

# Rousseau's Idea of Theatre

From Criticism to Practice

Maria Gullstam





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Maria Gullstam

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### Abstract

As a critic of the moral consequences of Parisian theatre while writing plays and music for it, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) had a double relationship to the art form of theatre. This doctoral thesis argues that his seemingly double position towards the theatre is not necessarily contradictory. Building on previous research about Rousseau's writings for the theatre, its main questions are 'Why did Rousseau compose works for the French stage, while at the same time directing his critique towards it?' and 'How through his own theatrical works did Rousseau try to respond, aesthetically and practically, to the inherent problems that he saw in the theatre?' Drawing on both Jean Starobinski and Jacques Derrida, the study outlines a theoretical starting point through the concept of *pharmakon*. In its two-fold structure – simultaneously medicine and poison – the *pharmakon* can help us understand how Rousseau saw art, and theatre in particular, as potentially both harmful and useful to society.

Starting from Rousseau's broader perspective on the arts, the thesis uses his many writings on music, alongside his early theoretical works on art and on the development of human society. This shows that Rousseau's neologism *perfectibility*, in addition to being an anthropological term describing a human faculty, is an aesthetic notion through which he writes his own history of the arts. By conceptualising this thought structure as *aesthetic perfectibility*, it is possible to demonstrate how Rousseau uses this notion to understand, expose and oppose systematised and universal rules of reason, beauty and taste. This is fundamental for our understanding of his dual relationship to theatre and to his sharp criticism of the Parisian stage in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. This is because *aesthetic perfectibility* has the same structure as the *pharmakon*; applied in the wrong way it is harmful to humanity, but studied well and used with care, it can also be applied to remedy or at least partly reduce the harm it has already caused. Moving from a theoretical perspective towards a practical one, the final chapters of the thesis focus on some of Rousseau's principal stage works: *Le Devin du village*, *Pygmalion* and *Narcisse, ou L'Amant de lui-même*. These chapters show that Rousseau's understanding of theatrical imitation suggests how he perceived the Parisian stage as morally dangerous, and why, in his own theatrical works, he tried to problematise and expose how theatrical imitation could be used as a tool to obtain power. Finally, the study argues that Rousseau's creation of a new dramatic genre, the *scène lyrique*, can be seen as an attempt to make theatrical art approach musical imitation, in order to make it less harmful morally. The thesis concludes by arguing that the public festival should be perceived as part of the same *pharmakon* as theatre, and that in his own stage works Rousseau therefore experimented with conceptual elements borrowed from the festivals.

**Keywords:** Jean-Jacques Rousseau, theatre, the Enlightenment, *pharmakon*, *perfectibility*, *aesthetics*, *imitation*, the public festival, *Pygmalion*, *Narcisse, ou L'Amant de lui-même*, *Le Devin du village*.

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Department of Culture and Aesthetics

Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm



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Cover photo from Performing Premodernity's production of Rousseau's *Le Devin du village* at Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, Stockholm, 2019, with choreography by Karin Modigh. Photo by Eva Frykevall.

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Till mamma, pappa och  
Etienne



Ah! Where are the games and festivals of my youth? Where is the concord of the citizens? Where is the public fraternity? Where is the pure joy and the real gaiety? Where are the peace, the liberty, the equity, the innocence? Let us go and seek out all that again.

Ah! où sont les jeux et les fêtes de ma jeunesse? Où est la concorde des citoyens? Où est la fraternité publique? Où est la pure joye et la véritable allégresse? Où sont la paix, la liberté, l'équité, l'innocence? Allons rechercher tout cela.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, 1758



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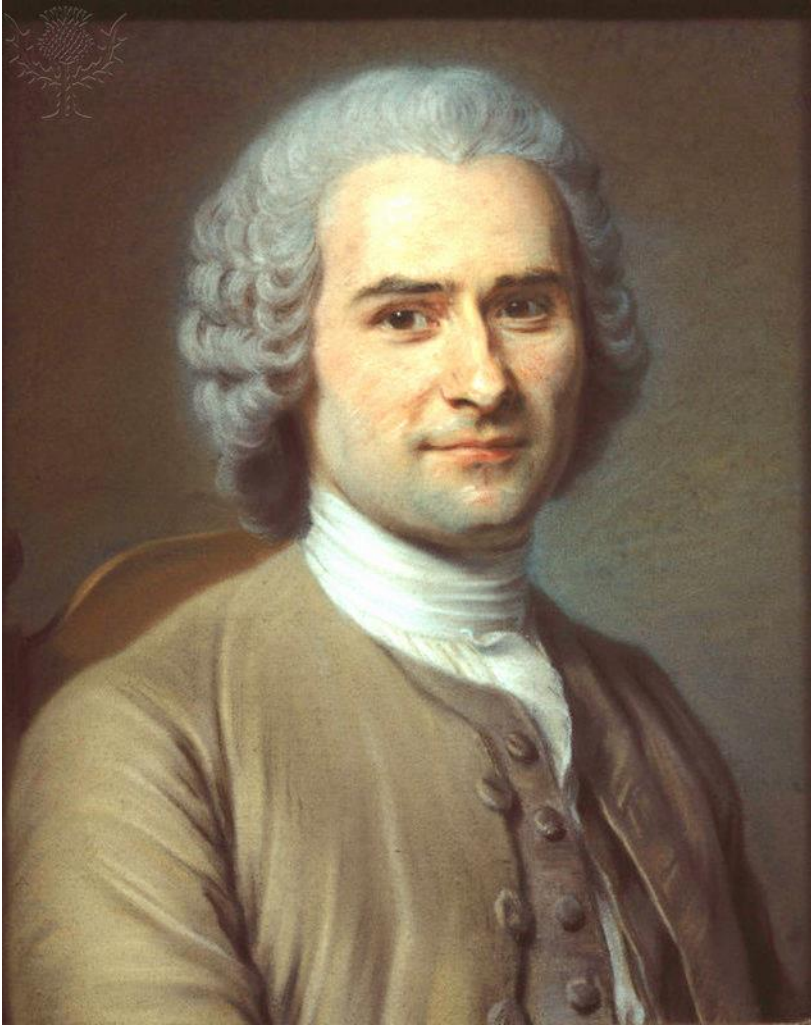
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*0.1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, portrait by Maurice Quentin de La Tour, 1753.*

# Introduction

## Rousseau's idea of theatre

### Subject, aims and research questions

With its young and naive village couple, its pantomimic features often in rhythm with the music, and its long final *divertissement* celebrating modest country life and love with dance and song, the one-act opera *Le Devin du village* was a great success in Paris in the early 1750s.<sup>1</sup> The critics praised the author, who had composed both the libretto, which successfully portrayed the language of the villagers, and the simple but expressive music.<sup>2</sup> This pastoral opera came to be one of the most appreciated and performed works at the Paris Opera in the eighteenth century, and it played an important part in the development of the genre of *opéra-comique*.<sup>3</sup> Almost

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<sup>1</sup> Rousseau's opera *Le Devin du village* premiered at Fontainebleau on 18 October 1752, in the presence of Louis XV, and later at the Paris Opera on 1 March in 1753. The great popularity of *Le Devin du village* lasted into the nineteenth century, as can be seen in Michael O'Dea's article 'Rousseau's ghost: *Le Devin du village* at the Paris Opera, 1770-1779', *Rousseau on stage: playwright, musician, spectator*, ed. Maria Gullstam and Michael O'Dea (Oxford, 2017), p.209-25.

<sup>2</sup> '*Le Devin du village* is a new *intermède*, of which the words and music are by Mr Rousseau of Geneva, known for his famous Discourse to the Dijon Academy. This piece had both brilliant and complete success. Mr Rousseau has as poet, in placing on stage a reconciliation of two village lovers, not only employed their grammar, but spoken their language. And as a musician he has attempted a new musical genre, simple and naive, and with an expression suitable for its subject.' In *Mercure de France*, December 1752, p.173: '*Le Devin du village* est un Intermède nouveau, dont les parole et la Musique sont du sieur Rousseau de Genève, connu par le fameux Discours de l'Académie de Dijon. Cet Ouvrage eut un succès aussi brillant que complet. Le sieur Rousseau comme Poète en mettant sur la Scene un raccommodement entre deux Amans de Village, ne s'est pas attaché seulement à employer leur Grammaire, il a parlé leur langage, et comme Musicien, il a essayé un genre de Musique nouveau, simple et naïf, et d'une expression convenable à son sujet.' Please note that unless otherwise attributed, the translations are my own.

<sup>3</sup> See O'Dea, 'Rousseau's ghost', and David Charlton, 'The melodic language of *Le Devin du village* and the evolution of *opéra-comique*', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.179-207.

twenty years later, the same author made a great impression on the French stage with an entirely new dramatic genre. Critical of the lack of attention to the relationship between music and text in French operas of the time, the author wished to find a meaningful and new way of combining the two. Inspired by the Ovidian myth where the sculptor Pygmalion falls in love with his own creation, the author's solution was *Pygmalion* in which the text is spoken, not sung, alternating with brief musical interludes intended both to accompany the actor's silent stage action and gestures, and to illustrate his inner turmoil.<sup>4</sup> This genre, which the author himself called *scène lyrique*, quickly became popular in various countries around Europe, and is today often referred to as melodrama or monodrama.<sup>5</sup> The author was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).<sup>6</sup>

Although these two innovative pieces had an important influence on the direction of eighteenth-century theatre, it was his treatise about the Parisian stage, the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, published in 1758, between *Le Devin* and *Pygmalion*, that would affect posterity's image of his views of theatre to a far greater extent than his theatrical works. This treatise was to earn him the reputation of being an adversary of the theatre.

In late 1757 the seventh volume of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* was published. d'Alembert wrote an article in this volume about Geneva, Rousseau's native city, which suggested that the people of Geneva would benefit educationally and culturally (in matters of decorum) if a public theatre modelled on the Parisian stage was established in the city.<sup>7</sup> Rousseau did not agree. In his *Lettre à d'Alembert* he fiercely

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<sup>4</sup> In 1762, Rousseau wrote a first version of the text to his *scène lyrique Pygmalion*, which was completed with music and performed in 1770 at the Hôtel du Ville in Lyon. Most of the music to *Pygmalion* was composed by the Lyonnais amateur Horace Coignet, and the rest by Rousseau himself (2 out of 26 ritornelli). Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Horace Coignet, *Pygmalion: scène lyrique*, ed. Jacqueline Waeber (Geneva, 1997). See Waeber's introduction (in French and English), p.VIII-XXI.

<sup>5</sup> On the melodrama as a genre, and Rousseau's *Pygmalion* as a precursor, see Jacqueline Waeber's *En musique dans le texte: le mélodrame, de Rousseau à Schoenberg* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Except for these two works, he composed several comedies, operas and one tragedy (further presented below). However the only other theatrical work that was finished and performed on a public stage was his comedy *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même* (performed in 1752, published in 1753).

<sup>7</sup> See the article 'Genève', in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Diderot and d'Alembert, vol.7, p.578-578D. In English translation in Rousseau, *The Collected writings of Rousseau*, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, 14 vols (Hanover, NH, and London, 1990- 2012), (hence forward *CW*), vol.10, edited and translated by Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth and Christopher Kelly, 'Geneva' (by Jean le Rond d'Alembert), p.239-49.

denounces d'Alembert's suggestion, while showing that he had a profound first-hand knowledge and an intense love of the Parisian theatrical repertoire. In his eyes such an institution could never lead to any good thing for his countrymen, since it was built on appearance, corrupt morals and prescribed ideas (of the *philosophes*) represented by the falsehood of actors.<sup>8</sup> More than anything Rousseau rejects the common contemporary view that the Parisian theatre served society as a school of virtue. Throughout the *Lettre à d'Alembert* Rousseau builds his case that this concept of the stage was not only wrong but also dangerous. To his mind the people with power – the *philosophes* and the nobility – were spreading their version of the truth about virtue, wisdom and beauty through the theatre, under the false premise that their enlightenment was the one and only truth to be adopted by all. Moreover, he implicitly argues that their underlying goal was to gain even more power and influence.<sup>9</sup> Rousseau states that the Parisian stage also encourages the audience to adopt qualities of vice and shallowness, and to show off in front of these important and powerful people and each other, arguing that the pomp and splendour of the theatre milieu was creating a society for mutual admiration.<sup>10</sup>

How can this serious critique of the Parisian stage in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* be reconciled with the author who created innovative theatrical works like *Le Devin du village* and *Pygmalion*? It is possible because Rousseau had a double relationship to the arts throughout his entire career, criticising the role of the arts in society, while at the same time being a composer of music, and creator of theatre plays, novels etc. This double relationship can be seen as early as 1751 in his First discourse, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, where he criticised the fine arts (and sciences) for having a damaging influence on society and morals. He argued that the arts are one of the reasons for the human fixation upon appearance and politeness, because they contribute to the formalisation and organisation of feeling and thinking; the arts shape us into copies of each other by refining a common taste for and an

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<sup>8</sup> The *Lettre à d'Alembert*, its political background and aesthetic motives are discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. Rousseau's thoughts on the art of acting are discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, trans. Allan Bloom, ed. Bloom and Christopher Kelly, p.258-61; Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols (Paris, 1959-1995), vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Jean Rousset, p.10-14. And Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, ed. and trans. Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, *Preface to Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, p.198, footnote by Rousseau. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Préface to Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, ed. Jacques Scherer, p.974, footnote by Rousseau. This argument is further developed and discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 3.

awareness of inner and outer beauty. When we are occupied with outer appearance, we lose the ability to simply be.<sup>11</sup> The First discourse won a writing competition organised by the Academy of Dijon, and it subsequently created lively debates among the *philosophes* in Paris.<sup>12</sup> In 1752 his critics had more fuel for their arguments when Rousseau's comedy *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même* was performed at the Comédie-Française in the French capital. This enabled the critics to argue that he was not only wrong, but inconsistent and self-contradictory as he practised the arts while criticising their very existence.<sup>13</sup> In his defence, Rousseau published a preface to his comedy in which he stated:

I will write Books, compose Poems and Music [...] will continue to say very frankly all the evil that I think about letters and about those who cultivate them, and will believe that I am not worth any less for that. It is true that it will be possible to say some day: This professed enemy of the sciences and arts, nevertheless composed and published Theatrical Plays; and this discourse will be, I admit, a very bitter satire, not on me, but on my century.<sup>14</sup>

In a footnote following this last part of the preface, Rousseau encourages the readers to understand that his criticism of the arts and sciences is not a personal attack on the *philosophes*, but rather a way towards ameliorating socie-

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<sup>11</sup> 'Today, when subtler researches and a more refined taste have reduced the Art of pleasing to principles, a base and deceptive uniformity prevails in our morals, and all minds seem to have been cast in the same mold. Incessantly politeness requires, propriety demands; incessantly usage is followed, never one's own genius. One no longer dares to appear as he is.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.6. 'Aujourd'hui que des recherches plus subtiles et un gout plus fin ont réduit l'Art de plaire en principes, il régné dans nos mœurs une vile et trompeuse uniformité, et tous les esprits semblent avoir été jettés dans un même moule: sans cesse la politesse exige, la bienséance ordonne: sans cesse on suit les usages, jamais son propre genie. On n'ose plus paroître ce qu'on est.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur le sciences et les arts*, ed. François Bouchardy, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> The subject for the contest was: 'If the reestablishment of the sciences and the arts has contributed to purify morals.' 'Si le rétablissement des Sciences et des Arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs.' *Mercur de France*, October 1749, p.154.

<sup>13</sup> In December 1752 it was performed twice. See Gullstam and O'Dea, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: a theatre and music chronology', *Rousseau on stage*, p.xiv-xix.

