Nephew's movements through the text proceed exactly according to this temporal dichotomy, splitting the texts into a series of different levels of consciousness and forms of expression, at the same time fragmenting the continuity of the Nephew's identity. It is almost impossible to identify the Nephew who goes off in an automatic enactment of a pantomimic flattery with the Nephew who puts forth so eloquently the theory of the 'pantomime du monde'. Moreover, as I have already mentioned in the section on the Nephew's 'alienation d'esprit', the syntax of the Nephew's musical pantomime is structured exactly according to this principle of serialisation.

Whether or not the alienating theatricality of the Nephew's world is predetermined by the centrality of money or whether it is structured through a kind of self-perpetuating illusory aspect of sociality, I cannot determine here. What is interesting nevertheless is that the structure of fetishism, which for Marx is connected with the magical quality in capitalism, is also at work in the way in which the *theatrum mundi* of *Le Neveu de Rameau* is structured. In this, illusion is integrated into the textures and the making of reality itself. The subjects of this world are not entirely unaware of the unreality that is lurking amidst their reality. They even know that they participate in the reproduction of its structure and they can speak of it with eloquence and irony, but they switch into an entirely other mode of being and consciousness once they proceed to become actors in that very world.

#### 4.2.IV AUTOMATISM: THE INSCRIPTION OF ALIENATION IN BODILY ACTION

It is fascinating that the Nephew's adoration of money becomes also the prime principle of educating his son, 'un enfant destiné à vivre à Paris. [...] Je veux que mon fils soit heureux; ou ce qui revient au même honoré, riche et puissant.'<sup>395</sup> (64) Instead of training him to learn a profession, he attempts to impart him with both the desire for luxury as well as an understanding of the fetish position of money. His son's specific talents are not worth any consideration. What is more important is to 'addict' him at an early stage to the habits of commodity fetishism.

Habituation to the pleasure principle of a culture of consumerism implies the introjection of the fetishistic value of the coin. It is the sacred coin which will buy his son his every wish, 'a beautiful dress, a beautiful hat, a good biscuit'. Moreover, the absolute value associated with the sacred coin will appear to satisfy all fantasies of omnipotence.<sup>396</sup> Once his son has been conditioned to internalise the value of money as a quasi-divine principle, he will lack nothing, not even the Philosopher's appreciation and respect.<sup>397</sup> *What* his son does, does not matter as long as he is in possession of money, for all other values, even moral value, will be subsumed under the absolute value of money.

However, if the circuiting of his son's economy of desire with the economy of capital is best achieved by a pedagogic of conditioning, pantomime as the Nephew's preferred form of expression becomes here the perfect tool of education. The Nephew's educational programme of commodity fetishism consists in a series of gestures which express the typical actions of handling money:

Ensuite je mets le louis dans ma poche. Je me promène avec fierté; je relève la basque de ma veste; je frappe de la main sur mon gousset; et c'est ainsi que je lui fais concevoir que c'est du louis qui est là, qui naît l'assurance qu'il me voit.<sup>398</sup> (65)

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>396</sup> See Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les iconoclastes* (Paris: Seuil, 1978). Goux links the fetishistic value of money to the Sadean fantasy of omnipotence. Money, in Sade, becomes eroticised, representing the absolute value for any fantasy of *jouissance*. See the section '*La jouissance Sadienne de l'or*', pp. 177-82.

<sup>397</sup> See NdR, p. 93; RN, p. 111.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

If commodity fetishism is realised in practice rather than consciousness, the Nephew chooses the right pedagogical tool to teach his son survival skills and the means to success within capitalist society. The money ritual has to be absorbed into the subjective tissues of his son's body, for it is the body first that must desire an object in order for the mind to submit to the entire script of fetishism. A detailed breakdown of the physical actions that typify the commodity fetishist, choreographed in a pantomimic routine exercise represents a better lesson than any theory could communicate.

In the aesthetics of the pantomime, nature meets the artifice of culture: the Nephew knows very well, that even if the short-circuiting between desire and the fulfilment through the commodity is nothing natural, it can be made second nature by physical habituation at a level where a distinction between natural subjectivity and artificial exteriority no longer matters. Pantomimic conditioning is nothing more than an adaptation to actual routines, routines that exist in social reality. These artificial routines will appear natural once they are re-enacted in the sphere of exteriority. These will be movements which will make collective movement flow more elegantly rather than jerk and disrupt it. In the learning programme of money fetishism, mirroring equals recognition. Alienation equals identificatory inclusion, the 'coming home' into the social cosmos of capitalism. To go back once more to Slavoj Žižek, the kind of meeting between interiority and exteriority which the Nephew's pedagogical efforts are trying to accomplish is based on the exteriority of belief itself: 'it is embodied, materialised, in the effective functioning of the social field'. In order for the social field to function, it must be supported by a complementary system of interiority. This, Žižek writes:

...was already articulated by Pascal, one of Althusser's principal points of reference in his attempt to develop the concept of 'Ideological State Apparatuses'. According to Pascal, the interiority of our reasoning is determined by the external, nonsensical 'machine' – automatism of the signifier, of the symbolical network in which the subjects are caught: 'For we must make no mistake about ourselves: we are as much automaton as mind...Proofs only convince the mind; habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed. It inclines the automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it.' (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Harmondsworth, 1966, p. 274)<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Žižek (1989), p. 36.

Once the subject is initiated, it loses its awareness that it is imitating at all, since the belief it will bring to its representations will be prefigured by the belief structures of collective habit. No matter how delusional, how malign these constructions are – as Rousseau would surmise – belief is made real by real action. In order to be ‘believable’ and ‘realistic’ at the level of what collective habit demands, the subject must go on reduplicating the given habits and it will feel itself approved by the virtue of its own pragmatic ‘realism’.

However, what the Nephew offers as his pedagogic of fetishism is as profound as it is sarcastic, and as liberating as it is constraining. On the one hand, the initiation of his son into the symbolical script of fetishism means nothing less than an initiation into automatism. Automatism promises liberation from the self-alienation experienced by the Nephew when his consciousness splits into two, when he divides himself between external appearance and internal surveillance. One could argue that if his mimetic routines were to reach the level of automatism, his mimetic contortionism and self-prostitution would no longer be riddled by conflict.

On the other hand, whilst the Nephew intends to educate his son to become a successful automaton, one must take into account that he himself does not reside on the side of ‘automatic’ success. Once he has failed as an aspiring composer, he assumes the role of the ‘wise fool’, situated outside the universe of appearance. His analysis of the phenomenon of the automaton therefore becomes most acute in his polemics against his patron Bertin:

Et puis vous n’avez pas d’idée de la petaudiere dont il s’agit. Imaginez un melancolique et maussade personnage,[...] enveloppé dans deux ou trois tours de robe de chambre; qui se plait à lui meme, a qui tout deplait [...]; qui considere froidement les grimaces plaisantes de mon visage, et celles de mon jugement qui sont plus plaisantes encore; car entre nous, ce père Noël, ce vilain benedictin si renommé pour ses grimaces; malgré ses succes a la Cour, n’est,[...] a comparaison de moi, qu’un polichinelle de bois. J’ai beau me tourmenter pour attendre au sublime des Petites-Maison, rien n’y fait. Rira t-il? ne rira-t-il pas? voila ce que je suis forcé de me dire au milieu de mes contorsions; et vous pouvez juger combien cette incertitude nuit au talent. Mon hyprocondre, la tete refoncée dans un bonnet de nuit qui lui couvre les yeux, a l’air d’une pagode immobile a laquelle on auroit attaché un fil au menton [...]. On attend que le fil se tire; et il ne se tire point; ou il s’il arrive que la machoire, s’entrouvre, c’est pour articuler un mot desolant, un mot qui vous apprend que vous n’avez point été aperçu, et que toutes vos singeries sont perdues; ce mot est la reponse a une question

que vous lui aurez faite il y a quatre jours; ce mot dit, le ressort mastoïde se detend, et la machoire se renferme...

Puis il se mit a contrefaire son homme; il s'etoit placé dans une chaise, la tete fixe, le chapeau jusque sur ses paupieres, les yeux a demi-clos, les bras pendants, remuant sa machoire, comme un automate, et disant:

'Oui, vous avez raison, mademoiselle. Il faut mettre la finesse la.'<sup>400</sup> (66)

The Nephew uses the idea of the automaton to parody his patron. Again, this is not done *theoretically* but practically. Only the Philosopher will spell out the concept of automatism explicitly. The satire of the beggar's pantomime of gracious flattery is here complemented with the satire of the automatised 'great'. Monkey slave and automaton patron meet each other in mimetic competition. The one over-animated by his duty to entertain others, the other deadened by boredom and overindulgence: both form part of a human condition defined by mimetic repetition. The slaves of social status and affluence stiffen up into wooden marionettes at court and their servants have the duty to compensate them for the lack of vital energy suffered. Such master-slave relation is characterised by an imbalance in energy. It is paradoxically the Nephew's lively skill of aping others, including the likes of Bertin himself, which causes his patron's apathy. But such transmission of vitality is only superficial, the Nephew can console himself. Whilst he is alive Bertin remains wooden, lethargic and hypochondriac. A career in society or the court requires the enslavement by a protocol which deadens the flow of life energy and sensibility, a process of mechanisation from which the dis-empowered are free. But whilst the notion of the automaton is clearly employed as a figure to attack the rich and the powerful, it is curious that the Bertin-automaton is depicted in yet another pantomimic act, which seems quite automated itself, and which indicates that the difference between masters and slaves is perhaps not that large after all.<sup>401</sup>

The caricature of Bertin is conjured up by an act of reminiscence which is itself triggered by a kind of automatism. Once more, the Nephew becomes hypnotised by the rhythmic repetitions of his linguistic expression. The automating key this time is 'mot': 'un mot desolant, un mot qui vous apprend que vous n'avez point aperçu..., ce mot dit, le

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<sup>400</sup> NdR, p. 47-8.

<sup>401</sup> On *Le Neveu*'s theme of habit and automatism see elsewhere, Merle, L. Perkins, *Diderot and the Time-Space Continuum: His Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1982), p. 120.

ressort mastoïde se renferme'. Instead of the anticipated speech act, which should now follow, we are made to observe in slow motion the tedious mechanical process which precedes Bertin's linguistic utterance. The Nephew's language dries up and his automatic gestures take over.

If his account has already worked to conjure up a visual scene for the reader, this scene is now fully brought into presence by the Nephew becoming the Bertin-automaton himself. The automatism of language has facilitated a kind of self-hypnosis. Identity and role become indistinguishable; automaton and self-automation are identical. The movement of language transgresses into the movement of movement. Linguistic repetition is used to the point of undoing itself, where it becomes the pure means of triggering an entirely other scene, bringing to the fore the imaginary memory of the automaton. The following impersonated words are already uttered with the voice and the stilted movements of the automaton: 'Oui, vous avez, raison, mademoiselle. Il faut mettre la finesse la.' The Nephew ends up miming mimesis at its most static form and it becomes clear that he is just as much subject to the process of automation as his patron is.

The idea of the automaton is thus presented in an incredibly layered way. Whilst throughout *Le Neveu de Rameau* automation figures as a psychic mechanism of imagination and memory, integral to a creative kind of mimesis or self-alienation, the Nephew's pantomime of the automaton introduces the idea of automation as the dehumanising monstrous outcome of social mimesis and inequality. Here, both phenomena are encased in one action. Whereas normally such automatic absorption into other levels of reality and personality is indicative of the Nephew's compulsion to 'dramatise', the passage of the automaton goes one step further and shows the results of the process of social mimesis as one that is uncompromisingly applied in social reality. In the hallucinatory automatism, miming is supported by an invigoration and expansion of body and soul, but in the example of the automaton, the opposite is shown: body and soul rigidify into the mechanical movements of a socially dictated prototypical pattern.

It is however true that despite becoming identified with the idea of the automaton, the Nephew's representation is also a satirical demonstration (as Brecht would say, *Zuschaukunst*). This demonstration becomes most interesting in its processual character. The representation of the automaton highlights the temporal course of events through which the Nephew becomes alienated into another entity. Microscopically the description zooms into the moment where transformation occurs, from a subject which has been in control of itself to one that becomes ruled by external force.

Here we return to a quasi-dramaturgical form, which is not too dissimilar from the Brechtian formula of the *gestus*, but again, as with regard to the 'similarities' previously discussed, also not all that similar. Both the Diderotian automaton as well as the Brechtian *gestus* describe the inscription of social ritual into bodily texture. They indicate a de-individualised constitution of character, conditioned by the strata of collective action. For Brecht, *gestus* shows the character in its social construction. For Diderot, automation reveals the individual's social conditioning. Brecht emphasised that *gestus* equals the freezing of psychological movements and emotions into a movement which conveys the typical action within a specific situation. The Diderotian figure of the automaton literally delineates the moment at which movement stagnates into automation, the moment where individualism is alienated into machinery action. And precisely here lies the difference.

Whereas *gestus* could perhaps be equated with the trope of the automaton, in that it replicates automatically a specific pattern of movements dependent on the social circumstances in which a figure is inscribed, the automaton is not a *gestus*. Rather, the figure of the automaton is interested in the subject's process of losing an individualised form of motion in favour of collective automation. It is interested in the moment of loss and in the *process* of alienation itself, in the recognition of the transitional moment at which alienation has just become manifest. What is put into relief is the importance of temporal structure. An obsession with minute processes of change and alteration that may suddenly manifest themselves, unexpectedly or not, makes a detailed observation of the temporal structure indispensable.



This interest in the moment of the loss of subjectivity and identity entails a certain sense of anxiety. Inevitably, the automaton connotes a pejorative notion whereas the *gestus* does not. The Nephew's performance of the automaton serves Diderot to satirise the deadliness of Bertin. Rather than represent a form of polemical protest, the Brechtian *gestus* shows an inescapable situation of social conditioning. An insistence on protecting individuality against social habituation as alienation has thus disappeared from the scene of dramatic action.

However, the end of an individual's protest against the alienation of social inscription also signifies the end of satirical humour projected onto the automated 'other'. The scene of the automaton in *Le Neveu* is after all comical. The Nephew's commitment to automating himself as an automaton is highly self-ironic, a sense of humour which disappears with the notion of the *gestus*. The *gestus* replaces the self-irony of the automaton with the notions of rational distance and sociological specificity. One could therefore say that a concern with automatism stands at the beginning of a history of the notion of alienation whilst *gestus* stands at the end. Whereas Diderot explores alienation in all the possible detail as a kind of marginal experience, of which it counts to delineate and understand the limits, for Brecht there are certain forms of de-individualisation which have become structural and hence acceptable. If Brecht's understanding of character as *dividual* would have appeared to Diderot acutely alienating, for Brecht it is merely a dramaturgical extension of a 'realist' understanding of social construction. Nonetheless, by becoming structural it also becomes static. The nexus between automaton, processual temporality and humour is dissolved.

#### 4.2.V IDIOTISME: THE IDEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF LANGUAGE

The final point of this exposition of the Nephew's world of alienation is a term which evokes the reminiscence of another classical concept of Marxism: this concerns the passage on 'idiotisme'. The passage in question arises as the culmination of the Nephew's account of his practice as music teacher including a detailed dissection of his tricks of self-presentation. The philosopher reacts with indignation to the Nephew's corrupt working morale and 'his vile little tricks' to which the Nephew lashes back at

him a cynical tirade on working morale in general. What follows is an almost fanatical speech on the theory of the ‘professional idiom’, a speech rich in complexity and paradox, breathtaking in its stringency and originality. Its effect for both the Philosopher as well as the reader is a riddle-like mental exercise, a journey between confusion and a strange kind of enlightenment absurdity. Here Diderot conveys an acute sense of language becoming more and more evacuated of meaning.

MOI. – Et pourquoi employer toutes ces petites viles ruses la.

LUI. – Viles! et pourquoi, s’il vous plait. Elles sont d’usage dans mon etat. Je ne m’avis point en faisant comme tout le monde. Ce n’est pas moi qui les ai inventées: et je serois bizarre et maladroit de ne pas m’y conformer.[...] Mais, monsieur le philosophe, il y a une conscience generale, comme il y a une grammaire generale, et puis des exceptions dans chaque langue que vous appelez, je crois, vous autres scavants, des... aidez moi donc...des...

MOI. – Idiotismes.<sup>402</sup> (67)

The Nephew’s way of tricking the client into the illusion of being the most popular music teacher in town is part of being ‘professional’. This ‘guise of professionalism’ partakes of the universal order of social etiquette from which the individual cannot abstain. Being professional and appearing professional cannot be distinguished. The Nephew’s ‘vile little tricks’ therefore constitute a quasi natural law of professional behaviour. To ignore them, according to the Nephew, would mean to turn white into black and black into white.<sup>403</sup> Subversion of such a universal would mean to be unprofessional. The Nephew then proceeds to the exceptions. Here the paradoxicality begins, for the exceptions of a universal professionalism will prove to be identical with the general itself: the theory of the idioms which is about to be revealed is from its outset based on absurdity.

As Jean Fabre illustrates in his annotations of the same passage,<sup>404</sup> Diderot caricatures a theory proclaimed by his contemporary grammarians, who were also responsible for the linguistic entries in the *Encyclopédie*. This linguistic theory claimed that if reason was a universal feature of man, so were the grammatical laws of language, as well as morality. To understand the structure of language would mean to unearth the logic of

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<sup>402</sup> NdR, pp. 35-6.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., p. 35; RN, p. 61.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 173-5.

thought and morals itself.<sup>405</sup> The difficulty of explicating the phenomenon of idiomatic difference in language was resolved by linguists such as Dumarsais and Beauzée with the idea of ‘exception’. In the *Encyclopédie*, Beauzée proposed the concept of an idiom which derives its status from the original properties (*génie propre*) of each language. The idea of the idiom as an exception to a rule of a unified system of language and morals aroused Diderot’s scepticism, which, according to Fabre, is put directly into the words of the Nephew. The Nephew’s struggle with the term itself anticipates the ‘convolutions’ of an ‘intellectualisation’ that is about to follow. The term ‘idiotisme’ itself, beyond signifying the idea of the linguistic idiom, comes here very close to being ‘idiotic’.

However, the successive order of the sentence can also be read in the manner of an enumeration: there is a standard conscience, just as there is a standard grammar, and then there are exceptions to the rule which are termed ‘idioms’. The structure of the sentence allows for analogy as well as opposition. In the latter case, grammar and conscience fall apart rather than become unified in one overriding concept. This is an opposition which is exploited by the Nephew in the following sentences, where idiotism is thrown into explicit contradiction to ‘general conscience’ in relation to the practice of professions.

LUI.- Tout juste. He bien, chaque etat a ses exceptions a la conscience generale auxquelles je donnerois volontiers le nom d’idiotismes de metier.  
MOI. – J’entends. Fontanelle parle bien, ecrit bien, quoique son stile fourmille d’idiotismes françois.<sup>406</sup> (68)

The Philosopher’s understanding of the Nephew’s explanation reverts to the classical definition of idioms as belonging to the order of linguistic analysis, putting into relief that the Nephew really applies this concept to a field – the practice of professions – which surpasses in its ethical scope the field of language. Whilst the Nephew operates this assimilation of a purely linguistic term into the field of social and therefore moral practice, the gap between those two fields, their very discrepancy, becomes increasingly evident. What is more, with the assimilation of the term ‘idiotisme’ into the field of

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<sup>405</sup> See Fabre, in NdR, pp. 174-5.

<sup>406</sup> NdR, p. 36.

social interaction, an 'ethic of exception' is introduced. The ideological code of a specific field of practice allows for a custom that can be revealed as unethical. The division between a real ethic and an ethic of exception must be dubious from the start. What the Nephew cynically announces is that the individual becomes absolved from ethical responsibility once he buys into the 'idiomatic' norms of egotistical and unethical competitiveness:

LUI. – Et le souverain, le ministre, le financier, le magistrat, le militaire, l'homme de lettres, l'avocat, le procureur, le commerçant, le banquier, l'artisan, le maître à chanter, le maître à danser, sont de fort honnêtes gens, quoique leur conduite s'écarte en plusieurs points de la conscience générale, et soit remplie d'idiotismes moraux. Plus l'institution des choses est ancienne, plus il y a d'idiotismes; plus les temps sont malheureux, plus les idiotismes se multiplient. Tant vaut l'homme, tant vaut le métier; et réciproquement, à la fin, tant vaut le métier, tant vaut l'homme. On fait donc valoir le métier tant qu'on peut.<sup>407</sup> (69)

From the Nephew's proposition that a professional attitude depends on the 'exceptional' law of the idiom, several other 'natural laws' follow. With the history of cultural institutions, the number of idioms multiplies since this involves numerous possibilities of a departure from the general natural order, a theory similar to Rousseau's pessimistic understanding of a process of civilisation which involves an ever-increasing level of alienation. Sign systems become less transparent and readable. Furthermore, with the increase of pressures in the market situation, the idiomatic forms of behaviour are also on the rise. The more competitive a situation, the more exploitative and cunning the communicative forms of the professional must become, if he wants to sell himself and his goods. The 'idiom' is so to speak the 'brand' of the eighteenth century.

The last consequence of these rules of the 'socio-natural' theory of 'universal idiotism' implies the reification of the 'professional' himself. The value of the profession or the products come to depend on the aptitude to invent new forms of idiomatic expression. Two exchanges happen here. The value of a product, be it a specific service or an actual commodity, hinges on the social 'image' which the professional manages to enact, whilst the material profit of the person depends on the success of his 'business'. The value of man comes to be interchangeable with the value of the commodity. Such

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

reification of man poses the continual question at what price one is selling oneself; how much one can keep of oneself, and how much one can sell of oneself.<sup>408</sup>

The next lesson of the doctrine of ‘idiotism’ is concerned with the production and interpretation of trade idioms. Here the Nephew returns to his original account of his music lesson from which he hastily rushes off to an illusory next pupil. Now he presents us with the theory behind his ‘little trick’:

Or donc un idiotisme de presque tous les etats, car il y en a de communs a tous les païs, a tous les tems, comme il y a des sottises communes, un idiotisme commun est de se procurer le plus de pratiques que l’on peut; une sottise commune est de croire que le plus habile est celui qui en a le plus. Voila deux exceptions a la conscience generale auxquelles il faut se plier.<sup>409</sup> (70)

In order to upgrade one’s professional idiomatic value, one must create the illusion of demand. Since the Nephew, as music teacher, does not trade with any material goods, he becomes himself the commodity, which he attempts to make as desirable as possible.

But the Nephew also prides himself in being able to decipher idiomatic codes from the point of view of the client who is able to unmask the illusion of the trade idiom and see what it really is. Once more, he is an expert in decoding the complex and obscure universe of signs that surrounds him. The term idiotisme begins to oscillate with its other notion: ‘stupidity’, stupidity of those who are idiotic enough to believe that idiomatic value is identical with real value.

The different notions of value now become even more entangled, but only in order to show more acutely the very double standard involved in the currency of the trade idiom. First, the Nephew reminds us of the special ethical status that the trade idioms occupy, the fact that they present exceptions to the general conscience. Then he undertakes a comparison between ‘idiotism’ and a kind of surplus value theory which we know from the context of Marxism:

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<sup>408</sup> See Wuthenow (1987), p. 153.

<sup>409</sup> NdR, pp. 36-7.

C'est une espece de credit. Ce n'est rien en soi; mais cela vaut par l'opinion. On a dit que *bonne renommé valoit mieux que ceinture dorée*. Cependant qui a bonne renommée n'a pas ceinture dorée; et je vois qu'aujourd'hui qui a ceinture dorée ne manque gueres de renommée. Il faut, autant qu'il est possible, avoir le renom et la ceinture. Et c'est mon objet, lorsque je me fais valoir par ce que vous qualifiez d'adresses viles, d'indignes petites ruses. Je donne ma leçon, et je la donne bien; voila la regle generale. Je fais croire que j'en ai plus a donner que la journée n'a d'heures, voila l'idiotisme.<sup>410</sup> (71)

The illusion of being inundated with pupils functions as a credit system, which increases the trader's investment power. The virtual impression that makes one appear professional and businesslike is interpreted as success or profitability itself. What is only appearance, and in material terms nothing in itself, literally transforms into material value by deluding the imagination of potential clients. 'Etre rien en soi' transfigures into real material value by being believed to be valuable in public opinion. The Nephew could be as ethical about his work ethic as he wanted. Unless he fulfils the conventions of the trade idiom, unless he fuels certain expectations associated with his profession, he can be as adroit a teacher and musician as he wants to, no client will want to invest into a service which has no high ranking in the imaginary landscape of the market.

Conscience must therefore allow for an exception to the rule, to prevent the whole system from collapsing: to practise one's profession responsibly must be complemented by the illusion that one has more lessons to give than hours in the day, an illusion which supports the continuity of the business and hence the survival of the trader on the market. The vital function of the idiom is then to guarantee material existence itself. Although it functions as a supplement, it comes first in terms of the individual's survival instinct.

As I have shown in the beginning of this passage with reference to Jean Fabre, 'idiom' is a term borrowed explicitly from the science of grammar, a science which claimed to be able to deduce the constitution of mind and morals from the structuring of language. The Nephew's implementation of the term into the field of professional custom, as a site where social action inevitably will raise questions adhering to the domain of ethics, shows that the movement of language and the movement of ethics do in fact conflict.

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

Ideological language is imbued with a capacity to create imaginary values that are entirely disconnected from material reality, but which are powerful enough to influence the development of reality, and thus become material themselves. Just as language forms idioms which have become alienated from the true ‘roots’ of linguistic signification, where meaning can no longer be delineated from the larger structure of language itself, relying entirely on convention, so too the construct of the trade idiom, denies translation from ‘signifier’ to ‘signified’. The way the professional presents his profession is abstracted from the way he practices his profession. Yet, despite this discrepancy, the idiom preserves the reality of the profession itself. To transfer the idea of idioms into the field of professional practice and use them synonymously with what the philosopher named ‘vile little tricks’ is not merely metaphorical. The illusion of demand is created precisely through language itself, through those words, *qui peignent plus fortement et plus complètement que tout un discours...*<sup>411</sup> (72)

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<sup>411</sup> Denis Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. XIV, ed. Jean Assézat and Tourneux, (Paris: 1875-1877), p. 483; as quoted by Herbert Dieckmann, ‘The Relationship between Diderot’s *Satire I* and *Satire II*’, in *Studien zur europäischen Aufklärung* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1974), p. 81.

### 4.3 ALIENATING THE SUBJECT OF THE SPECTATOR

In the first section of this chapter I have shown how the notion of alienation in *Le Neveu de Rameau* is made manifest in terms of the subjective experience of the Nephew, that is, by means of his expression and his actions. In the second section I proceeded to outline how alienation is not reduced to an exclusively subjective experience of the Nephew, which would singularise and pathologise him, but that he represents a literary figure who *integrates* and *extegrates* a social world of alienation, a figure who makes tangible a new experience of alienation arising in the eighteenth century. Such experience is described in a more objective language in the socio-anthropological writings of Rousseau and further analysed by Hegel and Marx, thus leading to the creation of the concept proper of *Entfremdung*.

The point of departure of depicting this journey from subjective to objective alienation is situated in a critique of Brechtian *Verfremdung*, a concept, which, as I described in the third chapter, was declared by Brecht to be antagonistic to notions such as subjectivity, the individual and experience. By positing the *dividual* as a substitution of the individual, Brecht's starting-point for the treatment of social alienation is entirely different from Diderot's. Whereas Brecht absolved his protagonists from an experience of subjective alienation, Diderot focused, not only in *Le Neveu*, but also in texts such as *La Religieuse* or *Le fils naturel*, on the problems of alienation imposed on the subject.<sup>412</sup> These subjects are also presented as socially determined, but their desire for individuation remains the driving force of their expression and the expressiveness which speaks out of the text. They are more than the objectively constructed *dividual*: they are driven by the psychological energies inherent to their constant oscillation between acceptance and rejection of social stricture and alienation.

In this last section I will pick up the threads of Brecht's epistemological concept of *Verfremdung*, namely the question of recognition and his focus on the spectator. Is it possible to grasp alienation as an epistemological tool in *Le Neveu*? And if it is, in what way is it different from Brecht's dialectic of *Verstehen – nicht verstehen – verstehen*?

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<sup>412</sup> *Le Fils Naturel ou les Epreuves de la vertu*, DOE, pp. 1081-1127. *La Religieuse*, DOC, pp. 277-405. For a discussion of those works in relation to an outsider discourse consult Jay Caplan's *Framed Narratives: Diderot's Genealogy of the Beholder*, afterword Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985), in particular, chapters three and four, 'Moving Pictures (*La Religieuse 1*)' and 'Misfits (*La Religieuse 2*)', pp. 45-75.



What I want to suggest is that it is precisely the subjective side of alienation emphasised by Hegel in the *Preface* of the *Phänomenologie* and in his discussion of the Socratic method which seems to be put into practice in Diderot's literary aesthetic of alienation.

Diderot not only explores the theme of alienation as a reality in which the subjects of his texts are caught, but he, too, is concerned with alienation as a question of representation, a question which surfaces in his contact with the reader. However, whereas for Brecht alienation figures as a concern of representation which can be isolated from the subject matter and which allows us to examine the thematic material with disinterested distance, a Diderotian form of *Verfremdung* creeps at us straight out of the text, demanding the collapse of distance rather than its implementation. It emanates directly from an experience of alienation thematised in the text, thus forming a continuum between subjective and objective alienation.

If in chapter 3 I criticised Brecht for adopting a Hegelian methodology of alienation without subjective *Zerrissenheit*, I will show in the following how the theme of *Zerrissenheit* in *Le Neveu de Rameau* is not only restricted to the Nephew. His tormented state of mind, torn between a materially impoverished individualism and a spiritually impoverished conformism, points straight back to the position of 'Moi', which is also the position occupied by the reader. The theme of *Zerrissenheit* is not only restricted to the figure of the Nephew, it becomes an inevitable confrontation for Diderot's reader.

#### 4.3.1 THEMATIC CRITIQUE OF COMMUNICATION AS ALIENATION

In the previous sections I have laid out the theme of alienation as a consistent object of discussion recurring throughout *Le Neveu de Rameau* on very different levels. Alienation presents itself in the text in different forms, incorporating some of Rousseau's core ideas around alienation and even anticipating important aspects of Marx's theory of alienation. Alienation is explicated as a structure that vacillates between a human condition rooted in sociality, and a Marxist form of alienation that is changeable and based on inequality in material possession, in the fetishistic constitution of money, in the idiotisms of language and in the automatism of action.

To start off the discussion of a dialogical kind of alienation I wish to look once more at the issue of linguistic alienation. For, if Diderot in rather Rousseauian terms exercises a critique of communication, he does so without sacrificing the pleasures of expression. Communication is utilised in the text in a way which is profoundly characterised by a tendency towards otherness and alienation *and* by a celebration of the communicative contact with the other, regardless of its potential delusional implications.

Critique of communication as a form of alienation is articulated in *Le Neveu* in so far as it represents a narcissistic structure in which the participants become inevitably entangled once they exchange words and actions. The communicator is incessantly under pressure to perform for the other, thus not presenting his authentic natural being but offering to the other appearances which he believes the other to expect.

Communication is fundamentally flawed by an erasure of truth. Rousseau connects this communicative form of alienation with the notion of theatricality. A sociology marked by lying, obscurity, anonymity and appearance is implemented with the origin of social interaction, and most incisively with the birth of language. The historical progress of culture and civilisation heralds nothing positive, but implies a profound movement towards human alienation and social conflict. The result is a social universe in which the notions of alienation and theatricality become inextricably linked and are furthermore connected with the problem of inequality in material possession and social status.

*Le Neveu* deals with all of these manifestations of alienation, albeit in an a-systematic manner. No hierarchy is built around the way in which they are articulated. Alienation experienced by a theatricalised subject who performs for the other and encounters others' theatricality coexists with the phenomenon of material alienation. Alienation, deriving from the abstract yet absolute exchange value of money, coincides with the social tendencies towards automatised. Such diversified and non-unified representation of the theme of alienation throughout the text is mixed in with a call for human dignity and individualism.

In the field of textuality, a textuality which stands out as thoroughly dialogic, the question of alienation reappears again, this time within an intimate conversation

between reader and text. The reader becomes caught in what I earlier described as Diderot's tactics of *integration* and *extegration*. If the dialogue between the Philosopher and the Nephew could be observed at a safe distance, Diderot's dialogic attack on the reader, the way in which he systematically makes him aware of his own subjective implication in an alienated cosmos of social interaction, could not function.

#### 4.3.II AFFIRMATION OF COMMUNICATION AT THE LEVEL OF THE TEXT

In the dialogical extension of the contents is rooted a certain paradox, which is highly productive in creating an epistemological methodology of alienation, at once dialogical and subjective. This paradox emerges from a contradiction between a critique of alienation postulated from within the text and the treatment of dialogue, which could be said to affirm alienation. Dialogue is explored and unpacked with breathtaking dexterity in all its riches and exuberance. Despite the pejorative assessment of language leading to a world of deception and appearance, Diderot neither stops communicating nor representing communication with unabashed expressive naturalism. Whereas Rousseau draws the necessary consequences from his analysis of alienation by searching for authenticity in solitary existence and 'soliloquial' forms of communication, Diderot remains communal in his aesthetics, implementing the psycho-social dynamics of the dialogue as one of the key structures of his writing.

