Exposition/Exhibition: The French Salons

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Whether considered to be vulgar and shameful, or simply designed for commercial use, "exposition" is certainly not aristocratic. In 1690, the French lexicographer Furetière stated that the term *exposition* means putting something into circulation. He then listed a series of prohibitions linked to this commerce, before inserting the term into the religious and scholarly culture in which it became consecrated: [1]

> EXPOSITION. The action of exposing, making visible in public. For an auction of horses or jewelry, three *expositions* over three market days are required. *Exposition*, delivery of counterfeit currency is a capital crime. *Exposition* of the Blessed Sacrament should never be allowed without permission from the Bishop.
> EXPOSITION is also used for abandoned infants. In case of an infant's *exposition*, a Commissioner establishes a statement and then has it sent to the city's nursery, that is to say, the foundling hospital.
> EXPOSITION in a military context refers to what is exposed in the open. The General was obliged to change his camp because of its *exposition* to the enemy's battery.
> EXPOSITION also designates Interpretation. The Holy Fathers made several *expositions* of this Biblical passage, they made different interpretations.
> EXPOSITION can also be used for story-telling, what is narrated. This Rapporteur is not content with a simple *exposition* and deduction of the facts of the case, he delves into the most minor circumstances. This traveler gave us a naïve and sincere *exposition* of his adventures.[2]

In the first entry of the French dictionary, the trivial precedes the ceremonial: the auctioning of horses at the fair comes before that of jewelry, and is immediately reversed into fraud and counterfeiting; after that strange parade comes the exhibition of Sacramental bread, itself hedged by prohibitions. Exposition "makes visible in public"; it exposes things to the public view, but it is not in itself a public act. Moving an object or act from the private sphere, it opens up a circulation to the public gaze, but under the suspicious control of public institutions.[3]

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[1] In French the single word *exposition* covers both "exposition" and "exhibition." As we start with a French seventeenth century definition, where the modern institutional meaning of "exhibition" did not yet exist, we will introduce the differentiation between the two English terms progressively.

[2] Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* (The Hague and Rotterdam: Arnoud et Reinier Leers, 1690).

[3] This ambivalent relation of exposition vis-à-vis public space can be related to Jürgen Habermas's analysis of the development of the bourgeois public sphere, which gradually came to compete with the old public space of representation, and then finally replaced it. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). The fair, the shop, and the court all developed as places of exposition, constituting primitive forms of exhibition.

The rhetorical usage of the term *exposition* in the sense of a discourse that interprets, or even simply describes, is relegated to the two last entries, although that was the usual Latin meaning, attested in Cicero. Exposition exposes to a risk: in exposing something, the seller risks his merchandise, the Church ventures outside the church, the illegitimate or unwanted child is exposed to opprobrium, the military camp exposes its flank to the enemy. The process of exposition, when transposed to discourse, is neutralized. Reduced to an erudite commentary, a factual description of circumstances, a gratuitous recitation of far-off adventures, exposition was performed in society or by the indirect means of a remote reading audience. Yet in this retreat, *exposition* demonstrates some form of excess: a meticulous exposition exceeds the tale's simple "narration," bringing along with it the grubby heterogeneity of the real. Exposition opens the subject to sullying, hurting, or corrupting, while at the same time bringing symbolic recognition to the exposed item: an audience validates it, auction on the market assesses it, a commissioner's statement serves as paternity.

The second entry of EXPOSITION concerns the abandoning of children, which became the first entry in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert in 1756. In fact, *expositio* is a term in Roman private law, where it primarily concerns the abandoning of badly formed infants, which was not punished (or only lightly) by law. Here we find a strange oscillation of *exposition* between the private and public spheres, between permitted and forbidden gaze, between the gleaming trade in precious objects and the deception of the falsified, the forgery, and the futile.