<sup>14</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcissus*, p.198. 'j'écrirai des Livres, je ferai des Vers et de la Musique [...] je continuerai à dire très-franchement tout le mal que je pense des lettres et de ceux qui les cultivent, et croirai n'en valoir pas moins pour cela. Il est vrai qu'on pourra dire quelque jour: Cet ennemi si déclaré des science et des arts, fit pourtant et publia des Pièces de Théâtre; et ce discours sera, je l'avoue, une satire très-amère, non de moi, mais de mon siècle. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcisse*, p.974.

ty.<sup>15</sup> He raises the possibility that artistic works have the ability to amend or ease the harm already done to humankind, partly by the arts. He writes that even though the arts (and sciences) have greatly damaged humanity ‘it is very essential to use them today as a medicine for the evil they have caused, or like those harmful animals that must be crushed on [...] their bite.’<sup>16</sup>

His reputation of being self-contradictory and ambiguous in relation to the arts, and particularly the theatre, was nonetheless reinforced when his *Lettre à d’Alembert* was published. That someone so closely connected to the *Encyclopédie* project and the *philosophes* should direct such a sharp critique toward the stage was unexpected, and caused a lively debate among the men of letters.<sup>17</sup> And so, the images of Rousseau as both self-contradictory and as an opponent of art and theatre, have followed and moulded his reputation even to today. His plays and musical dramas likewise have until recently been of little interest to scholars, having rarely been treated in relation to his critique of the arts and the theatre, and seldom considered as vital parts of his work.

The present study is a doctoral thesis about Jean-Jacques Rousseau, his life-long engagement with and his critique of the theatrical arts. I aim to challenge the image of Rousseau as a man of ambiguities and will argue that his seemingly double position towards the arts and theatre is not necessarily contradictory or paradoxical. As the quotation above from the preface to *Narcisse* shows, there are clear indications in Rousseau’s works that he was fully conscious of his various roles as author, playwright, musical composer and critic of the arts, and that he was also aware of how future readers of his works would react to this double position.<sup>18</sup> The present study therefore takes Rousseau at his word: practising a discourse while criticising the same can be constructive and productive. Thus, the image of the arts as harmful on the one hand, and healing to society on the other, constitutes an important

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<sup>15</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcissus*, p.198, footnote by Rousseau. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Préface to Narcisse*, p.974, footnote by Rousseau.

<sup>16</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcissus*, p.198. ‘quoique ces choses [read art and science] aient fait beaucoup de mal à la société, il est très-essenciel de s’en servir aujourd’hui comme d’une médecine au mal qu’elles ont causé, ou comme de ces animaux malfaisans qu’il faut écraser sur la morsure.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Préface to Narcisse*, p.974.

<sup>17</sup> The *Lettre* received over 400 replies. See Ourida Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève et la république des lettres* (New York, 2003), p.4.

<sup>18</sup> See also Gullstam and O’Dea, ‘Introduction: “La vérité est que Racine me charme”’, in *Rousseau on stage*, p.18.

theoretical point of departure in my approach to the subject of Rousseau and the theatre.<sup>19</sup>

The two overarching research questions that the study aims to answer are therefore:

1) Why did Rousseau compose works for the French stage, while at the same time directing his critique towards it, and why did he take on this seemingly contradictory position?

2) How through his own theatrical works did Rousseau try to respond, aesthetically and practically, to the inherent problems that he saw in the theatre?

## Hypotheses

My hypothesis for the first research question is that this self-chosen double position regarding the arts is the very foundation upon which Rousseau builds his argumentation concerning the stage. Even while being a playwright and composer, his criticism of both the theatre and the opera of his time should be seen as a strategy to break down an established system, and to create an alternative. As mentioned above, a central point in Rousseau's critique of the theatre concerns the conviction of his contemporaries, that the arts and the stage in particular can educate their audience through prescribed truths and didactics. Rousseau is suspicious of this because of its hierarchical structure, often with the *philosophes* at the top. Rousseau thought that such elitist didactics with a given goal led only to limited access to enlightenment. Telling and instructing people how and what to think, in his opinion, contributes to forming people 'in the same mould' ['dans un même moule'] as the arts and sciences had.<sup>20</sup> Throughout large parts of his oeuvre, not the least in his works concerning theatre, Rousseau proposes an alternative, calling out for an individual process of autonomous thinking.<sup>21</sup> One hypothesis is therefore that Rousseau's seemingly double position in relation to the arts and to theatre, is part of this argument, that it is a way of encouraging his

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<sup>19</sup> Jean Starobinski's title essay in *Le Remède dans le mal* (Paris, 1989), p.165-232, has been a great inspiration concerning this notion in Rousseau's thought in the present study, further developed in Chapter 1.

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.6; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur le sciences et les arts*, p.8.

<sup>21</sup> For further reading see for example Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*.



audience and readers to think and feel for themselves, instead of handing them an answer book about how to appreciate art.

For the second research question – Rousseau’s strategies to respond to some of the issues of the stage with his own theatrical works – his many writings on music theory will be considered as a central source. I have chosen this for several reasons. Firstly, his musical writings constitute by far the most complete theoretical body of material concerning aesthetics in his oeuvre. Secondly, music held a very special position for Rousseau throughout his life, and he considered music generally less problematic than other art forms, even though he was a harsh critic of French music.<sup>22</sup> And thirdly, I am adopting this approach because the music in several of his theatrical works plays a vital role as both a stylistic statement and as a theatrical tool, thinking here primarily of *Le Devin du village* and *Pygmalion* and of the fact that in both works the author left detailed stage directions on how to act to the music. It seems to me that it is through studying his works on music theory that a clearer image can emerge of his thinking about other art forms, such as theatre. My hypothesis is that in his musical writings Rousseau developed a form and language for criticising art and its influence on humankind, and that in these writings he also discovered possible solutions to the problems he found. Thus, I understand that both Rousseau’s socio-political view of theatre, and his way of dealing on a practical level with scenic works were largely developed through his musical thinking and writings.

Before giving a detailed disposition of the subsequent analysis, the following subsection will introduce the research field and previous studies on the topic of Rousseau and theatre that are relevant for the present thesis. Here, I will also outline the body of material used in the thesis.

## Material and the research field

It is surprising that the image of Rousseau as an enemy of theatre forms his reputation to such an extent in modern times. The general view of Rousseau in theatre studies today remains largely influenced by it.<sup>23</sup> Willmar Sauter’s

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<sup>22</sup> See C.N Dugan and Tracy B. Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, in *The Cambridge companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge, 2001), p. 329-64.

<sup>23</sup> There are of course exceptions. Theatre scholars who have recently contributed to the topic of Rousseau’s involvement with theatre are Patrick Primavesi and David Wiles. See for example Patrick Primavesi’s article, ‘The dramaturgy of Rousseau’s *Lettre à d’Alembert* and its

overview of thirty or more theatre history books bears this out, showing numerous examples of how Rousseau and his *Lettre à d'Alembert* are dismissed as anti-theatrical or ignored entirely. Sauter writes that either theatre historians paint the *Lettre à d'Alembert* simply as an example of anti-theatricalism, or they choose to speak of Rousseau as a generally positive philosophical influence, but without specifically addressing his thoughts about theatre.<sup>24</sup> While this reputation of being an antagonist of art and theatre has largely dominated posterity's image of Rousseau's dealings with the stage, his own works for the theatre have until recently been given little attention by scholars.

In the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, Rousseau's double relationship with the arts was the topic of lively discussion (see Chapter 1), and it appears that, in combination with the subsequent publication of a new edition of Rousseau's *Œuvres complètes* (1959-1995), this might have created new interest for both his philosophical and practical approach to theatre.<sup>25</sup> In the past decades, scholars in the fields of musicology, social sciences and comparative literature, as well as some in theatre studies, have shown an increasing interest in Rousseau's theatrical works. There has been a reassessment of his relationship to theatrical performances witnessed by several articles, books and edited volumes considering both the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, and Rousseau's own plays, operas and musical compositions, in addition to monographs about Rousseau's musical writings, all of which have contributed to a wider understanding of his thoughts about theatre and music. Of these, only those central to my study are presented in the subsection below.

### **Rousseau and the stage in previous research**

In this section I will present studies that have been seminal to my thesis. The outline below should not be seen as a complete overview of the research field of Rousseau and the theatre, but rather as a selection of works that are important from the perspective of this particular study. Previous research on

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importance for modern theatre', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.51-75; David Wiles' chapter 'Geneva: Rousseau versus Voltaire' in his *Theatre and citizenship* (Cambridge, 2011 and 2014), and the last part of Wiles' chapter on 'Emotions' in his *The Player's advice to Hamlet: the rhetorical acting method from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Willmar Sauter, 'A theatrophobic dramatist: J.-J. Rousseau's position in theatre historiography and on today's stage', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.226-52, p.231.

<sup>25</sup> Edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond.

Rousseau's double relationship to the arts will be discussed in Chapter 1. However, I would like to name Jean Starobinski here, a scholar whose writings about Rousseau's philosophy have inspired the present study significantly, specifically his monumental work *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle* (1957 and 1971) and his essay 'Le remède dans le mal: la pensée de Rousseau' (1989), which touches upon theatre and music in Rousseau.

Two important studies on the *Lettre à d'Alembert* were published in the 1980s, both with the aim to see beyond the text's antitheatrical reputation. Firstly, Patrick Coleman's *Rousseau's political imagination: rule and representation in the Lettre à d'Alembert* (1984), in which he argues that the *Lettre* is an imperative part of Rousseau's other socio-political writings. In his close reading of the *Lettre*, Coleman argues that the text is a continuation of Rousseau's Second discourse, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*. Coleman sees the *Lettre* as a practical application of the theoretical principles, using the term 'spectacle' in its broadest sense in order to include various cultural customs, institutions and social roles and functions in different types of societies (Paris and Geneva).<sup>26</sup> Secondly, published a few years later, in 1988, David Marshall's chapter, 'Rousseau and the state of theatre', also considers the *Lettre à d'Alembert* as an extension of the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*.<sup>27</sup> Marshall points out that already in the Second discourse, where he investigates the first human relations and formations in a conjectural history of the beginning of humankind, Rousseau is critical of theatricality in general, in the sense of the pretence between people. Theatricality has no place in the state of nature as presented in the Second discourse. It is in the early stages of the first emerging societies, as described by Rousseau, that people start to be conscious of how they appear to others, and as a consequence start comparing themselves to their kin in terms of skills and beauty. Thus, humans became actors in their own world in order to impress or deceive one another. Through this approach, Marshall argues that the *Lettre à d'Alembert* could be read as an inquiry about whether it is even possible in modern society to escape theatricality, and how theatre affects people both in and outside the physical playhouse.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Patrick Coleman, *Rousseau's political imagination: rule and representation in the Lettre à d'Alembert* (Geneva, 1984), p.7-17.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall, 'Rousseau and the state of theater', in *The Surprising effects of sympathy* (Chicago, 1988), p.135-77.

<sup>28</sup> See Marshall, 'Rousseau and the state of theater', p.135-44.

In 1992, Catherine Kintzler published a significant work on the *Poétique de l'opéra français: de Corneille à Rousseau*. Kintzler's writings are essential, because they place Rousseau's music aesthetics in a historical context, particularly in relation to Lully and Rameau and their respective views of the relationship between music and text in opera.<sup>29</sup> Kintzler also devotes two chapters from the point of view of content and of rhetorical strategy to showing how, time and again, Rousseau breaks the tradition of the logic and structured systems of the theorists of French classicism (such as Boileau, Bossuet, Duclos, Batteux, l'abbé Dubos). He favours an aesthetic theory based on immateriality and 'a language of the heart'.<sup>30</sup> Discussing Rousseau's thoughts about both music and theatre, Kintzler argues that Rousseau deliberately used ideas and formulations from his adversaries, turning their own words against themselves, and reappropriated their ideas so that they would follow his argument.<sup>31</sup>

A few years later, Michael O'Dea in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: music, illusion and desire* (1995) established a link between Rousseau's early musical writings and later philosophical works through aesthetic ideals based on affectivity and desire.<sup>32</sup> O'Dea highlights Rousseau's different attitudes towards the effects of the passions created and generated through art: music's

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<sup>29</sup> Catherine Kintzler, *Poétique de l'opéra français: de Corneille à Rousseau*, (Paris, 1992, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2006). I will refer to the later edition in the following. See also Catherine Kintzler's *Jean-Philippe Rameau: splendeur et naufrage de l'esthétique du plaisir à l'âge classique* (Paris, 1988). For further reading on French music and theatre in the eighteenth century, see for example Martine de Rougemont, *La Vie théâtrale en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 2001), Béatrice Didier, *La Musique des Lumières* (Paris, 1985), and Marian Hobson, *The Object of art: the theory of illusion in eighteenth-century France* (Cambridge, 2009, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l'opéra français*, p.353-59.

<sup>31</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l'opéra français*, p.353-420. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: politics, art, and autobiography*, ed. John T. Scott (London and New York, 2006) includes many important texts on the political aspects in relation to art in Rousseau's thought and notably, it includes texts by both Coleman and Marshall as well as by Kintzler.

<sup>32</sup> The fifth and last volume of the *Œuvres complètes* (edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond), comprising much important research in notes and various introductions, was published in the same year with the subtitle *Écrit sur la musique, la langue et le théâtre*. I would like to highlight especially Jean Rousset's preface to the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, which suggests that Rousseau's broader idea of a theatrical spectacle is taking its revenge in modern times through a looser idea of the division between actor and spectator. Rousset, in Rousseau, *OC*, vol 5, introduction to *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.XXX-XLVI, p.XLIV. From the 1990s the English translation (used in this thesis) of Rousseau's work, based on the *OC* was published between 1990-2012. Especially volume 7 (with Rousseau's writings on music, trans. and ed. by John T. Scott) and volume 10 (Rousseau's theatrical works and the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, trans. and ed. by Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth and Christopher Kelly) have been of great value for my work.

finest ability in Rousseau's eyes is the way in which it can touch its audience, while the art and talent of the actor to move a spectator is presented as utterly dangerous in his *Lettre à d'Alembert*. With a focus on the notion of the human voice in Rousseau's writings, O'Dea argues that even though it might not be possible to reconcile the various attitudes within Rousseau's authorship, the aesthetic ideals worked out in his early musical writings – notably his numerous articles on music for the *Encyclopédie* – are nevertheless present in many of his later and most important philosophic and literary works.<sup>33</sup>

The comparison of Rousseau's ideas on music with his thoughts on theatre, partly developed by Kintzler and O'Dea, was pursued in 2001 by Dugan and Strong in 'Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau', in *The Cambridge companion to Rousseau*, edited by Patrick Riley. Investigating political, theatrical and musical representation in Rousseau, Dugan and Strong argue that musical representation differs from other types of representation in Rousseau's thought. It does not act persuasively in the sense that it does not call for a particular judgement induced by a theatrical character or a playwright. Instead, music would allow individual evaluation 'within the audience', which enables a kind of representation that instead of moral/political diversion/destruction, could invoke autonomous feeling and thinking in relation to the self. Thus, Dugan and Strong point out that Rousseau's thoughts about art/theatre and his political philosophy can be better understood when read with his musical theories as a backdrop.<sup>34</sup>

Ourida Mostefai in *Le Citoyen de Genève et la république des lettres* (2003) places the *Lettre à d'Alembert* and Rousseau's thoughts about theatre politically in relation to the *philosophes* and the *Encyclopédie* project.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Michael O'Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: music, illusion and desire* (London and New York, 1995), p. 1-6. O'Dea has produced a large number of important articles on Rousseau and music/theatre (not least on *Le Devin du village*) and edited several volumes related to the topic. See O'Dea's name in the bibliography. For reading on the relationship between Rousseau's musical writings and his philosophical 'system', see John T. Scott, 'The harmony between Rousseau's musical theory and his philosophy', in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: politics, art, and autobiography*.