As Jay Caplan writes in his conclusion to *Framed Narratives*, 'rather than lament the human tendency to mistake fiction for reality, or deplore the 'effeminate' position one thereby comes to occupy (these are Rousseauist gestures), Diderot positively delights in doing so. [...] Unlike Rousseau, Diderot does not feel the need to be alone in order to be him-self. On the contrary, he only feels himself when 'alienated' in dialogue, represented or real. [...] It doesn't occur to him – as it does to a Rousseau – that identifying with the representation of a suffering heroine might make him less likely to help someone who really was suffering.'<sup>413</sup>

Whereas Brecht, in keeping with Rousseau's politics of anti-identification drew aesthetic consequences from his critique of social alienation, by numbing language's or

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<sup>413</sup> Jay Caplan (1985), p. 90.

dramatic representation's illusionistic capacity, Diderot stays within the corrupt medium, uncoiling in his aesthetics communication's dialogical realities and its movement towards alienation.<sup>414</sup>

Whereas both authors announce a critique of illusion, appearance and alienation at the level of the theme, Diderot, in terms of aesthetic solutions stays within a paradox. Whereas Brecht's concept of aesthetic *Verfremdung*, functions as a critique of alienated conditions, Diderot throws into contradiction intention and method. As a result, two very opposite aesthetics can be observed. Brecht draws all the necessary consequences and stops his aesthetics from continuing to spread a world of alienation, appearance and illusion. Although his programme of anti-alienation never explicitly postulates an attack on the deluding effects of communication or language, language's inevitable contamination with alienation, finds its aesthetic consequences in Brecht. Aesthetics of alienation will imply a tendency towards minimisation. Communication and expressiveness will have to be interrupted and muted so that a break can be put onto the seductively absorbing appeal communication exerts on the reader or spectator.

In the same way as Roland Barthes in *The Third Meaning* defines the chosen gestures of Eisenstein's film as devoid of *polysemous* meaning, reduced to signify the specific, the chosen, the intentional,<sup>415</sup> realist, non-figurative art, in general could be said to undertake a liberation of language from its expressive excesses. A minimalism of chosen signification becomes characteristic for modernist aesthetics, and especially for Brecht's. Hand in hand with an economy of minimisation, in which aesthetic and political signification is thrown into marked relief, expressiveness, eloquence, dynamics, and above all, the overriding constituent of all those aspects, naturalist illusionism must be exorcised. Represented communication can no longer communicate *like* in real life. It must signal its very difference, its potential to interrupt the continuities of an alienated reality.

For Brecht, no self-contradiction troubles the relation between political thought and aesthetic practice. A political project against alienated social conditions clearly

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<sup>414</sup> On Diderot's anti-solipsist attitude, see Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *Diderot: Ou la philosophie de la séduction* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), pp. 129-47

<sup>415</sup> Barthes (1991), p. 45.

demands an aesthetic which does not delude, alienate or seduce. But since aesthetics cannot help 'communicating', communication can only be represented in a tamed version, stripped down to its essential signification. It is divested of its drive to create expression above and beyond the limitations of a highly select form of content and intent. It is muted in its exuberant tendency towards otherness, in its inclination to perform towards and for the other.

On the contrary, for Diderot it is precisely the dialogical dimension of language which is explored in all its complexities. The performative relation between 'I' and 'you' which is profoundly permeated with the notion of illusion becomes one of the key principles of the Diderotian text. The Brechtian continuity between a critique of alienation and its political reflection on aesthetic theory is thus cancelled. Despite a complex texture of causalities drawing links between alienation implied in communicative action, exploitation within the master-slave relations, the depiction of self-alienation through automation, mental illness, and imagination, Diderot insists on naturalistic communication and its deceptive and illusionistic capacity. If one of Diderot's main characteristics can be found in his enthused sociability, *Le Neveu*, despite its thematic anti-alienation agenda, is entirely consistent with the pattern of indulging in a dialogic fervour which puts the reader directly in touch with the presence of his thought, the movements of his mind, the sense that *here is* someone who speaks *now*, someone who addresses us, someone who won't let us escape from the labyrinthine movements of his mind, who draws us closer into the intimacies of his own presence. What is apparent in such speech is precisely the need for a communicative partner, an other, despite the fact that at the level of thematic representation, the Nephew can only speak despicably of the other and his pantomimic distortions.

Diderot's aesthetic of naturalism revolves around the figure of an interlocutor, an other, who sets into motion and gives reality and 'realism' to his form of expression, someone who is there to acknowledge, to believe, or to question his imaginary representations almost in the sense of Bakhtinian 'answerability'.<sup>416</sup> If Diderot indulges in communication in contradiction to the Nephew's satire of communication, he does so to

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<sup>416</sup> See M.M. Bakhtin, 'Art and Answerability', in *Art and Answerability: Early Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. and annot. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 1-3.

come into touch with this other, even at the cost of deluding identification. The power of illusion is thus celebrated with utmost virtuosity. The other as someone who is courted with performative genius, who is to be won over, convinced and hypnotised, becomes an indispensable figure in Diderot's scenario of writing fiction.<sup>417</sup> If the Nephew is self-ironic about his conflation of social and artistic skill, such self-irony extends directly to the representation of the text at large. *Le Neveu* becomes an inverted mirror of the Nephew's satirical propositions of an anti-alienation theory.

But this cynicism behind an exchangeability of aesthetic and social representation, involving the invasion of illusion into the realm of sociality, is not the only aspect behind Diderot's dialogical literature. Jean Starobinski, in 'Diderot et la parole des autres' has shown in a number of texts, reaching from Diderot's translation of *L'Essai sur le mérite et la vertu*, to *L'Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Neron*, to *Est-il bon? Est-il méchant*, to the *Eléments de Physiologie*, *Le Rêve d'Alembert*, and also touching briefly on *Le Neveu*, that Diderot's inclination to allow for exteriority is characteristic of his writing and indeed his philosophical conception of consciousness.<sup>418</sup> Speech which is in itself other, but also the speech of others, determines his process of thinking and writing. In the *Eléments de la Physiologie*, Diderot proposes that exteriority imprints itself on and prints the structures of our consciousness,

Je suis porté à croire que tout ce que nous avons vu, connu, entendu, aperçu, [...] jusqu'à la multitude des voix humaines, à la mélodie et à l'harmonie de tous les airs, de toutes pièces de musique, de tous les concerts que nous avons entendus, tout cela existe en nous à notre insu.<sup>419</sup> (73)

Diderot entrusts his consciousness to exteriority. As in the *Paradoxe's* postulations on expression, the self's interiority is constantly opened up to exteriority, to the point where it becomes itself a structure of otherness. Contrary to Rousseau who suggests that such exteriority annihilates the self, for Diderot there is no threat involved in the

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<sup>417</sup> Caplan interprets the presence of the addressee as part of a sacrificial economy, where the beholder is to fill in empathetically for the loss of a represented figure. Although this theory is demonstrated convincingly with regard to *Le Fils naturel* and *La Religieuse*, the position of the addressee as a fundamental constituent, seems to me even more fundamental than that. Although the notion of 'lack' might be key to the constitution of an imaginary dialogical partner, such lack, as *Le Neveu de Rameau* shows, is not necessarily based on an economy of sacrifice. Caplan (1985) on Diderot's economy of sacrifice, see his chapter 'The Aesthetics of Sacrifice', pp. 15-29.

<sup>418</sup> Starobinski, 'Diderot et la parole des autres', *Critique*, no. 28 (1972), pp. 3-22.

<sup>419</sup> Denis Diderot, *Eléments de physiologie*, publiés par Jean Mayer, Paris, 1964; as quoted by Starobinski, *ibid.*, p. 18.

exteriorisation of the self. Rather, the self nourishes itself upon exteriority and is situated in a constant dialogue with otherness. As Starobinski shows, this otherness is at the root of the Enlightenment project itself, not only in the sense of exploring scientifically the unknown structures of objects but also in terms of communicating new insights back to a wider public. Language and linguistic symbolisation of objects come from the other and must be given back to the other. The self is situated in a position of constant mediation. It affirms its own centre in a dialogic movement between re-situating itself in relation to the other and trying to re-situate the other. There is no problem in the attempt to make the other identify with one's own position since such identification is only limited to a transitional moment in the other's consciousness. In time the other will surely overcome his identification and re-appropriate the given proposition, replying back and contributing further to the network of communication at large. Part and parcel of Diderot's belief in communication is that he entrusts his dialogic partner as himself with the gift of self-alienation.

Such a concept of a positive, self-affirming form of alienation represents a radical alternative to Rousseau's anxiety of alienation, a form of otherness which threatens to annihilate the self. Diderot allows the self to turn itself inside out, to identify entirely with the other's position, but also to split itself into two to rationalise self-consciously its own communicative externalisations. He treats alienation as a natural condition, a *natural medium*, within which we move and constitute our identity. This is diametrically opposed to Rousseau's dichotomous approach to alienation as unnatural and parasitic. Diderot's concept of nature, from the outset, is thoroughly pervaded by otherness. There is no possibility of reversing or undoing alienation in total, no longing for a return to a pure state of originality. Diderot rather accepts, utilises, explores and plays with a condition of alienation, which is acceptable by virtue of being irremovably natural.

Hence, Diderot's concept of the self is always willing to become decentred. In the words of Starobinski, who exemplifies Diderot's 'consent to alienation' in the ways in which the latter would trust his editor and friend Naigeon to insert changes even in his most autobiographical writings: 'Il s'affirme *lui-même*, par l'aliénation consentie, le

service rendu, le renfort d'éloquence qu'il apporte à une *cause commune*.<sup>420</sup> (74) This trust in the other as a friend, the very possibility of a 'friendly' form of alienation, invokes the possibility of a community and sociability which instead of jeopardising the stability of the self and the community, promises to enrich the realm of knowledge, communication and culture, at the same time as opening up a potential for collective political action. These politics, rather than be prompted by a materialist-historical anti-alienation dynamic, would derive from the individual's capability to entrust itself to a form of 'aliénation consentie'.

The most basic relation in which the subject is confronted with alienation is the structure of the dialogue. Here, the subject encounters the insurmountable otherness of the other, but also the narcissistic dimension of identification, which decentres him under the gaze of the other. The dialogue as literary form is a form in which ideas are moved around not only by the force of dialectics alone, but by the instance of bodily relations. The discourse of two bodies revolves not only around pure ideas but the corporeal actions which accompany their propositions and interactions. Apart from creating scope for a subtext – this would be the heightened subtext of tone and gesture – this text of the body gives rise to both identificatory illusion, at the same time as it presents us with the performative body who withdraws from us. A situation is created in which the reader comes to be confronted with a movement between identification and alienation. Before I explain more closely what I mean by this, I will lay out the ways in which dialogue in *Le Neveu* is structured.

#### 4.3.III THE DIALOGICAL STRUCTURE OF 'LE NEVEU DE RAMEAU'

The dialogic scheme of *Le Neveu* consists of an ever-ramifying chain of dialogic action. 'Moi' invites us on the journey of his internal monologue, which from the very outset presents itself as a dialogue between 'Je' and 'moi', whilst embracing into this silent communication of the self, the third of the reader:

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



C'est moi qu'on voit, toujours seul, rêvant sur le banc d'Argenson. Je m'entretiens avec moi même de politique, d'amour, de gout ou de philosophie. J'abandonne mon esprit a tout son libertinage.<sup>421</sup> (75)

This is a discourse which is typified by both a driven stream of consciousness as well as the scrutinising function of self-consciousness. Unconscious forward-leaping energies are here polarised by the disengaged gaze of the observer. 'Id' meets 'superego'; 'Moi', the philosopher-observer meets 'Lui', the actor; the 'psychoanalyst' meets the hysteric. The interpreter is faced with an encrypted subtext of action.

Whether inhabiting one single consciousness or two interlocutors, the dialogic organisation of the text creates in total a system of scenic consciousnesses boxed into one another, confusing the boundaries of internality and externality. This system of theatrical 'boxing' moves both inwards as well as outwards. Theatrical scenes manifest themselves in 'real' external environments such as the cafe but also in the internal theatre of imagination and memory.<sup>422</sup> Above all, this chain of scenic pocketing hastens forward towards an otherness which is directed towards the cryptic other of the text as well as to the other of the reader and interpreter. Subjectivity and objectivity become inseparable in so far as subjectivity objectifies itself into further and further roles. It alienates itself from itself in pre-Hegelian manner in order to come closer to itself. By splitting itself into its own representations, into 'Moi' and 'Lui', and by extending this principle of fragmentation into the Nephew's continual role games, 'I' views itself in otherness, in different roles, possibilities, relations and scenarios. 'Lui' as an extension of 'I' is 'I' stripped of boundaries, inhibitions and fears. 'Lui' helps 'I' to mobilise in himself and make visible the more hidden scenes of his consciousness. The subject's speculative self-objectification produces a quasi-Hegelian dialectic, a dialectic, which is perhaps more self-conscious of its theatrical origin than Hegel's.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> NdR, p. 3.

<sup>422</sup> In this I would disagree with Evelyn Gould's explication of *Le Neveu* as an internal subjective theatre, which therefore resists dramatisation. See Gould (1989); see for example pp. 12. I have discussed the simultaneity of internality and externality more closely in 'The Play between Monologue and Dialogue in *Le Neveu de Rameau*: Mechanism of Subjectivity or Eccentricity?', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 8 (2000), pp. 219-227.

<sup>423</sup> On the difference between Diderotian dialogics and Hegelian dialectics with regard to *Le Neveu*, see Jauss (1984), pp. 145-80. On the dialectical shifts between identity and otherness in *Le Neveu*, see James E. Fowler, 'Je m'entretiens avec moi-meme: Self versus Other in *Le Neveu de Rameau*', *Dalhousie-French Studies*, vol. 42 (Spring 1998), pp. 77-87.

Soon after the initial introduction of the motive of a performer/observer relation, the daydreaming 'Je' explicitly invites the reader into a voyeuristic set-up. The reader's inclusion is of course purely imaginary and from the very beginning based on his very exclusion. The imaginary participation of the reader depends on an actual impossibility of a real encounter. However, despite the fictional status of this inclusion, the contact between 'Je' and the reader is real in the event of reading. The reader figures as an essential dialogical partner, representing for the writing subject the gaze towards which he directs his dialogue. The reader becomes an observer and addressee for an author who produces text by virtue of being driven by the other.

The structure of this event merges the categories of reality and illusion. The fictional dialogue is superseded by another dialogue with the reader, which lends structure and energy to the text, in the sense of reality, the reality of communication, as far as communication can become real. In turn, the reader must answer back to the ways in which the text decentres him or her. Diderot makes space for the reader's dialogical implication, thus provoking a meeting-point of consciousnesses. Such an event displaces the reader from his position of pure observation throwing him into a situation which is real in the sense that he is here forced to take a stance and reconfigure himself. This possibility depends entirely on the dialogical orientation of the text: its urge to wrap the reader into the illusion of the represented reality, that is into a *situation*, and to snatch from within that situation, a real response, a real dialogical reaction.

If Rousseau's confessional writing meticulously avoided the ambiguities of this 'unreal reality' of communication (a dialogical system of aesthetic expression involving an author who stages himself for the other) Diderot's writing thrives on the performative dimension of the dialogue. For the latter, the implicit theatrical delusion is overcome by the reality of dialogue which in itself could be understood as representative of the incessant fluctuations of an entirely destabilised materialist reality.<sup>424</sup> If *Le Neveu* is thus driven by an implicit tendency towards *deixis*, as it has been shown by Marian

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<sup>424</sup> Caplan (1986), suggests that Diderot's dialogism is firmly grounded in his concept of materialism: 'Diderot had an affinity for the dialogic mode because it provided him with a way of both seeking after and revealing what he believed was the essential changeability of reality. Only in dialogue – in the shifting movements of conversation and dialogic confrontation – could he find a sense of his own identity, as well as approach the fleeting object of his thought.' P. 7.

Hobson,<sup>425</sup> rendering into flesh the process of thought itself, this search for material embodiment derives from a profound need to think 'out' and merge the figments of the self with those of others, the closest the subject can get to reality. Imagined or real the reader sets into motion the 'materialisation' of the author's thought.

Integral to the dialogic 'enboxment' of *Le Neveu de Rameau* is its 'eccentric' tendency to explode the consistency of its speech patterns. The initial internal monologue of the Philosopher very soon is interrupted by the dramatic animation of his 'dreamt' characters. The narrative daydream transforms into the scene of the past encounter in the café. If the Philosopher's intense imagination propels the text to move onto another plane, this can be recognised as a wider principle governing the textual structure of *Le Neveu de Rameau*: we are being drawn closer to the object of 'Je's' imagination although explicit subjectivity is dissolved and the reader is now facing two 'objects', 'Moi' and 'Lui', who are objects of his own imagination as well as objects of the author's dramatised narrative. Although the transition from 'Je' to 'Moi' is abrupt, it is here that identification comes into play since it is through the narrator's obsession with his captivating memory that his imagination takes off onto another level of text and 'fictionality'. Miraculously, and as an entirely natural consequence of the dynamics of his precipitating consciousness, the textual format transforms and with it the reader's relation to the text.

As the text transfers from narrative to dramatisation, temporality necessarily shifts. From the past tense of the memory we are transported into a present tense determined by the 'presence' of the memory. Co-absorbed with the narrator, we find ourselves closer to the imaginary scene, closer to a scene where intensity has taken over and prompted a shift to an all-absorbing fiction. For a moment, and only for a moment, the previous stage of narrative representation seems eclipsed by a new reality which seems more carnal, more present and more intense at once. We have arrived in the Café de la Régence, in the middle of the conversations between Philosopher and Nephew, who immediately become entangled in a desire for reciprocity and exchange:

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<sup>425</sup> Marian Hobson, 'Déictique, dialectique dans *Le Neveu de Rameau*', in *Etudes sur Le Neveu de Rameau et Le Paradoxe sur le comédien de Denis Diderot. Actes du colloque organisé à l'Université Paris VII les 15 et 16 novembre 1991*, ed. Georges Benrekassa, Marc Buffat and Pierre Chartier, Cahiers Textuel 11 (Paris: Revue de l'U.F.R. Sciences des textes et documents, 1992), pp. 11-19.

Il m'aborde...Ah, ah, vous voilà, Mr le philosophe; et que faites vous ici parmi ce tas de faineants? Est-ce que vous perdez aussi votre temps a pousser le bois? C'est ainsi qu'on appelle par mepris jouer aux echecs ou aux dames.  
MOI. – Non; mais quand je n'ai rien de mieux a faire, je m'amuse a regarder un instant, ceux qui poussent bien.<sup>426</sup> (76)

'Je' from now onwards, except for few yet essential exceptions, retreats from the text, reconfiguring himself as 'Moi' and thereby nominating the place of the original narrator-observer to the reader as the only present 'Je'. It is now only I, the reader, who views the scene enacted by 'Moi' and 'Lui'. No longer am I guided by an explicit rapport with the narrator, no longer am I addressed by him in intimate conversation, but I am made to follow into the footsteps of the previous I-author.

The readjustment of the dialogic pattern of the protagonists also alters the dialogic involvement of the reader. At the very moment the Philosopher becomes absorbed into his memory and the text shifts into dialogue, he abandons the 'you' relation to the reader established in the beginning passage. Distance is interjected in the former intimacy, a distance nevertheless, which allows us to be closer to the re-enactments of the Philosopher's memory. The reader being simultaneously relocated on the inside and the outside, this double-sided positioning, is paradigmatic for the proceedings of the text as a whole. Identification and distance are not two dichotomous terms, they are arranged in a variety of different formations.

Both the experience of distance and that of identification conspire to a sense of voyeurism in such a way as Michael Fried has demonstrated.<sup>427</sup> In Fried's assessment of the paintings discussed by Diderot, it is the very exclusion of the beholder, which facilitates the sensation of entering into the represented scene. In terms of Diderot's literary dialogue, this absorption is prefigured by the narrator's absorption into the process of imagination which inevitably makes him lose contact with the reader as his primary dialogist. At the moment he loses touch, there is distance between him and the reader, but such distance is undone since his imagination opens in fact up, seemingly without any self-protection against the scrutiny of the voyeuristic reader.

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<sup>426</sup> NdR, p. 7.

<sup>427</sup> Fried (1980).

However, a transfer of Fried's painting-based theory of absorption to Diderot's literary practice is problematic in so far as the movement of absorption in *Le Neveu* is not only absorptive but also interruptive in the sense of alienation: the whole textual exposition changes abruptly. The temporal definition of Fried, which is defined by the reader's elevation over durational time shifts into a mode of temporality which is highly dynamic functioning almost like a 'coup de théâtre'. The imaginary absorption is pierced by another structure, a structure much closer to Brecht's notion of an epic organisation of the text, and yet nevertheless very different in terms of allowing for identification and illusion. The reader is offered a variety of different roles. He is explicitly addressed as an interlocutor, in this sense remaining other and outside, but he is also seduced into identification with the author's imaginary consciousness. At not one moment can there be any doubt that Diderot does not want his reader to re-experience his own experiences and to retrace the very movements of his consciousness which lock him into his dialectical relation with 'Lui'.

The reader is thus integrated into a shifting pattern of being on the inside and on the outside of dialogue, sometimes at once, and sometimes subsequently, oscillating between different temporal experiences, which are nevertheless contained within one organic macro-structure. He fulfils the function of a listener, whose interest in the story hypnotises him into identification, but he is also offered the role of the author, the role of an actor and instigator, an active dialogist as other. Thus, Diderot bequeaths to the reader a position which is about passivity and activity at once.

Paradigmatic for the subsequent structuring of the text are the leaps and transformations from one dialogical relation to another through which the text consistently transcends towards otherness. This dialogical orientation towards otherness is always double, driving towards exteriority and interiority at once, interiority in the sense of delineating imagination's process of absorption and exteriority in the sense that the transformation from one textual stage to another always evolves in the manner of an explosion. The Nephew's eccentricity is entirely in line with this textual explosiveness. As one dialogical format is always on the edge of exploding into another, the Nephew's eccentricity is always on the edge of switching into mental alienation.

#### 4.3.IV 20<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY EPIC DRAMA VERSUS 18<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY EPIC DIALOGUE

I have suggested that in *Le Neveu* dialogical transformation occurs according to a logic of interruption. It would however be wrong to say that this interruption is 'interruptive' in the sense of Brecht. Neither would it be correct to approximate *Le Neveu's* form of textual organisation to the way in which Brecht defined the notion of the *epic*. Both forms germinate however in an ancient tradition of text first defined by Plato.

In Book 3 of the *Republic*,<sup>428</sup> Plato draws a distinction between three forms of poetic discourse: narration, dramatic representation, which for Plato constitutes *mimesis*, and *mixed diegesis*, e.g. the form of the epic. The last form, best found in the poetic works of Homer, was of particular interest to Plato since it constituted one of the main sources of learning at the time, thus competing with the discourse of philosophy.<sup>429</sup> The *epic* according to Plato is characterised by a fluctuating movement between narration, spoken in the voice of the poet, and dramatic enactment, spoken in the voice of the protagonist. In the way in which Plato words his explanation of the epic it becomes apparent how strong his belief in the magical powers of dramatic transformation must have been: the poet comes to obtain the voice of the protagonist, who in the first place had been introduced as a figure separate from himself. Dramatic discourse is inevitably predicated on the notion of *becoming*. Illustrating his definition of the epic in relation to the beginning of the *Iliad*, Socrates says:

So far the poet speaks in his own person, but later on he speaks in the character of Chryses and tries to make us feel that the words come, not from Homer, but from an aged priest. Throughout the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the events are set forth in these two different forms. All the times, both in the speeches and in the narrative part in between, he is telling his story; but where he is delivering a speech in character, he tries to make his manner resemble that of the person he has introduced as speaker. Any poet who does that by means of voice and gesture, is telling his story by way of dramatic representation; whereas, if he makes no such attempt to suppress his own personality, the events are set forth in simple narrative.<sup>430</sup>

By *suppressing his own personality* and mimicking the characteristics of the protagonist, the poet speaks as if from within the body of his protagonist. The extent of

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<sup>428</sup> *The Republic of Plato*, trans., intro., and annot. Francis Macdonald Cornford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 'The influence of dramatic recitation', pp. 78-83. From now on abbreviated as *The Republic*.

<sup>429</sup> See Eric A. Havelock: *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1963), pp. 87-95.

<sup>430</sup> *The Republic of Plato*, p. 83.

deception and magic integral to the mode of dramatisation makes even the epic style suspect. As a model for Rousseau,<sup>431</sup> Plato formulates in Book 3 and 10 of the *Republic* a proto-theory of anti-theatricality based on the alienating and metamorphosing status of dramatic representation.<sup>432</sup> Theatre *suppresses* the true status of being. With the impersonation of others, the poet, or the reciter, produces something of the order of the miraculous. He transforms not only himself but also the spectator. The magical powers of the theatrical form of expression are believed to be so strong, that they could jeopardise both rationality and morality within the *Republic*. Plato can therefore only accept the 'less magical' discourse of narration as an institutionalised form of literature:

Suppose, then, that an individual clever enough to assume any character and give imitations of anything and everything should visit our country and offer to perform his compositions, we shall bow down before a being with such miraculous powers of giving pleasure, but we shall tell him that we are not allowed to have any such person in our commonwealth; we shall crown him with fillets of wool, anoint his head with myrrh, and conduct him to the borders of some other country. For our own benefit we shall employ the poets and storytellers of the more austere and less attractive type, who will reproduce only the manner of a person of high character and, in the substance of their discourse, conform to those rules we lay down when we began the education of the warriors.<sup>433</sup>

Plato's final verdict in the discussion of poetic form in Book 3 is highly ambiguous. In terms of aesthetic pleasure, dramatisation clearly triumphs over narrative style. It is for this reason, for its innate attractiveness and magical charm, its inevitably mimetic status, that it must be censored and exiled in favour of the 'more austere and less attractive type' of pure narrative.

Plato's definition of the epic returns in both Diderot's philosophical dialogue as well as in Brecht's re-conceptualisation of drama. In the case of Diderot, it is the Socratic dimensions of his dialogues which could be said to be responsible for the interpolation of narrative and dramatic expression. In the case of Brecht, the definition of epic theatre attempts to exhume the rational potential of theatre by banning its illusionistic powers through narrative interruption.

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<sup>431</sup> Rousseau writes a summary of the passages most relevant to his ideas on the indictment of theatre in relation to his *Lettre à d'Alembert*. See 'De l'imitation théâtrale', in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V (1995), pp. 1195-1211.

<sup>432</sup> See elsewhere Jonas Barish (1981), the chapter 'The Platonic Foundation', pp. 5-37.

<sup>433</sup> *The Republic of Plato* (1955), p. 83.

However, despite the fact that both texts belong to the genre of *mixed diegesis* and are situated somewhere on the margin of philosophical discourse, the *epic* dimension of Brechtian drama is fundamentally different from what Diderot undertakes in his dialogical literature. At first sight it looks as if we can find in Diderot a principle which is astonishingly reminiscent of Brecht's modernism: the notion of the *epic* or *open form*, by means of which narrative is interwoven with dramatic expression, one consistently interrupting the other, and opening up the text to the reader's interpretative reflection. This initial similarity is however effaced by the differing dynamics behind each structure.

*Epic* for Brecht signified a dramatic structure, in which each element could be contemplated independently. The plot, instead of precipitating forward with intense speed in one particular track, is broken into fragments. According to Brecht, such 'fragmentism' encourages greater possibilities of analysis. In intervals the dramatic figure, similar to Diderot's philosopher in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, is made to step out of the form of dramatic expression. As the protagonist addresses the audience, dramatic action is displaced into further distance. The inserted narratives interrupt the flow of the evolving drama, thereby facilitating an attitude of criticality. Just as the actor is only meant to cite his role, the spectator should perceive the drama in 'quotation marks'. Dramatic bodily enactment is qualified and framed by *another* perspective. Interrupted by the citing commentator, dramatic enactment is disembodied as pure discourse, which could be replaced by another discourse. Brecht's concept of the *epic* could thus be said to articulate itself in terms of the moment of distance between embodied and disembodied speech patterns. It continually moves in and out of the frame of citation, fluctuating between embodied enactment and disembodied metaphysical inquisition, between drama and narrative, keeping its constituent elements in loose semantic relation. Up to this point, one might argue, there is still sufficient ground for comparing Diderot and Brecht.

However, as I have shown already in the first chapter with regard to Brecht's acting principles, the individual fragments of the overall work are meant to be *viewed* laterally. In kaleidoscopic manner one fragment can be juxtaposed in a variety of ways with different other fragments thus opening up a potential for different semantic arrangements. Not only is such 'laterality' to induce a comparative juxtapositional way



of thinking, the two-dimensional pictorial quality of such an arrangement prevents the spectator's absorption into a third dimension of representation. 'Laterality' is precisely the remedy for the hypnosis, which pulls the spectator into an imaginary depth of representation, into the subjectivity of the protagonists, a psychological dimension, which for Brecht is connected with both the problem of illusion and identification.

Here we encounter the essential difference between the Brechtian and the Diderotian epic. Whereas Brecht uses the movement from dramatisation to narrative to put a brake on the illusionistic pull of embodied representation, that is, to loosen up dramatic unity and hypnotic concentration, Diderot moves the other way round. Instead of using a dynamic of stepping out of the frame, he steps deeper and deeper into the frame. Whereas Brecht moves from drama to narrative, Diderot's predominant device is to let himself be transported by mere automatism from narrative to dramatisation.

Even though Diderot's manoeuvres are explosive, time and again announcing a radical change in form, they are prompted from *within* the dynamic of the narrative, presenting the consequence of an enthused process of imagination rather than the conscious incisions suggested by Brecht. Where Brecht breaks out, Diderot breaks in, pursuing in the depths of his subjective imagination the resurrection of his fictive or remembered characters, thus bringing us back to the presence of a past situation. Rather than use interruption as a means of breaking the hypnotic power of illusion, this transformative kind of interruption figures as the result of moving along with the mechanism of illusion. The lateral organisation of the Brechtian *epic* thus presents a structure which is radically different from the way in which the epic is articulated in *Le Neveu* or other Diderotian fiction.

In contradiction to Brecht's two-dimensional laterality, our experience of Diderot's heterogeneous dialogical system is spatial. Movement and temporality become an eminent experience of reading the text. The movement of the text embraces our own consciousness since, again and again, we are transported by the energies of Diderot's imagination. Brecht, instead, wants the spectator to view dramatic exposition from the outside. Relations are stabilised for us in fragmented yet static images, an arrangement is constructed which is supposed to help us to 'see' and to 'rationalise'.

In opposition to Brecht's montage-like arrangements, offering a comparative and dialectical mode of seeing, Diderot withdraws from us the clear-cut juxtapositions of dialectical oppositions. The more movement becomes stirred up by the continual leaps into dramatisation, the more blurred vision in the Brechtian rationalist sense becomes. Juxtapositional contrast is abandoned and we are no longer viewing representation from outside; we are losing all sense of kaleidoscopic vision and becoming instead sensitised to the 'transits' of time and space. To apply a dialectically juxtapositional mode of thinking becomes more difficult since oppositions become pulled apart from their direct relational contrasts. The dissolution of epic laterality thus opens the dimensions of time and space: of three-dimensionality.

With the departure from a static kind of visuality we enter a state in which we experience our own passivity by way of being moved through the text. Semantic relations, oppositions and paradoxes are no longer neatly encapsulated on the plane of the 'dialectical image'. Brecht's rhetorical figure of the 'nicht-sondern', for which the proximity of two oppositional terms is decisive, is dissolved. Oppositions are torn apart, interspersed by the medium of time. Yet this dimension of temporality functions nevertheless as an arbiter of difference, difference which gradually tends towards contrast and opposition. Instead of Brecht's non-durational visuality, temporality then becomes a medium through which negativity strikes us in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. One could also say our experience of negativity in *Le Neveu de Rameau* is very much connected with our experience of time. Time reveals identities to be dis-identical.

*Le Neveu's* paradoxical contrariness stretches out over the whole text. The paradoxical figure of the Nephew, who is initially introduced to us as 'rien ne dissemble plus de lui que lui meme',<sup>434</sup> (77) flows over into the constant flickering of the text as large. Paradox is no longer enclosed in one place where the static law of logic presents us with impossibility, with an attack on conventional thinking, but self-contradictions evolve gradually *in time* in the motions of the text. This extended and temporalised form of paradoxical negativity is symptomatic for *Le Neveu* and presents us with negativity in moments not of juxtaposition but of gradual shift. Identities and differences continually rearrange themselves. Negativity thus appears in places where it is least expected.

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<sup>434</sup> NdR, p. 4.

The figure of the chiasm, which has been described by Jean Starobinski as characteristic for *Le Neveu*,<sup>435</sup> arises in the gradual permutations of a highly complex procedure of recombining recurrent key categories, which after having been shown in varying semantic constellations, finally appear in contradiction to their original inscription. The surprise-element implicit in this paradoxical *fluxus* depends not only on the negativity which is finally inflicted on a particular category, but on the impact of time. For instance, time has to pass for the motive of ‘genius’ to undergo a highly complex discussion. Its status has already been qualified and repositioned by the shifting opinions of the Nephew and the Philosopher, to then be forgotten for some time, only to make a reappearance in its most precarious context of the story of ‘The Jew and the Renegade’. The challenge of confusion resulting from chiastic inversion is highly amplified by the elapsing of time, its gradual shifts and changes, the disappearance of categories and their reappearance in new connections and re-evaluations. Diderot’s understanding of time as monstrosity, a time which continually mutates into different shapes, unsystematically and uncontrollably, is imprinted in the thought process of *Le Neveu* in the temporal discontinuities of the paradox. The Nephew demonstrates to us that *in time* our most cherished beliefs can pervert into monsters, into the opposite of what we meant them to be.

#### 4.3.V LE NEVEU’S UNCANNY ORCHESTRA OF VOICES

The discussion between ‘Moi’ and ‘Lui’ keeps erupting into a variety of further speech patterns, which I have already partly described in relation to the Nephew’s imaginary absorption into daydreams and pantomimes. In the manner of impersonation the Nephew’s voice consistently fans itself into a disarray of different voices. It is however not only the notion of voice metamorphosis which is uncanny, the phenomenon of voice multiplication seems to constitute one of the overriding aesthetic impressions of *Le Neveu*, producing an uncanniness that derives both from the theatrical self-alienations of the Nephew as well as from the predominance of phonetics over content.

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<sup>435</sup> ‘Sur l’emploi du chiasme dans *Le Neveu de Rameau*’, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 89, no. 2 (1984), pp. 182-196.