The French Salons: Construction of an Operative Device[4]

The establishment, throughout the French eighteenth century, of a "public exhibition of paintings" was made possible and extraordinarily efficient thanks to that oscillation of exposition. Denis Diderot opens his report on the 1763 exhibition at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (the Salon de 1763) with this apology:

> Blessed be forever the memory of the one who in instituting this public exhibition of paintings, excited emulation among artists, prepared for all orders of society and especially for men of taste a useful exercise and a gentle recreation; postponed among us the decadence of painting for perhaps more than one hundred years, and rendered the nation more educated and more demanding in this genre.
> A single genius may make the arts flourish; artists need the general taste in order to improve. Why did the Ancients have such great painters and sculptors? Because recompense and honors awakened talents, and a people accustomed to regard Nature and to compare artistic productions were a formidable judge. Why such great musicians? Because music was part of a liberal education: every well-born child was given a lyre. Why

[4] In this essay, "operative device" translates the French *dispositif*.

> such great poets? Because there were competitions in poetry and crowns for the victors. If such contests were instituted among us;' if we were permitted to aspire to the same honors and awards, soon we would see the *beaux-arts* quickly advance to perfection.[5]

The exposition process at stake in the exhibition cannot be reduced to either a real place or a concrete event: Diderot is not writing about the Salon Carré in the Louvre (where it was held) or its biennial periodicity. Exhibition "excites," "prepares," "postpones", "renders": it is not a thing in itself but an ensemble of placements that together produce a series of effects. Instituted by the monarch for political purposes, the Salon exhibition essentially was an operative device that acted ideologically on the social body and influenced its cultural identity.

Not every exhibition was necessarily public: instituting a *public* exhibition meant shifting the term, an orientation toward the political that was not contained in the primitive notion of *exposition*. In exhibiting to the public, there is a double movement: first a retreat toward the trivial and commercial, hedged by a vague and fluctuating series of interdictions, and then a transposition, an advance, a forcing toward another kind of space, toward an institution meant ultimately to be public.

Exhibition is not exposure to the viewer's *gaze* but to the viewer's *judgement*. Diderot does not mention pleasure nor leisure for the eye; what matters are the relationships formed among men constituting thus a community: on the one hand, artists emulate each other, and on the other, the social body acquires instruction. Salon exhibitions never demonstrated a split between spectators and spectacle: any passivity was banished in what was actually a contest driving toward perfection. Exhibition induces action, not representation; it is an operative device for acting, not for gazing.

Emulation and instruction together form public taste. Taste is what is produced by the exposition process apprehended as an operative device. The principle of taste is contest: "Because there were *competitions* in poetry," "if such *contests* were instituted among us," wrote Diderot. A new sphere is taking shape that can be superimposed to the actual location of the Salon: a symbolic sphere where taste discriminates among the talents on exhibition. Artists engage in a contest, and "all orders of society" judge them. Judges and contenders: that is supposed to induce a positioning of people in the Salon, which directly influences the symbolic sharing of roles and positions in the symbolic sphere.[6] But actually artists and viewers mingle, talk and share a common

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[5] Diderot, *Salon de 1763 in Œuvres complètes*, ed. Dieckmann-Proust-Varloot (Hermann, 1978), v. IV, 236. References to Diderot are given in either the shorter Versini or complete edition of his works (DPV) XIII, 339–340.

[6] Jacques Rancière has given this idea its philosophical elaboration, notably in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Mansell Publishing, 2004), ch. 1; *Aisthesis. Scenes from the*

experience. The symbolic space of the exhibition breaks down the split between spectacle and audience, while the paintings continue to represent and even to celebrate it.