<sup>34</sup> Dugan and Strong, 'Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau', 'within the audience'; p.345. I would also like to mention a few doctoral theses that have been written on the topic of Rousseau and music: Stephen John Xavier Bausted, *From le cri de la nature to Pygmalion: a study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy of music and aesthetic and reform of opera* (Dartington College of arts, 2003); Jørgen Langdalen, *The Rhetoric of a reform: Gluck and Rousseau* (University of Oslo, 2005); Guy Dammann, *The morality of musical imitation in Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, (King's College, London, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> See also Mostefai's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau écrivain polémique: querelles, disputes et controverses au siècle des Lumières* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2016). For a parallel reading of

Rousseau's critique of the Parisian theatre must be understood in light of the central role and power that the theatre of the time held in the philosophical landscape. Mostefai suggests that Rousseau's criticism of the Parisian theatre – and of d'Alembert's suggestion to build such a theatre in Geneva – is part of a much larger argument. For, she contends, Rousseau writes the *Lettre* not only to break his previous liaisons with the *philosophes*, but also to make a statement about a new possible role as author. Opposing the *philosophes'* belief that a man of letters should also be a man of society, Rousseau's position as author in the *Lettre* suggests solitude and looking inwards to the self as the source of truth – a path that Rousseau was going to pursue and through which he wrote many of his later important writings such as *Les Confessions*, *Les Dialogues* and *Les Rêveries*. Mostefai thus argues that the *Lettre* marks the beginning of a crucial notion in Rousseau's philosophical thought.<sup>36</sup>

The two scholars who have contributed the most to a broader and deeper understanding of Rousseau's two most central works for the stage – *Le Devin du village* and *Pygmalion* – are both musicologists. Jacqueline Waeber's important book on the history of melodrama as a genre, *En musique dans le texte: le mélodrame, de Rousseau à Schoenberg* was published in 2005.<sup>37</sup> Describing the physical and philosophical context in which *Pygmalion* was created, and works by others that it was to inspire, Waeber argues that Rousseau wanted to create with this piece a dramatic genre of excessive feelings, expressions and sensibility. Waeber has also written a large number of articles concerning the aesthetic structures of both *Pygmalion* and *Le Devin du village*, problematising Rousseau's music theory in relation to them both.<sup>38</sup> The second musicologist that I would like to mention is David Charlton who offers a new understanding of *Le Devin du village* and Rousseau's influence on the operatic landscape of the eighteenth century in his

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Rousseau and Voltaire's involvement in the debate about the creation of a public theatre in Geneva, see also David Wiles' 'Geneva: Rousseau versus Voltaire' in his *Theatre and citizenship*.

<sup>36</sup> Ourida Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.1-13, 132-37.

<sup>37</sup> Jacqueline Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*. This volume is to come out in English translation, in a revised and expanded form, under the title *The Musical origins of melodrama: from Rousseau to Schoenberg*. For further reading on melodrama, see for example Kirsten Gram Holmström's *Monodrama, attitudes, tableaux vivants: studies on some trends of theatrical fashion* (Stockholm University, 1967), and Jan Van Der Veen, *Le mélodrame musical de Rousseau au romantisme: ses aspects historiques et stylistiques* (The Hague, 1955).

<sup>38</sup> Waeber wrote her doctoral thesis on *Le Devin du village: Waeber, 'Le Devin du village de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: histoire, orientations esthétiques, réception (1752-1829)'* (University of Geneva, 2002). See Waeber in the bibliography for further references.

*Opera in the age of Rousseau: music, confrontation, realism* (2013) and other texts.<sup>39</sup> With his vast knowledge of the music-historical context for the creation of *Le Devin* and the influence it was to have, Charlton argues that *Le Devin* played an important part in the development of the genre of *opéra-comique*.<sup>40</sup>

In the same year as Charlton's monograph, *Rousseau among the moderns: music, aesthetics, politics* (2013) by Julia Simon was published. It presents an interdisciplinary approach to Rousseau's musical writings and sets them in dialogue with his political texts. With a focus on the importance that Rousseau ascribes to music as a force capable of creating social community, Simon argues that there are clear links between Rousseau's musical and political thoughts.<sup>41</sup> Several collected volumes were also published around this time, making connections between Rousseau's aesthetic and political thinking, including *Rousseau, politique et esthétique: sur La Lettre à d'Alembert* (2011) edited by Blaise Bachofen and Bruno Bernardi; *Rousseau et le spectacle* (2014) edited by Christophe Martin, Jacques Berchtold and Yannick Séité; and *Rousseau on stage: playwright, musician, spectator* (2017) edited by Maria Gullstam and Michael O'Dea. Many of these articles on both Rousseau's own stage works and the *Lettre à d'Alembert* are of importance and will be referred to in the following, but for reasons of space I will not present the individual chapters in each edited volume here.<sup>42</sup>

The writings of Rousseau that are the main focus of this thesis will be presented below.

### **Transdisciplinary challenges and sources**

Needless to say, this thesis could not have been written without the research and publications of previous scholars. There is however still much to be said about how Rousseau tried to use his own works for the stage as a response to the problems he saw with the theatre of his time. This gap in the scholarly literature has probably occurred because such an analysis demands interest

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<sup>39</sup> Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau: music, confrontation, realism* (Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Charlton, 'The melodic language of *Le Devin du village*'.

<sup>41</sup> Julia Simon, *Rousseau among the moderns: music, aesthetics, politics* (Pennsylvania, PA, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> At a late stage in the writing of my thesis, a monograph was published, *Rousseau's theatre for the Parisians: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the 18<sup>th</sup> century French stage*, by Jerome Martin Schwartz (Scott's Valley, CA, 2018). It places Rousseau's theatrical writings in the context of his life.

in and access to several different disciplines within the Humanities. Rousseau's world of ideas (as so many of his contemporaries') was not divided into musicology, theatre studies, philosophy, social sciences, comparative literature etc. Instead, they constantly interact and overlap with one another, covering a wide interdisciplinary secondary literature, such that can easily make a modern scholar tied to a particular discipline uncomfortable.

When it comes to Rousseau's relationship to theatre, his own works for the stage, his texts on music theory and parts of his socio-political writings are of the greatest importance. All these components are vital to grasping Rousseau's idea of theatre. Therefore, I intend to take into account these three areas of Rousseau's writings. It should nevertheless be pointed out that this thesis is primarily written from the perspective of theatre studies and literary history.

### *Stage works*

My prime examples among Rousseau's theatrical works will be *Le Devin du village* (1752) and *Pygmalion* (1762/1770). These have been selected because they are his most innovative stage works. One of his comedies will also feature. It is the only comedy played on a public stage; *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même* (1752), and is particularly interesting because of its important preface and because of Rousseau's documented reflections on its performance.<sup>43</sup> Other pieces referred to only sporadically will be the comedies and operas written at a very early period in Rousseau's career,<sup>44</sup> and

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<sup>43</sup> Rousseau wrote a first version of *Narcisse* already in 1732. See Gullstam and O'Dea, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: a theatre and music chronology', p.xiv-xix.

<sup>44</sup> Early operas never completed include: *Iphis, tragédie pour l'Academie royale de musique*, and *La découverte du nouveau monde*. Another early piece of musical drama, which was to play an important part in Rousseau's future hostile relationship to Rameau was the *opéra-ballet Les Muses Galantes* (1743-1745). See Chapter 5. Early comedies: *Les Prisonniers de guerre*, *L'Engagement téméraire* and *Arlequin amoureux malgré lui*. Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Dièval has shown how Rousseau in these three comedies in different ways explored the genre of comedy. For further reading on these early works, see Plagnol-Dièval's articles: 'Rousseau and his early comedies: the concept of the comic', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.139-155; and 'Le théâtre de Rousseau et les théâtres non officiels: influences, variations et représentations', in *Rousseau et le spectacle*, ed. Christophe Martin, Jacques Berchtold, and Yannick Séité (2014, Paris), p.59-74. Rousseau was also commissioned to rework and shorten a *comédie-ballet* with music by Rameau and text by Voltaire in 1745, but when the piece was performed, Rousseau's name was not mentioned. See Rousseau's own account of it in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.5, *The Confessions*, ed. Roger D. Masters, Christopher Kelly and Peter G. Stillman, translated by Christopher Kelly, book VII, p.282-83; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confessions*, ed. Bernard Ganébin and Marcel Raymond, p.336-38. Rameau and Voltaire's



unfinished works like his only tragedy *La Mort de Lucrece* (1754) and the opera *Daphnis et Chloé* for which he composed the music (1774).<sup>45</sup> This is not because I perceive these works as unimportant, but rather because I see them as Rousseau's attempts to play with genres and to sharpen his dramaturgical pen.<sup>46</sup>

### *Music theory*

Rousseau's musical writings span many years and across various works. The most important for the present study are the *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753), the *Essai sur l'origine des langues, où il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale* (developed in the later half of the 1750s and finalised in 1762, published posthumously) and the *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768, many of the articles are developed versions of the over 400 articles on music that Rousseau wrote for the *Encyclopédie* in 1749). Together these three works illustrate Rousseau's music theory, his standpoints on different musical quarrels, his anthropological thinking and his thoughts about theatrical declamation in relation to music. Other briefer works, such as the very early *Dissertation sur la musique moderne* (1744) and the much later *Lettre à M. Burney* (1777) will also be mentioned as important complements to his thinking.

### *Socio-political writings*

I have chosen to focus on the socio-political works that demonstrate the formation of Rousseau's conception of art and those in which he specifically discusses theatre. The most central texts for the present study in this category are Rousseau's First and Second discourses: the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1751) and the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), alongside the *Lettre à d'Alembert* (1758), and the text *De l'Imitation théâtrale* that Rousseau had planned to include in the *Lettre*, but never did. To maintain the clarity of focus of this thesis, I have largely limited the socio-political writings to those written before the 1760s, although later writings such as the *Contrat social* (1762) will sometimes be referred to.

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work was *La Princesse de Navarre*, and the shortened and reworked version had the title *Les Fêtes de Ramire*.

<sup>45</sup> The libretto for *Daphnis et Chloé* was written by Guillaume Olivier de Corancez.

<sup>46</sup> For a reading on *La Mort de Lucrece*, see for example David Wiles, *Theatre and citizenship*, p.117-20.

There are also works such as *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (1762) and *Les Confessions* (published posthumously), which cannot be placed in either of the above groups, but that nevertheless touch upon important issues for the present study. These works will therefore be referred to as needed.

Before moving forward to the next chapter and presenting my theoretical approach, the subsequent section describes the methodology and disposition that I have developed for this study.

## Methodology and disposition

In my approach to the subject of Rousseau and his idea of theatre, I have chosen to begin with his criticism of the arts, because this broader perspective appears to be essential to understanding Rousseau's complex relationship to the theatre. Subsequently, I will narrow the focus to his theories about theatre. Finally, I will analyse how he tried to respond practically to the problems he saw with the arts and theatre through his own works for the stage.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part discusses three recurring themes of criticism in Rousseau's writings concerning the arts/theatre: 1) his double relationship to art as both critic and creator of art; 2) his critique of the prescribed rules of the arts, including theatre, and their formation throughout history; and 3) his view of the *philosophes* as upholders of these rules (partly through the theatre) and his preference for Enlightenment ideals through autonomous thinking rather than through didactics. The second part of the thesis focuses on Rousseau's strategies to remedy some of the problems that he saw with theatre. I approach this from two different perspectives: 1) Rousseau's problematising of theatrical imitation as a tool of power; and 2) his understanding of musical imitation as a kind of imitation that avoids inflicting a particular opinion on its audience, which he therefore proposes as a remedial inspiration for theatre.

For clarity I now include an outline of each chapter.

## Part I: Criticism and ideals

### *Chapter 1. Theoretical approach – Rousseau’s pharmacy*

Jean Starobinski has highlighted a recurrent metaphor in Rousseau’s philosophy that could be used to better understand the seemingly contradictory character of Rousseau’s writings. While going through numerous theoretical and aesthetic works by Rousseau, Starobinski demonstrates how the philosopher repeatedly comes back to the image of finding a possible remedy to the ills of society inside the poison itself: the possibility of curing evil with evil, culture with culture, art with art, and consequently, theatre with theatre. In the first chapter, addressing some of the most relevant studies concerning the seemingly ambiguous character of Rousseau’s authorship in relation to the arts, I will argue that the image of the remedy inside the poison is not only a metaphor, recurring throughout Rousseau’s work, but rather – as Starobinski seems to hint – a thought structure that can be found in Rousseau’s writings that do not specifically speak of this metaphor. I suggest an expansion of Starobinski’s theories through the concept of *pharmakon* as defined and discussed in Derrida’s *La Pharmacie de Platon*. In this text, Derrida draws his central argument from the Greek word *pharmakon* – a word Plato uses to describe (and criticise) writing – that can mean both poison and remedy. The point is that in a pharmacy, a potion or pill can before being used be perceived as both medicine and/or a poison. It holds a double character before being applied and can be used for different purposes, but from the outset the venom and the antidote are the same. Thus, the thought structure of the *pharmakon* could allow for a critique of ‘poisonous’ art to coexist with a hope to simultaneously create art with a ‘curing’ effect.

Through a discussion of Rousseau’s neologism *perfectibility*, I demonstrate that the *pharmakon* as a thought structure reaches beyond the remedy/poison metaphor and is incorporated on a broader scale into his anthropological philosophy.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Perfectibility* according to Rousseau is the human faculty that gives us the ability to supersede our animal instincts, our capability to improve and perfect ourselves and to progress from generation to generation.

## Chapter 2. *Aesthetic perfectibility – a history of the arts*

In the second chapter I demonstrate how Rousseau's early musical works alongside his first socio-political writings create a conjectural history of the arts. Deviating from the traditional view that Rousseau's neologism *perfectibility* is a purely anthropological concept, developed in the Second discourse, I suggest that it is also an aesthetic concept, the foundation for which was laid and developed in Rousseau's early writings on aesthetics. Rousseau's writings on music serve as an important example, demonstrating how he in his use of words like *perfect* and/or *perfected* argues that throughout history, modern French music has progressively lost its ability to move the soul through melody, and as an effect, composers instead aim to *perfect* music through systematised rules of harmony in order to please the ear. The chapter shows that what I have chosen to call *aesthetic perfectibility* is a thought structure through which Rousseau – without using the term – criticises art that he thinks has lost its expressive power, and that instead tries to make up for the loss of expressiveness through prescribed rules of beauty and imitation. I argue that perfectibility in Rousseau's thought – in addition to being an anthropological term describing a human faculty – is a notion through which he writes his own history of the arts. I maintain that it is through *aesthetic perfectibility* that he analyses aesthetics, and that he uses it to understand, expose and oppose systematised and universal rules of reason, beauty and taste.

Reading the *Lettre à d'Alembert* through the lens of *aesthetic perfectibility*, I argue that this concept is vital for our understanding of Rousseau's thoughts about theatre. Firstly, because it gives an important context to Rousseau's criticism of the rules of theatre from the time of Louis XIV, typical of the era of French classicism. For both in language and thought, he here comes back to the criticism of *aesthetic perfectibility*: While criticising the Parisian theatre, he speaks of it as the most *perfect* of theatres. Similarly, while calling playwrights like Molière and Racine the most *perfect* of dramatists, he criticises their works for being morally corrupt because they are ruled by *bienséance*, decorum and politeness. Secondly, the concept of *aesthetic perfectibility* is central because it provides a new understanding of the public festival in Rousseau's thought as the birth of the theatrical arts. This leads to the conclusion that more conventional theatre and the public festival should not be read as two concepts opposing each other in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, but rather as kindred examples of the same art form, containing elements both 'poisonous' and 'curative' to society.