The importance attributed to the Nephew's lungpower, which is also associated with the organ of his stomach, and symptomatic for his instinctual characterisation, extends into the text as a whole.<sup>436</sup> The Nephew and *Le Neveu* beat reason by exerting themselves with the seductiveness of musicality as well as with the repulsiveness of noise. They appeal to the emotions and to the senses, thereby subverting reason's control and sense of orientation through the text. What the Nephew says about Robé seems to have validity in relation to *Le Neveu* at large:

Nous avons quelquefois l'ami Robé. Il nous regale de ses contes cyniques, des miracles des convulsionnaires dont il a été le témoin oculaire; et de quelques chants de son poème sur un sujet qu'il connoit à fond. Je hais ses vers; mais j'aime à l'entendre reciter. Il a l'air d'un énergumène. Tous s'écrient autour de lui: voilà ce qu'on appelle un poète. Entre nous, cette poésie n'est qu'un charivari de toutes sortes de bruits confus; le ramage barbare des habitants de la Tour de Babel.<sup>437</sup> (78)

The reference to alienation is clear. Instead of offering a language which translates itself immediately, language in *Le Neveu* is highly mediated and keeps translating itself from one idiom to another, thereby capitalising on its constantly changing melody. The result is a multi-layered assemblage of sound effects, a complex phonetic experience of different dialects, registers of tone and accents, moving between crescendo and decrescendo. In the pantomimes the distinction of separate voices breaks up into pure noise, into pure Babylonian confusion: meaning becomes subsumed in the chaos of purely acoustic experience. With each added voice the sense of eccentric dispersion increases whilst orientation and centredness are undermined.

The ultimate effect arising from *Le Neveu's* tendency of self-multiplication is an eminently acoustic one. Each role or attitude is acoustically highlighted with distinct and characteristic tones. Diderot takes a chance here to show off the brilliance and width of his heteroglotic faculty, giving proof to his mimetic-linguistic talents of self-alienation.<sup>438</sup> Metamorphosis can only be conveyed if the Nephew fully strips himself

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<sup>436</sup> For a discussion on the significance of the Nephew's lungpower see Elisabeth de Fontenay (1982), pp. 170-6.

<sup>437</sup> NdR, p. 58-9.

<sup>438</sup> See Walter E. Rex, who praises Diderot for his 'verbal abundance [which] in this work is simply phenomenal; none of the other great authors of the time shows anything like his command of vocabulary on all levels – from the most sublime abstractions at one end, to excrement and the sex act at the other. Rex stresses that *Le Neveu* is 'the only great fictional work of the century [...] in which one hears absolutely authentic spoken language – as opposed to the various literary styles employed universally [...]

of his own voice and fully embodies the voice of another. His mimetic skills are most convincing when within the totality of orchestrated sound particularity does not seem lost and each new voice resurrects a new and specific character. This orchestral organisation is most literally articulated in the great pantomime:

il sifflait les petites flutes; il recouloit les traversieres, criant, chantant, se demenant comme un forcené; faisant lui seul, les danseurs, les danseuses, les chanteurs, les chanteuses, tout un orchestre, tout un theatre lyrique, et se divisant en vingt roles divers, courant, s'arretant, avec l'air d'un energumene, etincelant des yeux, ecumant de la bouche. <sup>439</sup> (79)

Despite the fact that Diderot has been typified as a theoretician of visuality and gesture, in his own literary works, it is in fact the impact of sound that is at the heart of his literary naturalism. The acoustic illusion of the speaking voice transforms written speech into embodied and heard voice. Voice is a medium which far more than gesture constitutes a link to the inside of the body, its heart and its soul. Whereas Diderot claimed in his dramaturgical writings that the externality of the gesture rendered it the perfect for imitation, his novelistic practice shows that illusion can be conjured up by the vocal dimension of the text alone. Voices arise from the interior of the body and therefore can be taken to invoke a stronger sense of authenticity. In opposition to facial expression and gesture which always already seems to belong to a mimetically dominated territory of the body, the voice is more acceptable as an indexical link to the innermost characteristics and properties of a personality. Like the speaking jewels in *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, the voice is believed to expose from within the body the truths which the surface of the body knows how to cover up. However, the acoustic medium, which is deemed more trustworthy since it seems more difficult to manipulate, can be considered a much more powerful and cunning instrument of illusion, once it is under mimetic control.

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in the fictions of Voltaire, Rousseau, Crébillon fils, Montesquieu and all the other famous authors.' Furthermore Rex points out that this idiomatic abundance mainly applies to the Nephew, who in opposition to the Philosopher's literary correct yet limited vocabulary, has to be able to let his words wonder anywhere, 'bringing into the open just the thoughts and behaviour Diderot would never have articulated for himself and on his own.' In *Diderot's Counterpoints: The Dynamics of Contrariety in his Major Works* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), pp. 253-4. Although I believe that the latter remark is assumptive and that the author is here confused with 'Moi', the Philosopher, it is nevertheless true that *Le Neveu's* unleashing of linguistic variety, in particular the exploration of common language, can be seen as an unblocking of repressed energies. Bakhtin on heteroglossia and the novel, see 'Discourse and the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist' (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259-422.

<sup>439</sup> NdR, p. 84.

It is precisely for that reason, namely the voice's power to delude and to manipulate, that it is implicitly uncanny. Diderot as 'Je', as 'Moi', as 'Lui' as 'il', as the Philosopher, as the Nephew, as the pimp, as the girl, as Bouret, as the renegade, and as many more 'others', shows us that different characters can be mimetically reproduced by one voice alone, that even the voice can lie. If gesture was recommended as drama's prime medium of illusionistic representation, in *Le Neveu* illusion does its work better when invested with a medium that is supposedly more candid and innocent. In opposition to the illusionistic effects of the *heteroglossia* performed by the narrator, gesture only stands as a schematic sketch of the Nephew's pathological pantomimic behaviour. The automaton-like visual traces left by the Nephew's pantomimic exercises are perceived with curious distance, since the strangeness of the Nephew's behaviour is too explicit. The function of the Nephew's gestures is to raise curiosity as to what lies behind them and not to dupe the reader with illusion. Mimetic gesturality in *Le Neveu* is meta-mimetic, gesturing at the task of interpretation rather than mime for the purpose of illusion.<sup>440</sup>

This cannot be said about the position of the voice in the text. Every emergent voice seems to transform from the visual medium of the written word to a voice with full acoustic body. Mediation is being undone, distance is cut down, and under the impact of a physically perceived phonetic experience in the here and now, we become subject to an illusion that is profoundly connected with the medium of sound. Much of the presence of the text depends on this use of the metamorphic voice, a voice whose idiom must be replicated so perfectly that we can 'literally' hear it speak, that we can sense a body behind the linguistic configuration, the body of a real 'character', who addresses us, who through his voice transgresses the medium of text and moves physically into our intimacy.

Furthermore, vision is a medium which seems to lend itself better to rational analysis than acoustics. Deprived of vision we have to sensitise ourselves to the highly differentiated undulations of resonating bodies in a dark space. To make sense of a

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<sup>440</sup> See Martin Raether: 'Pantomime und Mimesis: Die Interpretationen des Neveu', in *Denis Diderot: Oder die Ambivalenz der Aufklärung*, ed. Dietrich Harth and Martin Raether (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1987), pp. 105-127. I will discuss this article in detail in the final section.

purely acoustic world is a far more difficult task. In the *Lettre sur les Aveugles*, Diderot writes about the blind man:

Il a la mémoire des sons à un degré surprenant; et les visages ne nous offrent pas une diversité plus grande que celle qu'il observe dans les voix. Elles ont pour lui une infinité de nuances délicates qui nous échappent, parce que nous n'avons pas à les observer, le même intérêt que l'aveugle. Il en est pour nous de ces nuances comme de notre propre visage. De tous les hommes que nous avons vus, celui que nous nous rappellerions le moins, c'est nous-même. Nous n'étudions les visages que pour reconnaître les personnages; et si nous ne retenons pas la nôtre, c'est que nous ne serons jamais exposés à nous prendre pour un autre, ni un autre pour nous.<sup>441</sup> (80)

Just as our own sense of self is shadowy and blurred, without much contrast and definition, the sense of hearing has to rely on the subtle nuances and gradations from tone to tone, an exercise of perception far more challenging for the one who relies predominantly on his eyes. We are not looking at an external picture of the world, but at the elusive resonances which hit us internally and which we are attempting to translate into sense. Although this space is marked by familiarity, it appears strange and we have yet to learn how to read its subtle gradations.

By creating a dense orchestral texture of sound, and by elevating the voice as a prime medium of illusion and manipulation, Diderot seems to confront the reader with exactly that challenge: to learn how to read within an alien medium in which we are less practised and which we have yet to learn how to discern. By blinding us he puts us into a situation, in which our interpretative sensitivity has to become heightened. In the field of a dark space, enriched with the complex textures of sounds, we will have to develop the blind man's memory for sound, we will have to learn how to distinguish the many differences of the voice, and above all, we will have to learn how to discriminate the voice of seduction from the one we can trust. In the predominance of sound over vision we will have to learn how to distance ourselves from the dialogical intimacy into which Diderot tries to wrap us.

In sum, the exploration of the acoustic medium in *Le Neveu* is twofold. On the one hand the voice as a prime medium of illusion seduces us because it cuts down distance and mediation. Instead, we can define the medium of visibility as a semantic field of

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<sup>441</sup> *Lettre sur les Aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient*, DOP, p. 144.

rational distance. Diderot proposes an uncanny form of alienation as part and parcel of his skilled vocal illusionism.<sup>442</sup> Yet this illusionism based on Diderot's skill to speak in the tongues of others is a double-edged one. On the one hand, it constitutes the moment in which rationality is shaded by the magic of illusion and by an experience that transmits itself primarily through the senses. On the other hand, by switching from the sense of vision to that of acoustics, the reader is led into disorientation, exposed to a texture of shadings that posits a challenge for recognition far more radical than Brecht's dialectical aesthetics of visual contour and contrast. In the last section I will demonstrate how this uncanniness of 'tone' is framed in the context of the Nephew's stories, suggesting that here Diderot confronts us with the question of recognition in a way that is incongruous with Brecht.

#### 4.3.VI NO ALIENATION-EFFECT WITHOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF ILLUSION

Diderot is far removed from renouncing the form of illusion despite the fact that *Le Neveu* is largely concerned with society's decline into mimetic machinery. The acknowledgement that theatricality has come to rule over social life, that the notions of truth and morality have become evacuated from the field of social action, leads to no attempt to eliminate illusion as a form of representation. On the contrary, as I have just demonstrated, through the forms of dialogue, dramatisation and voice, illusion is celebrated and put to full effect. What becomes alienating here, is not the interruption of illusion, but the staging of an illusion that seems to lurk everywhere.

However, this is not all there is to it. Although Diderot enchants us with the magic of bringing to life the resonance and specificity of the speaking voice, although he uses dramatisation to bring us nearer the subjectivity of a scene, this illusionism is nonetheless incomplete. It functions rather, as the final passages will show, as an inevitable preparation for the staging of a Diderotian form of *Verfremdung*, which closer to Diderot's vocabulary, could perhaps also be named 'mystification'. The inclusion of illusion into aesthetics is not uncritical, but serves to sharpen the inherent

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<sup>442</sup> My argument can perhaps be further supported by the fact that spatial visualisation is neglected in *Le Neveu*. In opposition to nineteenth-century naturalism, *locus* and *milieu* only become relevant in very exceptional circumstance. They do not function as a means of creating an illusion of the real circumstances of the figures. The experience of space in *Le Neveu de Rameau* is one of ethereal blackness, an abstract space, in which wraps into itself the bodies of the speaking voices.



problems of alienation, making more complex and tangible its effects by splicing together the themes of 'real' and 'aesthetic' illusion. The experiential side of the problem of illusion is hence not circumvented but enhanced.

#### 4.3.VII MYSTIFYING THE ALIENATION-EFFECT

In *Diderot et la Mystification*, Jean Catrysse explicates the role of *mystification* as an aesthetic means which belongs at once to realism and parody: what appears first as realism reveals itself as parody, that is, as an ironical critique of realism.<sup>443</sup> In the form of *mystification* we can see converge such otherwise incompatible and opposite aesthetic means. *Mystification* involves not only the skilled authorial craft of duping the reader with the *vraisemblance* of fictional material - the making plausible of a slightly dubious scenario: it also involves the process of unmasking the fictional basis of a story, ridiculing the reader's (or, as Catrysse shows, in many cases Diderot's real dialogist's) naive credulity.

According to Catrysse the structure of *mystification* depends on two conditions. The one is the element of temporal process in which suspension of belief and the momentum of unmasking come to define the dynamics of Diderot's *duperie*. By confirming the essentially temporal experience of *mystification*, Catrysse also invokes the possibility of positing a temporalised form of alienation, which is one of the questions at the core of this dissertation. A mystifying form of alienation-effect would rely on the spectator's heightened sense of durational, successive time.

La mystification n'est pas un événement isolé, strictement limité dans le temps à un épisode unique; elle se déroule au contraire en plusieurs étapes, elle comporte de préférence une suite.<sup>444</sup> (81)

The other condition is that the *mystification* must evolve in the framework of a highly intimate dialogical situation. Cartrysse describes Diderot as:

Menteur avisé, il s'est insidieusement installé dans notre intimité pour faire de nous les dupes de sa fiction.<sup>445</sup> (82)

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<sup>443</sup> (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1970), p. 11.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

The ‘mystificateur’ scrutinises, anticipates and exploits his ‘victim’s’ every response, his interlocutor’s eagerness to indulge in a sensational story, his belief and curiosity. Thus, *mystification* is experienced by the listener as a highly discomfiting and alienating event. Whilst believing himself in the role of the complicit listener, his trust and sympathy with the storyteller are undermined, and it is he who finds himself at the end of the story as the object of ridicule. An exchange of victimisation is rehearsed. If in the beginning, the reader believed himself on top of the story, on top of the process of victimisation, he ends up being the victim himself. If originally he could draw satisfaction from identifying with the omnipotent voice of the author, thus becoming invisible and passive in the anonymity of the story, he finds himself tested in the end, forced to confront his own subjective implications in the story.

Catrysse retrieves from Diderot’s biography prolific and varied examples of practical jokes in the sense of *mystification*. He shows in fact how the relations between Rousseau and Diderot ended in conflict precisely in relation to such a practical joke performed at the cost of the abbé Petit for the entertainment of Diderot’s friends. Diderot had jokingly advised the abbé to write tragedies, which the abbé had taken seriously. He recites his tragedies before the circle of Diderot and his friends who use the occasion as entertainment and mockery, until Rousseau steps in, tearing the manuscript out of the abbé’s hands:

‘Votre pièce ne vaut rien, votre discours est une extravagance, tous ces messieurs se moquent de vous, sortez d’ici et allez vicarier dans votre village.’ Il fallut les séparer et ce fut, selon le baron, le début de la brouille entre Rousseau et la ‘coterie holbachique’.<sup>446</sup> (83)

The event depicts Rousseau’s discomfort with this type of amusement, which epitomises for him the corrupt and deceptive sociability of the circle around Diderot. Catrysse shows how *mystification* penetrates Diderot’s fictional writings, most famously perhaps with regard to *La Religieuse*, which began as a practical joke and ended as a novel. Catrysse assigns the use of *mystification*, to *Jacques le Fataliste*, *Les bijoux indiscrets* and *L’Oiseau blanc*.<sup>447</sup> In comparison to these novels, he considers *Le*

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid., p. 28. With reference to André Billy: *Vie de Diderot* (Paris, 1943), pp. 128-131, and Arthur M. Wilson: *Diderot: The Testing Years, 1713-1759* (New York, 1975), p. 182.

<sup>447</sup> *L’Oiseau blanc, conte bleu*, DOC, pp. 223-267.

*Neveu* as anti-Richardsonian, as an *Anti-Religieuse*.<sup>448</sup> *Le Neveu de Rameau* supposedly lacks the process of the victimising *mystification*, instead representing the symbolisation of the principle of dupery itself. The Nephew is not a virtuous victim like the nun, but a figure who condenses in himself the skills of masking and unmasking.<sup>449</sup> He is entirely situated on the side of cynical satire; for Catrysse, that is on the side of dis-illusion. This conclusion neglects however a complex interplay between the emblematic satirical characteristics of *Le Neveu* and those which speak the language of illusion. As I will show in the following section, it is in the process of the Nephew's storytelling that *mystification* unfolds itself, putting the reader under the spell of illusionistic power not in order to make him believe but to render conscious the reader's willingness to be duped.

In the process of storytelling Diderot draws the reader into a world which he describes in *Le Neveu* as alienating. Alienation as *Verfremdung*, thus becomes coupled with the notions of subjectivity and identification. An aesthetic conjunction of effects is constructed which would have been unthinkable in the theory of Brecht. My argument in the following owes much to Martin Raether's analysis of the significance of mimetic and pantomimic action in *Le Neveu de Rameau*.<sup>450</sup> Although his argument positions *Le Neveu* in almost too close a proximity to the Brechtian 'unalienating' process of 'unmasking' – Raether does indeed neglect the textual strategies of illusionism which I have attempted to unravel in the notions of dialogue, voice and dramatisation – his analysis of a 'polysemous' structure of mimetic action is highly illuminating in the ways in which Diderot confronts the subject of the reader with the problematics of alienation set out in the text through the aesthetics of the text itself. I have adopted with some differences in emphasis and interpretation Raether's understanding of the core trilogy of stories in *Le Neveu*, 'The Pimp and the Girl', 'Bouret' and 'The Jew and the Renegade'. I have done so in order to re-address the issue of Raether's 'mask' as a trope for an illusionistic kind of alienation-effect. I will however only focus on the culminating story, 'The Jew and the Renegade', since this last one comprises elements of the two former stories and represents the most radical event in *Le Neveu's* storytelling.

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<sup>448</sup> Catrysse (1980), p. 288.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Martin Raether: 'Pantomime und Mimesis: Die Interpretationen des Neveu', in *Denis Diderot: Oder die Ambivalenz der Aufklärung*, ed. Dietrich Harth and Martin Raether (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1987), pp. 105-127.

Before outlining the ways in which Diderot produces an unbrechtian kind of alienation-effect, I want to take one step back to show how the elaboration of the theme of theatrical alienation, namely, the infiltration of theatricality into the realm of society, effects the dialogue between the Nephew and the Philosopher. Their relation represents a kind of micro-sociology in itself, in which the corruption of social hypocrisy is not only elaborated as a subject of their discussions but surfaces in their actual relation.

It is of course not the case that the protagonists of *Le Neveu* are in any sense innocent or traumatised victims of the trickeries of the 'pantomime du monde'. On the contrary, as subjects of a world of alienating theatricality, one can assume, they have perfected the art of how to play the game. One of the theatrical pleasures of observing their discussions consists in their elegant skill of masking themselves in the face of the other's intrusive gaze of interrogation. The philosopher is as concerned to protect himself against the Nephew's attempts to bring him to the point of personal confession, as the Nephew excels in making a virtue out of his protean qualities, performing in the manner of the exhibitionist the enigma of his character-less character. Both of them are implicated in an elaborate dialogical game, which must be played strategically, as the metaphor of the chess game reveals at the very beginning of the text. Never do they reveal their true motivations and selves. If the Nephew can be said to 'play for his life', this survival game is also reframed in the chess-like modalities of discussion.<sup>451</sup>

Although the Nephew and the Philosopher are not caught within one of the master-slave discourses parodied by the Nephew, in which one must contort himself pantomimically for the other, they are nevertheless performing for each other, organising their dialogue according to the principles of a theatrical performance, in which one will have to guard himself not to become the fool of the other. Both dialogists are constantly aware that the other may mean something else from what he says; that he may lay out traps for him just like the Nephew's 'friend Robbé' who conceals intelligence behind a stupid looking face: 'C'est un piège que nous tendons aux nouveaux venus, et je n'en ai presque pas vu un seul qui n'y donnât.'<sup>452</sup> (84)

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<sup>451</sup> On the trope of the chess game in *Le Neveu*, see Sumi (1975), in particular the chapter 'Autour de l'image de jeu', pp. 95-110.

<sup>452</sup> NdR, p. 59.

The Nephew's and Philosopher's theatrical conditioning is typified by a sharpened alertness to the dangers of illusion and deception. With almost paranoid caution they scrutinise each other's every move. Almost no discussion is led to an end: time and again one of the protagonists suggests a change of subject, just at the point when a hidden agenda seems to surface behind an abstract debate. The protagonist's relationship evolves as a process of concealing the self and unmasking the other. From this arise further consequences. The notion of their true identity becomes for ever deferred, an effect which however entails that hermeneutic faculties have to become further and further sensitised. Be it at the level of the protagonists' everyday survival or at the level of textual understanding, there is no end to the task of interpretation. It is exactly this double structure of mask and interpretation which is restaged in the spectacle of the protagonist's rhetorical manoeuvres. With an increase in theatrical appearance and alienation, one could argue, interpretative efforts have to become more sophisticated.<sup>453</sup> At the level of aesthetic strategy, the notion of Hegelian *Zerrissenheit* is therefore implicitly linked to the restaging of theatrical modalities of expression. The more the author shrouds the status of truth in the text, the more *zerrissen* will be the *Zerrissenheit* of the reader.

Within the framework of 'Moi's' and 'Lui's' dialogue Diderot reorganises and condenses, at the level of the representation of communication, the mechanisms of a mimetic social cosmos. He thereby enhances the satire of the 'pantomime du monde' with an actual execution of mimetically conditioned forms of communication. The categories of masking, illusion, seduction, deception on the one hand, and unmasking and interpretation on the other, are recognised as part and parcel of the social pressures of a society caught in theatrical spectacle, but they are also reconfigured in a highly layered scheme of textual re-presentation, which Raether understands as integral to the satirical origin of *Le Neveu*. Satire calls for the interpretative involvement of the reader.<sup>454</sup>

Not only 'Moi', the Philosopher, but also 'moi', the reader, become the receiving end of the Nephew's slippery form of self-representation. According to Raether, it is never

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<sup>453</sup> One could at this place refer back to Gracian, whose *Manual* displays the same connection between a maximisation of theatrical concealment and the concomitant need for developing faculties of interpretation.

<sup>454</sup> Raether (1987), p. 107.

quite clear whether the Nephew in his anecdotes *represents* or whether he *presents*.<sup>455</sup> Does he represent himself or the satire of society? Does he mime the caricature of himself, or does he show the mirror image of ‘Moi’s’ distorted opinion about him?<sup>456</sup> The ambiguity of the Nephew’s prolific self-exhibitionism is even more accentuated by the way in which he responds to the Philosopher’s questions. Instead of staying in the medium of verbal language, he constantly changes ‘medium’: his responses are encrypted in gestures, parodies, pantomimes and songs, thus making the ‘trans-legibility’ of the text a difficult exercise. Instead of receiving an answer, the reader is asked to interpret the possible subtext implied in the Nephew’s mimeticism. The process of maximising and layering moments of mimetic action could thus be said to lead to a sense of mediality which is less to do with the idea of Brecht’s anti-illusionism than with a strategy of complicating textual semantics in order to put into relief the necessity of the work of interpretation.

Raether exposes the many signals gesturing towards this task of interpretation. ‘The Pimp and the Girl’ story ends with the Nephew’s enunciation: ‘voilà le texte de mes fréquents soliloques que vous pouvez paraphraser à votre fantaisie; pourvu que vous en concluiez que je connais le mépris de soi-même...’<sup>457</sup> (85) The possibility of different interpretations is articulated at the end of the passage on reading: ‘De là vient que leurs lectures ne les rendent pas meilleurs que moi; mais qu’ils restent ridicules, et de pit d’eux; au lieu que je ne le suis que quand je veux, et que je les laisse alors loin derrière moi; car le même art qui m’apprend à me sauver du ridicule en certaines occasions, m’apprend aussi dans d’autres à l’attrapper supérieurement.’<sup>458</sup> (86) The possibility of wrong interpretation is suggested at the end of the Nephew’s anecdote, when he reports of his enforced support of Bertin’s lover’s acting ambition: ‘Ma ressource étoit de jeter quelques mots ironiques qui sauvassent du ridicule mon applaudissement solitaire, qu’on interpretoit à contresens.’<sup>459</sup> (87)

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<sup>455</sup> The difference is sharper in German: Raether distinguishes between *Darstellung* und *Vorstellung*, p. 110, drawing here on a distinction that is also typical for the Brechtian vocabulary: the difference between being a character and presenting it.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>457</sup> NdR, p. 24.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.

#### *4.3.VIII STORYTELLING AS TEST*

Whereas the Nephew's slippages into pantomimic gesture impose the necessity of interpretation, since understanding is only provided at an oblique angle through the translation from the medium of movement to that of language, the issue of interpretation figures differently in the Nephew's storytelling. Whereas in the pantomimes the reader could observe the theme of the mask from distance, in the stories the author ties a more intimate communicational circuit with his reader, reaching further into his consciousness. Here he excels most in crafting the illusionistic pull of his voice and the reader's risk of seduction is most acute. What is common to the three main stories, 'The Pimp and the Girl', 'Bouret', and the 'Jew and the Renegade' is that in all of them the problem of the seductive powers of illusion is restaged. Narrative thrives on its potential to capture, absorb and make the reader identify.

However, the illusionistic element of storytelling is nonetheless interspersed with calls for interpretation, with interruptive reflections and conspicuous signals. Theatricality, which has been amply thematised and parodied, proceeds now to put the reader to the test. Instead of censoring the form of illusion, as Brecht's aesthetic of alienation proposed, illusion and identification become essential constituents in Diderot's rhetoric of recognition.

In the 'Pimp and the Girl' the Nephew impersonates a Pimp's procuring an 'innocent' bourgeois girl. The dramatic quality of the narrative is highly convincing, since the tone of each character is captured with utmost realism. We can literally hear the 'naive girl' and the 'ruthless villain' speak. The Nephew's story is so believable that we are tempted to take it as autobiographical and identify him with the 'Pimp'. However, as the end of the story reveals, the Nephew's daydream was purely speculative, and it is 'others' who make a social success out of their corruption. Due to his sarcastic frankness the Nephew never manages to stay for very long in the company of the 'great' and is thus excluded from the privileges of a society embroiled in immoral and hypocrite behaviour.

'Bouret' takes the theme of the mask into a more explicit domain. Instead of the process of fictional seduction the reader is confronted with the 'mask' as a signal for

caution, which will become essential in the last and most precarious story of 'The Jew and the Renegade'. This time, the contents of the story are absurd and unbelievable, but the Nephew stages nevertheless an intimate dialogue with his listener, continually checking whether his interlocutor pays attention to every single step of the story and is sufficiently convinced. The story reports of Bouret's triumphant trickeries. In order to flatter the 'Keeper of the Seals', he has a mask made that resembles the latter. Since the 'Keeper of the Seals' had taken a liking to Bouret's dog he now reconditions the dog to develop affection to the 'Keeper of the Seals' by wearing the mask and rewarding the dog when he runs up to him. The story is not precisely a revelation since we would have expected a more thrilling example of trickery. Moreover, it is unconvincing that a dog could become conditioned by means of a mask. Nevertheless our curiosity is not exhausted and we want to hear more about Bouret. But the Nephew decides that we and the Philosopher have heard enough: 'Vous etes un profane qui ne merite pas d'etre instruit de miracles qui s'operent a coté de vous.'<sup>460</sup> (88) Instead of further narrative thrills the reader is presented with a hymn to the mask:

Se faire un masque qui lui ressemble! Le masque surtout me tourne la tete. Aussi cet homme jouit-il de la plus haute consideration. Aussi possede-t-il des millions. [...] Le masque! le masque! Je donnerois un de mes doigts pour avoir trouvé le masque.<sup>461</sup> (89)

This hinting at a mask which has meaning beyond the context of the story could not be done more explicitly. The mask becomes a warning sign of the possibility of taking the story too seriously and confusing fact with fiction. If the reader had trusted his own sense of perplexity, if he had been able to read the notion of the mask in its double sense, he had perhaps been able to interrupt the process of being fooled.

In the story of the 'Jew and the Renegade' Diderot's mystifying trickeries are stretched to an extreme. Until now the Nephew's story telling had only tested the reader's credulity. The 'Pimp and the Girl' and 'Bouret' focused on performing the powers of narrative seduction and the reader's readiness to become trapped in obvious rhetorical tricks. 'The Jew and the Renegade' proceeds to play with higher stakes. If the previous stories were more or less benign in their consequences, mainly functioning as a 'school of awareness', the 'Jew and the Renegade' is stripped of the earlier light-heartedness

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.



and accentuates the implicit process of victimisation. The Nephew's theoretical fascination with evil moves closer to practice. The enjoyment of the story is here bought at the price of human life. It is not only the reader who is victimised on account of his naively taking fiction for fact, but the story demands the victimisation of another, the murder of a Jew.

The story of the 'Jew and the Renegade' is anticipated by the Nephew's announcement that he will take his morality of abjection to the very end. Once more he wants to expose his character as a perverse inversion of the Philosopher's understanding of dignity:

Je suis a vos yeux un etre tres abject, tres meprisable, et je le suis aussi quelquefois aux miens; mais rarement. Je me felicite plus souvent de mes vices que je ne m'en blame. Vous etes plus constant dans votre mepris.<sup>462</sup> (90)

The target of the Nephew's next 'intrigue' will be an attack on the Philosopher's firm constancy of moral judgement. His 'confession' to reveal now the rest of his moral corruption is here only pretext. The subject of 'confession' will end up being 'Moi'. However, if the Nephew promises to reveal finally to the Philosopher the rest, his ideas immediately move on from personal story to history, the history of great criminals. The Nephew shifts, almost unnoticeably, the question of 'personal abjection' to the realm of the sublime, of sublime evil and aesthetics. This shift is made invisible by a promising aphorism on the greatness of evil:

S'il importe d'etre sublime en quelque genre, c'est surtout en mal. On crache sur un petit filou; mais on ne peut refuser une sorte de consideration a un grand criminal. Son courage vous etonne. Son atrocite vous fait frémir.<sup>463</sup> (91)

Already we have settled in the abstract realm of story telling, and we are becoming oblivious to how the story might be connected to the Nephew's personal confessions. Although the Philosopher is still attempting to take the attention back to the Nephew's concrete relation to the subject of sublime evil, our own interest has already drifted to the promise of the story. The Nephew, or Diderot, has thus managed to establish a dialogue with the reader at the level of a desire for fictional *jouissance*. 'Son courage

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-2.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

vous etonne. Son atrocité vous fait fremir'. This rhetoric of putting us directly into a scenario of aesthetic enjoyment makes us forget the question at issue: the Nephew's provocative definition of morality. The question of morality has been superseded by an aesthetic of sublime evil.

For a few more moments, the back-and-forth between Philosopher and Nephew still withholds from us the name of the criminal hero who, according to the Nephew, takes second place with Palissot, after Bouret, a remark which in itself is deeply ironic, given the absurdity of Bouret's exploits. Finally the Nephew presents us with the 'Renegade of Avignon'. The ironic signals, which could make the reader take a more sceptical stance, have become ineffectual: 'Moi', the philosopher and the reader, have become mystified, offering their willingness to become seduced. The Nephew now strikes a double discourse, which Raether in his interpretation divides into 'reflexion' and 'histoire', two terms, which are put into relief by the Nephew himself.<sup>464</sup>

These two counter-movements vacillate between the forward-leaping absorptive drive of the story and the interrupting quality of the reflections which direct the attention inwards, towards the dialogical relationship between the storyteller and the reader, between seducer and the subject of seduction. This reflective subtext is a highly personal one, pushing 'Moi' into a place where he is not an abstract rational observer like Brecht's spectator, but where he becomes personally involved in a concrete event, in a situation in which each participant has to confront his own singularity. The subtextual dialogue, performs both the function of drawing the reader closer into the narrator's intimacy, as well as giving him a chance to escape the voice of seduction. Much can be made of the Nephew's sparse words which start off the story: even the upcoming downfall of 'Moi' seems here ironically anticipated:

MOI. - Je n'ai jamais entendu parler de ce renegat d'Avignon; mais c'est doit être un homme bien étonnant.

LUI. - Aussi l'est-il.

MOI. - L'histoire des grands personnages m'a toujours intéressé.

LUI. - Je le crois bien.<sup>465</sup> (92)

After having hinted at the Philosopher's credulity the Nephew moves straight into the story, introducing the other protagonist, the Jew, in longwinded rhetorical twists and

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<sup>464</sup> Raether (1987), p. 121.

<sup>465</sup> NdR, pp. 72-3.

detours. He then returns to the question of credulity, this time in relation not to 'Moi' but to the Jew. Reflection and story have become intermeshed. From now onwards the Nephew will continually oscillate between 'histoire' and 'reflexion'.

...Celui ci vivoit chez un bon et honnete de ces descendants d'Abraham, promis au pere des Croyants, en nombre egal a celui des etoiles.

MOI. – Chez un Juif.

LUI. – Chez un Juif. Il en avait surpris d'abord la commiseration, ensuite la bienveillance, enfin la confiance la plus entiere. Car voila comme il en arrive toujours. Nous comptons tellement sur nos bienfaits, qu'il est rare que nous cachions notre secret, a celui que nous avons comblé de nos bontés. Le moyen qu'il n'y ait pas des ingrats; quand nous exposons l'homme, a la tentation de l'etre impunement. C'est une reflexion juste que notre Juif ne fit pas. Il confia donc au renegat qu'il ne pouvoit en conscience manger du cochon. Vous allez voir tout le parti qu'un esprit fecond sçut tirer de cet aveu.<sup>466</sup> (93)

As with the 'Pimp and the Girl', the theme of the story is the seduction of the innocent 'believers' who do not protect themselves against the exploitation of those who might potentially have a different set of *mœurs*. The 'Jew' is essentially a believer in contrast to the 'Renegade' who has abandoned religious belief as well as ethics and who epitomises perhaps the worst outcome of atheism. Furthermore, the 'Renegade' is also identified with the Nephew in taking 'negativity' to its ultimate ends. His rejection of ethical responsibility is the realisation of the Nephew's hypothetical moral abjection. Thus, the Nephew proclaims cynically that it is the Jew's responsibility to have confided in the Renegade, that he himself produced the crime that in the course of the story will be inflicted on him. Honesty and trust supposedly lead to evil.