The Problem of Eloquence

However, Diderot introduces into this virtuous and elevating operative device one important restriction:

> I make an exception for eloquence. True eloquence will only be shown in the midst[7] of great public interest. The art of speaking must promise the orator the prime State offices. Without this expectation, a mind occupied with either given or imagined topics will never become heated by real fire and profound warmth, and so we will obtain mere rhetoricians. To speak well, one must be the tribune of the people, or be eligible to become a consul. After the loss of freedom, there were no more orators either in Athens or Rome. Declaimers appeared at the same time as tyrants.[8]

Eloquence is the sole art that cannot fit into the operative device of exposition. This is a strange exception when one thinks of the Roman *expositio*, which Quintilian made the hallmark of Roman political history and the heart of Latin eloquence. There's no eloquence without *expositio*, but eloquence can't be exhibited: this proves that the exclusion of eloquence from the exposition as an operative device is not due to the nature of eloquence as art, but to History. Diderot takes into consideration the lack of a public space where eloquence could be expressed, where it could become an instrument of circulation from private to political spheres, of oscillation between withdrawal and exposure where it would constitute the basic political leverage for good governing. The eloquent orator's speech, sharpened by emulation among orators and then subjected to judgement by an audience, ought to be worth (as was supposedly the case in Rome) "the prime State offices;" here *tribune* or *consul* are not simple titles but levers for political action. It is precisely because eloquence is the driving force of exposition (whereas all the other arts furnish mere transpositions or artifacts of it), that it is excluded in the here and now, where the orator could not find a public sphere to express himself and commit into political action. As an operative device, exhibition makes visible a political deficit; in such a context, there cannot be any exhibition if not on the basis of a lack of exposition.

Aesthetic Regime of Art, trans. Zakir Paul (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2013), "Prelude"; *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), ch. 6; *The Lost Thread. The Democracy of Modern Fiction*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, ch. 1.

[7] "Au milieu des grands intérêts public": Diderot doesn't write "confronted to" (*devant*, *face à*, which would follow the classical scenic operative device), but "among" (which corresponds to the mingling of people in the exhibition).

[8] Versini, 236; DPV XIII, 340.

The correlation that Diderot establishes between eloquence and freedom constitutes the theoretical basis upon which Johann Winckelmann built his history of art, which in many respects can be read as a theory of artistic exposition:

> With regard to the constitution and government of Greece, freedom was the chief reason for their art's superiority. Freedom always had its seat in Greece, even beside the thrones of the kings […]. In very early times, art was already used to preserve the memory of a person by erecting his statue, and this means was available to every Greek. Given that the earliest Greeks valued the learned far less than those in whom nature manifested itself foremost, the first such rewards were bestowed for athletic training. […] Through freedom, the way of thinking of an entire people sprang up like a fine branch from a healthy trunk. For just as the mind of a man accustomed to reflection tends to rise higher in a wide field or on an open path or at the top of a building than in a low chamber or in any restricted place, so also the way of thinking among the free Greeks must have been very different from the concepts of subjugated peoples. […] For the same reason, rhetoric first began to flourish in the enjoyment of full freedom among the Greeks.[9]

Freedom is the precondition for the Greek art's superiority. This freedom was first expressed in the Olympic tournaments: anybody could supposedly compete in athletics, as anybody could commemorate victory in these competitions by erecting a statue. We cannot enter the debate about the actual historicity of this democratic process; what matters is the model Winckelmann constructs: art is a sort of meta-Olympics, a contest over the competition, that is to say an exhibition after an exposition. At both levels, we find the processes of emulation and judgement.

Winckelmann's topology of exhibition, like Diderot's, is neither theatrical (split between a stage and an audience) nor submitted to any other division or sharing. During the exposition process, the spirit "tends to rise higher" and becomes itself a sight. The physical emulation of athletes, transposed into the spiritual elevation of art, culminates in the installation of a site from which a view can be deployed ("a wide field," "an open path," or "the top of a building"): the operative device of exposition becomes a visual layout, but only after its democratic politicization. In fact, Winckelmann had begun by evoking freedom "even beside the throne of kings," the freedom in infancy of Homeric and pre-democratic Greece. What is now at stake is the power and grandeur achieved by Athens. Elevation into the arts and the conquest of political autonomy go hand in hand.

