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DIDEROT AND THE THEATRE:
TOWARD A SECULAR CHURCH

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This study reinterprets Denis Diderot's proposals for the transformation of the French classical stage as a vision of the theatre as a secular church. In this view, the theatre will become a place where the human need for transcendent experience can be expressed and channeled into the development of a body politic composed of citizen-critics. The active engagement of this reinvigorated audience in the process of community-building will serve to prevent the abuses of political and religious absolutism.

Though Diderot's importance to the history of theatrical practice is widely appreciated, the relationship between his own religious training and his subsequent work has been largely ignored, possibly due to his reputation as one of the Enlightenment's most radical materialists. In this study, it is argued that when Diderot imagines a world where the church is replaced by the theatre and priests are replaced by actors, he is not only expressing his distrust of religious institutions, he is also proposing an alternative social structure where the body politic can fully experience strong emotion without devolving into fanaticism.

Diderot saw the potential of the theatre to provide the opportunity for people to be moved by a feeling of transcendence, of an emotional experience of timelessness and oneness within a social framework that benefited both the individual and society without the attendant risks of coercion and repression associated with church and state that he

believed inhibited rational thought in the individual and distorted the development of society as a whole. The present work thus presents a new reading of Diderot's well-known treatises on the theatre, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique*, which integrates Diderot's attempts to transform the classical stage with his political writings. It is suggested that these works can usefully be viewed as tutorials through which Diderot hopes to educate the theatre audience to become a congregation of critics able to engage in the collective evaluation of culture and politics, thereby creating a space where the pleasures of art and the duties of citizenship are joined.

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Introduction

La comédie, chez les anciens, a pris son origine de la religion, et faisait partie de leurs mystères;... les Espagnols, nos voisins, ne célèbrent guère de fête où la comédie ne soit mêlée, et... même, parmi nous, elle doit sa naissance aux soins d'une confrérie à qui appartient encore aujourd'hui l'Hôtel de Bourgogne;... c'est un lieu qui fut donné pour y représenter les plus importants mystères de notre foi; ... on en voit encore des comédies imprimées en lettres gothiques, sous le nom d'un docteur de Sorbonne et, sans aller chercher si loin,... on a joué, de notre temps, des pièces saintes de M. de Corneille, qui ont été l'admiration de toute la France. (Molière, *Préface à Tartuffe*)

Tous les peuples ont leurs sabbats, et nous aurons aussi les nôtres. Dans ces jours solennels, on représentera une belle tragédie, qui apprenne aux hommes à redouter les passions; une bonne comédie, qui les instruisse de leurs devoirs, et qui leur en inspire le goût. (Diderot, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*)

In the western tradition, drama and religion have a shared history that begins in the performance of rituals that serve to unite human communities and continues for at least 2500 years. From the performances of tragedies and comedies during festivals honoring the god Dionysus throughout the hundred-year period of Athenian democracy to the performances of medieval plays, secular and religious, in churches and church courtyards,¹ the church and the theatre remained at the center of civic life. This connection continued to be relevant, albeit weaker, as church commentators across Europe, both pre- and post-reformation, critiqued the theatrical nature of the mass with some disturbed by the overly dramatic demeanor of certain priests and others bemoaning the difficulty in maintaining the congregation's interest.² While Molière, in the citation above, uses the connection between religion and theatre to justify his artistic choices in *Tartuffe*, it can also serve as a metaphor for either a pejorative evaluation of the

¹ John M. Wasson, "The English Church as Theatrical Space" in *A New History of Early English Drama*, eds. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 26-27. Each reference is given in full in a footnote and thereafter MLA in-text citations are used.

² T.P. Dolan, "The Mass as Performance Text" in *New Approaches to European Theater of the Middle Ages*, eds. Barbara I. Gusick and Edelgard E. DuBruck (Kalamazoo, Michigan : Medieval Institute Publications, 2005) 13-14.

performative possibilities of religious practice or an attempt to solemnify the entertainment value of theatre-going. When Denis Diderot suggests, however, that he would like to see a world where the church is replaced by the theatre, priests are replaced by actors and, as "tous les peuples ont leurs sabbats ... nous aurons aussi les nôtres,"³ he is expressing a utopian vision rather than a metaphor. The details of this vision are further testament to his wish to link religious and theatrical practices. The theatre will no longer be merely an evening's entertainment, but will become part of the fabric of civil society. The Sabbath will be celebrated through the performance of Comedy and Tragedy, rather than the Mass. The rest and worship associated with the Sabbath will be redefined in secular terms as an opportunity for the development of communally shared and shaped experiences which will alter the nature of the social contract. Diderot hopes, in fact, to recapture the intimate connection between theatre and religion that existed in the classical period and that became problematic from the early days of Christianity.

Diderot's œuvre is replete with indications that his plans for the reformation of the theatre can be read as part of a larger project of political and social reform to replace the repressiveness of eighteenth-century religious and political authority with a secular, non-absolutist institution that would retain the positive aspects of religious experience. Diderot's project concerning the theatre goes far beyond the already ambitious goal of reforming contemporary theatre to make it meet the needs of an expanding, educated middle class. This project was at once a part of his overall interest in developing a materialist basis for science, politics and aesthetics and an attempt to fill in the gap he acknowledged between the human need to deny mortality through at least temporary

³ Denis Diderot, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel, Œuvres de Diderot IV*, ed. Laurent Versini (Paris : Éditions Robert Laffont, 1997) 1147.

experiences of transcendence, and his unwavering commitment to a materialist world view. The purpose of this study is to present Diderot's writings on the theatre as a nexus where the discourses on religion, politics and aesthetics meet and to demonstrate how Diderot collected the various strands of these discourses to create a model for a secular church that would resolve the apparent contradictions of materialism and the emotional experience of spiritual feelings.

Diderot's drama and his writings on theatre are noted for their transformation of theatre practice. His critique presages both romanticism and realism and, as with other eighteenth-century French writers such as Mercier and Beaumarchais, the "well-made play" of the nineteenth century. The didacticism of his plays themselves, and the apparent wish to teach in the theoretical writings, likens them to Voltaire's dramatic plays of ideas, as well as the political and social ideas of others wishing to recuperate drama from the court and address it to the parterre. In these ways, Diderot's dramatic works are linked to the corpus of eighteenth-century plays where enlightenment ideas are used to transform the classical stage. For Diderot, however, the theatre is meant to serve a larger purpose. It will become a secular church, returning theatre to its original roots as a site of enthusiasm and social cohesion. Throughout Diderot's *œuvre*, we note the apparent desire for transcendent emotional experiences within a framework that is unapologetically materialist. This apparent paradox, of a materialist philosopher seeking the powerful emotional feelings of religious mysticism is resolved in Diderot's vision for the theatre. Diderot's intent is to make theatre the place where enthusiasm can be both expressed, by the actor who returns to the spectators a representation of the vicissitudes of their own experience and by the spectator whose imagination is liberated in a process

of identification and empathy; and contained, through the actor's artistic skill and the spectator's connectedness to the community. By these means, Diderot believed we are able to become most fully human, because there are two ways in which we can experience and transcend the human condition: through our passions and through our connection as social beings.

Diderot's views on the theatre are both political and aesthetic. While writers on enthusiasm often use religious distinctions to serve political ends, Diderot's use of the term is also connected to his views on the value of human experience. As we shall see he removes the concept of enthusiasm from the purview of the spiritual and resituates it in the realm of the material. Throughout Diderot's œuvre there are references to the power of enthusiasm which finally comes to be expressed and contained within the theatre. More precisely, it is expressed in the viewer's response as part of a community of spectators. The theatre audience becomes a collective beholder, able to experience the absorption and rapture of the individual looking at a painting.⁴ Diderot draws from a number of discourses to develop these ideas, including theological debates on the nature of enthusiasm, political arguments regarding the social contract and philosophical discussions of the arts.

This study will analyze a number of those discourses in order to delineate their final transformation by Diderot into a new vision of civil society which resituates the theatre at its center. The first two chapters investigate, for the first time, how Diderot draws from the discourse on enthusiasm from the classical period to the eighteenth century and from the Catholic liturgy to transform the theatre of his day. Chapter One explores how

⁴ See Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. A discussion of Fried's insights regarding Diderot's aesthetic theories is presented in Chapter Three.

Diderot translates enthusiasm from a term associated with religious and philosophical fanaticism to the basis for a conception of creativity and human connectedness based on materialist principles. The importance of enthusiasm for Diderot cannot be underestimated: it is the source of humanity's access to the transcendent. Chapter Two describes the manner in which he transposes liturgical performance into the foundation of a new form of theatre practice. My analysis of Diderot's intellectual and religious training suggests that his perspective on representation, which differs from many of his contemporaries, can be understood through the optic of his rejected faith and that many of the specific recommendations he makes to change contemporary theatre practice have a direct link to the performance of Church ritual. I argue that Diderot seeks to use the power of religious feeling, not to separate people into the elect and the damned, but to join them in a sense of their common humanity, which he finds to be located in the emotions and to be released through the various forms of devotional practice.

Chapter Three situates Diderot within the republic of letters and among those writers who saw themselves as part of an alternative community to religious and political institutions. It is well known that Diderot was among those who understood that the power of the republic of letters was based in the exchange and dissemination of new ideas and critiques of established structures. I argue that he also saw the theatre as an underutilized resource in this process. The accessibility of theatrical performance and text to critical review and change underscores its appropriateness as a new focus of community-building. In fact, the texts of Diderot's two major theatre pieces, *Le Fils naturel* and *Le Père de famille*, were published with accompanying texts that I read as critiques of the plays which precede them. My analysis suggests that both the *Entretiens*

sur Le Fils naturel and *De la poésie dramatique* are attempts to put into practice Diderot's vision of the theatrical script and performance as a new kind of scripture and ceremony which allow for on-going critique and revision in the public sphere.

Chapter Four places Diderot's political writings within the context of the century's debates regarding the proper functioning of the state. I argue that by viewing his theatrical works through the perspective of his political *œuvre*, it becomes evident that Diderot envisioned theatrical performance as a type of social contract. Diderot thus posits a dialectical relationship between private and public experience. The script of a play itself becomes a new kind of "scripture" that can be edited and critiqued. The "publication" of both performance and script differ radically from the performance of the Mass and the dissemination of scripture precisely because of their vulnerability to criticism. For Diderot, both the theatre performance and the text of the play are unstable, allowing for change that remains in the public forum. In this way the theatre becomes a willing and voluntary communion, without the strictures required by religions and some forms of the state. This process of negotiation and criticism creates a locus for the social contract that incorporates change into its very nature. For Diderot, the theatre becomes a privileged space in a time of religious intolerance and political absolutism, which can serve as a vehicle for change and a source of social cohesion.

The *drame*⁵ and the many theatrical reforms suggested by Diderot represent an attempt to create a public space where citizens could meet regularly and voluntarily to satisfy their individual needs for transcendent experience within a collective which would provide social cohesion and act as a continually renewable source of critique and re-

⁵ Diderot refers variously to the "genre sérieux," the "tragédie domestique et bourgeoise" or the "drame." For the sake of clarity, I will be using the term *drame* to refer to the new genre he proposes.

evaluation for the individual and society. Diderot's ideas are rooted in his own personal and intellectual background as well as the major discourses of his time and we will begin by focusing on one of the major intellectual debates which are critical to an understanding of Diderot's sources and contributions: the discourse on enthusiasm.

Chapter One: Resolving Enthusiasm and Materialism

A. Diderot's Passion for Enthusiasm

For Diderot, replacing the church with the theatre is not merely a statement of anti-clerical sentiment; it is his acknowledgement of the place of religion in people's lives and the place of theatricality in religious practice. In a letter to his mistress, Sophie Volland, he writes that "l'amour, l'amitié, la religion sont à la tête des plus violents enthousiasmes de la vie" (July 14, 1762)⁶, and this statement suggests both the importance of religious impulses and their fearsome power. It also points to the complex relationship Diderot maintained with the notion of *enthousiasme*, particularly in light of Enlightenment critiques of intolerance and zealotry. Voltaire expresses the *philosophes'* concerns regarding religious enthusiasm in the following passage:

Les lois sont encore très impuissantes contre ces accès de rage; c'est comme si vous lisiez un arrêt du conseil à un frénétique. Ces gens-là sont persuadés que l'esprit saint qui les pénètre est au-dessus des lois, que leur enthousiasme est la seule loi qu'ils doivent entendre. Que répondre à un homme qui vous dit qu'il aime mieux obéir à Dieu qu'aux hommes, et qui, en conséquence, est sûr de mériter le ciel en vous égorgeant?⁷

Enthousiasme is, in this case, essentially a synonym for fanaticism, while Diderot's use of the term is more broadly related to all "violent" passions. Enthusiasm is thus, for Diderot, a term that is interchangeable with passion and sensitivity to strong emotion, yet which holds, for the eighteenth century, an echo of religious fervor. It is in these violent passions, in enthusiasm, that Diderot finds destructive and creative power.

Tout ce que la passion inspire, je le pardonne. Il n'y a que les inconséquences qui me choquent. Et puis, vous le savez, j'ai de tout temps été l'apologiste des passions fortes. Elles seules m'émeuvent. Qu'elles m'inspirent de l'admiration ou de l'effroi, je sens fortement. Les arts de génie naissent et s'éteignent avec elles. Ce sont elles qui font le scélérat et l'enthousiaste qui le peint de ses vraies

⁶ Diderot, *Correspondance, Œuvres de Diderot* V 377.

⁷ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, ed. Gerhardt Stenger (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2010) 288.

couleurs.

(July 31, 1762)⁸

But this distinction between Diderot's understanding of enthusiasm and that of his contemporaries is only part of his nuanced treatment of the subject. Unlike Voltaire, for example, whose definition of enthusiasm and its relationship to religious fanaticism remained fairly stable throughout his career ("l'enthousiasme est une maladie qui se gagne"),⁹ Diderot's conception was developed and modified over the course of his writings and parallels his thinking in the areas of aesthetics and drama.

While the critique of enthusiasm, like that of superstition and toleration, pre-dates the Enlightenment, it also takes on particular valence during this period. It is Diderot, however, who gathers several strands of the on-going discourse on enthusiasm and returns the idea of enthusiasm to its classical aesthetic roots while retaining its religious connotations. As Marc Buffat notes, in his discussion of the idea of poetry in the *Encyclopédie*, "l'étymologie du terme [enthousiasme] renvoie à la tradition platonicienne qui fait du poète le simple interprète, le simple porte-parole d'une divinité."¹⁰ Buffat cites Hugo's "Dieu dictait, j'écrivais" (99), to point to the recurrence of this tradition in the romanticism of the nineteenth century, but he situates Diderot's views on the subject firmly within the eighteenth-century discourse on fanaticism, which places a positive value on poetic enthusiasm and a negative value on religious enthusiasm. But, in fact, this Platonic tradition was no more simple or straightforward than Diderot's subtle reconfiguring of the term. Although "enthusiasm" and "inspiration" are terms linked by their etymological relationship, both terms meaning being possessed by or filled with a

⁸ Diderot, *Correspondance, Œuvres de Diderot* V 397.

⁹ Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, ed. G. Lanson (Paris : Hachette, 1917) 33.

¹⁰ Marc Buffat, "Sur la notion de poésie dans l'*Encyclopédie*," *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie* 5 (1988) : 99.

god, the valence attributed to these terms varies. As we shall see, Plato and Aristotle had significantly different points of view regarding the relationship of enthusiasm to human nature and artistic endeavors.

B. The Ancients and Enthusiasm

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates discusses the various forms of "divine madness" which are expressed in enthusiastic transports. Prophecy, poetry and love all involve states which are inspired by the gods and enthusiasm is a source of knowledge, beauty and joy. For Plato, of course, these states can be corrupted through the intervention of human activity and, as with all emotions, must be ultimately subject to reason. Thus enthusiasm is an essential, if potentially problematic, aspect of human nature. Josef Pieper, in his study of the *Phaedrus* notes that Plato's formulation of enthusiasm, which necessarily involves a state of passivity in the enthusiast, who is "filled with the god," is at odds with the overall thesis of the work, which posits the importance of a person's responsibility to critically examine all aspects of life. Pieper resolves this apparent contradiction by presenting the elaboration of enthusiasm as evidence of Plato's ongoing interrogation of the fact that "both autonomy and the shattering of that autonomy...are essential to the nature of man."¹¹ Thus for Plato, enthusiasm is a divine gift that the poet utilizes in expressions uniquely his own. For Diderot, as well, enthusiasm is essential to human nature and, though Plato leaves room for the divine in human nature, Diderot will seek to clarify its material basis.

Enthusiasm is crucial to Diderot's ideas regarding artistic production and aesthetic appreciation as well as the nature of being fully human. In Diderot's investigation, as in Plato's, enthusiasm represents both the ineffable and the necessary.

L'enthousiasme naît d'un objet de la nature. Si l'esprit l'a vu sous des aspects frappants et divers, il en est occupé, agité, tourmenté. L'imagination s'échauffe; la passion s'émeut. On est successivement étonné, attendri, indigné, courroucé. Sans l'enthousiasme, ou l'idée véritable ne se présente point, ou si, par hasard, on

¹¹ Josef Pieper, *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964) 51.

la rencontre, on ne peut la poursuivre...le poète sent le moment de l'enthousiasme; c'est après qu'il a médité.¹²

In this passage we find those elements that link Diderot with traditional Aristotelian ideas of mimesis and with the Romantic Movement to come, but it is his stress on the paradoxical notion of enthusiasm that interests us here, and its connection to Plato's equally paradoxical conception as delineated by Pieper. It is clear that enthusiasm is the necessary spark which will light the flame of creativity. While enthusiasm is presented as a force of violent energy, it is also a requirement for the marshaling and focusing of artistic invention. This confounding mix of directedness and turbulence parallels Plato's notion that the individual is both responsible for and at the mercy of inexplicable forces. For Diderot, of course, it is the power of human emotion that is the seat of this inexplicability and he continues to elaborate these ideas in the description of the *homme de génie* in *De la poésie dramatique*.

Ce sont des hommes de génie qui ont su fouiller au fond de nos entrailles, et en arracher le trait qui nous frappe. Jugeons les poèmes, et laissons là les personnes. Nous ne confondrons, ni vous, ni moi, l'homme qui vit, pense, agit et se meut au milieu des autres; et l'homme enthousiaste qui prend la plume, l'archet, le pinceau, ou qui monte sur ses tréteaux. Hors de lui, il est tout ce qu'il plaît à l'art qui le domine. Mais l'instant de l'inspiration passé, il rentre et redevient ce qu'il était quelquefois un homme commun.¹³

The artist is consumed by inspiration during the creative process, but it is the special quality of genius to ultimately dominate the passions. For Diderot, this domination is necessary not as a step toward spiritual or religious purity; rather, it is necessary as a step in the development of a body politic which can fully experience strong emotion without devolving into fanaticism. Diderot's understanding of how this process occurs also has its roots in classicism.

¹²Diderot, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1142.

¹³Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1324-1325.

In Plato's *Ion*, the poet, the rhapsode and the audience are all "not in their right mind", as the enthusiastic frenzy is passed from each to the other through a process similar to that of magnetism.¹⁴ This formulation appears to be an early example of the enthusiastic contagion which will be decried by Martin Luther and later recuperated by Diderot. The link between author, actor and audience which is suggested in *The Ion*, is elaborated and developed by Diderot who, we shall see, creates a space for the actor to transmit the poet's passions to a community which becomes self-aware. The relationship loses its negative connotation and the fear of contagion becomes the desire for cohesion. "L'action des hommes les uns sur les autres, et... la communication des passions dans les émeutes populaires" (*Entretiens* 1157) will be garnered for the public good. In this, Diderot's analysis has more in common with that of Aristotle who, in his *Politics*, finds the cure for religious mania to be found within artistic experience.

For emotions such as pity and fear, or again enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into a religious frenzy, whom we see as the result of the sacred melodies - when they have used the melodies that excite the soul to mystic frenzy – restored as though they had found healing and catharsis. Those who are influenced by pity or fear, and every emotional nature, must have a like experience, and others in so far as each is susceptible to such emotions, and all receive a sort of catharsis and are relieved with pleasure.¹⁵

Aristotle considers enthusiasm to be a natural human emotion which, as with all emotions, is susceptible to variations of intensity. Contrary to Plato, for whom the emotions must be subservient at all times to the intellect and who views the excitation of emotions through the arts as dangerous, Aristotle considers the emotions to be part of the pleasure of being human and views the experience of emotion through artistic

¹⁴ James S. Hans, *Socrates and the Irrational* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006) 28.

¹⁵ This passage is cited in Jonathan Lear's "Katharsis" in *Essays on Aristotle's 'Poetics'*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 316.

representation to be of value in self-regulation.¹⁶ Through the art of music, enthusiasm is subject to the same process of catharsis that effects critical change in the emotions of pity and fear through the art of tragedy.¹⁷ In his *Poetics*, Aristotle tells us that catharsis, rather than being an emotional release as the term is sometimes used today, is a process by which the emotions engendered by the viewing of tragic action become modified in such a way as to create pleasure. This pleasure is associated with the pleasures of human communion and the pleasures of self-awareness. Catharsis, as well as enthusiasm,¹⁸ has been interpreted, at times, as a medical term. In such a context, catharsis suggests a purging of the emotions, in the sense of ridding the body of noxious substances. However, there appears to be a scholarly consensus today that Aristotle's use of the word is more appropriately understood as "purification," in the sense of forgiveness of human foibles or "clarification," in the sense of a clearer understanding of the appropriate emotional responses to re-presented actions.¹⁹ It is through the cathartic experience of music that excessive enthusiasm can be healed and it is through the cathartic experience of tragedy that "we as audience are thus enabled to participate in the restorative capacities

¹⁶ See Martha C. Nussbaum's "Tragedy and Self-sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity" for her discussion of the differences between Plato and Aristotle in their handling of emotion and the arts (268-276). Richard Janko also compares Plato and Aristotle on this issue in "From Catharsis to the Aristotelian Mean" (342-343). Both articles are found in *Essays on Aristotle's 'Poetics'*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Janko, in "From Catharsis to the Aristotelian Mean," argues that, for Aristotle, "our responses to the representation (mimesis) of human action can habituate us to approximate more closely to the mean in our ordinary emotional reactions" and thus lead to virtue (341).

¹⁸ See Michael Heyd, *"Be Sober and Reasonable": The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995) for his discussion of the early medicalization of the term enthusiasm, which is frequently attributed to Aristotle but is now considered to be based on a work of one of his students. According to his formulation, creative enthusiasm is the progenitor of prophecy and the arts, while pathological enthusiasm is the progeny of the pathological effects of melancholia (45-47). This is another ancient formulation in the discourse on enthusiasm that will be rediscovered and developed in the 17th century.

¹⁹ The following articles all discuss this change in the understanding of the meaning of the term catharsis: Jonathan Lear, "Katharsis"; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity"; Richard Janko, "From Catharsis to the Aristotelian Mean"; and Edward J. Chute, "Critics, Catharsis and Colonus" *Comparative Drama* V: 4 (1971-72) 283-300.

of human society to forgive and thus to heal the guilty sufferers of tragic misaction.”²⁰

Aristotle’s consideration of enthusiasm treats it not only as another human emotion, but as one of the powerful human emotions that respond to the ministrations of artistic experience. In this way, Aristotle links the theatre with the proper functioning of the polis and answers Plato’s critique of the emotions and of the theatre.

The classical approach to enthusiasm clearly goes beyond the notion that the enthusiast is a mere spokesperson for various gods. For the ancients, enthusiasm is a human capacity, whose provenance may remain elusive but whose vicissitudes encompass human experience. This is one of the traditions in the discourse on enthusiasm that Diderot continues to engage as he attempts to recuperate the notion of enthusiasm from more narrow definitions and from his contemporaries’ frequent equation of poetic enthusiasm as positive and religious enthusiasm as negative. Diderot resolves this apparent opposition by reinvigorating classical formulations of the importance of enthusiasm as a means of human communication and as a natural human emotion which is responsive to artistic experience. Critics in the eighteenth century revived many of Plato’s concerns regarding the relative value of emotions and reason as well as the proper role of the theatre in society. We shall see, in Chapter Two, that Diderot answers his contemporaries’ concerns with arguments similar to those suggested by Aristotle and, more surprisingly, with arguments which reflect his understanding of the underlying structures of Christianity.

²⁰ Aryeh Kosman, “Acting: Drama as the Mimesis of Praxis” in *Essays on Aristotle’s ‘Poetics,’* ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 68.

C. Christianity and Enthusiasm

It is from the early days of Christianity that enthusiasm begins to be identified with those who falsely believe they are inspired by the one God. R.A. Knox suggests that Paul's *Epistle to the Corinthians* was motivated by the need to admonish and stamp out enthusiastic preachers who were promulgating their own interpretations of Christian thought and practice.²¹ That this particular criticism should arise with Christianity, after having been absent from classical discussions, is likely related to the fact that the structure of polytheism renders the problem of heresy moot.²² Paul sought to provide guidelines for acceptable devotional practices, denigrating speaking in tongues and prophecies, unless these could be interpreted and judged by the congregants (Knox 23). As early as the first century (53-57CE?) then, Christian fathers felt threatened by those behaviors and practices that would recur in London and Paris in the early eighteenth century. Throughout the middle ages, the heretic and the enthusiast were essentially interchangeable terms of disapprobation. The Church reserved for itself the right to distinguish between divine and satanic inspiration. The divine inspiration of classical poets and philosophers has now become suspect and subject to the judgment of established authority.

Martin Luther (1517) uses the term *schwärmer* (from the concept of bees swarming) to describe the enthusiast and thus introduces the notion of social contagion to the discourse on enthusiasm. Anthony La Vopa notes that while the term enthusiasm is abstract, the idea of bees swarming added a powerful image that easily evoked frenzied

²¹ R.A.Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950) 9-11.

²² This phenomenon was noted, of course, by both Pierre Bayle and David Hume in their individual studies of religion.

mobs acting without understanding or restraint.²³ Thus from the beginnings of the Reformation, enthusiasm was associated paradoxically with isolated aberration as well as collective madness. The image of individual enthusiasts "swarming" to produce an uncontrollable mass is, of course, opposed to Diderot's use of the image of swarming bees.

Les avez-vous vues s'en aller former à l'extrémité de la branche d'un arbre une longue grappe de petits animaux ailés, tous accrochés les uns aux autres par les pattes?... Si l'une de ces abeilles s'avise de pincer d'une façon quelconque l'abeille à laquelle elle s'est accrochée, que croyez-vous qu'il en arrive?... celle-ci pincera la suivante; qu'il s'excitera dans toute la grappe autant de sensations qu'il y a de petits animaux; que le tout s'agitiera, se remuera, changera de situation et de forme; qu'il s'élèvera du bruit, de petit cris, et que celui qui n'aurait jamais vu une pareille grappe s'arranger serait tenté de la prendre pour un animal à cinq ou six cents têtes et à mille ou douze cents ailes.²⁴

For Diderot, this formation is not an uncontrollable mass, but an organic system that follows determinable rules.²⁵ The metaphor is used to represent the communicability of sensation as a means of organization rather than decompensation. Throughout his work, Diderot describes the coming together of large groups of people as a source of powerful emotion, without suggesting that this emotion should be feared.

[I]l est de la nature de tout enthousiasme de se communiquer et de s'accroître par le nombre des enthousiastes. Les hommes ont alors une action réciproque les uns sur les autres, par l'image énergique et vivante qu'ils s'offrent tous de la passion dont chacun d'eux est transporté: de là cette joie insensée de nos fêtes publiques, la fureur de nos émeutes populaires, et les effets surprenants de la musique chez

²³ Anthony La Vopa, "The Philosopher and the *Schwärmer*: On the Career of a German Epithet from Luther to Kant" in *Enthusiasm ad Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850*, eds. Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa (San Marino California: Huntington Library, 1998) 88.

²⁴ Diderot, *Le Rêve de d'Alembert, Œuvres de Diderot I* 627.

²⁵ See Mary Efrosini Gregory's *Diderot and the Metamorphosis of Species* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 63-65, for her discussion of Diderot's development of his conception of the *polype*, which is a foundational element of his materialism, from Maupertuis' description of swarming bees that, while being formed from many individuals, appear to be one body. See also Wilda Anderson's *Diderot's Dream* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 49-56, for her discussion of how Diderot uses this image of the polype formed by swarming bees to describe various forms of dynamic organization, which can adapt to change. For our purposes, it is important to distinguish Diderot's positive interpretation of the possibility for the communication of human emotion through close association with others, from the negative valence presumed by Luther.

les Anciens.²⁶

Le parterre de la comédie est le seul endroit où les larmes de l'homme vertueux et du méchant soient confondues. Là, le méchant s'irrite contre des injustices qu'il aurait commises; compatit à des maux qu'il aurait occasionnés, et s'indigne contre un homme de son propre caractère. Mais l'impression est reçue; elle demeure en nous, malgré nous; et le méchant sort de sa loge moins disposé à faire le mal que s'il eût été gourmandé par un orateur sévère et dur.

(*De la poésie dramatique* 1283)

The communicability of enthusiasm described in Plato's *Ion*, becomes, for Diderot, the basis of social cohesion which can be manipulated through the agency of the theatre, rather than a fearsome form of public frenzy.²⁷ The positive effects of the public experience of shared emotion echoes Aristotle's belief that it is through the agency of civic institutions, cultural and political, that we are able to live fully (Kosman 66-69). Unlike Catholic and Protestant thinkers, Diderot sees enthusiasm not as a threat to community, but as its medium. The rhetoric of the rhapsode and the awe-inspiring gestures of the priest will come together in the body of the actor who provides access to strong emotion to the audience.

With the rise of Christianity, direct and personal access to divine truth is no longer celebrated as a source of knowledge and beauty, but rather denigrated as evidence of pride and presumption. These elements of the definition of enthusiasm will be used by many Protestant sects to describe the beliefs of other denominations. From the period of the Reformation, the Church does not further elaborate a discourse on enthusiasm.

²⁶ Diderot, *Additions à la Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 60-61.

²⁷ My thanks to Mathilde Bombart for bringing to my attention the work of Laurent Thirouin. See Thirouin's *L'aveuglement salutaire: Le réquisitoire contre le théâtre dans la France classique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997) for a discussion of the theatre as a source of contagion in the writings of the Jansenist Pierre Nicole in 1667. Thirouin argues for a line of thought from Augustine through Nicole to Rousseau in which the passions represented in the theatre are viewed as a source of moral illness (121-141). The widespread belief that the communicability of passion is a public danger points to the singularity of Diderot's vision and his borrowings from ancient sources.

Various writers²⁸ suggest that this lack of interest may be related to a number of factors, including Catholicism's openness to mysticism in general²⁹ and that, politically, the Church was better positioned to allow the Protestant sects to squabble among themselves rather than directly engage the issue of enthusiasm. In any case, the critique of enthusiasm generally derives from Protestant writers and is focused on other sectarians, as a way of controlling dissent, while their discourse on superstition is primarily directed against idolatry and the Roman Church.

By the mid-seventeenth century, a confluence of factors results in the expansion of the term enthusiasm and its critique. For example, in response to philosophical critiques of religion, Meric Casaubon, in his *Critique of Enthusiasm*, adds rhetorical enthusiasm and philosophical enthusiasm to the definition of enthusiasm as false claims of divine inspiration and enthusiasm becomes associated with various forms of free-thinking.³⁰ In this context, Descartes can be viewed as a new sort of enthusiast: his *lumière naturelle* being understood as a belief in a direct link to the divine (128-129). The philosophical critique of religion becomes a critique of philosophy as a form of specialized access to the truth without the aid of revelation. The term becomes an epithet to cover all forms of extremism or difference.

Michael Heyd notes that, by the late seventeenth century, the term enthusiasm undergoes a medicalization by both religious and secular writers. According to his

²⁸ See R.A.Knox, *Enthusiasm*; Michael Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable*; and Jan Goldstein, "Enthusiasm or Imagination? Eighteenth-Century Smear words in Comparative National Context" in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850*, eds. Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1998).

²⁹ The mysticism of the Catholic Church was, of course, another contentious issue of the Reformation, particularly regarding transubstantiation of the Eucharist. In France, *l'Affaire des placards* was motivated largely by this doctrinal disagreement (see Anthony Levi, *Renaissance and Reformation: the Intellectual Genesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 330-332, for a discussion of this incident).

³⁰ Heyd, "Be Sober and Reasonable": *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* 74-75.

analysis, religious critics joined medical writers in describing enthusiasm as a health problem because if enthusiasm was pathological then religious orthodoxy could be viewed as healthy and the sign of a well-balanced mind (8-10). This critique allowed for a naturalistic explanation for their point of view, which was not based on scripture but on science. In this way, clerical authors were able to utilize secular reasoning to support their religious point of view.

Another means by which the religious discourse on enthusiasm was modified to adapt to a changing cultural climate appeared in the emphasis on the importance of good works over correct beliefs in the sermons and essays of religious writers after the wars of religion in England in the 1640's-1650's. In 1671, Samuel Parker notes that "a peevish, ill-natured Christian is the greatest contradiction in the world,"³¹ while this idea is given a broader focus by Benjamin Whichcote (1703) when he writes "That must not be done in the defense of religion which is contrary to religion" (158). This change in emphasis from correct belief to correct action suggests an effort, by these writers, to distance themselves from religious extremism and find areas of agreement among moderate thinkers who feared a recurrence of sectarian violence. The accentuation of living in accordance with the values of Christian charity and humility is not only an attempt to down-play sectarian doctrinal differences, but also indicates a movement toward sociability which will become a dominating concept in philosophical circles of the eighteenth century.

Thus, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the discourse on enthusiasm by religious thinkers shows a noticeable shift away from sectarian in-fighting toward a view

³¹ Lawrence E. Klein, "Sociability, Solitude, and Enthusiasm" in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850*, eds. Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1998) 158.

that would define a different enemy while modernizing the weapons in their arsenal. The spirit of critique that would come to characterize eighteenth-century European thought is taken up by religious writers as they combat the presumption of philosophers who seek knowledge without the aid of Scripture and exhort their compatriots to take their place within the developing public sphere. Enthusiasm continues to be associated with false belief and dissent, but its primary site is now the philosophical enthusiasm that renders its proponents dangerous to society.³²

³² Later writers, particularly after the French Revolution, would pick up on the idea of philosophical enthusiasm as part of their critique of the Enlightenment. See Pocock's discussion of Edmund Burke's critique in Pocock's essay "Enthusiasm: the Anti-self of Enlightenment" in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe 1650-1850*, eds. Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1998). Pocock appears to share this view of an Enlightenment where "the mind, which in the first place set limits to its own powers in the hope of ending fanaticism, becomes the object of its own worship"(26). Burke's history of the French Revolution, which was influential in shaping nineteenth-century thought about the Enlightenment, also pervaded the twentieth century; see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

D. The Secular View of Enthusiasm

Secular thinkers during this same period were also taking up the issue of enthusiasm in relation to other intellectual currents of the Enlightenment. For secular writers, the discourse on enthusiasm was included in the critique of established authority in general and of religion in particular. It also provided a perspective on the importance of reason in religious matters, the notion of free will, issues of sociability and individualism and the development of political theory. For the most part, the secular view of enthusiasm was as negative as that of religious thinkers. This strain of the Enlightenment critique of enthusiasm begins with John Locke who added a chapter to his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to specifically deal with the issues raised by those who would oppose reason with inspiration. In "Of Enthusiasm", Locke supplements his critique of innate knowledge with a specific polemic against "divine direct assistance" in order to address the claims of those individual enthusiasts asserting direct access to the divine.³³ Locke maintains the sectarian division between true inspiration and false enthusiasm. He preserves true inspiration for early church fathers who were able to support their claims with material evidence, i.e. miracles, and relegates contemporary enthusiasts to those whose claims can only be reliably assessed through reason.

