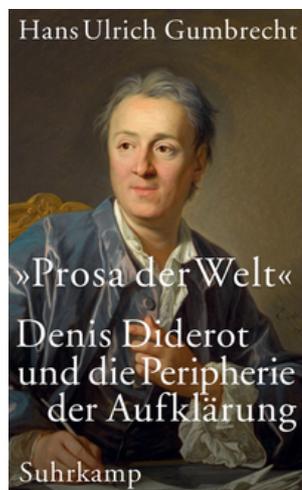


Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

»The Prose of the World« - Denis Diderot and the Periphery of the Enlightenment



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Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht was born in 1948. He has been teaching at Stanford University since 1989, where he is the Albert Guérard Professor in Literature. In addition to numerous visiting professorships, he has received eight honorary doctorates.

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About

Philosopher and translator, critic and writer, art agent and encyclopaedist: Denis Diderot, born in Champagne in 1713, died in Paris in 1784, was one of the defining figures of the movement that went down in history as the European Age of Enlightenment. But what is the vanishing point of his multifarious oeuvre, which is characterised by downright centrifugal dynamics – unlike the works of his contemporaries Voltaire and Rousseau, Schiller, Kant and Hume?

Along scene from Diderot's eventful and moving life and in precise readings of his key works Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht pursues this question and develops a new approach to this exceptional intellectual in his elegant book. He contrasts this with the system of Hegel, who was both irritated and fascinated by Diderot's writings and conceptualised them under the term »the prose of the world«.

Gumbrecht shows how radically Diderot engaged with the concreteness and contingencies of the world and thereby reached the centre of an intellectual periphery that also attracted others: Goya, for example, but also Lichtenberg and Mozart. The movements of thought in this periphery reach us today as those of contemporaries.

Praise

»[...] a good characterisation of Diderot.« Jürgen Kaube, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

»[...] his book [is] a source of highly interesting suggestions.« Joseph Hanimann, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

»*The Prose of the World* illustrates how Diderot didn't try to reduce the complexity of the world and of reality by forcing it to fit into a system of »necessary forms of progress« – unlike Hegel, who was fascinated by Diderot's thought and writings, attempted to in his works. For Diderot, the world remains »overwhelmingly – and at times excitingly – complex.« Susanne Kippenberger, *Der Tagesspiegel*