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[9] Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1764), *History of the Art of Antiquity*, chap. IV, "On Arts of the Greeks," 1st section, trans. Harry Mallgrave (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Documents, 2006), 187–188.

So in fact Diderot's mention of eloquence completes the building of the operative device. The process of exposition seems to follow a gradual progression toward the visible, from emulation (in the privacy of gymnasium or workshop) to elevation (in which the exposition enters an open site) and then to eloquence (which grants the site, made political, meaning and profundity). Coming back to Diderot, we see that he clearly considers the Salon to be an incomplete exposition, or more precisely it draws its nature as a public exhibition from this very incompleteness, which prevents it from being an open space for political speech.

Exposition and Dissemination

The *sight* from the *site* is the most advanced form of exposition in Diderot's *Salons*. Description of landscape paintings is a privileged opportunity to develop and spread out that form, on which the operative device of the whole Salons will progressively appear to be based. Starting in 1763, Diderot was fascinated by the marine painter Claude Joseph Vernet:

> I wish I could for a moment raise from the dead the painters of Greece and those of both ancient and new Rome, and hear what they had to say about the works of Vernet! It is almost impossible to speak of them, one has to see them.[10]

We cannot imagine what the painters of Greece would have said about Vernet's paintings; Diderot himself remains speechless: "one has to see" these paintings because they exceed the classical, scenic play and display of speech. Here the exception of eloquence is manifest. "One has to see": from the expected speech to describe the paintings there remains only the injunction to see, endorsed by the spectral presence of a bench of geniuses, coming from Ancient Greece, giving the future painting to be seen and the revolutionary conception of artistic creation it implies: "Such prodigious variety of scenes and figures! Such waters! Such skies! Such truth! Such magic! Such effect!"[11]

There's no doubt that the series of exclamations opening what serves to describe Vernet's canvases derives from the epideictic genre, the generic category that contains *ekphrasis*, the rhetorical ancestor of modern description. But Diderot's exclamations break the syntax, suppress the verbs, and substitute for the storytelling (from which the painter is supposed to compose and then the viewer to interpret the composition) a fragmentation of effects, closely imitating the breathless astonishment of the visitor faced with visual fireworks that unsettle and transport him. "Such effect!" marks the swing from a poetic régime focused on composition to an aesthetic régime organized around reception; "Such magic!", which refers to what is irreducible to language,

[10] Versini, 269–270; DPV XIII, 386–7.

[11] Versini, 269; DPV XIII, 386. This quotation follows the previous one.

alludes to the illusionist's prestige, which is made of marvel and fraud. Exposition is magic, as both jewels and counterfeit money are magic. This is the very heart of exposition, and its contradictory principle, which allows Diderot to exclaim in the same breath, "Such magic! Such truth!"

Here composition disappears because the very form of the classical painting's intelligibility, based on a scene placed within a frame, has been torn apart: the "prodigious variety of scenes and figures" no longer corresponds to multiple canvasses, each one arranging its figures in a scene. Variety is manifest in each one, disseminating the gaze across a variety of activities, instead of a gathering scene. No longer is the framed painting the unit that articulates a painter's œuvre; as a demiurge, Vernet produces worlds.

> If he lights a fire, it is where its brilliance should seem to extinguish the rest of the composition. Thick smoke rises, gradually dissipates and gets lost in the atmosphere immense distances away.
> If he throws an object into the crystal seas, he knows how to tint them at great depth, without making it lose its natural color or transparency.
> If he drops light on them, he knows how to penetrate. One can see it trembling and shivering on the surface.
> If he puts people in action, you see them acting
> If he spreads clouds in the air, how lightly they are suspended! How gently they are pushed about by the winds! What space between them and the firmament!
> If he raises a fog, light is weakened by it, and in turn the whole vaporous mass is imprinted and tinged by it. The light darkens and the vapor becomes luminous.[12]