Voltaire's opinion of the enthusiast has been cited above and in his article "Enthousiasme" in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* he links the enthusiast not only to religiosity but to political intrigue, noting that "il n'est point de faction qui n'ait ses énérgumènes." Voltaire would, like Locke, have the claims of enthusiasts assessed through the lens of reason, but his belief that enthusiasm is akin to drunkenness makes

³³ Nicholas Jolley, "Locke on Faith and Reason" in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding,"* ed. Lex Newman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 446-448.

that possibility unlikely. Voltaire does allow that "l'enthousiasme raisonnable est le partage des grands poètes" and he is careful to clarify that "un poète dessine d'abord l'ordonnance de son tableau; la raison alors tient le crayon." But it is the history of the murder of Catholics by the Camisard prophets after the revocation of the *Edit de Nantes* in 1685 and the re-emergence of this same group as the French Prophets in London in the early 1700's, as well as the Jansenist *convulsionnaires* of 1733 that, for the most part, informs Voltaire's writings on enthusiasm.

In the *Spectator* (1711), Addison and Steele add their own twist to the received idea that enthusiasm is associated with false belief and superstition with pagan practice in noting that "an enthusiast in religion is like an obstinate clown, a superstitious man like an insipid courtier" (Klein 154-156). This epigram develops the caricature of the enthusiast as stubbornly holding on to his foolish, idiosyncratic beliefs and that of the superstitious person as unable to think independently. In this formulation both the under-socialized, isolated enthusiast and the over-socialized, other-dependent superstitious person are equally unable to function adequately in society, the one because of his passionate belief in his wrong-headed ideas and the other because of his lack of independent thought. Both types are examples of extremes on the continuum of sociability which makes them both unfit as citizens. The critique of religious belief has been taken into the public square, not in relation to the ultimate salvation of the believer's soul, but with regard to the ability of the believer to function in society.

In *Of Superstition and Enthusiasm* (1741), Hume also contrasts enthusiasm and superstition in relation to their effect on the body politic. Hume's analysis describes the enthusiast and the superstitious person as personality types whose particular

characteristics pose special problems for the development of the state. Superstition thus attracts those with a tendency toward "weakness, fear, melancholy [and] ignorance".

These are people whose fears lead them to grasp onto methods to influence the gods, such as ritual practice. Superstitious people would thus find a monarchy, whose leader was divine, to be congenial. The enthusiast, on the other hand, has a tendency toward hope, pride, presumption and imagination, as well as ignorance. Hume views the enthusiast's belief in a direct connection with the divine as an attempt to escape from the real world and associates this type with the rejection of established authority.³⁴ Hume's later writing suggests that he began to take an even more critical view of enthusiasts as compared to the superstitious, seeing the tractability of the superstitious as a positive political asset.³⁵ In this, Hume's ideas about the enthusiast are consistent with the religious critique of enthusiasts as those who are unable to control themselves and are, thus, ungovernable.

There is, however, another strand of the critique of enthusiasm which, while responding directly to contemporary events, changes the terms of the discourse to reflect both ancient sources and a modern sensibility. Shaftesbury's *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (1708) was written in response to the presence of the French Prophets in London (Heyd 211). The letter begins with a criticism of attempts to suppress the enthusiasts through harsh treatment. Citing the example of early Christianity, Shaftesbury suggests that persecution of believers leads to the growth of their movement and recommends instead that the enthusiasts be dealt with through mockery and laughter, as a means of minimizing their influence. While suggesting that these same weapons

³⁴ Knud Haakonssen, "The Structure of Hume's Political Theory" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993) 182-183.

³⁵ Éléonore Le Jallé, "Enthousiasme et superstition à partir de l'*Histoire d'Angleterre* de Hume," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 3 (2008) : 362-364.

might have been effectively used to thwart the rise of Christianity, Shaftesbury makes further connections between enthusiasm and religious belief. For Shaftesbury, enthusiasm springs from the same source as religion and, as such, it is natural to humanity. In effect, society may choose among enthusiasms but cannot obliterate it. Shaftesbury does not restrict the experience of enthusiasm to religious fanatics or inspired poets. As Stanley Grean notes, “enthusiasm is not restricted to great men or to special occasions; it belongs to common experience. It is whatever makes men seek something beyond mere animal satisfactions.”³⁶

All sound love and admiration is enthusiasm: “The transports of poets, the sublime of orators, the rapture of musicians, the high strains of the virtuosi – all mere enthusiasm! Even learning itself, the love of arts and curiosities, the spirit of travellers and adventurers, gallantry, war, heroism – all, all enthusiasm!”³⁷

All human striving can be viewed as enthusiastic and thus Shaftesbury’s rupture with his contemporaries’ views on enthusiasm becomes apparent. In fact, Shaftesbury considered enthusiasm to be crucial in motivating people toward “the manners and conduct of a truly social life.”³⁸

Heyd notes that in Shaftesbury's formulation "enthusiasm becomes an apprehension of the divine, rather than an action of the divine spirit itself" (221). Enthusiasm is the expression of the human wish to transcend the mortal world whether through religion, art or knowledge. For Shaftesbury, poetry itself arises from the imagining of a divine presence. Thus, all forms of enthusiasm warrant toleration and the validity of any claims to truth can only be subject to the strictures of reason. In his description of the process by

³⁶ Stanley Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1967) 31.

³⁷ Shaftesbury, *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* cited in Grean (32).

³⁸ Shaftesbury, *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* cited in Klein, “Sociability, Solitude and Enthusiasm” (172).

which these claims to truth can be assessed Shaftesbury's formulation is also singular. To the extent that religious enthusiasm is manifested publicly, Shaftesbury recommends the combination of toleration and derision noted above. However, throughout the discourse on enthusiasm, the enthusiast has also been reviled for valorizing the primacy of individual belief. The isolated clown described by Addison and Steele and the ungovernable free-thinker of Hume are examples of this trend. Shaftesbury also expresses concerns regarding the apparently independent thought of some religious enthusiasts, but in a manner which encourages self-reflection. In "Sociability, Solitude, and Enthusiasm," Klein notes that for Shaftesbury, the individual enthusiast is not isolated from society since no "recluse religionist, votary or hermit, was ever truly by himself" because he has, in fact, internalized a myriad of false religious beliefs which leave him with little capacity for independent thinking (174-176). The distortions of reason attributable to religion are, not surprisingly, internal as well as external and in both cases lead to an inability to make adequate judgments. Shaftesbury insists that to subject the claims of the enthusiast to reason requires a turn inward toward personal reflection and self-critique, to rid oneself of false beliefs and discover truths. Independent belief, a major element in the definition and condemnation of enthusiasm is thus transformed into the means of determining its validity through reason and self-reflection. The spirit of critique that defines the Enlightenment is turned toward self-evaluation and the development of critical judgment and presages Diderot's development of a process of aesthetic appraisal and civic engagement which will require enthusiastic appreciation, individual evaluation and public discussion.

D. Diderot's Recuperation of Enthusiasm

One of Diderot's first publications was a translation of Shaftesbury's *An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*, and it is he who can most clearly be seen to elaborate the importance Shaftesbury placed on enthusiasm's crucial role in creative activity and its relationship to the construction of a community based on considered truths rather than imposed fantasies. For Diderot enthusiasm is a natural human trait that allows us to experience what we might call the secular divine, that is, the apprehension of transcendence in our everyday lives: individually, in our personal responses to aesthetic works such as paintings; in relationships, in our experience of love and friendship; and communally, in our experience of shared activities like the theatre.

Jugez de la force d'un grand concours de spectateurs, par ce que vous savez vous-même de l'action des hommes les uns sur les autres, et de la communication des passions dans les émeutes populaires. Quarante à cinquante mille hommes ne se contiennent par décence. Et s'il arrivait à un grand personnage de la république de verser une larme, quel effet croyez-vous que sa douleur dût produire sur le reste des spectateurs? *(Entretiens 1157)*

The social contagion implicit in Luther's use of the term *schwärmer*, can be harnessed for the emotional education of the public. For Diderot, contagion becomes the basis for social cohesion. Diderot understood that religion provided an opportunity for people to be moved by a feeling of transcendence, of an emotional experience of timelessness and oneness, within a social framework that benefited both the individual and society. The difficulty lay in the fact that while religious experience could provide the individual with those moments of exaltation which were one of the joys of existence, contemporary religious institutions were a form of social control for governing bodies. His critique of religion was thus based not only on his materialist world-view but on his analysis of the coercion and authoritarianism associated with church and state that he believed inhibited

rational thought in the individual and the development of society as a whole. Diderot transforms this tension between the individual and society, between autonomy and sociability in his theorizing on the theatre. In Diderot's thought, the development of independent thinking requires a public forum which, while allowing a periodic, renewable source of communal experience, maintains the possibility of critical transformation; in the form of the authorial text, as well as written critiques, oral discussion and in the restaging of theatrical works. The seeds of this overarching plan are found in Diderot's development of his conception of the actor/priest who will preside over our "jours solennels".

The artist is consumed by enthusiasm during the creative process and it is only during this period, that the artist differs from the rest of us. Diderot begins to re-shape this conception of the artist as a being overwhelmed by the power of violent passions over the course of writing the *Salons* (1759-1781), but the extent and quality of the change is best exemplified in his description of the actor in *Paradoxe sur le comédien*.

Et pourquoi l'acteur différencierait-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 et 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.³⁹

The artist is no longer at the mercy of enthusiasm. It is, as noted above, the special quality of genius to moderate the passions. Diderot makes clear that "ce n'est pas l'homme violent qui est hors de lui-même qui dispose de nous; c'est un avantage réservé à

³⁹ Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1382.

l'homme qui se possède...la sensibilité n'est guère la qualité d'un grand génie. Remplissez la salle de spectacle de ces pleureurs-là, mais ne m'en placez aucun sur la scène" (1383). Enthusiasm remains an important characteristic of the human organism, but its value for the actor is in the ability to replicate the appearance of being carried away by emotion for the audience. For Jacques Chouillet, in *La Formation des idées esthétiques de Diderot*, enthusiasm becomes the "énergie de nature" and "le rôle du poète est de la produire, celui de l'acteur est de la traduire, celui du spectateur est de s'y abandonner."⁴⁰ While Chouillet develops this thesis from his analysis of the *Entretiens* and *De la poésie dramatique*, he views the *Paradoxe* as a break with the developmental continuity of Diderot's ideas regarding the "poétique de l'enthousiasme" (432). In defining his view of Diderot's aspirations for the theatre, Chouillet states that "ce qu'il demande au poète et à l'acteur, c'est de révéler le spectateur à lui-même, en libérant cette "énergie de nature" que l'état de civilisation laisse en sommeil au fond de chacun de nous" (429). I would suggest, however, that the *Paradoxe* does not represent a rupture with the earlier texts, but rather a further stage in the process of Diderot's refining his vision of the theatre's role in society. He proposes to liberate us not from our inability to appreciate nature's awesome beauty, but to re-awaken a sense of religious awe based on materialist principles. It is through these two ostensibly irreconcilable notions, the emotional experience of spiritual transcendence and materialism, that Diderot would provide humanity with guarantees against the extremes of fanaticism while endowing us with glimpses of immortality.

The historical ambivalence regarding the potential benefits and dangers of enthusiasm is finally resolved in Diderot's figure of the actor/priest or, as he states in the *Paradoxe*

⁴⁰ Jacques Chouillet, *La Formation des idées esthétiques de Diderot, 1745-1763* (Paris : Librairie Armand Colin, 1973) 429-430.

(1773), in "l'utile et belle profession de comédiens ou de prédicateurs laïques" (1401).⁴¹

The paradox that great actors remain cool observers of the heated emotions they portray identifies them as members of the artistic community who produce their works after the frenzy of enthusiasm has passed. In describing the theoretical developments between the *Entretiens* and *De la poésie dramatique*, Chouillet notes that "dans les *Entretiens*, la confusion de l'acteur et du personnage est complète...dans (*De la poésie dramatique*) Diderot sent que l'ivresse du comédien est passagère: '...l'instant de l'inspiration passé, il rentre et redevient ce qu'il était' - ce qui signifie au moins que le comédien et l'homme font deux" (433). However, in the *Paradoxe*, Mlle Clairon, at the height of her performance "est double: la petite Clairon et la grande Agrippine" (1382). In this way Diderot distinguishes the unruly talent of the *neveu* de Rameau from the genius of the true artist and expresses the limits of *sensibilité*. The *neveu* remains in the state described in the *Entretiens*, where the artist is subject to the fury of inspiration, as we see when "lui n'apercevait rien; il continuait, saisi d'une aliénation d'esprit, d'un enthousiasme si voisin de la folie, qu'il est incertain qu'il en revienne."⁴² In the *Paradoxe*, however, a great actor, such as Mlle Clairon, is able to gather the fruits of her *sensibilité* and become a medium through which others can experience the power of transcendent emotions.⁴³ And

⁴¹ In this chapter, I am limiting my analysis of the *Paradoxe* to the issue of enthusiasm. In Chapter Four, however, we will see, by analyzing the *Paradoxe* through the perspective of Diderot's political texts (*Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*; *Contributions à l'Histoire des deux Indes*; *Observations sur le Nakaz*; and *Plan d'une université*), how Diderot reinterprets the relationship among actors, authors and spectators as a new form of the social contract which places the theatre at the center of the body politic.

⁴² Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, *Œuvres de Diderot II* 677.

⁴³ Mme de Moni, the mystic Mother Superior of *La Religieuse* and a positive religious figure, enlists her zeal in the service of others but, unlike Mlle Clairon, is unable to control her talent consistently. As she uses her gift in praying with the young novitiates, Mme de Moni was unable to separate herself from the strong emotions she inspired.

On sortait chez elle avec un cœur ardent, la joie et l'extase étaient peintes sur le visage, on versait des larmes si douces ! C'était une impression qu'elle prenait elle-même, qu'elle gardait longtemps et qu'on conservait. (Diderot, *La Religieuse*, *Œuvres de Diderot II* 297)

Ultimately, her failure to take control of her power leads to its loss.

it is these others, the spectators, whose role is crucial for Diderot, not only in their effects on one another but on the power of the theatre itself.⁴⁴

Celui qui ne sent pas augmenter sa sensation par le grand nombre de ceux qui la partagent, a quelque vice secret... Mais, si le concours d'un grand nombre d'hommes devait ajouter à l'émotion du spectateur, quelle influence ne devait-il point avoir sur les auteurs, sur les acteurs?⁴⁵

Enthusiasm is thus a necessary component in the effectiveness of all forms of public communion: from our “fêtes publiques” to our “émeutes populaires.”⁴⁶ It is our shared passion that is the medium through which we experience our common humanity and which comes not from a spiritual realm to be interpreted and codified by religious and state authorities, but from our material biological make-up. Human emotions are communicated through a process not unlike the “magnetism” described by Plato, and they spring not from a divine source but from the nature of being human. Diderot resolves the seeming contradiction between the emotional experience of spiritual transcendence and materialism by situating enthusiasm solidly in the realm of the material. His description of the process by which the actor/priest channels the power of enthusiasm is only one element of his vision for the theatre. As Laurent Versini notes in his preface to Diderot's correspondence, Diderot “est un combattant plus qu'un militant. L'enthousiasme a été son arme.”⁴⁷ It is a weapon he wields in forging a new place for the theatre as a secular church. Diderot's translation of enthusiasm from a term of religious and philosophical disapprobation to the basis for a new conception of creativity and human connectedness

⁴⁴ See Chapter Three for a detailed analysis of the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique* as tutorials presented by Diderot to engage the audience to become spectator-critics, able to evaluate cultural productions through a process of collective experience, individual judgment and public discussion.

⁴⁵ Diderot, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* (1157).

⁴⁶ See the passage cited in the previous section (Christianity and Enthusiasm) from Diderot's *Additions à la Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (60-61).

⁴⁷ Laurent Versini, *Œuvres de Diderot V* Préface xvi.

parallels his transposition of liturgical performance into the foundation of a new form of theatre practice.

Chapter Two: From Liturgy to Theatre

A. Introduction

While Diderot's relationship to the discourse on enthusiasm from its classical roots into the eighteenth century informs his reconfiguration of that discourse, he is also part of a tradition linking the Catholic mass with theatrical practice and community-building that reaches back to the earliest liturgical exegeses. Diderot's views on enthusiasm certainly can be linked to his translation and study of Shaftesbury, but must also be considered in relation to the Catholic tradition in which he was raised and educated. As noted above, a number of critics note that the trajectory of enthusiasm was different in France than in the rest of Europe and they tend to attribute this difference to an affinity for mysticism within the Church hierarchy. I would suggest that the Church's affinity for the performative aspects of devotion and the theatrical nature of the liturgy also played a part in this difference and informed Diderot's plans for the reformation of the theatre. We shall see that this perspective underlies his distinctive views on representation, which were at odds with his contemporaries.

The long history of sacred and secular plays performed under the aegis of the Church and within church grounds is evidence of the historical connection between Catholicism and theatre, as mutually supporting foci of community life. But there is another, more trenchant link in the nature of the mass itself. The mass is, of course, a performance, a repeated representation of purportedly real events, with script, actors, costumes and props used in the service of enhancing ritual practice. Interestingly, it is precisely those elements of the liturgy that were most theatrical that were found to be most repugnant to Protestant critics while remaining a fruitful source of theological debate within

Catholicism and serving as the basis for bridging the gap between celebrant and congregation.

B. Liturgy and Performance

The Catholic liturgy has, from its inception, been a means of educating the community through the use of dramatic forms. Within the Church, while there have been internal debates about the amount of theatricality appropriate to the celebration of the mass, its theatrical nature has never been in doubt. Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-67), in his *Speculum Charitatis*, criticizes the overly theatrical movements of some members of the clergy complaining that "such was the histrionic way they moved their bodies, even their lips and shoulders...that you would think you were at the theater, not at church."⁴⁸ During the same period, however, in the *Gemma Animae* (ca. 1100), the churchman Honorius of Autun writes that

It is known that those who recited tragedies in the theaters represented to the people, by their gestures, the actions of conflicting forces. Even so, our tragedian [the celebrant] represents to the Christian people in the theater of the church, by his gestures, the struggle of Christ, and impresses upon them the victory of his redemption... By the liturgical silence he signifies Christ as a lamb without voice being led to the sacrifice. By the extension of his hands he delineates the stretching out of Christ on the cross. By the singing of the preface he expresses the cry of Christ hanging on the cross.⁴⁹

In "the theater of the church", the actor/priest allows the audience/congregation to experience their own redemptive victory through the representation of the trials of Christ. Similarly, Diderot will make a church of his theatre, where "dans ces jours solennels, on représentera une belle tragédie, qui apprenne aux hommes à redouter les passions; une bonne comédie, qui les instruisse de leurs devoirs, et qui leur en inspire le goût" (*Entretiens* 1147). But it is not only the didactic possibilities that link church liturgy and Diderot's vision: as Honorius' text makes clear, there exists profound expressive power in silence, gesture and non-speech verbalizations. While Diderot will elaborate the

⁴⁸ Dolan, "The Mass as Performance Text" 14.

⁴⁹ David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975) 9.

importance of pantomime and tableaux in both the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique*, as early as *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* he already alerts us to the fact that "il y a des gestes sublimes que toute l'éloquence oratoire ne rendra jamais."⁵⁰

One of these gestures, and its attendant silence, occurs in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

La somnambule Macbeth s'avance en silence et les yeux fermés sur la scène, imitant l'action d'une personne qui se lave les mains, comme si les siennes eussent encore été teintes du sang de son roi... Je ne sais rien de si pathétique en discours que le silence et le mouvement des mains de cette femme. (17)

This sensitivity to the emotional communicability of gesture and silence can be linked to Diderot's early training which not only encompassed the thought of ancient pagans and the devotional practices of contemporary Catholics, but incorporated the use of theatre as a pedagogical strategy. The Jesuit education that Diderot received, first in his hometown of Langres and later in Paris, incorporated the performance of plays as an aid in the perfection of rhetorical skills and as a method of teaching morality.⁵¹ Theatre performances included tragedies as well as comedies, and were noted for their creative use of the *entr'acte*. While in classical French theatre the *entr'acte* was typically a *divertissement* with little connection to the main theme of the play being performed, these school productions attempted to integrate the dances into the total work. For example, in 1685, Père Jouvancy writes that "si la tragédie a pour sujet la paix rétablie entre deux rois, on décrira par la danse les causes, les effets, les avantages de la paix."⁵² The Jesuit

⁵⁰ Diderot, *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 17.

⁵¹ See Arthur M. Wilson, *Diderot* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 25-27 and Marie Souviron, "La crise mystique du jeune Diderot" *Dix-huitième Siècle*, 1987; (19):315-316 for further discussion of Diderot's education in Paris. Both writers suggest that Diderot attended first the Jesuit Louis-le-Grand and later the Jansenist d'Harcourt. The influence of the *colleges jésuites* on other writers on the theatre is also noted by Pierre Frantz who, in *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre de XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1998), argues that Racine's increasing use of the "*spectaculaire*" in his tragedies is evidence of this influence (15). Frantz also credits Jesuit education with the increasing importance of the *tableau* in XVIIIe century France, for writers such as the Abbé Dubos, Antoine Houdar de La Motte and Charles Porée (20).

⁵² Pierre Peyronnet, "Le Théâtre d'éducation des Jésuites," *Dix-huitième Siècle* 1976 (8):116-117.

approach to drama was thus innovative as well as didactic and these innovations emphasized the non-verbal components of performance, supporting the power of gestural explication found in the mass itself.

During the several centuries that Catholic educators were making extensive use of the visual as a pedagogical tool, Protestant critique of the Roman Church centered on its imagery and rituals, with a call to reject these on the basis of their perceived links to idolatry and superstition. In this context, it is not surprising that Diderot should resonate to the possibilities of theatre as a means of experiencing and expressing the same feelings usually assigned to religious practices, in light of his being the son of a religious household and student of Jesuits intent on teaching the classics while instilling respect for liturgical devotions.⁵³ Nor, for that matter, is it surprising that the Protestant Rousseau should be suspicious of such a possibility. As Angelica Goodden notes, not only did Catholicism rely on images to support devotional practices but "for Protestants... certain truths could be grasped only through words for which no eidetic form was available; the principal organ of salvation was for them the ear."⁵⁴

Diderot, Enlightenment thinker and materialist though he was, never denigrated the human yearning for the spiritual. Diderot may have broken with the Catholic Church, but he never broke with his devout father and sister. William F. Edmiston suggests that "Diderot wanted to believe that he had inherited his father's secular virtues without the religious devotion, while his brother had embraced Christian piety without moral

⁵³ See Wilson, *Diderot* (15) for his description of Jesuit training.

⁵⁴ Angelica Goodden, "Une Peinture Parlante: The *Tableau* and the *Drame*," *French Studies* Oct 1984; 38 (4): 401-402.

principles."⁵⁵ In fact, his admiration for his pious father and his contempt for his priest brother parallels his appreciation of the power of religious feelings and his rejection of theology. Diderot never loses his responsiveness to the power of religious feeling or to the spectacle of public virtue.

[L'] enthousiasme de la multitude à la procession de la Fête-Dieu [est] l'enthousiasme qui me gagne moi-même quelquefois. Je n'ai jamais vu cette longue file de prêtres en habits sacerdotaux, ces jeunes acolytes vêtus de leurs albes blanches, ceints de leurs larges ceintures bleues, et jetant des fleurs devant le Saint Sacrement; cette foule qui les précède et qui les suit dans un silence religieux; tant d'hommes le front prosterné contre la terre; je n'ai jamais entendu ce chant grave et pathétique donné par les prêtres et répondu affectueusement par une infinité de voix d'hommes, de femmes, de jeunes filles et d'enfants, sans que mes entrailles ne s'en soient émues, n'en aient tressailli, et que les larmes ne m'en soient venues aux yeux.⁵⁶

He was acutely aware of his own emotional responsiveness to the rites and rituals of Catholicism and understood this to be a basic human capacity linked not only to the history of Christianity but to the functioning of the ancient Greek city-state.

J'aime une vieille cathédrale couverte de mousse, pleine de tombeaux et des ombres de nos aïeux. Ces voutes, noircies par les siècles, retentissent du même chant funèbre* qu'Athènes entendait sous Périclès; l'orgue, les cloches, la voix solennelle des prêtres, les tableaux des Raphaël, des Dominiquain, des Lesueur, suspendus aux murailles; les statues des Michel-Ange et des Coustou, placées à ces autels et sous ces portiques; ces fleurs, ces feux, ces parfums, cette pourpre et cette soie, ces vases d'argent et d'or, ces cérémonies pompeuses et mystiques; ces enfants vêtus de lin, et ces hommes de la solitude et du silence, qui me retracent les costumes et les mœurs de l'antiquité: tout ce spectacle porte à mon âme des émotions profondes.

* N.B. On croit que notre chant grégorien n'est autre chose que la mélodie des Grecs. *(Mercure, XI, II, 334-335)*⁵⁷

⁵⁵ William F. Edmiston, *Diderot and the Family: A Conflict of Nature and Law* (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1985) 35.

⁵⁶ Diderot, *Salon de 1765, Œuvres de Diderot IV* 419.

⁵⁷ This quotation is cited in Michel Delon's "Diderot et le renouveau catholique du Consulat: Un fragment de lettre oublié" *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie* avril 1987; (4): 54 from a letter written by Diderot but not published until after his death.

As evidenced here and elsewhere in Diderot's writings, human emotion provides the basis for religious feeling, public virtue and aesthetics, all of which are inextricably interwoven with his materialistic worldview. Spirituality is based in the emotions and is thus integral to the full expression of the human organism. For Diderot, the question is not whether spirituality should be expressed, but how its expression can be accomplished while preserving critical thinking and rational debate. Diderot will find his answer to this question in his reforms for the theatre, reforms which borrow from the long history of theatrical performances in monasteries and churches, as well as from the mass itself.

While it was the early Christian fathers who prevailed upon Roman emperors to ban all public performances, it was in the monasteries and churches that this ban was first breached. Though the Roman emperors had embraced Christianity by the late fourth century, it was not until the fifth century (after the death of a monk who was stoned by the spectators for attempting to stop a contest among gladiators) that all public acting was banned (Bevington 3-4). Performances continued by itinerant jongleurs and troubadours, but the traditions of classical drama were no longer followed or fully understood. In fact, when the tenth-century German nun Hrotsvitha wrote a series of quasi-dramas, the works were intended as "moral, grammatical, and philosophical" exercises, rather than as performance pieces.⁵⁸

Despite the break in the public performance of dramatic work, the devotional practices of the Catholic liturgy continued unabated. Congregants, during the mass, and the religious community in monasteries and convents, throughout the course of their daily

⁵⁸ Norma Kroll, "Power and Conflict in Medieval Ritual and Plays: The Re-invention of Drama," *Studies in Philology* 2005 Fall; 102 (4): 459-461.

observances, participated in rites involving performers and audience, with specialized speech, clothing and décor. But even more fundamentally, as noted by Thierry Revol, "cet univers religieux était particulièrement apte à créer des formes dramatiques. D'une part, la foi chrétienne se fonde sur l'idée de la création de l'homme à l'image de Dieu, et sur celle de l'incarnation de Dieu dans la figure humaine de Jésus. Et d'autre part, le culte chrétien ne se comprend que comme l'évocation symbolique et imagée des événements de la vie du Christ pendant sa vie terrestre."⁵⁹ In view of this perspective, it is not an exaggeration to say that while theatre has its historical roots in religious practice; Christianity has its historical basis in theatre. While Catholicism will continue this tradition, the philosophical basis for Protestantism will oppose such practice. The Catholic liturgical calendar consists of a year-long commemoration of Christ's birth, passion, crucifixion and resurrection, with particular emphasis placed on the re-enactment, during each mass, of the Last Supper. Christ's counsel to his apostles, to continue to perform these acts in his memory, is echoed in the words of Lysimond to Dorval.

[Il s'agit] de conserver la mémoire d'un événement qui nous touche, et le rendre comme il s'est passé... je me survivrais à moi-même, et j'irais converser ainsi, d'âge en âge, avec tous mes neveux... Dorval, penses-tu qu'un ouvrage qui leur transmettrait nos propres idées, nos vrais sentiments, les discours que nous avons tenus dans une des circonstances les plus importantes de notre vie, ne valût pas mieux que des portraits de famille, qui ne montrent de nous qu'un moment de notre visage?⁶⁰

Though he ultimately finds this model unsatisfactory,⁶¹ Diderot inaugurates his theatrical work with a meditation on the possibilities attendant upon such a memorializing event.

⁵⁹ Thierry Revol, *Représentations du sacré dans les textes dramatiques des XIe-XIIIe siècles en France* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999) 522-523.

⁶⁰ Diderot, *Le Fils naturel*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1082.

From Christianity's beginnings, the mass was celebrated before a group of spectators who, for the most part, would not have understood the text in its original Greek, nor in its Latin translation from the third century (Dolan, 14). Thus, it is the non-verbal aspects of the ritual which would have been the source of meaning for the congregation throughout most of Church history. As Diderot notes in his *Encyclopédie* article "Cérémonies", "les représentations sensibles, de quelque nature qu'elles soient, ont une force prodigieuse sur l'imagination du commun des hommes: jamais l'éloquence d'Antoine n'eût fait ce que fit la robe de César."⁶² He ends the article with a quote from Pope Gregory who, during his papacy (590-604CE), made changes to the liturgy to make it more accessible to congregants: *Quod litteratis est scripture, hoc idiotis proestat picture* (Images are to the illiterate what writing is to the literate). Diderot's recognition of the importance of the iconography of Catholicism can also be seen in his theories on the development of artistic production. He situates the birth of art in the temple, with particular emphasis placed on the images and representations found there. According to Diderot, when sculptors attempted to create statues of the gods based on poetic descriptions, they had no choice but to copy from models of real people, which they might choose and recombine according to their various talents. For Diderot, the significant moment comes later, after the creation of the work of art.

C'est que, quand, au sortir du temple, le peuple venait à reconnaître ces qualités dans quelques individus, il en était bien autrement touché. La femme avait fourni ses pieds à Thétis, sa gorge à Vénus; la déesse les lui rendait, mais les lui rendait sanctifiés, divinisés. L'homme avait fourni à Apollon ses épaules, sa poitrine à

⁶¹ The relationship between the play and the *Entretiens* will be discussed in Chapter Three. For now, I would note that the reasons for Diderot's rejection of this model are based on his larger project for the theatre as a source of a renewable and revisable social contract.

⁶² Diderot, "Cérémonies," *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2011 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

Neptune, ses flancs nerveux à Mars, sa tête sublime à Jupiter, ses fesses à Ganymède; mais Apollon, Neptune, Mars, Jupiter et Ganymède les lui rendaient sanctifiés, divinisés.⁶³

It is their own human attributes that are returned to them sanctified through the work of art. Rather than viewing art as evidence of either the decadence of court society or the idolatry of superstition, Diderot recuperates artistic imagery as humanity's creative potential and the mimetic capacity is exalted as evidence of human possibility rather than inadequacy.⁶⁴ Thus Diderot sees, in the iconography of the temple and, by extension, of the Church, a glorification of the human rather than the divine.

The history of the mass and religious plays comprises a series of attempts within the Church to maintain its position as keeper of holy mysteries while simultaneously using various means to engage, and thereby increase, its membership. Amalarius of Metz (775-850 CE) was among those Church leaders who attempted to capitalize on the inherent theatricality of the mass in an attempt to "give immediacy to religious worship" (Bevington 4-5) and to clarify the gestural meaning of the celebrant's actions in order to more fully engage the laity. Amalarius provided an allegorical reading of the mass because "the sacraments ought to have largely the appearance of these things which are sacraments. For that reason, as bread and drink are like the body of Christ, so may the priest be like Christ. Thus the sacrifice of the priest at the altar is, as it were, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross."⁶⁵ Amalarius and other commentators were responsible for the many textual additions to the liturgy which developed within monasteries during the ninth and tenth centuries and attempted to bridge the illiteracy of the congregants through

⁶³ Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture pour faire suite au Salon de 1765*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 491.

⁶⁴ I am indebted to James Creech's analysis of the development of artistic representation in the temple in *Diderot: Thresholds of Representation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986). This process can be understood to obtain in Diderot's theatre as well as in the plastic arts.

⁶⁵ Cited in Kroll (458).

the power of non-verbal action and vernacular speech. David Bevington describes an example of one of these textual and dramatic additions made by Amalarius.

Bishop Amalarius of Metz's service for the consecration of a church made typological use of the church building in such a way as to suggest the harrowing of hell. The bishop assumed the role of Christ, triumphantly battering down the gates of hell (in order to signify the purifying of the church), while a member of the clergy spoke from within as a devil attempting to resist this divine invasion. (5-6)

These additions would become the basis for the first liturgical plays, which became integral parts of the Church calendar.

By the late tenth century, these elaborations were most frequently found during Easter celebrations, which took place over the course of Holy Week and presented numerous opportunities for demonstrating the meaning of the mass and of increasing the participation of other members of the clergy as well as the congregation. While these embellishments will eventually form the basis of the Passion Plays and Corpus Christi cycles of the late middle ages, they began as intimate interactions between celebrants and congregants during the celebration of the mass. One of the earliest examples of this process of elaboration is found in the trope of the *Quem queritis* (*Quem queritis in sepulchro, o Christicole?: Whom do you seek in the sepulcher, O followers of Christ?*).⁶⁶ This moment of the liturgy marks the point where humanity presumably learns of the resurrection of Christ and it is both portentous and intimate, in that it is the culmination of the Holy Week services and yet occurs between one angel and three women. The *Quem queritis* portrays what might appear to us as a naturally dramatic

⁶⁶ The earliest example of this trope dates from the liturgy of St. Martial, Limoges, a discussion of which can be found in Bevington, who engages in a discussion of the dating of the manuscript; in Kroll, who discusses the *Quem queritis* in the context of the changes in liturgical drama from the Augustinian tradition to that of Pierre Abélard; and in Campbell (see below), who discusses the textual and musical aspects of the trope.

interlude. The angel asks the three Marys whom they are seeking, and when they reply that they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the angel replies *Non est hic* (He is not here), reminding them that the prophecy has been fulfilled and urging them to announce the resurrection to others. While the query and response pattern of the passage lends itself quite easily to the idea that it be vocalized by two sets of chanters, Thomas Campbell brings our attention to the moment of the *Non est hic*.