As Raether shows, the overriding themes of the story's beginning are 'confiance' and belief. This also refers to the listener's willingness to be transported by fiction. The Renegade's achievement consists in having gained the Jew's complete trust, to the point where the latter entrusted to him the secret of his religion, thereby revealing the vulnerability of his social status. This 'reflexion' is also a sign for 'Moi' and for the reader, who as a result of the previous stories should already have learnt how to protect themselves against their eagerness to trust and to believe. But instead, 'Moi' shows himself annoyed by the Nephew's reflections, experiencing them as distracting and irrelevant to the course of the story. The Nephew has just reported to us the Renegade's cautious tactics in winning the Jew's trust when he bursts into such a reflection:

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

...Admirez la circonspection de cet homme. Il ne se hate pas. Il laisse murir la poire avant que de secouer la branche. Trop d'ardeur pouvoit faire echouer son projet. C'est qu'ordinairement la grandeur de caractere resulte de la balance naturelle de plusieurs qualites opposees.

MOI. – Et laissez la vos reflexions, et continuez moi votre histoire.<sup>467</sup> (94)

Captivated himself, 'Moi' has no use for the storyteller's 'epic' interruptions. His scepticism has been reduced to zero. He comes to be identified with the role of the 'believer'. However, the Nephew insists on his compulsion to reflect and it is on this new level that the discourse continues. In dialogical complicity the Nephew asks the Philosopher to remind him where he had left off:

...Ou en etais-je?

MOI.- A l'intimité bien etablie, entre le Juif et le renegat.

LUI. - Alors la poire etait mure...Mais vous ne m'écoutez pas. A quoi revez-vous?

MOI. - Je reve a l'inegalité de votre ton; tantot haut, tantot bas.

LUI.- Est-ce que le ton de l'homme vicieux peut etre un?<sup>468</sup> (95)

The discussion has moved to the subject of tone, which as I have shown in the section on voice, constitutes one of the eminent aesthetic experiences in *Le Neveu*. The experience of tone is strongly linked to the issue of illusion and the difficulty of determining the true identity and status of a voice. Now the Nephew proclaims that there can be no unity in the tone of a vicious man. It is precisely the lack of a stable and balanced identity which propels an evil kind of theatricality and which makes up the criminal's capability to adopt other voices in order to manipulate his victims. In the ambiguity of the voice the danger of deception becomes most acute. We cannot see through the story or the storyteller, all we are left with is our judgment of tone. In the minute shades of the Nephew's voice we have to learn how to differentiate between sincerity and artificiality, between lie and truth.

The Nephew does not linger over these reflections and precipitates back into storytelling, now no longer in the form of a 'Platonically correct' narrative, but in the form of impersonation. However, whilst he here tightens the screws of his illusionistic magic, he provides us with another key. By impersonating the voices of the protagonists, and at the same time attributing to evil an inconsistent tone, he opens up

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

the possibility that he might in fact be the Renegade himself: 'Can the style of the vicious man have any unity?' As Raether remarks, it remains open who this vicious man may be.<sup>469</sup> Again we are given a chance to safeguard ourselves against the voice of seduction, but we are already immersed in the rapid and now highly dramatic account of the story:

...Il arrive un soir chez son bon ami, l'air effaré, la voix entrecoupée, le visage pale comme la mort, tremblant de tous ses membres. – Qu'avez-vous? – Nous sommes perdus. – Perdus, et comment? – Perdus, vous dis je; perdus sans ressource. – Expliquez vous...- Un moment, que je me remette de mon effroi. – Allons, remettez vous, lui dit le Juif; au lieu de lui dire: Tu est un fieffé fripon; tu joues la terreur.<sup>470</sup> (96)

The Philosopher is perplexed about the last reflection: why should the Jew have spoken like this. According to his perception, nothing disconcerting could have been observed. But the Nephew puts him straight, exposing not only the Jew's but also the Philosopher's blindness to the 'tones' of evil:

LUI.- C'est qu'il etoit faux, et qu'il avait passé la mesure. Cela est clair pour moi, et ne m'interrompez pas davantage. – Nous sommes perdus, perdus sans ressource. Est-ce que vous ne sentez pas l'affectation de ces *perdus* repetés?<sup>471</sup> (97)

Representation has become not only dramatic but also highly theatrical. The Renegade's tone seems affected; perhaps a little too affected to pass as genuine. Due to his overt rhetoric of repetition we should have become aware that representation has become too self-conscious for its own good. The Renegade does not express himself, but he enacts an exaggerated show of fear in order to affect the Jew. By spelling out the rhetorical tricks of the Renegade's technique of seduction, the Nephew also points at the rhetoric to which his interlocutor will have succumbed. The lies of the Renegade are identical with the Nephew's skill of crafting a thrilling story. Social mimesis is once more presented in unity with aesthetic mimesis. If the Nephew has elsewhere spoken of the importance of measure and balance within social mimesis, he now shows the application of such principles and their dissimulation.

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<sup>469</sup> RN, p. 123.

<sup>470</sup> NdR, p. 74.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

With the equation of social and aesthetic mimesis, Diderot puts the emphasis back on the social situation of storytelling, back to a dialogue between a seducer and a believer, a dialogical event in which also the reader is involved. This situation uncoils in every single moment of the story in which the Nephew demonstrates power and authority over his listener. Despite his own continual interruptions, he puts the Philosopher back into place: ‘stop interrupting me’, he demands almost tyrannically. The situation is no longer a democratic dialogue, but the Nephew plays with the Philosopher’s very consciousness, always one step ahead of his next thought. The storytelling continues on the same line, saturated with the pompous rhetoric of the Renegade as well as complicating reflection:

...Un traître nous a déferés a la sainte Inquisition, vous comme Juif, moi comme renégat, comme un infame renégat. Vous voyez comme le traître ne rougit pas de se servir des expressions les plus odieuses. Il faut plus de courage qu’on n’en pense pour s’appeler de son nom. Vous ne savez pas ce qu’il en coûte pour en venir là.<sup>472</sup> (98)

The unity of the different mimetic levels of the text is now perfect. If fiction demanded from the Nephew as a storyteller to become his protagonists, this process is now reversed, and the fictional Renegade becomes the Nephew. The monsters of imagination become real, the delivery of speech more and more fanatical. But whilst the Nephew still boasts with the bluntness of his self-revelation (‘Il faut plus de courage qu’on ne pense pour s’appeler de son nom. Vous ne savez pas ce qu’il en coûte pour en venir là’), ‘Moi’s’ interest is still fixated on the contents of the story, still insisting on a clear separation between fiction and reality. Does he have any interest in the Renegade’s strange unmasking? ‘Non certes. Mais cet infame renégat...’<sup>473</sup> (99) The Nephew responds by pushing him back to the ambiguity of the dialogical situation, the very collapse of social and aesthetic mimesis. The renegade: ‘Est faux; mais c’est une fausseté bien adroite.’<sup>474</sup> (100)

However, he now seems to appear more lenient towards his listener, finally willing to proceed to the culmination of the story. Whilst the story becomes more gripping, the rhetoric becomes more and more blunt:

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

...Le Juif s'effraye, il s'arrache la barbe, il se roule a terre. Il voit les sbirres a sa porte; il se voit affublé du san benito; il voit son auto da fé préparé. - Mon ami, mon tendre ami, mon unique ami, quel parti prendre....<sup>475</sup> (101)

As Raether points out, the threefold repetition of 'perdu', 'voit' and 'ami' and the emphatic tone conspire to an all too obvious artificiality in the speech delivery of the protagonists, which is of course nothing but the rhetoric of the storyteller. The Nephew stops his reflective interruptions and the Renegade proceeds with his plans continuing to feign solidarity with the Jew, suggesting an escape route, which involves hiring a ship that can take them into safety and liberty:

...et nous irons, vous et moi, chercher, sous un autre ciel, la liberté de servir notre Dieu et de suivre en sureté la loi d'Abraham et de notre conscience.<sup>476</sup> (102)

The Nephew's speech culminates in the rhetoric of religious fanaticism, opening up the pathos of communal religious worship between 'vous et moi'. We are in expectation of a catastrophe, for these tones are clearly not to be trusted. The narrative now speeds up immensely and we have already, 'fait et dit', arrived at the boat, the night before the departure, when finally the Renegade's true motives are disguised:

...Pendant la nuit, le renegat se leve, depouille le Juif de son portefeuille, de sa bourse et de ses bijoux; se rend à bord, et le voila parti.<sup>477</sup> (103)

The story ends with a pathetic little theft. We are confused and disappointed. But we have to accept whatever the narrator conveys to us. Before we can even begin to question what the 'point' of the story is, the Nephew already lays back into us. Again he seems to have read our mind before we could have read it ourselves:

Et vous croyez que c'est la tout? Bon, vous n'y etes pas. Lorsqu'on me reconta cette histoire, moi, je devinai ce que je vous ai tu, pour essayer votre sagacité. Vous avez bien fait d'etre un honnete homme; vous n'auriez été qu'un friponeau. Jusqu'ici le renegat n'est que cela. C'est un coquin meprisable a qui personne ne voudroit ressembler. Le sublime de sa mechanceté, c'est d'avoir lui meme été le delateur de son bon ami l'israelite, dont la sainte Inquisition s'empara a son reveil, et dont, quelques jours apres, on fit un beau feu de joye. Et se fut ainsi que le renegat devint tranquille possesseur de la fortune de ce descendant maudit de ceux qui ont crucifié Notre-Seigneur.<sup>478</sup> (104)

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<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

A second end to the story entails a major alienation-effect for 'Moi's consciousness. The Nephew's scornful mockery which anticipates already the laughter which will seal the text, demonstrates that the story's purpose has been nothing but a test for the Philosopher, examining his astuteness and capability to discriminate real plausibility from fictional theatricality. The story's point does not lie with its fictional contents, but with the Philosopher's response to the realities of interpersonal communication. Although the Philosopher's reactions show that he was probably aware of the Nephew's subtext, he nevertheless was in denial. His desire was for fantasy and nothing else. The overt theatricality in the Nephew's speech had been willingly ignored in favour of the promised thrills, suggesting that the Philosopher might also in reality not have been strong enough to resist the enticing tones of a seducer. This opens up a huge rupture in the moral consciousness of the enlightened Philosopher, for if the inquisition is his declared enemy, he nevertheless proved incapable of analysing its proceedings and neither was he interested in situating himself on the side of the victim. By buying into the rhetoric of the storyteller he also participated in the making of the auto-dafé. He wanted to have his share in the sublime moment of criminal genius and he ended up celebrating a murder committed in the name of the Inquisition.

It is this flickering between reality and aesthetics which makes the passage of the 'Jew and the Renegade' so disconcerting for the 20<sup>th</sup>-century reader. For the components of history, seduction, anti-Semitism, inquisition, and theatricality seem to pierce straight into the thematic core of the phenomenon of fascism. If the Nephew denounces the Philosopher as a mediocre, little criminal, he seems here also to address the self-righteous consciousness of the average middle-class fascist, hungry for the aura of pomp and theatricality and blind to its devastating destruction. Shielded by a world of fantasy, the fantasies of the sublime and the great, the Philosopher's moralism did not prove strong enough to stand up to real moral challenge. As the Nephew says, the reason for his own sincerity is that he is at least conscious of and honest about his moral 'abjection'.

Et voila ce que je vous disois. L'atrocité de l'action vous porte au dela du mepris; et c'est la raison de ma sincérité. J'ai voulu que vous connussiez jusqu'ou j'excellois dans mon art; vous arracher l'aveu que j'etois au moins original dans mon avilissement, me placer dans votre tete sur la ligne des grands vauriens, et m'ecrier ensuite, *Vivat*



*Mascarillus, fourbum Imperator!* Allons, gai, monsieur le philosophe; chorus. *Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum Imperator!*<sup>479</sup> (105)

Aesthetic genius and the genius of criminal evil become merged in the person of the Nephew. The proximity between aesthetic and social mimesis implies both the downfall of an aesthetic of classical idealism as well as the birth of art in the sense of ideology. The Nephew calls upon the philosopher to join him in his triumphant hymn to evil: 'vivat Mascarillus fourbum Imperator', a call which foreshadows uncannily fascism's appropriation of Roman imperialist symbolism. The Nephew has become a demagogical leader of evil with the Enlightenment philosopher in his following.

At this point 'Moi' has escaped from the dialogical situation with the Nephew, and he is back with us sharing his experience of *Zerrissenheit* and shock triggered by the Nephew's attack on a moralist system of values. *Horror alieni* has afflicted his soul:

Je ne scavois, moi, si je devois rester ou fuir, rire ou m'indigner. Je restai, dans le dessein de tourner la conversation sur quelque autre sujet qui chassât de mon âme l'horreur dont elle étoit remplie. Je commençois à supporter avec peine la présence d'un homme qui discutoit une action horrible, un execrable forfait, comme un connoisseur en peinture ou en poésie, examine les beautés d'un ouvrage de gout; ou comme un moraliste ou un historien relève et fait eclater les circonstances d'une action heroïque.<sup>480</sup> (106)

If the Philosopher admits here that the Nephew's presence has become unbearable for him, due to the latter's aesthetic exploitation of the worst form of human atrocity, what is even more unbearable is his own implication and identification with the Nephew's perverse imagination.<sup>481</sup> Not only the Nephew has indulged in moral monstrosity, but the Philosopher himself has become an immoral monster, with the only difference that his implication is more mediocre, passive and less imaginative. The sense of alienation conveyed here is one that rises from the very depth of the Philosopher's subjective consciousness. It derives from the shocking confrontation with his internal monster, which latently had always been there, unnoticed and unguarded, stronger than any enlightened humanism.

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<sup>479</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> See also Walter E. Rex, 'Two Scenes from *Le Neveu de Rameau*', *Diderot Studies*, vol. 20 (1981), p. 265.

The story of the 'Jew and the Renegade' thus produces an alienation-effect which ruthlessly explores consciousness' willingness to be enchanted and seduced. In the manner of the *mystification* it is based on illusion, whilst providing cues to the unmasking of illusion as deception. The story retraces a trajectory of identification and makes us identify instead of avoiding identification altogether. Such a process involves both a strong experience of temporality as well as a deliberate oscillation between a theatricality that is truly captivating and illusionistic and a theatricality that is overtly artificial and indicative of the hidden strategies of deception.

These signs of the 'mask' are revealed in the story of the 'Jew and the Renegade' in the nuances of tone. This is the site where a blinded Enlightenment subject is challenged to find his orientation through both the story as well as the dialogical relation with the storyteller. In opposition to Brecht's vision-based alienation, the reader finds himself in a situation far more alienating. Instead of the contrasts of an organised dialectic, the black and white of the 'nicht-sondern', he is only left with the subtle gradations of tone, nuances which flicker between reality and fiction, between social and aesthetic mimesis.

This flickering indecisiveness, this never-ceasing *Zerrissenheit*, is also the reason why no politics could be built on this aesthetic. However, this is only true if political consciousness is treated as a subject entirely different from ethics. With the stories' explicit attack on moralism, Diderot also introduces the notion of ethics in the field of aesthetic perception. Whereas the Philosopher had believed himself in possession of morality, his 'conscience' is shown to open itself up to the pleasures of representations of evil. If the Nephew's cynical spitefulness, his insensitivity towards the feeling of others, his doctrines of an entirely egotistical hedonism, had characterised him as a 'moral monster', as 'abnormal' in terms of the 'law' of sociality, the Nephew now turns around and shows how flawed with corruption moralist self-righteousness is.<sup>482</sup> The moralist's consciousness is embroiled with 'immoral' desire. At the very moment of a negation of moralism, when interrogation intrudes the mind of the moralist, the

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<sup>482</sup> Gerhard Stenger juxtaposes the Nephew's abject monstrosity with the Philosopher's social monstrosity. The former is a monster to social order, whilst the latter is a monster to the natural conditioning of man. Moralism can turn monstrous when its law condones the neglect of natural need. The moralist represents a danger in so far as he can become an authoritarian legislator, inflicting punishment on others in consequence of his own self-repression. In the words of the Nephew, the one who suffers makes others suffer. See 'L'ordre et les monstres', in *Diderot et la question de la forme*, ed. Annie Ibrahim (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), pp. 139-57; in relation to *Le Neveu*, pp. 153-5.

Enlightenment system of moralism is replaced by the notion of ethics. Ethics appear as a system of self-conscious questioning. Moral self-certainty can no longer be maintained. The continuum between the three stories could perhaps be read as an ongoing suspension of such continuing self-interrogation, an ongoing Socratic negativity that fluctuates between the dimension of ethics and aesthetics.

This process can only be conjured up by the very performance of monstrosity itself. At no other moment in the text does the Nephew present us with such monstrous fantasies, at no other moment do we feel such an extent of alienation to him, at no other moment is the Philosopher's state of mind so distraught. The Nephew's 'negative mask',<sup>483</sup> which in the positive is a cast of the self-denied distortions of the face of the moralist, reveals the abyss of our own monstrous unconscious, making us aware of the hypocrisy of our and the philosopher's bizarre and 'romantic twist of mind'.<sup>484</sup> If we had been in sympathy with the Philosopher's refusal to accept the Nephew's cynical conformism with 'la vile pantomime', we are hungry for the Nephew's vilest story. If we had found in his categorical imperative of mimesis the death of signification, the Nephew brings home to us the question of morality reconfigured as ethics.

The method employed for this self-interrogation of subjective consciousness traverses the medium of aesthetics itself, for the Nephew attacks by way of his own mimetic depravity, a depravity which had been declared to sacrifice the meaning of morality in favour of mimesis. His satirical negativity is transformed throughout the text into positive manifestations of mediality, thus drawing attention to the task of interpretation. However, this mediality could be said to be sterile in an almost Brechtian sense. Whilst hinting at the need for interpretation, for detachment and inquisitiveness, it does not involve the reader at the level of subjectivity. Instead I would argue that the stories and in particular, 'The Jew and the Renegade', entangle and penetrate the reader's consciousness. They demonstrate to him in the negative his 'belatedness' of not having been aware and critical enough at the right time. The absolute importance of ethics is shown in retrospect, via a failure and a lost chance.

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<sup>483</sup> Raether (1987), p. 114. Raether derives the term 'Negativmaske' from the Nephew's role as a fool, who continually reveals the weaknesses of others by impersonating them. One will be tempted to take him for what he enacts, but the Nephew in fact only parodies the behaviour of others.

<sup>484</sup> The Nephew's definition on the Philosopher's ideal of 'virtue': 'un certain tour d'esprit romanesque...', NdR, p. 39.

If the Nephew subjects 'virtue' to the relativity of mimesis, continually exhibiting himself as a 'moral simulacrum',<sup>485</sup> he shows with the 'Jew and the Renegade', by means of mimesis itself, how dangerous such an attitude can become. In *Le Neveu*'s multi-layered system of doubles, in which theatricality was at first announced as the non-sense of moral value, a strategy that can be dismissed by the moralist and applauded by the conformist, theatricality in the context of the stories gradually shifts into closer and closer intimacy of 'Moi'. From objective doctrine it transforms into concrete situation.

Although the Nephew's doubling of a world of doubles is in and of itself an alienating experience, this doubling only becomes truly monstrous in the 'Jew and the Renegade', since 'Moi' is here forced to experience the ultimate consequences of a cynical sacrifice of morals in the name of a hedonist materialism thought through to its very limitations. The Nephew's inconsequential cynicism ('car, moi, je suis sans consequence. On fait de moi, avec moi, devant moi, tout ce qu'on veut, sans que je m'en formalise.'),<sup>486</sup> (107) becomes cancelled out, and a sense of the subject's responsibility is reinstalled in the most traumatic way possible. The consequences of our *jouissance* of the Nephew's story could have been atrocious. We invested our interest not in the saving of the 'victim', but in victimisation to the point of murder. We became entangled in a situation where our enjoyment of the Nephew's diabolical fantasies opened ourselves up to the very abyss of his supposed depravity. Our distance was broken down, and it is in 'intimacy' that we experience an alienation-effect.

The story of the Jew and the Renegade might be the only moment in the text when a real rupture in the alienated *theatrum mundi* world of *Le Neveu de Rameau* occurs, when theatricality is dissolved in its entirety. Our own fantasmatic enjoyment in the text is transformed into a catastrophic experience of ourselves. Alienation emanates from within a situation of intimacy, from a place where we least expected it, from a dialogue with Diderot who performs for us the monstrous other of ourselves.

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<sup>485</sup> See Geitner (1992), pp. 322-3.

<sup>486</sup> NdR, pp. 18-9.

## Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation has been an attempt to come to a more differentiated understanding of the dramaturgical concept of alienation through the latent notions of alienation in Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* and *Le Neveu de Rameau*. To this date the connection between *alienation* and the theatre has been determined by Bertolt Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* and it was my intention to open up to critique some of the main strata and complexities of this concept whilst reasserting its essential importance for theatre practice and theory, mainly with regards to the role of the actor and the dramatic figure.

By examining Brecht's acting theory through Diderot's *Paradoxe*, it becomes clear that the former's rationalist doctrine projected on the structure of self-alienated acting is not necessarily valid. Diderot's method of self-alienated acting confronts us with a rationalism that is only for the actor and not for the audience, thereby calling into question Brecht's positivistic application of a politicised agency of alienation. Whilst Brecht develops the structure of self-alienated acting as a methodology against a naturalist aesthetic that will lull the spectator into identification and illusion, Diderot's aesthetics presents us with the reverse logic: the spectator is made to empathise and undergo catharsis precisely because the actor is self-alienated. The more self-alienated an actor is, the more in control he is in manipulating the spectator's emotion.

Diderot's *Paradoxe* thus undermines the simplicity of Brecht's equation between the actor's internal state of mind and the external effect he has on the spectator. He subverts the political positivism implicit in Brecht's theory that the actor's rationalist and critical mental disposition will necessarily redeem the spectator from his passive and emotionally driven consumer attitude. Although it is Brecht's intention to break out of the cycle of identification-based mirror relations established by what he calls the Aristotelian tradition of Western theatre and especially the Stanislavskian system, I

have argued that this interruptive strategy is disputable: identification is in fact preserved in so far as that the spectator still reacts in accordance with the mental disposition of the actor. This time, it is 'rationalism' and the exclusion of emotional involvement which migrates from the actor to the spectator, but actor and spectator are still caught within the communion of a specific mental state. The spectator does not come to the point of confusing theatre with life, but neither is he confronted with the challenge of resisting illusion. There is no need for him to emancipate himself from the impositions of the performance since he is always already detached. He is faced with a performance which unfolds in fragments, gestures and citations, a performance which not for a moment would attempt to persuade the spectator into belief and absorption.

Hence, the identity relation between the actor's rational disposition and the spectator's rational response is less a choice than the spectator's obedient acknowledgement of the given format of performance. The spectator does what he is supposed to do. He is distanced, but it remains questionable, whether he ever comes 'close enough' to the point of intervention. This is even truer for post-Brechtian productions in the tradition of *Verfremdung* which without the immediate historical context of Brecht's works lack the innovative and revolutionary effects promised by Brechtian aesthetics. Modernist Brechtianism turned postmodernist, as in for example the productions of Robert Wilson, has become entirely un-alienating despite its decisively non-naturalist style.

When Robert Wilson in 1992 in his Berlin production of *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* engaged a group of East-German acting students (from the Brecht-based Ernst-Busch School of Performing Arts) to enact the text in English precisely because he was interested in the effect of alienation emerging from a cast of non-English speakers reciting a language they could neither understand nor identify with, he takes the expressive sterility of the alienation-effect to extremes. The actors become 'citational objects' placed within an abstract space of design and lighting, yet the expressive potential of linguistic understanding and thus the actor's possibilities to identify as well as to dis-identify are entirely cancelled out. Intellectual as well as emotional complexities that could in fact ignite from the cultural clash between an ex-East-German cast unfamiliar with Anglo-Saxon literature are suppressed in favour of a style of de-subjectified abstraction. The space of action before the eyes of the audience has

also displaces Diderot's cold actor into the aristocratic world of the *ancien régime* and infiltrates his bourgeois aesthetics with the spirit of the *tragédie classique*. The *Paradoxe* thus states that the actor's theatrical self-aggrandisement, calculated to the perfect degree of theatrical naturalism, is always on the edge of tilting into the ridiculous puppet-like movements of the courtier or into the phantasmagorical ghost show of children's games.

Despite Diderot's explicit aim to posit an aesthetic of empathy derived from a methodology of self-alienated acting, the many anecdotes of the *Paradoxe* seem to activate a sense of alienation springing from a theatricality that has become excessive and out of control. Diderot does not entirely condemn this process of a self-animated form of theatricality. Rather, one could say that here lies the magic and the fascination produced by the *Paradoxe*'s continual mutations. Methodological doctrine is here replaced by a dramaturgical model in which alienation emerges and disappears between the parameters of nature and the theatre, between representation in social life and on stage, between the too much and the too little. The *Paradoxe* then equips the stage practitioner with a model of representation that depends largely on subtle relativities, which can never be assumed to be stable but which constantly change and alter themselves and which must be constantly observed and re-calculated in its actual effects.

Thus, Diderot's *Paradoxe* not only calls into question the positivistic straightforwardness of Brecht's self-alienated and hence alienating actor by making the cold actor the responsible agent for the cathartic function of the *drame bourgeois*, he also captures a form of alienation which is always latently agitating underneath a theatre which aims to contain itself in a form of representation that appears natural. According to Diderot, this form of alienation is far removed from Enlightenment rationale, from a theatre which seeks to morally instruct its audience, but it is a form of alienation which keeps on alienating itself into anarchic dimensions beyond reason and beyond the notion of a political utopia.

What we are faced with here is then less a method, a technique or a program on which an interventionist politics could be based but a model of conceptualising theatrical alienation which in a sense directs the attention back to the notions of observation and

interpretation. One could argue that rather than display to us the space of calculated things, Diderot confronts us, on the one hand with the space of the 'incalculable', the 'ever-alienated', and on the other hand with the space of observation, caution and interpretation. He does not entirely sacrifice the fascination with an anarchic form of alienation which fuels the theatre with energies that cannot be rationalised but he spells out its problems and dangers. The *Paradoxe* thus evokes the possibility of a theatre, which I would suggest departs from Barthes' definition of Brechtian and Diderotian theatre aesthetics as 'fetish objects' which posit a scene of political significance. The *Paradoxe* instead elaborates and discovers all those moments where a deliberate political or moral intent becomes subverted into a form of alienation which transgresses and disrupts reason.

The negation of positivistic reason through the work of alienation is also one of the prominent themes of *Le Neveu de Rameau*. What I attempted to show via a reading of Diderot's *satyre seconde* is that Brecht's objectivist use of alienation as a means of recognition can be challenged by the ways in which the notion of alienation in *Le Neveu* both springs from a subjective experience of alienation as well as that it targets the subjective response of the spectator. What becomes clear through an analysis of the Nephew's ever-refracting facets of alienation is that his constant provocations not only negate the Philosopher's positivistic ideas on morals, arts and education, but that he represents a figure who incorporates in himself both a subjective experience of social alienation as well as an articulate analysis of the mechanisms and structures of this alienated social cosmos. In opposition to Brecht's highly objectified dramatic figure represented by the *dividual*, a being lacking the dimension of emotional and psychological movement, the Nephew is a figure, who despite his socially constructed constitution, and despite his materialist contextualisation, is directed through the energies of psychic life, an internal drive that becomes powerfully transmitted in his enthused gestures and language.

My analysis of the Nephew as a subject of alienation showed that his tendency to become alienated occurs on two closely linked levels. On the one hand one can diagnose the moment at which the Nephew is driven to become other as the moment at which alienation becomes linked with theatricality. The Nephew, in this, compulsively enacts the personae of his memory and imagination. On the other hand, the moment of



his otherness is staged as the moment of madness. His frenetic re-enactment of the gestures of musical instruments, orchestras, singers, dancers, and in sum, the different protagonists of the *pantomime du monde*, is explicitly defined as ‘alienation d’esprit’. The desire to become others, that is, other social beings, thus merges with a movement towards mental alienation, the transgression of reason and normality.

The theme of the *theatrum mundi* emergent in the *Paradoxe* thus also figures in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. One could say that in both texts the theme of alienation is articulated in the tradition of the *theatrum mundi*: otherness means here a human condition that seems doomed to enact and to other itself, that is caught in an endless circle of performing for the other. Whether this is done with reason or without, alienation, as personified in the Nephew, represents a drive, a desire, a materialist need, and in the case of madness an irrepressible compulsion.

However, I also indicated that this alienated subjectivity presented by the Nephew does not mean that he is solely identified with the structure of passive alienation, that he is simply, a ‘case study’ for the Philosopher. In this case, one could argue, his alienation would become objectified again. He would be simply a victim of alienation, parasited by powers that are beyond his control. But in fact, what makes him alienating and untameable for the Philosopher as well as for the reader, is that one can never be sure whether he has truly succumbed to a psychotic loss of self or whether he is only performing the state of madness. The dichotomy of passive and active alienation elaborated in the *Paradoxe* is at once powerfully condensed and undermined in the figure of the Nephew. Through the combination of both structures the effect of alienation on his interlocutor becomes amplified. We can be deeply moved by the strong psychic energy behind his compulsion to ‘other’ himself, and a moment later, we have to realise that such compulsion is enacted for us, staged in order to entangle us in traps of illusion and deception.

This is a form of subjectivity, which goes beyond Brecht’s definition of the naturalist or Aristotelian dramatic figure who arouses emotionally, and whose complex psychological conflicts force the spectator into identification. The less the Nephew becomes identifiable in his true state of mind, the less we can say that his alienation is either authentic or performative, the more intense is our experience of alienation. In

opposition to the Brechtian conception of the dramatic figure which causes alienation by way of being stripped of its emotional and psychological internality and by way of representing an abstraction of collective rather than individual structures, one could derive from the Nephew, a figure who causes an effect of alienation by constantly obscuring the status of his alienation, that is the question whether he is suffering or playing alienation. Moreover, in order to arrive at this elusive and oscillating effect of alienation, the psychological depth and emotional expressiveness of the subjective features of the Nephew must precisely not be erased but fully played out.

Closely linked to the Nephew's provocative hinting at the duplicitous status of his alienation (that is the disclosure of his objectified representation of his alienation) is the critique of a society that has become structured by alienation. Subjective alienation made tangible in the figure of the Nephew is reflected back on a social situation in which authenticity, honesty, immediacy and community are lost. In the Nephew's many satirical attacks on the *pantomime du monde* it becomes clear that the critique of social alienation is most essentially a critique of the theatrical inevitability of social action and communication as such. In this conjunction between society, alienation and theatricality *Le Neveu de Rameau* elaborates on Rousseau's highly sceptical assessment of a social culture of civilisation that has become contaminated by artifice and appearance. In the same way in which Marxism's concern with alienation can be said to originate in Rousseau's socio-anthropological writings, *Le Neveu's* Rousseauian farce of the ridiculous gestures of the *pantomime du monde* can be said to delineate a proto-Marxist theory of alienation. The Nephew's speeches on the inequality of the classes, its master-slave structure, the pains suffered by the destitute who need to contort themselves according to the whims of the powerful, his critique of the automaton, of the 'fetishistic' constitution of money and the 'idiomatic' or ideological status of language, resonate some of the key polemics of Marx's critique of alienation.

However, although *Le Neveu's* extensively treated theme of alienation seems to prefigure some of the major concerns and structural transformations that path the way from pre-modernism to modernism, socially, philosophically and aesthetically (and which are clearly recognised by Hegel in his assimilation of *Le Neveu* into the *Phenomenologie*), it is equally important to note that Diderot treats the issue of alienation in the tradition of the *theatrum mundi*, which belongs into the thought

patterns of the *ancien régime*, aristocracy and Christianity. Although I have not been able to even begin to examine the ways in which the transformation of the *theatrum mundi* into the concept of alienation could be explained in socio-historical terms, *Le Neveu* as a historical document clearly reveals that the coincidence of alienation and theatricality, their mutually exchangeable relation does in fact lead to an analysis of alienation that is different from the Hegelian, the Marxist and thus also the Brechtian concept of alienation.

One could in fact contend that *Le Neveu's* representation of alienation as an inevitable symptom of sociality departs from the Marxist Utopian concept of alienation: alienation is posited as a human condition whatever political revolutions will transform society. Furthermore, one could suggest, that despite the materialist presuppositions voiced in *Le Neveu*, an irremovable form of alienation, brought forth by the mythology of the *theatrum mundi*, is deeply linked with an understanding of alienation as absolute and dependent on a theocratic universe. Alienation is integral to the constitution of the world and no politics can overcome it. What is furthermore curious is that the dilemmas voiced in *Le Neveu*, anticipating the conflicts of the modern subject, in particular bourgeois consciousness, are in fact observed within the social relations of the court. As in the case of the *Paradoxe*, the automaton-courtier-marionette becomes the model for the alienated modern subject. The courtier's gestures of flattery become the universal language of the bourgeois subject who is trying to emancipate and individuate itself within an increasingly competitive society of seemingly equal citizens, foreshadowing the sociology of bourgeois democracy. And yet whilst the Nephew's 'folies' are those of the *theatrum mundi's* fool, the expression of his internal fragmentation and Diderot's interest in madness as a state of marginality and an attack on social normativity strike one as an entirely modernist concern, as part of a scheme of interests defined by Foucault as the birth of the modern sciences: psychology, sociology and anthropology.

However, for the purpose of this dissertation, the most important difference in the treatment of alienation, more precisely the treatment of aesthetic alienation in relation to social alienation, emanates from Diderot's aesthetic consequences regarding the phenomenon of social alienation. In opposition to Rousseau, and as I showed also Brecht's iconoclast position towards a deluding form of theatricality, Diderot's aesthetic

conclusion regarding the crisis of an entirely theatricalised society is to amplify and play out the structures of illusion and appearance rather than to censor them. Whereas Rousseau, and in line with him Brecht, would aim to omit the depoliticising and demoralising effect of a kind of theatricality that lulls the spectator into illusion, that makes him exhaust his empathetic or socially-engaged capacity in the dynamics of a performance, Diderot explores the traps and the attraction of illusion and confronts the spectator with a situation in which he will have to decide from moment to moment whether he can justify his passive absorption into fiction, identification and empathy. Since for Diderot alienation is a necessary constituent of social life itself, it must be accepted as a natural condition and it can be enjoyed as a necessary and energising factor of communication. Social alienation, despite its structure of alienation, is understood as natural need and cultural potentiality. In the same way in which our relations to others energise our drives, no matter how corrupt with appearance they are, illusion in terms of the artwork must be utilised and celebrated. The necessary 'alienations' supporting social exchange are therefore included in Diderot's literary expression. Although Diderot, too, dissects his dialogue in *Le Neveu* with distancing moments of narrative, narrative voice is powerfully used in order to transport the reader into the illusion of a transformed character, another scene, another space.