Depending henceforth on an economy of possible worlds, exposition flirts with virtuality. The possible shift of representation toward virtuality is made sensible by endangered lighting: in the process of exposition, the logic of luminous exposition takes precedence; but Vernet constantly challenges himself to exhibit light where it seems that it cannot be exposed. The reality he is painting stands on the edge of physical impossibility. In *Night by Moonlight,*[13] Vernet lights a fire in front of the moon: any other painter would have the pale light of his moon eclipsed by the brilliant glow from the brazier. But Vernet paints the smoke from the fire and the stages of its gradual dissipation into the air up to the moonlight, and thereby manages to *expose* the moon to the brazier. Similarly, he exposes the translucent depth of the sea to the

[12] Versini, 269–270; DPV XIII, 386–7. This quotation follows the previous one.

[13] https://utpictura18.univ-amu.fr/GenerateurNotice.php?numnotice=A0639. Utpictura18, notice A0639. Here Diderot is alluding to a painting exhibited in 1763 Salon, but the whole passage is based on the series "Four Parts of the Day" painted for the overdoors of the Dauphin Library in Versailles.

boat keels and the sea's surface to trembling reflection of the dawn light.[14] By the play of vapors and clouds that modulates the density of the air, Vernet makes the concurrent parts of the world he creates bleed or fade into one another.

Exposition disseminates action: we do not see an *action* (which would necessarily find a source or an equivalent in the directory of history paintings and tragic scenes) but *people in the process of acting*, activity as a ferment. We may not know at a push *why* the characters are acting: what matters is the effect of activity, and the fact that Vernet paints its intensity. What is at stake is the energetic network of transactions, whatever the energy is: energy of human emotions, communication of lights and vapors in the air, of tints and shadows in the water.

Now the purpose of painting becomes the viewer's exposure to the effects of the disseminated action. Figures complete this exposition, themselves become exposed to dissemination. Within this new economy of representation, the tempest emerges as a perfect theme, and Vernet excels at it:

> If he triggers a tempest, you can hear the winds blowing and the waves howling; you see them rise against the rocks and whiten them with their foam. The sailors shout and the sides of the ship burst. Some dive into the water, and moribund others lie on the shore. Here spectators raise their hands to the sky, and there a mother presses her child to her breast; others expose themselves to death in order to save their friends or kin; a husband holds in his arms his swooning wife. A mother cries over her drowned infant, but the wind presses her clothing against her body and you can see her shape; cargo merchandise bobs on the water, and passengers are dragged toward the abyss.[15]

"Expose themselves to death" lies at the end of a long chain of what is being exposed: exposure of the sea to the storm, of the sailors and then the ship to the sea, of the passengers to the split side of the vessel, of bodies to the wind, of the cargo to the water. This chain of solidarity exhibits at the heart of the canvas the nameless heroism of ordinary people, and expands a continuum from nature to humans, from people to merchandise, from whirlwinds to the circulation of goods.

Radicalizing the principle of exposition in a painting abolishes not only the framed picture as a pattern for composition based on a scenic operative device, it also makes obsolete the distinction between actors and spectators, stakeholders and beholders, between subject and object, between the human and non-human. Spectators "raising their hands to the sky" stand at the heart of the tempest. Everything leads us to

[14] Utpictura18, notice A4444.
[15] Versini, 270; DPV XIII, 387.

abandon the apparently obvious distinction between the organization of figures on a canvas and the circulation of visitors in the Square Room of the Louvre, between the composition as a first level of representation and the exhibition as a second one. Not only is the interplay between actor and spectator completely disseminated, but the very status of the actor, like that of the spectator, is reshaped by the exposition process, that is to say by the circulation of its energies, the impact of its transactions. For instance, in Diderot's *Salons*, Jean Siméon Chardin is valued as the Salon's *tapissier* (curator), whose gift was for the significant hanging of paintings alongside each other, as well as, and even more than the still-life painter who puts one fruit or color or matter beside another.