### *Chapter 3. The stage of Enlightenment – and its power structures*

To Rousseau the Parisian theatre and its actors were in many ways a miniature replica of French Enlightenment society and what he perceived as its problems; analysing and appearing, governed by philosophy and *bienséance*, had become more important than just being in the world. Particularly addressing d’Alembert, Voltaire and Diderot, the *Lettre à d’Alembert* could be said to paint a picture of why Rousseau wanted to keep the *philosophes* and the Parisian Enlightenment theatre out of Geneva. In the third chapter, I propose an alternative reading of the *Lettre*, showing how the men of letters are indirectly described as upholders of *aesthetic perfectibility* and the prescribed rules of art and theatre, inherited from previous decades. Here, I maintain that Rousseau partly saw the *philosophes* as leading representatives of didactics, since their implicit goal was to maintain *their* Enlightenment, in order to keep their power position as preachers of truth. Reading between the lines of the *Lettre*, Rousseau could be said to have painted them as puppeteers trying to pull the strings of the thoughts and feelings of the people. Rousseau is here writing from a complex position, for he must avoid repeating his adversaries’ errors – he cannot successfully accuse them of telling people how and what to think, while doing so himself. Therefore, he can only insinuate and subtly point towards a direction of thought concerning this in the *Lettre*. On this subject, the readers will have to draw their own conclusions; they must be allowed to think for themselves.

To Rousseau, learned men – who were often the composers of plays and operas on the royal stages or had an influence on the same – had a tendency to work against autonomous thinking in the audience by spreading their own truth through the theatre. Further, since these men of letters were often paid by and thus dependent upon the royal house and/or its close connections, Rousseau linked them to the aristocrats’ courtly politeness and *bienséance*, inherited from the era of Louis XIV. I thus contend that a vital argument in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* against the Enlightenment stage is that it emanates from and upholds the hierarchic morality of the royal *bienséance*, which Rousseau at all costs wished to keep out of his native, republican Geneva. Finally, I suggest that Rousseau uses the outdoor public festival as an ideal of what theatre *could* be. Led by no one but the people itself, the festival aims to be a ‘pure’ presentation of its participants, their sentiments and the communality between them. I show that Rousseau’s encouragement of public festivals as an alternative theatrical entertainment in Geneva not only is a critique of Enlightenment aesthetics and philosophy, but also a promoting of

an alternative Enlightenment theatre, ideologically free – in theory if not in practice – from both philosophical and royal organisation and methodisation.

## **Part II: Strategies in practice**

### *Chapter 4. Exposing and amending theatrical imitation – an alternative education*

Theatrical imitation is problematic to Rousseau because he thinks that it forces a prescribed point of view onto the spectator. In this chapter I discuss several studies that show how Rousseau saw traditional imitation as potentially charged with pretence, prescribed didactics and domination. I argue that Rousseau partly saw theatrical imitation as a tool used by the men of letters didactically to maintain their power position. The public festival emerges as an alternative and liberating means to education, which instead of teaching the pupils to think according to a prescribed didactic created by learned men, encourages them to develop autonomous thinking and transparent intentions. I emphasise that the emancipating function of the public festival is partly due to its refutation of traditional artistic imitation. However, the public festival is not completely without mimetic elements; it rather manifests a change in focus and direction of these elements, and that is a notion that Rousseau explores in some of his theatrical works.

I suggest that in his plays for the stage Rousseau tries both to expose and amend the function of imitation in order either to reveal the possibly dangerous effects of imitation to the audience, or to seek to evoke the liberating transparency of the festival. I discuss *Pygmalion*, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui même* and *Le Devin du village* and investigate how Rousseau problematises imitation through his own theatrical representations.

### *Chapter 5. Melodising theatre – performing the inner landscape*

Rousseau appears to contrast musical imitation with theatrical imitation, because he believes that the former does not force a particular point of view onto the audience. The audience is rather part of the process of creating the musical imitation through their memories and inner minds. In Rousseau's music theory, imitation is not only something good, it is a necessity. Without it, music loses its expressiveness and thus its power to touch the audience. I argue that Rousseau found inspiration in the concept of *melody* and in its

particular way of imitating and representing, and that in various ways he tried to make it ‘rub off’ on his theatrical works.

First, I outline the particularity of Rousseau’s conception of melody and musical representation in relation to other types of imitation. Then I focus on how Rousseau tried practically to insert the concept of melody in his theatrical works in terms of their dramaturgy and their performance. The main examples I use are *Pygmalion*, and the *scène lyrique* as a new dramatic genre. Many of Rousseau’s contemporaries saw the plastic arts as a model for how to express passions on stage. I argue that Rousseau instead used melody and musical imitation as models for the art of acting.





# PART I: Criticism and ideals



*1.1. An eighteenth-century French pharmacy, contemporary illustration.*

# Chapter 1

## Theoretical approach – Rousseau’s pharmacy

Rousseau’s seemingly ambiguous attitude toward theatre can only be understood if read in the context of his double relationship to the arts in general. In this first chapter, I will therefore discuss some research on these complexities within Rousseau’s oeuvre. The aim is to identify any theoretical basis in Rousseau’s thinking, and then to sketch a theoretical framework to help understand his double relationship with the arts, while holding together the inherent tensions within his writings. As the duality may be a deliberate rhetorical strategy on Rousseau’s part, my aim is to give space to these tensions, rather than to box everything up into neat categories.

## Antidotes and their poisons

Wise admirer of the stupidity and brutality of the Savages, you have cried out against the Sciences, and cultivated Sciences. You have addressed Authors and Philosophers as Charlatans; and to prove by example, you have been an Author. You have written against Comedy, with the devotion of a Capuchin monk, and you have composed nasty Comedies.<sup>48</sup>

Even during his life, Rousseau was accused of being a hypocrite, of basing his works on paradoxes and of criticising various discourses while practising

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Judicieux admirateur de la bêtise et de la brutalité des Sauvages, vous avez crié contre les Sciences, et cultivé les Sciences. Vous avez traité les Auteurs et les Philosophes de Charlatans; et pour prouver d’exemple, vous avez été Auteur. Vous avez écrit contre la Comédie, avec la devotion d’un Capucin, et vous avez fait de méchantes Comédies.’ Voltaire, ‘Lettre au docteur Jean-Jacques Pansophe’, in *Le Docteur Pansophe ou Lettres de Monsieur de Voltaire* (London, 1766), p.20. Voltaire did however deny that he was the author of this text, but repeatedly admits that he wishes he were the author of it. See letters by Voltaire from the end of November 1760, for example letters no. 5562-5563 and 5566-5567 in Rousseau, *Correspondance complète de Rousseau*, ed. R. A. Leigh, 52 vol. (Geneva, Madison, WI, Banbury, Oxford, 1965-1989), (hence forward CC), vol.31.

them himself, as the above comment, published in 1766, testifies. As discussed in the introduction, this criticism is still common within academia today. There seems to be something in Rousseau's fascination with the origin of humankind, combined with his ardent critique of his own time – the Enlightenment era, its *philosophes* and its belief in progress through the sciences and the arts – that touched and still touches a nerve. And the fact that he delivered this criticism, as the citation above indicates, *as* a philosopher, *as* a playwright and *as* a composer, has become the standard excuse for dismissing his actual theories and classify his critique as contradictory. However, in 1989, Jean Starobinski wrote an important essay on the topic, 'Le remède dans le mal: la pensée de Rousseau'.<sup>49</sup> It highlights a recurrent metaphor in Rousseau's philosophy that can be used to better understand the seemingly contradictory character of some of his writings. This metaphor became the main theoretical starting point of the present thesis.

While going through numerous philosophical and aesthetic works by Rousseau, Starobinski demonstrates how the philosopher repeatedly comes back to the image of finding a possible remedy to the ills of society from the poison itself: the possibility of curing evil with evil, art with art, and consequently, theatre with theatre. Starobinski highlights the end of the First discourse, because here, after his assessment of the arts (and sciences), and their negative influence on virtue and morality, Rousseau opens up a possible solution, a solution which might also make the Academy of Dijon more inclined to consider his otherwise condemnatory treatise for the prize.<sup>50</sup> Rousseau writes that the corruption in society is not as bad as it could have been, because, just as in nature, a remedy can be found in the poison itself. 'By placing salutary herbs beside various harmful plants, and by placing within several injurious animals the antidote for their wounds, eternal providence has taught Sovereigns, who are its ministers, to imitate its wisdom.'<sup>51</sup> Starobinski underlines that this gesture towards the academy – the academy being in effect the king's prolonged arms that controls the moral purity of writers –

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<sup>49</sup> In Starobinski, *Le Remède dans le mal* (Paris, 1989), p.165-232. Henceforth, I refer to the English translation of Starobinski's text by Arthur Goldhammer, published under the title 'The Antidote in the poison: the thoughts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau', in Jean Starobinski, *Blessings in disguise; or, The Morality of evil*, p.118-168.

<sup>50</sup> Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.119-20.

<sup>51</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.19. 'La prévoyance éternelle, en plaçant à côté de diverses plantes nuisible des simples salutaires, et dans la substance de plusieurs animaux malfaisans le remede à leurs blessures, a enseigné aux Souverains qui sont ses ministres à imiter sa sagesse.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur le sciences et les arts*, p.26.

should not simply be seen as flattery, as hoping to increase his chances of winning the contest, because Rousseau uses the argument of a possible cure for the ills of society repeatedly in various different contexts.<sup>52</sup>

For example, a few years later he was to use it in the preface of his comedy *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui meme*, where in order to defend his double position as critic of art/theatre and creator of the same, he comes back to the twofold medicinal image, describing how the poison that has caused corruption in society can also be used as a palliative: 'someone who has spoiled his temperament by an indiscreet use of medicine, is forced to continue to have recourse to doctors to preserve his life.'<sup>53</sup> Thus, even though the arts (and sciences) have created vice, it is they that can prevent vices from escalating into criminal activity. Therefore universities, theatres and other such institutions must be used to occupy the people 'with foolishness to turn them away from bad actions'.<sup>54</sup> Starobinski also finds the remedy metaphor in numerous different shapes and forms throughout Rousseau's oeuvre: fear of darkness can only be treated through being exposed to the darkness itself;<sup>55</sup> a fatal arrow must be left in the wound it has caused in order to save the victim's life;<sup>56</sup> a weapon taken from the hand of someone who is trying to do you harm can be used in your defence;<sup>57</sup> Rousseau describes how he cannot begin to be fully alive before believing that he is on his deathbed;<sup>58</sup> and, if anything can prevent 'social man from being totally artificial' it is 'a great deal of art'.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the poison and its remedy appear to have different characters. Some are simply products of nature in which the course of events will either lead to the disease's final blow or to recovery.<sup>60</sup> Others are palliatives,

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<sup>52</sup> Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.119.

<sup>53</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, p.196. 'celui qui s'est gâté le tempérament par un usage indiscret de la médecine, est forcé recourir encore aux médecins pour se conserver en vie'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, *Préface*, p.972.

<sup>54</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, p.196. 'il faut les occuper à des niaiseries pour les détourner des mauvaises actions'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Préface to Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, p.972.

<sup>55</sup> Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.150.

<sup>56</sup> Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.123-24.

<sup>57</sup> Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.123.

<sup>58</sup> Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.146; Rousseau, *CW*, vol.5, *Confessions*, book VI, p.191; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confessions*, book VI, p.228.

<sup>59</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.13, ed. and trans. by Christopher Kelly and Allan Bloom, *Emile, or on Education*, p.485. 'il faut employer beaucoup d'art pour empêcher l'homme social d'être tout à fait artificiel.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.4, *Émile, ou de l'Éducation*, ed. John S. Spink, p.640. Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.128.

<sup>60</sup> Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.129.

which cannot really solve the problem, but rather delay and/or ease the pain of the inevitable end. And finally, there is the occasional genuine remedy that can have a real positive effect on its subject.

In this way, Starobinski demonstrates how Rousseau repeatedly comes back to the metaphor of the antidote that resides inside or beside the venom itself. While Starobinski's essay is certainly illuminating, it also raises further questions: is the image of the 'good' inside the 'bad' a mere metaphor, recurring throughout Rousseau's work, or is it – as Starobinski seems to hint – a thought structure that can be found in Rousseau's writings and/or concepts that do not specifically speak of this metaphor? And if there is a pattern of thought that corresponds to the image of remedy/poison in Rousseau's oeuvre, how could such a structure of thought further illuminate Rousseau's seemingly dual relation to art and theatre?

Starobinski's essay is well known and often referred to within the field of Rousseau studies, but its full potential as a framework for a thought structure that permeates large parts of Rousseau's oeuvre has, to my knowledge, not been further explored or developed by scholars. The present thesis sets out to use Starobinski's text as an inspiration for developing a theoretical foundation and lens through which Rousseau's theoretical, political and aesthetic thoughts about art and theatre will be viewed and discussed in the subsequent chapters. To fully appreciate the implications and importance of Starobinski's study, it is necessary first to address some earlier studies pre-dating 'Le remède dans le mal', and to see how they viewed the seemingly ambiguous character of Rousseau's writings.

## The *pharmakon*

One of the most elaborate studies of the contradictory elements in Rousseau's oeuvre is Jacques Derrida's deconstructive manifesto *De la Grammatologie* (1967).<sup>61</sup> Derrida's criticism of Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues* draws large parts of its argument from Rousseau's thinking. Derrida uses Rousseau and his essay as prime examples of what he perceives as the

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<sup>61</sup> Two recent studies investigate Rousseau's music aesthetics in the light of Derrida's work: Julia Simon's *Rousseau among the moderns*, p.7-14, and; Jørgen Langdalen's 'The voice of nature in Rousseau's theatre: reconstructing a dramaturgy', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.76-101.

Western world's unawareness of its thinking through *supplements*.<sup>62</sup> Derrida borrows this term from Rousseau, and uses it to both analyse Rousseau's oeuvre and to develop his own deconstructive theory.<sup>63</sup> Derrida claims that Western metaphysics is built on a falsely dichotomous system consisting of the dualism of positive and negative opposites, in which the positive extreme is always the starting point (where presence is thought before absence, goodness before evil, sufficiency before lack etc.): He writes: 'By a dichotomous operation that one must ever begin anew and carry further, Rousseau exhausts himself in trying to separate, as two exterior and heterogeneous forces, a positive and a negative principle.'<sup>64</sup>

In a detailed analysis of Rousseau's essay, Derrida underlines two series of notions within Rousseau's work, that 'always relate to each other according to the structure of supplementarity.'<sup>65</sup> In the first series, Derrida lists 'animality, need, interest, gesture, sensibility, understanding, reason etc.' and in the second, 'humanity, passion, imagination, speech, liberty, perfectibility, etc.'<sup>66</sup> The words in the second series are all thought of as substitutes for something 'more original' which came before them. Derrida thus claims that Rousseau's 'system of oppositions'<sup>67</sup> denies the fact that opposites cannot be thought without the other, and that they necessarily have the same origin, and are initially one. At the same time, Rousseau is 'caught [...] *within* the graphic of supplementarity', because he 'says what he does not wish to say, describes what he does not wish to conclude: that the positive (is) the negative, life (is) death, presence (is) absence.'<sup>68</sup> Derrida repeatedly highlights what he perceives as Rousseau's dual standpoint, where he supposedly says one thing while demonstrating something else:

Rousseau's entire text *describes* origin as the beginning of the end, as the inaugural decadence. Yet, in spite of that description, the text twists about in a sort of oblique effort to act *as if* degeneration were not prescribed in the genesis and as if evil *supervened upon* a good origin.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> For a recent contextualisation of this and other central concepts in Derrida, see *Jacques Derrida – key concepts* (London and New York, 2015), ed. Claire Colebrook, particularly the chapter 'Supplement' by Robert Bernasconi, p.19-22.

<sup>63</sup> See Derrida, here referred to in English translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London, 1997, an earlier edition was published in 1976), p.141-64.

<sup>64</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.212.

<sup>65</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.183.

<sup>66</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.183.

<sup>67</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.202.

<sup>68</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.246.

<sup>69</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.199.