Diderot's approach to the question of alienation is thus a highly complex one. On the one hand, we must be aware of the dangers of an alienated *theatrum mundi* that is corrupt with deception and a mimetic kind of master-slave relation, on the other, it is natural for us to enjoy our own displacement in the other, our being transported by the power of representation inherent in language and art. In Diderot's position which problematises and at the same time rejoices in the notion of alienation we can detect a position which is utterly different from Brecht's unequivocally negative approach to a concept of *Entfremdung* predicated on illusion and identification. Whereas Brecht exorcises all illusion from representation, for Diderot illusion remains an indispensable aspect of art. It is recognised as a structural condition of reality which we must live with, which we can enjoy and which we must learn to use constructively. As long as we remain alert to the limits and consequences of our own identification, alienation remains acceptable.

In the Nephew's stories we encounter an alienation-effect which is not based on the Brechtian predicates of distance, detachment, objectivity and dialectical juxtaposition. On the contrary, the structure of Diderot's *mystification* incorporates the elements of illusion, identification and subjective involvement, even if these do not constitute the final aim of representation. Since illusion is an inevitable component of an alienated reality, it must refigure in a kind of representation that puts us in touch with the challenge of how to confront the problem of alienation rather than avoid it altogether. In the same way in which Socrates enchanted Menon with magical and narcotic energies, penetrating his interlocutor with confusion and despair, the Nephew mystifies the Philosopher in order to make tangible a subjective experience of the implicit destructiveness of identificatory alienation. Here, alienation emanates from within a situation of intimacy, always from the place where we expect it least, where we have succeeded in deluding ourselves most with fantasies of power and familiarity. Whilst Brecht confronted the problem of an alienating familiarity by de-familiarising it, Diderot alienates by putting us in touch with what we desire to identify with most. By unmasking each step in the process of the Philosopher's manipulation, the Nephew reaches behind the latter's self-assured moralism. In this Diderot does not point at the conditions of an alienated reality outside the subject, but he sensitises the subject's awareness to his own readiness to become manipulated by others or by his own narcissistic moral self-complacency.

In the process of confronting the subject with his desire for illusion both temporal as well as vocal gradation become essential reference points. Again, this is a point in which Diderot is radically different from Brecht's juxtapositional dialectics and from Barthes' concept of a *dioptric* theatre. Whereas in Brecht the moments of recognition rely on the contrasting arrangements of a visual dialectic, *Le Neveu* flows in musical structures, in scales and tonalities, delivering a kind of 'showing' that resembles perhaps more Barthes' antithesis of a *dioptric* form of representation by touching upon the sense of acoustics.

Since alienation and illusion are phenomena of universal laterality; since they belong to the domain of pleasure as well as crisis, the subject must learn to differentiate from moment to moment when alienation is constructive and when it turns into destruction. In the same way in which Diderot's concept of time can constantly overturn the norm

into disaster, and the abnormal can become natural, the subject must continually interpret the grades and nuances of alienation in order to prevent mutation into monstrosity. No dialectical juxtaposition and no temporal 'freezing', as suggested by Brecht, can be of any help here, for unless the subject learns to read in between the tones and grades of a phenomenal world, in between doctrines, systems and ideologies, it will always remain subject to a passive form of mimesis, miming a theatre of dislocated gestures, highly theatrical, pompous and destructive.

In sum, Diderot's eighteenth-century embryology of alienation depicted in *Le Neveu de Rameau* confronts us with similar problems as voiced by Brecht: aesthetics must resolve the relation between social alienation and representation. In opposition to Brecht, Diderot offers us an aesthetic in which the issue of alienation is developed within a continuum reaching from the subject of the literary figure, to the polemical treatment of alienation as a social problem, to an alienation-effect based on identification which is targeted at the subject of the spectator. Alienation is *expressed* in naturalistic, subjective and figurative ways. Rather than exclude the experience of identification and illusion, its provocative appeal is based on these Brechtian taboos. Rather than reduce representation to its essential intentionality, to a kind of political minimalism or conceptualism, Diderot aims to open up the phenomena of the world by showing us more and more of it. Figuration, or *imitatio naturae*, remain a means of representation that coincides rather than contradicts alienation. Contrary to Brecht who frames negativity within the dialectical contradictions inherent in capitalism, Diderot's negativities encapsulated in the contradictions of paradoxical flow do not lead to any solutions, but put the subject under an ever-increasing pressure of confusion and conflict. The experience of conflict is most poignantly conveyed in relation to the question of morals within a materialist or atheist concept of society. Although one could say that Diderot does not offer any politics with *Le Neveu*, he does in fact sharpen the focus to the problematic relation between materialism and ethics. By means of a Diderotian alienation-effect, 'Je', the Philosopher, or 'Je' the reader, have to confront the abyss of their moral self-righteousness, their own monstrosity and their own readiness to sacrifice morals for pleasure.

# Appendix

## *Translations of Quotations*

### Introduction

- (1) I dipped into Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist* when a possibility occurred to me of putting the old *Ziffel* plan into operation. I was struck by *Kivi*'s way of weaving dialogues together. On top of that the *Puntila* tone is still in my ears. I wrote 2 little chapters on an experimental basis and called the whole thing *Refugee Conversations*.<sup>1</sup>
- (2) This book is published under the patronage of the Diderot-Society and the American Guild for German Cultural Freedom.<sup>2</sup>
- (3) I would now suggest calling it the Diderot Society. The great Encyclopaedist wrote about the theatre philosophically in the sense of materialist philosophy. From the bourgeois standpoint, of course, but that of the revolutionary bourgeoisie.<sup>3</sup>
- (4) *Yes, you may have esprit. Me!* One could not have less; but I have even more: simplicity, truth, a passionate soul, a fiery mind, plenty of enthusiasm, love for the good, true and beautiful, an easy disposition to smile, to admire, to become indignant, to empathise, to cry. I also know how to alienate myself, a talent without which one can't do anything of value.<sup>4</sup>

### Chapter 1

- (1) It's lovely to see the way Bi acts: utterly human, utterly simple. A queen is a queen, terror is terror, and Bi is Bi. She's got style, but she never achieves the same effects as Nature. [...] She doesn't imitate nature, she acts.<sup>5</sup>
- (2) The actors must alienate figure and process for the spectator, so that they will astonish him. Instead of identifying, the spectator must make choices.<sup>6</sup>
- (3) Dressed in an evening dress he demonstrates certain feminine movements. There are obviously two figures. One shows, one is being shown. In the evening, one of the figures, the doctor (father, banker), shows even more of the second figure: her face, her clothes, and also the way in which she is being surprised, jealous or cheeky, also her voice. The figure in the evening dress disappears almost completely. Perhaps one would stop seeing him entirely, were he not so incredibly famous, from the Pacific Ocean to the Urals.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BBJ, pp. 102-3.

<sup>2</sup> My translation.

<sup>3</sup> BBL, p. 250.

<sup>4</sup> My translation.

<sup>5</sup> BBJ, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> My translation.

<sup>7</sup> My translation.

- (4) She cried into her sleeve, and the man grasped that sleeve and acted as if he had found it wet.<sup>8</sup>
- (5) The Chinese actors don't just present the actions of people, they also show the action of acting. They show in their own way how actors perform the gestures of other people. For actors translate the language of the every day into their own one. When observing a Chinese actor, one can see no less than three persons at the same time: one who is showing and two who are being shown.<sup>9</sup>
- (6) Thus if he is representing a cloud, perhaps, showing its unexpected appearance, its soft and strong growth, its rapid yet gradual transformation, he will occasionally look at the audience as if to say: isn't it just like that?<sup>10</sup>
- (7) As soon as the V-effect appears, breaking the hypnotic spell of an art of illusion, the wolfing down of the dramatic plot can no longer occur unconsciously, smoothly and mechanically. The intentions behind the representation emerge cheekily - in the most primitive case it leaps out. Once this kind of mechanical wolfing down is interrupted, the mechanics of dramatic action can be revealed, and straight away it is being insulted as such. For one had understood, and now one shouldn't have understood?<sup>11</sup>
- (8) Mechanisation is to be emphasised, to be pursued – to the point of gesture. The individual gesture is subject to mechanisation, which must become collective gesture.<sup>12</sup>
- (9) The magic of the 'word', the transubstantiation of the actor, the 'fate' of the hero, the absorption of the spectator who follows the actions as if 'hypnotised': all of this must disappear. Art has no need for it.<sup>13</sup>
- (10) To make oneself believe that one is someone else, and to try to get others to believe this too, is madness; and this is exactly what they do, and they are paid even better the more they succeed in this madness.<sup>14</sup>
- (11) What actor of the old sort [...] could demonstrate the elements of his art like the Chinese actor Mei Lan-fang, without special lighting and wearing a dinner jacket in an ordinary room full of specialists? It would be like a magician at a fair giving away his tricks, so that nobody ever wanted to see the act again. He would just be showing how to disguise oneself; the hypnotism would vanish and all that would be left would be a few pounds of ill-blended imitation, a quickly-mixed product for selling in the dark to hurried customers. Of course no Western actor would stage such a demonstration. What about the sanctity of Art? The mysteries of metamorphosis? To the Westerner what matters is that his actions should be unconscious; otherwise they would be degraded. By comparison with Asiatic acting our own art still seems hopelessly parsonical.<sup>15</sup>
- (12) If this complete conversion succeeds then his art has been more or less expended. Once he has become the bank-clerk, doctor or general concerned he will need no more art than any of these people need 'in real life'.<sup>16</sup>
- (13) It is not the mystical moment of creation in which we disturb him: when he stepped upon the stage the creation was already complete.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> My translation.

<sup>9</sup> My translation.

<sup>10</sup> 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting', (from now on abbreviated as *Alienation Effects*), in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1978), p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> My translation.

<sup>12</sup> My translation.

<sup>13</sup> My translation.

<sup>14</sup> My translation.

<sup>15</sup> *Alienation Effects*, p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> My translation.



- (14) In moments where the represented person is profoundly agitated, the artist takes a strand of hair between his lips and bites it. But this is like a ritual without anything eruptive in it. The artist shows: this man is beyond himself, and he indicates the appropriate external signs for this state.<sup>18</sup>
- (15) For the actor cannot usually manage to feel for very long on end that he really is the other person; he soon gets exhausted and begins just to copy various superficialities of the other person's speech and hearing, whereupon the effect on the public drops off alarmingly. This is certainly due to the fact that the other person has been created by an 'intuitive' and accordingly murky process which takes place in the subconscious. The subconscious is not at all responsive to guidance; it has as it were a bad memory.<sup>19</sup>
- (16) For the actor it is difficult and taxing to conjure up particular inner moods or emotions night after night; it is simpler to exhibit the outer signs which accompany these emotions and identify them. In this case, however, there is no automatic transfer of emotions to the spectator, the same emotional infection. The alienation effect intervenes, not in the form of absence of emotion, but in the form of emotions which need not correspond to those of the character portrayed. On seeing worry the spectator may feel a sensation of joy; on seeing anger, one of disgust. When we speak of exhibiting the outer signs of emotion we do not mean such an exhibition and such a choice of signs that the emotional transference does in fact take place because the actor has managed to infect himself with the emotions portrayed, by exhibiting the outer signs; thus by letting his voice rise, holding his breath and tightening his neck muscles so that the blood shoots to his head, the actor can easily conjure up a rage. In such a case of course the effect does not occur.<sup>20</sup>
- (17) The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on.<sup>21</sup>
- (18) The performer's self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character completely, i.e. to the point of giving up his own identity, and lent a splendid remoteness to the events.<sup>22</sup>
- (19) The coldness comes from the actor's holding himself remote from the character portrayed, along the lines described. He is careful not to make his sensations into those of the spectator. Nobody gets raped by the individual he portrays; this individual is not the spectator himself but his neighbour.<sup>23</sup>
- (20) Their paintings are composed in a way that different objects appear side by side. They are spread across a piece of paper like the inhabitants of a city would be spread across it, not without dependence, but neither with a kind of dependency jeopardising their own existence. [...] The eye is free to explore. The shown objects are represented as elements, which can exist autonomously, at the same time however, they are organised as one integrated yet divisible whole. By cutting those screens into sections they will come to change but not lose their meaning.<sup>24</sup>
- (21) Our imitation of a place gives more to the spectator than the looks of the real place, because it bears the characteristics of social processes, which are lacking in the former, at least in that kind of clarity; on the other hand, our imitation of a place gives less to the spectator than the real place by undoing its *appearance (Augenschein)*.<sup>25</sup>
- (22) By social gestus we mean the ensemble of all facial and gestural expressions of social relations in which people are situated relation to each other.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> My translation.

<sup>19</sup> *Alienation Effects*, pp. 93-4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> My translation.

<sup>25</sup> My translation.

<sup>26</sup> My translation.

- (23) The performer shows that this man is not in control of himself, and he points to the outward signs. [...] Among all the possible signs certain particular ones are picked out, with careful and visible consideration. Anger is naturally different from sulkiness, hatred from distaste, love from liking; but the corresponding fluctuations of feeling are portrayed economically. The coldness comes from the actor's holding himself remote from the character portrayed, along the lines described.<sup>27</sup>
- (24) The gesture is expression which consistently remains without expression.<sup>28</sup>
- (25) The stream of events, the succession of replications, movements, reactions is somehow indistinct, disorienting, since one cannot intervene with one's examinations, for this stream is continually accompanied by a stream of moods and emotional intonations.<sup>29</sup>
- (26) The actor must play the events as historical events. Historical events are singular, transitional events, which are bound to specific periods. People's behaviour within them is not just simply human and fixed, it has certain specificities; as a consequence of the process of history, it carries with it aspects which are out-dated as well as out-datable, and it is subject to the critique of each subsequent period. Constant development alienates us from the behaviour of those born before us.<sup>30</sup>
- (27) *Actor*: You said the actor must find a way of expressing the changeability of things. What does that mean? *Spectator*: This means your spectator is also a historian.<sup>31</sup>

## Chapter 2

- (1) In my view he must have a deal of judgement. He must have in himself an unmoved and disinterested onlooker. He must have, consequently, penetration and no sensibility; the art of mimicking everything, or, which comes to the same thing, the same aptitude for every sort of character and part.<sup>32</sup>
- (2) The fact is, that to have sensibility is one thing, to feel is another. One is a matter of soul, the other of judgment. One may feel strongly yet be unable to express it...<sup>33</sup>
- (3) What confirms me in this view is the unequal acting of players who play from the heart. From them you must expect no unity. Their playing is alternately strong and feeble, fiery and cold, dull and sublime. To-morrow they will miss the point they have excelled in to-day; and to make up for it will excel in some passage where last time they failed.<sup>34</sup>
- (4) She comes on the stage without knowing what she is going to say; half the time she does not know what she is saying; but she has one sublime moment. And pray, why should the actor be different from the poet, the painter, the orator, the musician? It is not the stress of the first burst that characteristic traits come out; it is in moments of stillness and self-command; in moments entirely unexpected. Who can tell whence these traits have their being? They are a sort of inspiration. They come when the man of genius is hovering between nature and his sketch of it, and keeping a watchful eye on both. The beauty of inspiration, the chance hits of which his work is full, and of which the sudden appearance startles himself, have an importance, a success,

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<sup>27</sup> *Alienation Effects*, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> My translation.

<sup>29</sup> My translation.

<sup>30</sup> My translation.

<sup>31</sup> My translation.

<sup>32</sup> PoA, p. 14. See also p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

a sureness very different from that belonging to the first fling. Cool reflection must bring the fury of enthusiasm to its bearings.<sup>35</sup>

- (5) Reflect a little as to what, in the language of the theatre, is *being true*. Is it showing things as they are in nature? Certainly not. Were it so the true would be commonplace.<sup>36</sup>
- (6) You give a recitation in a drawing-room; your feelings are stirred; your voice fails you; you burst into tears. You have, as you say, felt, and felt deeply. Quite so; but had you made up your mind to that? Not at all. Yet you were carried away, you surprised and touched your hearers, you made a great hit. All this is true enough. But now transfer your easy tone, your simple expression, your every-day bearing, to the stage, and I assure you, you will be paltry and weak. You may cry to your heart's content, and the audience will only laugh. It will be the tragedy played outside a booth at a fair.<sup>37</sup>
- (7) People would whisper to each other, 'Is this fellow mad? Where in the world does this Don Quixote come from? Who is the inventor of all this stuff? In what world do people talk like this?'<sup>38</sup>
- (8) ...it is a protocol three thousand years old.<sup>39</sup>
- (9) Homer talks like that; Racine talks like that; and this pompous language can only be used by unfamiliar personages, spoken from poetical lips, with a poetical tone.<sup>40</sup>
- (10) ...this strange parting of self from self.<sup>41</sup>
- (11) What, then, is truth for stage purposes? It is the conforming of action, diction, face, voice, movement, and gesture, to an ideal type invented by the poet, and frequently enhanced by the player. That is the strange part of it. This type not only influences the tone, it alters the actor's very walk and bearing. And hence it is that the player in private and the player on the boards are two personages, so different that one can scarce recognise the player in private. The first time I saw Mlle. Clairon in her own house I exclaimed, by natural impulse, 'Ah, mademoiselle, I thought you were at least a head taller!'<sup>42</sup>
- (12) ...the highest, the greatest, the most perfect type her imagination could compass [...] a vast spectre.<sup>43</sup>
- (13) ...but once the struggle is over, once she has reached the height she has given to her spectre, she has herself well in hand, she repeats her efforts without emotion. As it will happen in dreams, her head touches the clouds, her hands stretch to grasp the horizon of both sides; she is the informing soul of a huge figure, which is her outward casing, and in which her efforts have enclosed her. As she lies careless and still on a sofa with folded arms and closed eyes she can, following her memories dream, hear herself, see herself, judge herself, and judge also the effects she will produce. In such a vision she has a double personality; that of the little Clairon and of the great Agrippina.<sup>44</sup>
- (14) This principle – that the actor appears on the stage in a double role....<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-1.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-2.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> 'The Short Organum', in *Brecht on Theatre* (1978), p. 194.

- (15) And hence it is that the player in private and the player on the boards are two personages, so different that one can scarce recognise the player in private.<sup>46</sup>
- (16) At the very moment when he touches your heart he is listening to his own voice [...]. He has learnt before a mirror every particle of his despair.<sup>47</sup>
- (17) What then, is the true talent? That of knowing well the outward symptoms of the soul we borrow, of addressing ourselves to the sensations of those who hear and see us, of deceiving them by the imitation of these symptoms, by an imitation which aggrandises everything in their imagination, and which becomes the measure of their judgment; for it is impossible otherwise to appreciate that which passes inside us. And after all, what does it matter to us whether they feel or do not feel, so long as we know nothing about it?<sup>48</sup>
- (18) Do not people talk in society of a man being a great actor? They do not mean by that that he feels, but that he excels in simulating, though he feels nothing.<sup>49</sup>
- (19) Is it at the moment when you have just lost your friend or your adored one that you set to work at a poem on loss? No! ill for him who at such moment takes pleasure in his talent. It is when the storm of sorrow is over, when the extreme of sensibility is dulled, when the event is far behind us, when the soul is calm, that one remembers one's eclipsed happiness, that one is capable of appreciating one's loss, that memory and imagination unite, one to retrace the other to accentuate, the delights of a past time: then it is that one regains self-possession and expression. One writes of one's falling tears, but they do not fall while one is hunting a strong epithet that always escapes one; one writes of one's falling tears, but they do not fall while one is employed in polishing one's verse; or if the tears do flow the pen drops from the hand: one falls to feeling, and one ceases writing. Again, it is with intense pleasure as with intense pain - both are dumb.<sup>50</sup>
- (20) The man of sensibility obeys the impulse of Nature, and gives nothing more or less than the cry of his very heart; the moment he moderates or strengthens this cry he is no longer himself, he is an actor.<sup>51</sup>
- (21) A great actor's soul is formed of the subtle element with which a certain philosopher filled space, an element neither cold nor hot, heavy nor light, which affects no definite shape, and, capable of assuming all, keeps none.<sup>52</sup>
- (22) Garrick will put his head between two folding-doors, and in the course of five or six seconds his expression will change successively from wild delight to temperate pleasure, from this to tranquillity, from tranquillity to surprise, from surprise to blank astonishment, from that to sorrow, from sorrow to the air of one overwhelmed, from that to fright, from fright to horror, from horror to despair, and thence he will go up again to the point from which he started. Can his soul have experienced all these feelings, and played this kind of scale in concert with his face?<sup>53</sup>
- (23) One is one's self by nature; one becomes some one else by imitation; the heart one is supposed to have is not the heart one has.<sup>54</sup>
- (24) ...all this is pure mimicry, lessons carefully learned, the grimacing of sorrow, the magnificent ['sublime'] aping which the actor remembers long after his first study of it, of which he was perfectly conscious when he first put it before the public, and which leaves him, luckily for the

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<sup>46</sup> PoA, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

poet, the spectator, and himself, a full freedom of mind. Like other gymnastics, it taxes only his bodily strength. He puts off the sock or the buskin; his voice is gone; he is tired; he changes his dress, or he goes to bed; and he feels neither trouble, nor sorrow, nor depression, nor weariness of soul. All these emotions he has given to you. The actor is tired, you are unhappy; he has had exertion without feeling, you feeling without exertion. Were it otherwise the player's lot would be the most wretched on earth: but he is not the person he presents; he plays it, and plays it so well that you think he is the person; the deception ['illusion'] is all on your side; he knows well enough that he is not the person.<sup>55</sup>

- (25) Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. A whole elaborate European stage technique, which helps to conceal the fact that the scenes are so arranged that the audience can view them in the easiest way, is thereby made unnecessary.<sup>56</sup>
- (26) Whether you write or act, think of the spectator as if he didn't exist. Imagine on the outer edge of the stage a tall wall separating you from the auditorium; play as if the curtain had never risen.<sup>57</sup>
- (27) Illusion is involuntary. The one who says: "I would like to delude myself," resembles the one who says: "I've got certain life experiences to which I will pay no attention."<sup>58</sup>
- (28) In performance one should be no more interested in the spectator than if he wasn't there. If he is only addressed in the slightest, the author has deserted his subject, the actor has fallen out of his role. Both tumble down the stage. I can see them in the stalls; and as long as the tirade lasts, the action, for me, is suspended, the scene remains empty.<sup>59</sup>
- (29) The man of sensibility is a being who is *moved* or *affected*. Consequently, an alienated being who is carried beyond himself, but in the mode of *passivity* or *passion*.<sup>60</sup>
- (30) Your fiery, extravagant, sensitive fellow, is forever on the boards; he acts the play, but he gets nothing out of it. It is in him that the man of genius finds his model.<sup>61</sup>
- (31) In the great play, the play of the world, the play to which I am constantly recurring, the stage is held by the fiery souls, and the pit is filled with men of genius. The actors are in other words madmen; the spectators, whose business it is to paint their madness, are sages.<sup>62</sup>
- (32) Fill the front of the theatre with tearful creatures, but I will none of them on the boards.<sup>63</sup>
- (33) And it is they who discern with a ready eye the absurdity of the motley crowd, who reproduce it for you, and who make you laugh both at the unhappy models who have bored you to death and at yourself.<sup>64</sup>
- (34) A 'coup de théâtre' is an unforeseen moment in the action, suddenly changing the situation of the protagonist.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. pp. 19-20.

<sup>56</sup> *Alienation Effects*, in *Brecht on Theatre* (1978), pp. 91-2.

<sup>57</sup> My translation.

<sup>58</sup> My translation.

<sup>59</sup> My translation.

<sup>60</sup> Philippe Lacoue Labarthe, 'Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis', in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, intro. Jacques Derrida, ed. and trans. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), p. 263.

<sup>61</sup> PoA, p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> My translation.

- (35) If only we had theatres in which the design changed at once with the change of the scene. [...] The spectator would follow effortlessly the developments of the piece; representation would become more varied, more interesting, and clearer.<sup>66</sup>
- (36) I do not only see you; I hear you. It is your hands that speak to me.<sup>67</sup>
- (37) There are entire scenes in which it would be infinitely more natural for the protagonists to move rather than speak [...] There should be nothing in this world which could not have a place on stage.<sup>68</sup>
- (38) One should no longer bring 'characters' to the stage, but conditions. Until now, it has been the case in theatre that character constituted the main subject and condition came secondary; today condition has to come first, and character becomes an accessory. [...] It seems to me that this is a more fertile source, more extensive and more useful than that of character. For the more character is developed, the more the spectator can say to himself, this is not me. But he cannot hide away from the fact, that the class displayed in front of him is his own; he must be able to identify himself with the specific duties of his class. He will have to apply to himself what he will hear.<sup>69</sup>
- (39) A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men. The sentence 'pluck the eye that offends thee out' is less effective from the gestic point of view than 'if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.'<sup>70</sup>
- (40) Do you suppose that the dialogue of Corneille, of Racine, of Voltaire, or let me add, of Shakespeare, can be given with your ordinary voice and with your fireside tone?<sup>71</sup>
- (41) On the boards all the conditions were changed: there a different impersonation was needed, since all the surroundings were enlarged.<sup>72</sup>
- (42) Actors impress the public not when they are furious, but when they play fury well. In tribunals, in assemblies, everywhere where a man wishes to make himself master of other's minds, he feigns now anger, now fear, now pity, now love, to bring others into these diverse states of feeling. What passion fails itself to do, passion well imitated accomplishes.<sup>73</sup>
- (43) ...it is above all, when all is corrupt that the stage becomes purest.<sup>74</sup>
- (44) Is it to be believed that an actor on the stage can be deeper, cleverer in feigning joy, sadness, sensibility, admiration, hate, tenderness, than an old courtier?<sup>75</sup>
- (45) He who in society makes it his object, and unluckily has the skill, to please every one, is nothing, has nothing that belongs to him, nothing to distinguish him, to delight some and weary others. He is always talking, and always talking well; he is an adulator by profession, he is a great courtier, he is a great actor.<sup>76</sup>
- (46) A great courtier, accustomed since he first drew breath to play the part of a most ingenious puppet, takes every kind of shape at the pull of the string in his master's hand.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> My translation.

<sup>67</sup> My translation.

<sup>68</sup> My translation.

<sup>69</sup> My translation.

<sup>70</sup> 'On Gestic Music', in *Brecht on Theatre* (1978), p. 104.

<sup>71</sup> PoA, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

- (47) A great actor, is a most ingenious puppet, and his strings are held by the poet, who at each line indicates the true form he must take.<sup>78</sup>
- (48) ...a resource, never a choice.<sup>79</sup>
- (49) They are excommunicated. The public, which cannot do without them, despises them. They are slaves, constantly dreading the rod of another slave. Think you that the marks of so continual a degradation can fail to have effect, and that under the burden of shame the soul can be strong enough to reach the heights of Corneille?<sup>80</sup>
- (50) In our days Clairon and Mole played when they first appeared like automata.<sup>81</sup>
- (51) This last [ideal model of the actor] climbs on the shoulders of the one before him and shuts himself up inside a great basket-work figure of which he is the soul. He moves this figure so as to terrify even the poet, who no longer recognises himself; and he terrifies us, as you have very well put it, just as children frighten each other by tucking up their little skirts and putting them over their heads, shaking themselves about, and imitating as best they can the croaking lugubrious accents of the spectre that they counterfeit.<sup>82</sup>
- (52) According to you the likeliest thing to an actor, whether on the boards or at his private studies, is a group of children who play at ghosts in a graveyard at dead of night, armed with a white sheet on the end of a broomstick, and fending forth from its shelter hollow groans to frighten wayfarers.<sup>83</sup>
- (53) Have you not observed an urchin coming forward under a hideous old man's mask, which hides him from head to foot? Behind this mask he laughs at his little companions, who fly in terror before him. This urchin is the true symbol of the actor; his comrades are the symbol of the audience.<sup>84</sup>
- (54) Whatever imprints a sensation of terror leads to the sublime.<sup>85</sup>
- (55) A spiteful monster that pleases the eye is no longer a monster. Whatever deformations a being is afflicted by (if it is in any case possible to speak of deformations at all), it will please as long as it is well represented.<sup>86</sup>
- (56) The general order of nature changes constantly. Can the duration of a species remain identical among so many vicissitudes? No. Only the molecule remains consistently unaltered. The monster is born and disappears: the individual is exterminated in less than a hundred years.<sup>87</sup>

### Chapter 3

- (1) In *Baal* and *Jungle of Cities* I hope to have avoided a great mistake of other art works: the intention to get the spectator carried away. [...] The 'splendid isolation' of the spectator is left intact. It is not sua res, quae agitur. He is not calmed down by being invited to empathize, and to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-8.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>85</sup> My translation.

<sup>86</sup> My translation.

<sup>87</sup> My translation.

observe himself in two examples, indestructible and all-important. There is a higher order of interests: interest in allegory, otherness, in the remarkable and miraculous.<sup>88</sup>

- (2) The individual was born as an individual, as indivisible, and irreplaceable. [...] This is how Shakespearean drama became the drama of the medieval subject, of a subject which would discover itself more and more as an individual and which from this position would become involved in dramatic situations with his likes as well as with superior forces.
- (3) The sociologist knows that there are situations in which improvements do no longer help. The span of his judgment does no longer range between 'good' and 'bad', but between 'right' and 'wrong'.<sup>89</sup>
- (4) War determined the role which the individual of the future was going to play. The individual itself would achieve incisive effects only as a representative of collectives. But his participation in large-scale economical and political processes is confined to their exploitation. Yet the 'mass of individuals' lost its indivisibility by its inherent possibility of collective division. [...] The material greatness of this time, its huge technical achievements, the powerful deeds of great economists, even the world war as a massive material battle, and especially the scale of chance and risk involved for the individual, these realisations formed the pivots of the new drama, a drama, which was at once an entirely idealist and a capitalist one. The aim was to show and accept the world as it is: its god was to be 'the god of things as they are'.<sup>90</sup>
- (5) But the essence of man is not an abstraction inhering in isolated individuals. Rather, in its actuality, it is the ensemble of social relations.<sup>91</sup>
- (6) Here, too, the consequence is the abolition of any personal characteristics, of properties, of privacy, of private properties.<sup>92</sup>
- (7) Our concept of the masses is derived from the notion of the individual. Thus, mass is defined as a composite; its divisibility is no longer its main characteristic. Consequently, the *dividual* turns more and more into an individual. (...)

What statements can be made about the individual, as long as we are searching the masses through the individual. We will attempt to search and construe the individual from the starting-point of the masses.<sup>93</sup>

- (8) Dialectical drama started off with experiments in terms of form rather than subject matter. It operated without psychology, without the concept of the individual, and dissolved, with emphasis on the epic, *states* into *processes*. Characters as types, which were made to appear as strange as possible, and henceforth as objective (so that emotional identification could not happen), were shown in the ways in which they behaved towards other types.<sup>94</sup>
- (9) From now on followed the discovery of a kind of subjectivity inherent in objectivity, a partial kind of objectivity. What appeared as tendency, was the tendency of material itself.<sup>95</sup>
- (10) In the process of recognition the intellect fulfils two functions: the organisation of what has been or will be learnt, and the estrangement of processes, a kind of confrontation of thought with its negative. The 'it is this' is perceived with astonishment as 'it is this and nothing else'.<sup>96</sup>
- (11) To alienate actions and characters means first of all to show them in a less obvious, known and

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<sup>88</sup> My translation.

<sup>89</sup> My translation.

<sup>90</sup> My translation.

<sup>91</sup> 'On Feuerbach', in *Marx Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Joseph O'Malley with Richard A. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), p. 117

<sup>92</sup> My translation.

<sup>93</sup> My translation.

<sup>94</sup> My translation.

<sup>95</sup> My translation.

<sup>96</sup> My translation.



- straightforward form, to present them in a way that they produce astonishment and curiosity.<sup>97</sup>
- (12) Quite generally, the familiar, just because it is familiar, is not cognitively understood.<sup>98</sup>
- (13) ...the power and the work of the *Understanding*, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power.<sup>99</sup>
- (14) But that an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual, only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom – this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure ‘I’.<sup>100</sup>
- (15) Even when ordinary, find it strange  
 Even when familiar, find it inexplicable  
 Even when quite normal, it must astound you  
 Even when the rule, recognise it as an abuse  
 And wherever you have recognised abuse  
 Put it right!<sup>101</sup>
- (16) The potential for change is rooted in the contradictions of the world. Something is hidden in things, people and processes which makes them exactly what they are, and at the same time, makes them other. For they develop, they do not remain the same, they change beyond recognition. And the things, just as they are now, contain in themselves, almost unnoticeably, something other, something belonging to earlier times, something which is hostile to the here and now.<sup>102</sup>
- (17) This is the celebrated Socratic irony, which in his case is a particular mode of carrying on intercourse between one person and another, and is thus only a subjective form of dialectic, for really dialectic deals with the reasons for things.<sup>103</sup>
- (18) ‘I used to hear of you, before I knew you, that you were yourself in doubt [...], and also brought others in doubt, and now you cast a spell on me too, so that I am at my wits’ end [...]. You seem, if I may venture to jest, to be like a torpedo fish, for it is said of it that it makes torpid [...] those who come near it and touch it. You have done this to me, for I am become torpid in body and soul, and I do not know how to answer you, although I have talked thousands of times about virtue with many persons, and, as it seemed to me, talked very well. But now I do not know at all what to say. Hence you do well not to travel amongst strangers, for you might be put to death as a magician.’ Socrates again wishes to ‘inquire’. Now Menon says, ‘How can you inquire about what you say you do not know? And if you find it out by chance, how can you know that it is what you looked for, since you acknowledge that, you do not know it?’<sup>104</sup>
- (19) Philosophy must, generally speaking, begin with a puzzle in order to bring about reflection; everything must be doubted, all prepositions given up, to reach the truth as created through the Notion.<sup>105</sup>
- (20) 1. *Verfremdung as recognition* (to understand – not to understand – to understand), the negation of the negation.  
 2. *Agglomeration of incomprehensibilities until understanding takes over* (transformation of quantity into quality).  
 3. *The particular in the general* (an action in its specificity, singularity, typical).