Campbell notes that several factors point to the importance of this moment in the *Quem queritis*: the words are the beginning of the angel's response to the three Marys and the music also rises at that moment. In addition, the iconography of the period invariably shows the three Marys before the empty tomb, as the angel gestures toward the sepulcher. According to Campbell, the musical and artistic versions of this liturgical moment are evidence of the true source of its dramatic potential as "the Marys...are coming to the tomb with the expectation of finding Christ; but he is not there: that is the central reversal, the inherent dramatic peripetea, of the Easter liturgy."⁶⁷ For Campbell, it is the implied gesture of the angel that provides the drama in the text and creates an opportunity to explain the meaning of the liturgy to a congregation that would have had only rudimentary understanding of the actual words of the text. The power of the "liturgical silence", noted by Honorius of Autun (see above), is extrapolated from the celebration of the mass to those early dramatic works in the attempt to further educate the public.

As the *Quem queritis* (or *Visitatio*) became more developed over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this emphasis on gesture, on *showing* events remained. One version of the *Visitatio* includes the disciples John and Peter who display the empty

⁶⁷ Thomas P. Campbell, "Liturgical Drama and Community Discourse" in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, eds. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005) 569-570.

shroud to the Marys and describes a race of John and Peter to the sepulcher, performed as a pantomime. A twelfth-century version includes the congregation singing in the vernacular, as they narrate the race to the sepulcher. Another, thirteenth-century, version develops Mary Magdalene's confusion of the risen Christ with a gardener, and she is finally shown her mistake, as Christ makes himself known to her (Bevington 32). In all of these elaborations, the additions include opportunities for the congregation to be included as participants in the liturgy; as audience to gestural displays of meaning, as narrators of the action or as actors playing minor roles. These developments suggest an attempt to minimize the distance between celebrant and congregant. These changes are interpreted by Norma Kroll as evidence, as well, of the new humanism that developed in the twelfth century as a result of the influence of Pierre Abélard's reinterpretation of the Augustinian tradition of divine grace to allow for the possibility of free will. According to Kroll, this emergent humanism "led to literary interpretations of the liturgy" (467) which resulted in liturgical plays, such as Hilarius' Fleury Easter Visit to the Sepulcher and his Christmas Nativity which emphasize Christ's human nature rather than his divine nature (473-476).

This process parallels the struggle, in the eighteenth century, to change the theatre from seventeenth-century models which reify the distance of the audience from gods and kings, to a model which would privilege life as it is lived by the majority of people. The reformation of theatrical practice advanced by Enlightenment thinkers, particularly by Diderot, echoes the humanist clergy of the twelfth century who attempted to manipulate ritual practice in such a way as to glorify Christ's humanity over his divinity in its insistence on the value of quotidian over the epic. This theatre emphasized the experience of the spectator's identification with the actors on the stage, not as models of

an unrealizable ideal, but as an experience of transcendent emotional and communal experience.

The shift in liturgical practice influenced by Abélard's new humanism, in addition to the use of gesture and pantomime to help close the distance (both figurative and literal) between the celebrant and the congregation and to enhance the laity's emotional understanding of the liturgy would continue into the development of community-based and -organized Corpus Christi cycles in England and Passion plays in France. From the fourteenth century well into the sixteenth century, while liturgical plays continued to be performed as part of church services, the development of large-scale, community-based dramatic performances based on the liturgy and, more broadly, on events from the bible, was simultaneously occurring throughout Europe. The Corpus Christi plays, presented in northern English towns through a partnership of craft guilds and ecclesiastical authorities and the Passion plays presented by La Confrérie de la Passion at the Église de la Trinité in Paris, with the licensed approval of the Parlement, are the best-known and best-documented of these dramas.

Bevington notes that previous scholarship has presented the development of the Corpus Christi cycles as evidence of increasing secularization during the period, as church drama was gradually removed from religious auspices to the control of lay authority. He disputes this notion, however, suggesting instead that the performances of these religious plays beyond church grounds indicate the continuing integration of the church in the life of civil society (228-234). In fact, he notes that the cycles, first performed in the late fourteenth century, did not come to a gradual end, as previously theorized, as a result of Renaissance values which would have deemed the plays

"outmoded or ridiculous". Rather, the cycles came to a more abrupt end at the end of the sixteenth century "by the hostility of the reformed English Church toward what it viewed as idolatrous art" (241). As argued above, the expansion of liturgical drama and the development of community-based theatre with biblical subjects can be viewed as the incorporation of humanist values by the Catholic Church, in its attempts to maintain its central position in civic life and draw congregants into the fold by exploiting the power of dramatic performance to enhance their emotional connection to the liturgy.

A similar pattern can be discerned in the history of La Confrérie de la Passion. This lay group of merchants and artisans had begun to perform religious and secular plays in the late fourteenth century. Their mission included the proviso that profits from the plays would serve the Church and they were permitted to perform at the Église de la Trinité. The Confrérie obtained its royal *privilège* through the Parlement in 1402, which gave it sole rights for all theatrical productions in Paris. The Confrérie sought to renew its *privilège* at the outset of each new reign and each Parlement had agreed to this until 1546, when the *privilège* was granted with the condition that no religious plays would be performed. The Confrérie were forbidden "to play the Passion of Our Lord and any other sacred mysteries on pain of an arbitrary fine." They were, however, permitted "to perform other secular, honest and decent mysteries provided that there is in them no offence or insult to anyone."⁶⁸ The plays were not halted in Paris at the behest of the

⁶⁸ William D. Howarth, *French theatre in the neo-classical era, 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 11-12.

Church, but rather through the civil authorities who feared public disturbances related to religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants.⁶⁹

The Passion plays, like the Corpus Christi plays, involved the community as participants in the drama of Christ's passion. In this way, the plays emphasize Christ's human nature over his divinity and greatly enhance the identification of the congregants with the pain and suffering of Christ. The paradox, of course, is that the sensory and emotional knowledge of suffering is wedded to aesthetic pleasure. In her study, Véronique Dominguez elaborates the humanism implicit in the performance of these dramas and the potential danger this humanism holds for the ecclesiastical authorities who have sanctioned them. The contradiction of experiencing the full power of the religious meaning of the Passion while simultaneously experiencing the power of a spectacle produced, not only by the clergy within the confines of liturgical devotions, but by one's neighbors in a civic performance, destabilizes the lessons potentially learned.⁷⁰ Do these performances ultimately glorify God or humanity? The history of the Passion plays and the development of liturgical drama throughout the middle ages and into the sixteenth century suggest that Church authorities were willing to take the risk implicit in this question, as they continued to utilize the potency of dramatic forms to teach congregants religious lessons and inform religious experience. In fact, the more clearly defined separation of church and theatre did not develop from dissatisfaction among the clergy with the value of liturgical performance, but rather from the gradual proliferation of dramatic forms outside the physical space of the church, such as passion plays and

⁶⁹ The members of the Confrérie, stripped of their ability to perform religious plays, were no longer able to perform at the Église de la Trinité. It is their construction of a stage at the Hôtel de Bourgogne (1548) that would create the first theatre in Paris.

⁷⁰ Véronique Dominguez, *La scène et la Croix: Le jeu de l'acteur dans les Passions dramatiques françaises (XIVe-XVIe siècles)* (Turnhout, Belgique: Brepols, 2007) 293-298.

mystery plays, and the consolidation of Church doctrine and liturgical exegeses during the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The Council's attempt to bring order and consistency within the Church eventually led to the adoption of the Tridentine Mass (1570), which effectively limited the possibilities for further liturgical innovation.⁷¹

The argument cited earlier, which suggests that the different trajectory taken by the discourse on enthusiasm in France, when compared to England and Germany, is linked to the history of religious struggle is supported here, not by reference to the Church's affinity to mysticism, but rather to the Church's acknowledgment of the power and utility of dramatic performance in the teaching of religious lessons and in the experiencing of religious feelings. The tendency toward *schwärmerei*, feared and denigrated by Luther, is encouraged within the confines of liturgical devotions and dramas. By the seventeenth century, Molière, in the epigraph to this work, can confidently assume that his readers will take the connection between church and theatre for granted, as denoting spaces where "les plus importants mystères de notre foi" are represented and understood. The question whether dramatic performances ultimately glorify God or humanity is, of course, further complicated by the consolidation of religious and political power during this period in the body of Louis XIV, since dramatic performances and religious rituals were staged to glorify he who was "le créateur de la nation, le père du peuple, image de Dieu et soleil dont le rayonnement infini délimite les formes de la société."⁷² The commingling of church, state and art is in evidence throughout a century where Church

⁷¹ See Robert Bireley's "Redefining Catholicism: Trent and Beyond (145-161) and Simon Ditchfield's "Tridentine Worship and the Cult of Saints" (201-224) in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Reform and Expansion 1500-1600*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) for their discussions of the ramifications of the Council of Trent.

⁷² Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Roi-machine: spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1981) 150.

fathers demand the censorship of *Tartuffe* and Racine's final dramatic output takes the form of two "pièces pieuses" performed in a girls' religious academy.⁷³ Diderot will reactivate the question of whether dramatic representation ultimately glorifies God or humanity and translate its apparent contradiction into the basis for his reform of the theatre and his notions of aesthetics and the functioning of the body politic. It is important to note that Diderot, unlike many of his contemporaries, does not question the validity of representation itself.

⁷³ In Chapter Three we will explore how the nascent republic of letters in the seventeenth century, beginning with the *querelle du Cid*, leads to the development of a critical public in the eighteenth.

C. The Problem of Representation

Diderot's relationship to representation differed from many of his contemporaries and, I would argue, that difference derives from the impact of his rejected faith as well as his understanding of human nature. It is thus useful to consider the ways in which Diderot answered the critics of his time regarding the centrality of theatre to the body politic. Eighteenth-century France witnessed a surge in theatre-going and an explosion of theatrical forms, including Voltaire's attempts to reinvigorate classical tragedy through the play of ideas, Marivaux's transformation of comedy to include *l'amour*, operas, plays that followed seventeenth-century models and those works meant for salon productions, as well as the *parades* and *comédies* created for the *Théâtre de la foire*. At the same time, considerable suspicion regarding the value of theatre remained. Critique arose not only from the expected sources of authority, as Crown and Church sought to control the message of this ever-expanding medium, but by those intimately connected to the theatre, as indicated, for example, by the critiques of the acting profession put forth by Riccoboni and Rousseau. Luigi Riccoboni, actor-manager of the Comédie Italienne, shared Rousseau's belief that the actor was engaged in an activity that was inherently immoral and could only be partially integrated into society through a system of coercive laws.⁷⁴ But Rousseau's judgment went further than that of Riccoboni in that he sought to undermine the philosophical basis of drama itself, and his critique of theatrical representation raised significant questions that require response. For Rousseau, all representation is inherently problematic in that it is false and deceptive and he elaborates his concerns in both the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750) and *Discours sur*

⁷⁴ These critiques are detailed and compared to Diderot's views on actors and their profession in Chapter Four.

l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes (1755), as well as in his *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758). This concern with artifice does not, of course, begin with Rousseau. Earlier in the century, Marivaux raises the problem of representation both for the theatre and for the larger society.

In *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley*, David Marshall points to the confluence of concern regarding the moral value to both the reader of novels and the spectator of plays, found in the *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719) by the abbé Du Bos and in the “Avis du lecteur” introducing Marivaux’s first novel, *Les Aventures de *** ou les Effets surprenants de la sympathie* (1713), as indicating contemporary struggles to ground the pleasure of artistic experience in its capacity to “move and to touch [the reader/holder]: *émouvoir*, *attendrir*, and *toucher*.”⁷⁵ But both authors are aware of the paradox that one seeks to evoke real sympathetic emotions from the reader/spectator through the use of artifice, whether by means of the description of the emotions of fictional characters or via the performance of passionate exchanges among actors. For Marivaux the problem of artifice continues to be a thread throughout his work, in his *journaux* and in his plays.

When the Spectator of *Le Spectateur français* (1721-1724), relates his early disillusionment after observing his beloved practicing what he had previously thought were her naturally charming mannerisms⁷⁶ or when the Philosophe of *L'Indigent philosophe* (1727), admires himself before a mirror,⁷⁷ Marivaux confronts the problem of representation in society: we are always at risk of deceiving others or ourselves,

⁷⁵ David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 14.

⁷⁶ Marivaux, *Le Spectateur français, Journaux et Œuvres diverses*, eds. Frédéric Deloffre et Michel Gilot (Paris: Garnier, 2001) 117-118.

⁷⁷ Marivaux, *L'Indigent philosophe, Journaux et Œuvres diverses* 280-281.

consciously or unconsciously. As a playwright of numerous comedies for the *Comédie italienne* and the *Comédie française*, he frequently employed the masks and traditional costumes of the *commedia dell'arte* as if to make explicit the artifice at the heart of theatre and social relations, whether between lovers (*La Double Inconstance*, 1723; *Les Fausses Confidences*, 1737) or between masters and servants (*L'Isle des esclaves* 1725).⁷⁸ In the last play that he wrote, *Les Acteurs de bonne foi*, published in 1757 but not performed during his lifetime, Marivaux further complicates the relationship between life and theatre, between the representation of self in everyday life and the actor's representation of a character on the stage. The work reveals a number of plays within plays, as real actors represent characters who are non-actors pretending to be actors in a play being presented not as a play but as a slice of real life. The comic confusions and misunderstandings attendant upon this situation where the characters “font semblant de faire semblant”⁷⁹ lead to apparently genuine heartbreak as the play undermines the possibility that *des acteurs de bonne foi* could exist.

While Marivaux raises the problem of artifice and representation in society and in the theatre, Rousseau presents the issue as residing in the foundation of civilization itself. In the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750), Rousseau first describes what will become a theme throughout his work, the problem of the alienating effects of socialization on the natural characteristics of human beings. In the natural state “[l]a nature humaine, au fond, n'était pas meilleure; mais les hommes trouvaient leur sécurité dans la facilité de se pénétrer réciproquement” and this natural advantage of being

⁷⁸ Marivaux, *La Double Inconstance*, ed. Françoise Rubellin (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2000) ; *Les Fausses Confidences*, ed. Michel Gilot (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1997) ; *L'Isle des esclaves*, ed. Henri Coulet (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

⁷⁹ Marivaux, *Les Acteurs de Bonne foi, La Dispute, L'Épreuve*, ed. Jean Goldzink (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1991) 263.

without pretense, which years of civilization has overlaid with artifice, “leur épargnait bien les vices.”⁸⁰ In the second discourse, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), Rousseau famously conflates the earliest stages of sociability with the creation of inauthenticity as a result of a series of environmental “accidents” that “rend un être méchant en le rendant sociable.”⁸¹ The very existence of others with whom we compare ourselves, leads to our attempts to hide from one another, so that we can no longer trust that we can penetrate each other’s motivations and intentions. If, for Rousseau, civilization requires that humanity becomes alienated from itself, then theatre is the most extreme example of that alienation.⁸²

Here is one of the several arguments that Rousseau makes against theatre that is based on a premise diametrically opposed to the equivalent premise for Diderot. Where Rousseau sees a solitary human being, Diderot sees a social being. For Rousseau “dès l’instant qu’un homme eut besoin du secours d’un autre...l’égalité disparut... [et] la misère germer et croître” (*Second Discourse* 101). Diderot, however, never posits a time where humans lived alone in a solitary virtuous state; rather “il n’y a que le méchant qui soit seul...l’homme de bien est dans la société.”⁸³ People do not become human except through their interactions with other human beings. In fact, Diderot’s commitment to the social foundation of humanity is such that he makes no stark distinction between nature

⁸⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, ed. François Bouchardy (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) 32.

⁸¹ Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi des hommes*, ed. Jean Starobinski (Paris: Gallimard, 1969) 92.

⁸² Jean Starobinski, in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau : La transparence et l’obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), challenges Rousseau’s contention in the *Lettre à d’Alembert sur les spectacles*, that we are isolated in the theatre. Rather, he notes that in the theatre “je sais que d’autres regards sont fixés sur la scène, et que je les rejoins dans l’action que nous regardons tous. C’est l’exemple même d’une communion médiante” (120). It is this mediated communal experience that has no value for Rousseau, while it remains the basis of Diderot’s vision for a secular church.

⁸³ Diderot, *Le Fils naturel*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1113. This statement is, of course, considered to have been directed by Diderot toward Rousseau.

and culture; not only because culture is the natural state of humanity, but because both are bound by the same processes that govern all aspects of the world. As Wilda Anderson notes in *Diderot's Dream*, the fact of representation is, in itself, not problematic for Diderot. For him, every artistic expression is not a shadowy, inaccurate, deceptive representation of something else; rather, it expresses the truth of the artist's particular experience and understanding. When the painter, for example, paints an object from memory or from life, the painting is not an imitation of that object, rather it "is [the painter's] reading experience that is expressed on the canvas (and not represented – his act of painting *is* his act of reading)." ⁸⁴ What the artists produce, then, are true depictions of their particular visions, not bad copies of the world. Diderot's relationship to representation differs from many of his contemporaries, notably Rousseau, in that he accepts the Aristotelian notion that imitation is integral to the nature of human beings and is to be celebrated rather than viewed with suspicion. ⁸⁵ Imitation is the currency through which we learn and through which we communicate in our inherently social universe. ⁸⁶

Jean Starobinski, in *La transparence et l'obstacle*, emphasizes that Rousseau rejects all forms of mediation. Rousseau seeks in theatre, as in society, a spectacle in which nothing is represented. ⁸⁷ The virtue of the sex-segregated *cercles* of Geneva and the warm memory of a spontaneous dance among soldiers found in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* lie in their expression of unmediated experience, where the men can express their natural predilections without the presence of women in the first instance and become the authors

⁸⁴ Anderson, *Diderot's Dream* 103.

⁸⁵ As noted in Chapter One, Diderot also shares Aristotle's belief in the educative value of the arts.

⁸⁶ In *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley*, Marshall also presents the work of Adam Smith, as another eighteenth-century writer who grapples with the notion of representation in everyday life. As Marshall notes, however, Smith presents the theatricality of human interactions as descriptive rather than prescriptive or pejorative (4-5).

⁸⁷ Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle* 120.

of their own spectacle in the second. Spontaneity and immediacy of expression are highly valued as aspects of humanity's natural goodness. Here we can discern a parallel between Rousseau and Diderot in the value both place on the passions and on emotional expressivity. The joyful union Rousseau describes among the drunken revelers of the *Lettre* is not unlike the enthusiastic transports of Diderot's theatre-goers. However, Rousseau appears to wish to separate the passions from intellectual analysis. While, as Starobinski notes, Rousseau does not critique intuition or spontaneous insight (58), he does disparage education precisely because it "orne notre esprit et corrompt notre jugement" (*Discours sur les sciences* 48) and remarks that the ancient Romans "s'étaient contentés de pratiquer la vertu; tout fut perdu quand ils commencèrent à l'étudier" (38). In the second discourse, Rousseau leaves some room for reflection and the use of reason in the development of human perfectibility but suggests that it is this same "faculté distinctive" which is responsible for "tous les malheurs de l'homme" (72). This idea becomes, by the time of the *Dialogues*, a belief that reflection is "le fondement du mal" (Starobinski 245-249).

By contrast, Diderot, while exalting the feelings of transcendence engendered by passionate feelings, does not substitute intuition for judgment. Just as Moi tells Dorval in the *Entretiens* that he can only discuss the play he has just seen after he has had a chance to meditate on his emotional reactions and Socrates abjures his friends to use their philosophy to make sense of their feelings in *De la poésie dramatique*,⁸⁸ Diderot insists that only through analysis and public discussion can the emotions be used to inform one's behavior and beliefs. As we will see, in his political writing Diderot also seeks to use

⁸⁸ These particular examples are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, where I develop the importance of reflection and public discourse to Diderot's larger vision of the theatre.

education and intellectual critique to protect the body politic from having their emotional sensibilities co-opted and manipulated by external authorities. The eighteenth-century concern regarding the “unreliability of representation”⁸⁹ is answered by Diderot through his elaboration, in both his theatrical writings and his political works, of the theatrical experience as one that involves not only spectatorship, but communally shared emotional experiences and critical response. At the most basic level, Diderot is not primarily concerned with the reliability of artistic expression. For Diderot, as we shall see, artistic production is meant to create myriad responses in each individual which can then be meditated upon in private and discussed in public. The fact that our emotional responses to artistic productions are complicated is a source of possibility in Diderot’s view. The very profusion of possible results is one way that the power of the spectacles created by Church and Crown is undermined.

Despite the value he placed on the ideal of immediate experience, Rousseau possessed deep misgivings toward the unmediated collective expressiveness he seems to support in his description of the *cercles* and the spontaneous village dance mentioned earlier. His distrust of reason to control the passions appears to lead him to a position where external control becomes the sole means of undercutting the potential instability of unmediated emotion. *Le Devin du village*,⁹⁰ Rousseau’s hugely successful opera written after the first *Discours* but before the second *Discours* and the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, ends with a public celebration of the love between a young couple which shares the sense of spontaneity and simple pleasures promoted in the later texts. However, it is the village *Devin* who, in fact, orchestrates the relationship between the two lovers and presides over the feast.

⁸⁹ Creech, *Diderot: Thresholds of Representation* 167.

⁹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Le Devin du village*, *Œuvres complètes II*, eds. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris : Gallimard, 1964).

This tendency to impose external constraints on the public expression of emotion can be seen as well in Rousseau's description of the dance of the soldiers in the *Lettre*, where it is the women who come to lead their happily exhausted men back to their homes.⁹¹

The spontaneous dance is, however, an example of a largely unmediated social spectacle and it is noteworthy that it is relegated to a footnote and presented as Rousseau's wistful memory of a childhood experience. It is, rather, "les bals entre de jeunes personnes à marier"⁹² that are described in careful detail, at the end of the *Lettre*, as exemplars of public festivals that would benefit society. As Marshall notes, unmediated public spectacle is rejected by Rousseau in favor of highly controlled and mediated social events, which are, in fact, "scenes of rigorously enforced theatricality" (160-162).⁹³ Thus, Rousseau appears to acknowledge the impossibility of excising theatre from the body politic as he recognizes, while deploring, the theatricality of everyday life. The marriage balls are a form of public theatre employed to create social cohesion and moral suasion, which will direct the unruly passions of unmediated emotional expression and protect the populace from the depravity of professional actors. Rousseau's argument then is not to support the value of spontaneous public festivals or to deny the possibility of theatre having a positive influence on society, but to bemoan the impossibility of controlling the effects of both without external controls.

I would suggest that the opposition between Rousseau and Diderot regarding the theatre is less about the problem of representation, than about who controls that

⁹¹ The predilection for external controls to contain strong emotion is also suggested in *Du Contrat social*, discussed in Chapter Four, where Rousseau recommends exile and/or death for those who refuse to accept a civil religion.

⁹² Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles*, ed. Marc Buffat (Paris: Flammarion, 2003) 184.

⁹³ Patrick Coleman, in *Rousseau's Political Imagination: Rule and Representation in 'Lettre à d'Alembert'* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1984), suggests another arena in which Rousseau seeks to employ theatricality. Coleman argues that by creating a sort of "spectacle" of Geneva's wealth and power, Rousseau hopes to impress both citizens and outsiders, thus enhancing civic spirit while protecting the republic (30-34).

representation. Rousseau hopes that magistrates would be present at the marriage balls because “[I]eur présence... maintient tout le monde dans le respect qu’on doit porter aux lois, aux mœurs, à la décence, même au sein de la joie et du plaisir” (*Lettre à d’Alembert* 186). The balls would then integrate the three instruments that Rousseau considers to be effective in acting upon the manners and morals (*les mœurs*) of a people: “la force des lois, l’empire de l’opinion, et l’attrait du plaisir” (70). The life portrayed at Clarens in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*⁹⁴ is one where unruly emotions have been domesticated and the community lives in idyllic renunciation of passion. Clarens is, of course, controlled by the benevolent Wolmar who comes to represent both the power of the law and of public opinion to control the potentially disruptive effects of social existence. As Starobinski states in his analysis of Julie’s death at the end of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, her death represents a choice that Rousseau sets up “entre l’absolu de la communauté et l’absolu du salut personnel” and between which “il a opté pour le second” (148). Even the most carefully planned society is not capable of restraining the power of the passions. For Rousseau, there is no possibility of individual transcendence within even a well-regulated collective; salvation can be attained only by an individual since society as such remains damned. Given his understanding of the social nature of humanity Diderot does not set the individual in opposition to the group. Contrary to Rousseau’s vision of a society where all the power to control manners and morals rests in a single benevolent authority, Diderot envisions a theatre that maintains a critical distance from governmental

⁹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse, Œuvres complètes II*, eds. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

authority.⁹⁵ Additionally for Diderot, even the “bad citizen” is to be allowed liberty.⁹⁶ And that liberty includes the expression of strong emotion.

Rousseau’s valorization of the simple, sustained pleasures found at Clarens stands in contrast to Diderot’s search for the passionate renewal of excitement that can be found in the theatre.⁹⁷ At no point in his writings does Diderot opt for moderation and stasis, but he does seek a means to inoculate the public from the arbitrary demands of church and state. Diderot approaches the theatre from the perspective of the community and its ability to support both individual and collective feelings of transcendence. The value Rousseau places on moderation and stasis is consistent with his understanding of the relationship between nature and civilization, in the same way that Diderot’s interest in change and movement is supported by his scientific theories regarding the ever-changing nature of the universe.⁹⁸ In the two *Discours*, Rousseau makes clear his belief that all change from humanity’s origins can only be viewed as devolution from an ideal state. Starobinski summarizes Rousseau’s position on this issue by noting both its severity and its similarity to strict Protestantism.

Rousseau appréhende le changement comme une corruption: dans le cours du temps, l’homme se défigure, il se déprave. Ce n’est pas seulement son apparence, mais son essence même qui devient méconnaissable. Cette version sévère (*et pour ainsi dire calviniste*) du mythe de l’origine, Rousseau la propose en divers moments de son œuvre. (29) [italics mine]

⁹⁵ I read Diderot’s suggestions, noted in Chapter Four, that governments take advantage of the power of the theatre to effect change as encouraging the government to use the theatre as a means of engendering public awareness and education rather than authoritarian control.

⁹⁶ See Chapter Four.

⁹⁷ See James Swenson’s *On Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Considered as One of the First Authors of the Revolution* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), for his discussion of the distinction Rousseau makes in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* between the passion of the moment and the virtue of sustained happiness (136-140).

⁹⁸ See Chapter Four for its discussion of Diderot’s theory of flux and its relationship to his political theorizing.

Starobinski's rather offhand connection of Rousseau's thought to Calvinism underscores an assumption made by other critics that Rousseau's ideas are not unrelated to his Protestantism and raises the question of to what extent his views on representation were informed by his religious background.⁹⁹ Just as Diderot's Catholicism can be seen to have informed both his personal responses to public ritual and his theorizing of the relationship between performance and civic discourse, Rousseau's ambivalence toward the theatre can be understood from a similar perspective.

Diderot and Rousseau share the eighteenth-century critique of the Church which was a foundational aspect of Enlightenment thought. But while the *philosophes* were joined in their outrage against the dogmatism and intolerance of the Church, it was Rousseau's role to critique the French *philosophes* from the same perspective. Given France's specific history of religious intolerance toward Protestantism, the French Enlightenment can be construed as an essentially Catholic Enlightenment, reinforcing Rousseau's (despite a youthful flirtation with Catholicism) outsider status. Rousseau's critique of the power of priests and their connection to kings is thus informed by anti-Catholicism as much as by the more general critique of intolerance. Just as Diderot's interest in the production values of the theatre is related to his admiration of the power of Church spectacle, so Rousseau's preference for simplicity is consistent with a larger Protestant critique of spectacle as such. Rousseau's stress on the importance of unmediated experience is consistent with one of the basic tenets of the Reformation: the denial of the need for a priestly mediator between the congregation and their god. But Rousseau's commitment

⁹⁹ See Mark Hulliung's "Rousseau, Voltaire and the Revenge of Pascal" in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) for his analysis of the parallels between the Pascal and Rousseau regarding the human condition. That Rousseau's ideas are consistent with the Jansenist Pascal is not surprising here, given the well-documented similarities between Jansenism and Protestantism.

to the danger of representation leads him to deny, as well, the theological notion that Christ, in his dual nature, also mediates between humanity and the divine. Starobinski emphasizes the significance of this transformation of the figure of Christ from mediator to example as stemming from Rousseau's relationship to Christianity: "L'essentiel du christianisme, pour Rousseau, est dans la prédication d'une vérité immédiate" (88). Christ thus becomes an example to be followed, a means of educating believers in proper behavior.¹⁰⁰

Diderot, on the other hand, embraces the representational status of priests and the dual nature of Christ as models for the role of the actor in his secular church. Diderot suggests the transformation of the priest into the figure of the actor, who celebrates not the glory of the divine, but of the quotidian. Unlike the priest, whose authority comes from the force of Church and Crown, the authority of the actor comes from the ability to translate the script of the poet into a moving, emotionally powerful moment. While the priest serves a double function as a member of the church hierarchy and as a representation of Christ on earth, thus mediating between the earthly and the divine, the actor is both artist and a representation of the human condition, thus mediating between the individual and the collective. The dual nature of the actor reflects Diderot's recognition of the value of representation as the means through which human intercourse takes place. Edward Said, in his introduction to Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis*, makes the case that through the figure of Christ, Christianity "destroys the separation between the sublime and the everyday" (xxiv). The creation of a figure which mediates between the material and the spiritual remains a foundation of Christianity and a powerful source of

¹⁰⁰ In "Rousseau, Voltaire and the Revenge of Pascal," Hulliung also suggests that Rousseau's body politic analogizes the body of Christ (73).

its appeal. Christ, then, is a figure of identification, a figure representing both humanity and the possibility of transcendence. Similarly, the priest is the earthly representative of divine power. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Diderot does not critique the priesthood or the Church from the perspective of their strategies to engage the congregation. For him, the feelings of transcendence which can be engendered by political and religious spectacles are associated with basic human needs to experience passion and temporary escape from the knowledge of mortality. He thus critiques the utilization of those strategies by church and state to control their adherents and to disallow critique and change.

Thierry Revol, in *Représentations du sacré dans les textes dramatiques des XIe-XIIIe siècles en France*, argues that Christianity is founded on the idea of representation. The structure of Christian thought, from the creation of man and woman in God's image to the divine and human nature of Christ, as well as the entire liturgical calendar which enacts the life and death of Christ, rests on the foundation of representation as the medium of religious practice (523-533). The power of Christianity rests in this representation of events. The genius of Christianity, as a social movement, lies in part in the creation of the figure of Christ, a figure of identification which is continually renewed through the mass, through performance.¹⁰¹ As discussed earlier, Diderot's proposals for the transformation of eighteenth-century theatre echo the evolution of theatrical techniques to better engage the congregation developed by ecclesiastical innovators, indicating the breadth of Diderot's knowledge of Church history and his willingness to

¹⁰¹ It would be interesting to consider the role of theatricality in other religious traditions. Of the major world religions, Catholicism would appear to be the most highly theatricalized.

learn from the models that “porte à mon âme des emotions profondes.”¹⁰² But Christianity provides more than an example of the power of representation in human history; it is a model for another of Diderot’s theatrical innovations. As Erich Auerbach suggests in *Mimesis*, the New Testament can be construed as the first *drame*.

Scripture “created an entirely new kind of sublimity, in which the everyday and the low were included, not excluded, so that, in style as well as in content, it directly connected the lowest with the highest.”¹⁰³ The stories of the New Testament present characters whose simple and humble backgrounds are elevated through their belief in and identification with Christ. The tragic figures of the New Testament are not the tragic figures of the Ancients and, as Auerbach notes, they do not fit into the classical genres of comedy and tragedy, in which comedy is reserved for the everyday and tragedy for the heroic. Just as the *drame* would be “plus voisin de nous” by showing “les malheurs qui nous environnent” (*Entretiens* 1174), so the liturgy itself “opens its arms invitingly to receive the simple and untutored and to lead them from the concrete, the everyday, to the hidden and the true” (Auerbach 155). In his theorizing on the *drame*, Diderot suggests that the representation of lives and events close to their own experience will lead spectators not only to discover social and political truths, but to encounter enthusiastic communion.¹⁰⁴ It is through the medium of theatrical representation that we are led to transcendent experience.

¹⁰² From a letter written by Diderot but not published until after his death, cited in Michel Delon’s article “Diderot et le renouveau catholique du Consulat: Un fragment de lettre oublié” (54)

¹⁰³ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trusk with an Introduction by Edward Said (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) 154.

¹⁰⁴ The development of the *drame* and its place in Diderot’s vision will be detailed in the chapters that follow.

Representation for Diderot is linked to possibility rather than deceit. Diderot recognizes that Church and Crown utilize the power of representation to their own purposes. It is not, however, the act of representation that is problematic, but its use. Diderot answers the concerns of Rousseau in the *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* and in *Emile* regarding the object of the spectator's identification not only through the requirement of on-going discussion, but through his understanding of the manifold opportunities for identification in the theatre. Part of what we enjoy and respond to in the theatre is the actors' interactions with each other and, as we shall see, Diderot brings our attention to the importance of this involvement as well as to the role played by minor characters. This multiplicity also distinguishes the actor from the priest – the actor is multiple – and plays a part in reversing the position of spectatorship from passivity to active engagement. In addition, the spectator responds to multiple effects on the stage. In *De la poésie dramatique*, Diderot also highlights the subtleties of décor and staging. In Diderot's understanding we identify, in the theatre, with the action as a whole. The action that Diderot wishes to substitute for the action of French classicism is not the story of gods and kings, but the story of human beings. The *drame* is envisioned as an exploration of all the possible conditions of humanity.

D. Conclusion

We have seen, in Chapter One, how Diderot's views on enthusiasm are related to and go beyond the traditional discourse on enthusiasm. It now becomes clear that Diderot's notions about the power of the theatre cannot be separated from the complex history of the Church and performance. Many features of the performance of liturgical plays, their emphasis on gesture and pantomime, the representation and recreation of events and the intimate connections between "actor" and "spectator" will find their way into Diderot's theorizing on the theatre. The shift in the focus of liturgical drama from the divine to the human nature of Christ also prefigures changes in the theatre proposed by Diderot, where the *drame* will be of human rather than divine scale.¹⁰⁵ In addition, we can see how Diderot's views on representation itself differ broadly from many of his contemporaries and are consistent with the foundational concepts of Catholicism. The theatre will become a place where humanity's inherent need for enthusiastic expression will be set free through the representation of the actions, not of gods and kings, but of the human condition. With the development of the *drame*, Diderot moves away from a glorification of God and heroes, to a glorification of humanity. Unlike tragedy which examines the grand, or comedies which satirize the quotidian, Diderot will choose to create a serious portrayal of the everyday.