Diderot himself constantly plays on the levels of the exposition within which he stands. He sometimes puts himself in front of a picture; sometimes he stands at a higher level, observing its effect among the other paintings and viewing the viewers of the Salon. Or he may go to a lower level when he enters into the composition to participate in the action of the painting. Nevertheless, his discourse does not appear to be structured around these levels of representation. From one to another, the same operative device is at work, in which both the depicted scene and its framing as patterns for composition are being dismantled.

The Politics of Exposition

In the course of the "Promenade Vernet", in the *Salon de 1767*, Diderot reports an anecdote that places an old woman in front of two history paintings representing the same subject:

> Two paintings were exhibited in competition for a prize; the subject was *Saint Bartholomew* under the executioner's blade. An old peasant woman swayed the hesitant judges: "This one," said the good woman, "gives me great pleasure; but the other causes me great pain." The first one left her outside the canvas, while she entered into the second. We like pleasure in our own persons and pain in painting.
> It has been maintained that a thing actually present is more striking than its imitation; however one will abandon Cato dying on stage[16] to run to Lally's execution.[17] This is a matter of curiosity; if Lally were beheaded every day, one would stay with Cato. The stage is the Tarpeian Rock, the parterre the Quay Pelletier of respectable people.[18]

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[16] Jaucourt praises Addison's *Cato* in his TRAGÉDIE article of the *Encyclopédie* (XVI, 517).

[17] General Lally was held responsible for the French military disaster at Pondicherry in 1761 and was executed four years later on the Place de Grève, an injustice protested by Voltaire.

[18] The Quai Pelletier was part of the Quai de Gesvres on the Right Bank of the Seine, two steps from the Place de Grève. It was built over a vaulted gallery (*le canal des Cagnards*) that at night was a sordid area where one risked getting one's throat cut.

> But the people never tire of public executions. This is according to another principle; on his return, the man from the corner becomes the Demosthenes of his neighborhood; for eight days he holds forth, he is listened to, "pendent ab ore loquentis"[19]; he is someone.[20]

In this anecdote, when facing the two *Saint Bartholomews*, the peasant woman has two contradictory movements: the aesthetic pleasure distances her from the canvas, while the compassionate participation places her as spectator at its heart, in the position of the martyr. The movements of empathy and detachment of the spectator-actor, the fascination and repulsion exerted by the "presence of the thing," and the interplay of exposure and withdrawal within the painting itself are superimposed to constitute the operative device of exposition, the semi-public sphere that it establishes and circumscribes, the virtual breach of prohibition that it deals with on its edges.

On the other hand, repetition is an essential effect of exposition (the tragedy of *Cato* is repeatedly exposed on the stage). It is through repetition that the incursion of a singularity should lastingly settle into public space (the completion of "Lally once beheaded on the place de Grève" would be "Lally beheaded every day," first through witness's exposition, and from that with the creation of a painting or a drama representing Lally's end). But at the same time, repetition undoes that singularity: here we touch the very particular device operating the process of exposition. When the actual singular event becomes the exposition of an event, submitted to repetition, the performance of exposition must make the spectator forget it is just a performance, that is to say a repetition. If it does not, the exhibition effect progressively vanishes. Exposition has to present itself as unique, that is to say it has to deny its quality of repetition. This denial needs the establishing of the fiction of a private sphere where each spectator is the only one, viewing, once and privately, a singular event. That fiction can be repeated indefinitely. But it will never equal the effect of a singular actual event. We can thus say that exposition denies itself while it develops, and unleashes, or should unleash, its own withdrawal just as soon as it is made public.

This is why Cato dying every day in the theater attracts people less than Lally, who died only once on the Place de Grève, though he seems to implement more thoroughly the process of exposition, which is based on publicizing the spectacle. Using the play of chiasmus, Diderot returns to Cato at the moment when Cato seems definitively disqualified from the argument. This is because, when one compares the exposition of Lally's death with that of Cato's, that is to say one kind of repetition with another, then the superiority of imitation over the presence of the thing is manifest, thanks to

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[19] Adapted quotation from Virgil, *Aeneid*, IV, 79: Dido hangs from Aeneas's lips while he narrates the fall of Troy.