In summary, Derrida examines various ‘dichotomies’ (such as spoken and written language, melody and harmony, accent and articulation etc.) in Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues* and argues that Rousseau touches upon the supplementary nature of this system, however ‘without drawing any conclusions from it’<sup>70</sup> and ultimately denying that ‘[d]egeneration as separation [...] has always already begun.’<sup>71</sup>

Other scholars, such as Paul de Man, have opposed Derrida’s assumption that Rousseau was unaware of this dual position, and de Man famously writes that ‘in the case of Rousseau, the ambivalence is itself a part of the philosophical statement.’<sup>72</sup> In fact, de Man claims that Derrida’s *Grammatologie* is so similar to Rousseau’s *Essai* – in its inner structure and criticism of a prevailing metaphysical language system – that it is possible to mirror Derrida’s critique of Rousseau and direct it towards the deconstructivist himself:

Rousseau’s use of a traditional vocabulary is exactly similar in its strategy and its implications, to the use Derrida consciously makes of the traditional vocabulary of Western philosophy. What happens in Rousseau is exactly what happens in Derrida: a vocabulary of substance and of presence is no longer used declaratively but rhetorically, for the very reasons that are being (metaphorically) stated.<sup>73</sup>

This does not mean however that Derrida’s theories on deconstruction are generally wrong. On the contrary, claims de Man, although he underlines that Derrida chose the wrong work and author to apply it to.<sup>74</sup>

While de Man’s text explicitly opposes Derrida’s assessment of Rousseau and is an open defence of the latter as a thinker in full control of his own theoretical system, Starobinski’s ‘Le remède dans le mal’ can be read as a profound albeit more subtle response to Derrida. Starobinski does not explicitly engage in a dialogue with Derrida, but refers only briefly to *De la Grammatologie* in the first part of the essay.<sup>75</sup> On a meta-level, however, Starobinski’s discussions on Rousseau’s thoughts on the balance between

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<sup>70</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.215.

<sup>71</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.199.

<sup>72</sup> Paul De Man, ‘The Rhetoric of blindness: Jacques Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’, *Blindness and insight: essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism* (Minneapolis, 1983, first edition 1971), p.111.

<sup>73</sup> de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of blindness’, p.136.

<sup>74</sup> de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of blindness’, p.139.

<sup>75</sup> Starobinski, ‘The Antidote in the poison’, p.226, footnote 78. (Starobinski here refers to Derrida’s chapter ‘Ce dangereux supplément’, in *De la Grammatologie*.)



various poisons and their respective remedies in society clearly emphasise Rousseau's awareness of the 'common background' of opposites. In this thought structure, the respective concepts of remedy and poison are not ultimately each other's opposites, but rather notions that correspond to and depend on each other, because from the outset they are the same: the remedy resides inside the poison. Interestingly, another text by Derrida, *La Pharmacie de Platon* (1968), where he elaborates on the ideas expressed in *De la Grammatologie*, supports this theory.

In *La Pharmacie de Platon*, Derrida develops a key argument in his evaluation of the Western way of thinking: the false superiority of the spoken language over the written word, and hence the common and faulty assumption that written language was not already inscribed in speech from the very beginning. Here, Derrida makes a close reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, and criticises Plato for arguing that only through speech (not written language) can we achieve ideas of truth, which leads Plato to judge oral discourse to be superior to written discourse. Derrida argues, however, that Plato repeatedly comes back to explaining speech through writing and letters: 'The scriptural "metaphor" thus crops up every time difference and relation are irreducible, every time otherness introduces determination and puts a system in circulation.'<sup>76</sup> In this way, Derrida shows how it is impossible to separate spoken from written language. He derives his central argument, and the title of his text, from the Greek word *pharmakon* – a word Plato uses to describe writing – which can mean both poison and/or remedy. Speech and writing cannot be separated, just as it is impossible to

distinguish [in the pharmacy] the medicine from the poison, the good from the evil, the true from the false, the inside from the outside, the vital from the mortal, the first from the second, etc. Conceived within this original reversibility, the *pharmakon* is the *same* precisely because it has no identity. And the same (is) as supplement.<sup>77</sup>

Starobinski never uses the term *pharmakon* in 'Le Remède dans le mal' to describe the recurring remedy/poison metaphor in Rousseau's oeuvre, but he could very well have done so. Furthermore, Starobinski indicates – even though still without addressing Derrida directly – that with the remedy/poison metaphor as a backdrop, the 'supplement' in Rousseau's thought

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<sup>76</sup> I am referring here to the English translation of *La Pharmacie de Platon* by Barbara Johnson. Derrida, *Plato's pharmacy*, published in *Dissemination* (London and New York, 2004, an earlier edition was published in 1981), p.162.

<sup>77</sup> Derrida, *Plato's pharmacy*, p.166-67.

is not necessarily purely negative. Art is, to Rousseau's mind, a supplement 'for the privileges of the primary human associations, now forever lost,' and, Starobinski continues, when these supplements are flawed, 'they merely aggravate the lack they are meant to compensate,' and thus make things worse.<sup>78</sup> But there is also a possibility, in this supplement – since it is the *same*, and since it is as *pharmakon* – to find a restorative and ultimately positive function. Starobinski is here referring to an earlier passage in his essay, which points to the first manuscript version of *Du Contrat social* (known as the Geneva manuscript), where Rousseau writes the following lines:

let us attempt to draw from the ill itself the remedy that should cure it. Let us use new associations to correct, if possible the defect of the general association. [...] Let us show [...] in perfected art the reparation of the ills that the beginnings of art caused to nature.<sup>79</sup>

If art (a supplement) is as *pharmakon*, is the *same*, it follows that the positive and negative principles that Derrida sees in Rousseau's oeuvre, and outlines as two series of concepts,<sup>80</sup> are more complex than Derrida allows us to believe, even though he does hint at an unconscious presence of the 'true' face of supplementarity in Rousseau's texts. For the unawareness and/or denying of the supplementary nature of Western metaphysics that Derrida claims is ruling Rousseau's thinking is, at least partly, cancelled by the continual presence in Rousseau's oeuvre of the structure of the *pharmakon*, that in its nature contains both good and bad, originarity and supplementarity.

How, then, do these conclusions help us to better understand Rousseau's double position as a parallel critic and creator of art? Through the structure of the *pharmakon*, we realise that it is possible to criticise poisonous art with the hope of simultaneously creating art with a curing effect. But if art can be both harmful and/or remedying, how can we distinguish between the two?

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<sup>78</sup> Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.158. See also p.144-45 and p.147 where the term 'supplement' also occurs.

<sup>79</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.4, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, trans. Judith R. Bush and the editors, *On the Social contract* (First version, the Geneva manuscript), p.82. 'efforçons nous de tirer du mal même le remède qui doit le guérir. Par de nouvelles associations, corrigeons, s'il se peut, le défaut de l'association générale. [...] Montrons [...] dans l'art perfectionné la réparation des maux que l'art commencé fit à la nature.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Du Contrat social* (première version, manuscrit de Genève), ed. Robert Derathé, p.288. Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the poison', p.127.

<sup>80</sup> The first series with 'original' notions, and the second with supplements that supposedly add themselves to the 'good' origin.

What are the distinctive traits of art that can have a ‘curing’ effect? Starobinski indicates that Rousseau thought the ‘right type’ of art is not able to reverse the progress of civilisation, nor take us back to the state of nature, but can give us a ‘chance of rediscovering in a new (political and moral) form our original (natural and animal) wholeness, which has been destroyed by the onset of our afflictions.’<sup>81</sup> Starobinski points to three possible ways which according to Rousseau can lead through art and/or philosophy to this ‘rediscovering’ of ourselves: 1) Self-reconciliation through solitude, reflection on/writing about oneself and complete independence from the world;<sup>82</sup> 2) Experiencing art that not merely pleases the senses, but that touches the heart and one’s sensibility;<sup>83</sup> and 3) Experiencing communion through such art together with others.<sup>84</sup> For such art can awaken feelings similar to those experienced in the beginning of humankind, when the first expressions of art were created. Such art could have the potential to ‘reestablish the lost plenitude’ or at least to give ‘a vivid image of it.’<sup>85</sup> But would this ‘original wholeness’, that Starobinski writes about, not take us back to Derrida’s conclusion that for Rousseau, on an affirmative level (even as his text suggests something more complex), evil has throughout history added itself in a linear fashion to an original goodness of humankind? Would the concept of a ‘lost plenitude’ not deny our initial conclusion about Rousseau’s awareness of the common origin of opposites?

To fully answer these questions, it is necessary to investigate whether the *pharmakon*, as a thought structure reaching beyond the remedy/poison metaphor, can be found on a broader scale in Rousseau’s thinking. *Perfectibility* (*la perfectibilité*) is a central concept in Rousseau’s Second discourse and vital when analysing his thoughts about originarity. In addition, Derrida lists perfectibility as a supplement in Rousseau’s thinking. The following subsections will therefore examine whether and how the concept of perfectibility can be said to incorporate the structure of the *pharmakon*.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Starobinski, ‘The Antidote in the poison’, p.127.

<sup>82</sup> Starobinski, ‘The Antidote in the poison’, p.141-42.

<sup>83</sup> Starobinski, ‘The Antidote in the poison’, p.156-59.

<sup>84</sup> Starobinski, ‘The Antidote in the poison’, p.155, 160.

<sup>85</sup> Starobinski, ‘The Antidote in the poison’, p.156.

<sup>86</sup> Scholars agree that the concept of perfectibility continued to play a vital role in Rousseau’s own writings after the Second discourse, and that it had an important influence on Rousseau’s contemporaries and future generations. See for example Starobinski in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondemens de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, ed. Starobinski, p.XXVII-LXXI; Robert Wokler, ‘Perfectible apes in decadent cultures: Rousseau’s anthropology revisited’, in *Rousseau, the age of Enlightenment, and their legacies* (Princeton and Oxford, 2012), p.1-28; and Mark Hulliung, ‘Philosophical history’, in *The Autocritique of*

## The concept of perfectibility

Before going into the discussion of how and whether the concept of Rousseau's neologism *perfectibility* has structural similarities with the *pharmakon*, I will give a brief background and introduction to the Second discourse, which is where the faculty of perfectibility is often said to have been coined.

In response to the question posed by the Dijon Academy concerning the source of inequality, Rousseau argues in his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* that the answer lies in the very roots of humankind.<sup>87</sup> For this reason he devotes his Second discourse to examining the original nature of mankind and the development of our minds through a conjectural study of history. He states that it is necessary to set 'all facts aside', that his conclusions should not be seen as 'historical truths,' but rather as 'hypothetical and conditional reasonings better suited to clarify the Nature of things than to show their genuine origin.'<sup>88</sup> This type of conjectural deduction and hypothetical history of the origins of various phenomena was popular in Rousseau's time. Étienne Bonnot de Condillac for example – a friend of Rousseau's whose ideas would become important for the writing of the Second discourse – contributed to the popularity and dissemination of this kind of philosophical history writing in Paris. He encouraged interest in the writings of Fontenelle and Locke and inspired many of the *philosophes* to explore the hypothetical origin and history of human faculties.<sup>89</sup>

Jean Starobinski states that in the introduction to the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* Rousseau develops two important aspects of the conjectural history of humankind. Firstly, while some of his predecessors fo-

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*Enlightenment*, (Cambridge, MA, 1994), p.38-75. For further reading on the concept of perfectibility in general, see also Florence Lotterie, *Progrès et perfectibilité: un dilemme des Lumières françaises*, (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> 'how can the source of inequality among men be known unless one begins by knowing men themselves'; Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, trans. by Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters, Christopher Kelly and Terence Marshall, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.12. 'comment connoître la source de l'inégalité parmi les hommes, si l'on ne commence par les connoître eux même'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.122.

<sup>88</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.19. 'écarter tous les faits'; 'des verities historiques'; 'des raisonnemens hypothétiques et conditionnels; plus propres à éclairir la Nature des choses qu'à montrer la véritable origine'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.132-33.

<sup>89</sup> Hülling, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment*, p.53-54. See for example works by Condillac such as the *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746) and the *Traité des sensations* (1754). Other examples of practitioners of the genre were Buffon, Diderot, d'Alembert and Marmontel. Hülling writes that the *philosophes* repeated Locke's argument 'that failure to remember having acquired an idea was what misled us into believing it innate', and following this idea, thinkers of the eighteenth century were dedicated to reverse this 'amnesia', p.54.

cused on the hypothetical development of a singular mind, he considered the 'collective dimension' of humankind throughout history. Secondly, Rousseau emphasised that we cannot possibly understand modern man and society if we do not comprehend the way in which humanity has progressed over the years.<sup>90</sup> Starobinski notes that another important aspect of Rousseau's work is that he gives humanity, and humanity alone, the responsibility for its developments.

Rousseau presents as a human *oeuvre* what tradition defined as an original gift of nature or God. A human creation, the perfecting of articulated language; a human creation, the abiding union between male and female; a human creation, society, property, the formal rules of law; a human creation, morality, as soon as it is based in reason and exceeds [...] the simple instinct of conversation and the obscure momentum of sympathy.<sup>91</sup>

Rousseau believes that this human responsibility is due to the human faculty of *perfectibility*, a neologism often claimed to have been coined by Rousseau.<sup>92</sup> In the Second discourse Rousseau states that alongside free will, the faculty of perfectibility is what sets us apart from other animals, above any other quality. Perfectibility, according to Rousseau, is our ability to supersede our animal instincts, our capability to improve and perfect ourselves and to progress, not only throughout our individual lives, but also from generation to generation.<sup>93</sup> Thanks to this faculty, humans have the power to

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<sup>90</sup> Starobinski, in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.LV.

<sup>91</sup> 'Rousseau présente comme une *œuvre* humaine ce que la tradition définissait comme un don originel de la nature ou de Dieu. Création humaine, le perfectionnement du langage articulé; création humaine, l'union durable du male et de la femelle; création humaine, la société, la propriété, les règles formelles du droit; création humaine, la morale, sitôt qu'elle se fonde en raison et outrepassé [...] le simple instinct de conservation et l'élan obscur de la sympathie.' Starobinski, in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.LVII-LVIII.

<sup>92</sup> Reviewers of Rousseau's Second discourse quickly picked up on the notion of perfectibility. In the 1760s it became a frequent term within natural history in France and Rousseau's neologism became a popular term in the late Enlightenment. Robert Wokler writes that 'the theory of history which Rousseau built around his concept – and especially the account of property and inequality which he attached to it – were to exercise a striking influence upon the development of nineteenth-century social thought.' Wokler, 'Perfectible apes', p.26-27, p.27. On the coining of the term of 'perfectibility', see Starobinski, in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, footnote 3, p.1317-1319; and Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'The supposed primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on inequality*', in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Paradoxes and interpretations*, ed. John T. Scott, (London and New York, 2006) p.37.

<sup>93</sup> 'faculty of self-perfection, a faculty which, with the aid of circumstances, successively develops all the others'; 'resides among us as much in the species as in the individual'; Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.26. 'la faculté de se perfectionner,

adapt and change their ways of life in accordance with changing circumstances, while an animal can perish because its regular source of food is not available.<sup>94</sup> In Rousseau's eyes this faculty is however not something that forces humanity toward perfection. As Starobinski writes, it is rather something that man is free to refuse or choose, or at least to 'accelerate or slow down.'<sup>95</sup>

In his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, Rousseau imagines the first savages as solitary beings, who over time as human faculties awakened, learned to recognise themselves in other humans. What started off as simple collaboration during a hunt and informal groups of humans eventually led to the establishment of settlements with families building the first simple huts.<sup>96</sup> Living close to each other facilitated the development of a common language and Rousseau writes that the process must have been accelerated by misfortunes such as earthquakes and floods, and this in turn forced linguistic progress. With time, the less crude lifestyle softened the people, and while the first sentiments of love were sparked, the humans learned the concept of comparison:<sup>97</sup>

People grew accustomed to assembling in front of the Huts or around a large Tree; song and dance, true children of love and leisure, became the amusement or rather the occupation of idle and assembled men and women. Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had a value. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most adroit, or the most eloquent became the most highly considered; and that was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice.<sup>98</sup>

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faculté qui, à l'aide des circonstances, développe successivement toutes les autres', and 'réside parmi nous tant dans l'espèce, que dans l'individu.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.142. See also Wokler, 'Perfectible apes', p.23.