On dit qu'il n'y a plus de grandes passions tragiques à émouvoir; qu'il est impossible de présenter les sentiments élevés d'une manière neuve et frappante...Mais la tragédie domestique aura une autre action, un autre ton, et un sublime que lui sera propre. Je le sens, ce sublime; il est dans ces mots d'un père, qui disait à son fils qui le nourrissait dans sa vieillesse: "Mon fils, nous sommes quittes. Je t'ai donné la vie; et tu me l'as rendue." (*Entretiens* 1174)

¹⁰⁵ These issues are taken up again in my discussion of *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique* in Chapter Three.

The re-creation of the everyday, in the *drame*, thus becomes a means of experiencing the exultation/exaltation of being human. The sublime is recognized as pertaining to the relationships of humans with one another. The rituals of the theatre replace the rituals of religion by privileging the material over the spiritual. But the capacity for emotional release and the glorification of human nature do not alone create a secular church.

For his vision of the future of theatre, Diderot will also look to two phenomena which have become closely associated with the eighteenth century: the republic of letters and the social contract. The consciousness of the republic of letters as an alternative community to the religious and political authorities of the time became fully developed during the Enlightenment and Diderot was influential in helping to set the tone of this period's discourse on sociability and critique. His understanding of the power of critique was as much a part of his aesthetic theorizing as it was of his political writings and underlies one aspect of his project for the theatre. The accessibility of theatrical performance and text to critical review and change underscores its appropriateness as a new focus of community-building. In fact, the texts of Diderot's two major theatre pieces, *Le Fils naturel* and *Le Père de famille*, were published with accompanying texts that can be read as critiques of the plays which precede them. In the next chapter, I present an analysis of both *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique* as attempts to put into practice Diderot's vision of the theatrical text and performance as a new kind of scripture and ceremony which allow on-going critique and revision in the public sphere. In addition, theatrical performance can be seen as a species of social contract, the various forms of which (between author and spectators, between actor and spectator, between author and actor, etc.) are negotiated rather than imposed. It is this

possibility of negotiation and criticism which makes the theatre a viable source of moral and social stability in terms of the discourses surrounding the republic of letters and the social contract. The next chapter focuses on the first of these two major trends and its relation to Diderot's project.

Chapter 3: Diderot's Spectator-Critic in the Republic of Letters

A. Introduction

In his vision of the theatre as a secular church, Diderot uses the power of those strategies developed in liturgical settings to engage the congregation in order to enhance the spectators' enthusiasm and feelings of transcendence during theatrical performances. As he sets forth to transform the rigid rules of the classical stage by paradoxically returning theatre to its more ancient civic and religious roots, he is also determined to reinforce the audience's capacity for self-distancing critique.¹⁰⁶ Through the confluence of these two seemingly antithetical approaches, to enhance spectators' emotional involvement in the theatrical experience and to strengthen their ability to evaluate that experience, Diderot sets the stage for the development of a theatre filled with spectator-critics. The audience is akin to a congregation in its capacity to be overwhelmed by the emotional power of a performance and to experience moments of collective enthusiasm which translate into feelings of communal transcendence. Diderot's striking image of swarming bees from *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*¹⁰⁷ describes the coming together of large groups of people as an opportunity for experiencing enthusiasm through the communicability of powerful emotions. The audience, however, is not a passive beholder of spectacle, but a responsive organism that has the right and obligation to evaluate artistic productions. Unlike the performance of the Mass and the teaching of

¹⁰⁶ In contradistinction to Bertolt Brecht who, in the twentieth century, emphasizes the importance of the audience's ability to maintain their critical faculties during the performance of a play (see *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992)), Diderot sought to enhance the spectator's emotional immersion in the production. As we shall see, for Diderot, self-distancing comes after the performance and is related to private contemplation and public discussion.

¹⁰⁷ In Chapter One, I discuss the difference in Diderot's evaluation of this image as a symbol of organization and cohesion from that posited by the Reformation, which used this image to evoke frenzied mobs.

scripture, theatrical performances and dramatic scripts are subject to the valuation of the public.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, Catholicism, contrary to Protestantism, had a long history of encouraging the theatricality of ritual practice. Theatrical modes of expression and dramatization were incorporated into the mass to encourage the congregation's identification with the celebrant representing the struggles and ultimate redemption of Christ.¹⁰⁸ Diderot did not distance himself from the powerful, transcendent feelings inspired by religious spectacle and ritual performance. In fact, he wished to garner this power as a source of civic cohesion. He was, however, convinced of the vulnerability of such feelings to being appropriated by those who would control society through superstition and fear. This chapter will focus on Diderot's vision of the theatre as a secular church from the perspective of the theatre's centrality as a site in an expanding republic of letters which would offer the spectator-critic an opportunity to experience collective moments of transcendence that are not encapsulated in time but become part of an on-going critical discussion. Through an analysis of Diderot's theatrical writings, we will see the development of a template for the audience's critical review of theatre performances which distinguishes them from the passive spectatorship of the congregation. Diderot develops a model for critical viewership which offers a dynamic relationship between the spectators' communal enthusiasm and private contemplation which becomes the basis for civic action through public discussion.

¹⁰⁸ Donald Cardinal Wuerl describes this relationship between priest and congregant for a contemporary audience in "The Sacraments: A Continuing Encounter with Christ" from *The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults*.

When, in the person of Christ, bishops and priests pronounce the words of consecration, the sacrifice of the new covenant is made present to the faithful in such a way that they, too, can participate in it. (34)

In order to fully elaborate Diderot's model, this chapter begins by examining the importance Diderot placed on the value of the republic of letters in the development of an enlightened society. The second step in the discovery of this model for critical spectatorship is the exploration of the ways Diderot borrowed from the repertoire of devotional practices to more fully engage the audience, and the relationship of these borrowings to Diderot's understanding of the basis of morality. Finally, this chapter will present a new interpretation of two of Diderot's major writings on the theatre, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique*. Rather than emphasizing the importance of these two works as manifestoes for theatrical innovation, I will be viewing both texts as tutorials in critical practice for the theatre-goer.

B. The Republic of Letters

Throughout the seventeenth century in France, political and religious authority came to be concentrated in the body of Louis XIV.¹⁰⁹ While artistic productions were thus subject to powerful institutional constraints, critical reception of theatrical productions was not limited to that coming from political and ecclesiastical authorities. While *la querelle du Cid* may have climaxed with the 1638 judgment of the Académie française, Corneille's critics were voluble and varied in their opinions from the first production of the play in 1637.

[A] l'ouverture [de l'Acte V], Rodrigue vient en plein jour revoir Chimène, avec autant d'effronterie, que s'il n'en avait pas tué le père... Mais si je ne craignais de faire le plaisant mal à propos, je lui demanderais volontiers, s'il a donné de l'eau bénite en passant, à ce pauvre mort, qui vraisemblablement est dans la salle? Leur seconde conversation est de même style que la première, elle lui dit cent choses dignes d'une prostituée.

(de Scudéry, *Observations sur Le Cid* 1637)¹¹⁰

Que Scudéry eût crié bien plus haut, si on eut représenté Chimène après la mort de son père en état de ne regarder qu'avec dédain Rodrigue, ce sang épanché ayant effacé tous les traits qu'amour avait vivement imprimé en son âme, le devoir avec l'honneur étouffant ses flammes, et si au lieu du mariage on eût fait perdre la vie au Cid par poison, ou sous l'effort impourvu de quelque assassin que la haine eût produit par l'invention de cette fille, il aurait mis en avant l'Histoire, appelant très justement l'Auteur de cette Tragi-Comédie fourbe et menteur, il n'aurait pas approuvé la vraisemblance qui s'écarte du vrai.

(Anon., *Le Souhait du Cid en faveur de Scudéry* 1637)¹¹¹

The seventeenth-century theatre audience shared its response to theatre in pamphlets and letters, as well as within the setting of the *salon*, and this response was not ignored by those in power. As Paul Bénichou notes, in his discussion of Richelieu's creation of the

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Roi-machine: spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1981) 150-151.

¹¹⁰ Armand Gasté, *La Querelle du Cid* (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974) 93-94.

¹¹¹ Gasté 163.

Académie française and the Cardinal's response to *Le Cid*, audience response to a play can be construed in political terms.¹¹²

Pellisson, dans son *Histoire de l'Académie*, décrit ingénument la réaction du public à l'initiative de Richelieu; les gens "appréhendaient que cet établissement ne fût un nouvel appui de sa domination, et que ce ne fussent des gens à ses gages, payés pour soutenir tout ce qu'il ferait, et pour observer les actions et les sentiments des autres." Si Pellisson, dont le témoignage est tardif, dit vrai, le public grossissait démesurément les intentions de Richelieu, mais enfin l'Académie devait servir les vues de gouvernement et celles du ministre: elle était à peine créée qu'elle en fit l'expérience dans l'affaire du *Cid*. Quels qu'aient été les motifs exacts de l'animosité de Richelieu à l'égard de cette tragédie, le succès du *Cid* dans le public et sa censure par le ministre apparaissent en fin de compte comme un épisode particulier d'un conflit plus vaste et plus latent entre l'opinion et celui qui incarnait, face à elle, l'autorité absolue.¹¹³

Later in the century, while political and ecclesiastical authority actively engaged in various means of artistic critique and control, as in the banning of *Tartuffe* (1664), the criticism of Molière's work took place within the public sphere as well. In fact, the response to Molière's plays was, in some respects, a field of entertainment in itself. Donneau de Visé makes mention, in his *Nouvelles nouvelles*, of the seemingly paradoxical response of the public to *L'Ecole des femmes*.

Cette pièce a produit des effets tout nouveaux: tout le monde l'a trouvée méchante, et tout le monde y a couru. Les dames l'ont blâmée, et l'ont été voir. Elle a réussi sans avoir plu à plusieurs qui ne l'ont pas trouvée bonne; mais, pour vous dire mon sentiment, c'est le sujet le plus mal conduit qui fut jamais, et je suis prêt de soutenir qu'il n'y a point de scène où l'on ne puisse faire voir une infinité de fautes...[Elle] est un monstre qui a de belles parties, et que jamais on ne vit tant de si bonnes, et de si méchantes chose ensemble.
(*Nouvelles nouvelles*, February 1663, vol II)¹¹⁴

Public discussion of artistic productions was lively and contentious throughout the seventeenth century. Molière, of course, famously responded to the wide-ranging

¹¹² See Hélène Merlin-Kajman's *Public et Littérature en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1994) for a comprehensive analysis of the political implications of the developing literary public of the seventeenth century.

¹¹³ Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948) 77.

¹¹⁴ Pierre Mélése, *Donneau de Visé: fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1936) 17.

reviews of the play with his own *La Critique de L'Ecole des femmes*, fully engaging in the public discussion of his work.¹¹⁵ Molière's responsiveness to his public also became a source of critical comment.

Etudiez la cour et connaissez la ville;
L'une et l'autre est toujours en modèles fertile.
C'est par là que Molière, illustrant ses écrits,
Peut-être de son art eût remporté le prix,
Si, moins ami du peuple, en ses doctes peintures,
Il n'eût point fait souvent grimaces ses figures,
Quitté, pour le bouffon, l'agréable et le fin,
Et sans honte à Térence allié Tabarin.
Dans ce sac ridicule où Scapin s'enveloppe,
Je ne reconnais plus l'auteur du Misanthrope.
Le comique, ennemi des soupirs et des pleurs,
N'admet point en ses vers de tragiques douleurs;
Mais son emploi n'est pas d'aller, dans une place,
De mots sales et bas charmer la populace.
(Boileau, *L'Art poétique*, 1674 Chant III v 391-404)¹¹⁶

Boileau's critique of Molière centers on the dramatist's apparent wish to please not only the court and society, but those spectators in the parterre as well, the *populace* whose membership could not be restricted to *la cour et la ville*.

This public quarrel, taking place through pamphlets, journals and letters, represents the beginnings of that republic of letters which comes into force during the eighteenth century. Dena Goodman, in *The Republic of Letters*, makes the case that the republic of letters was at the very heart of the public sphere, first described by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*,¹¹⁷ which first began to emerge in the early seventeenth century. She traces the development of the republic of letters, in France, as an alternative community to the religious and political authorities of the time.

¹¹⁵ Molière, *La Critique de l'École des femmes*, ed. Georges Bonneville (Paris: Bordas, 1985).

¹¹⁶ Nicolas Boileau, *Satires, Epîtres et Art poétique*, ed. Jean-Pierre Collinet (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

¹¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).

Goodman notes that for Diderot, "[t]he *Encyclopédie* would represent the associative basis of knowledge; it would become the place where ideas were exchanged, preserved and diffused":¹¹⁸ knowledge would no longer be contained in and vetted by the academy or governmental bureaus. But the *Encyclopédie* represented only one forum of the republic of letters, which was based as well in the salons of Paris and the willingness of the *philosophes* to play out their debates in public.

By volunteering to submit to the tribunal of public opinion, men of letters made that tribunal an institution of their republic. At the same time, they activated their readership, gave the public a role to play. Open-ended and interactive forms of writing, such as letters, correspondences, and dialogues, encouraged an active readership; literary journals counted on their readers' contributions. (40)

Diderot's involvement in this side of the republic of letters is well-documented, from his public arguments with Rousseau in the 1750's, which led to the comment of the Marquis de Castries that "it's incredible. People don't talk of anything but of those fellows" (40) to Diderot's *Apologie de l'abbé Galiani*, in which he defended the Abbé against the attacks of Morellet and the physiocrats.¹¹⁹ In his *Apologie*, Diderot reconfirms the importance of the republic of letters as a space of critique and civility (220). Not only are all forms of religious and political activity appropriate sites of critical evaluation, but all critique must be couched in terms that do not violate the norms of polite conversation and all those participating in the republic of letters are expected do so out of the shared goal of benefiting the common good. What is of interest here is the importance of the public as participant in the philosophical, aesthetic and political debates of the period.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 28.

¹¹⁹ For an in-depth discussion of Galiani's *Dialogues sur le commerce des blés* and Morellet's *Réfutation de l'ouvrage qui a pour titre Dialogues sur le commerce des blés* see Goodman (187-214).

¹²⁰ See Gary Bruce Rodgers' *Diderot and the Eighteenth-Century French Press* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) for his analysis of a series of long-running arguments that Diderot conducted with journal editors. In particular, he sees Diderot's public correspondence with Père Berthier, editor of the *Jesuit*

As Suzanne R. Pucci argues in *Sites of the Spectator: Emerging Literary and Cultural Practice in Eighteenth-Century France*, there was a gradual shift in the concept of a public initially embodied in the physical being of the king to a developing awareness on the part of critics, readers and other consumers of culture of their right to criticize cultural productions and, eventually, political structures, that led to the adoption of the spectator as a new field of interest.¹²¹ From Marivaux's Spectator who observes and comments upon political and cultural events throughout the issues of *Le Spectateur français* to Montesquieu's narrators of *Les Lettres persanes* who comment on the spectacle of French society, the spectator becomes more than merely a passive observer. It is Diderot who will finally develop this spectator into a spectator-critic who possesses not only a right but a responsibility to critically evaluate cultural productions.

In *The Contested Parterre*, Jeffrey S. Ravel argues that, beginning in the seventeenth century and continuing through the eighteenth, the broad swath of the public that composed the parterre, including "students from nearby Sorbonne, magistrates, clerks, and other administrative figures from the courts and governmental bureaus, merchants dealing in luxury items from the rue St-Denis, and figures from the literary and cultural world of the Parisian salons,"¹²² was an acknowledged force, not only in the eyes of playwrights but of the authorities as well. Ravel notes that both Louis XIV and Louis XV used "a network of spies and other policing agents" to monitor their subjects' "discontent through their cries, gestures, and collective actions" while viewing theatrical performances (6-7). In this context, Boileau's critique of Molière's suspected pandering

Journal de Trévoux, regarding religious debates engendered by the publication of the *Encyclopédie* as an avenue Diderot exploited to engage a larger audience.

¹²¹ Suzanne R. Pucci, *Sites of the Spectator: Emerging Literary and Cultural Practice in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001) 4-16.

¹²² Jeffrey S. Ravel, *The Contested Parterre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 74.

to this group has serious political as well as literary overtones. For Diderot, the importance of the parterre rests not only on its value as “le seul endroit où les larmes de l’homme vertueux et du méchant soient confondues,”¹²³ but in its role as part of an active, engaged audience. In his response to the critique of his *De la poésie dramatique* by the actress Mme Riccoboni, Diderot describes the cumulative power of the transference of enthusiasm among all audience members, including the parterre.

Il y a quinze ans que nos théâtres étaient des lieux de tumulte. Les têtes les plus froides s'échauffaient en y entrant, et les hommes sensés y partageaient plus ou moins le transport des fous... On s'agitait, on se remuait, on se poussait; l'âme était mise hors d'elle-même. Or, je ne connais pas de disposition plus favorable au poète. La pièce commençait avec peine, était souvent interrompue; mais survenait-il un bel endroit? C'était un fracas incroyable, les *bis* se redemandaient sans fin; on s'enthousiasmait de l'auteur, de l'acteur et de l'actrice. L'engouement passait du parterre à l'amphithéâtre, et de l'amphithéâtre aux loges. On était arrivé avec chaleur, on s'en retournait dans l'ivresse; les uns allaient chez des filles, les autres se répandaient dans le monde; c'était comme un orage qui allait se dissiper au loin et dont le murmure durait longtemps après qu'il s'était écarté. Voilà le plaisir.¹²⁴

It is this vibrant energy engendered by the entire audience that Diderot hopes to harness in order to advance his vision of the theatre as a site of social change. The theatre audience, for Diderot, is akin to those swarming bees mentioned above, among whom sensation is communicated as if it were one organism rather than an assembly of many individuals. His appreciation of the “joie insensée”¹²⁵ attendant upon this mass excitement is not, however, limited to its appeal as sensory stimulation and sensual pleasure. From Richelieu’s creation of the Académie française to expand his control of and authority over literary production to Louis XV’s use of spies in the parterre in order

¹²³ Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1283.

¹²⁴ Diderot, *Lettre à Mme Riccoboni*, *Œuvres de Diderot, Correspondance* 80.

¹²⁵ For the extended quote see *Additions à la Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (60-61), where Diderot describes the feelings engendered by collective civic experiences. The passage is discussed in Chapter One.

to monitor the responses of theatre audiences to specific plays, the potential of the theatre as a site of subversion had long been recognized. It is this potential that Diderot will exploit as he develops a model for turning spectators into spectator-critics. The republic of letters provides the medium through which Diderot's vision will be realized. His recuperation of the value of enthusiasm and his recognition of the importance of religious ritual that was detailed in the first two chapters, indicate his respect for and deep understanding of the power of religious practice to produce strong emotional responses. The power of collective enthusiasm and religious ritual become two of the sources from which he draws his strategies for directing the pleasures of communal spectatorship into a form of civic discourse. In his vision for the transformation of the classical stage, Diderot recommends techniques to enhance the audience's involvement in theatrical productions while developing the spectator's ability to critically evaluate these productions. This next section focuses on the first part of this process. In this reading, Diderot's appreciation of the power of ritual performance to produce collective feelings of transcendence is presented as the basis for his appropriation of liturgical strategies in his efforts to more fully engage theatre audiences during dramatic performances.

C. Engaging the Audience

Diderot borrows from the repertoire of devotional practices as the first step in his transformation of the classical stage. The formal and, for Diderot, distancing rituals of seventeenth-century theatre are to be replaced by the performance strategies developed over centuries to involve the congregation more intimately in the mass. Before detailing how Diderot proposes to more fully engage the audience, it is necessary that we understand why this engagement is so crucial to Diderot's project. In order to do this, we must first consider Diderot's understanding of the basis of morality, which rests in the process of identification.¹²⁶ The capacity for emotional identification underlies moral development.

Qu'est-ce que la vertu? C'est, sous quelque face qu'on la considère, un sacrifice de soi-même. Le sacrifice que l'on fait de soi-même en idée est une disposition préconçue à s'immoler en réalité.¹²⁷

Diderot conflates the power of imaginative experience with actual experience in the development of virtue. Thus the urgency to enhance the spectator's active participation and identification with the actors and actions presented on the stage.

[G]race à cet auteur, j'ai plus aimé mes semblables, plus aimé mes devoirs;...je n'ai eu pour les méchants que de la pitié;... j'ai conçu plus de commisération pour les malheureux, plus de vénération pour les bons, plus de circonspection dans l'usage des choses présentes, plus d'indifférence sur les choses futures, plus de mépris pour la vie et plus d'amour pour la vertu (161).

¹²⁶ A number of authors have noted the importance of identification in Diderot's theatrical works from different perspectives. Romira M. Worvill, for example, in *'Seeing' speech: illusion and the transformation of dramatic writing in Diderot and Lessing* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005) argues that Diderot models the engagement of the theatre audience on that of the viewer of a painting who becomes "susceptible to the moral influences of the drama" only when "emotionally engaged" (81). See also Alain Ménil's *Diderot et le drame: Théâtre et politique* (Paris: PUF, 1995) in which he differentiates the spectator's mediated identification to classical theatre from the direct identification that Diderot creates for the spectator of the *drame*. In Ménil's terms "le spectateur du drame doit se dire: "C'est moi," alors que la dramaturgie classique engage le spectateur à se dire: "C'est comme pour moi" (60).

¹²⁷ Diderot, *Eloge de Richardson, Œuvres de Diderot IV* 156.

The imaginative identification with the characters in a novel and, by extension, with the actors on the stage creates the opportunity for the moral growth of the audience. This identification can be supported through the use of techniques that close the gap between audience and artistic presentation.

It must also be remembered that Diderot situates morality in the realm of the human rather than the divine. The emphasis in Church catechism on the congregant's identification with the figure of Christ in the person of the celebrant as noted above, allows for the maintenance of the ambiguity inherent in the belief in Christ's dual nature. Does the congregation celebrate Christ's divinity or his humanity? For Diderot, the ambiguity is resolved in favor of the humanity of all human representations of the divine. As noted in Chapter Two, Diderot locates the birth of artistic production in the temple, where religious iconography becomes the source of a glorification of humanity rather than the gods. The confluence of the human and the divine and of the religious and the secular occurs frequently in Diderot's writing. For example, in a letter to Sophie Volland, Diderot relates a parable of paternal love that he created based on his own experience and which he used for the edification of a member of the clergy with whom he was in conversation.

On parla de l'amour paternel. Je lui dis que c'était une des plus puissantes affections de l'homme..."Les premières années que je passai à Paris avaient été fort dissolues; le désordre de ma conduite suffisait de reste pour irriter mon père, sans qu'il fût besoin de le lui exagérer... L'occasion d'aller le voir se présenta. Je ne balançai point. Je partis plein de confiance dans sa bonté. Je pensais qu'il me verrait, que je jetterais entre ses bras, que nous pleurerions tous les deux, et que tout serait oublié. Je pensais juste."

After having presented this example of the strength of paternal love in an all-too-human situation, Diderot then extends the metaphor to encompass distances that can be read as a reference to the expectation of divine love.

[J]e demandai à mon religieux s'il savait combien il y avait d'ici chez moi. "Soixante lieues, mon père; et s'il y en avait eu cent, croyez-vous que j'aurais trouvé mon père moins indulgent et moins tendre? - Au contraire - Et s'il y en avait eu mille? - Ah! comment maltraiter un enfant qui revient de si loin: - Et s'il avait été dans la lune, dans Jupiter, ou dans Saturne?" En disant ces derniers mots j'avais les yeux tournés au ciel, et mon religieux, les yeux baissés, méditait sur mon apologue.¹²⁸

For Diderot, it is the model of earthly paternal love that forms the basis for our view of divine paternal love. He seeks to have the monk consider that the human desire for and expectation of divine forgiveness is based in our experience of the vicissitudes of human love.¹²⁹ As in the temple of old, it is the human model from which we must fashion our gods. Human passion and religious feelings are inextricably linked in Diderot's formulation as the "plus violents enthousiasmes de la vie."¹³⁰

In *Le Père de famille*, the hero, St. Albin, has his first sight of his beloved Sophie in church, during a celebration of the mass where, once again, Diderot connects human love and religious emotion.

La première fois que je la vis, ce fut à l'église. Elle était à genoux au pied des autels, auprès d'une femme âgée que je pris d'abord pour sa mère; elle attachait tous les regards... Ah! mon père, quelle modestie! quels charmes!¹³¹

¹²⁸ Diderot, *Lettre à Sophie Volland* (1 août 1765), *Correspondance* 513-514.

¹²⁹ In both *Pensées philosophiques*, *Œuvres de Diderot I*, written early in his career (1745), and *Observations sur le Nakaz*, written during 1773-1774, Diderot stresses the importance of giving the divine human proportions.

Les jeunes gens veulent être pris par les sens; je multiplierais donc autour de lui les signes indicatifs de la présence divine. S'il se faisait, par exemple, un cercle chez moi, j'y marquerais une place à Dieu, et j'accoutumerais mon élève à dire: "Nous étions quatre, Dieu, mon ami, mon gouverneur et moi." (*Pensées philosophiques* 27)

[L]'homme juste et libre ne demande qu'un Dieu qui soit son père, des égaux qui le chérissent et des lois qui le protègent. (*Observations sur le Nakaz* 510)

¹³⁰ Diderot, *Lettre à Sophie Volland* (14 juillet 1762), *Correspondance* 377.

¹³¹ Diderot, *Le Père de famille*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1206.

But this description does more than associate love and virtue; St. Albin's response to the tableau presented by Sophie and her maid in church echoes Diderot's ideas about the importance of absorption for the beholder of a painting that, as we shall see, he makes in the *Salons*. While this scene reminds the reader of the similar scene in *Tartuffe*, which is presented as indicating Tartuffe's self-conscious manipulation of Orgon, Diderot presents Sophie as an innocent, unaware of the existence of St. Albin. St. Albin's response to this vision of innocence and virtue parallels that of the viewer of a painting or theatrical *tableau* with a touching subject.

Non, je ne puis vous rendre l'impression qu'elle fit sur moi. Quel trouble j'éprouvai! avec quelle violence mon cœur palpita! ce que je ressentis! ce que je devins! (*Le Père de famille* 1206)

The source of St. Albin's enthusiasm is a scene presented in church, yet it mirrors the audience's emotional reactions to a scene presented on the stage. Diderot links the transcendent emotional experiences that are experienced in both religious and theatrical spaces to theoretical bases which remain firmly humanist and materialist. For Diderot, the salons and the theatre join with the church as spaces which allow for both contemplation and absorption, which are crucial components of the identification necessary for the development of virtue.

Another reason that the engagement of the spectator is crucial to Diderot's transformation of classical dramaturgy is related to the importance of securing the attention of the viewer. It is not only in his works on aesthetics, such as *De la poésie dramatique*, the *Entretiens* and the *Salons*, that Diderot discusses the importance of paying attention. As Wilda Anderson notes in *Diderot's Dream*, Diderot conceived of attention as an active process. It is a state in which one is not a passive receiver but where

one's intellect and emotions become absorbed in the activity of reception. In his epistle to students who would read his *Interprétation de la nature*, Diderot emphasizes the importance of engaging the students in the work because "il n'importe peu que tu adoptes mes idées, ou que tu les rejettes, pourvu qu'elles emploient tout ton attention."¹³² The student of science, like the spectator at the theatre, is expected to actively participate in the process. Attention is necessary not only for learning to occur, but for the audience's emotions and interest to be awakened. For Diderot, the engagement of the spectator is predicated on the action of the stage performance.

Dans les pièces italiennes, nos comédiens italiens jouent avec plus de liberté que nos comédiens français; ils font moins de cas du spectateur. Il y a cent moments où il en est tout à fait oublié. On trouve dans leur action je ne sais quoi d'original et d'aisé, qui me plaît et qui plairait à tout le monde... [Les comédiens français] s'arrangent en rond; ils sortent de l'action; ils s'adressent au parterre; ils lui parlent, et ils deviennent maussades et faux. (*De la poésie dramatique* 1336)

The actors' involvement with one another also adds to the clarity and naturalism of what is presented on the stage, which enhances the attention of viewers and encourages their emotional identification. Whether depicting farce or tragedy, the actors' focus of attention should be on one another rather than the audience.

Une observation que j'ai faite, c'est que nos insipides personnages subalternes demeurent plus communément dans leur humble rôle que les principaux personnages. La raison, ce me semble, c'est qu'ils sont contenus par la présence d'un autre qui les commande; c'est à cet autre qu'ils s'adressent; c'est là que toute leur action est tournée. Et tout irait assez bien, si la chose en imposait aux premiers rôles, comme la dépendance en impose aux rôles subalternes. (1336)

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. (*Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* 1145)

¹³² Anderson. *Diderot's Dream* 16.

The spectator's attention is not to be won through the rhetorical performances of actors looking to be admired; rather that attention is gained through the apparently paradoxical effect of the actors seeming to ignore the presence of the audience.¹³³ In order for the individual spectator to experience the passions that are then transmitted throughout the theatre audience to create the collective enthusiasm that is crucial to Diderot's conception of the theatre, the spectator must become absorbed in the action portrayed on the stage. This absorption is itself predicated on the apparent absorption of the characters with one another. The act of absorption takes the viewer outside of self-awareness and allows for the self-forgetting necessary for sympathy, in the sense of being able to identify with others, and of learning itself, in the sense of being able to suspend judgment long enough to learn something new (as in the *Interprétation*). The absorbed viewer shares with the enthusiast the ability to get beyond one's contained point of view and join in the flow of human connectedness.

As Michael Fried compellingly argues in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, the absorption of characters with one another and in absorptive activities became an important subject of painting and of art criticism during the middle of the eighteenth century in France, and he cites Diderot's theories on painting as a prime exemplar and major influence in this movement.¹³⁴ Diderot's interest in the absorption of figures in paintings was antedated by his interest in the involvement of actors with one another and the importance of their apparent exclusion of the audience

¹³³ While Diderot supports the notion that the actors appear to be unaware of the spectators, he insists that the dramaturge be acutely aware of the audience in the development of the plot. It may be necessary “que tous les personnages s'ignorent, si vous le voulez; mais que le spectateur les connaisse tous” (*De la poésie*, 1307).

¹³⁴ See Worvill's '*Seeing*' *Speech: Illusion and the Transformation of Dramatic Writing in Diderot and Lessing* for her development of this idea to suggest that Diderot's focus on the relationship between theatre and painting created a “new theatrical code” based on painting theory (79-111) which was then a major influence on the theories and dramas of Lessing (115-209).

from their awareness in order to enhance the spectator's identification with the passions depicted on the stage. Through his art criticism and his description of the relationship between the painting and the beholder, it is possible to more fully understand the connection that Diderot made between the absorption of the actors and the absorption of the theatre audience. Fried presents an analysis of Diderot's description of Van Dyck's painting of *Belisarius Receiving Alms* in a letter to Sophie Volland.

Il est certain que c'est la figure de ce soldat qui attache, et qu'elle semble faire oublier toutes les autres. Suard et la comtesse disaient que c'était un défaut. Moi, je prétendais que c'était là précisément ce qui rendait la peinture morale, et que ce soldat faisait mon rôle. Van Dyck a rendu la chose même, et on lui en fait un reproche... Si quand on fait un tableau, on suppose des spectateurs, tout est perdu. Le peintre sort de sa toile, comme l'acteur qui parle au parterre sort la scène. En supposant qu'il n'y a personne au monde que les personnages du tableau, celui de Van Dyck est sublime. Or, c'est une supposition qu'il faut toujours faire. Si l'on était à côté du soldat, on aurait sa physionomie, et on ne la remarquait pas en lui. Le Bélisaire ne fait-il pas l'effet qu'il doit faire? Qu'importe qu'on le perde de vue! (18 juillet 1762 *Correspondance* 385)

Fried emphasizes the importance of what he calls "the supreme fiction of the beholder's non-existence" in Diderot's definition of the sublime, while also noting that "the figure of the soldier functioned in the composition as a kind of surrogate beholder who in effect mediated between the actual beholder and the figure of Belisarius".¹³⁵ As the soldier contemplates Belisarius, so the beholder contemplates the soldier. The beholder is able "to enter a state of rapt attention, of being completely occupied or engrossed or (as I prefer to say) absorbed in what he or she is doing, hearing, thinking or feeling" (10) because the figures in the painting represent a similar state of "obliviousness and self-abandonment" (33). For Diderot this same effect exists in the relationship of the theatre audience and the figures on the stage. "Le peintre [qui] sort de sa toile, comme

¹³⁵ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 149-150.

l'acteur qui parle au parterre," loses the connection with the spectator which must be established as a first step in aesthetic appreciation. It is this connection which leads, ultimately, to the collective passions possible in the theatre.

The attention and enthusiasm that Diderot seeks to inspire in his theatre audience is predicated on the phenomenon that Fried has identified as absorption. This state of "attention, obliviousness, and resistance to distraction" (13), is one that Diderot hopes to create in the theatre audience because, as noted earlier, it is only in this state that learning can occur. At the same time, those emotions and actions which are, at times, "involuntary, automatic, or unconscious" (20) describe the state of enthusiasm and its "*négligence... oubli de soi* or self-forgetting" (13) which Diderot identified as a necessary human experience which is often identified with religious passion. As argued in the previous chapter, Diderot sees this state as one that derives from the human need for self-transcendence and as important in the development of human sympathy and connection. Throughout his aesthetic writings, we thus find his search for the development of means to enhance this state, but it is important to note that the enhancement of this state of absorption was, for Diderot, related to his understanding of moral development and his intention to maximize the potential for this development within the theatre.

Among the most important of these strategies is the use of non-verbal techniques borrowed from liturgical performance. In the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique*, as well as other texts, Diderot emphasizes the importance of non-verbal strategies to encourage the closing of the gap between spectator and spectacle. The use of gesture is supported from the double perspective of clarity and authenticity.

Among those “scènes entières où il est infiniment plus naturel aux personnages de se mouvoir que de parler,” Diderot imagines two characters waiting impatiently for a third.

Je suppose donc que deux hommes, incertains s'ils ont à être mécontents ou satisfaits l'un de l'autre, en attendent un troisième qui les instruisse: que diront-ils jusqu'à ce que ce troisième soit arrivé? Rien. Ils iront, ils viendront, ils monteront de l'impatience; mais ils se tairont. Ils n'auront garde de se tenir des propos dont ils pourraient avoir à se repentir. Voilà le cas d'une scène toute ou presque toute pantomime. (*De la poésie dramatique* 1337)

For Diderot, there are dramatic situations when “un mot de pantomime aurait éclairci cet endroit,” where the use of words serves only to obscure meaning. In this case, he calls upon playwrights to disregard the example of the ancients, who he believed did not sufficiently exploit the power of gesture, by including pantomime in their work (1338). The example of the ancient pagans, who emphasized rhetoric over gesture, is rejected here in favor of those liturgical innovators who appreciated the expressive power of pantomime. Just as the priest mimes the events of the Last Supper before a congregation who would find the words of the mass incomprehensible, the gestures of actors provide meaning which the audience receives without the mediation of words.