<sup>97</sup> My translation.

<sup>98</sup> *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, intro. J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), p. 18.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *The Exception and the Rule*, trans. Tom Osborn, BBP3ii, p. 176.

<sup>102</sup> My translation.

<sup>103</sup> *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Routledge, 1974), p. 398.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 405-6.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

4. *Contradictions* (this person in precisely these conditions! These consequences of this action!) [...]

6. *One understood through the other* (the scene, at first independent in its meaning, comes to partake of other meanings in the context of other scenes).

7. *The leap* (*saltus naturae*, epic development in leaps).

8. *Unity of contradictions* (search for contradictions in unity). Mother and son – in ‘Mother’ – from the outside apparently united, they fight each other because of their wage. [...]

(21) The actor should approach his role with an attitude of astonishment and contradiction. Not only the way in which an action comes about, also the behaviour of his role, has to be put to the test and understood in all its particularity; he may accept nothing as given, as an action, ‘which couldn’t have taken place any differently’, which ‘was not to be expected any differently in a person with such a character.’ Before memorising the words, he should memorise about what he was astonished and where he didn’t agree. These moments he should fix in his interpretation. Once he enters the stage, he will in all the important moments find, name and evoke something what he does not do. This is to say that he plays in a way that an alternative becomes as obvious as possible, so, that his play evokes other possible actions, only representing one of the variations. [...] What he does not do must be contained and resolved in what he does. In this way all sentences and gestures signify decisions, the dramatic figure remains under control and is being tested. The technical expression for this method is called: fixing the ‘non-but’.<sup>106</sup>

(22) Miss Jännicke’s work was indecent. There was something dirty about her profession. Not the ones, who threw dirt on her, but she was dirty. Not the ones who had bread and held it out to her in exchange for sexual intercourse were indecent, but she was, who did not have the piece of bread and who took it. Not the ones who bought desire and thought it filthy, but she was, who sold desire and did not feel it. Wasn’t she the case of a loose girl? She was foolish because she did not want to die of tuberculosis in one of those lower basement flats – but of syphilis in the Charité. She did not want to stand in line at one of the factory gates, where already so many others stood, but it was much more pleasant, to have the clients on top of her, of which, by the way, there was shortage, too.<sup>107</sup>

(23) The solution to this question did not remain undecided or open. For a Marxist the correct answer can of course not depend on subjective opinion, if it matters to convey the kind of objective truths that Brecht wants to bring across.<sup>108</sup>

## Chapter 4

(1) ...it overlooks the inner rebellion of the other; it overlooks the fact that all restraints have been cast off, overlooks this state of sheer disruption in which, the *self-identity* of being-for-self having become divided against itself, all identity, all existence, is disrupted, and in which the sentiment and view-point of the benefactor suffer most distortion. It stands on the very edge of this innermost abyss, of the bottomless depth, in which all the stability and Substance have vanished; and in this depth it sees nothing but a common thing, a plaything of its whims, an accident of its caprice. Its Spirit is a subjective opinion wholly devoid of essentiality, a superficiality from which Spirit has fled.<sup>109</sup>

(2) ...as a ‘rigmarole of wisdom and folly...’<sup>110</sup>

(3) The consciousness that is aware of its disruption and openly declares it, derides existence and the universal confusion, and derides its own self as well; it is at the same time the fading, but still

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<sup>106</sup> My translation.

<sup>107</sup> My translation.

<sup>108</sup> My translation.

<sup>109</sup> Hegel (1977), p. 315.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

audible, sound of all this confusion. This vanity of all reality and every definite Notion, vanity which knows itself to be such, is the double reflection of the real world into itself...<sup>111</sup>

- (4) All I know, is that I would like to be somebody else, even at the risk of being a man of genius, a great man. Yes, I must confess to this, something tells me that I would. I have never heard any of them praised without this eulogy making me secretly enraged. I am envious. So when I hear something disreputable about their private lives I listen with pleasure. It brings us nearer together. It makes my own mediocrity more bearable. [...] In fact, I have been and I am angry at being mediocre. Yes, yes, I am mediocre and angry. I have never listened to the overture of *Les Indes galantes*; never heard sung *Profonds abymes du Tenare, Nuit, éternelle nuit*, without painfully telling myself: that's what you will never do. In fact I am jealous of my uncle, and if at his death there had been some beautiful pieces for keyboard still unpublished, I wouldn't have hesitated to remain myself and be him, too.<sup>112</sup>
- (5) I am prepared to forget mine, but at my discretion, and not at somebody else's orders.<sup>113</sup>
- (6) Couldn't you flatter as well as anybody else? Couldn't you lie, swear, perjure, promise, fulfil or back out like anybody else? Couldn't you go on all fours like anybody else? [...] Couldn't you aid and abet Madame's intrigue and deliver Monsieur's love letters like anybody else? Couldn't you encourage that young man to speak to Mademoiselle, and persuade Mademoiselle to listen, like anybody else?<sup>114</sup>
- (7) ...the one best suited to my role as an idler, fool and good-for-nothing.<sup>115</sup>
- (8) It would be very strange if I were to torment myself like a damned soul, so as to twist myself and make myself other than I am in order to take on a character foreign to myself; qualities of high esteem, which would cost me a lot to acquire, to apply, and would land me nowhere, maybe worse than nowhere, because I would be continually satirising the rich from whom poor devils like me have to make a living.<sup>116</sup>
- (9) Do I know that sentiment;...<sup>117</sup>
- (10) Well, Ramau, there are ten thousand good tables in Paris, each laid for fifteen or twenty, and of all those places, not one for you!<sup>118</sup>
- (11) You would have a fine house (measuring the house with his arms), a good bed (nonchalantly stretching himself thereon), good wines (tasting them and clicking his tongue against his palate), a fine coach (raising one leg to step into it), pretty women (fondling their bosoms and gazing at them voluptuously), a hundred lickspittles would come and pay court to me every day (he seemed to see them all round him – Palissot, Poincinet, the Frérons, father and son, LaPorte – and he gave ear to them, swelled with pride, bestowed his approval on them, smiled, treated them with disdain or scorn, sent them packing, called them back and then went on)...<sup>119</sup>
- (12) Having sampled the sweetness of this repose for a few moments he awoke, yawned, rubbed his eyes and went on looking about him for his fawning flatterers.<sup>120</sup>
- (13) Be a hypocrite if you want; but don't speak like one. Keep the vices that you find useful; but do away with both the tone and the appearances, which make you seem ridiculous. In order to safeguard oneself from this tone and these appearances one needs to know them. [...] I am what I am, and I will remain so, yet I act and I speak as expected. [...] It would be better to be insolent

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 319-20.

<sup>112</sup> RN, p. 43, translation modified.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 71, translation modified.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 49, translation modified.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 68, translation modified.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 49, translation modified.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

than to possess the physiognomy of insolence; the insolent character only insults from time to time; the insolent physiognomy insults all the time. By the way, don't think that I am the only reader of this sort. The only merit I can claim here, is to have become so systematically, through accurate, sensible and clear perception, what the majority of others have become by instinct. From this it follows; their reading doesn't make them any better than me; they remain ridiculous in spite of themselves, whereas I am so only when I choose to be, and then I leave them far behind.<sup>121</sup>

- (14) I was their dear Rameau, their pretty Rameau, their Rameau the lunatic, the impertinent, the ignorant, the lazy, the greedy, the fool, the big beast. Not one of these pet names but earned me a smile, a caress, a tap on the shoulder, a box on the ears, a kick, a toothsome morsel chucked onto my plate during meals, at other times a certain liberty I could take without its being of any consequence, for I am a person without any consequence.<sup>122</sup>
- (15) Unhappy man, to have been born or to have fallen into a state so vile!<sup>123</sup>
- (16) I am quite prepared to be abject, but not under compulsion.<sup>124</sup>
- (17) For in spite of the miserable, abject, vile, abominable part you play, I think you really have great refinement of soul.<sup>125</sup>
- (18) In your eyes I am an abject, despicable creature, and sometimes I am in my own eyes too, but only occasionally.<sup>126</sup>
- (19) The boy would need a very great deal of time and waste the best years of his life before the paternal molecule has regained control and brought him to the state of total abjectness that I have reached.<sup>127</sup>
- (20) Virtue demands respect; and respect is a liability. Virtue demands admiration, and admiration is not amusing. I have to deal with people who are bored and I have to make them laugh. Now, it is ridicule and folly which make you laugh, so it follows that I have to be ridiculous and foolish.<sup>128</sup>
- (21) ...he is the speck of yeast that leavens the whole and restores to each of us a portion of his natural individuality.<sup>129</sup>
- (22) I am an excellent mimic, as you are about to see. Then, smiling as he did so, he began impersonating the admiring man, the supplicating man, the complaisant man, right foot forward, left foot behind, back bent, head up, looking fixedly into somebody else's eyes, lips parted, arms help out towards something, waiting to a command, receiving it, off like an arrow, back again and with it done, reporting it.<sup>130</sup>
- (23) The funny thing was that while I was holding forth to him in this way he was doing the actions. He flung himself down with his face pressed to the ground, he seemed to be holding the point of the slipper between his hands, and he wept and sobbed, saying: 'Yes, my little queen, yes, I promise, never in my life, in my life.'<sup>131</sup>
- (24) Nobody has ever touched me in this art. But it is in the opposite thing that I am really amazing. I have some soft notes which I accompany with a smile and an infinite variety of approving

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-3, translation modified.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-5, translation modified.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-1.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

faces, with nose, mouth, eyes and brow all brought into play. I have a certain agility with my hips, a way of twisting my spine, raising or lowering my shoulders, stretching my fingers, bowing my head, shutting my eyes and being struck dumb as though I had heard an angelic, divine voice come down from heaven. That's what gets them. I wonder whether you appreciate the full power of this last attitude. Watch it. Look.<sup>132</sup>

- (25) The language of this disrupted consciousness is, however, the perfect language and the authentic existent Spirit of this entire world of culture. This self-consciousness which rebels against this rejection of itself is *eo ipso* absolutely self-identical in its absolute disruption, the pure mediation of pure self-consciousness with itself. It is the sameness of the identical judgement in which one and the same personality is both subject and predicate; for this personality is absolutely, and subject and predicate are utterly indifferent, immediate beings which have nothing to do with one another, which have no necessary unity, so much so that each is the power of a separate independent personality.<sup>133</sup>
- (26) That something which is here and which speaks to me, tells me: Rameau, you would have liked to have composed those two pieces.<sup>134</sup>
- (27) (*And placing his right hand on his chest he added*): I can feel here something rising and speaking to me: 'Rameau, you will do nothing of the kind. There must be a certain dignity attached to the nature of mankind, which nothing can suffocate.'<sup>135</sup>
- (28) (While saying this he seized with his right hand the fingers and wrists of his left and turned them backwards and forwards until his fingertips touched his arm; his joints cracked and I was afraid they would be dislocated for good.)  
I: Mind what you are doing, you will maim yourself.  
HE: No fear, they're used to it. For ten years I've been giving them a dreadful time of it. Whatever they felt about it the buggers just had to get used to it and learn to hit the right keys and flit over the strings. And so they work all right now. Yes, quite all right.<sup>136</sup>
- (29) ...fine, there he goes, losing his head again, and a new scene is building up.<sup>137</sup>
- (30) There were bursts of laughter fit to split the ceiling open. He noticed nothing, but went on, possessed by such a frenzy, an enthusiasm so near to madness that it was uncertain whether he would ever get over it, whether he should not be packed off in a cab straight to Bedlam.<sup>138</sup>
- (31) ...dividing himself up into twenty different parts [...] with the air of a lunatic, eyes flashing and mouth foaming, and creating so much heat, you could have died from it.<sup>139</sup>
- (32) By now he was quite beside him. Knocked up with fatigue, like a man coming out of a deep sleep or long trance, he stood there motionless, dazed, astonished, looking about him and trying to recognise his surroundings. Waiting for his strength and memory to come back, he mechanically wiped his face. Like a person waking up to see a large number of people gathered round his bed and totally oblivious or profoundly ignorant of what he had been doing his first impulse was to cry out...<sup>140</sup>
- (33) Here he is a young girl, who cries and he shows off all her affectations; there is a priest, he is king, he is tyrant, who threatens, commands, enrages himself, he is slave, he obeys.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>133</sup> Hegel (1977), p. 316.

<sup>134</sup> RN, p. 44, translation modified.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 48, translation modified.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-3.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 102, translation modified.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-4, translation modified.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 102, translation modified.

- (34) All the chess-players had left their boards and gathered around him. Outside the café windows were thronged with passers-by who had stopped because of the noise. There were bursts of laughter fit to split the ceiling open.<sup>142</sup>
- (35) All was there, the deliciousness of song, as much as the force of expression; and the pain [...]; possessing our souls, and leaving us in suspense, in an experience of utmost singularity. Did I admire? Yes, I admired! Was I touched? I was touched; and yet a tint of ridicule was confounded with these sentiments, and made them seem unnatural.<sup>143</sup>
- (36) ...here he was night, with its darkness; there he was shadow and silence; for even silence is painted through sounds.<sup>144</sup>
- (37) ...he jumps, crawls, twists himself up, creeps along. He spends his life taking up positions and carrying them out?<sup>145</sup>
- (38) I: But by your reckoning there are lots of beggars in this world, and I can't think of anybody who doesn't know a few steps of your dance.  
 HE: You are right. There is only one man in the whole of a realm who walks, and that is the sovereign. Everybody else takes up positions.  
 I: The sovereign? But even then isn't there something else to be said? Do you think he doesn't find himself from time to time in the vicinity of a dainty foot, a little lock of hair, a little nose that makes him put on a bit of a pantomime? Whoever needs somebody else is necessitous and so takes up a position. The king takes up a position with his mistress and with God; he performs his pantomime step. The minister executes the movements of courtier, flatterer, flunkey or beggar in front of his king. The mob of place-seekers dance your steps in a hundred ways, each more vile than the one before, in front of the minister. [...] Good heavens, what you call the beggar's pantomime is what makes the whole world go round.<sup>146</sup>
- (39) ...the savage lives within himself, while social man lives constantly outside himself, and only knows how to live in the opinion of others, so that he seems to receive the consciousness of his own existence merely from the judgement of others concerning him.<sup>147</sup>
- (40) ...those sudden and continual changes which arise from the passions and caprices of bodies of men living together.<sup>148</sup>
- (41) It is the animal cry of passion that should dictate the melodic line [...]. We want something more energetic, less stilted, truer to life. The simple language and normal expression of emotion are all the more essential because our language is more monotonous and less highly stressed. The cry of animal instinct or that of man under stress of emotion will supply them.<sup>149</sup>
- (42) ...the pure emotion of nature.<sup>150</sup>
- (43) It is reason that engenders *amour propre*, and reflection that confirms it: it is reason which turns man's back upon itself, and divides him from everything that could disturb or afflict him. It is philosophy that isolates him, and bids him say, at sight of the misfortunes of others: 'Perish if you will, I am secure.'<sup>151</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 103, translation modified.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 104, translation modified.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-1.

<sup>147</sup> 'A Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind', in Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. and intro. by G. D. H. Cole, revised and augmented by J. H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall (London: Everyman, 1993), p. 116. From now on abbreviated as *Inequality*.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>149</sup> RN, pp. 105-6.

<sup>150</sup> *Inequality*, p. 74.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

- (44) My pupil handed me my fee with the graceful arm movement and curtsey she had learned from her dancing-master. As I was pocketing it her mother said: 'Very nice, Mademoiselle, and if Javillier were here he would clap.'<sup>152</sup>
- (45) Oh, if only it were the daughter.<sup>153</sup>
- (46) Before art had moulded our behaviour, and taught our passions to speak an artificial language, our morals were rude but natural; and the different ways in which we behaved proclaimed at the first glance the difference of our dispositions. Human nature was not at bottom better than now; but men found their security in the ease with which they could see through one another, and this advantage, of which we no longer feel the value, prevented their having many vices.<sup>154</sup>
- (47) Sincere friendship, real esteem, and perfect confidence are banished from among men. Jealousy, suspicion, fear, coldness, reserve, hate, and fraud lie constantly concealed under that uniform and deceitful veil of politeness; that boasted candour and urbanity, for which we are indebted to the enlightened spirit of this age.<sup>155</sup>
- (48) It now became the interest of men to appear what they really were not. To be and to seem became two totally different things; and from this distinction sprang insolent pomp and cheating trickery, with all the numerous vices that go in their train. On the other hand, free and independent as men were before, they were now, in consequence of a multiplicity of new wants, brought into subjection, as it were, to all nature, and particularly to one another; and each became in some degree a slave even in becoming the master of other men: if rich, they stood in need of the services of others; if poor, of their assistance; and even a middle condition did not enable them to do without one another. Man must now, therefore, have been perpetually employed in getting others to interest themselves in his lot, and in making them, apparently at least, if not really, find their advantage in promoting his own.<sup>156</sup>
- (49) Every artist loves applause.<sup>157</sup>
- (50) ...there is but art and mummery...<sup>158</sup>
- (51) I do not like the need to occupy the heart constantly with the stage as if it were ill at ease inside of us.<sup>159</sup>
- (52) People think they come together in the theatre, and it is there that they are isolated. It is there that they go to forget their friends, neighbours, and relations in order to concern themselves with fables, in order to cry for the misfortunes of the dead, or to laugh at the expense of the living.<sup>160</sup>
- (53) ...beings so enormous, so bloated, so chimerical...<sup>161</sup>
- (54) ...is not brought nearer to us, but made more distant<sup>162</sup>
- (55) ...the theatre, which can do nothing to improve morals [manners], can do much toward changing them.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> RN, p. 60.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>154</sup> 'A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences', in Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. and intro. by G. D. H. Cole (London: Everyman, 1993), p. 6. From now on abbreviated as *Arts*.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>156</sup> *Inequality*, pp. 95-6.

<sup>157</sup> *Arts*, p. 19.

<sup>158</sup> *Inequality*, p. 116.

<sup>159</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre*, trans., annot. and intro. Allan Bloom (Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960), p. 16.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-7.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

- (56) But an actor on the stage, displaying other sentiments than his own, saying only what he is made of to say, often representing a chimerical being, annihilates himself, as it were, and is lost in his hero. And, in this forgetting of the man, if something remains of him, it is used as the plaything of the spectators.<sup>164</sup>
- (57) I beg every sincere man to tell if he does not feel in the depths of his soul that there is something servile and base in this traffic of oneself.<sup>165</sup>
- (58) But if it is natural to be hungry: for I always come back to hunger, to the sensation I am always aware of, then I believe it is not the right order to go without food. What a bloody economy, there are people who devour everything, while others have stomachs equally demanding, constant hunger, and nothing to dig their teeth into. The worst thing is, the constrained posture in which we are kept by need. The needy man does not walk like anybody else; he jumps, he grovels, he twists himself, he creeps along; he spends his life taking up positions and executing them.<sup>166</sup>
- (59) From pole to pole all I can see is tyrants and slaves.<sup>167</sup>
- (60) In nature all the species feed on each other, and all classes prey on each other in society. We mete out justice to each other without the law taking a hand.<sup>168</sup>
- (61) Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. How did this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? That question I think I can answer.<sup>169</sup>
- (62) Money, money. Money is all, and the rest, without money, is nothing. And that is why, instead of stuffing his head with fine maxims that he would have to forget or else beg for bread, when I possess a *louis*, which isn't often, I take up my stand in front of him. I take the coin out of my pocket. I show it him with admiration. I roll my eyes to heaven. I kiss the *louis* in front of him. And to make him appreciate still more the importance of the sacred coin, I stammer out the names and point out with my finger all the things you can acquire with it – a nice child's frock, a nice bonnet, a lovely biscuit. I strut about proudly, lift my waistcoat and tap my fob pocket. In this way I make him understand that the state of self-confidence he sees me in comes from the coin in there.<sup>170</sup>
- (63) You are dancing, you have danced, and you will go on dancing this vile pantomime.<sup>171</sup>
- (64) ...a child destined to live in Paris [...]. I want my son to be happy or, what comes to the same thing, honored, rich and powerful.<sup>172</sup>
- (65) I take the coin out of my pocket. I show it him with admiration. I roll my eyes to heaven. I kiss the *louis* in front of him. And to make him appreciate still more the importance of the sacred coin, I stammer out the names and point out with my finger all the things you can acquire with it – a nice child's frock, a nice bonnet, a lovely biscuit.<sup>173</sup>
- (66) And besides, you have no idea what a madhouse it is. Imagine a melancholic and dismal figure, morbid and depressed, [...] wrapped in two or three layers of dressing gown, who finds himself pleasing, contrary to everything else. [...] He coldly examines the funny contortions of my face,

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>166</sup> My translation.

<sup>167</sup> RN, p. 65.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>169</sup> 'The Social Contract: Or Principles of Political Right', in Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. and intro. by G. D. Cole, revised and augmented by J. H. Brumfit and John C. Hall (London: Everyman, 1993), p. 181.

<sup>170</sup> RN, p. 110.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.



and those of my mind, which are even funnier; for, between us, that old Father Christmas of a Benedictine who is so famed for his grimaces, is, despite his success at the Court, [...] nothing but a wooden clown. Struggle as I will to reach the heights of the looney bin – nothing doing. Will he laugh? Won't he? This is what I am forced to ask myself in the middle of my contortions; so you can judge for yourself how harmful this uncertainty is to one's talent. My hypochondriac, his head buried under a nightcap covering his eyes, looks like a motionless puppet with a string tied to his chin. [...] You wait for the string to be pulled; and nothing happens; or the jaw puts itself into motion, only to utter a harsh word, a word teaching you that you have never been noticed, and that all your aperies have been lost on him. This word is the answer to a question you asked him four days ago. Once the word has been said the mastoid spring is released and the jaw snaps to...

Then he began to imitate his man; he sat himself on a chair, his head fixed, his eyes half closed, his arms hanging, moving his jaw, like an automaton: 'Yes, you are right Mademoiselle. This has to be treated with subtlety.'<sup>174</sup>

(67) I: Then, why resort to all these vile little tricks?

HE: Vile, what do you mean vile! They are common practice in my profession. There is nothing degrading in doing the same as everybody else. I didn't invent them: and I would be weird and clumsy if I didn't conform.[...] But, Mr. Philosopher, there is a standard conscience just as there is a standard grammar; and as there are exceptions in every language, that I believe you learned people call...emm...help me out here...

I: Idioms.<sup>175</sup>

(68) HE: Exactly. So, too, in every profession there are exceptions to a standard conscience, which I would like to term trade idioms.

I: I understand. Fontanelle speaks and writes well, although his style is teeming with French idiotisms.<sup>176</sup>

(69) HE: And the sovereign, the minister, the financier, the magistrate, soldier, writer, advocate, prosecutor, merchant, banker, artisan, the singing-master, the dancing-master, are all perfectly honourable people, although their conduct departs in several aspects from the standard conscience, and is full of moral idioms. The longer things have been institutionalised, the more there are idioms; the harder times get, the more the idioms multiply. As the worth of the man, so the worth of the profession; and vice-versa, at the end of the day, as the worth of the profession, so the worth of the man. Hence, one makes the profession worth as much as one can.<sup>177</sup>

(70) One idiom for almost all trades - now, there are idioms common to all countries, all times, as there are common stupidities - one such common idiom is to get as many customers as possible; one such common stupidity is to believe that those with the most customers are the most competent. These are two exceptions to the standard conscience to which one must yield.<sup>178</sup>

(71) It's a kind of credit system, nothing in and of itself; but a system where value is conferred by opinion. Once it was thought that a good name is worth more than a belt of gold. However, the one with the belt of gold seldom lacks the good name. Therefore, so far as possible, one should have the name and the belt. And that is my objective when I make my worth known by what you would call vile skills, undignified little tricks. I give my lesson, and I give it well; that is the general rule. I let it be known that I have more lessons to give than there are hours in the day, that is the idiom.<sup>179</sup>

(72) ...which paint more vividly and comprehensively than a whole speech.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-2, translation modified.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 61, translation modified.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 61, translation modified.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-2, translation modified.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 62, translation modified.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 62, translation modified.

<sup>180</sup> My translation.

- (73) I came to believe that all we have seen, known, heard, perceived, [...] from the entire range of human voices to melodies and harmonies of all the airs, all the musical pieces and all the concerts we have heard, all of this exists within ourselves in our unconsciousness.<sup>181</sup>
- (74) He affirms himself through consented alienation, the service to others, the eloquent support he contributes to a common cause.<sup>182</sup>
- (75) You can see me there, always by myself, sitting on a bench on the Allé d'Argenson, dreaming. I entertain myself with thoughts on politics, love, taste and philosophy. I abandon my mind to all its libertinage.<sup>183</sup>
- (76) He accosts me... 'Aha, there you are, Mr Philosopher, and what are you doing here among all this lot of idlers? Are you wasting your time, too, pushing the wood about? (This is a disparaging way of referring to the games of chess and draughts.)  
I: No, but when I've nothing better to do I enjoy for a moment watching those who push well.<sup>184</sup>
- (77) Nothing is less like him than himself.<sup>185</sup>
- (78) Sometimes we get friend Robbé. He entertains us with his cynical tales, with the miracles of Convulsionaries, of which he has been a first-hand witness, and also with a few cantos of his poem on a subject he knows through and through. I loathe his verses, but I enjoy hearing him recite. He looks like one possessed, and all the onlookers cry: 'There's a poet for you! Between you and me this poetry is nothing but a jumble of all sorts of odd noises, the confusion of tongues of the inhabitants of the Tower of Babel.'<sup>186</sup>
- (79) ...he whistled the recorders and cooed the flutes, shouting, singing and throwing himself about like a mad thing: a one man show featuring dancers, male and female, singers of both sexes, a whole orchestra, a complete opera-house, dividing himself into twenty different stage parts, tearing up and down, stopping, like one possessed, with flashing eyes and foaming mouth.<sup>187</sup>
- (80) He has a surprising memory of sounds, and can distinguish as many differences in voices as we can in faces. He finds in these an infinite number of delicate gradations which escape us because we have not the same interest in observing them. For us, these shades of difference are like our own countenance. Of all the men we have seen, the one we least remember is our own self. We notice faces to recognise people; and if we do not remember our own, it is because we are never liable to mistake ourselves for another person or another for ourselves.<sup>188</sup>
- (81) The *mystification* is not an isolated moment which is strictly bound to the time of one particular episode. On the contrary, it unfolds in several stages, preferably through a chain of successive events.<sup>189</sup>
- (82) ...A clever liar who cunningly installs himself in our intimacy in order to dupe us with fiction.<sup>190</sup>
- (83) 'Your play is worth nothing; your speech is ridiculous. All these gentlemen are mocking you. Get out of here and preach in your village.' One had to separate them and, according to the count, this was the beginning of the quarrel between Rousseau and the 'Holbach clique'.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> My translation.

<sup>182</sup> My translation.

<sup>183</sup> RN, p. 33, translation modified.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>188</sup> 'Letter of the blind for the use of those who see', in *Denis Diderot: Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature and Other Philosophical Works*, intro. and annot. by David Adams (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 1999), pp. 152-3.

<sup>189</sup> My translation.

<sup>190</sup> My translation.

<sup>191</sup> My translation.

- (84) He is a trap we set for newcomers, and I have scarcely known a single one who has not fallen into it.<sup>192</sup>
- (85) ...that is the theme of my frequent soliloquies, and you can paraphrase them how you like as long as you conclude therefrom that I do know what self-contempt is.<sup>193</sup>
- (86) That is why their reading doesn't make them any better than me, and why they remain ridiculous in spite of themselves, where as I am ridiculous only when I mean to be, and then I leave them far behind. For the same art which helps me to avoid being ridiculous on certain occasions helps me on others to achieve it in a masterly manner.<sup>194</sup>
- (87) All I could do was to pass a few sarcastic remarks in order to cover up the absurdity of my solitary applause, which they interpreted the wrong way round.<sup>195</sup>
- (88) You are a non-believer and don't deserve to be instructed in these miracles happening in front of you.<sup>196</sup>
- (89) Having a mask made to look like him! Above all, that mask makes me envious. What's more that man enjoys the highest esteem and is worth millions, [...] That mask! That mask! I would give one of my fingers, to have thought up that mask.<sup>197</sup>
- (90) In your eyes I am a very abject being, highly contemptible, and sometimes, I am so even in my own; but rarely. More often than not I congratulate myself for my vices than I blame myself for them. You are more consistent in your contempt.<sup>198</sup>
- (91) If it is important to be sublime in anything, it is especially so in evil. You spit on a petty thief, but you can't withhold a sort of respect from a great criminal. His courage bowls you over. His brutality makes you shudder.<sup>199</sup>
- (92) I: I have never heard of this renegade of Avignon, but he must be a most astonishing man.  
HE: He certainly is.  
I: The history of great men has always interested me.  
HE: I quite believe it.<sup>200</sup>
- (93) ...This one lived in the house of a good and virtuous descendant of the family of Abraham, promised to the father of the faithful in number equal to the stars.  
I: A Jew?  
HE: A Jew. First he won the Jew's sympathy, then his kindness and finally his complete confidence. And that is how it always happens. We are so sure of the effect of our own acts of kindness that we rarely hide our secrets from the person on whom we have lavished our goodness. How can there fail to be ingratitude when we expose a man to the temptation of being ungrateful with impunity? This is a wise reflection which our Jew did not make. So he confided to the renegade that his conscience would not allow him to eat pork. You are about to see the advantage that a fertile brain would be able to take of this admission.<sup>201</sup>
- (94) ...You must admire the circumspection of the man. No hurrying – he let's the pear ripen, before shaking the branch. Too much eagerness might ruin his project. Usually greatness of character results from the natural balance of several opposing qualities.

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<sup>192</sup> RN, p. 81.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-6, translation modified.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 92, translation modified.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-4, translation modified.

- I: Oh, spare me with your reflections, and continue with the story.<sup>202</sup>
- (95) ...Where was I?  
 I: You had got to the well-established friendship between the Jew and the renegade.  
 HE: Well, the pear was ripe...But you aren't listening. What's on your mind?  
 I: I was thinking how variable your style is, sometimes lofty, sometimes familiar.  
 HE: Can the style of an evil man have any unity?<sup>203</sup>
- (96) ...One night, it happened, petrified, with a trembling voice, face pale like death, shaking in every limb, he came to see his good friend. – What's the matter? – We are lost.- Lost, how come? – Lost, I tell you; lost beyond recall. – Explain yourself...- One moment, let me get over my fright. – Come now, calm down, said the Jew; instead of saying: you are a shameless trickster; I don't know what you have to tell me, but you are a shameless trickster; you simulate terror.<sup>204</sup>
- (97) HE. – Because he was a liar and he had crossed the line. That, to me, seems to be clear, so stop interrupting. – We are lost, lost beyond recall. Don't you sense the affectation in his repeated *losts*?<sup>205</sup>
- (98) ...Some traitor has denounced us to the Holy Inquisition, you as a Jew, me as a renegade, as an infamous renegade. Note how the traitor did not blush when using such odious expressions. It takes more courage than one would think to call oneself by one's name. You have no idea how much it costs to achieve this.<sup>206</sup>
- (99) But to come back to this unspeakable renegade...<sup>207</sup>
- (100) Is not only a liar, but a highly skilful one.<sup>208</sup>
- (101) ...The Jew gets frightened, he tears out his beard, he rolls on the ground. He sees the sbirros at his door; he already sees himself clothed with the san-benito; sees his own auto-da-fé being prepared. – My friend, my dearest friend, my only friend, what is to be done?<sup>209</sup>
- (102) ...and we will go, you and I, to search for, under another sky, the freedom to serve our God and in safety follow the law of Abraham according to our conscience.<sup>210</sup>
- (103) In the night the renegade gets up, relieves the Jew of his wallet, his purse and his jewels, embarks and off he goes.<sup>211</sup>
- (104) And you think that's all there is to it? Well, you didn't get it. When I was told this story, I guessed what I withheld from you in order to test your powers of perception. You did well to become an honourable man; you would have made nothing but a petty thief. Up till now the renegade is no more than precisely that. He is a despicable scoundrel who nobody would like to resemble. The ingenuity of his wickedness, is to have been himself the one to have denounced his good friend the Israelite, who was seized by the Holy Inquisition, when he awoke, and who, several days later, was made into a bonfire. And thus the renegade became the undisputed possessor of the fortune of this accursed descendant of those who crucified Our Lord.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 94, translation modified.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 94, translation modified.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 94, translation modified.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 95, translation modified.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 95, translation modified.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 95, translation modified.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 95, translation modified.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 95, translation modified.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-6.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

- (105) And that's just what I meant. The atrocity of the deed carries you beyond mere contempt; and that is the reason for my sincerity. I wanted you to know how far I excelled in my art; to force you to admit that I was at least original in my degradation, and for you to place me in your mind in the lineage of the great villains, and then exclaim, *Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator!* Come on, jolly, chorus, Mr. Philosopher: *Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum Imperator.*<sup>213</sup>
- (106) I did not know whether I should stay or flee, laugh or be furious. I stayed, intending to turn the conversation onto some subject which would chase away from my soul the horror with which it was filled. I could hardly bear any longer the presence of a man who discussed a horrible act, an execrable crime, like a connoisseur of painting or poetry, examining the beauties of a work of art; or like a moralist or historian would put into relief and illuminate the conditions of a heroic action.<sup>214</sup>
- (107) ...for I am a person who isn't of any consequence. People do what they like with me, in my company, in front of me, without my standing on ceremony.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., pp. 96-7, translation modified.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

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*Alienation and Theatricality in Brecht and Diderot*  
Volume II  
Practical Component

Including a Stage Adaptation of Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*  
and video documentation of a production of the same piece  
staged at the Citizens Theatre, October 1998

DENIS DIDEROT

# RAMEAU'S NEPHEW

*Translated and Adapted  
for the Stage by*  
Phoebe von Held and Nina Pearlman  
*Performed at the  
Citizens Theatre Glasgow  
October 1998*

*Nephew: Candida Benson  
Philosopher: Alexandra Belcourt  
Director/Designer: Phoebe von Held  
Lighting: Zerlina Hughes*

# RAMEAU'S NEPHEW

## SECOND SATIRE

*VERTUMNIS, QUOTQUOT SUNT, NATUS INIQUIS*

(HORACE: *SATIRES*, II, 7)

PHILOSOPHER: Come rain or shine, it is my habit to go for a walk in the Palais-Royal every afternoon at about five. You can see me there, always by myself, sitting on a bench on the Allée d'Argenson, dreaming. I entertain myself with thoughts on politics, love, taste or philosophy. I abandon my mind to complete libertinage. It becomes the master who follows the first wise or foolish idea on its path, like all those sleazy guys in the Allée de Foy looking for an easy catch. They march in the footsteps of a flirtatious woman who has a laughing face, sparkling eye and tip-tilted nose, only to leave her for another, soliciting them all, but sticking to none. For me, my thoughts are my wenches. If it is too cold or wet, I take refuge in the Café de la Régence; there I amuse myself watching people playing chess. Paris is the place in the world, and the Café de la Régence the Place in Paris where the game is played best. It's here that the most amazing moves can be seen, and the poorest conversation heard. One afternoon there I was, watching a great deal, saying little, and listening to as little as I could; when I was accosted by one of the weirdest characters in this land where God has not been sparing of them. He is a composition of the highest and the lowest, of good sense and folly. Moreover he is blessed with a strong constitution, a singularly vivid imagination, and lung-power quite out of the ordinary. Should you ever come across him and his originality does not grip you, you will either stick your fingers in your ears or run away. God, what awful lungs! Nothing is less like him than himself. At times he is thin and gaunt, like an ill person in the last stages of consumption. A month later he is sleek and plump, as though he had never left the table of some millionaire. I don't think much of these individuals, myself. They interest me once a year, when I meet them because their character contrasts sharply with other people's, and breaks the tedious uniformity that our education, our social conventions and codes of behaviour have introduced.