<sup>94</sup> 'a Pigeon would die of hunger near a Basin filled with the best meats, and a Cat upon heaps of fruits or grain, although each could very well nourish itself on the food it disdains if it made up its mind to try some.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.26. 'un Pigeon mourroit de faim près d'un Bassin rempli des meilleures viandes, et un Chat sur des tas de fruit, ou de grain, quoique l'un et l'autre pût très bien se nourrir de l'aliment qu'il dedaigne, s'il s'étoit avisé d'en essayer.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.141.

<sup>95</sup> 'l'accélérer ou de le ralentir.' Starobinski, in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.LVIII.

<sup>96</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.44-45; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.165-67.

<sup>97</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.46-47; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.168-70.

<sup>98</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.47. 'On s'accoutuma à s'assembler devant les Cabanes ou autour d'un grand Arbre: le chant et la danse, vrais enfans

These first pre-societies might have been the spawning ground for inequality, nonetheless Rousseau maintains that this period, in between ‘the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of Civil man’, was in fact the golden age of humankind, which must have been ‘the happiest and most durable epoch.’<sup>99</sup>

He claims that the faculty of perfectibility in combination with various challenges that the human species met, led to further development: the more humans were perfected on an individual level, the more the species deteriorated.<sup>100</sup> In perfecting their tools and techniques, Rousseau claims that people realised the benefits of helping each other and of having a surplus of provisions so that soon the concept of property and wealth was created.<sup>101</sup> These advances eventually led to the development of metallurgy and agriculture, which in turn expanded, not only to the newly discovered notions of labour and slavery, but also those of comparison and social esteem.<sup>102</sup> Rousseau writes that being and appearing ‘became two altogether different things; and from this distinction came conspicuous ostentation, deceptive cunning, and all the ensuing vices.’<sup>103</sup> This is a brief summary of Rousseau’s con-

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de l’amour et du loisir, devinrent l’amusement ou plutôt l’occupation des hommes et des femmes oisifs et atroupés. Chacun commença à regarder les autres et à vouloir être regardé soi-même, et l’estime publique eut un prix. Celui qui chantoit ou dansoit le mieux; le plus beau, le plus fort, le plus adroit ou le plus éloquent devint le plus considéré; et ce fut là le premier pas vers l’inégalité, et vers le vice en même tems.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.169-70.

<sup>99</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.48. ‘la stupidité des brutes et des lumières funestes de l’homme civil’; ‘l’époque la plus heureuse, et la plus durable’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.170-71.

<sup>100</sup> ‘all subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps toward the perfection of the individual, and in fact toward the decrepitude of the species.’ Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.49. ‘tous les progrès ulterieurs ont été en apparence autant de pas vers la perfection de l’individu, et en effet vers la décrépitude de l’espèce.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.171.

<sup>101</sup> The first person ‘who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.’ Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.43. ‘qui ayant enclos un terrain, s’avisa de dire, *ceci est à moi*, et trouva des gens assés simples pour le croire, fut le vrai fondateur de la société civile.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.164.

<sup>102</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.49-51; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.171-74.

<sup>103</sup> A slightly amended translation based on Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.51. ‘Etre et paroître devinrent deux choses tout à fait différentes, et de cette distinction sortirent le faste imposant, la ruse trompeuse, et tous les vices qui en sont le cortège.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.174.

tural history of how humankind came to lose its natural freedom and of how inequality among men was created.<sup>104</sup>

### Perfectibility *as* pharmakon?

To add further to the discussion about the remedy/poison metaphor, we have to ask if Rousseau saw the faculty of perfectibility as the source of the ills of society, the source of the ‘poison’ of civilisation, which has caused humankind all its misery and the loss of an original plenitude. Rousseau writes that it would be sad to conclude ‘that it is this faculty which, bringing to flower over the centuries his [man’s] enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues, in the long run makes him the tyrant of himself and of Nature.’<sup>105</sup> Yet, this seems to be precisely the conclusion that he draws in his Second discourse. For it is the awakening of the dormant perfectibility in the savage man, by way of various accidents and circumstances that made the development of the species possible.<sup>106</sup> In the light of this, it is not surprising that some readers have perceived perfectibility as a negative principle within Rousseau’s thinking, and as pure criticism of humankind’s striving for progress. In Derrida’s *Grammatologie* for example, the notion of perfectibility is placed in the sequence of ‘unoriginal’ supplements. Derrida thus appears to presume that in Rousseau’s thought, this human faculty is a mere substitute for a more ‘original’ and positive principle manifested in the State of Nature.<sup>107</sup>

At the same time, other scholars, including Robert Wokler, claim that even though perfectibility is a stimulus for ‘mankind’s enslavement of itself,’ it should not be perceived as a predetermined negative force. Wokler

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<sup>104</sup> The concept of perfectibility and the Second discourse are further discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>105</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.26. ‘Il seroit triste pour nous d’être forcés de convenir, que cette faculté distinctive [...] qui font éclore avec les siècles ses lumières et ses erreurs, ses vices et ses vertus, le rend à la longue le tiran de lui-même, et de la Nature.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.142.

<sup>106</sup> ‘different accidents [...] were able to perfect human reason while deteriorating the species, make a being evil while making him sociable, and from such a distant origin finally bring man and the world to the point where we see them.’ Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.42. ‘différens hazards [...] ont pu perfectionner la raison humaine, en détériorant l’espèce, rendre un être méchant en le rendant sociable, et d’un terme si éloigné amener enfin l’homme et le monde au point où nous les voyons.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.162.

<sup>107</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.183.



states that this faculty rather ‘established [...] that there could be cumulative change in one direction or another, and it was as much in accord with our degradation as it would have been compatible with the history of our progress.’<sup>108</sup> Wokler points to several of Rousseau’s later writings – on politics, on the theatre and autobiographical works – as proofs of a belief in the possibility of profiting from the human faculty of perfectibility.<sup>109</sup> Mark Hulliung aligns himself with this opinion, arguing that perfectibility in Rousseau’s thought can be a positive force as well, something that can be used to improve society and remedy evils.<sup>110</sup> These readings also concur with Leo Strauss’ assertion of Rousseau’s repetition of the argument that man is naturally good. Strauss maintains that if it is possible for Rousseau to state this, it is because man is above all ‘subhuman’: ‘Man is by nature good because he is by nature that subhuman being which is capable of becoming either good or bad.’ To Rousseau humankind is, according to Strauss, ‘infinitely perfectible’ and ‘infinitely malleable’ and there is thus no limit to man’s potential improvement and/or ruin.<sup>111</sup>

Thus, it appears that the faculty of perfectibility escapes any predefined and linear system of positive and/or negative values, just as in the case of the *pharmakon*, which ‘is the *same* precisely because it has no identity’ and thus ‘(is) as supplement.’<sup>112</sup> We recall how Derrida asserts that ‘Rousseau would like to separate originarity from supplementarity,’ because to Rousseau and the system of our logos ‘it is unthinkable and intolerable that what has the name *origin* should be no more than a point situated within the system of supplementarity.’<sup>113</sup> But defining perfectibility as a supplement,<sup>114</sup> Derrida’s list of original concepts and supplements in Rousseau gives the impression of neglecting the possibility of perfectibility being a simultaneously positive

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<sup>108</sup> Wokler, ‘Perfectible apes’, p.25

<sup>109</sup> ‘Rousseau’s later philosophy – studies of the nature of religion, his political writings on Geneva, Corsica and Poland, his commentaries on the theatre and’ writes Wokler, ‘most important of all, his *Contrat social*, *Emile* and *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* – bears ample testimony to his belief that our natural perfectibility might still be employed to our advantage.’ Wokler, ‘Perfectible apes’, p.27.

<sup>110</sup> ‘the “perfectibility” that sets us apart from animals, source though it is of our undoing, hold out the possibility that the person before our eyes is not the final word, that in a civic republic of the future the most common sight may be a different person, at one with himself and with his comrades.’ Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment*, p.69.

<sup>111</sup> Leo Strauss, *Natural right and history* (Chicago, 1965), p.271.

<sup>112</sup> Derrida, *Plato’s pharmacy*, p.169.

<sup>113</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.243.

<sup>114</sup> Created out of the false myth of addition – as something that merely opposes humans to animals.

and negative force, and of presupposing that perfectibility describes a meta-physical linearity. This since Derrida's list seems to miss out on the way in which Rousseau describes the awakening and basic function of perfectibility. Rousseau writes that

After having shown that *perfectibility*, social virtues, and the other faculties that Natural man had received in potentiality could never have developed by themselves, that in order to develop they needed the chance combination of several foreign causes which might never have arisen and without which he would have remained eternally in his primitive constitution, it remains for me to consider and bring together the different accidents that were able to perfect human reason while deteriorating the species, make a being evil while making him sociable, and from such a distant origin finally bring man and the world to the point where we see them.<sup>115</sup>

Three important observations and conclusions can now be drawn: 1) perfectibility is present, however dormant, in the 'original' man, and thereby contains all positive and negative potential for future development from the outset. For Rousseau perfectibility is not a distant point in time but rather a constant force which is simultaneously the origin, the present and the future of humankind, 2) perfectibility was awakened from within by an outer cause, corresponding to a need, caused by either absence (food, shelter, protection) or presence (an enemy, a flood or an earthquake): perfectibility *is* and *is not* before its catalysts presence and/or absence, *is* and *is not* before its positive and/or negative effects, and from this follows that 3) perfectibility not only presupposes supplementarity, it incorporates and describes the structure of the *pharmakon*, in which remedy and poison are the same, before and after being perceived as two separate notions opposing each other in a linear thought structure, where the positive is always thought before the negative.<sup>116</sup>

From this we can determine that the *pharmakon* as a thought structure is indeed present in Rousseau's philosophy on a level that reaches beyond the

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<sup>115</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.42. 'Après avoir montré que la *perfectibilité*, les vertus sociales, et les autres facultés que l'homme Naturel avoit reçues en puissance, ne pouvoient jamais se developper d'elles mêmes, qu'elles avoient besoin pour cela du concours fortuit de plusieurs causes étrangères qui pouvoient ne jamais naître, et sans lesquelles il fût demeuré éternellement dans sa condition primitive; il me reste à considérer et à rapprocher les différens hazards qui ont pu perfectionner la raison humaine, en détériorant l'espèce, rendre un être méchant en le rendant sociable, et d'un terme si éloigné amener enfin l'homme et le monde au point où nous les voyons.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.162.

<sup>116</sup> I do not mean to say that either of the concepts are primary in relation to the other. I rather wish to emphasise a structural likeness between them.

recurring remedy/poison metaphor. Rousseau's oeuvre is full of dichotomous concepts and antonyms such as good/bad, nature/art, being/appearing, etc. And thus, without an awareness of the structure of *pharmakon* it can appear contradictory that some concepts, such as art, can be both positive and/or negative notions in Rousseau's thought, making it possible to claim that Rousseau says one thing while demonstrating the opposite. Rousseau does think that modern society is a degeneration of the world that was once closer to nature, but as we have seen through the analysis of the faculty of perfectibility, it is not a question of an evil that has added itself to an origin from the outside, but rather of something that from the outset was always a possibility and grew from within. Consequently, with the *pharmakon* as a backdrop, we can conclude that the above-mentioned 'original wholeness' that according to Starobinski, Rousseau thinks can be aroused through the 'right' kind of art, does not necessarily contradict an awareness in Rousseau that everything has 'always already begun.' For according to the faculty of perfectibility – and the thought structure of *pharmakon* – this plenitude of originarity is rather an *emptiness*, a blank page of perfectibility on which everything or nothing can be written. The remedying type of art that Starobinski describes in Rousseau's philosophy is thus not so much a reminder of a time when everything was good; it is rather an evocation of a time when everything was still possible.

Therefore, in investigating Rousseau's double relationship to the theatre – criticising the very being of French theatre while writing works for the same stage himself – the *pharmakon* will be the theoretical foundation on which I will base my argument. Knowing that perfectibility as a concept has a structural likeness to that of the *pharmakon*, I will next examine the aesthetic implications of perfectibility in Rousseau's thoughts about the development of art and theatre throughout history. This will enable me to further crystallise how and why art in general and theatre in particular are sometimes highly problematic to Rousseau, and why sometimes, in some forms, art and theatre offer solutions to those same problems.



*2.1. Louis XIV receives the ambassador of Persia in 1715, by Antoine Coypel.*

## Chapter 2

### Aesthetic perfectibility – a history of the arts

Criticism of various kinds of rules – prescribed systems of thinking, feeling and behaviour – is a central theme and a recurring issue in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings. Deciphering and exposing structures such as social norms of politeness, philosophical patterns of thought and aesthetic laws of beauty are frequently dealt with in his works. To understand Rousseau's critique of the theatre, and his ideals for it, it is vital to get to grips with this background from a social, philosophical and aesthetic perspective. The closest Rousseau came to defining or naming the human systematisation of thinking, feeling and behaviour, was in the Second discourse, when he defined the human faculty of *perfectibility*.<sup>117</sup> As described in the previous chapter, Rousseau proposed that it was this human faculty above all in combination with free will that sets humans apart from other animals. He argued that it is our ability to perfect ourselves, through this 'faculty which, with the aid of circumstances, successively develops all the others', that makes our species able to supersede our natural instincts and therefore able to progress from generation to generation.<sup>118</sup> The concept of perfectibility is thus not only a term defining a human faculty, but a term that describes the historical development of mankind. Rousseau is invested in this development of humankind, because he thought that the faculty of human perfectibility can be understood through recognising the progress of the mind's organisation of thoughts, systematisation of social interaction and formation of rules of aesthetic beauty.

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<sup>117</sup> See Chapter 1 for a summary of the Second discourse and a background to the concept of perfectibility.

<sup>118</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.26. 'la faculté de se perfectionner, faculté qui, à l'aide des circonstances, développe successivement toutes les autres'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p.142. See also Wokler, 'Perfectible apes in decadent cultures: Rousseau's anthropology revisited', in *Rousseau, the age of Enlightenment, and their legacies* (2012, Princeton and Oxford), p.23.

The faculty of perfectibility was formulated in his Second discourse primarily as an anthropological concept describing how it played a decisive role in the development of humankind before and in what is now called the Neolithic age.<sup>119</sup> Even though it is clear in Rousseau's text that this faculty, as a distinctively human trait, is fully present and operational in modern times, scholars most often relate it to his conjectural history of the cradle of humankind. This might very well be due to the fact that Rousseau does not use the term in any other work than the Second discourse. However, in this chapter, I will show that Rousseau's notion of perfectibility is of crucial interest when analysing his criticism of the arts, and specifically his assessment of the Parisian theatre. I will go further and argue that it was his analysis of aesthetics that laid the foundation for his formulation of the faculty of perfectibility, and that this in turn led to his elaborate criticism of the theatre that we find in texts such as the *Lettre à d'Alembert* and *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*. His many writings on opera and music theory play a vital role here, as do his thoughts about the arts in the First discourse. And as is clear from these writings, the Neolithic era is just one historical epoch that interests Rousseau: classical antiquity (especially ancient Greece), for example, is a constant source of ideals and inspiration for Rousseau, and the norms and tastes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (particularly in the era of the Sun King, Louis XIV) are a recurring object of criticism. As I will show, these three periods play a central role when analysing Rousseau's thoughts about the arts.

Fundamental to my understanding of Rousseau's notion of perfectibility is an article by Felicity Baker, who argues that in his *Lettre à d'Alembert* Rousseau depicts the initiative by d'Alembert in the *Encyclopédie* to set up a Parisian theatre in Geneva as a 'colonial invasion' devised to overthrow the native Genevan culture.<sup>120</sup> Rousseau thought that this colonial invasion meant to introduce a modern French city life was influenced by artificial monarchical values and mores, where the 'man of the world is entirely in his mask.'<sup>121</sup> Baker's argument is partly developed through Rousseau's neologism *perfectibility*. She argues that even though the cities of Geneva and Paris in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* are not separated in time, they can still re-

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<sup>119</sup> The field of anthropology was not yet developed in Rousseau's time, of course. On Rousseau and the Neolithic age, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris, 1955) p.451-54.