In the manner of early celebrants of the mass who understood the impression that could be made on the congregation during the *Non est hic*,¹³⁶ Diderot discovers, in his own experience, the power of gesture and silence as he explains in a letter to Sophie Volland.

Depuis que j'ai quitté cette ville [Langres], tous ceux que j'y connaissais sont morts. Je n'y ai retrouvé qu'une femme, amie d'une jeune fille que j'aimai autrefois et qui n'est plus... Peu de temps après la mort de son amie et de la mienne, je fis un voyage en province... Elle m'invita à l'accompagner à l'église. Je lui donnai le bras. Lorsque nous fûmes sur le cimetière, elle se détourna la tête, et me montra du doigt l'endroit où celle que nous avions aimée l'un et l'autre était déposée. Jugez de l'impression que son silence et son geste firent sur moi.

¹³⁶ See Chapter Two for a discussion of the importance of the *Non est hic* in the history of liturgical performance.

(3 août 1759 *Correspondance* 128)

Here the power of gesture to indicate absence and loss is, in effect, a metaphor for the entire process of representation, in which what is presented on the stage evokes emotional responses identical to those experienced in real-life situations. In the *Entretiens*, after Dorval has described a scene in which his character responded to another with a gesture, he exclaims

Mais combien d'autres circonstances, où le silence est forcé? Votre conseil exposerait-il celui qui le demande à perdre la vie, s'il le suit; l'honneur, s'il ne le suit pas? vous ne serez ni cruel ni vil. Vous marquerez votre perplexité par le geste; et vous laisserez l'homme se déterminer. (*Entretiens* 1144)

The use of words in such a situation thus appears not only less natural, but not up to the task of describing, in a single moment, the confusion and helplessness that attend it.

Pantomime and gesture are but two of the non-verbal elements that Diderot's recommendations for the theatre share with the history of theatre in general and liturgical performance in particular. The iconography of Catholicism is replete with illuminations, stained glass representations and paintings which chronicle biblical stories and the life and death of Christ with emotionally wrought scenes designed to capture the attention and stir the feelings of the viewer. Through the use of tableaux, Diderot will harness the power of the visual to elicit emotion and engage the spectator.

Le troisième [acte de *Tancredé* de Voltaire] est une des plus belles choses que j'aie jamais vues. C'est une suite de tableaux grands et pathétiques. Il y a un moment où la scène est muette et où le spectateur est désolé; c'est celui où Aménaïde traînée au supplice par des bourreaux, reconnaît Tancredé.¹³⁷

The beauty of this scene lies in its ability to create strong emotion in the spectator, not through the power of rhetoric, but through the visual representation of a scene of pathos and recognition. As noted by Pierre Frantz in *L'Esthétique du Tableau dans le Théâtre*

¹³⁷ Diderot, *Lettre à Sophie Volland* (5 septembre 1760), *Correspondance* 211.

du XVIIIe Siècle, “chez Diderot, le 'tableau' dramatique est une notion qui porte l'énergie de la vérité plutôt que la représentation de la réalité.”¹³⁸ It is the emotional truth of the representation that will enhance the identification of the spectator with the image on the stage.

Before the development of his art criticism in the *Salons* (1759-1781), Diderot already made a strong connection between stagecraft and painting.

Je pense, pour moi, que si un ouvrage dramatique était bien fait et bien représenté, la scène offrirait au spectateur autant de tableaux réels qu'il y aurait dans l'action de moments favorables au peintre. (*Entretiens* 1137)

The action of a play is to be captured in a series of *tableaux vivants*, each of which could be the subject of a good painting. It is important to note here Diderot's focus on the power of visual stimuli to produce emotional effects and his belief that French classical dramaturgy had somehow lost this knowledge, in its insistence on learning the wrong lessons from the Ancients.¹³⁹

Nous n'avons rien épargné pour corrompre le genre dramatique. Nous avons conservé des Anciens l'emphase de la versification qui convenait tant à des langues à quantité forte et à accent marqué, à des théâtres spacieux, à une déclamation notée et accompagnée d'instruments; et nous avons abandonné la simplicité de l'intrigue et du dialogue, et la vérité des tableaux. (1156)

¹³⁸ Pierre Frantz, *L'Esthétique du Tableau dans le Théâtre du XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1998) 35.

¹³⁹ Another forgotten lesson is the spectator's knowledge of the play. The spectators of ancient Greek drama had intimate knowledge of the stories being performed before them: the incest of Œdipus, for example, would have been known to the audience. In *De la poésie dramatique*, Diderot makes the case for the importance of the spectator being kept aware of plot twists and subordinates the power of surprise to that of the emotional involvement that comes with foreknowledge.

Zaïre et Nérestan ignorent qu'ils sont frère et sœur; le spectateur l'ignore aussi. Mais quelque pathétique que soit cette reconnaissance, je suis sûr que l'effet en eût été beaucoup plus grand encore, si le spectateur eût été prévenu. Que ne me serais-je pas dit à moi-même, à l'approche de ces quatre personnages? Avec quelle attention et quel trouble n'aurais-je pas écouté chaque mot qui serait sorti de leur bouche? A quelle gêne le poète ne m'aurait-il pas mis? Mes larmes ne coulent qu'au moment de la reconnaissance; elles auraient coulé longtemps auparavant" (1306)

The importance of the audience's complicity with the text, not only links Diderot's strictures to the Ancients, it also emphasizes the ritual aspect of the performance. While contemporary playwrights cannot replicate the pre-knowledge of ancient audiences or the ritual repetition of the mass in writing new plays, they can insure that the audience has more knowledge of the story being told than the characters on the stage.

Diderot's exploration of the non-verbal aspects of stage performance also goes beyond liturgical performance and makes use of what would more properly be called non-speech vocalizations; that is, the use of sounds which express emotion without the use of language.¹⁴⁰ While these are not strictly visual components of performance, their importance here is that they do not rely on language for their reception by the audience.

Le poète l'a montré [Philoctète] sur la scène, couché à l'entrée de sa caverne, et couvert de lambeaux déchirés. Il s'y roule; il y éprouve une attaque de douleur; il y crie; il y fait entendre des voix inarticulées. La décoration était sauvage; la pièce marchait sans appareil. Des habits vrais, des discours vrais, une intrigue simple et naturelle. Notre goût serait bien dégradé, si ce spectacle ne nous affectait pas davantage que celui d'un homme richement vêtu, apprêté dans sa parure. (1155-1156)

Again, for Diderot, the effectiveness of these non-speech vocalizations lies in their simplicity and realism. To the inarticulate cries of those in the throes of deep emotion, Diderot would also add the stumbling hesitations and confused ramblings that are part of everyday speech. The importance of such vocalizations lies in their power to convince the audience of their authenticity and to imitate the natural flow of speech that has little in common with the polished rhetoric of classical theatre.

Qu'est-ce qui nous affecte dans le spectacle de l'homme animé de quelque grande passion? Sont-ce ses discours? Quelquefois. Mais ce qui émeut toujours, ce sont des cris, des mots inarticulés, des voix rompues, quelques monosyllabes qui s'échappent par intervalles, je ne sais quel murmure dans la gorge, entre les dents. La violence du sentiment coupant la respiration et portant le trouble dans l'esprit, les syllabes des mots se séparent, l'homme passe d'une idée à une autre; il commence une multitude de discours; il n'en finit aucun; et, à l'exception de quelques sentiments qu'il rend dans le premier accès et auxquels il revient sans cesse, le reste n'est qu'une suite de bruits faibles et confus, de sons expirants, d'accents étouffés que l'acteur connaît mieux que le poète. (*Entretiens* 1144-1145)

¹⁴⁰ The mass did include, of course, chants and speech in Latin which might be considered non-speech vocalizations in that most of the congregation would not have understood the language.

The crucial function of all these non-verbal performance strategies, pantomime, tableaux, non-speech vocalizations, is to gain the attention and involvement of the spectator. The importance of the attention of the viewer is a recurring theme in Diderot's work and it is intimately related to the development of virtue. But enhancing the audience's involvement in the theatrical experience was only the first step in Diderot's project. He also sought to strengthen their ability to evaluate that experience and, in this, they would differ sharply from a congregation of the faithful whose spectatorship did not require or admit of critical appraisal. The spectator-critic would need to develop the capacity to become overwhelmed by an emotionally powerful experience and yet be able to provide an intellectual critique of that same experience. The key to that apparent paradox can be found through an analysis of the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique*. Rather than approaching these texts from the perspective of Diderot's proposals to transform theatre practice, we will be looking at them as a means of educating the audience to assume a new role that combines aesthetic pleasure with civic responsibility.

D. The Spectator-Critic

While Diderot intended to reorganize the balance between the verbal and the non-verbal that obtained during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he did not underestimate the importance of speech.

La pantomime, si négligée parmi nous, est employée dans cette scène [entre Clairville et Dorval]; et vous avez éprouvé vous-mêmes avec quel succès!... Quel effet cet art, joint au discours, ne produirait-il pas? Pourquoi avons-nous séparé ce que la nature a joint? A tout moment, le geste ne répond-il pas au discours?
(*Entretiens* 1143-1144)

Both speech and gesture are necessary components of human communication and expressivity. Classical theatre errs in its insistence on the primacy of rhetoric as a vehicle of dramatic presentation and in its insistence on an unnatural style of delivery, but speech provides information for the audience that cannot be fully expressed through gesture.

Near the end of *De la poésie dramatique*, Diderot imagines a scene between Orestes and Pylades, taken from Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Tauri*.

...dans quel effroi ne me jettera-t-il pas, si les idées d'Oreste se troublent peu à peu, à mesure qu'il raisonne avec son ami; si ses yeux s'égarerent, s'il cherche autour de lui, s'il s'arrête, s'il continue de parler, s'il s'arrête encore, si le désordre de son action et de son discours s'accroît;... s'il succombe sous la violence du tourment; s'il en est renversé par terre, si Pylade le relève, l'appuie, et lui essuie de sa main le visage et la bouche;... si, entrouvrant ensuite les paupières, et semblable à un homme qui le soutiennent et qui le pressent, il lui dit, en penchant la tête de son côté, et d'une voix éteinte: "Pylade, est-ce à toi de mourir?," quel effet cette pantomime ne produira-t-elle pas?... Séparez ici la pantomime du discours, et vous tuerez l'un et l'autre. (*De la poésie dramatique* 1339)

The power of each of these elements, pantomime and discourse, is not of the same nature and derives from different bases. Pantomime speaks directly to the feelings, creating strong emotion without the viewer being able to accurately assess the source of the character's pain. The spectator makes an empathic leap, identifying with the representation of a feeling, but bypassing knowledge of its motivation. It is only with

Orestes' words that the viewer understands the specificity of his torment. Language is required to fully understand a scene, while action engages the most basic responses.

A crucial difference thus exists between the congregation and the audience: it is in the theatre that the engulfing power of emotion is tempered with intellectual distance. This difference is further elucidated in Diderot's presentation of a sketch of the death of Socrates which incorporates the use of pantomime, tableaux, non-speech vocalizations and language, in order to present an example of such a synthesis. Diderot introduces this sketch as “une suite de tableaux” and exhorts the reader : “appliquez les lois de la composition pittoresque à la pantomime, et vous verrez que ce sont les mêmes” (1342). The scene includes gesture, inarticulate sounds and speech, as well as the recommended group compositions. In his description of Socrates' friends as he drinks from the cup, Diderot shows a variety of possible responses.

Les uns s'envelopèrent dans leur manteau. Criton s'était levé, et il errait dans la prison en poussant des cris. D'autres, immobiles et droits, regardaient Socrate dans un morne silence, et des larmes coulaient le long de leurs joues. Apollodore s'était assis sur les pieds du lit, le dos tourné à Socrate, et la bouche penchée sur ses mains, il étouffait ses sanglots. (*De la poésie dramatique* 1341)

The sketch provides the viewer with a scene of intense feeling, enhanced through the representation of a number of different ways that grief can be portrayed. Socrates then responds to the grief of his disciples in speech.

Il disait à celui-ci: "Où est la fermeté, la philosophie, la vertu?... A celui-là: "C'est pour cela que j'avais éloigné les femmes..." A tous: "Eh bien! Anyte et Mélite auront donc pu me faire du mal!... Mes amis, nous nous reverrons... Si vous vous affligez ainsi, vous n'en croyez rien." (*De la poésie dramatique* 1341)

It is through these words that the meaning and tone of the scene are changed. Socrates provides both education and solace to his friends through language. He does not provide embraces and tears in his show of support; rather, he would have them reflect on their

philosophy and gain support from that. It is the power of their reason which will guide them in finding a way through the morass of their overwhelming feelings.

Diderot's vision of the theatre as an institution that would retain the traditional power of the church as a focus for community cohesion and, at the same time, be a vehicle for social change, becomes possible only through the use of speech.¹⁴¹ It is through language that we manipulate and understand the world; and it is only through language that we can change it. The republic of letters allowed for the dissemination of ideas and the critique of institutions in the public forum. This forum was a means of evaluating not only specific ideas and institutional practice, but of emotional responses to those ideas and practices. The power of the non-verbal lies in its ability to elicit intense emotion through what is experienced rather than understood. Thus the pageantry of the Church and the Crown can be used to manipulate an uneducated public who naturally respond to the awe-inspiring grandeur of spectacle.¹⁴² It is only through language that those responses can be analyzed and understood in a way that allows the viewer to incorporate visceral responses into thoughtful action. The *Salons* and *Essais sur la peinture* are, in a sense, tutorials on how to enjoy aesthetic pleasures while maintaining the critical faculty. Diderot says of himself in his letter to Mme Riccoboni, “je sais aussi m’aliéner” (*Correspondance* 82), and he expects the same of his theatre-goers.¹⁴³ Diderot's secular church allows for, and

¹⁴¹ Speech has a particular significance for Diderot. As we shall see in Chapter Four, Diderot's political critiques often link silence and superstition. In the *Histoire des deux Indes*, for example, he fears the institution of a theocratic state where subjects are “réduites au silence par des prodiges ou par des forfaits.” Additionally, in the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron* he notes that “parler rigoureusement” is one of the requirements of enlightenment.

¹⁴² See Chapter Four for a discussion of Diderot's warning to Catherine II in *Observations sur le Nakaz* of this possibility.

¹⁴³ The importance of audience members distancing themselves from the play remains an issue for contemporary writers as well. See Paul Woodruff's *The Necessity of Theater: The Art of Watching and Being Watched* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) for his discussion of the relationship between meaning and reflection for the spectator (200-202). Bertolt Brecht will, of course, elaborate some of

demands, the expression and appreciation of the passions in a context which creates a congregation of critics.

Through his use of the art critic as a spectator-critic in the *Salons* (1759-1781), Diderot provides a model for his conception of the relationship between viewer and spectacle. The *Salons* are replete with examples of Diderot the art critic apparently overwhelmed by the sublimity of a work of art, while continuing to maintain a critical distance.¹⁴⁴ This critical distance is created however, not in the moment of beholding, but in the process of hearing the opinions of others and sharing his experience through the text that is the *Salons*.¹⁴⁵ In addition to emphasizing the importance of public discussion in the formation of critical judgment, Diderot also notes the necessity of private meditation, a theme we will see repeated in the discussion of *Le Fils naturel* below.

J'ai donné le temps à l'impression d'arriver et d'entrer. J'ai ouvert mon âme aux effets, je m'en suis laissé pénétrer. J'ai recueilli la sentence du vieillard et la pensée de l'enfant, le jugement de l'homme de lettres, le mot de l'homme du monde et les propos du peuple... Seul, j'ai médité ce que j'ai vu et entendu.¹⁴⁶

The use of the art critic as a model for the spectator-critic is particularly apt in the context of Diderot's larger purpose, as he sought to develop the critical faculties of the

Diderot's ideas in the development of his "epic theatre." See Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985) for his discussion of Brecht's indebtedness to Diderot (196-200), as well as Andy Byford, "The Figure of the 'Spectator' in the theoretical writings of Brecht, Diderot, and Rousseau" *Symposium* 56 (2002):25-42.

¹⁴⁴ My thanks to Nicholas Rennie for bringing to my attention the similarity of Diderot's formulation with that of Kant in *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. James Creed Meredith, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952) where Kant suggests that the overwhelming nature of the human response to the sublime leads to the awareness of the limitations of imagination and thus to the appreciation of reason as a means of apprehending the world beyond the use of the senses (495-505). For further discussion of Kant's theory of aesthetic reflective judgment see Bjorn K. Myska, *The Sublime in Kant and Becket: aesthetic judgments, ethics and literature* (Berlin: W.de Gruyter, 2002) and Robert R. Clewis, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁵ This ability of the critic to become absorbed and maintain critical distance is analogous to the ability of the artist to be consumed by enthusiasm and create a work of art discussed in Chapter One.

¹⁴⁶ Diderot, *Salon de 1765, Œuvres de Diderot IV* 291.

public in the face of powerful institutional agents. As Habermas notes, the critic is a model of a peer rather than an authority.

The *Kunstrichter* (art critic) retained something of the amateur; his expertise only held good until countermanded; lay judgment was organized in it without becoming, by way of specialization, anything else than the judgment of one private person among all others who ultimately were not to be obligated by any judgment except their own. This was precisely where the art critic differed from the judge.¹⁴⁷

One can add that the art critic differs from all ecclesiastical and political authority, and thus serves as a stand-in for the public. The absorption and rapture experienced by the viewer of a painting as well as the enthusiasm and critical analysis of the art critic can be expanded to include the theatre audience or a religious congregation as a collective beholder and critic. This conception of the role of the spectator as a spectator-critic is consistent with Diderot's proposal for a secular church which will consist of a congregation of critics.

The republic of letters was fully developed during the Enlightenment and, as we have seen, Diderot was among those who understood that the power of the republic of letters was based in the exchange and dissemination of new ideas and critiques of established structures. I would add that he also saw the theatre as an underutilized resource in this process.

Tout peuple a des préjugés à détruire, des vices à décrier, et a besoin de spectacles, mais qui lui soient propres. Quel moyen, si le gouvernement en sait user, et qu'il soit question de préparer le changement d'une loi, ou l'abrogation d'un usage! (*De la poésie dramatique* 1129)

The accessibility of theatrical performance and text to critical review and change underscores its appropriateness as a new focus of community-building. In fact, the texts of Diderot's two major theatre pieces, *Le Fils naturel* and *Le Père de famille*, were

¹⁴⁷ Habermas 41.

published with accompanying texts that can be read as critiques of the plays which precede them. In my view, both the *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique* are attempts to put into practice Diderot's vision of the theatrical script and performance as a new kind of scripture and ceremony which allow for on-going critique and revision in the public sphere.¹⁴⁸

Le Fils naturel is constructed as a play which is to be presented as a commemorative event in which Christ's injunction to his disciples "faites cela en mémoire de moi" (Luke 22:19)¹⁴⁹ is echoed in the words of Lysimond to Dorval, as he insists that Dorval begin a memorializing ritual that will survive their own lives and allow Lysimond to continue to be a presence in the lives of future generations.

Il ne s'agit point d'élever ici des tréteaux, mais de conserver la mémoire d'un événement qui nous touche, et de le rendre comme il s'est passé... Nous le renouvellerions nous-mêmes tous les ans dans cette maison, dans ce salon. Les choses que nous avons dites, nous les redirions. Tes enfants en feraient autant, et les leurs, et leurs descendants. Et je me survivrais à moi-même, et j'irais converser ainsi, d'âge en âge, avec tous mes neveux. (*Le Fils naturel* 1082)

Diderot makes the association of this memorializing event to the Mass even more explicit when Moi is called to witness its performance on the Sabbath.¹⁵⁰ We should recall here that Diderot reinforces the association between the Mass and the presentation of plays

¹⁴⁸ The *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, in particular, is a text which has a long and rich history of literary analyses that cover a broad range of critical perspectives. As just one example, *Diderot, l'invention du drame*, ed. Marc Buffat (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000) contains ten articles that discuss the *Le Fils naturel* and the *Entretiens*, together and separately, from ten different points of view including: an analysis of the theme of incest, a novelistic reading of the entire work, a consideration of the impact of music in the *Troisième Entretien*, and the problems of producing the play today. The perspective taken in this study, that the *Entretiens* can usefully be considered a part of Diderot's larger political vision, is one that certainly accommodates a multitude of alternate readings of the text.

¹⁴⁹ Also found in 1 Corinthians 11:24.

¹⁵⁰ A number of writers call attention to the attempt to produce a ritualized performance in *Le Fils naturel* and of Diderot's apparent intention to link this ritual to the Mass. Béatrice Didier in "Images du sacré chez Diderot" *Travaux de littérature* 6 (1991) 193-209, Worvill in *Seeing speech: illusion and the transformation of dramatic writing in Diderot and Lessing* (84-85) and Creech in *Thresholds of Representation* (88) are three authors who note this association. My own perspective is that Diderot constructs this possibility of ritualized performance as a stand-in for the rigidity of classical theatre, absolutist politics and, most important, Church ritual, in order to show the short-comings of such ritual.

when he imagines presenting “une belle tragédie” or “une bonne comédie” on the Sabbath in the *Entretiens* (1147). Although the play is presented as a ritualized performance which is intended to preserve the feelings and ideas related to a particular series of events, the work of the *Entretiens* will be to show the problems inherent in this task.¹⁵¹ He will thus present the limitations of all ritual practice, including but not restricted to the mass, and provide a model that goes beyond these constraints and establishes the theatre as a space where the instinct for continuity is balanced with the necessity of change. In addition to its well-known reputation as an example of Diderot's development of the dialogic technique and as a source of his innovations for theatrical practice,¹⁵² the *Entretiens* can also be shown to be a subversion of both the possibility and the practicability of the sort of representation *Le Fils naturel* purports to portray. The analysis of the play found in the *Entretiens* is thus a critique not only of the accepted practices of the classical stage but also of all religious ritual.¹⁵³ This critique lays the groundwork for a new way of addressing theatrical performance.

As noted earlier, the moral basis of the theatre resides, for Diderot, in the emotional identification of the spectator with the characters on the stage. However, it is only through private reflections and the rational discussion of the effects and responses attendant upon that identification that the spectator can become an active participant in the process of creating ethical social behavior. Diderot raises the problem of the spectator's response and critical evaluation in the final section of *Le Fils naturel*. A few

¹⁵¹ Hayes, in *Identity and Ideology: Diderot, Sade and the Serious Genre* (42-43) and Creech, in *Thresholds of Representation* (88) also note this apparent failure of ritualized performance as attempted in *Le Fils naturel*.

¹⁵² See Derek F. Connon's *Innovation and Renewal: A Study of the Theatrical Works of Diderot* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1989) 5-74.

¹⁵³ While this critique can usefully be expanded to include other forms of social ritual or of ritualized performance in general, Diderot's frequent denunciations of the dangers of religious superstitions and the negative power of religious rituals would seem to make these the primary referent.

days after the truncated performance of the play that Moi witnesses, Dorval asks him if he was satisfied with the experience.

J'aime à dire la vérité. Cet homme aimait à l'entendre, et je lui répondis que le jeu des acteurs m'en avait tellement imposé qu'il m'était impossible de prononcer sur le reste; d'ailleurs que, n'ayant point entendu la dernière scène, j'ignorais le dénouement; mais que s'il voulait me communiquer l'ouvrage, je lui en dirais mon sentiment. (*Le Fils naturel* 1126)

Moi is unable to judge his response to the play based solely on his experience of the performance. The emotions evoked by the actors on the stage overwhelm his ability to give a critical response to the experience as a whole. Dorval, on the other hand, is satisfied that Moi enjoyed the experience.

Votre sentiment! Et n'en sais-je pas à présent ce que j'en veux savoir? Une pièce est moins faite pour être lue que pour être représentée; la représentation de celle-ci vous a plu, il ne m'en faut pas davantage. Cependant la voilà. Lisez-la, et en parlerons. (*Le Fils naturel* 1126)

Dorval, as the author of the piece, is initially interested only in Moi's emotional reaction to the play. He insists that the importance of the performance rests in its ability to please the audience. As Moi makes clear, however, it is only through reading the text in its entirety, and in private, that he can distance himself sufficiently from the emotional impact of the performance to give an informed opinion. Here Moi is akin to the amateur art critic of the *Salons*, who must mediate alone to understand his own responses.

While Dorval's comment on the importance of a play's performance is frequently cited to support the notion that Diderot privileges performance above text in his dramaturgical theory, the fact that the *Entretiens* is the record of the discussion Moi and Dorval have after Moi has read the text on his own undermines such an analysis. As in the case of the art critic noted earlier, Moi's role is that of a spectator-critic, who enacts the work of criticism after he has had the opportunity to reflect on the performance in solitude. While

it is only in solitude that one can obtain sufficient distance to evaluate the play, text and performance, the principles and values of the republic of letters require that this critique become part of public discourse. In the *Éloge de Richardson*, Diderot notes that it is “pour l'homme tranquille et solitaire, qui a connu la vanité du bruit et des amusements du monde, et qui aime à habiter l'ombre d'une retraite, et à s'attendrir utilement dans le silence,”¹⁵⁴ that Richardson writes. However, it is in conversation with others, that the value of Richardson's novel comes alive.

J'ai remarqué que, dans une société où la lecture de Richardson se faisait en commun ou séparément, la conversation en devenait plus intéressante et plus vive. J'ai entendu, à l'occasion de cette lecture, les points les plus importants de la morale et du goût discutés et approfondis. J'ai entendu disputer sur la conduite de ses personnages, comme sur des événements réels; louer, blâmer Paméla, Clarisse, Grandison, comme des personnages vivants qu'on aurait connus et auxquels on aurait pris le plus grand intérêt. Quelqu'un d'étranger à la lecture qui avait précédé et qui avait amené la conversation, se serait imaginé, à la vérité et à la chaleur de l'entretien, qu'il s'agissait d'un voisin, d'un parent, d'un ami, d'un frère, d'une sœur. (*Éloge de Richardson* 161)

What is true for other art forms is also valid for the theatre: the sequence of performance, solitary reflection and public discussion create the most complete theatrical experience.

While the *Entretiens* begins as a memorializing event, in the manner of the mass, it becomes apparent that this paradigm has several inherent difficulties. After having read the text, it becomes clear to Moi that the historical events represented in the play have been altered in a number of ways.

Je vous ai lu; mais je suis bien trompé, ou vous ne vous êtes pas attaché à répondre scrupuleusement aux intentions de monsieur votre père. Il vous avait recommandé, ce me semble, de rendre les choses comme elles s'étaient passées; et j'en ai remarqué plusieurs qui ont un caractère de fiction qui n'en impose qu'au théâtre, où l'on dirait qu'il y a une illusion et des applaudissements de convention. (*Entretiens* 1131)

¹⁵⁴Diderot, *Éloge de Richardson*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 159.

Dorval's defense of his need to alter real events to conform to the necessities of the stage allows Diderot to express his support for the retention of some stage conventions, such as the three unities, in the construction of plays, while calling for significant changes in stage productions, including sets that can be changed to suit the requirements of each scene. The discussion here already suggests that, even with changes to stage practice, any memorializing event is necessarily only apparently true. But there are more significant ways in which ritualized performance is problematic.

To be consistent with the strictures of his father, the play must remain static and fixed, and it requires a faithful rendering of the events as they occurred. However, no real event can ever be fixed because no real event can ever be understood from just one perspective. Thus, as Moi discovers through his reading of the text, many passages in the play were changed in order to satisfy the perspectives of all the characters involved.

Lorsque l'ouvrage fut achevé, je le communiquai à tous les personnages afin que chacun ajoutât à son rôle, en retranchât, et se peignît encore plus au vrai. Mais il arriva une chose à laquelle je ne m'attendais guère, et qui est cependant bien naturelle. C'est que, plus à leur état présent qu'à leur situation passée, ici ils adoucissent l'expression, là ils pallièrent un sentiment; ailleurs ils préparèrent un incident. Rosalie voulut paraître moins coupable aux yeux de Clairville; Clairville, se montrer encore plus passionné pour Rosalie; Constance, marquer un peu plus de tendresse à un homme qui est maintenant son époux; et la vérité des caractères en a souffert en quelques endroits. (*Entretiens* 1135)

By offering the text to the other characters to enhance its truthfulness, and accepting the changes made by them, Dorval acknowledges that his own version of events was only one version among many. Not only can the text not be fixed due to the multiple perspectives involved, but it also cannot remain static as the needs and perspectives of the characters change over time as well. Rosalie is changed by the experiences which are being memorialized in the play and thus she adds, in her own hand-writing, the line “je crus y

reconnaître la vérité de toutes ces chimères de perfection que je m'étais faites” in Act II, scene 2 of *Le Fils naturel*. While Moi considers such a line to be out of character for the young and naïve Rosalie, the line represents the self-knowledge she has gained since the original events. In the *Entretiens*, no one has a monopoly on the truth or on its portrayal. When Clairville rejects the dialogue that Dorval has written for him in Act V, scene 3, it is because Dorval's attempt to supplement his poor memory of events is a failure. Even Lysimond's servant, André, is given the opportunity to criticize Dorval's dramaturgical efforts.

André's critique is particularly interesting in part because his status as a character in the play trumps his status as a domestic and gives him a public voice. But André's voice is also used to insert references to overtly religious and political conflicts which are absent from the rest of the text.

Monsieur, est-ce qu'il est défendu de prononcer sur la scène le nom de Dieu, ce nom saint que votre père avait si souvent à la bouche: - Je ne crois pas, André. – Est-ce que vous avez appréhendé qu'on sût que votre père était chrétien? – Nullement, André. La morale du chrétien est si belle! Mais pourquoi cette question? - Entre nous on dit... - Quoi? - Que vous êtes... un peu... esprit fort; et sur les endroits que vous avez retranchés, j'en croirais quelque chose.

(*Entretiens* 1149)

The possibility of Dorval's suppression and rejection of the religion of his father is raised as an act of censorship that reveals the beliefs of the censor. Dorval's free-thinking is set in opposition to Lysimond's religious orthodoxy and thus Dorval's failure to adhere to the conditions set down by his father becomes not merely a son's lack of success but an act of defiance.

Puisque vous me le permettez, vous êtes un peu bref sur les bons procédés de l'Anglais qui vint à notre secours. Monsieur, il y a d'honnêtes gens partout... Mais vous êtes bien changé de ce que vous étiez, si ce qu'on dit encore de vous est vrai. - Et qu'est-ce qu'on dit encore? - Que vous avez été fou de ces gens-là. - André! –

Que vous regardiez leur pays comme l'asile de la liberté, la patrie de la vertu, de l'invention, de l'originalité. (*Entretiens* 1149)

André's suggestion that Dorval has altered the text in an attempt to mask his attraction to the "English traits" of invention and originality further emphasizes the difficulties Dorval faces in attempting to fulfill his father's wishes. Diderot shows the differences between the values and affinities of Dorval and Lysimond to be irreconcilable. Dorval cannot successfully create the memorializing event that was to have been *Le Fils naturel* because the basis of such an event restricts his personal creative liberty and artistic innovation.

The play that Moi has seen was not a verbatim account of events as they occurred, but a text that was edited and re-written various times and to which Moi has now added his own marginalia. Moi adds his comments in his role as a spectator, thus removing the audience from the role of passive receptor and inscribing the right of critical appraisal. Dorval's inability to strictly apply the instructions of his father is not a failure of his own, but of the instructions themselves. The authoritarianism of the father is thus rejected in favor of a collective creation that attempts to accommodate more than one point of view and that suggests that it is the right of the children to find their own way. That way, as we shall see, is finally explored in *Le Père de famille*, an elaboration of a particular "condition" that opens up all social conditions for public scrutiny. The conversations between Dorval and Moi provide the opportunity for Diderot to discuss contemporary stage practices and the need for reform in some areas.

[C]elui qui ignorera la raison poétique, ignorant aussi le fondement de la règle, ne saura ni l'abandonner, ni la suivre à propos. Il aura pour elle trop de respect ou trop de mépris, deux écueils opposés, mais également dangereux. L'un réduit à rien les observations et l'expérience des siècles passés, et ramène l'art à son enfance; l'autre l'arrête tout court où il est, et l'empêche d'aller en avant.

(*Entretiens* 1133)

In characteristic fashion, Diderot wishes to learn from the past but not be constrained by it; but it is precisely by this standard that *Le Fils naturel* is found wanting. The attempt at memorializing an event is finally rejected because it does not move theatre forward; rather it keeps theatre in its infancy as pure ritual. Diderot seeks a theatre that changes with the manners and morals of the age, rather than one that is tied to the experiences of the past. As in the performance of religious practice, ritualized theatre can be emotionally powerful and enjoyable as passive entertainment, but it fails as a site of social and political change.

Que ce ne sont plus, à proprement parler, les caractères qu'il faut mettre sur la scène, mais les conditions... 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. (*Entretiens* 1176-1177)

The portrayal of the many conditions of life will enhance the emotional identification necessary to create ethical behavior. As Diderot will later note in the *Éloge de Richardson*, artistic representation affects the audience most powerfully when naturalistic situations and emotions are depicted.

Le monde où nous vivons est le lieu de sa scène; le fond de son drame est vrai; ses personnages ont toute la réalité possible; ses caractères sont pris du milieu de la société; ses incidents sont dans les mœurs de toutes les nations policées; les passions qu'il peint sont telles que je les éprouve en moi; ce sont les mêmes objets qui les émeuvent, elles ont l'énergie que je leur connais; les traverses et les afflictions de ses personnages sont de la nature de celles qui me menacent sans cesse; il me montre le cours général des choses qui m'environnent. Sans cet art, mon âme se pliant avec peine à des biais chimériques, l'illusion ne serait que momentanée, et l'impression faible et passagère. (*Éloge de Richardson* 156)

At the same time, an understanding of the various conditions will serve to change the political landscape.

Moi. - On aurait de la peine à en citer une [pièce] sans un père de famille.
Dorval. - J'en conviens; mais le père de famille n'est parfait. En un mot, je

vous demanderai si les devoirs des conditions, leurs avantages, leurs inconvénients; leurs dangers ont été mis sur la scène. Si c'est la base de l'intrigue et de la morale de nos pièces... Nous avons chacun notre état dans la société; mais nous avons affaire à des hommes de tous les états.