If one of them appears in the company of people; he is the grain of yeast which makes the dough rise and which restores to each of us a portion of his natural individuality. He provokes, he stirs, he makes us take sides; he brings out the truth, shows up the good and unmasks the bad.

This particular one, I have known for quite a while. He had weaved his way, I don't know how, into several good homes, where there was always a place laid for him, but on condition that he did not speak, unless permission had been given. He sealed his lips and ate in rage. Under this restraint he was wonderful to behold. If he felt like breaking the agreement and he opened his mouth, at the first word, all the guests cried out: oh Rameau! Then his eyes glittered with fury and he fell to eating again with even more rage. You were curious to know the man's name, and now you know. He is the nephew of the famous musician who has saved us from the plainsong of Lully that we have been chanting for over a hundred years; who has written so many unintelligible visions and apocalyptic truths on the theory of music, neither he or anybody else has ever understood, and from whom we have a certain number of operas in which there is harmony, snatches of song, disconnected ideas, clash of arms, dashing to and fro, triumphs, lances, glories, murmurs and victories to take your breath away, and some dance tunes that will last forever.

He accosts me... **Ah, there you are, Mr. Philosopher; and what are you doing here among all this lot of idlers? Are you wasting your time, too, pushing the wood about?** This is a disparaging way of referring to the games of chess and draughts.

- No; but when I've nothing better to do, I enjoy for a moment watching those who push well.

NEPHEW: In that case you don't enjoy yourself very often; apart from Légal and Philidor, the rest know nothing about it.

PHILOSOPHER: And Monsieur de Bissy, what about him?

NEPHEW: He is to chess what Mademoiselle Clairon is to acting. They play, both of them, knowing all that can be learnt about it.

PHILOSOPHER: You are fussy, and I can see you only have sympathy for men of genius.

NEPHEW: Yes, in chess, draughts, poetry, eloquence, music, and other nonsense of that kind. What's the use of mediocrity in that sort of thing?

PHILOSOPHER: Not much, I admit. But there need to be men who apply themselves to pave the way for the genius to come. He is one in a million. But lets leave that. It's been ages since I've seen you. I hardly ever think of you when I don't see you, but I am always pleased when I do. What have you been up to?

NEPHEW: The same as you, I and everybody else: good, bad and nothing. And then I've been hungry and I've eaten when the chance came along; after having eaten I have been thirsty and I had a drink, sometimes. In the meantime my beard grew; and when it grew, I had a shave.

PHILOSOPHER: That was a bad call. That's the only thing you lack in order to be a sage.

NEPHEW: True. I have got the large wrinkled forehead, the blazing eyes; the prominent nose; the large cheek bones; the black, bushy eyebrows, the good mouth; with full lips and the determined chin. If this grand chin were covered by a long beard it would figure very well in bronze or marble.

PHILOSOPHER: Side by side with Caesar, Marcus Aurelius and Socrates.

NEPHEW: No, I should look better between Diogenes, the cynic, and Phryne, the courtesan. I am as impertinent as the one and I like visiting the other.

PHILOSOPHER: Are you still in good health?

NEPHEW: Yes, usually, but not all that wonderful today.

PHILOSOPHER: How come? You with a paunch like Silenus and a face...

NEPHEW: A face you would take for his behind. The spleen which has dried up my dear uncle is apparently fattening his dear nephew.

PHILOSOPHER: Speaking of your uncle, do you see him sometimes?

NEPHEW: Yes, in passing on the street.

PHILOSOPHER: Doesn't he ever do anything for you?

NEPHEW: If he ever does anything for anybody it is without realising it. He is a philosopher of some sort. He thinks of nothing but himself and the rest of the universe is not worth a pin to him. His wife and daughter can just drop dead when they like, so long as the parish bells at their funeral go on sounding intervals of a twelfth and a seventeenth everything will be just fine. He's quite happy. This is what I particularly value in men of genius. They are only good in one thing, beyond that, nothing. They don't know what it means to be citizens, fathers, mothers, brothers, relations, friends. Between ourselves, we should aspire to be like them in every aspect, but not wish their seed to become common. We need men, but not men of genius. No way, we certainly don't need them. It is they who change the face of the globe; but in the smallest things stupidity reigns and is so powerful that it is hard to remedy without a major upheaval. Let the world go its own sweet way. It does so quite well, since the majority is quite happy with it. If I knew anything about history, I would show you that evil has always come here below through some man of genius. But I don't know any history, because I know nothing. Let the Devil take me, if I have ever learnt anything, and if for not having learnt anything I am any the worse off. One day I was at the table of a Minister of the Crown who has brains enough for four. Well, he demonstrated as clearly as one and one makes two, that nothing was more useful to the people than lies and nothing more harmful than truth. I don't recollect his proofs very well, but it followed obviously that men of genius are detestable, and that if a new-born child bore on his brow the mark of this dangerous gift of nature, he should be either strangled or thrown to the wolves.

PHILOSOPHER: And yet people like that who are so against genius all claim to possess it.

NEPHEW: I am sure they do deep down inside; but I don't think they would dare admit to it.

PHILOSOPHER: That's just modesty. So from then on you developed a terrible loathing for genius?

NEPHEW: From which there is no point of return.

PHILOSOPHER: But I have seen the time when you were in despair at only being an ordinary man. You will never be happy, if you are afflicted equally by the pros and cons. One should make up one's mind and stick to it. Still, I agree with you that men of genius are frequently peculiar; as the saying goes, great wits are sure to madness near allied, and there's no denying that. But periods which have not produced any will be despised. Geniuses will bring honour to their nations, statues are erected in their memory, and one regards them as benefactors of mankind. With all due respect to your noble minister, I think that although a lie maybe useful for a moment it is necessarily harmful in the long run; and that, on the contrary, truth will always succeed, even though it maybe harmful at the moment. From which I would be tempted to conclude that the man of genius who shows up a common error, or who establishes a great truth, is always worthy of our veneration. It may happen that such a man falls victim to prejudice and the law; but there are two kinds of law, some absolutely equitable and universal; the others capricious and only owing their authority to blindness or force of circumstances. These last ones only momentarily disgrace the man who infringes them, a disgrace which is reverted in time to the judges and nations, and remains so forever. Who is dishonoured today, Socrates or the judge who made him drink the hemlock?

NEPHEW: Does it matter? Was he any the less condemned? Was he any the less put to death? Was he any the less a seditious citizen? Since he despised a bad law did that not encourage fools to despise good laws? Just now you weren't far off from admitting to a very unfavourable view of men of genius.

PHILOSOPHER: Listen to me, dear man. A society ought not to have bad laws; and if it had only good ones it would never be in the position of persecuting a man of genius. I did not say that genius was inseparable from wickedness, nor wickedness from genius. But a fool is more likely to be wicked than a

man of intelligence. Even if a genius was difficult to live with: touchy, tricky, intolerable. What if he was wicked, what would you conclude from that?

NEPHEW: That he ought to be drowned.

PHILOSOPHER: Calm down, my dear man. Now, tell me; I won't take your uncle as an example; he is a hard man; he is brutal; he is inhuman; he is avaricious; he is a bad father, bad husband; bad uncle; and it has yet to be decided if he is a man of genius; if he has pushed his art far enough and if his work will count ten years from now. But Racine? That one most certainly had genius, and yet he was not too good as a man. And what about Voltaire?

NEPHEW: Don't press me too hard; I am logical.

PHILOSOPHER: Which of the two would you prefer? That he had been a worthy person, giving his wife a legitimate baby once a year; good father, good uncle, good neighbour, an honest tradesman but nothing more; or that he had been roguish, traitorous, ambitious, envious, spiteful, but the creator of *Andromaque*, *Iphigénie*, *Phèdre*, *Athalie*?

NEPHEW: Well, for him it might have been better if he had been the first of these two.

PHILOSOPHER: That is infinitely truer than you think.

NEPHEW: Oh! There you go just like the others! If we say something good it is like lunatics or visionaries, by accident. Only people of your sort realise what they say. Yes, Mr Philosopher. I do know what I am saying, and I know it as well as you know what you say.

PHILOSOPHER: So what about my question? What about Racine?

NEPHEW: If he had been a prosperous silk merchant in the Rue Saint-Denis or the Rue Saint-Honoré, or an apothecary with good contacts, he would have amassed a huge fortune and while doing so would have enjoyed every possible kind of pleasure. We would have had some excellent meals at his

home, played for high stakes; drunk excellent wines, excellent liqueurs, excellent coffees, gone for excursions into the country. You see I was perfectly aware of what I was saying. You can laugh. Racine has only been good for the people and for the times he did not live to see.

PHILOSOPHER: Agreed. But weigh the bad against the good. A thousand years from now he will still draw tears; he will still be the admiration of people in all countries of the world. He will inspire kindness, compassion, tenderness; it will be asked who he was and of what country, and they will envy France. He hurt a few individuals who are dead and gone and in whom we take little or no interest; but we have nothing to fear from his misdeeds or faults. He is a tree which has parched some other trees planted in its neighbourhood; which has smothered plants growing at its feet; but it has raised its crown to the clouds; its branches have spread far and beyond. It has lent its shade to those who came, come or will come to rest round its majestic trunk. Let us look at what's really interesting here; let us forget for a moment the point we occupy in space and time; let us extend our gaze towards centuries to come, to most distant lands and people yet to be born. If we are not generous enough ourselves let us at least forgive nature for having been wiser than we are.

NEPHEW: But if nature was as powerful as she is wise, why didn't she make them as good as she made them wise?

PHILOSOPHER: But don't you see that with such an argument you overthrow the universal order of things, and that if everything down here was excellent, there would be nothing at all of excellence?

NEPHEW: You are right. The important thing is that you and I should be, and that we should be you and I. Other than that let everything go as it pleases. The best order of things, in my opinion, is the one I was meant to be part of; and to hell with the most perfect of worlds if I am not of it. I would rather be, even as an impudent provocateur, than not be at all.

PHILOSOPHER: No one would disagree with you there. Everyone thinks like you and complains about the existing order of things, but without realising that they are thereby denying their own existence.



NEPHEW: True.

PHILOSOPHER: Let us therefore accept things as they are. Let us see what they cost us and what we gain; and let us leave alone all that we don't know enough about either to praise or to blame; which is probably neither good nor bad; but only necessary, as many good people think.

NEPHEW: I don't understand much of what you are holding forth here. It is apparently philosophy, and I warn you that I care little for that. All I know is that I would like to be somebody else, even at the risk of being a man of genius, a great man. Yes, I must confess to this, something tells me that I would. I have never heard any of them praised without this eulogy of greatness making me secretly enraged. I am envious. So when I hear something disreputable about their private lives, I listen with pleasure. It brings us nearer together. It makes my own mediocrity more bearable. I have been angry, I still am angry at being mediocre. Yes, yes, I am mediocre and angry. I have never listened to the overture to *Les Indes galantes*; never heard sung *Nuit, éternelle nuit*, without painfully telling myself: that's what you will never do. In fact I was jealous of my uncle, and if at his death there had been some beautiful pieces for keyboard still unpublished, I wouldn't have hesitated to remain myself and be him, too.

PHILOSOPHER: If that's all that's bothering you, I shouldn't worry about it.

NEPHEW: Oh, it's nothing. These things are just passing phases.

PHILOSOPHER: He fell once again to singing the overture to *Les Indes galantes* and the air *Profonds abîmes*, and then went on:

NEPHEW: That something which is there and which speaks, tells me: Rameau, you would like to have composed those two pieces; if you had composed those two you could compose two more; and when you had done a certain number you would be played, you would be sung everywhere; as you walked along you would hold your head high. Your mind would be witness to your own merit. The others would point their finger at you. They would say: 'It's him that made the pretty gavottes'.

PHILOSOPHER: And he sang the gavottes. With airs of a person deeply touched, who swims in his joy, and whose eyes are moist, he added, rubbing his hands:

NEPHEW: You would have a fine house.

PHILOSOPHER: Measuring the house with his arms.

NEPHEW: A good bed.

PHILOSOPHER: And he stretched himself nonchalantly on it.

NEPHEW: Good wines.

PHILOSOPHER: Tasting them and clicking his tongue against his palate.

NEPHEW: And a fine coach.

PHILOSOPHER: And he raised his foot to step into it.

NEPHEW: Pretty women.

PHILOSOPHER: Who's bosoms he grabbed and stared at voluptuously.

NEPHEW: A hundred suckers would come and pay lip-service to me every day.

PHILOSOPHER: And he believed he saw them all around him. He saw Palissot, Poinsinet, the Frérons, father and son, La Porte. He listened to them; he swelled with pride; approved them, smiled at them, rejected them, scorned them, sent them packing, called them back. Then he went on:

NEPHEW: And so it is that you would be told in the morning that you were a great man. You would read in the *Trois Siècles* that you were a great man; by the evening you would be convinced that you were a great man; and the great man, Rameau the Nephew, would fall asleep with the soft murmur of eulogies ringing in his ears. Even in sleep, he would have the air of

satisfaction about him; his chest would fill out, rise, fall with pleasure; he would snore like a great man.

PHILOSOPHER: And while saying all this he sank softly upon a seat, closed his eyes and mimed the happy slumbers he was imagining. Having tasted the sweetness of his repose for a few moments, he awoke, stretched out, rubbed his eyes and went on looking about him for his insipid admirers.  
-So you believe the happy man sleeps well?

NEPHEW: Do I believe the happy man sleeps well! Me - poor devil - when, in the evening, I have returned to my attic and tucked myself into my pallet, all shriveled up under my cover; my chest is tight and my breathing restrained. It's a sort of faint moan which can hardly be heard; a financier on the other hand, makes his house shudder, and the whole street is astounded. But what I'm worried about today, is not that I snore or sleep badly, like a poor bastard.

PHILOSOPHER: That in itself is bad enough.

NEPHEW: What has happened to me is far worse.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, what?

NEPHEW: You have always taken an interest in me, because I am basically a poor soul you despise, but yet I amuse you at the same time.

PHILOSOPHER: That's true.

NEPHEW: So let me tell you about it.

PHILOSOPHER: Before beginning, he lets out a deep sigh and puts both hands to his forehead. Then he recovers an appearance of calm, and says to me:  
**You know of course that I am an ignoramus, a fool, a lunatic; rude, an idler, and what we in Burgundy call an out and out thug, a rogue, a pig...**  
- What a eulogy!

NEPHEW: It's true in every detail. Not one word can be rebutted. No controversy there, if you please. Nobody knows me better than I do, and I don't tell everything.

PHILOSOPHER: I don't want to offend you, and so I will agree with everything.

NEPHEW: Very well then, I was staying with some people who took to me precisely because I was gifted to an unusual degree with these qualities. I lived like a fighting cock. I was celebrated. I wasn't missed for a moment without regret. I was their dear Rameau, their pretty Rameau, their Rameau the lunatic, the impertinent, the ignorant, the lazy, the greedy, the fool, the big beast. The clumsy dog that I am; I've lost it all! I've lost it all for having had common sense for once, for once in my life.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, what's the story?

NEPHEW: This was an incomparable, an unforgivable, incomprehensible stupidity.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, what stupidity?

NEPHEW: Rameau, Rameau, is that what they took you for? The stupidity of having shown a bit of taste, a bit of intelligence, a bit of reason! Rameau, my friend, this will teach you to remain what God made you and what your patrons wanted you to be. And then, they grabbed you by the shoulders, they led you to the door, they said to you: 'Bastard, piss off! Don't ever appear here again. I believe he wants to have reason, he wants to have logic! Clear off. We've got those qualities, in abundance.'

PHILOSOPHER: But aren't there any means of reconciliation? Is the blunder so unforgivable? If I was you I would go and see those people again. You are more valuable to them than you imagine.

NEPHEW: Oh, I'm sure now they haven't got me to make them laugh they are bored like the dogs.

PHILOSOPHER: That's why I would go and see them. I wouldn't leave them time to get along without me, to turn to some respectable amusement: for who knows what might happen.

NEPHEW: That's not what I am afraid of. This won't happen.

PHILOSOPHER: No matter how ingenious you are, somebody else can replace you.

NEPHEW: Hardly.

PHILOSOPHER: Very well. Even so, I would go with that distorted face, those dazed eyes, that sloppy attire, scruffy hair, in that truly tragic state. I would throw myself at the feet of the divinity. I would glue my face to the ground; and without lifting myself I would say to her in a low, sobbing voice: 'Pardon me, Madame! Pardon me! I've been disgraceful and infamous. It was an unfortunate moment; for you know that I am not subject to having any common sense, and I promise I will never make as though I have some ever again'.

The amusing thing was that while I was giving him this lecture he was enacting it as a pantomime. He flung himself to the ground; he seemed to be holding between his two hands the tip of a slipper; he cried; he sobbed; he said:

**Yes, my little queen; yes, I promise; it will never happen again, never again.**

Then suddenly rising, he added in a serious and thoughtful tone:

NEPHEW: Yes, you are right. I believe that is the best. She is an obliging sort; I can vouch for that. And yet to go and humiliate myself in front of that bitch! I, Rameau! Son of Monsieur Rameau, apothecary of Dijon, who is a good man and has never bowed the knee for anyone! I, Rameau, the nephew of the man they call the great Rameau; I who have composed keyboard pieces which nobody plays, but which may well be the only ones to be passed on to posterity who will play them; I! I indeed! That I should go! ... Look, Monsieur, it can't be done.

PHILOSOPHER: And placing his right hand on his chest he added:

NEPHEW: I can feel here something rising and speaking to me: 'Rameau, you will do nothing of the kind.' There must be a certain dignity attached to the nature of mankind, which nothing can suffocate. A mere nothing will awake it. Yes, a mere nothing; yes there are other days when it doesn't cost me a thing to be as vile as you like; those days, I would kiss this Bertin girl's arse for a penny.

PHILOSOPHER: Ah, but my friend; she is fair, pretty, young, soft and plump. This would be an act of humility which one more delicate than yourself might lower himself to.

NEPHEW: Let us have an understanding here: there is arse-kissing literally and arse-kissing metaphorically. Ask fat old Bergier who kisses Madame de la Marck's arse literally and metaphorically; and my goodness, the literal and the metaphorical disgust me equally.

PHILOSOPHER: If the method I am suggesting doesn't appeal to you then you should have the courage to be a pauper.

NEPHEW: It is hard to be a pauper when there are so many wealthy idiots you can live on. And then the self-contempt; it is unbearable.

PHILOSOPHER: Do you know that sentiment?

NEPHEW: Do I know that sentiment; how many times have I said to myself: how, is it Rameau, there are ten million good tables in Paris, each laid for fifteen or twenty; and of all of those places, not one for you! Couldn't you flatter as well as anybody else? Couldn't you lie, swear, perjure, promise, fulfil or back out like anybody else? Couldn't you go on all fours like anybody else? Couldn't you aid and abet Madame's intrigue and deliver Monsieur's lover-letters like anybody else? Couldn't you encourage that young man to speak to Mademoiselle, and persuade Mademoiselle to listen, like anybody else? Couldn't you drop a hint to one of our bourgeois daughters that she looks unfashionable; that a beautiful pair of ear-rings, a little bit of rouge, some lace, a dress à la polonaise, would make her delightful? That these small feet are not made for walking in the street? That there is a handsome gentleman, young and rich, with a gold-

braided coat, a superb carriage, and six tall lackeys; he saw her in passing, he found her charming; and that from that day on he has lost all appetite for drinking and eating; it has stopped him sleeping and it will kill him. But what about Papa? - Well, well; your Papa! It will upset him a little at first. - And Maman, who is always telling me that there is nothing in this world but honour? - Dated beliefs that don't mean a thing. - And my confessor? - You won't see him anymore; or if you insist on the idea of going and telling him the story of your amusements; it will cost you a few pounds of sugar and coffee. - He is a severe man who has already refused me absolution for the song *Viens dans ma cellule*. - That was because you had nothing to give him ... but when you will appear to him all in lace... - So I shall have lace? - Of course and of all kinds... with beautiful diamond earrings ... - So I shall have beautiful diamond earrings? - Yes. - Like those of that *marquise* who sometimes comes and buys gloves in our shop? - Precisely. In a fine coach with dappled grey horses; two tall lackeys and a little boy-servant, and the outrider in front, make-up, beauty-spots, the train carried. - To the ball? - To the ball ... at the opera, at the theatre... Already her heart flutters with joy. You fiddle with a piece of paper between your fingers... - What's that? - It's nothing. - I think it is. - It's a note. - For whom? - For you, if you are at all interested. - Interested? I should think so. Let us see... She reads ... A meeting, impossible. - On the way to Mass. - Maman always comes with me; but what if he came here early in the morning; I always get up first, and I am at the counter before anyone else gets up. - He comes: he pleases; and one fine day, at twilight, the damsel disappears and I get my two thousand crowns ... And to think that you possess such a talent; and you go without bread? I know of villains who didn't come up to my ankles and who were rolling in money. How did they start out? Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you misery? Anyway, this is the text of my frequent soliloquies which you can paraphrase according to your own fantasy; provided that you will conclude from this that I do know what self-contempt is, or the torment of the conscience that comes from neglect of the talents heaven has blessed us with. This is the cruellest of all. It were almost better that a man had never been born.

PHILOSOPHER: I listened to him; and as he was performing the scene of the pimp and the girl he had been seducing, my soul was torn by two opposing forces, I did

not know whether to give into laughter or to express indignation. He noticed the conflict going on inside me: **What's wrong**, he asked me.

- Nothing.

NEPHEW: You seem troubled.

PHILOSOPHER: And so I am.

NEPHEW: Then what do you advise?

PHILOSOPHER: To change subject. Oh, you pour soul, into what an abject state you have been born or fallen.

NEPHEW: Yes, I admit so. But nevertheless don't let my state affect you too much. My aim, in confiding in you, was not at all to afflict you. I made some savings, amongst these people. Think, that I needed nothing, but absolutely nothing; and still I was allowed extra for my little pleasures.

PHILOSOPHER: And then he began beating his forehead with one of his fists, to bite his lips, and to roll his dazed eyes ceiling wards; adding: **but it's an accomplished fact. I've put something aside. Time has run out, and at least that much is saved.**

-You mean lost.

NEPHEW: No, no saved. One gets richer by the minute. One day less to live, or one crown more; it's all the same. The most important thing is to shit easily, freely, pleasantly, and copiously, every evening. And this is the grand finale of life in every state. To rot under marble, to rot under earth, is still to rot. And then look at this wrist of mine; it was as stiff as the devil. These ten fingers, they were like sticks fixed in a wooden metacarpus; and these tendons, they were like old strings from catgut, dry, stiff, inflexible. But I tormented, strained, broke them. So you won't work; Well, I say, you damn well will.

PHILOSOPHER: While saying this, he had seized with the right hand the fingers and the wrist of the left hand and he twisted them backwards and forwards; the



fingertips touched the arm; the joints then cracked; I feared that the bones would remain dislocated.

-Watch out, I said to him, you will cripple yourself.

NEPHEW: Don't worry. They're used to it. For ten years I have done this to them, and worse. Whatever they suffered, the buggers, they had to get used to it and learn how to hit the right keys and flit over the strings. And now, they work well. Yes, quite well.

PHILOSOPHER: At the same time, he takes on the position of a violinist; he hums with the voice an allegro of Locatelli; his right arm imitates the movement of the bow; his left hand and fingers seem to fly up and down the length of the neck; if he plays a wrong note, he stops; he tightens or loosens the string; he plucks it with a nail to make sure it is in tune; he takes up the piece where he left off; he taps the beat with his foot; he works himself up; head, feet, hands, arms, body, all play their part. As you have sometimes seen Ferrari or Chiabran or some other virtuoso in the same convulsions, presenting a picture of the same torture, and causing me almost as much pain; for is it not a painful thing to see nothing but torment, in the one who is supposed to be giving a representation of pleasure. Draw a curtain between this man and me so I will be saved the vision of a prisoner on the rack. Then, putting back his instrument, under his left arm, with the same hand in which he had been holding it, and dropping his right hand with the bow: **well**, he said to me, **what do you think of that?**  
- Marvellous.

NEPHEW: Not bad, I think; it sounds almost like the others.

PHILOSOPHER: Immediately after he crouched like a musician sitting at the harpsichord.  
- Have mercy upon yourself and me, I said to him.

NEPHEW: No, no, as I've got you here you shall listen. I don't want any applaud given to me without knowing why. You will praise me in an even more convincing tone, and that will be worth another pupil.

PHILOSOPHER: I socialise so little; and you will tire yourself for absolutely nothing.

NEPHEW: I never get tired.

PHILOSOPHER: As I saw that it would be pointless to pity the fellow, for the violin sonata had left him bathed in sweat, I stood back and let him get on with it. And there he was seated at the harpsichord; the legs bent, the face turned towards the ceiling, where he seemed to see the score written out; singing, improvising, playing a piece by Alberti or Galuppi; I don't know which. His voice went like the wind and his fingers flew over the keys. The passions chased each other over his face. One could distinguish there tenderness, anger, pleasure, pain. But what seemed so strange about it, was that every now and then he fumbled, set off again, as though he had failed and was frustrated at no longer having it at his finger tips.

**So, you see, he said, rising to his feet and wiping the drops of sweat that were running down his cheeks, that we can also strike a tritone or an augmented fifth, and that we are familiar with consecutive fifths. These enharmonic passages that dear uncle has made such a fuss about aren't all that difficult, and, we shall manage all right.**

-You have put yourself to a lot of trouble to show me how very skilful you are; a man like me would have taken your word for it.

NEPHEW: Very skilful? Oh no; as far as my trade is concerned, I know just about enough, and that is more than necessary. For in this country need anyone know what one teaches?

PHILOSOPHER: No more than to know what one learns.

NEPHEW: That's true, and very true indeed. I learnt through teaching others and I turned out some good pupils. Now, Mr. Philosopher, you take on tutors for your daughter?

PHILOSOPHER: Not yet, it's her mother who sees to her education.

NEPHEW: How old is your child?

PHILOSOPHER: Let's say eight.

NEPHEW: Eight! She should have had her fingers on the keys for these four years.

PHILOSOPHER: But perhaps I don't care so much about bringing into her educational programme a study that takes up so much time and serves so little purpose.

NEPHEW: Then, if you please, what would you teach her?

PHILOSOPHER: To reason correctly, if possible.

NEPHEW: Oh, let her be unreasonable, as much as she likes. So long as she is pretty, amusing and attractive.

PHILOSOPHER: Since nature has been unkind enough to give her a delicate constitution and a heart of bronze, I shall teach her, if I can, how to bear these things with courage.

NEPHEW: Oh, let her weep, suffer, simper, and have nerve-storms like everybody else, so long as she is pretty, amusing and attractive. What, no dance?

PHILOSOPHER: No more than one needs to curtsy, to carry oneself decently, to present oneself well, and walk with grace.

NEPHEW: No song?

PHILOSOPHER: No more than one needs for good enunciation.

NEPHEW: No music?

PHILOSOPHER: If there was a good teacher in harmony I would gladly entrust her to him, for two hours a day, for a year or two, no more.

NEPEW: And in the place of the essential things you censor...

PHILOSOPHER: I put grammar, literature, history, geography, a bit of drawing and lots of ethics.

NEPHEW: And these teachers, you believe, will know the grammar, literature, history, geography, ethics in which they will give lessons?  
Rubbish, my dear sir, rubbish. If they knew these things well enough to teach them they would not be teaching. Can one teach well without method? And the method, where does it come from? Look, Mr. Philosopher, I have a feeling physics will always be a boring science, a drop of water from the vast ocean, taken upon a needle-point. And what is behind these phenomena? Really, it would be just as well to know nothing as to know so little so badly. That was precisely my position when I made myself master of accompaniment and composition.

PHILOSOPHER: You are saying, you have taught accompaniment and composition?

NEPHEW: Yes.

PHILOSOPHER: And you know nothing at all about it?

NEPHEW: No, good Lord, and that is why there were worse teachers than me: those who were convinced they knew something. At least I didn't influence the judgement of the children and ruin their fingers. When they went on from me to a good teacher, since they had never learnt, at least they had nothing to unlearn, and that was always so much money and time saved.

PHILOSOPHER: And how was this done?

NEPHEW: I would arrive. I look solemn. I hasten to take my hands out of my muff. I open the harpsichord and try the keys. I am always pressed for time. If I am kept waiting for a moment, I scream as if I were being robbed of a crown. An hour from now I have to be at such and such; in two hours at the Duchess of so and so's. I am expected to dinner by a beautiful marquise; and immediately after there is a concert at the Baron de Bagge, in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs.

PHILOSOPHER: But really you aren't expected anywhere?

NEPHEW: Quite true.

PHILOSOPHER: Then why resort to all these vile little tricks?

NEPHEW: Vile, what do you mean, vile! They are common practice in my profession. There is nothing degrading in doing the same as everybody else. I didn't invent them: and I would be weird and clumsy if I didn't conform. But, Mr. Philosopher, there is a standard conscience just as there is a standard grammar; and then there are exceptions in every language, that I believe you learned people call... er....oh...emm... help me out here ....emm...

PHILOSOPHER: Idioms.

NEPHEW: Exactly. Well, in every profession there are exceptions to the standard conscience, which I would like to term trade idioms.

PHILOSOPHER: Aha...

NEPHEW: And the sovereign, the minister, the financier, soldier, merchant, banker, artisan, the singing-master, the dancing-master, are all perfectly honourable people, although their conduct departs in several aspects from the standard conscience, and is full of moral idioms. The longer things have been institutionalised the more there are idioms; the harder times get, the more the idioms multiply. As the worth of the man, so the worth of the profession; and vice-versa, as the worth of the profession, so the worth of the man. Hence, one makes the profession worth as much as one can.

PHILOSOPHER: All I can gather clearly from all these convolutions, is that there are few professions which are practised honestly, and few men who are honest in their profession.

NEPHEW: Right. I can see you have understood. One such common idiom is to get as many customers as possible; one such common stupidity is to believe that those with the most customers are the most competent. These are two exceptions to the standard conscience to which one must yield. It's a kind of credit system, nothing in and of itself; but a system where value is conferred by public opinion. I give my lesson, and I give it well; that is

the general conscience. I let it be known that I have more lessons to give than there are hours in the day, that is the idiom.

PHILOSOPHER: And the lesson, you give it well.

NEPHEW: Yes, not bad, reasonably well. The ground bass of dear uncle has simplified all that. Formerly I used to rob my pupils of their money; yes, I robbed, indeed I did. Today I earn it, at least as much as the others.

PHILOSOPHER: So you robbed without remorse?

NEPHEW: None what so ever. There is a saying, if a thief robs a thief, the devil has a good laugh. The parents were rolling in money, god knows how they acquired their fortune; they were people from the court, entrepreneurs, financiers. I helped them to cough up, myself together with masses of the likes of me they had employed. In nature all species devour each other; in society all classes devour each other. We make justice with one another, without the law interfering. And then there is poverty. The voice of conscience and honour is quite feeble when the guts are crying out. It should be enough that if I ever become rich, I should have to cough up, and I am adamant to make restitution in all possible ways. Through food, gambling, wine and women.

PHILOSOPHER: But I fear that you will never get rich.

NEPHEW: I suspect as much myself.

PHILOSOPHER: If things were to turn out differently, what would you do?

NEPHEW: I would do as all poor bastards do; I should be the most insolent scoundrel you have ever seen. Then I would remember all that I suffered; and pay back all the insults I was made to swallow.

PHILOSOPHER: Judging by the worthy use you would make of your fortune I can well see what a great pity it is that you are a poor bastard. You would live in a manner most honourable for the human species, most useful to your fellow citizens; most glorious for yourself.