[20] Versini, 610–611; DPV XVI, 200. Translated by John Goodman in *Diderot on Art, Volume II: The Salon of 1767* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 103. I slightly revised the translation.

efficacy of the fiction of a private sphere of withdrawal within the public exhibition. By that device, imitation goes as far as imitating singularity: for the spectator, Cato dies each time as if for the first time.

Diderot does not explicitly tell us why nor how this is so. But he continues with another story, which this time has as hero "the man from the corner" who was present at the death of Lally and speechifies for eight days about what he saw. Now repetition is twice displaced: first, from the event toward the account of the event, which combines the presence of the thing (he was there) with its imitation (he recounts it); and then from the theatricality of the observed singular event toward the eloquence of a tale that may be perfected as it is repeated. Eloquence is the outcome of Diderot's reasoning, and completes the operative device of exposition, as exhibition prevailing over withdrawal. But the problem is that eloquence was what Diderot (in the beginning of the *Salon de 1763*) had excluded from the exhibition.

Therefore, eloquence is not just the means of producing the illusion of singularity within the repetition, but also articulates the aesthetic effect politically. Cato draws an audience in the theater, a hundred times if necessary, because Cato signifying by his suicide the wreck of the Roman Republic resonates in the eighteenth century spectator with the current emergence of a new demand for political sharing of the common, which the ideal of Roman Republic symbolizes. And telling the tale of the death of Lally, a scandalous execution of a scapegoat for Louis XV's political failure, crystallizes in popular Parisian districts the emergence of a public opinion, which exercises first in the telling of the event, in its repeated *exposition*, but then shifts from the aesthetic scene (the emotional impact of an execution seen on Place de Grève) to the political arena of contestation (the political impact of the exposition to the community formed by the audience). From this perspective, there is no longer a difference between the representation of Cato and that of Lally. This is expressed in the enigmatic sentence: "The stage is the Tarpeian Rock, the parterre the Quay Pelletier of respectable people." Actors are nobly dying on the stage *as if* they were Roman heroes nobly throwing themselves off the mythical Tarpeian Rock, in front of an audience of honest bourgeois who pretend to be frightened *as if* they were on the Quai Pelletier mingling with the rabble in a murderous area. The two "as ifs" are reciprocal, from low to high, and then from high to low levels of society. Diderot's chiasmus thus establishes an opposition and immediately cancels it, dismantling the classical split which used to structure the scenic operative device and the poetic régime. Thanks to the chiasmus, the reciprocal places of political show and murderous terror are inverted: one goes to the Quay Pelletier to see a political execution, but at the risk from its vaulted promenade beneath, where murders occurred; this is the inverted representation of the Tarpeian Rock, from which the condemned were thrown down: it was situated above the Forum, the political place where the verdicts were reached.

The distinction between stage and audience, or between the theater and the private room, is replaced by a polarity that runs from the so to speak accidental intimacy of

the event toward the impact on the public of its storytelling, thanks to which the event becomes historic. Making the event historical, transforming the real into History by its exposition, topologically balances and completes the process of exposition: this topology transforms exposition into exhibition and activates the operative device as visually operating an exhibition.

Diderot frames the ridiculous figure of the man from the corner perorating with, on one side the figure of Demosthenes, the orator of the *Philippics*, the democrat fighting against the monarch to come, and on the other side the figure of Aeneas, who relates the fall of Troy in front of Dido and her court, but also prefigures the Rome that is to come. This frame is not necessarily, or anyway not exclusively intended to denigrate the popular improvised orator: through him eloquence is not only reintegrated within the operative device of exposition, conjuring the prohibitions and withdrawal attached to it; it achieves it as free exhibition. Virgil's Latin is placed in a humble mouth and the symbolic power of humanistic culture is to be exhibited as popular and revolutionary speech.

Translated from the French by Emilia Lanier.