Les conditions! Combien de détails importants, d'actions publiques et domestiques, de vérités inconnues, de situations nouvelles à tirer de ce fonds! Et les conditions n'ont-elles pas entre elles les mêmes contrastes que les caractères? et le poète ne pourra-t-il pas les opposer? (*Entretiens* 1177)

The future of the theatre lies not in ritualized performance that is reminiscent of church practices and court processions, but in a new form of social practice that includes innovative works with all of the public as subject and audience. It is important to remember here that, in the ancient Greek theatre to which Diderot often alludes, while the time and place of performances were subject to religious and political requirements, the plays themselves were pieces newly created for each festival.¹⁵⁵ The ancient theatre that Diderot admired as a site of civic cohesion relied not on the repeated presentation of a memorialized event, but on the performance of new plays.¹⁵⁶ Unlike ancient and contemporary tragedies, however, Diderot envisioned new theatrical works that would be “plus voisine de nous” and would show not the trials of gods and kings but “les malheurs qui nous environnent” (*Entretiens* 1174). Through its analysis and critique of the failure of *Le Fils naturel* as an appropriate model for the future of theatre, the *Entretiens* implicitly criticizes the failure of church ritual and political absolutism to address the moral needs of the community. The needs of the community are not static and thus the theatre requires continual up-dating in order to maintain its relevance. In the *Entretiens*, Diderot notes that “[t]elle est encore la vicissitude des ridicules and des vices, que je

¹⁵⁵ See J. Michael Walton *Greek Theatre Practice* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980) for his discussion of the organization of the dramatic festivals in ancient Athens and the expectations placed on the playwrights. After having submitted proposals for a group of four tragedies, each of the chosen playwrights would produce four plays to be performed solely during that year's festival (59-80).

¹⁵⁶ See Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz *Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) for her discussion of the relationship of the ancient Greek theatre to the Athenian polis as a site where the myths of the culture were retold in the context of contemporary political debates (33-84).

crois qu'on pourrait faire un *Misanthrope* nouveau tous les cinquante ans" (1178). The mutable nature of manners and morals demands a theatre that evolves with changing circumstance.

At the end of the *Entretiens*, Dorval tells Moi of another play he is writing that is to be called *Le Père de famille* and which will attempt to explore the conditions of fatherhood. Contrary to the method employed in the *Entretiens*, *De la poésie dramatique* presents *Le Père de famille* as a positive example of the new *drame*, in which the vicissitudes of all social conditions will be explored. Diderot's commitment to fully exploring the condition of fatherhood is evident in his treatment of the father in *Le Père de famille*. In the *Entretiens*, Dorval suggests that he will be completing the portrayal of his father, *le bon Lysimond*, in the new play he is writing. However, the father in *Le Père* is not the authoritarian paragon that we see in *Le Fils naturel*; in fact, the father function in *Le Père* is split between the Commandeur and Le Père.¹⁵⁷ This splitting allows Diderot to interrogate more aspects of the role of the father than might otherwise be possible. Although the Commandeur is presented as the more authoritarian of the two, Le Père is not presented as a perfect parent. He is unable to assert himself with the Commandeur, he shares some of the Commandeur's rigid views regarding the rights of fathers, the young people in the play make plans to subvert his authority and he is shown to be uncertain and indecisive. These qualities are, of course, balanced by his love for his dependents and his eventual willingness to change. But it is precisely this conflict between his personal expectations and the needs of the young people over whom he has authority that provides the spectator with a new vision of fatherhood. Le Père is not the

¹⁵⁷ In *Innovation and Renewal: A Study of the Theatrical Works of Diderot*, Connon attributes this splitting to an autobiographical motivation, arguing that Diderot embodied the negative qualities of his brother in the Commandeur and the positive qualities of his father in *Le Père* (150-151).

comic Orgon of *Tartuffe*; he changes because of his recognition of the folly of his conventional beliefs. The subversive planning of the children and their lovers is thus presented as their rightful action. For Diderot, the importance of studying the many "conditions" that exist in society is to show the way in which "ce sont les misérables conventions qui pervertissent l'homme, et non la nature humaine qu'il faut accuser" (*De la poésie dramatique* 1282). The spectator of *Le Père de famille* watches a deconstruction of the *le bon Lysimond*, in which the wishes of the father are not assumed to be sacred and the will of the children to be heard and acknowledged triumphs. Diderot presents the *drame* as theatre that can provide social and moral critique in *Le Père de famille* and he uses *De la poésie dramatique* to elaborate this position.

Throughout *De la poésie dramatique*, Diderot refers to *Le Père de famille* to demonstrate how he went about resolving dramaturgical problems. So, for example, in section VIII: *De l'esquisse* he delineates the way in which he followed Aristotle's advice that "soit que vous travailliez sur un sujet connu, soit que vous en tentiez un nouveau, commencez par esquisser la fable; et vous penserez ensuite aux épisodes ou circonstances qui doivent l'étendre" (1290). Diderot believes that this idea can be applied to all genres, and he proceeds to show how his sketches for *Le Père* guided him in developing the events he portrayed. In addition to using *Le Père* as an exemplary text, this strategy allows him to link the *drame* with the Ancients, as a new genre that accepts the wisdom of the past. This strategy is continued in section XI: *De l'intérêt*, in which he uses examples from Euripides' *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Voltaire's *Zaïre*, Racine's *Britannicus* and his own *Le Père de famille* in determining how much of the plot should be revealed to the audience (1306-1308). He thus casts his new play in the context of other, serious

plays from ancient times to the present. In so doing, he opens the genre up to scrutiny beside established classics, asking the reader of *De la poésie dramatique* to judge its worth. Rather than a dialogue between two interlocutors as in the *Entretiens*, *De la poésie* is written as an engagement with the reader. The juxtaposition of his work and those of celebrated playwrights is presented as a laying bare of the process of artistic production and of the problems encountered in that process, rather than as a set of rules to be obeyed.

By exposing his own creative process to public view, Diderot engages the reader of the text and, by extension, the viewer of the play in a critical analysis of the work. In section XIII: *Des caractères*, Diderot tells the reader that he believes he has got something right in *Le Père de famille*; he has been looking for and thinks he has found the proper balance among his characters, so that he has developed "different" personalities rather than "contrasting" ones.

Je veux que les caractères soient différents; mais je vous avoue que le contraste m'en déplâit. Écoutez mes raisons, et jugez. (1312)

Using Molière's *Le Misanthrope* and Terence's *Les Adelphes*, as examples of the use of contrast in both comedy and tragedy, he proceeds to describe the characters in *Le Père* as individuals the reader might be likely to come across assembled together in real life, not only on the stage. Readers are being asked to judge the efficacy of the new genre as a means of portraying their social reality. A similar process is seen in section XVI: *Des scènes*, where Diderot explains that "ce que j'ai essayé" to do in Act II, scene 1 was to manage a scene that included two sets of characters that were both speaking and miming simultaneously (1323). He leaves it to the reader to judge whether he was successful in

presenting this scene clearly and without confusion.¹⁵⁸ Diderot then discusses several other scenes, including Act II, scene 3 and Act IV, scene 10, in which he would have liked to try the same method, but found it daunting.¹⁵⁹ He explains that he was able to imagine certain methods that might work well for the reader but not for the spectator: such as, for example, printing the dialogue and pantomime for the simultaneous scenes in two side-by-side columns. For Diderot, the experience of the spectator is of primary importance to the playwright in developing his work, but it is during the process of analyzing the text and its relationship to performance that reader and spectator become critics, no longer ceding this power to professional critics.

Le rôle d'un auteur est un rôle assez vain; c'est celui d'un homme qui se croit en état de donner des leçons au public. Et le rôle du critique? Il est bien plus vain encore; c'est celui d'un homme qui se croit en état de donner des leçons à celui qui se croit en état d'en donner au public.

L'auteur dit: "Messieurs, écoutez-moi; car je suis votre maître." Et le critique: "C'est moi, messieurs, qu'il faut écouter; car je suis le maître de vos maîtres." (1344)

The text of *De la poésie dramatique* is a primer for the public audience, not the professional critic, on how to critically appraise a work they have seen or read by basing that appraisal on their own experience of the play. While not denying the genius of some playwrights, attention is given to the work of authorship as a series of trials, choices and problems to be solved. The work of writing a play is presented as an incremental process, replete with variations, changes and continual critique. Before elaborating on

¹⁵⁸ This tone of engaging the reader in puzzling through the problems presented can be found throughout *De la poésie dramatique*. For example, we find the question "sera-ce la faute du genre ou la mienne?" addressed to the reader during a discussion of the short-comings of *Le Père de famille* and he then suggests "appliquons ici ce moyen" as he continues to ask the reader to follow him through the process of critique (1282). Later in the text, Diderot lays out the process through which he would construct an out-line for a play and, using *Le Père de famille* as a model, provides the reader with the sort of information one can use to evaluate a play (1292).

¹⁵⁹ In his discussion of these scenes, Diderot also refers to the role of the actor, whose skill is required to make up for some of the deficits of the playwright who may lack the skill to create the scene that he(the author) is only able to imagine (1323).

the notion of the use of the *modèle idéal* in artistic creation, Diderot has already presented an example of its application.

E. Conclusion

Although the term *modèle idéal* can easily be confounded with platonic idealism, Diderot's concept is rooted in a materialist and sensationalist philosophy.¹⁶⁰ As Joseph Roach notes, in *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, Diderot also referred to the concept as a *modèle intérieur*, which more clearly identifies the concept as a mental analogue to the physical *modèle extérieur* of the painter or sculptor.¹⁶¹ The *modèle idéal* is thus a means of describing the internal process by which the artist creates a work of art. Using observation and memory, the artist creates an internal model which serves as the template for all artistic production. In this way, the artist produces not an “imitation of reality” but an “illusion of reality” created from personal experience (Roach 125). But a crucial aspect of this model is its adaptability to new and changing circumstance and information.

C'est l'étude des passions, des mœurs, des caractères, des usages, qui apprendra au peintre de l'homme à altérer son modèle, et à le réduire de l'état d'homme à celui d'homme à bon ou méchant, tranquille ou colère.

(De la poésie dramatique 1350)

This process applies to the sculptor, the painter and the dramaturge. Even the philosopher must acknowledge, as Ariste does at the end of *De la poésie*, that he must “[modifier sa philosophie] selon les circonstances” (1349) in order to keep abreast of a constantly changing reality. As the texts of the *Entretiens* and *De la poésie dramatique* demonstrate, the work of artistic creation is necessarily a series of trials, choices and

¹⁶⁰ While it is in the *Salon of 1767* and *De la poésie dramatique*, that Diderot first discusses his conception of the *modèle idéal*, it is in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1399-1401) that this idea is linked to the actor's role in society. Through the use of the *modèle idéal* the actor is able to use the memories collected from close observation of others to create an internal model of a character which then becomes refined and perfected in performance. This template is created from the actor's own store of sensations and is constantly re-worked through a confluence of inspiration, skill and experience.

¹⁶¹ Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985) 125-126.

problems to be solved not only for authors alone in their studies. The two texts offer another model for the production of theatrical performance and published scripts, which incorporates the emotional and intellectual responses of the audience as part of an ongoing critical/creative process. Professional critics and authors are to share their privileged place as arbiters of taste and morality with a public composed of critics of both performance and script. In this way, the theatre offers a space for the dissemination and evaluation of ideas in the public forum, which has the potential to expand the republic of letters to include the entire theatre-going public. The new theatre will incorporate techniques to enhance the emotional responsiveness of the audience; an audience distinguished from the passive congregation that remains in awe of the spectacle presented to them, by its recognition of its right to critique and its knowledge of how that critique is to be accomplished. The *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique* present a paradigm for a different kind of artistic reception, one that presents theatrical works not as finished products imposed from without but as works which provide the raw material for private meditation and public discussion.

To the dedication page of *Le Père de famille*, Diderot appends an epigraph from Horace.

Il te faut marquer les mœurs de chaque âge, et donner aux caractères, qui changent avec les années, les traits qui leur conviennent.
(*Le Père de famille* 1193)

The depiction of the changing state of human affairs was not merely an aesthetic issue for Diderot or, indeed, for the *philosophes* in general. The next chapter places Diderot's political writings within the context of eighteenth-century debates regarding the proper functioning of the state and the appropriate role of religion in society. While Diderot's

political thought has many points of similarity with that of other eighteenth-century political writers, notably Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau, it is through his differences that his vision of a society where religion is replaced with theatre can be discerned. By viewing his theatrical works through the perspective of his political œuvre, it becomes evident that Diderot envisioned theatrical performance as a type of social contract. The crucial point being that the various forms of this contract can be negotiated among the participants, rather than imposed from without. For Diderot, the theatre is a privileged space which, particularly in a time of religious intolerance and political absolutism, can serve as a vehicle for change and a source of social cohesion. The process of negotiation and criticism creates a locus for the social contract that incorporates change into its very nature.

Chapter Four: The Citizen-Spectator and the Social Contract

A. Introduction

Within the authoritarian structures of eighteenth-century France, Diderot draws on the power of religious communion and on the developing republic of letters to create a theatre audience capable of being more than passive consumers of culture. I have argued that through the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique*, Diderot presents the work of artistic creation as a series of trials, choices and problems to be solved, not only by authors, but by spectator-critics. These texts provide a model for the production of theatrical performance and published scripts which incorporates the emotional and intellectual responses of the spectator as part of an on-going critical/creative process. The idea of an actively engaged public is equally evident in his political texts and is associated with the importance of universal education and the reciprocal relationship that exists between the government and the governed. In this chapter, by viewing the theatrical works through the perspective of his political œuvre, it becomes clear that Diderot envisioned the theatre as replacing the “code religieux” with an institution that would work in concert with governing bodies to ensure the liberty and happiness of their citizens. Fully engaged spectators will be capable of doing more than critique artistic productions, they will become citizen-spectators, using the critical faculties developed through their involvement in cultural productions to judge the performance of political actors and actions as well.

Before moving on to an analysis of the close relationship between Diderot’s aesthetic and political theories, it is necessary to situate Diderot’s thought in the context of his contemporaries. The investigation and critique of political and religious structures was

one of the major projects of the Enlightenment. The concept of natural law provided the basis for the examination of the authoritarian institutions existing in eighteenth-century France for the major authors of the period, including Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau.¹⁶² All three share an interest in developing institutions based on natural law, insisting that natural law provides a basis for political and religious structures that pre-dates all positive law, whether that law derives from revelation or fiat. Just as natural law prepares the foundation of a properly functioning state and for the relationship of various forms of government to human happiness and notions of justice, natural religion provides the groundwork of a universal morality and for notions of religious toleration. While Diderot shares this belief in the primacy of natural law and natural religion, it is important to focus attention on how his thinking was a significant departure from all three. These differences highlight the radical nature of Diderot's thinking about religion and the theatre and their function within the body politic.

¹⁶² For discussions of natural law during the Enlightenment see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 234-274 and Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969) 455-461.

B. Natural Law and Natural Religion

Natural law was the subject of serious debate long before the eighteenth-century. From Plato and the Stoics in ancient Greece, through Aquinas in the Middle Ages, to Grotius, Pufendorf and Hobbes in the sixteenth century, the matter of the relationship of natural law to contemporary political structures was a subject of intense scrutiny.¹⁶³ While Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot all use the concept of natural law as the basis for their investigations of political and social structures, they each provide different supports for this belief. For Montesquieu, in *De l'Esprit des lois* (1748), the existence of justice and injustice is an element of the natural world comparable to the basic assumptions of mathematics.¹⁶⁴

Les lois, dans la signification la plus étendue, sont les rapports nécessaires qui dérivent de la nature des choses... Avant qu'il y eût des lois faites, il y avait des rapports de justice possibles. Dire qu'il n'y a rien de juste ni d'injuste que ce qu'ordonnent ou défendent les lois positives, c'est dire qu'avant qu'on eût tracé de cercle, tous les rayons n'étaient pas égaux.¹⁶⁵

Among these necessary relations is natural religion which “est tirée de la nature de l'homme, dont ne peut pas disputer, et du sentiment intérieur de l'homme, dont on ne

¹⁶³ See C.P. Courtney's “Montesquieu and Natural Law” in *Montesquieu's Science of Politics*, eds. David W. Carrithers, Michael A. Mosher, and Paul A. Rahe (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), for a discussion of the various forms of this debate and their impact on Montesquieu and his contemporaries (41-68). Mary Efrosini Gregory, in *Freedom in French Enlightenment Thought* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), also traces the general outlines of these debates (1-16).

¹⁶⁴ In *Lettres persanes* (1721) Lettre LXXXIII, ed. Jean Starobinski (Paris: Gallimard, 1973) Montesquieu also makes a case for natural law based on another sort of logical necessity.

[I]l n'est pas possible que Dieu fasse jamais rien injuste : dès qu'on suppose qu'il voit la justice, il faut nécessairement qu'il la suive : car, comme il n'a besoin de rien, et qu'il se suffit à lui-même, il serait le plus méchant de tous les êtres, puisqu'il serait sans intérêt.

Ainsi, quand il n'y aurait pas de Dieu, nous devrions toujours aimer la justice; c'est-à-dire, faire nos efforts pour ressembler à cet être dont nous avons une si belle idée, et qui, s'il existait, serait nécessairement juste. Libres que nous serions du joug de la religion, nous ne devrions pas l'être de celui de l'équité.

¹⁶⁵ Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, ed. Laurent Versini (Paris: Gallimard, 1195) I.1.

peut pas disputer encore.”¹⁶⁶ Unlike positive law and revealed religion, which are subject to human construction and interpretation, the tenets of natural law and natural religion are derived from the very nature of things.

Voltaire, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1765), makes a case for the natural basis of justice through an argument that combines scientific and anthropological arguments while also addressing the possible contradictions of natural law and empiricism.

Qui nous a donné le sentiment du juste et de l’injuste ? Dieu, qui nous a donné un cerveau et un cœur. Mais quand votre raison vous apprend-elle qu’il y a vice et vertu ? Quand elle nous apprend que deux et deux font quatre. Il n’y a point de connaissance innée, par la raison qu’il n’y a point d’arbre qui porte des feuilles et des fruits en sortant de la terre. Rien n’est ce qu’on appelle inné, c’est-à-dire né développé ; mais répétons-le encore, Dieu nous fait naître avec des organes qui, à mesure qu’ils croissent, nous font sentir tout ce que notre espèce doit sentir pour la conservation de cette espèce.

(*Dictionnaire philosophique* “Juste (du) et de l’injuste”)

In this passage, Voltaire attempts to resolve the contradiction implicit in his rejection of the idea of innate ideas and his belief in a natural basis for justice by analogizing the growth of plant life to the development of human moral consciousness. Moral awareness is part of the natural progress of human development. The naturalness of this growth is supported by a comparison of other cultures, present and past.

Comment ce mystère continuel s’opère-t-il ? Dites-le-moi, jaunes habitants des îles de la Sonde, noirs Africains, imberbes Canadiens, et vous Platon, Cicéron, Épictète. Vous sentez tous également qu’il est mieux de donner le superflu de votre pain, de votre riz ou de votre manioc au pauvre qui vous le demande humblement, que de le tuer ou de lui crever les deux yeux. Il est évident à toute la terre qu’un bienfait est plus honnête qu’un outrage, que la douceur est préférable à l’emportement.

Redisons tous les jours à tous les hommes : “La morale est une, elle vient de Dieu; les dogmes sont différents, ils viennent de nous.”

Dieu avait donné la connaissance du juste et de l’injuste dans tous les temps qui précédèrent le christianisme.

(*Dictionnaire philosophique*, “Juste (du) et de l’injuste”)

¹⁶⁶ Montesquieu, *Lettre à Warburton* (mai 1754), *Correspondance de Montesquieu*, eds. F. Gebelin et A. Morize (Paris: Champion, 1914) 528.

Neither positive law nor revealed religion is necessary to the development of morality, as evidenced throughout the history of humankind.

Rousseau, in his *Discours sur l'inégalité* (1755) employs comparative biology and psychology to describe the state of humanity prior to the imposition of religious or political rule, which includes both liberty and compassion.

[L]a Nature seule fait tout dans les opérations de la Bête, au-lieu que l'homme concourt aux siennes, en qualité d'agent libre. L'un choisit ou rejette par instinct, et l'autre par un acte de liberté... [I]l y a une autre qualité très spécifique qui distingue [l'homme et l'animal], et sur laquelle il ne peut y avoir de contestation, c'est la faculté de se perfectionner ; faculté qui, à l'aide des circonstances, développe successivement toutes les autres, et réside parmi nous tant dans l'espèce, que dans l'individu.

Il y a d'ailleurs un autre Principe... qui, ayant été donné à l'homme pour adoucir, en certaines circonstances, la férocité de son amour propre, ou le désir de se conserver avant la naissance de cet amour, tempère l'ardeur qu'il a pour son bien-être par une répugnance innée à voir souffrir son semblable. Je ne crois pas avoir aucune contradiction à craindre, en accordant à l'homme la seule vertu Naturelle, qu'ait été forcé de reconnaître le Détracteur le plus outré des vertus humaines. Je parle de la Pitié. (*Discours sur l'inégalité*, 71-72, 84)

Whether from the perspective of the natural or social sciences, liberty and justice and compassion are presented as pre-dating positive law and revealed religion and as residing in the basic structure of our humanness.

As early as 1746, in *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle*, Diderot proclaims his belief in a natural religion that he finds superior to all revealed religions. The advantage of natural religion lies in its simplicity and transparency. Unlike Christianity, which “au lieu d'éclaircir, donne lieu à une multitude infinie de ténèbres,” natural religion is accessible and comprehensible to all ; it is “écrite dans le cœur.”¹⁶⁷ Twenty-five years

¹⁶⁷ Diderot, *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle*, *Œuvres de Diderot I* 61.

later, in his contributions to Raynal's *L'Histoire des deux Indes*, Diderot finds the basis of morality to be located even more firmly within the human body.

[Une morale universelle] est dans l'homme même, dans la similitude d'organisation d'un homme à un autre, similitude d'organisation qui entraîne celle des mêmes besoins, des mêmes plaisirs, des mêmes peines, de la même force, de la même faiblesse; source de la nécessité de la société ou d'une lutte commune et concertée contre des dangers communs et naissants du sein de la nature même qui menace l'homme de cents côtés différents. *(L'Histoire des deux Indes, 587)*¹⁶⁸

This universal morality based on the common characteristics of all human beings defines, for Diderot, the basis of that natural religion that he finds preferable to all revealed religions. Morality “ne peut donc avoir pour base les opinions religieuses qui, depuis l'origine du monde et d'un pôle à l'autre, ont toujours varié” (587). The idea that civil and religious laws are antedated by a natural code that supersedes and calls into question the authority of both the crown and the church is fundamental to Enlightenment critiques and implies the need for social and political reform. In this regard, Diderot can be situated within the mainstream of eighteenth-century criticism of absolutism in its secular and spiritual forms. For Diderot, the notion of natural law was critical as establishing a material foundation for morality, rather than resting that foundation in a spiritual source. Although *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle* presents natural religion as a religion “qui vient de Dieu,” an important change in Diderot's thoughts about natural religion occurred early in his career.¹⁶⁹ By the time of *L'Histoire des deux Indes*, Diderot's deism has transformed into a more certain materialism which has important implications for his

¹⁶⁸ Diderot, *Contributions à L'Histoire des deux Indes, Œuvres de Diderot III* 587.

¹⁶⁹ See Aram Vartanian's “From Deist to Atheist: Diderot's Philosophical Orientation 1746 -1749” in *Diderot Studies*. eds. Otis E. Fellows and Norman L. Torrey (Syracuse: Syracuse university Press, 1969) 46-63, which supports the notion that this shift occurred quite early in Diderot's career and can be detected in important differences between the *Pensées philosophiques* and the *Lettre sur les aveugles*.

view of the body politic. It is only Diderot, among the most prominent of Enlightenment figures, who finds no place for religion in his vision of a properly functioning state.

C. Religion and the Body Politic

In Lettre XLVI of *Lettres persanes* (1721), Montesquieu displays skepticism regarding the relative value of revealed religion over natural religion, in terms of its practical application in society.

[E]n exerçant envers [les hommes] tous les devoirs de la charité et de l'humanité, et en ne violant point les lois sous lesquelles ils vivent... on est bien plus sûr de plaire à Dieu, qu'en observant telle ou telle cérémonie: car les cérémonies n'ont point un degré de bonté par elles-mêmes; elles ne sont bonnes qu'avec égard, et dans la supposition que Dieu les a commandées. Mais c'est la matière d'une grande discussion: on peut facilement s'y tromper, car il faut choisir les cérémonies d'une religion entre celles de deux mille.

The social value of charity and the civic virtue of compliance with the law are presented here as more pleasing to God than various rites and ritual practice. In *De l'Esprit des lois*, he considers laws that recall us to our better selves to be of value, whether those laws derive from religious beliefs or political authority. While there are some invariable laws that govern the world, Montesquieu notes, with some irony, that human intelligence and passion cause us to frequently transgress both divine and civil laws: since a person “pouvait à tous les instants oublier son créateur; Dieu l'a rappelé à lui par les lois de la religion” and, likewise, “[f]ait pour vivre dans la société, il y pouvait oublier les autres; les législateurs l'on rendu à ses devoirs par les lois politique et civiles.”¹⁷⁰ Both religious and civil laws serve a purpose in the body politic and, thus, his investigation into the myriad legal and political structures of his day leads him to consider that any religion is better than none at all.¹⁷¹

Dans un pays où l'on a le malheur d'avoir une religion que Dieu n'a pas donnée,

¹⁷⁰ Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, I.1.

¹⁷¹ See Rebecca E. Kingston's “Montesquieu on Religion and on the Question of Toleration” in *Montesquieu's Science of Politics*, eds. David W. Carrithers, Michael A. Mosher, and Paul A. Rahe (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001) for a nuanced analysis of some of the complexities of Montesquieu's thinking about religion.

il est toujours nécessaire qu'elle s'accorde avec la morale; parce que la religion, même fausse, est le meilleur garant que les hommes puissent avoir de la probité des hommes. (*De l'Esprit des lois*, XXIV.8)

This belief is echoed by Voltaire who, despite his many virulent attacks on religious intolerance and the conjunction of superstition and revealed religion, finds a place for religion in society. In his *Traité sur la Tolérance* (1763), Voltaire suggests that any religious belief is less dangerous than none.

Telle est la faiblesse du genre humain, et telle est sa perversité, qu'il vaut mieux sans doute pour lui d'être subjugué par toutes les superstitions possibles, pourvu qu'elles ne soient pas meurtrières, que de vivre sans religion. L'homme a toujours eu besoin d'un frein, et quoiqu'il fût ridicule de sacrifier aux faunes, aux sylvains, aux naïades, il était bien plus raisonnable et plus utile d'adorer ces images fantastiques de la Divinité que de se livrer à l'athéisme. Un athée qui serait raisonneur, violent et puissant, serait un fléau aussi funeste qu'un superstitieux sanguinaire.

Quand les hommes n'ont pas de notions saines de la Divinité, les idées fausses y suppléent, comme dans les temps malheureux on trafique avec de la mauvaise monnaie, quand on n'en a pas de bonne... Partout où il y a une société établie, une religion est nécessaire; les lois veillent sur les crimes connus, et la religion sur les crimes secrets.¹⁷²

Voltaire's contempt for the superstitious appears to be equal to his fear of the atheist, but he is able, nonetheless, to imagine a future in which superstitions are supplanted by "notions saines de la Divinité." The atheist appears to be dangerous due to the absence of beliefs which might be transformed in this way. The value of religion, true or false, lies in its capacity to moderate humanity's potential excesses. In this passage, Voltaire equates the blood-thirsty fanatic "qui vous dit qu'il aime mieux obéir à Dieu qu'aux hommes, et qui, en conséquence, est sûr de mériter le ciel en vous égorgeant,"¹⁷³ with the atheist who lacks any "notions saines" to serve as an internal monitor, as the two extremes which religion and the state have the responsibility to moderate.

¹⁷² Voltaire, *L'Affaire Calas et le Traité sur la Tolérance*, ed. Jacques Van den Heuvel (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) 170-171.

¹⁷³ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, "Fanatisme."

Rousseau's perspective on the value of religion in civil society also stresses its value for the body politic. In *Du Contrat social* (1762), Rousseau would have individual belief remain a matter of conscience, removed from the scrutiny and control of others, but the public profession of faith in the articles of a civil religion would be a means of maintaining standards of civility and sociability in society.

Chacun peut avoir au surplus telles opinions qu'il lui plait, sans qu'il appartienne au Souverain d'en connaître: car comme il n'a point de compétence dans l'autre monde, quel que soit le sort des sujets dans la vie à venir ce n'est pas son affaire, pourvu qu'ils soient bons citoyens dans celle-ci. Il y a donc une profession de foi purement civile dont il appartient au Souverain de fixer les articles, non pas précisément comme dogmes de Religion, mais comme sentiments de sociabilité, sans lesquels il est impossible d'être bon Citoyen ni sujet fidèle. Sans pouvoir obliger personne à les croire, il peut bannir de l'État quiconque ne les croit pas ; il peut le bannir, non comme impie, mais comme insociable, comme incapable d'aimer sincèrement les lois, la justice, et d'immoler au besoin sa vie à son devoir. Que si quelqu'un, après avoir reconnu publiquement ces même dogmes, se conduit comme ne les croyant pas, qu'il soit puni de mort ; il a commis le plus grand des crimes, il a menti devant les lois.¹⁷⁴

The importance of a civil religion to the functioning of the body politic is emphasized by the punishments attached to its denial: banishment or death.

Les dogmes de la Religion civile doivent être simples, en petit nombre, énoncés avec précision sans explications ni commentaires. L'existence de la Divinité puissante, intelligente, bienfaisante, prévoyante et pourvoyant, la vie à venir, le bonheur de justes, le châtement des méchants, la sainteté du Contrat social et des Lois, voilà les dogmes positifs. Quant aux dogmes négatifs, je les borne à un seul; c'est l'intolérance: elle rentre dans les cultes que nous avons exclus.

(*Du Contrat social*, 290-291)

Rousseau will keep “dogmes négatifs” out of civil religion and its articles of faith consist of a small number of required beliefs. In Rousseau's construction, religion becomes a repository for those positive values of society which would support a smoothly functioning state. The existence of a powerful deity who punishes the bad and rewards the good is seamlessly linked to the sanctity of the social contract and civil laws as

¹⁷⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat social*, ed. Robert Derathé (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) 289-290.

necessary foundations for a healthy body politic. While the bases for their beliefs in the importance of religion for society differ, in that Montesquieu and Voltaire rely on religious faith to guarantee that the individual will behave appropriately within society and Rousseau seeks to minimize the potential destructiveness of individual beliefs by creating a socially agreed-upon deism, all three agree that religion is necessary to maintain social stability. For Diderot, religion is not a necessary part of the body politic and it does not figure in his vision of the future.¹⁷⁵ Diderot rejects not only the notion that religion is necessary to maintain civil society but also the idea that moderation is the ultimate social virtue.

¹⁷⁵ In *Observations sur le Nakaz*, Diderot's recommendations for Catherine II include scathing commentary on the danger of religion to the body politic.

La religion est un appui qui finit toujours par renverser la maison. La distance entre l'autel et le trône ne peut jamais être trop grande. L'expérience de tous les temps et de tous les lieux a démontré le voisinage de l'autel pour le trône... La religion n'est pas même sans fâcheuse conséquence pour l'État démocratique.

(*Œuvres de Diderot III* 509-510)

Additionally, in the *Histoire des deux Indes*, he repeatedly makes the connection between religion and colonialism as being responsible for global problems (*Œuvres de Diderot III* 593 & 689).

D. Diderot's "Code Théâtral"

In *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, Diderot notes that the American Revolution provided "à tous les habitants de l'Europe un asile contre le fanatisme et la tyrannie,"¹⁷⁶ both forms of absolutism being linked by their constraints on free thought and liberty. Diderot's rejection of the value of religion in a future state derives not only from the connection between religion and political constraint and from his atheism,¹⁷⁷ but from his rejection of the notion of stasis. Just as his support for the idea of natural law is based in the materiality of the human body, his understanding of the body politic is linked to his scientific thought. Diderot theorizes the world in a state of constant flux, from the most basic forms of life to complex social institutions everything exists in a process of continual and unpredictable transformation.

[L]e philosophe... ne pourrait-il pas soupçonner que l'animalité avait de toute éternité ses éléments particuliers, épars et confondus dans la masse de la matière; qu'il est arrivé à ces éléments de se réunir, parce qu'il était possible que cela se fît; que l'embryon formé de ces éléments a passé par une infinité d'organisations et de développements; qu'il a eu, par succession, du mouvement, de la sensation, des idées, de la pensée, de la réflexion, de la conscience, des sentiments, des passions, des signes, des gestes, des sons, des sons articulés, une langue, des lois, des sciences, et des arts; qu'il s'est écoulé des millions d'années entre chacun de ces développements; qu'il a peut-être encore d'autres développements à subir, et d'autres accroissements à subir, et d'autres accroissements à prendre, qui nous sont inconnus; qu'il a eu ou qu'il aura un état stationnaire; qu'il s'éloigne, ou qu'il s'éloignera de cet état par un dépérissement éternel, pendant lequel ses facultés sortiront de lui comme elles y étaient entrées; qu'il disparaîtra pour jamais de la nature, ou plutôt qu'il continuera d'y exister, mais sous une forme, et avec des facultés tout autres que celles qu'on lui remarque dans cet instant de la durée ?¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Diderot, *Essais sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, *Œuvres de Diderot I* 1197.

¹⁷⁷ Diderot's atheism is perhaps a necessary though not sufficient reason for his rejection of the value of religion, since it is certainly possible to believe that religion might be a useful fiction to keep the masses in line despite one's personal beliefs.

¹⁷⁸ Diderot, *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*, *Œuvres de Diderot I* 597.

In posing this question at the end of the *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* (1753), Diderot presents the first affirmation of his life-long belief in a constantly changing world subject equally to the vagaries of chance and the constitution of matter.¹⁷⁹ Accordingly, he does not attempt to envision a point of stasis where governments and institutions remain fixed. Rather, he supports a notion of the functioning of society that is consistent with his approach to science.

In the *Pensées*, Diderot compares “la philosophie rationnelle” which “pèse les possibilités, prononce et s’arrête tout court” with the “philosophie expérimentale” which “ne sait ni ce qui lui viendra, ni ce qui ne lui viendra pas de son travail, mais elle travaille sans relâche.” While the non-experimentalist will insist that “on ne peut décomposer la lumière,” it is the experimentalist who will eventually discover the prism (568). Science is presented as a continuing search for viable practices rather the perfection of a system. In the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique*, Diderot presents the artistic project in the same terms, as a series of trials, choices and problems to be solved in a public forum, much as the results of scientific inquiry are disseminated and discussed. As we saw in Chapter Three, Diderot finds traditional performance to be problematic, in large part, because of its reliance on content and structures that seek to avoid change and attempt to maintain the status quo. Whether ceremonial or theatrical, performances that do not “changent avec les années” and fail to provide spectators with “les traits qui leur conviennent” are insufficient both artistically and politically (*Le Père de la famille* 1193). Diderot’s recommendations for the renewal of dramaturgy rest on

¹⁷⁹ In *Diderot’s Dream* (11-41), Anderson makes the case for the primacy of the notion of matter in motion in all his writing, “including the most literary,” throughout his career. See also Gregory’s *Diderot and the Metamorphosis of the Species* for a discussion of the importance of the notion of flux in Diderot’s scientific works (19-51, 125-129).

the same assumption underlying his scientific theories: society can best be maintained and have the longest duration¹⁸⁰ through the use of self-critiquing/self-regulating institutions that do not embody the reification of old forms and beliefs.