<sup>120</sup> Felicity Baker, 'The anthropological foresight of the *Lettre sur les spectacles*', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.24-49.

<sup>121</sup> Translation slightly amended. Rousseau, *CW*, vol.13, *Emile*, p.383. 'l'homme du monde est tout entier dans son masque.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.4, *Emile*, Book IV, p.515. Baker, 'The anthropological foresight', p.33.

flect different stages of Rousseau's concept of perfectibility, and exemplify the advancement 'from nature to culture.'<sup>122</sup> Considering perfectibility as a neologism, Baker writes that

although the choice of word is morally neutral, its proximity to *perfection*, *perfectionnement*, and so on, confers on it an ironic quality in Rousseau's work since he represents human development, beyond a certain point, as a worsening rather than an improving of the human; the most modern societies are at the farthest and most corrupted remove from nature. Paris is thus more 'perfected', that is, more denatured, than republican Geneva.<sup>123</sup>

Baker's understanding of Rousseau's concept of perfectibility – as 1) not merely a human faculty which has caused humankind to develop throughout the centuries from nature to culture, but also as something that it is possible to observe at different stages in parallel, contemporary societies, and, 2) a neologism incorporating an ironic element where 'perfection' and 'degeneration' can be synonymous – opens up new ways of analysing the concept itself, and new ways of analysing Rousseau's critique of art and theatre. Rousseau frequently uses words like *perfect*, *perfected*, and *perfection* when he analyses the arts. His use of these words can at a first glance appear to be inconsistent, if they are read without any awareness of their association with his concept of perfectibility, and this can cause his criticism of the arts to seem paradoxical, to say the least. For example, when writing his *Lettre à d'Alembert*, which was received by his contemporaries as a direct attack on Parisian theatre, Rousseau simultaneously praises the French stage as 'pretty nearly as *perfect* as it can be, whether from the point of view of pleasure or of utility', and, he continues, its stage is, the 'most *perfect*, or at least the most correct that ever existed' (emphasis added).<sup>124</sup> To add to the complexity, we can compare this vocabulary of 'perfection' to Rousseau's statement in the Geneva manuscript of *Du Contrat social* that 'in *perfected* art' it is possible to demonstrate 'the reparation of the ills that the beginnings of art caused to nature' (emphasis added).<sup>125</sup> What did Rousseau mean by this per-

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<sup>122</sup> Baker, 'The anthropological foresight', p.29.

<sup>123</sup> Baker, 'The anthropological foresight', p.29.

<sup>124</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.270-71, 'est cependant à peu près aussi parfait qu'il peut l'être, soit pour l'agrément, soit pour l'utilité'; 'la plus parfaite, ou du moins la plus régulière qui ait encore existé'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.25-26.

<sup>125</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.4, *On the Social contract* (first version, the Geneva manuscript), p.82. 'efforçons nous de tirer du mal même le remède qui doit le guérir. Par de nouvelles associations, corrigeons, s'il se peut, le défaut de l'association générale. [...] Montrons [...] dans l'art perfectionné la reparation des maux que l'art commencé fit à la nature.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Du Contrat social* (première version, manuscrit de Genève), p.288. As mentioned in the

fectured art? How can the French stage be the most perfect while at the same time being so damaging to morality and virtue? And how is it that perfected art can nevertheless be used to remedy the ruin that art wrought on humanity?

Strangely, even though scholars largely agree that the concept of perfectibility is central to Rousseau's writings, the possible development of the concept through the use of lexically similar words like 'perfect' and 'perfection' has today only been fragmentarily explored. Therefore, with Baker's reading of the *Lettre à d'Alembert* and the notion of perfectibility as starting points, this chapter will investigate how the concept of perfectibility could have developed as a thought structure in Rousseau's writings before the Second discourse. This will be studied through lexically related terms used in his writings on the arts. Beginning with a broader perspective of Rousseau's criticism of the arts, where his writings on music are central, I will successively zoom in on his critique of and ideals concerning theatre. I argue that Rousseau develops a thought structure, without giving it a name, that I will call *aesthetic perfectibility*. He uses this thought structure to unveil and expose prescribed systems of rules of thought, feelings and behaviour that throughout history have become more and more organised. While his neologism *perfectibility* describes a human faculty, *aesthetic perfectibility* can be said to be the resulting process of that faculty, often made visible and possible through the arts. So in a way, Rousseau writes his own history of the arts when forming the thought structure here conceptualised as *aesthetic perfectibility*. His critique of the theatre needs to be read in the context of this history. It is in this context that we can understand how he can express an intense love of the playwrights of French classicism, like Molière and Racine, and at the same time criticise some of their most important works as being contradictory, corrupt and morally bad. The era of Louis XIV, with its etiquette of *bienséance*, flawlessly formed verses and elaborate rules of *vraisemblance*, naturally becomes a milestone in Rousseau's investigation of the historical systematisation of aesthetic expression.

Finally, I argue that because of the *pharmakon* character of the faculty of perfectibility (as discussed in the previous chapter), which (as will be shown) also applies to *aesthetic perfectibility*, Rousseau plays with the idea of thwarting the development of the system, by searching for ideals within the structure itself that could cure or at least ease the pains of the systematised human mind. Here, I will consider more traditional theatre and the pub-

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introduction, Starobinski uses this as an example of the remedy/poison metaphor. Starobinski, 'The Antidote in the Poison', p.127.



lic festival in Rousseau's writings as parts of the same *pharmakon*, and conclude that the festival should not be read as a concept opposing or denying that of theatre, but that it rather represents the very beginning of theatre.

## The first aesthetic perfection

Rousseau's first publication, the *Dissertation sur la musique moderne*, appeared in early 1743.<sup>126</sup> Even though the *Dissertation* was written years before he had developed a preference for Italian over French music and well before he had written the two discourses, we can catch a glimpse of what would later develop into his analysis of the arts, his profound music theory and, even the first inklings of his later concept, the faculty of perfectibility.

In the *Dissertation*, Rousseau presents a new musical notation system, constructed of numbers to make it easier for people to learn and play music.<sup>127</sup> The goal was to reduce the number of signs and symbols to make the rules of music notation more immediately accessible.<sup>128</sup> As a justification,

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<sup>126</sup> Rousseau presented his idea of a new notation system to the Académie des Sciences in 1742. Despite a generally positive assessment of his proposition, they questioned the originality and the usefulness of his system. The report of the Academy hints at works published at the end of the seventeenth century by Father Souhaitty, *Nouveaux elemens de chant* (1677) and *Essai du chant de l'église par la nouvelle méthode des nombres* (1679), which also propose a new notation system based on seven numbers (as Rousseau's). For an investigation of the differences between the two systems and a discussion on the false accusations of plagiarism, see Sidney Kleinman's introduction to the *Projet concernant de nouveaux signes pour la musique* and *Dissertation sur la musique moderne* (ed. Kleinman and Gagnebin), in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, p.XLVII-LXXIII. Rousseau did however proceed with the work on this new notation system, and in early 1743, he published the *Dissertation sur la musique moderne*. Rousseau's notation system was later implemented in the nineteenth century, was practiced by the Galin-Paris-Chevé school and is even used in parts of modern day Asia. See John T. Scott's introduction to Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, p.xvi.

<sup>127</sup> Julia Simon argues that Rousseau's will to create a new and simpler notation system, accessible to more people, is motivated by a 'distinctly democratic impulse', which she assesses could also be said in general about his philosophy of singing. See Simon, *Rousseau among the moderns*, p.49 and the chapter 'Singing democracy: Music and politics', p.47-74.

<sup>128</sup> 'The system I propose turns on two principal objects. The first, to notate Music and all its complexities in a simpler, more convenient manner and in less volume. // The second and more considerable one is to make it as easy to learn as it has been discouraging until now, to reduce its signs to a smaller number without taking from them any of their expressiveness, and to abridge its rules so as to make light work of theory and to make practice dependent on only the habituation of the organs, without the difficulty of notation being able to have any part in it.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dissertation on modern music*, p.29-30. 'Le Systèm que je

Rousseau goes back to the origin of musical notation and describes its development in modern times. He names Guido of Arezzo (active in the eleventh century) and Jehan des Murs (active in the fourteenth century) as two of the founders of the modern musical notation system. Even though Rousseau was unsure of the state of music when Guido and Jehan des Murs created the system, he states that they decided to replace the old system which probably consisted of Greek characters ‘with which the ancient Greeks expressed that marvellous Music, which [...] our own will never approach with regard to its effects.’<sup>129</sup>

Rousseau thought that the modern notation system did not do music any favours. He looks back longingly to the simplicity of the Greek system, built on a single set of signs, an alphabet that could express ‘[a]ll the variations of discourse, all the relations of numbers, and all the combinations of sounds,’<sup>130</sup> in strong contrast with the modern notation system burdened with diversity and multitude. Rousseau writes that the more people have tried to improve and *perfect* the system over the years, the more complex it became with new rules and signs, which rather than improving made it worse:

Music has suffered the fate of the Arts that are *perfected* only successively. The inventors of its characters considered only the condition in which it was found in their time without foreseeing that to which it might later attain. From this happened that their system was soon found to be defective, and all the more defective as the Art was *perfected*. As it advanced, rules were established to remedy present inconveniences and to multiply a too limited expression which could not suffice for the new combinations with which it was burdened every day.<sup>131</sup> [Emphasis added.]

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proposer de rouler sur deux objets principaux. L’un de noter la musique et toutes ses difficultés d’une manière plus simple, plus commode, et sous un moindre volume. // Le second et le plus considérable, est de la rendre aussi aisée à apprendre qu’elle a été rebutante jusqu’à présent, d’en réduire les signes à un plus petit nombre sans rien retrancher de l’expression, et d’en abrégier les règles de façon à faire un jeu de la théorie, et à n’en rendre la pratique dépendante que de l’habitude des organes, sans que la difficulté de la note y puisse jamais entrer pour rien.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dissertation sur la musique moderne*, p.160.

<sup>129</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dissertation*, p.34. ‘avec lesquels les anciens Grecs exprimoient cette Musique merveilleuse, de laquelle [...] la nôtre n’approchera jamais quant à ses effets.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dissertation*, p.168.

<sup>130</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dissertation*, p.34. ‘toutes les variations du discours, tous les rapports des nombres, et toutes les combinaisons des sons.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dissertation*, p.168.

<sup>131</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dissertation*, p.33-34. ‘La Musique a eu le sort des Arts qui ne se perfectionnent que successivement. Les inventeurs de ses caractères n’ont songé qu’à l’état où elle se trouvoit de leur tems, sans prévoir celui où elle pouvoit parvenir dans la suite. Il est arrivé delà que leur système s’est bientôt trouvé défectueux, et d’autant plus défectueux que l’Art s’est plus perfectionné. À mesure qu’on avançoit, on établissoit des règles pour remédier aux inconvéniens présens, et pour multiplier une expression trop bornée, qui ne pouvoit suf-

The above quotation is a good example of what I have chosen to call *aesthetic perfectibility*. The arts here are seen as part of an inevitable process of improvement caused by the human will to constantly systematise and create order. The main flaw in this process is that new rules are applied on top of the old ones in order to cover up inherent faults and problems – a kind of ‘papering over the cracks’. Instead of perfecting the arts, as intended, the arts become more and more burdened with rules, causing them to become more unwieldy rather than more accessible.<sup>132</sup> The modern musical notation system like any system suffering from too many adjustments and development would, in Rousseau’s opinion, inevitably end up ‘extremely muddled and extremely ill-mixed’.<sup>133</sup> Here we find, in one of Rousseau’s very first writings, a continuous association of ‘perfection’ with something ‘spoilt’ and/or ‘too complicated,’ and the word *perfected* used almost as a synonym for *defective*. However, Rousseau sees this as an opportunity to break the pattern. First of all, one needs to recognise the difficulties of the modern system. Secondly it is necessary to go back to the roots, to correctly understand a theoretical system that has evolved to become too perfected, or rather defective, and through understanding its origins we may find a solution. One needs to find the courage to ‘attempt the *remedy*, to try to bring it back to its first simplicity, and in a word, to do for its *perfection* what Guido of Arezzo did to spoil it’ (emphasis added).<sup>134</sup> And of course, this is precisely what Rousseau aims to do with his new, simplified music notation system.

Already in this early *Dissertation*, we find a pattern of thought that was to be present throughout large parts of Rousseau’s later writings. Starobinski writes, in his introduction to the Second discourse, that if Rousseau is interested in understanding how human development went wrong, it is because of his belief that in order to counterbalance what is bad in the world, it is necessary to understand how we have reached the state in which we live. And these insights into primitive human nature and its denaturalisation in society

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fire aux nouvelles combinaisons dont on la chargeoit tous les jours.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dissertation*, p.167.

<sup>132</sup> Is the perfection of a method (‘la perfection d’une method’), Rousseau asks, really to make signs ‘more perceptible by making them cumbersome’? Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dissertation*, p.35. ‘plus sensibles en les rendant plus embarrassans’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dissertation*, p.169.

<sup>133</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dissertation*, p.34. ‘fort embrouillé et fort mal assorti’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dissertation*, p.168.

<sup>134</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dissertation*, p.34-35. ‘on n’ait pas le courage d’en tenter le remède, d’essayer de la ramener à sa première simplicité, et en un mot, de faire pour sa *perfection* ce que Gui d’Arezze a fait pour la gâter’ (emphasis added); Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dissertation*, p.169.

are the basis of a Rousseauan education that can ‘anticipate and thwart’ social corruption.<sup>135</sup> At this stage, however, in the *Dissertation sur la musique moderne*, the line of thought concerns the particular, concrete and limited system of musical notation. So far, it does not have much to do with either theatre or aesthetics and anthropological philosophy. But as will be shown in the following, little by little, Rousseau’s thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility* was to develop over the following years, as his music theories developed, and with the development of his first socio-political writings. Together these were to have an important influence on his thoughts about theatre.

### The value of imperfection

In 1749, six years after the publication of the *Dissertation*, Rousseau wrote over 400 articles on music for the *Encyclopédie*.<sup>136</sup> In these one finds many of the fundamental ideas that would come to fruition in Rousseau’s later works on music theory.<sup>137</sup> His preference for Italian music over French is there, as is the strong belief in melody as the natural source of music, opposing Rameau’s theory of harmony, which was largely founded on the conviction that music as a science should be studied through mathematical calculations and proportions.<sup>138</sup> There is also something in Rousseau’s vocabulary

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<sup>135</sup> ‘One can create an education that anticipates and thwarts the harmful influence of a corrupt society. However, for an education of this kind to be possible, the educator must know nature [...] It will therefore be indispensable to have in front of one’s eyes, not only the vivid image of the primitive nature of man, but also the exact causes for his denaturation.’ ‘On peut concevoir une éducation qui prévienne et contrecarre l’influence malfaisante d’une société corrompue. Seulement, pour qu’une éducation de cette sorte soit possible, il faut que l’éducateur connaisse la nature [...] Il sera donc indispensable d’avoir sous les yeux non seulement l’image vivante de la nature primitive de l’homme, mais encore les causes exactes de sa dénaturation.’ Starobinski, in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, editorial introduction to *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, p.LIX.

<sup>136</sup> For further reading on the articles on music in the *Encyclopédie*, see for example Alain Cernuschi, *Penser la musique dans l’Encyclopédie: Etude sur les enjeux de la musicographie des Lumières et sur ses liens avec l’encyclopédisme* (Paris, 2000).

<sup>137</sup> Michael O’Dea writes in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: music, illusion, desire*, p.16, that ‘[a]ny number of *Encyclopédie* articles could be cited in support of the view that some of the essential elements of Rousseau’s musical thought are already in place in 1749.’