**NEPHEW:** And I can well see that you are mocking me, Mr. Philosopher, you don't know what you are playing at here. You fail to realise that I represent the most important part of town and court. The most opulent of people in all of society may or may not have admitted to each other what I have just confided to you; but the fact is, that the life which I would lead in their place would be identical to theirs. Now this is the position you hold: you think the same happiness is there for all. Yours presupposes a certain romantic turn of the mind that we don't possess; a singular soul, a particular taste. You adorn this oddity with the name of virtue; you call it philosophy. But virtue and philosophy, are they made for everyone? Imagine the universe wise and philosophical; admit that it would be devilishly dull. Long live the wisdom of Solomon: drink good wine, eat yourself to death with luscious food, roll in the hay with pretty women, recline on a lavish bed. Apart from that the rest is nothing but vanity.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Helping one's friends?

**NEPHEW:** Vanity. Is there such a thing as friends? And if there is, would we not inevitably make them ungrateful? Take a close look, and you will see that this is almost always the outcome one gets for helping them. Gratitude is a burden, and every burden is meant to be shaken off.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Having a position and responsibilities in society?

**NEPHEW:** Vanity. What does it matter whether one has a position or not, provided you are rich; since you only take up a position in order to get rich. Fulfilling one's duties, where does that lead to?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Seeing to the education of one's children?

**NEPHEW:** Vanity. That's the teacher's job.

**PHILOSOPHER:** But if this teacher, so imbued with your principles, neglects his duties; who will be penalised for it?

NEPHEW: Good Lord, it won't be me; but perhaps one day, my daughter's husband, or my son's wife. In your opinion, wouldn't society be great fun if everybody did their own thing?

PHILOSOPHER: Well, these days pleasure is always a business and never a need.

NEPHEW: All the better, a need is always painful.

PHILOSOPHER: I hold no contempt for the pleasures of the senses. I too have a palate, and it is tickled by a delicate dish, or by a rich wine. I have a heart and eyes, and I enjoy looking at a pretty woman. I like to sense in my hands the firmness and roundness of her breasts; to press her lips against mine; to drink pleasure from her eyes, and to die of it in her arms. It's not that I don't like going out with my friends sometimes for a debauched night out. But I won't deny the fact, that it is infinitely more pleasurable for me to have helped the unfortunate, to have resolved a tricky bit of business, to have given some useful advice, to have read a good book; to have gone for a stroll with a man or a woman close to my heart; to have spent a few instructional hours with my children; to have written a satisfactory page; to have said some sweet and tender words to the woman I love, and by so doing earned myself a gentle embrace. I know of deeds I would give everything I possess to have done.

NEPHEW: What a curious being you are.

PHILOSOPHER: What a pitiful being you are, if you can not grasp that we have risen above our condition, and that it is impossible to be unhappy sheltered by the beauty of such deeds.

NEPHEW: So am I right to deduct from this that all beings should be moral?

PHILOSOPHER: To be happy? Absolutely.

NEPHEW: Yet, I see countless honest people who aren't happy; and countless people who are happy without being honest.

PHILOSOPHER: To you, it would seem like that.



NEPHEW: And isn't it for once having had common sense and sincerity that I don't know where to turn for a meal tonight?

PHILOSOPHER: Not at all, it is for never having had any common sense and sincerity in the first place. It is for not having realised in time that one has to create for oneself a resource free from enslavement.

NEPHEW: Free or not, the one I've made for myself is the easiest at least.

PHILOSOPHER: And the one least secure, and the least reputable.

NEPHEW: But the one most consistent with my character as an idler, fool and good-for-nothing. It would be very strange if I were to twist myself like a damned soul, and make myself other than I am; which would land me nowhere, maybe worse than nowhere, because I would be continually satirising the rich from whom poor devils like me have to make a living. Even though people praise virtue; they loath it; it can freeze you to death; and in this world one has to keep one's feet warm. Virtue demands respect, and respect is a liability. Virtue demands admiration, and admiration is not amusing. I have to deal with people who are bored and I have to make them laugh. Now, it is ridicule and folly which make you laugh, so it follows that I have to be ridiculous and foolish; and if nature had not made me that way, it would be easiest to appear so. To be blunt, I have no use for either your felicity or the happiness of some visionaries like you.

PHILOSOPHER: I can see, my friend that you know nothing of this and are not even capable of learning.

NEPHEW: Good God! All the better.

PHILOSOPHER: After all this, the only advice I can give you, is to return as quickly as possible to the house of the people who kicked you out.

NEPHEW: To do what you don't object to literally, but what I find slightly repulsive metaphorically?

PHILOSOPHER: That is my opinion.

NEPHEW: And to ignore this very metaphor, which at this moment I do find repulsive, but might not tomorrow.

PHILOSOPHER: How strange!

NEPHEW: There is nothing strange in this. I don't mind being abject, but not under compulsion. I'm quite willing to sacrifice some of my dignity... You are laughing?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, your dignity makes me laugh.

NEPHEW: Everyone has his or indeed her own. I am prepared to forget mine, but at my discretion, and not on somebody else's orders. Should people be allowed to say crawl, and I should be obliged to crawl? Anyway, you have no idea what a madhouse it was. Imagine a melancholic and dismal figure, morbid and depressed, wrapped in two or three layers of dressing-gown; who not only finds himself displeasing, but also everything else. He coldly examines the funny contortions of my face, and those of my mind, which are even funnier. Will he laugh? Won't he? I am forced to ask myself in the middle of my contortions. So you can judge for yourself how harmful this uncertainty is to one's talent. My hypochondriac, his head buried under a night-cap covering his eyes, seemed like a motionless puppet with a string tied to his jaw. You wait for the string to be pulled, and nothing happens; or the jaw drops, only to utter a harsh word, a word teaching you that it would have been better had he never noticed you.

PHILOSOPHER: Then he began to imitate his man. He sat himself on a chair, his eyes half closed, his arms hanging, moving his jaw, like an automaton, saying: **Yes, this has to be treated with subtlety.**

NEPHEW: At first I observed others, and I did like them, even a bit better; because I am more downright impudent, a better actor, hungrier and equipped with better lungs. [COUGHS LOUDLY.] No-one has mastered this like I have; but I can also go to the other extreme. I am more than capable of

simpering tones and an infinite number of suitable demeanours. Eyes, nose, mouth, forehead conspire to play the game. I can use my supple hips, twist my spine, tilt my head and close my eyes as if suddenly wrapped by an angelic voice from a heavenly sky.

PHILOSOPHER: I must admit that you have taken the talent for making fools of people, yourself included, as far as conceivably possible.

NEPHEW: Yes, while this role is amusing at first, in the long run it loses its appeal. Ingenuity and art have their limits. Only God and some rare genius can hope for a career with a longer life span. Bouret was one such, perhaps. The little dog, the book of felicity, the torches on the way to Versaille are of the kind of things that leave me feeling bewildered and insignificant.

PHILOSOPHER: What do you mean by your little dog?

NEPHEW: What, you seriously don't know the story of how this rare man tricked the dog into hating him and transferring its affections to the Chamberlain?

PHILOSOPHER: I must confess I don't.

NEPHEW: All the better. This is one of the most beautiful things one could have conceived. You, who does not lack wisdom, let's see what you would have done in his position. Think, that Bouret was loved by his dog. Think, that the strange attire of the Chamberlain frightened the little animal. Think, that he had no more than eight days to overcome the difficulties. You have to know all the conditions of the problem, so as to be able to appreciate the merits of the solution. So?

PHILOSOPHER: Well, I must admit that in these matters, the most simple things escape me.

NEPHEW: Listen,

PHILOSOPHER: He said to me, tapping me lightly on the shoulder, for he is given to taking liberties.

NEPHEW: Listen and admire. Bouret has a mask made which looks like the Chamberlain. He borrows from a footman the Chamberlain's ample robe. He covers his face with the mask. He slips on the robe. He calls his dog; he caresses it, he gives it a biscuit. Then suddenly, changing the costume, he is no more the Chamberlain, and it's Bouret who now calls his dog and whips it. In less than two or three days of this exercise continuing from morning till night, the dog knew to run away from Bouret himself and to run up to Chamberlain-Bouret. But I am too nice. You are a non-believer and don't deserve to be instructed in these miracles happening in front of you.

PHILOSOPHER: Never mind that, please, what about the book, the torches.

NEPHEW: No, no. Ask no questions, and profit from the circumstances which brought us together, to learn things nobody knows but me.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, you are right.

NEPHEW: That mask! That mask! Having a mask made to look like him! Above all, that mask makes me envious. I would give one of my fingers, to have thought up that mask.

PHILOSOPHER: If I were you, I would jot these things down on paper. It would be a shame if they were lost.

NEPHEW: Do you seriously believe that the story of the dog and the mask would be written down anywhere?

PHILOSOPHER: But in the small hours of the night, when the rumblings of your empty stomach, or the fatigue of excessive eating, keeps you awake....

NEPHEW: Then I will think about it; maybe it would be better to write of great things than to execute small ones.

PHILOSOPHER: What are you saying here? Is it irony or truth? You must have sinned once against the principles of your art and some of these bitter and painful truths

must have accidentally escaped you; for despite the miserable and abject role you assume, I believe that deep down inside you have a delicate soul.

NEPHEW: Me, you must be joking. Devil take me if I know what there is deep down inside me. Generally speaking, I've got a spirit pure as driven snow, a character fresh as the morning dew; never false, if I have anything to gain by being true; never true if I have anything to gain by being false. I say things as they come to me; if sensible all the better; impertinent, I couldn't care less.

PHILOSOPHER: Let's leave that. Ever since we have been talking, I have had a question on the tip of my tongue.

NEPHEW: Why hold it there so long?

PHILOSOPHER: Because I was afraid to be indiscreet.

NEPHEW: After all that I have revealed, I can't think of a secret I could keep from you.

PHILOSOPHER: Don't you ever question my judgement of you?

NEPHEW: Not at all. In your eyes I am a very abject being, highly contemptible, and sometimes, I am so even in my own; but rarely. More often than not, I congratulate myself for my vices than I blame myself for them. You are more consistent in your contempt.

PHILOSOPHER: That is true; but why show me all your turpitude?

NEPHEW: First, because you know a good part of it already, and I saw more to be gained than lost, by confessing the rest to you.

PHILOSOPHER: How so?

NEPHEW: If it is important to be sublime in anything, it is especially so in evil. One spits on a petty thief; but one can't refrain from respecting a great criminal.

One is astounded by such courage. His brutality makes you shudder. In everything, one pays tribute to the unity of character.

PHILOSOPHER: Yet, you yourself do not possess this unity of character. I can see you from time to time shift in your principles. It is unclear if you take your viciousness from nature or from study; and if study led you as far as conceivably possible.

NEPHEW: I agree; but I did my best. Didn't I have the modesty to acknowledge those beings more perfect than myself? Didn't I speak to you of Bouret with the most profound admiration? In my mind Bouret is the greatest human being in the world.

PHILOSOPHER: But immediately after Bouret, there is you.

NEPHEW: No. The renegade of Avignon.

PHILOSOPHER: I have never heard of the renegade of Avignon; but he must be quite an astonishing man.

NEPHEW: And so he is.

PHILOSOPHER: I've always been interested in the history of great people.

NEPHEW: I'm sure you are. This one lived in the house of a good and honourable descendent of the family of Abraham, promised to the father of the faithful, in numbers equal to the stars.

PHILOSOPHER: With a Jew.

NEPHEW: With a Jew. First he won over his compassion, then his generosity, then his complete confidence. For this is how it is done. We rely on our good deeds so much so that we rarely ever hide our secrets from those upon whom we have lavished our goodness. Of course, one must expect nothing but ingratitude when we nurture the temptation of impunity. This is a wise reflection which our Jew did not make. So he confided in the renegade that his conscience would not allow him to eat pork. Now you

will see what a fertile mind could make of this confession. A couple of months went by during which our renegade doubled his attention. When he was assured that his Jew was well softened, well captivated, well convinced by his attentiveness, that he had no better friend in all the tribes of Israel... You must admire the circumspection of the man. He does not hesitate. He lets the pear ripen, before shaking the branch. Too much eagerness might ruin his project. Usually the grandness of character results in the natural balance of several opposing qualities.

PHILOSOPHER: Oh, spare me your reflections, and continue with the story.

NEPHEW: Can't be done. There are days where I must reflect. It's a disease which one has to let run its course. Where was I?

PHILOSOPHER: You had reached the point of the well-established intimacy between the Jew and the renegade.

NEPHEW: Well, the pear was ripe... But you are not listening to me. What are you thinking of?

PHILOSOPHER: I was thinking of the inconsistency in your tone; sometimes high, sometimes low.

NEPHEW: Can the tone of a vicious man have any unity? - One night, it happened, petrified, with a trembling voice, face pale like death, shaking in every limb, he came to see his good friend. - What's the matter? - We are lost. - Lost, how come? - Lost, I tell you; lost beyond recall. - Explain yourself... - One moment, let me get over my fright. - Come now, calm down, said the Jew; instead of saying: you are a shameless trickster; I don't know what you have to tell me, but you are a shameless trickster; you simulate terror.

PHILOSOPHER: And why should he have spoken like that?

NEPHEW: Because he was a liar and had crossed the line. That, to me, seems to be clear, so stop interrupting. - We are lost, lost beyond recall. Don't you sense the affectation in his repeated 'losts'? Some traitor has denounced us

to the Holy Inquisition, you as a Jew, me as a renegade, as an infamous renegade. Note how the traitor did not blush when using such odious expressions. It takes more courage than one would think to call oneself by one's name. You have no idea how much it costs to achieve this.

PHILOSOPHER: Certainly not. But this infamous renegade...

NEPHEW: Is not only a liar, but a highly skilful one. The Jew gets frightened, he tears out his beard, he rolls on the ground. He sees the sbirros at his door; he already sees himself clothed with the san-benito; sees his own auto-da-fé being prepared. My friend, my dearest friend, my only friend, what is to be done... - What is to be done? To go about things as usual, to be most careful, to pretend to be unconcerned. The procedures of the tribunal are secret and slow. We must take advantage of these delays and sell everything. I will charter a ship or get a third party to do so; yes through a third party, that would be best. There we will deposit your fortune; for it is that they are after; and we will go, you and I, to search for, under another sky, the freedom to serve our God and in safety follow the law of Abraham according to our conscience. No sooner said than done. The ship is chartered and equipped with provisions and sailors. The fortune of the Jew is on board. Tomorrow, at dawn, they set sail. They can eat to their heart's content and sleep in peace. Tomorrow, they will escape their persecutors. During the night, the renegade gets up, relieves the Jew of his wallet, his purse and his jewels; embarks, and off he goes. And you think that's all there is to it? Well, you didn't get it. When I was told this story, I guessed what I withheld from you in order to test your powers of perception. You did well to become an honourable man; you would have made nothing but a petty thief. Up till now the renegade is no more than precisely that. He is a despicable scoundrel who nobody would like to resemble. The ingenuity of his wickedness, is to have been himself the one to have denounced his good friend the Israelite, who was seized by the Holy Inquisition, when he awoke, and who, several days later, was made into a bonfire. And thus the renegade became the undisputed possessor of the fortune of this accursed descendent of those who crucified Our Lord.



PHILOSOPHER: I don't know which of the two horrifies me more, the ruthlessness of your renegade or the tone in which you speak.

NEPHEW: And that is just what I meant. The atrocity of the deed carries you beyond mere contempt; and that is the reason for my sincerity. I want you to know how far I excel in my art; to force you to admit that I am at least original in my degradation, and for you to place me in your mind in the lineage of the great villains, and then exclaim, *Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator!* Come on, be jolly, chorus, Mr. Philosopher: *Vivat Mascarillus!*

PHILOSOPHER: And thereupon he began to sing a fugue, an absolutely extraordinary one. I did not know whether I should stay or flee, laugh or be furious. I stayed, intending to turn the conversation onto some subject which would chase away from my soul the horror with which it was filled. I became sombre in spite of myself. He noticed this and said to me:

NEPHEW: What's the matter? Are you feeling unwell?

PHILOSOPHER: A little; but it will pass.

NEPHEW: You have the worried look of a man tormented by some disturbing thought.

PHILOSOPHER: That's it.

- After a moment of silence on his part and mine, during which he paced up and down whistling and singing; trying to get him back to his talent, I said to him:

- What are you doing at present?

NEPHEW: Nothing.

PHILOSOPHER: How very tiring.

NEPHEW: I was sufficiently bored already. I had been to hear this music by Duni and some other young composers, and that totally did my head in.

PHILOSOPHER: Do you approve of that kind of music?

NEPHEW: Without doubt.

PHILOSOPHER: And do you find beauty in these new songs?

NEPHEW: You bet I do. What amazing recitals! What truthfulness! What expression! How sublime!

PHILOSOPHER: Well, if this music was sublime, then that of the divine Lully, of Campra, of Destouches, of Mouret, and even, between ourselves, that of dear uncle would be a little dull.

- Whispering into my ear, he replied:

NEPHEW: I wouldn't want to be overheard; for there are many people here who know me; but it is dull. It's not that I'm bothered by what dear uncle thinks, if dear he be, but fact is that people are getting bored. They persuaded themselves that after having mixed their tears with those of a weeping mother who is consoling herself on the death of her son, that they wouldn't be bored by their insipid mythology, their sickeningly sweet madrigals which show up the bad taste of the poet, no less than they mark the crises of an art that permits this. My good people! It is not so, and cannot be. The true, the good, the beautiful have their claims. That which does not bear their stamp, can only be admired for a time; and in the end one will inevitably yawn. Go ahead and yawn then, Messieurs, yawn as much as you like. Don't be ashamed. The reign of nature, and that of my trinity, against which the doors of hell do not prevail, are already aligning themselves in silence: truth being the father who engenders the good, who is the son, from where comes the beautiful, who is the holy ghost.

PHILOSOPHER: And off he went, pacing up and down, mumbling some aria from *L' Ile des Fous*, from *Peintre amoureux de son modele*, *Maréchal ferrant*, *De la Plaideuse*, and from time to time he screamed, raising his arms and his eyes to the heaven: **How this is beautiful, by God! How beautiful, how can one have ears and ask such a question?** He became imbued with passion, singing very softly. His voice grew forceful according to the intensity of passion; and there followed the gestures, the

grimaces of the face, and the contortions of the body; and I say: fine, there he goes, losing his head again, and a new scene is building up; and indeed, he breaks out into song. He crammed and muddled together a collection of arias, Italian, French, tragic, comic, of every character. He imitated through walk, deportment, gesture, the different singing personalities; successively furious, mellow, imperious, silly. Here, he is a young girl who cries and he shows off all her affectations; there he is a priest, he is king, he is tyrant, who threatens, commands, enrages himself; he is slave, he obeys. He appeases himself, he consoles himself, he complains, he laughs. All the chess players had left their chessboards and had assembled themselves around him. Outside of the cafe the passers by, who had stopped because of the noise, pressed their faces against the windows. They were laughing so loud that the ceiling could have split open. He noticed nothing; he continued, seized by an alienation of mind, an enthusiasm so close to madness, that it was uncertain that he would ever return; that one would not have to throw him into a carriage, and drag him straight to the madhouse. Singing some excerpts from the lamentations of Jomelli, he repeated with precision, truth and immense fervour. All was there, the deliciousness of song, as much as the force of expression; and the pain, possessing our souls, and leaving us in suspense, in an experience of utmost singularity. Did I admire? Yes, I admired! Was I touched? I was touched; and yet a hint of ridicule was confounded with these sentiments, and made them seem unnatural. And you, too, would have broken into bursts of laughter, when he mimicked the different instruments. With inflated and puffed cheeks, and a hoarse and sombre sound, he imitated the horns and bassoons; he assumed a striking nasal sound for the oboe; he hastened his voice with incredible speed for the string instruments; he whistled the small recorders, he trilled the flutes; screaming, singing, he thrashed about in frenzy; doing himself the roles of both the women and the men, the dancers, the singers, the whole orchestra, the entire opera, and dividing himself up into twenty different parts; running around, with the air of a lunatic with eyes flashing and mouth foaming. He created so much heat, you could have died from it; and the sweat, trailing along the wrinkles of his forehead and down the lengths of his cheeks, became mixed with the powder of his hair, streaming, and cutting across the top of his dress. There was nothing that I did not see him do. Here he was a woman swooning in pain; there he was

an unhappy man given over to all his despair; a temple arising; birds falling silent at dusk; waters either murmuring in a cool, solitary place or descending in a torrent from the heights of the mountains; a thunderstorm; the moaning of those who will perish, mixed in with whistling of the winds, with the roaring of the thunders; here he was night, with its darkness; there he was shadow and silence; for even silence is painted through sounds. Exhausted with fatigue like a man who comes out of deep sleep, or a long trance, he remained still, dumb, astonished; he looked about him, like a lost man who is trying to recognise the place in which he finds himself. In total oblivion or in profound ignorance of what he is doing, he cries out at the first moment:

**NEPHEW:** Well, Messieurs, what's going on? What are you grinning about, and why do you look so surprised, one should not despise certain pieces by Lully. I defy anyone to better the scene *Ah j'attendrai*. One should not despise the pieces by Campra, the violin airs of my uncle, his gavottes; his entries for soldiers, for priests, for sacrifices...

**PHILOSOPHER:** There his voice swelled; he held the notes, the neighbours were hanging out of their windows; we stuck our fingers in our ears. He added:

**NEPHEW:** This is where one needs lungs, a great organ, volume of air. They don't yet know what one must put into music, and therefore neither what would suit the musician. Lyric poetry is yet to be born. The passions must be strong; the tenderness of the musician and of the lyric poet has to be extreme. We must have exclamations, interjections, suspensions, affirmations, negations; we call out, we invoke, we scream, we moan, we cry, we laugh frankly. No wittiness, none of these frivolous thoughts. This is too far removed from the simplicity of nature. And then don't believe that actors playing in the theatre and their declamation can serve as a model. Pooh. We must be more energetic, with less mannerisms, more truthful. The animal cry or the cry of passionate man will supply them.

**PHILOSOPHER:** While he was talking to me like this, the crowd, who had gathered round us, melted away, misunderstanding or taking little interest in what he said, since generally speaking, the child as the adult, and the adult as the child, would much rather be entertained than instructed. Everyone was back at

their game, and we remained alone in our corner. Sitting on a bench, head leaning against the wall, arms hanging, eyes half closed, he said to me: **I don't know what's wrong with me; when I arrived here, I was fresh and well; and now I am totally exhausted, as if I had walked thirty miles. This came over me all of a sudden.**

- Would you like to refresh yourself with a drink?

NEPHEW: Yes, I would like that.

PHILOSOPHER: What would you like?

NEPHEW: Whatever. I'm not fussy. Poverty has taught me to make do with anything.

PHILOSOPHER: We are being served beer and lemonade. He fills a big glass and empties it two or three times in a row without noticing what he was doing. He would have drowned himself, just as he had exhausted himself, without being aware, had I not moved the bottle which he was groping for absent-mindedly. I then said to him:

- How come that with so fine a judgement, such great sensibilities for the beauties of the musical arts, you can be so blind to the beauties of morals, so insensitive to the charms of virtue.

NEPHEW: Apparently there are things that require a sense I don't possess, a fibre that wasn't allocated to me at all, a slack fibre that while one might pluck it will not vibrate; or perhaps it is that I have always lived with good musicians and with bad people, from which it followed that my ears became very fine, and my heart became deaf. And then there must have been something hereditary. The blood of my father and the blood of my uncle is the same blood. My blood is the same as that of my father. The paternal molecule was hard and obtuse, and this first accursed molecule has contaminated all the rest.

PHILOSOPHER: Do you love your child?

NEPHEW: Do I love him, the little bugger. I'm crazy about him.

PHILOSOPHER: Would you not like to apply yourself seriously to the task of arresting in him the effect of the accursed paternal molecule?

NEPHEW: I should work here, I think, to very little purpose. If he is destined to become a good man, nothing could prevent that. But if the molecule demanded that he become a good-for-nothing like his father, the trouble I would have gone to in order to make him into an honourable man, would have been quite harmful for him; education interfering continually with the tendencies of the molecule, he would be torn between two opposing forces, and walk all crooked, down the path of life, as I see do an infinity of types equally skilled in the good as in the bad; these are what we call types, which marks mediocrity, and the highest degree of contempt. A great good-for-nothing is a great good-for-nothing, but not a type. Before the paternal molecule could have become dominant and taken the boy to the point of perfect abjection, which I myself have reached, it would take him an eternity; he would lose his best years. I do nothing at present. I let him develop. I observe him. He is already greedy, smooth, a rogue, lazy, a liar. I well believe the apple has not fallen far from the tree.

PHILOSOPHER: And will you make him a musician, so that he would resemble you in every way?

NEPHEW: A musician! A musician! Sometimes I look at him, grinding my teeth; and I say: if you ever knew a note, I think I would wring your neck.

PHILOSOPHER: And why, if you please?

NEPHEW: It leads nowhere.

PHILOSOPHER: It leads everywhere.

NEPHEW: Yes, when one excels; but who can guarantee that one's child will excel? Do you know, that it's easier to find a child fit to govern a realm than to make a great violinist.

PHILOSOPHER: It seems to me that agreeable talents, even the mediocre ones, amidst a people lacking in morals, lost in debauchery and luxuriousness, make easy

a man's journey to happiness. I myself was a witness to the following conversation, between some patron and a protégé. The latter had been recommended to the former as an obliging person who could be useful to him... Monsieur, what do you know? - I am relatively knowledgeable in mathematics and I am very good at history and geography. I'm also a pretty good musician. - Then why didn't you say so straight away? You could put this last talent to good use. I have a daughter. Come every evening, between half past seven and nine. You will give her a lesson, and I will give you twenty five crowns per year. You will have breakfast, lunch, tea and supper with us. The rest of the day will be yours; to do with it as you wish.

NEPHEW: And this man, what became of him?

PHILOSOPHER: If he had been wise, he could have made a fortune, the only thing which seems to be on your mind.

NEPHEW: Without doubt. Gold, gold. Gold is everything, without gold, there is nothing. And that is why, instead of stuffing my son's head with fine maxims, which he would forget anyway under the strain of being a beggar; when I possess a crown, which doesn't happen very often, I plant myself in front of him. I take the crown out of my pocket. I show it to him with admiration. I raise my eyes to heaven. I kiss the crown in front of him. And to make him understand even better the importance of this sacred piece, I speak to him with a stammer; I point with my finger at all that one can buy: a beautiful dress, a beautiful hat, a good biscuit. Then I put the crown into my pocket. I walk with pride; I lift my waistcoat; I pat my pocket with my hand; and this is how I make him understand that it is the crown, which gives me the self-confidence.

PHILOSOPHER: But if it happened that deeply impressed by the value of the crown, he should one day...

NEPHEW: I get your point. One has to turn a blind eye to that. There's not a single moral principle which doesn't have its price. Anyway, I have plans of a success more prompt and certain. Ah! If only it were a daughter! But since one cannot make what one wants, one has to take what comes; and make

the best of it; and therefore not to give stupidly a Spartan education to a child destined to live in Paris. All I want is for my son to be happy; or honourable, rich and powerful, which amounts to the same. I know a little of the ways through which this can be achieved; and I will make sure that I teach them to him in time. If you do-gooders blame me, the masses are sure to absolve me. He will have gold, I'm telling you. If he has a lot of it he will lack nothing, not even your appreciation and respect.

PHILOSOPHER: You might be mistaken.

NEPHEW: Even so, he will get by.

PHILOSOPHER: In all of this there was much of what one thinks, of what one does; but leaves unsaid. This is the major difference between my man and the rest of the people. He admitted to the vices which he had in common with many others; but he was no hypocrite. He was no more or less contemptible than they, the only difference was that he was more frank, and more consistent; and sometimes more profound in his depravity. I trembled at the thought of what would become of this child under such a master. Thereupon, draining the last drop left in his bottle and addressing his neighbour:

NEPHEW: Monsieur, just a little pinch of snuff, if you would be so kind. That's a lovely box you've got. You are not a musician are you? - No. - Good for you; for these are poor buggers to be pitied. Fate decreed that I should be one; me, who otherwise, in Monmartre perhaps, in a mill, would have been a miller, or a miller's boy who would have heard nothing but the click of a ratchet. Rameau, to the mill! To the mill, that's where you belong. I am in this world and here I stay. But if it is natural to be hungry: for I always come back to hunger, to the sensation I am always aware of, then I believe it is not the right order to go without food. What a bloody economy! There are people who devour everything, while others have stomachs equally demanding, constant hunger, and nothing to dig their teeth into. The worst thing is, the constrained posture in which we are kept by need. The needy man does not walk like anybody else; he jumps, he grovels, he twists himself, he creeps along; he spends his life taking up positions and executing them. In the whole realm there is only



one man who doesn't dance, but walks, that's the sovereign. Everybody else takes up positions.

PHILOSOPHER: The sovereign? Can't something be said about that too? And don't you think that from time to time he too will find himself next to a dainty foot, a little lock of hair, a pretty nose, which will make him do a bit of a pantomime. Whoever is in need of someone else, takes up a position. The king takes a position in front of his mistress and before God; he performs his step in the pantomime. The minister performs the movements of a courtier, of a flatterer, of a servant, of a beggar before the king. Good heavens, that which you call the beggar's pantomime, is what makes the world go round.

NEPHEW: That makes me feel good.

PHILOSOPHER: And yet there is one person who can afford to do without the pantomime. That is the philosopher who has nothing and asks for nothing.

NEPHEW: And where can such an animal be found? If he has nothing he suffers; if he asks for nothing, he will obtain nothing, and he will always suffer.

PHILOSOPHER: No. Diogenes scoffed at needs.

NEPHEW: But one needs to be clothed.

PHILOSOPHER: No. He went about totally naked.

NEPHEW: Sometimes it was cold in Athens.

PHILOSOPHER: Less than here.

NEPHEW: One ate there.

PHILOSOPHER: Of course.

NEPHEW: At whose expense?

PHILOSOPHER: Nature's. To what does the savage turn? To the earth, to the animals, to the fish, to the trees, to the plants, to the roots, to the streams.

NEPHEW: That makes for a bad table.

PHILOSOPHER: A big one.

NEPHEW: But badly served.

PHILOSOPHER: It is, however, from where we help ourselves, in order to lay our own.

NEPHEW: But you must admit that the skills of our cooks, bakers, butchers, caterers, confectioners have something to contribute here. With such an austere diet your Diogenes must have had remarkably tolerant organs.

PHILOSOPHER: You are wrong. The Cynic's habit, then, was what is now that of the monk's, and with the same virtue.

NEPHEW: I agree with you there. Diogenes too then danced the pantomime; if not in front of Pericles, then at least in front of Phryne.

PHILOSOPHER: You're wrong again. There were those who had to pay a high price to the courtesan who gave herself to him just for the pleasure of it.

NEPHEW: But suppose it happened that the courtesan was busy, and the Cynic was desperate?

PHILOSOPHER: He went back to his barrel, and went without.

NEPHEW: And you advise me to do the same?

PHILOSOPHER: I would die, if this wasn't better than crawling, humiliating and prostituting oneself.

NEPHEW: But I must have a good bed, good food, warm clothes for the winter, and cool clothes for the summer; leisure, money, and many other things. This is in our nature.

PHILOSOPHER: The nature of man?

NEPHEW: The nature of man. Every living being, without exception, seeks his own well being to the detriment of someone else; and I am quite sure that if I let my little bugger run wild he would splash out on clothes, food, women and relish every pleasure on offer.

PHILOSOPHER: If the little bugger was left to his own devices; his childish reasoning, coupled with the violent passions of a thirty-year old man would lead him to wring his father's neck and sleep with his mother.

NEPHEW: I believe, I told you that already.

PHILOSOPHER: That's because you are idle, greedy and lazy, a scumbag.

PHILOSOPHER: No doubt, things in life have their price; but you have no idea as to what price you pay to get them.

NEPHEW: True. But it costs me little. I can see from what you have been saying there that my little wife was some sort of philosopher. She had the courage of a lion. Sometimes we had no bread and no money. We had sold the few valuables we had. I would throw myself on our bed, racking my brains to think of someone who could give me a crown without my having to pay it back. She, happy as a bird, would sit down at the harpsichord, singing. She had the voice of a nightingale; I regret that you never got to hear her. Sometimes, when I was playing at some concert, I would take her with me. - Come along Madame, make them all admire you; exert your talents and your charms. Seduce, enchant. We arrived; she sang, she seduced, she enchanted. Alas, I lost her, the poor little one. She had a mouth you could hardly fit your little finger into; teeth, a row of pearls; eyes, feet, skin, cheeks, breasts, the legs of a gazelle, thighs and buttocks fit to be sculpted. What a walk, what hips! Oh God, what hips!

PHILOSOPHER: And then he began to imitate his wife's walk; he walked in small steps; he held his head high; he played with a fan; he swayed his hips; he was the

caricature of our little coquettes, as pleasing and ridiculous as possible. Then picking up where he left off, he added:

NEPHEW: I took her everywhere, to the Tuileries, to the Palais-Royal, to the boulevards. It could not be that she would stay with me. When she crossed the street, in the morning, with her hair loose, and a light skirt, you would have stopped to look at her. Those who followed her, who saw her scurrying along on her tiny feet, measured her large hips outlined through her thin petticoats, and doubled their pace; she let them catch up, turned suddenly round, eyes wide and sparkling, which stopped them short. But alas, I lost her; and with her all my hopes for happiness have vanished. I had only taken her for that, I had confided to her all my plans; and she was too intelligent to see how infallible they were, and too wise not to approve of them.

PHILOSOPHER: And sobbing and weeping, he said:

NEPHEW: No, no, I will never get over this. Since then I have taken to bands and a skull cap.

PHILOSOPHER: Out of grief?

NEPHEW: If you like. But really, in order to wear my bowl on my head... But look at the time; I have to be at the opera.

PHILOSOPHER: What's on?

NEPHEW: Something of Dauvergne's. There are some beautiful things in his music; too bad that he wasn't the first to write them. There are always some of the dead who plague the living. So be it. But it is half past five. I can hear the bells ringing for the vespers of the Abbé de Cannaye and they also ring for me. Good-bye Mr. Philosopher. Isn't it true that I am always the same?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, unfortunately, yes.

NEPHEW: If only I could enjoy this misfortune for another forty years! He laughs best who laughs last.

*End*