Laurent Versini, in his introduction to Diderot's political writings suggests that Diderot discounts the "code religieux" in his exploration of the relationship between the "code naturel" and the "code civil."

[Diderot] rejoint la théorie des deux bonheurs et des trois codes : le bonheur individuel, accidentel, renvoie en nous à la nature, à la satisfaction des besoins et des désirs du corps, il n'est pas du ressort des lois ; le bonheur collectif est celui du citoyen qui obéit comme chez Spinoza aux lois de la cité. Le premier est la part laissée au "code de la nature" même dans la cité, le second est le privilège de l'homme civil protégé par le "code de la société": la théorie des trois codes informe toutes les dernières œuvres, *Mélanges pour Catherine II, Nakaz, Supplément, Histoire des deux Indes*, même si le code religieux est disqualifié et oublié.¹⁸¹

While agreeing that Diderot omits the code religieux in his political œuvre, I will be making the case that the code religieux is not simply disqualified and forgotten, but that it is, in fact, transformed into a "code théâtral" through which the theatre becomes a dynamic component of the body politic, particularly in contrast to revealed religion which insists on its authority without the right of the people to question that authority and its bases. Religion "empêche les hommes de voir, parce qu'elle leur défend, sous des peines éternelles, de regarder,"¹⁸² and thus cannot be part of a society whose successful functioning rests on the right of an educated public to freedom of thought. The theatre has long been the place where social dangers can be exposed before the public.

[L]e janséniste reconnaissait le jésuite dans Tartufe, et le jésuite y

¹⁸⁰ In both *L'Histoire des deux Indes* (601) and *Observations sur le Nakaz* (576) Diderot observes that civilization is responsible for lengthening the human life span, suggesting a value in duration in the face of ultimate decline.

¹⁸¹ Laurent Versini, ed. *Œuvres de Diderot III* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995) 8-9.

¹⁸² Diderot, *Réfutation d'Helvétius*, *Œuvres de Diderot I* 917.

reconnaissait le janséniste ; mais en le montrant sur la scène, le cou oblique, les yeux radoucis le chapeau rabattu, avec le petit collet et le manteau, le poète ne laissa point de doute sur l'état du personnage.¹⁸³

As we saw in Chapter Three, Diderot uses this characteristic of the theatre in developing his recommendations for theatre reform which will involve the theatre-goer more intimately in the experience of emotion and the critique of social mores. For Diderot, this critique is predicated on the education of the public, by teaching people how to understand and evaluate works of art as he does in his aesthetic works and by calling for broad education reform as he does throughout his career. Thus Diderot's secular church seeks to join the individual to the collective by drawing on the power of religious feelings and theatrical structures to create a robust body politic which can endure over time and adapt to change while remaining firmly materialist. An educated, informed citizenry will have opportunities to explore and critique new ideas in a forum where strong emotions are shared in the moment and later understood as part of a process of public discussion of aesthetic experience.

As I have discussed in Chapter Two, Diderot appreciates that religion has developed powerful means to address basic human needs. Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau all acknowledge the power of religion in their inability to envision a world without it; for them, religion represents a necessary component of human society. Rousseau, of course, goes further than Montesquieu and Voltaire by proposing a civil religion. His plan retains the authoritarianism and conservation of the status quo, as well as the spirituality, that is part of traditional religion. Diderot, however, analyzes the basis of religion's power in order to create an alternate institution, which rejects the absolutism, conservatism and spirituality of the Church. Diderot focuses not on the ability of religion

¹⁸³ Diderot, *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, *Œuvres de Diderot I* 1019.

to control but on its ability to provide the sense of belonging and transcendence necessary to human happiness. Those elements that Diderot borrowed from the liturgy to better engage the theatre audience, such as the development of non-verbal stage practices, all work to enhance the spectator's identification with the spectacle on the stage. The lessons Diderot learns from religion are grounded in the experience of the congregant/spectator, whose identification with the celebrant/actor is the conduit for transcendence and moral action. Diderot's investigation of the structures underlying the power of religion and religious practice leads to an attempt to harness that power to political ends. While Diderot can imagine a number of forms of government which could satisfy the requirements of providing political liberty for its citizens,¹⁸⁴ it is only theatre that can provide the emotional transports of religious experience while avoiding its propensity toward fanaticism.¹⁸⁵ The institution of the theatre can replace the institution of religion not only because it provides a forum for critique while creating a space for the expression

¹⁸⁴ For Diderot, the responsiveness of any government to the needs of its people is more important than a particular form of government, which is consistent with his views on *droit naturel* and the necessary nature of continual transformation. Thus he posits the following conclusions from his interrogation of the legitimacy of various forms of government in *Histoire des deux Indes*.

[I]l n'est nulle forme de gouvernement dont la prérogative soit d'être immuable.

Nulle autorité politique qui, créée hier ou il y a mille ans, ne puisse être abrogée dans dix ans ou demain.

Nulle puissance si respectable, si sacrée qu'elle soit, autorisée à regarder l'Etat comme sa propriété.

Quiconque pense autrement est un esclave. C'est un idolâtre de l'œuvre de ses mains.

(*Œuvres de Diderot III* 715)

Similarly, in *Observations sur le Nakaz* he emphasizes universal conditions that apply to all forms of government.

Les lois naturelles sont éternelles et communes. Les lois positives ne sont que des corollaires des lois naturelles. Donc les lois positives sont également éternelles et communes. Cependant, il est certain que telle loi positive est bonne et utile dans une circonstance, nuisible et mauvaise dans telle autre ; il est certain qu'il n'y a point de code qu'il ne faille réformer avec le temps. Cette difficulté n'est peut-être pas insoluble ; mais il faut la résoudre.

(*Œuvres de Diderot III* 513)

¹⁸⁵ Chapter One elaborated Diderot's conception of the theatre as a forum for the communal experience of strong emotion, while a discussion of the capacity for the theatre to develop an audience of citizen-critics can be found in Chapter Three.

of important human needs, but because it is capable of replicating the structures of religion without denying the individual's right to liberty and happiness.

Diderot's political critiques, from the early 1750's to the 1770's, engage the problem of maintaining liberty and happiness. Liberty and happiness are, for Diderot, natural, universal rights, associated with the use of reason and the expression of independent ideas. The first several volumes of the *Encyclopédie* include a number of articles on political topics in which Diderot begins to develop his theories on the proper relationship between governing entities and the rights of the governed. "Autorité politique" (1751) begins with a clear statement of the natural right of humanity to liberty and the use of reason.

Aucun homme n'a reçu de la nature le droit de commander aux autres. La liberté est un présent du ciel, et chaque individu de la même espèce a le droit d'en jouir aussitôt qu'il jouit de la raison.¹⁸⁶

The one natural authority that Diderot acknowledges is that of paternal authority, but even this authority is circumscribed and ends at the point where children "seraient en état de se conduire" (22). It is by the "bonheur des peuples" that the success of a government can be judged (25). The necessary relationship between liberty and happiness is one that he will continue to insist on throughout his life.

Si l'homme n'est fait que pour labourer, recueillir, manger et vendre, tout est bon ; mais il me semble qu'un être qui sent est fait pour être heureux par toutes ses pensées. Y a-t-il quelque raison à poser une limite à l'esprit et aux sens et à dire à l'homme: "Tu ne penseras que jusque-là, tu ne sentiras que jusque-là?" J'avoue que cette espèce de philosophie tend à tenir l'homme dans une sorte d'abrutissement, et dans une médiocratie de jouissances et de félicité tout à fait contraire à sa nature ; et toute philosophie contraire à la nature de l'homme est absurde, ainsi que toute législation où le citoyen est forcé continuellement de sacrifier son goût et son bonheur pour le bien de la société. Je veux que la société

¹⁸⁶ Diderot, "Autorité politique," *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2011 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

soit heureuse; mais je veux l'être aussi; et il y a autant de manières d'être heureux qu'il y a d'individus. Notre propre bonheur est la base de tous nos vrais devoirs.¹⁸⁷

Clearly Diderot does not envision a state, political or existential, in which the control and moderation of pleasure and thought are primary values. He goes so far, in the *Histoire des deux Indes*, to state that, in some circumstances, “il faut abandonner à l'homme en société la liberté d'être un mauvais citoyen.”¹⁸⁸ These values cannot be expressed under absolutist rule, secular or political, but they are consistent with Diderot's vision of the role of the arts in society.

Ce ne sont pas les beaux-arts qui ont corrompu les mœurs ; ce ne sont pas les sciences qui ont dépravé les homes. Étudiez bien l'histoire et vous verrez que, tout au contraire, la corruption des mœurs occasionnée par des causes tout à fait différentes a toujours amené à sa suite la corruption du goût, la dégradation des beaux-arts, le mépris des sciences, l'ignorance, l'imbécilité et la barbarie; non celle dont la nation était sortie, mais une barbarie dont elle ne sort plus. La première est d'un peuple qui n'a pas encore les yeux ouverts; la seconde est d'un peuple qui a les yeux crevés.¹⁸⁹

The value of the arts lies in their ability to continue the process of enlightenment by insuring that the nation's eyes remain open. In this sense, the arts are national treasures which insure liberty of thought and expression.

Lorsque les beaux-arts, l'éloquence, l'histoire, la poésie, la peinture, la sculpture, l'architecture seront excités par l'opulence nationale, ils produiront de grandes choses; lorsqu'ils concourront tous à illustrer les vertus et les talents, ils rendront la nation meilleure. (570)

At the end of *Histoire des deux Indes*, Diderot warns that nations have suffered when they have lost their connection to the arts, to “une voix qui les célébrât” and that to persecute the writer and the philosophe “c'est arrêter l'instruction nationale et le progrès des lumières.” (759)

¹⁸⁷ Diderot, *Observations sur le Nakaz*, *Œuvres de Diderot III* 545.

¹⁸⁸ Diderot, *Contributions à l'Histoire des deux Indes*, *Œuvres de Diderot III* 591.

¹⁸⁹ Diderot, *Observations sur le Nakaz*, *Œuvres de Diderot III* 571.

E. The Code Théâtral and the Social Contract

While the arts are an integral part of the process by which liberty and happiness are to be maintained for the individual and for society, the entire structure rests, for Diderot, on a social contract that binds governor and governed. In his emphasis on the importance of a social compact which underlies human association, Diderot is following a train of political thought that can be traced to Hobbes and Pufendorf, in the seventeenth century. Eleven years before the publication of Rousseau's *Contrat social*, Diderot insists in "Autorité politique" (1751), that political authority, not being a natural right, comes from one of two sources: either from "la force et la violence de celui qui s'en est emparé" or from "le consentement de ceux qui s'y sont soumis par un contrat fait ou supposé entre eux et celui à qui ils sont déferé l'autorité."¹⁹⁰ The consent of the people is the foundation of all political legitimacy, and Diderot maintains this position from his earliest political writings to his latest. He begins his critique of Catherine's *Nakaz* (1774) with a clear statement of the social contract that must obtain between both parties.

Il n'y a point de vrai souverain que la nation; il ne peut y avoir de vrai législateur que le peuple... La première ligne d'un code bien fait doit lier le souverain; il doit commencer ainsi : "Nous peuple, et nous souverain de ce peuple, jurons conjointement ces lois par lesquelles nous serons également jugés." (507)

For Diderot, this contract underlies all relationships in society and it is the foundation of the citizen's role as an active member of society.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, by the late 1750's, Diderot was inviting the theatre public to take an active role in critiquing dramatic productions by using the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique* as critical discussions of the

¹⁹⁰ Diderot, "Autorité politique," *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, etc. <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

plays which preceded them and, earlier in the *Salons*, in modeling the role of the art critic for the reading public. Dena Goodman, in *Criticism in Action*, makes the point that Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* is an attempt to create a critical readership in the 1770's, which is expected to engage with the political realities of the time.¹⁹¹ The text becomes one which "call[s] the reader to act upon the world in a particular fashion" (6).¹⁹² Although Goodman makes no mention of the aesthetic texts in her analysis, I would suggest that the *Supplément*, whose full title is *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville ou Dialogue entre A. et B. sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas*, is a continuation and expansion of the project that Diderot began in his aesthetic writings to create a public capable of actively critiquing their culture, thereby changing the expectations of cultural consumers from a stance of passive reception to spirited engagement. The parallels between the *Entretiens* and the *Supplément* suggest that, with the *Supplément*, Diderot is now putting into practice in an overtly political context a form of writing that he had first developed in his aesthetic texts: one that seeks to move the reader to action. In the *Supplément*, Diderot is not developing something new but is actually expanding his earlier ideas where, already in the aesthetic texts, he is using methodologies designed to "form rather than inform" (172).¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Dena Goodman, *Criticism in Action: Enlightenment Experiments in Political Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 225.

¹⁹² Goodman compares the *Supplément* to Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* and Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité* as differing examples of political writing and suggests that of these three texts it is only the *Supplément* that functions as a form of political action in itself, through its engagement of the reader as critic.

¹⁹³ In *Criticism in Action*, Goodman cites the work of Victor Goldschmidt on the Platonic dialogue to develop her analysis of the dialogue form as used by Diderot (172-174).

The *Supplément* follows the overall pattern of the *Entretiens* in that it consists of a dialogue between two interlocutors who are referring to another text.¹⁹⁴ Just as Dorval and Moi discuss the performance and script of *Le Fils naturel* to create the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, A and B discuss the voyage of Bougainville to create the *Supplément*. Elements of the *Supplément* that Goodman cites as indicative of the activist stance that Diderot takes in the work as he seeks to “change the world by changing the reader” (172), can be found in the *Entretiens*. For example, the use of the dialogic technique, which allows A to take the position of the reader of B’s supplement (175), replicates the position of Moi, as the reader/spectator of Dorval’s play and script. In both cases, the reader now reading the text identifies with the reader within the text as a “doubting and questioning” observer rather than as a passive receptor. Structurally as well, the *Supplément* parallels the complex construction of the *Entretiens*. The *Supplément* represents the discussion of a previously written/read text as the *Entretiens* is a discussion of a previously written/viewed play. Within the *Entretiens*, we are also privy to the changes/corrections that the actors in the play wish to make to the text. The writer (Dorval) and the critic (Moi) are not the only figures who contribute to the development of a new form, the actors in the performance also have their say. This process of critiquing the text from different perspectives is developed by Diderot in the *Supplément*, where we not only learn of the opinions of A and B as observers/critics of Tahitian society, but we become privy to the opinions and critique of members of that society (Orou and the Vieillard). While in the *Supplément* this strategy of multiple critiques is crucial to Diderot’s effort to relativize and equalize the culture of the Tahitians with that of contemporary France, it also serves, in the *Entretiens*, and later in the *Paradoxe*, to

¹⁹⁴ Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, *Œuvres de Diderot I* 461-480.

include the producers of art in a reciprocal relationship with the consumers of art.¹⁹⁵ In the *Entretiens*, through the critical discussions of Moi and Dorval as well as the criticisms and concerns of the actors in the play, theatre audiences are encouraged to engage with the script and the performance as critics.

This relationship is an elaboration of the same relationship described by Diderot in “Autorité politique” that exists between the government and the people. This relationship also requires mutual responsibilities on which “les peuples et ceux qui les gouvernent pourraient établir leur bonheur réciproque.”¹⁹⁶ The social contract that Diderot envisions is not limited to that between governing bodies and the governed, it applies as well to all social and cultural relations. In the *Encyclopédie* article “Droit naturel,” Diderot declares the essential connection of all human beings.

Il n’y a de qualité essentielle à votre espèce que celle que vous exigez dans tous vos semblables pour votre bonheur et pour le leur. C’est cette conformité de vous à eux tous et d’eux tous à vous qui vous marquera quand vous sortirez de votre espèce, et quand vous y resterez. Ne la perdez donc jamais de vue, sans quoi vous verrez les notions de la bonté, de la justice, de l’humanité, de la vertu, chanceler dans votre entendement. Dites-vous souvent: “Je suis homme, et je n’ai d’autres droits naturels véritablement inaliénable que ceux de l’humanité.”¹⁹⁷

This contract was enacted in the *Entretiens* through the engagement of all those involved in the production of *Le Fils naturel*: author, actors and audience.

Goodman’s insight, that Diderot’s intention in the *Supplément* “was not to put criticism in the service of politics but to make of criticism a political activity that could

¹⁹⁵ Jonathan M. Hess, in *Reconstituting the Body Politic: Enlightenment, Public Culture and the Invention of Aesthetic Autonomy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), describes the importance, in absolutist Germany in the eighteenth century, of the development of “aesthetic autonomy” which allowed for the development, in an ostensibly nonpolitical realm, of the strategies and methodologies of critique, while also reserving a space for intellectual liberty.

¹⁹⁶ Diderot, “Autorité politique,” *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.* <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

¹⁹⁷ Diderot, “Droit naturel,” *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.* <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

replace absolutist politics,”¹⁹⁸ can usefully be expanded to include his aesthetic texts as sites of political action. As we have seen in the previous chapter, his aesthetic texts were written with the goal of creating a spectator-critic, who will become the citizen-spectator able to critically evaluate cultural and political structures. Whether viewing a painting, reading a work of fiction, reading the text of a play or watching a theatrical performance, the reader/spectator is enjoined to critically evaluate the work of art through a process that includes solitary reflection and public discussion. Just as a viewer of a painting in the *Salons*, or a spectator at a performance in the *Entretiens* requires solitary reflection to sort out the sometimes overwhelming impressions gathered from the act of observation, so the reader of a script of a performance in the *Entretiens*, or the reader of work of fiction in the *Éloge de Richardson* requires conversation with other readers for the most satisfying aesthetic experience. For Diderot, reading and viewing are equivalent processes which allow the reader/spectator to engage with a text, a painting or a performance through a private/public dynamism that allows for the critical evaluation of ostensibly overpowering emotional experiences. The *Salons* in their celebration of the amateur critic absorbed in the work of art, the *Éloge de Richardson* in emphasizing the importance of conversation in making a work of art come to life, the *Entretiens* in its argument for viewing art as part of a collective process of interpretation, all contribute to educating spectator-critics in the proper functioning of their role.

¹⁹⁸ Goodman, *Criticism in Action* (171).

F. The Education of the Citizen-Spectator

Diderot opens his *Plan d'une université: ou d'une education publique dans toutes les sciences* (1775) by signaling and reaffirming his belief that education is critical to the expansion of enlightenment.

Instruire une nation, c'est la civiliser. Y éteindre les connaissances, c'est la ramener à l'état primitif de barbarie... L'ignorance est le partage de l'esclave et du sauvage.¹⁹⁹

As he noted in his article “Encyclopédie” from the fifth volume of the *Encyclopédie* (1755), the project itself was predicated on the notion that “nos neveux, devenant plus instruits, deviennent en même temps plus vertueux et plus heureux.”²⁰⁰ Diderot links education and virtue again in *Observations sur le Nakaz* (1774), when he insists that “il faut que partout un peuple soit instruit, libre et vertueux” (511). The *Plan d'une université* and the *Encyclopédie* make clear that society's leaders, whether they be kings or philosophes, have a responsibility to educate. Education is thus an integral part of the social contract in an enlightened society, linking liberty, virtue and happiness. And this contract includes the necessity of critical argument: “A parler rigoureusement, il n'y a qu'un devoir ; c'est d'être heureux ; il n'y a qu'une vertu ; c'est la justice.”²⁰¹ For Diderot, the answer to the question of whether it is appropriate to freely criticize “la religion, le gouvernement et les mœurs” involves the importance of refusing to be silent.

Il me semble que si jusqu'à ce jour l'on eût gardé le silence sur la religion, les peuples seraient encore plongés dans les superstitions les plus grossières et les plus dangereuses... Il me semble que si jusqu'à ce jour l'on eût gardé le silence sur le gouvernement, nous gémirions encore sous les entraves du gouvernement féodal; l'espèce humaine serait divisée en un petit nombre de maîtres et une multitude d'esclaves; ou nous n'aurions point de lois ou nous n'en aurions que

¹⁹⁹ Diderot, *Plan d'une Université, Œuvres de Diderot III* 415.

²⁰⁰ Diderot, “Encyclopédie,” *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, etc. <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

²⁰¹ Diderot, *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, Œuvres de Diderot I* 1189.

de mauvaises... Il me semble enfin que si jusqu'à ce jour l'on eût gardé le silence sur les mœurs, nous en serions encore à savoir ce que c'est que la vertu, ce que c'est que le vice. (1143)

All social institutions and practices must be subjected to the public criticism available through the republic of letters. The reading of the *Supplément* as well as the *Entretiens* and *De la poésie dramatique* as tutorials in the proper role of the citizen as a critic of aesthetic and political institutions allows us to see that Diderot does not differentiate the role of the spectator from that of the citizen. The spectator who watches a performance at the theatre is expected to be as actively engaged as the citizen who reads an article in a journal. In addition, the writer and the spectator-critic have overlapping, rather than distinct, roles as citizens. The theatre is a venue in which political realities can be experienced, critiqued and, as we shall see, reformed.

In *Les Origines culturelles de la Révolution française*, Roger Chartier notes that while the eighteenth century was developing opportunities for the expression of critical dissent and the formation of new cultural norms, there did not exist a physical, public space for such cohesion to develop.²⁰² Diderot, however, sees the theatre as a potential source of such social cohesion. The public space of the theatre will, as it did in ancient times, become a place of cultural and civic community. Diderot makes explicit the link between the theatre and social reform in *De la poésie dramatique*, not merely as a way of shaping cultural norms, but specifically as a mode of governance.

Qu'est-ce qu'Aristophane? Un farceur original. Un auteur de cette espèce doit être précieux pour le gouvernement, s'il sait l'employer. C'est à lui qu'il faut abandonner tous les enthousiastes qui troublent de temps en temps la société. Si on les expose à la foire, on n'en remplira pas les prisons. (1287)

²⁰² Roger Chartier, *Les Origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (Paris: Seuil, 1990) 44-49.

The foibles that dramaturges expose as a fundamental aspect of their artistic production to keep us laughing can also be presented to reflect more serious transgressions to keep us from erring. The role of theatre is here expanded to providing lessons not only in reinforcing social decorum, but in avoiding criminality. As Versini notes, Diderot “se préoccupe moins du régime, de la forme du gouvernement que du fonctionnement des institutions et de l’économie.”²⁰³ While the economy is beyond the scope of this project, theatre is one of the institutions that can be utilized not only to influence individual behavior but to sway the public at large in matters that pertain to the body politic.

Tout peuple a des préjugés à détruire, des vices à poursuivre, des ridicules à décrier, et a besoin de spectacles, mais qui lui soient propres. Quel moyen, si le gouvernement en sait user, et qu’il soit question de préparer le changement d’une loi, ou l’abrogation d’un usage! (*De la poésie dramatique*, 1329)

Diderot is not only speaking of lost possibilities, but of the necessity of determining ways to make use of this potentiality that exists in the theatre. The passages above, written in the late 1750’s within a work whose main focus is the establishment not only of a new form of dramatic production but of a new relationship between stage and spectator, are consistent with important aspects of Diderot’s political writings from succeeding decades. Even at this early date, and in this aesthetic context, Diderot’s views regarding appropriate forms of punishment and the importance of education for an enlightened population as well as his perspective on the social contract can be seen in nascent form and linked to the power of the theatre. Proposed changes in laws can be integrated into artistic productions, where the audience of citizen-spectators is able to experience and critique suggested reforms. In addition to the theatre’s age-old role in subjecting the customs (*mœurs*) of society to scrutiny, Diderot envisions the theatre as

²⁰³ Laurent Versini, ed. *Œuvres de Diderot III*, Introduction 5.

performing a similar role in educating the public in legislative matters. All people can benefit by those productions which are appropriate to their particular needs and circumstances (*qui lui soient propres*). As noted above, education is a necessary part of enlightenment and a part of the social contract he expects to be honored by government in its dealings with its people. The citizen-spectator can only be a fully integrated member of the body politic through education.

G. The Transformation of the Actor

In the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1773),²⁰⁴ Diderot continues his interrogation of the social and civic value of theatre as he turns his attention to the figure of the actor and reinterprets the relationship among actors, authors and spectators as one of political import. Although the *Paradoxe* was written during the same period as a number of his political texts,²⁰⁵ it has not been viewed through the perspective of these texts. The *Paradoxe* is generally cited for its apparently surprising support for great actors who remain cool observers of the heated emotions they portray, which is sometimes seen as a rupture with Diderot's earlier aesthetic theories,²⁰⁶ though there is also a critical tradition that emphasizes the continuity in the work.²⁰⁷ This continuity becomes even more apparent in the context of his political texts. In the *Entretiens* and *De la poésie dramatique* Diderot presents the script of the play as an opportunity for critical activity on the part of the spectator. However, in the *Paradoxe* he sets up the rules of engagement for the actor and the poet. He does this while he is contributing to the history of colonial expansionism in the *Histoire des deux Indes*, critiquing absolutist rule in *Observations sur le Nakaz* and developing a plan for universal education in the *Plan d'une université*. All of these works, unlike the more purely theoretical political articles he authored for the *Encyclopédie*, involve Diderot in a pragmatic appraisal of current political and social situations and, as an exercise in realpolitik, lead him to analyze

²⁰⁴ Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV*.

²⁰⁵ *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772); *Contributions à l'Histoire des deux Indes* (1772); *Observations sur le Nakaz* (1773-1774), *Plan d'une université* (1775).

²⁰⁶ See Chapter Two for a discussion of Jacques Chouillet's analysis of the *Paradoxe*.

²⁰⁷ For example, Frederick Burwick, in *Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), argues that the consummate actor of the *Paradoxe* is one who has gathered wide-ranging emotional experience through the exquisite *sensibilité* of the artist found in the *Entretiens*, has learned to bring it under the control necessary to become the great artist described in *La Rêve de d'Alembert* and is then able to communicate the powerful illusion of the *modèle idéal* developed in the *Salons* (44-52).

processes through which power becomes manifest and change is possible. In an analogous way, the *Paradoxe* goes beyond the earlier aesthetic texts to appraise the current state of the theatre as a vehicle for political change. In his transformation of the role of the actor, Diderot continues to draw on his knowledge of religious experience and his analysis of authoritarian models to create a figure that will serve as a medium through which spectators can experience strong emotions while preserving their right to, and capacity for, autonomy and critique. In order to understand the transformation of the actor into a “prédicateur laïque” (*Paradoxe* 1401) it is necessary to consider, first of all, the contemporary status of actors and Diderot’s proposals for radical changes in that condition. In addition, it requires that we fully appreciate the extent to which Diderot was capable of holding the priesthood in utter contempt at the same time that he wished to appropriate its power to different political ends.

The actor of the *Paradoxe* appears, at first, as a confounding figure. On the one hand, actors are described as “[l]es hommes d’un talent rare et d’une utilité réelle, [les] fléaux du ridicule et du vice, [les] prédicateurs les plus éloquents de l’honnêteté et des vertus,... la verge dont l’homme de génie se sert pour châtier les méchants et les fous” (1406). However, what usually leads someone to choose this profession is “[l]e défaut d’éducation, la misère et le libertinage” (1407) and it is noted that “un comédien galant homme, une actrice honnête femme soient des phénomènes si rares” (1408). This contradictory assessment of the actor is explained by combining Diderot’s clear-sighted awareness of the contemporary condition of actors in France, who “sont excommuniés” by a public “qui ne peut s’en passer les méprise,” (1411) with his hopes for a different future for the profession.

[U]ne troupe de comédiens n'est point, comme elle devrait l'être chez un peuple où l'on attacherait à la fonction de parler aux hommes rassemblés pour être instruits, amusés, corrigés, l'importance, les honneurs, les récompenses qu'elle mérite, une corporation formée, comme toutes les autres communautés, de sujets tirés de toutes les familles de la société et conduits sur la scène comme au service, au palais, à l'église, par choix ou par goût et du consentement de leurs tuteurs naturels. (1408)

Diderot's vision of the acting profession as one which would become on a par with military service, a position at court or membership in the clergy is in sharp contrast with those provided by other eighteenth-century theatre reformers who sought to minimize what they saw as the negative impact of actors on society. The actor-manager of the Comédie-Italienne, Luigi Riccoboni, in his *De la reformation du théâtre* (1743), proposes to establish a council that would enact laws governing the theatre and actors. Among his proposals, he recommends that a male actor "serait obligé de produire des témoins et de présenter des Certificats en bonne forme" in order to prove that he "fût connu pour homme d'honneur,"²⁰⁸ while female actors would be required to be married and living with their husbands (102-103).²⁰⁹ With his lists of those tragedies and comedies "à conserver, à corriger et à rejeter," his proposal for a governing board and his rules for the proper functioning of the theatre, Riccoboni attempts to conserve the original value of theatre which he believed rested in "la critique et la correction des mœurs" (4) through a program of censorship and control. Rousseau's *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758), expresses less faith than Riccoboni's treatise in the possibility of reform to ameliorate the dangerous effects of the theatre. While Rousseau acknowledges that "[p]our prévenir les inconvénients qui peuvent naître de l'exemple des comédiens, vous

²⁰⁸ Luigi Riccoboni, *De la reformation du théâtre* (Réimpression de l'édition de Paris, 1747, Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1971) 99-100.

²⁰⁹ See Virginia Scott's "The Actress and Utopian Theatre Reform in Eighteenth-Century France: Riccoboni, Rousseau, and Restif," *Theatre Research International* 27 (2002): 18-27, for her analysis of reforms focused specifically on the actress as a figure of aggressive and dangerous female sexuality.

voudriez qu'on les forçât d'être honnêtes gens,"²¹⁰ he doubts that even with coercion the reformation of the actor would be possible. For Rousseau, the actor's talent and profession are essentially irredeemable. The talent of the actor is "l'art de se contrefaire, ... de se passionner de sang-froid, de dire autre chose que ce qu'on pense aussi naturellement que si l'on le pensait réellement, et d'oublier enfin sa propre place à force de prendre celle d'autrui" and the actor's profession is "un métier par lequel il se donne en représentation pour de l'argent, se soumet à l'ignominie et aux affronts qu'on achète le droit de lui faire, et met publiquement sa sonne en vente" (132).²¹¹ Restif de la Bretonne, in his preface to his work, *La Mimographe* (1770), states that the (fictional) author he is purportedly publishing finds Riccoboni's reforms to be insufficient and that his author, "plus sévère que Riccoboni, voit le Théâtre des mêmes yeux que le célèbre & vertueux Citoyen de Genève."²¹² However, Restif takes exception to the idea of depriving society "d'un plaisir qui réunit l'agréable à l'utile" and proposes, instead, several means of increasing the utility of the theatre while improving the respectability of the performers (7). Restif's solution to the problem of maintaining the theatre while protecting society from its depredations is to turn actors into "les esclaves publics" (449).

On procurer aux Comédiens & aux Comédiennes toutes les douceurs de la vie, hors la liberté, dont ils seront privés, comme on l'a vu plus haut, ne pouvant disposer ni de leurs biens, ni d'eux-mêmes, ni même recevoir & rendre de visites, que sous le bon-plaisir du Supérieur, que ne les permettra, aux hommes seulement, que lorsqu'elles lui paraîtront utiles aux progrès l'art. (454)

²¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles*, ed. Marc Buffat (Paris: Flammarion, 2003) 117.

²¹¹ See Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion of Rousseau's critique of representation and its relation to Diderot's distinctly different approach to the notion of representation.

²¹² Nicola-Edme Restif de la Bretonne, *La Mimographe* (Réimpression de l'édition d'Amsterdam-La Haie, 1770, Genève: Slatkine reprints, 1980) 7.

While these commentators differ in their approaches to the possibility of theatre reform, none of them consider a possible future for the profession that does not involve coercion or further segregation from society. In contrast, Diderot presents a template for a future where the fortunes of actors would be commensurate with their value to society. That profession charged with “instructing, entertaining and correcting” society would be remunerated with the honor and status it deserves.²¹³ Significantly, actors would come from the same ranks as those who currently enter the military, the court or the church; rather than a class apart they would comprise a group to which others might aspire. These changes in social mores would be necessary for the acting profession to become “l’utile et belle profession de comédiens ou de prédicateurs laïques” (1401).

Diderot’s transposition of the actor into a clerical role reflects his acknowledgement of the equivalence between the power of religious ritual and theatrical performance. Diderot does not align the actor with magistrates and kings but with the clergy, thus emphasizing their role not as figures of authority but as mediums/mediators between the audience/congregation and another source of authority. The authority behind the priest, whether conceived of as the Church or God, admits of no change or critique. As Diderot states so often and in so many different contexts, the role of the priest is to incite the population to a form of enthusiasm which encourages superstition and abjures critical thought. The authority behind the actor, however, is the poet, who Diderot has presented in both the *Entretiens* and *De la poésie dramatique* as a fallible figure whose creations are material for private meditation and public discussion rather than revealed truth. The poet is also a collaborator with the actor in creating the emotional effects which will

²¹³ Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1408.

“instruire, amuser et corriger.”²¹⁴ In the earlier aesthetic texts, Diderot suggests this collaboration when Dorval requests the input of his actors in making changes to the script of *Le Fils naturel*, as well as by noting the importance of the poet’s willingness to, at times, submit the written script to the actor’s performance choices since it is “à lui à disposer de la scène écrite, à répéter certains mots, à revenir sur certaines idées, à en retrancher quelques-unes, et à en ajouter d’autres.”²¹⁵ This idea is elaborated further in *De la poésie dramatique* when he calls upon actors to “jouissez donc de vos droits ; faites ce que le moment et votre talent vous inspireront.”²¹⁶ In the *Paradoxe* this collaboration between actor and poet becomes even more pronounced, as Diderot recalls an anecdote where Voltaire exclaims “Est-ce bien moi qui ai fait cela?” while watching a performance of one of his plays by Clairon.

Tantôt le poète a senti plus fortement que le comédien, tantôt, et plus souvent peut-être, le comédien a conçu plus fortement que le poète.²¹⁷

This expertise on the part of the actor comes from long study and the development of one’s craft. Diderot recognizes that the contemporary state of affairs supports only a few actors in reaching this level of professionalism and he seeks to change the condition of actors in order to increase the impact of theatre.²¹⁸

Those few great actors, such as Garrick and Clairon, who manage to rise above the condition of most actors, are able to do so after long study and careful preparation, through which they learn to take mastery of their genius. Diderot makes the point in *De la poésie dramatique* that the creative artist must wait until the heady moment of

²¹⁴ Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1408.

²¹⁵ Diderot, *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1144.

²¹⁶ Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1343.

²¹⁷ Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1402.

²¹⁸ “[J]e pense à l’influence du spectacle sur le bon goût et sur les mœurs, si les comédiens étaient gens de bien et si leur profession était honorée” (1409).

inspiration passes before putting pen to paper or brush to canvas and, likewise, the great actor does not perform in the midst of powerful emotion.²¹⁹ In light of Diderot's stress on the importance of self-distancing, both for the creative artist and for the citizen-spectator, his distinction between the "comédien imitateur" and the "comédien de nature" (*Paradoxe* 1378) is a further elaboration of the importance of self-distancing critique as the basis of enlightenment.²²⁰ While the natural actor is given some gifts from nature, the genius of the great actor derives from constant study and observation of the world and its characters.

C'est à l'étude des grands modèles, à la connaissance du cœur humain, à l'usage du travail assidu, à l'expérience, et à l'habitude du théâtre, à perfectionner le don de nature. (1378)

The actor, like the playwright, "va sans cesse puiser dans le fonds inépuisable de la nature, au lieu qu'il aurait bientôt vu le terme de sa propre richesse" (1380). The self-distancing that Diderot describes for the critic in the *Salons* and for the spectator in the *Entretiens* is now prescribed for the actor as well.

C'est au sang-froid à tempérer le délire de l'enthousiasme. Ce n'est pas l'homme violent qui est hors de lui-même qui dispose de nous; c'est un avantage réservé à l'homme qui se possède. (1382)

The *Paradoxe* presents Diderot's resolution of the problem of how to translate the "joie insensée de nos fêtes publiques [et] la fureur de nos émeutes populaires"²²¹ into a source of enlightened communion. It is through the role of the actor/priest that this transformation will take place. Just as Christianity presents a complex model for human identification in the figure of Christ, as a being who shares divine and human status, the

²¹⁹ See Chapter One for a discussion of the significance to Diderot's thought of the ability of artists to master their genius and its relationship to his reconfiguration of enthusiasm.

²²⁰ See Chapter Three for a discussion of the value Diderot places on the capacity for self-distancing critique.

²²¹ Diderot, *Lettres sur les sourds et muets*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 61.

actor is a multivalent figure for the spectator. The significance of Diderot shifting the focus of his theory of acting at the same time that he is investigating social reform and the role of those in positions of authority becomes evident in the new role created for the actor.²²²

Il en est du spectacle comme d'une société bien ordonnée, où chacun sacrifie de ses droits primitifs pour le bien de l'ensemble et du tout. Qui est-ce que appréciera le mieux la mesure de ce sacrifice?... Dans la société, ce sera l'homme juste; au théâtre, le comédien qui aura la tête froide. (*Paradoxe* 1388)²²³

On the stage, artists sacrifice their personal emotional expression in the service of their art, just as the good citizen sacrifices their primal urges to exist in society. The description of the actor's role is not a rupture with the past but the integration of actors' skills and their new role as mediator between the emotions and self-distancing critical practice of the spectator. Just as the priest plays a double role as member of the church hierarchy and representation of Christ on earth,²²⁴ so the actor fulfills a double role as artist and as representation of the human condition.²²⁵ While the priest officiates at a solemn rite that purports to derive from the unquestionable source of revelation and points to an unchanging truth that is to be accepted absolutely, the actor presents a spectacle to be renewed through the emotions and intelligence of the spectator. Diderot co-opts the powerful emotional structures that the Church had developed as a means of

²²² It is important to note here that this new role for the actor, as a medium capable of communicating the thoughts of the poet renders moot the concern about the content of the actor's character, noted by some authors (see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Diderot, le paradoxe et la mimésis" *Poétique* 43 (Septembre 1980) 267-281). While Diderot's mention of the possibility that actors "ne sont propres à jouer tous [les caractères] parce qu'ils n'en ont point" (1407) can be viewed as another paradox within the *Paradoxe*, in the context presented here, an actor's lack of a fully formed "caractère" can be seen as an advantage in one's ability to take on a mediating role.

²²³ See Frantz for his analysis of this passage, in concert with passages where Diderot calls for artistic unity of expression, as suggesting a form of social contract between the actor and the playwright (247-248).

²²⁴ Wuerl 34.

²²⁵ In the *Salon de 1767*, Diderot also describes this phenomenon in the experience of the theatre-goer who is also double.

Je fais deux rôles, je suis double; je suis Lecouvreur, et je reste moi. C'est le moi Lecouvreur qui frémit et qui souffre, et c'est le moi tout qui a du plaisir. (610)

spreading and maintaining its earthly dominion to imagine a theatre that utilizes these same emotional structures to create intellectual liberty. Thus the model of the actor/priest that Diderot describes in the *Paradoxe* is created from his ideal model constructed from his exploration of the roles of both the actor and the priest. Just as the great actor works from an internal representation of observable events and lived experience, Diderot has developed his model based not only on his observation of great actors such as Garrick and Clairon, but on his experience of church and theatre.

As we have seen, Diderot was sensitive to the effects of religious spectacle which he was unable to view “sans que mes entrailles ne s’en soient émues, n’en aient tressailli, et que les larmes ne m’en soient venues aux yeux.”²²⁶ At the same time he found this power to be frightening in that it reduced humanity to fear and submission precisely because it is left unanalyzed and unanswered. He describes the most fearsome government to be that of a theocracy or a holy despotism (*despotisme sacré*).

[O]ù c’est un crime d’examiner ses ordres, une impiété de s’y opposer; où des révélations contradictoires sont mises à la place de la conscience et de la raison, réduites au silence par des prodiges ou par des forfaits; où les nations enfin ne peuvent avoir des idées fixes sur les droits de l’homme, sur ce qui est bien, sur ce qui est mal, parce qu’elles ne cherchent la base de leurs privilèges et de leurs devoirs que dans des livres inspirés dont l’interprétation leur est refusée.²²⁷

Rather than arousing the enthusiasm of the congregation in the service of religious exaltation that encourages enthrallment, the enthusiasm of the theatre audience will be tempered by discourse and critique. As he noted in his sketch for a scene about the last hours of Socrates’ life, in *De la poésie dramatique*, it is the words of a play that provide the educative moment.²²⁸ Likewise, in the *Paradoxe*, one does not go to the theatre “pour

²²⁶ Diderot, *Salon de 1765*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 419.

²²⁷ Diderot, *Histoire des deux Indes*, *Œuvres de Diderot III* 613.

²²⁸ See Chapter Three for a detailed analysis of this scene.

voir des pleurs, mais pour entendre des discours qui en arrachent” (1424). Emotions are aroused, in the theatre, in the service of transcendent experiences that link the spectators and, by encouraging discussion and argument, allow for self-distancing through conversation and writing among citizen-spectators. The mechanisms for this transformation of enthusiastic communion to self-distancing critique are those described in the aesthetic texts from the 1750’s through the *Salons* and rest in the power of discourse and the identification of the spectator with the actor/priest.

Unlike the priest, the actor and the playwright hold no power of constraint over the audience. Behind the priest rests the authority and the sanctions of the twinned institutions of Church and Crown. However, the power of actor and playwright lies wholly in their ability to move the spectator emotionally in the moment. A reinvigorated theatre, such as Diderot’s aesthetic texts describe, would provide the people with an institution that would be consistent with his political beliefs and serve as a protection against despotism. In her article on Diderot’s story “L’Oiseau blanc, conte bleu,” Isabelle Cassagne DeMarte notes that while the *Bijoux indiscrets* (1747) contains a critique of the Sultan Mangogul who maintains power by controlling knowledge, “L’Oiseau blanc, conte bleu” (1749) presents another relationship to power in the figure of the Sultana whose request for and subsequent critique of the story she is told raises the right to question the authority of all story-tellers.²²⁹ While DeMarte focuses on the implications of this questioning with regard to religious dogma, we can see how Diderot expanded his critique to include aesthetic and political productions as well. In this context, the fact that the poet does not maintain sovereignty over the script is consistent

²²⁹ Isabelle Cassagne DeMarte, “Eros Heretic: Transgression Generic and Religious In and Out of Diderot’s *L’Oiseau blanc, conte bleu*” in *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, eds. Regina Hewitt and Pat Rogers. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002) 211, 220.

with the notion that all power ultimately resides with the community of citizen-spectators, capable of evaluating culture and politics. The social contract that binds governor to governed and individuals to other members of society is also in effect between the actor and playwright and their spectators.

Il en est du spectacle comme d'une société bien ordonnée, où chacun sacrifie de ses droits primitifs pour le bien de l'ensemble et du tout. Qui est-ce qui appréciera le mieux la mesure de ce sacrifice? Sera-ce l'enthousiaste? Le fanatique? Non, certes. Dans la société, ce sera l'homme juste; au théâtre, le comédien qui aura la tête froide.²³⁰

For Diderot, the possibilities for the theatre exist in a world where the condition of the actor is significantly modified to allow the development of a class of people who would serve as “prédicateurs laïques” capable of guiding citizen-spectators through a civil ceremony whose conventions were open to critique and revision and of whose scripture they would become co-creators. This vision of the theatre is consistent with Diderot’s long-standing critique of the abuses of power and his goal of a continually evolving enlightenment. By replacing the religious code with a code based on the conventions of theatrical performance, Diderot seeks to maintain the enchantment of the world on the foundation of materialism.

²³⁰ Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1388.

Conclusion

La représentation d'une tragédie deviendrait un acte religieux: la musique, la peinture, la magie de tous les arts et tous les spectacles, seraient employées à retracer à un tel peuple la noblesse de sa nature, la grandeur et l'élévation de ses idées. Je vous laisse imaginer le tableau des vertus civiles et des mœurs domestiques d'un tel peuple. Quelle vénération pour la paternité, pour la magistrature, pour les services rendus à la patrie! Quels liens de tendresse et de douceur entre les familles, entre les proches, entre les différents ordres de la république, entre tous les concitoyens! Je ne vois pas de quelle nécessité serait à un tel peuple la religion, quelle qu'elle fût.

(Diderot *Correspondance Littéraire*)²³¹

The theatre is the last forum where idealism is still an open question: many audiences all over the world will answer positively from their own experience that they have seen the face of the invisible through an experience on the stage that transcended their life experience... Today... we are rediscovering that a holy theatre is still what we need. So where should we look for it? In the clouds or on the ground? (Peter Brook *The Empty Space*)²³²

Diderot's vision of the theatre as a secular church incorporated opportunities for individual and collective feelings of transcendence while inoculating the body politic from the contagion of enthusiasm and the control of absolutism. Several centuries before Peter Brook asks where we are to find the transcendent experiences that the theatre has long provided, Diderot provided an answer in his comprehensive view of a theatre that would become a center for social cohesion and the experience of the ineffable rooted firmly in materialism. The previous chapters have thus analyzed Diderot's theatrical œuvre from the perspective of the past (regarding his recuperation of the notion of enthusiasm from a term of religious opprobrium to a term reflecting the power of collective transcendence and his borrowings from the history of liturgical performance to transform the classical stage) and within the context of contemporary eighteenth-century debates (his exploitation of the republic of letters to develop a place for the spectator-

²³¹ Diderot, *Correspondance Littéraire et Critique* Tome Troisième, ed. Maurice Tourneux (1757 Paris: Garnier Frères, 1878) 401-402.

²³² Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) 42.

critic and his development of a code théâtral as an alternative to religious and political absolutism). I would like to conclude by considering Diderot's theatrical writings from the perspective of the future. This approach includes: the impact of Diderot's work on his contemporaries and near-contemporaries; Diderot's relationship to what he considered to be his legacy; and the relationship of Diderot's work to present-day debates. An investigation of Diderot's theatrical work in relation to other eighteenth-century playwrights, points not only to what they borrowed from Diderot, but also to what they missed. The history of the *drame*, while a significant theatrical development, does not capture the possibilities envisioned by Diderot, who appears to have understood that the accomplishment of his vision would require time and would ultimately rest in the hands of posterity. Diderot's continued relevance to current debates suggests that he was right.

A. Diderot and the drame

The radical possibilities of the *drame*, as envisioned by Diderot, include not only dramaturgical transformations, but structural social changes as well. A new form of theatre cannot be fully realized until universal education and the integration of the actor into society are also accomplished. Diderot envisioned the *drame* not only as an aesthetic genre situated somewhere between tragedy and comedy, he saw it as a political force in the development of citizen-spectators who would take an active role in their own governance. It is necessary to look at the development of the *drame*, within the context of the classical genres of tragedy and comedy in the eighteenth century, to consider the extent to which Diderot's vision was realized. The classical divisions between tragedy and comedy continued to hold into the eighteenth century, with tragedy pertaining to the grand gestures of heroic characters and comedy presenting the foibles of the quotidian. Within these rather rigid parameters, there were those who stretched generic boundaries. Voltaire, for example, created in *Mahomet* (1742)²³³ a political diatribe against religious fanaticism. But Voltaire's *Zaïre* (1732)²³⁴ and Houdar de la Motte's *Inès de Castro* (1723)²³⁵ display another significant step away from classical expectations in their emphasis on the tragedy of an innocent victim. Diderot would write admiringly of both plays in *De la poésie dramatique* and *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, respectively, noting that the spectators' ability to empathize with the emotions presented on the stage, a grieving mother/sister/wife, is enhanced because the emotional situation approximates their own experience. The "genre sérieux" to which Diderot refers in the *Entretiens* and other works

²³³ Voltaire, *Le Fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophète* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Jacques Truchet (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).

²³⁴ Voltaire, *Zaïre* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

²³⁵ Antoine Houdar de La Motte, *Inès de Castro* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

thus has precursors in tragedy as well as in the comedic tradition. As Diderot notes, the subjects treated by the *drame* “deviendront comiques ou tragiques, selon le génie de l’homme qui s’en saisira.”²³⁶

Despite the concern that after Molière there were no comedies left to write,²³⁷ at the end of the seventeenth and into the early eighteenth century playwrights, such as Regnard, Lesage and Dancourt, continued to find ways to entertain through comedies that held a satiric mirror to society. But as the century progressed, a more moralizing tone becomes evident in the comedies of Destouches and La Chaussée. In the preface to his play *Le Glorieux* (1732), Destouches criticizes his contemporaries in stating that “l’art dramatique n’est estimable qu’autant qu’il a pour but d’instruire en divertissant.”²³⁸ The plays of both Destouches and La Chaussée wed a moralizing tone to highly sentimental subjects.²³⁹ In plays such as *Le Préjugé à la mode* (1735) and *Mélanide* (1741),²⁴⁰ La Chaussée wrote comedies from which elements of satire and farce had been expunged. These *comédies larmoyantes* sought to move the spectator through domestic scenes of virtuous characters oppressed or misunderstood. Both the *comédie larmoyante* and the tragedies of Voltaire and Houdar de la Motte, share a taste for sentimentality that was prevalent throughout the eighteenth century, providing a link between comedy and tragedy that allowed for the generation of more mixing of the genres.

The history of the *drame* is often told beginning with the *comédie larmoyante* of Destouches and La Chaussée, presenting this form as an intermediate step between

²³⁶ Diderot, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1177-1178.

²³⁷ François Moureau, *Dufresny, auteur dramatique : 1657-1724*. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979) 127.

²³⁸ Philippe Néricault Destouches, *Préface, Le Glorieux* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

²³⁹ The power of this combination of moralizing and sentimentality appears to have had a constraining influence even on Sade. See Julie C. Hayes’ *Identity and Ideology: Diderot, Sade, and the Serious Genre* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 1991) for her discussion of Sade’s “admirably dull and moralizing collection of plays” in the genre (105).

²⁴⁰ Pierre-Claude Nivelle de la Chaussée, *Le Préjugé à la mode et Mélanide* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

Molière and Diderot. But, as we can see, the *comédie larmoyante* shared with many tragedies of the period a tendency toward the creation of more intimate scenarios of easily understood emotional crises. In “Spectacles of Intimacy: A New Look at the *comédie larmoyante*,” Deborah Steinberger highlights a number of similarities between the work of Destouches and La Chaussée and that of Diderot and suggests that the *drame* owes more to the *comédie larmoyante* than is often acknowledged.²⁴¹ The domestic setting found in the *comédie larmoyante* is, of course, the conventional setting that distinguishes comedy from tragedy, but the plays of Destouches and La Chaussée are notable for their serious tone and the attempt to increase the identification of the audience with the characters through realistic details of décor and costuming (66). Another way that these plays distinguish themselves from traditional comedy is through their lack of the comedic tension between parents and children. The father in Destouches’ *Le Philosophe marié*²⁴² is presented as a model of a just parent and a concerned spouse rather than satirized as a domestic tyrant. In this way the father is similar to the *père confident* to whom Diderot alludes in *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* and, Steinberger suggests, a precursor to the exploration of “condition” over “character” (67). Derek F. Connon, in *Innovation and Renewal: A Study of the Theatrical Works of Diderot*, also notes resonances between the *comédie larmoyante* and Diderot’s proposals for the *drame* and suggests that Diderot may have ignored these precursors to allow his own work to appear more innovative (121). However, Connon makes it clear that Diderot did consider the tragic plays of La Motte and Voltaire to be important examples of the direction in which he hoped to move theatre (120). Where then do the significant differences between

²⁴¹ Deborah Steinberger, “Spectacles of Intimacy: A New Look at the *comédie larmoyante*” *Esprit Créateur* 39: 3 (Fall 1999): 64-75.

²⁴² Destouches, *Le Philosophe marié* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

the *comédie larmoyante* and the *drame* actually lie? I would suggest that Diderot's response to the *comédie larmoyante* has more to do with his larger vision for the theatre than with whatever concerns he may have had regarding the singularity of his proposals.

While plays such as *Le Philosophe marié* of Destouches or *La Gouvernante*²⁴³ of La Chaussée present different views of heads of families than are commonly found in comedies, these portrayals must still be considered models of virtuous behavior, rather than thorough explorations of the "condition" of fatherhood or being a husband. Ariste, the philosophe marié, exemplifies a loving, concerned spouse, standing against the prejudices of his time. The Président, of *La Gouvernante*, is on a quest to correct his own mistakes of the past, thus providing his son with a familial paradigm of sin and self-redemption. Unlike M. d'Orbesson, who is always identified as Le Père de famille in the script of Diderot's *Le Père de famille*, these authority figures know what their proper roles should be. *Le Père de famille*, on the other hand, presents a father who is attempting to uphold the traditional "condition" of paternal authority which has become out-moded. His struggles are not viewed as comic, but rather as the result of firmly held traditional beliefs which are in conflict with the needs and concerns of his family. Le Père de famille ultimately cedes his place, not to the authoritarian Commandeur but to the desires of his children. Diderot's father is not a model for his children of paternal perfection, but a man whose role in life is subject to the vicissitudes of his exchanges with others. The *comédie larmoyante* does not provide the opportunity for the spectator to understand and investigate the ways in which our social conditions are, in fact, "les misérables conventions qui pervertissent l'homme."²⁴⁴

²⁴³ La Chaussée, *La Gouvernante* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

²⁴⁴ Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1282.

The work of Destouches and La Chaussée may share some of the qualities of the *drame*, particularly the serious tone which distinguishes them both from the satirical edge long associated with comedy, but they represent a cathartic experience at odds with Diderot's strategies for using the power of emotionality in the theatre. Diderot suggests, in fact, that part of the reason that his play *Le Père de famille* was initially poorly received was due to a "préjugé établi et qui subsiste encore contre ce qu'on appelle la comédie larmoyante."²⁴⁵ The plays of La Chaussée are associated with highly emotional scenes where the actors "sanglotait et nous faisait pleurer à chaudes larmes" (1394). Diderot shows a preference for the domestic dramas of the English during this period. When, in the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, Diderot first names his new genre "[l]a tragédie domestique et bourgeoise" it is to the English examples of Edward Moore's *The Gamester* and George Lillo's *The London merchant* that he turns as examples of the qualities for which he is searching, rather than the French plays of Destouches and La Chaussée.²⁴⁶ His decision, in 1760, to translate *The Gamester* (1753),²⁴⁷ is further evidence of the importance of this English model. In *Le Joueur*,²⁴⁸ while Diderot makes some changes in style in order to create a text that conforms more closely to recommendations made in his theoretical works, such as the use of broken sentences to suggest powerful emotion,²⁴⁹ he makes no changes to the plot or the moral power of the play. The play, however, is more than a tale of the moral wages of vice. *Le Joueur* investigates not only the character of the gambler, but explores the impact of his behavior

²⁴⁵ Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1410.

²⁴⁶ Diderot, *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, *Œuvres de Diderot IV* 1155.

²⁴⁷ Edward Moore, *The Foundling: a comedy and The Gamester: a tragedy*, ed. Anthony Amberg (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).

²⁴⁸ Donald Schier, "Diderot's Translation of *The Gamester*" *Diderot Studies* 16 (1973): 229-240.

²⁴⁹ See Derek F Connon's *Innovation and Renewal: A Study of the Theatrical Works of Diderot* for his detailed exposition of these changes (77-91).

on others. Gambling is not simply a vice for which the character suffers; it is a social condition that has ramifications for all those with whom the gambler interacts. In this way the play has not only a moral agenda, but a political one as well, and goes beyond the *comédie larmoyante* in its portrayal of the vicissitudes of social conditions.

Diderot's oft-noted enthusiastic support for Sedaine's *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* (1765)²⁵⁰ can be understood as a further attempt to distance the *drame* from the *comédie larmoyante*.²⁵¹ *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* breaks from the excessive sentimentalism of the *drame*'s precursors and opens up the domestic scene to include the outside world. The philosophe of the title, Vanderk, is shown plying his commercial trade on the stage, thereby expanding the spectator's awareness of the real-world conditions of the character. The play contains further political ramifications in its critique of dueling. *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* is thus closer to elucidating Diderot's vision of the potential of the *drame* to investigate the social context of human interactions and to provide opportunities for the critical evaluation of manners and morals. Diderot's vision is of a form of theatre that rejects the theatrical forms of French classicism as well as the contemporary *comédie larmoyante* in favor of a politically relevant theatre that serves as a center of civil discourse. However, rather than merely dismiss the maudlin emotionality of contemporary theatre audiences Diderot seeks to redirect the emotions so they become a means of informing judgment instead of being simply cathartic.

In *Un Essai sur le drame sérieux*, published in 1767 along with his play *Eugénie*, Beaumarchais tells us that it was Diderot's *Père de famille* that inspired him to reconsider

²⁵⁰ Michel Sedaine, *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

²⁵¹ See Mark Ledbury's *Sedaine, Greuze and the boundaries of genre* for the argument he presents that Diderot, along with Grimm and the actor Préville, collaborated on *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* (104-106).

the *drame*, and his own work, “avec une nouvelle ardeur.”²⁵² Beaumarchais’ support, in the *Essai*, for many of Diderot’s innovations, notably the importance of exploring social conditions and of securing the interest of the spectator through the use of subjects and characters with which the audience can identify, are well-known. In the context of this discussion of the sentimental and overly emotional precursors to the *drame*, it is worth noting that Beaumarchais’ admiration for Diderot’s work was based on “sa manière forte, le ton mâle et vigoureux de son ouvrage” (22). It is this tone and manner that Beaumarchais hopes to replicate in his efforts to produce a play of the *genre sérieux*, rather than the maudlin emotionality frequently associated with the new genre. The moral aspect of the *drame* remains central for Beaumarchais, it is “l’essence du genre sérieux d’offrir un intérêt plus pressant, une moralité plus directe que la Tragédie héroïque, et plus profonde que la Comédie plaisante” (26). This morality is linked to the ability of the spectator to identify with the action on the stage.

Que me font à moi, sujet paisible d’un Etat monarchique du dix-huitième siècle, les révolutions d’Athènes et de Rome ?...Il n’y a dans tout cela rien à voir pour moi, aucune moralité qui me convienne. Car qu’est-ce que moralité? C’est le résultat fructueux et l’application personnelle des réflexions qu’un événement nous arrache. Qu’est-ce que l’intérêt ? C’est le sentiment involontaire par lequel nous adaptons cet événements, sentiment qui nous met en la place de celui qui souffre, au milieu de sa situation. (28)

For Beaumarchais, as for Diderot, not only is identification necessary for the possibility of the moral suasion of the theatre, morality also requires reflection. While our feelings for the characters on the stage may be aroused involuntarily, the moral message comes only through reflecting on the events we are witnessing and applying them to ourselves.

²⁵²Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Un Essai sur le drame sérieux* dans *Œuvres de Beaumarchais*, ed. Pierre Larthomas (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) 22.

Thus Beaumarchais, like Diderot before him, distances himself from the notion that sentimentality itself is akin to virtue.²⁵³

Louis-Sébastien Mercier as well, in his borrowings from Diderot, presents a more political and less sentimentalized vision of the *drame*. Michael Fodor notes that Mercier's *La Brouette du vinaigrier* (1775), Sedaine's *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* (1765) and Beaumarchais' *Les Deux amis ou le Négociant de Lyon* (1770) all "address important social issues of eighteenth-century France."²⁵⁴ As Fodor makes clear, these authors go beyond the moralizing sentimentality usually associated with the *drame*, to present plays that created the dramatic space that Diderot called for between tragedy and comedy. In these *dramas*, the traditional role of the aristocrat in tragedy is taken by a merchant and, instead of this figure being the butt of the satirical humor of comedy, the values and social contributions of his class are taken seriously. While it is true that Mercier follows in the tradition of Sedaine and Beaumarchais in bringing social conditions to the stage and showing people practicing their trade in performance, the sheer number of his subjects, in plays such as *L'Indigent* (1772), *Le Juge* (1774) and *La Brouette du vinaigrier* (1775),²⁵⁵ allows him to investigate a much broader swathe of the public. Mercier brings a variety of social conditions to the stage but he goes beyond the bourgeoisie by depicting those of the lower classes. His *vinaigrier* may be classified as a

²⁵³ Jean Goldzink, in "Dramaturgies du droit : *Le Fils naturel* et *Le mariage de Figaro*" *Littératures Classiques* 40 (2000) 259-271, notes the paradox in the fact that "ce théâtre athée, ou d'athées (Diderot, Beaumarchais), condamné par l'Eglise et Rousseau, se retrouve le plus proche de la sphère religieuse, mais sur le plan laïcisé de la morale" (262). In addition to their secular morality, Diderot and Beaumarchais also shared an interest in authors' rights. See Lorraine Piroux's "Between a Hieroglyph and a Spatula: Authorlessness in Eighteenth-Century French Theater," for her discussion of the ramifications of this interest to their dramaturgy.

²⁵⁴ Michael Fodor, "The *Drame Commercial*: A Theatrical Experiment of the French Enlightenment" *The Dalhousie Review*. 82.3 (Autumn 2002): 469-479.

²⁵⁵ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *L'Indigent et Le Juge* dans *Théâtre Complète* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970) and *La Brouette du vinaigrier* dans *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

merchant in that he is engaged in the selling of his product, but he is clearly not of the same class as Sedaine's Vanderk or Beaumarchais' soon-to-be-ennobled silk merchant.

In his *Du théâtre, ou Nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique*,²⁵⁶ Mercier emphasizes the importance of the theatre audience as a means of assessing artistic achievement. He critiques the fact that “on juge trop des pieces de théâtre dans la solitude du cabinet : on prend alors le microscope en main, et l'on grossit tous à son aise les taches et les fautes du poète” (293). Rather than be judged by the individual critic alone in his room, “le drame est fait pour la représentation, et non pour la lecture. Lorsqu'il a réussi devant le public assemblé, le poète a rempli sa tâche” (293-294). Mercier calls upon the playwright to become a legislator, seemingly echoing Diderot's vision of a theatre which would engage the spectator in social and political critique.

Réunissant le titre de législateur à celui de poète (titres qui jadis n'étoient pas séparés) il enivrera tous les cœurs d'une haine vertueuse, il leur apprendra à connoître tous les chemins qui conduisent au despotisme, il instruira jusqu'aux enfans sur ce grand intérêt ; alors je reconnoîtrai en lui le poète qui aura créé une tragédie nationale, & ce terme ne sera pas dérisoire. (45)

While Mercier's vision suggests a moral and political use for the theater, particularly as an antidote to despotism, it also suggests a rather passive relationship between poet and spectator. Unlike Diderot's spectators, who are enjoined to view the performance of a play as one stage in an on-going re-writing of the text, Mercier's audience is not required to critically evaluate the theatrical presentation but solely to accept its inspiring message. Mercier sees the theatre not as a church but as a battlefield where the poet, with “sa plume,” must search out “les méchants, les suivre, les guetter de l'œil, & les percer avec l'arme morale qu'il tient en main; il doit leur livrer une guerre éternelle” (65).

²⁵⁶ Mercier, *Du Théâtre ou nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique* (Réimpression de l'édition d'Amsterdam 1773, Genève : Slatkine Reprints, 1970).

While Mercier's plays further the development of Diderot's conception of the *drame*, his theoretical writings show a tendency toward authoritarianism at odds with Diderot's inclusive view of the theatre.²⁵⁷ Mercier greatly admired the *comédie larmoyante* of La Chaussée, primarily because of its consistent moral message (*Du Théâtre* 105-106). On the other hand, he critiques the satire of Molière by quoting Rousseau's pronouncement that "peindre les mœurs n'est pas les corriger" (55). In *Le Rêve laïque de Louis-Sébastien Mercier: entre littérature et politique*, Enrico Rufi notes that Mercier goes even further in his condemnation of Molière and that "c'est quand il passe à préciser que 'le rire devient alors sacrilège' que la distance avec Diderot se fait sur ce point la plus grande : 'Il n'y a rien de sacré pour le poète,' avait écrit ce dernier dans le *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*, 'pas même la vertu, qu'il couvrira de ridicule si la personne et le moment l'exigent.'"²⁵⁸ The *drame* loses much of its power without the context in which Diderot placed it, as part of a larger movement of energizing the body politic and creating a public of informed citizens capable of critique and evaluation of politics and art. Diderot's utopian vision of a secular church at the center of civic life that this study has sought to delineate requires political and social changes that could only be possible in the future. It is on "nos neveux"²⁵⁹ that Diderot places his faith.

²⁵⁷ See Julie C. Hayes' "Changing the System: Mercier's Ideological Appropriation of Diderot" *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 18 (1988): 343-357, for her discussion of the place of women and actors in Mercier's work which undermines the notion of his theatre as a "theatre of liberation."

²⁵⁸ Enrico Rufi, *Le Rêve laïque de Louis-Sébastien Mercier : entre littérature et politique* (Oxford : Voltaire Foundation, 1995) 42.

²⁵⁹ Diderot, "Encyclopédie," *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

B. Posterity and the “église invisible”

Diderot’s critique of contemporary institutions necessarily implies some future point in time when the changes he recommends can be put into practice. But his relationship to the future is more complex than this: “La postérité pour le philosophe, c’est l’autre monde de l’homme religieux.”²⁶⁰ In this same letter, he also makes clear that he believes that this hope for future recognition can lead to virtuous action, without recourse to superstitious beliefs in immortal punishment or reward. One example of the importance of this belief for Diderot comes from a letter of commiseration written to the sculptor Falconet in 1766 regarding the possibility of recognition in the future. In this letter, Diderot writes of his belief in an “église invisible” which will be the ultimate arbiter of taste and value in the future. “La voix publique” of this group will possess a “jugement qui n’est jamais faux,” much like the judgment of the general will.

Quand je parle de la voix publique, il ne s’agit pas de cette cohue mêlée de gens de toute espèce, que va tumultueusement au parterre siffler un chef-d’œuvre, élever la poussière au Salon, et chercher sur le livret si elle doit admirer ou blâmer. Je parle de ce petit troupeau, de cette église invisible qui écoute, qui regarde, qui médite qui parle bas, et dont la voix prédomine à la longue et forme l’opinion générale. Je parle de ce jugement sain, tranquille et réfléchi d’une nation entière, jugement qui n’est jamais faux, jugement qui n’est jamais ignoré, jugement qui reste lorsque tous les petits intérêts particuliers se sont tus; jugement qui assigne à toute production sa juste valeur, jugement sans équivoque et sans appel. Lorsque la nation, d’accord avec les plus grands artistes sur le mérite reconnu et senti des productions anciennes, se montre compétente dans la sentence qu’elle porte des productions modernes. C’est qu’en fait d’arts, quand on y regarde bien, on voit que la sentence publique est celle même des artistes qui donne le ton; c’est qu’en fait de littérature, c’est celles des littératures que la foule a souscrite. (679-680)

This passage has been analyzed by Yves Citton, Elena Russo, and Peter Gay in the context of a perceived pessimism in Diderot at the end of his life related to Diderot’s

²⁶⁰ Diderot, *Lettre à Falconet* (15 février 1766) *Correspondance, Œuvres de Diderot* V 606.

belief that everyone is not (yet) enlightened.²⁶¹ I would argue, however, that the point of view expressed in this passage is one that Diderot takes throughout his life and supports his hopes for a better future where, among other things, artists will achieve their proper role in society. In this vision, we see repeated the value placed on reflection and meditation in the formation of aesthetic judgment. It is also another example of the association of church and art. It was in the temple that the arts were born and it is through this invisible church that the opinions of the nation will eventually be formed. The invisible church consists of a *troupeau* (flock) of people whose judgment will eventually replace the superficial fashions of the present. In contrast to those whose opinions currently predominate, members of this particular congregation make their judgments deliberately and without self-interest. Not only are these devotees not subject to the whims of fashion, they are not subject to the strictures of tradition. The congregation described here is the one on which he places his faith that his legacy will be redeemed and the same one that Diderot envisions when he describes the theatre as a church where public issues can be expressed and discussed and where citizen-spectators fulfill their roles. The arts (theatre, painting, literature) are linked to an image of an informed population spreading enlightenment. Diderot is not merely speaking of the uneducated, but of the ignorant and those who “affect” to be cultured, but are merely posing. In this passage, Diderot reiterates the importance of education and of artists as the ultimate leaders and arbiters of taste in his vision of the future.

²⁶¹ See Yves Citton’s article “Retour sur la misérable querelle Rousseau-Diderot: position, conséquence, spectacle et sphère publique” *Recherches sur Diderot et l’Encyclopédie* 36 (Avril 2004): 57-95; Elena Russo’s “Slander and Glory in the Republic of Letters: Diderot and Seneca confront Rousseau” *Republic of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics and the Arts* 1 (May 2009): 1-12; and Peter Gay in *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (519-521) for discussions of this passage focusing on Diderot’s perceived pessimism and his belief that enlightenment had not yet reached everyone.

C. Contemporary Debates

Diderot's work does not conform to the notion of a strict rationalism that attempts to "disenchant" the world²⁶² and thus serves as a foundation of authoritarianism and fascism. Diderot's strain of Enlightenment thinking is one which seeks to create a world where enchantment is based in materialist principles and to guarantee the place of secularism in civil society and the arts. Diderot's vision of theatre creates a secular church that leads to the use of emotionality to inform public discourse. Diderot's attempt to introduce secularism as a foundation of civil institutions anticipates by several centuries recent attempts to understand secularism from a perspective of celebration rather than pessimism.²⁶³ In addition, Diderot's analysis of political structures and religious institutions is particularly relevant to present-day arguments that seek to revisit secularism with a view to re-privileging the religious in civic discourse.²⁶⁴ Given Diderot's faith in the judgment of posterity, it is particularly fitting that his arguments are relevant to a contemporary perspective.

²⁶²See Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1-2) and Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 259-260, for discussions of this perspective on the Enlightenment.

²⁶³ George Levine, *The Joy of Secularism: 11 Essays for How We Live Now* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) contains essays which challenge the association of atheism with pessimism.

²⁶⁴ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) consists of thirteen essays which challenge the viability of secularism today.

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