<sup>138</sup> For further reading on Rousseau and Rameau, and the musical quarrels of the time, see for example Michael O’Dea, ‘How to be modern in music’, in *Rousseau and the dilemma of modernity*, ed. Mark Hülling (New Brunswick, 2016), p.89-119; David Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau*, Chapter 7: ‘The Querelle: “two ridiculous theses”’, p.179-208; Catherine

of 'perfection' that further develops and takes form in his *Encyclopédie* articles. In the *Dissertation sur la musique moderne* Rousseau expressed a preference for a simpler notation system, over what he sees as a complicated and 'too' perfected system. In his *Encyclopédie* articles, he takes this view one step further and speaks explicitly of *imperfection* as a quality of music that has become undermined. Now it concerns music on a much broader scale than merely its notation system.

Rousseau's article 'Musique' in the *Encyclopédie* will serve as the main example here. Michael O'Dea has highlighted an interesting polemic in the way Rousseau presents his conclusions in this article. The main part of the text focuses on Greek music, or rather on a comparison of Greek with modern (mainly French) music. O'Dea observes that time after time, Rousseau states that 'Greek music was inferior to modern music' (which would be consistent with Rameau's opinions), but every time after making such an assertion, Rousseau deliberately undercuts his own argument.<sup>139</sup> For, as O'Dea points out, all these statements have a hidden agenda.

For example, Rousseau claims that the musical instruments of the Greeks were poorly constructed: 'Their flutes had only a few holes, and their lyres and zithers only a few strings.'<sup>140</sup> However, Rousseau is not troubled by the fact that the Greeks had simple instruments, because they gave primacy to vocal music. He thinks that this is something that modern music should learn from, rather than giving priority to instrumental accompaniments. Further, he states that the Greeks' music had no harmony: 'they did not know music in parts, counterpoint, or harmony in the sense that we give to it.'<sup>141</sup> Yet, we soon understand that the absence of harmony in Greek tunes is not an indication that their music was poor, but rather of its richness in expressive melodies.<sup>142</sup> Rousseau also draws a parallel to modern Italian music, which, he argues, gives superiority to melody over harmony, as does ancient Greek music. He believes that beautiful accords could never compare to the inflections of a touching voice, since 'the true empire of the heart belongs to mel-

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Kintzler, *Jean-Philippe Rameau, and Poétique de l'opéra français*; and, Julia Simon's chapter 'Rameau and Rousseau on absolute and relative value', in *Rousseau among the moderns*, p.75-113. Rousseau's music theory in relation to Rameau and their quarrels will be specifically discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>139</sup> O'Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: music, illusion, desire*, p.18.

<sup>140</sup> 'Leurs flutes n'avoient que peu de trous, leurs lyres ou cythares n'avoient que peu de cordes.' Rousseau, article *Musique*, in *Encyclopédie*, vol.10, p.900.

<sup>141</sup> 'ils ne connoissoient point la *musique* à plusieurs parties, le contre point, en un mot l'harmonie dans le sens que nous lui donnons'; Rousseau, article 'Musique', in *Encyclopédie*, vol.10, p.900.

<sup>142</sup> Rousseau, article 'Musique', in *Encyclopédie*, vol.10, p.900-901.

ody.<sup>143</sup> His comments on rhythm follow the same line of argument.<sup>144</sup> As O'Dea writes, even though '[m]odern music appears to have more different tempi available to it, on examination it turns out that the ancients had a larger number of genuinely different measures.'<sup>145</sup>

In this polemical argumentation, Rousseau repeatedly uses various forms of the word 'perfect' and/or 'perfection', often to describe the development of music. Finally, he asks what all this implies, writing:

That ancient music was more *perfect* than ours? Not at all. On the contrary, I believe that ours is without comparison more learned and more agreeable; but I think that that of the Greeks was more expressive and more energetic. [...] they only sought to move the soul, and we only wish to please the ear. In a word, the abuse we make of our music only comes from its richness; and perhaps, without the bounds of *imperfection* that kept Greek music confined, it would not have produced all those marvellous effects that are reported to us.<sup>146</sup> [Emphasis added.]

It appears to be the *perfection* of French contemporary music that constitutes its major problem. In his opinion it is the well-developed techniques and learned harmony systems that are abusing modern music in order to please the ear, while the music of the ancients had its *imperfection* to thank for its ability to touch the soul. It was because of its boundaries of imperfection that Greek music reached such a high level of energy and expressiveness.

As the foundations were being established on which he would develop his future, more elaborate music theories, in polemic with Rameau's writings, one can see that in 1749 the thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility* was already growing and expanding. The argument that in the *Dissertation* was

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<sup>143</sup> 'le véritable empire du cœur appartient à la mélodie.' Rousseau, article 'Musique', in *Encyclopédie*, vol.10, p.901.

<sup>144</sup> He writes that 'if we want to compare it [ancient music] to measure in our music, the advantage again appears on our side.' 'si nous voulons lui comparer la mesure de notre *musique*, tout l'avantage paroîtra encore de notre côté.' Rousseau, article 'Musique', in *Encyclopédie*, vol.10, p.901.

<sup>145</sup> O'Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: music, illusion, desire*, p.20-21.

<sup>146</sup> 'Que veux je conclure de tout cela? que l'ancienne *musique* étoit plus *parfaite* que la nôtre? nullement. Je crois au contraire que la nôtre est sans comparaison plus savante et plus agréable; mais je crois que celle des Grecs étoit plus expressive et plus énergique. [...] ils ne cherchoient qu'à remuer l'ame, et nous ne voulons que plaire à l'oreille. En un mot, l'abus même que nous faisons de notre *musique* ne vient que de sa richesse; et peut-être sans les bornes où l'*imperfection* de celle des Grecs la tenoit renfermée, n'auroit-elle pas produit tous les effets merveilleux qu'on nous en rapporte.' Rousseau, article 'Musique', in *Encyclopédie*, vol.10, p.902.

concerned specifically with notation systems, has expanded in the article on 'Musique' to include the music of the ancient Greeks and modern French music, taking in aspects of music making from the physical instruments and the principal rules for playing them, to the way in which the respective music could/would be perceived and experienced. In 'Musique' he not only argued that the aim to perfect a system through more complex rules and structures often leads to its downfall, but explicitly stated that imperfection can have an aesthetic value. And in Rousseau's eyes, the history of music has been a constant movement away from this imperfection.

### The moral aspect of a growing concept

The thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility* in Rousseau's writings was soon to expand to include not only music, but all the arts. In this expansion, Rousseau's imagined history of the arts and their perfection through organisation and standardisation was to take on a moral dimension. Just a few months after writing the articles on music for the *Encyclopédie*, Rousseau came across an announcement by the Dijon Academy that would lead to his First discourse. The topic for the writing contest was the following question: 'If the reestablishment of the sciences and the arts has contributed to the purification of the morals.'<sup>147</sup> The 'reestablishment' of the sciences and the arts refers back to the Renaissance, and the Academy's concern was whether virtue and societal mores have changed favourably since then.<sup>148</sup> Having already begun to reflect upon the historical development of the art of music in his musical writings, Rousseau had something to build on when engaging with the topic set by the Academy,

His reply, the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, was announced as the winner of the contest the following year, and published in early 1751. It gave a negative response to the Academy's question, while expressing Rousseau's profound contempt for redundant luxury and politeness. Developing his conjectural history of the arts, he writes that our morals and virtue have been harmed rather than improved by the arts and sciences. In this society where the arts and sciences have a central and fundamental role, politeness and principles of taste have been forming people 'in the same mould', because

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<sup>147</sup> 'Si le rétablissement des Sciences et des Arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs.' *Mercur de France*, October 1749, p.154.

<sup>148</sup> O'Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: music, illusion, desire*, p.33.

appearances have become more important than being.<sup>149</sup> The more sophisticated the taste of people has become, the more the ‘art of pleasing’ has become bound up with prescribed rules, which in turn have given our morals a deceptive and standardised form.<sup>150</sup> Rousseau argues that people no longer take the risk of appearing as they are, because ‘endlessly politeness demands and propriety [bienséance] commands; endlessly we follow the customs, never our own genius.’<sup>151</sup> And therefore, he continues, if a foreigner from far away were to assess the morals of the European people based on ‘the *perfection* of our Arts, the decency [bienséance] of our Entertainments, [and] the politeness of our manners’ (emphasis added), that foreigner would suppose our morals to be completely contrary to what they actually are.<sup>152</sup>

This increasing corruption of the human soul, growing in proportion ‘to the advancement of our Sciences and Arts to *perfection*’ (emphasis added), is however, Rousseau states, something that started long before both the Renaissance and before his own time.<sup>153</sup> He takes the examples of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome and Constantinople and argues that they all eventually became victims of their own investment in the arts and sciences.<sup>154</sup> Nonetheless he feels that matters are becoming increasingly bad: while ancient politicians discussed virtue and morality, contemporary thinkers are primarily concerned with money and commerce because of the development of science and art into luxury. This ultimately leads to humans being evaluated like

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<sup>149</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.6. ‘dans un même moule’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.8.

<sup>150</sup> ‘when subtler researches and a more refined taste have reduced the Art of pleasing to principles, a base and deceptive uniformity prevails in our morals’; Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.6. ‘des recherches plus subtiles et un goût plus fin ont réduit l’Art de plaire en principes, il règne dans nos mœurs une vile et trompeuse uniformité’. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.8.

<sup>151</sup> Amended translation. See Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.6. ‘sans cesse la politesse exige, la bienséance ordonne: sans cesse on suit des usages, jamais son propre génie’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.8.

<sup>152</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.7. ‘la perfection de nos Arts, sur la bien séance de nos Spectacles, sur la politesse de nos manieres’ (emphasis added); Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.9.

<sup>153</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.7. ‘que nos Sciences et nos Arts se sont avancés à la perfection’ (emphasis added); Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.9.

<sup>154</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.7-8; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.9-10.



cattle and ‘a man is worth no more to the State than the value of his domestic consumption.’<sup>155</sup>

Without going further into the main argument of Rousseau’s First discourse, we can observe how the still unnamed faculty of perfectibility is starting to become more concrete in Rousseau’s thinking.<sup>156</sup> A moral aspect has been added to the aesthetic one, and more explicitly than before, Rousseau has begun to focus on the historical development of the human mind through the ‘perfection’ of the arts and sciences. As discussed in the first chapter, Rousseau leaves a small window open in the First discourse for a possible reversal of the advancement of perfection. Trying to appeal to the Dijon Academy, he ends the essay by writing that wise monarchs and learned academies, can play a positive part through their knowledge, which can partly purify and/or remedy the negative development caused by arts and sciences.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, it must be said that the general view given on the historical perfection of the arts and its influence on humankind in the First discourse is largely negative.

### The perfect makeover (or renaissance)

How then did Rousseau move from the moral philosophy of the First discourse with its fairly negative view of civilisation and cultural development, to formulating the faculty of perfectibility with an articulated *pharmakon* character in the Second discourse? One major, albeit rarely recognised, milestone written between the two discourses is the *Lettre sur la musique françoise*; a theoretical manifesto published in late 1753 on music and opera, following his opera *Le Devin du village*, which had had its premiere the pre-

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<sup>155</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.14. ‘un homme ne vaut à l’Etat que la consommation qu’il y fait.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.20.

<sup>156</sup> Concerning Rousseau’s statement that ‘our souls have been corrupted in proportion to the advancement of our Sciences and Arts to perfection’, Raymond Trousson remarks in his notes to the First discourse, that it is the ‘beginning of the idea of “perfectibility”’; ‘Amorce de l’idée de “perfectibilité”’, in Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes: édition thématique du tricentenaire*, ed. Raymond Trousson and Frédéric S. Eigeldinger, 24 vols (Geneva, 2012), vol.4, p.404, editor’s note 2.

<sup>157</sup> As will be shown later in the present and the following chapters, the view expressed in the First discourse on monarchs and learned academies as possible saviours or guardians of the arts stands in opposition with Rousseau’s thoughts and writings on the subject just a few years later.

ceding year.<sup>158</sup> By this time Rousseau had developed the remedy/poison metaphor in both his First discourse and the preface to his comedy *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même* (published earlier in 1753). This is important to keep in mind because in the *Lettre sur la musique française*, both the thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility* and the possibility of a remedy inside the poison are developed on a larger scale than before, and could thus be seen as a possible starting point for the future structural similarities between the faculty of perfectibility and the *pharmakon*.

In the *Lettre sur la musique française* Rousseau clearly states his position on something perfected and systematised as something defective. For example, he writes: 'I find that the further our Music is *perfected* in appearance, the more it is *ruined* in actuality' (emphasis added).<sup>159</sup> The letter on French music presents an idea that nuances the possibilities of 'perfection', because it partly contradicts the main argument made in the First discourse about the widespread decay (perfection as systematisation) of the arts since the Renaissance.<sup>160</sup> In the *Lettre sur la musique française*, Rousseau argues that at the time of the Renaissance, the schools of French and Italian music were in many ways one and the same. At this time in history, he writes, Italian music had 'that ridiculous emphasis of harmonic science, those pedantic pretensions of doctrine which it has lovingly preserved among us and by which one distinguishes that methodical, stiff Music, but without genius, without invention, and without taste.'<sup>161</sup> From this time on he claims that French music has continued on the path of harmonic calculations, which instead of 'real beauties' search for 'conventional beauties', instead of 'good music' produce 'learned music', and instead of investing in song/melody, have developed accompaniments/harmony. This he says is because the French language is

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<sup>158</sup> Further discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>159</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.162. 'je trouve que plus notre Musique se perfectionne en apparence, et plus elle se gâte en effet.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique Française*, ed. Olivier Pot, p.315. In the notes to his edition and English translation of the *Lettre sur la musique française*, in *CW*, vol.7, p.547, note 48, John T. Scott invites us to compare this quotation with the part of the Second discourse which states that 'all subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps toward the perfection of the individual, and in fact toward the decrepitude of the species.' (See Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.49; Rousseau, *OC*, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, vol.3, p.171.) See also O'Dea, 'How to be modern in music', p.101.

<sup>160</sup> O'Dea also remarks on this in his article, 'How to be modern in music', p.99.

<sup>161</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.158. 'cette ridicule emphase de science harmonique, ces pédantesques prétentions de doctrine qu'elle a chèrement conservée parmi nous, et par lesquelles on distingue aujourd'hui cette Musique méthodique, compassée, mais sans génie, sans invention et sans goût'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique française*, p.309.

not suited to singing, being ‘composed of only mixed sounds, of mute, indistinct, or nasal syllables, few sonorous vowels, many consonants and articulations.’<sup>162</sup> Whereas since the Renaissance the Italians have paid attention to ‘the *perfection* of melody’ (emphasis added), and actually managed to regain parts of the expressiveness in music, which he in his article ‘Musique’ in the *Encyclopédie* presented as the most admirable quality of ancient music.<sup>163</sup> Rather than ruining itself, Italian music has thus improved or remedied itself through *perfection* and is at the time of the composition of the *Lettre sur la musique française* the best and most expressive music there is in Europe.<sup>164</sup>

While the possibility of a historical makeover in the *Dissertation sur la musique moderne* was more a youthful dream of changing current musical practices, he presents it in the *Lettre sur la musique française* as something that has actually taken place successfully on a quite large scale. The Italians could be said to have succeeded in turning the process of *aesthetic perfectibility* into a positive development, and thus a remedy, through their expressive language and its connection to melody, which for Rousseau is the true source of music. In contrast, through their imagined perfection through systematisation, the French are trying to make up for something that they largely lacked from the outset, and have instead made the situation worse. Their ‘Schoolboy padding’ (‘remplissage d’Ecolier’) of learned and systematised harmony will never be able to generate a cure for itself.<sup>165</sup> However, even though an antidote for French music might be impossible to achieve, the persistent development of its perfection in appearance might hold a palliative that may eventually guide taste in the right direction. Immediately after stating that the perfection of French music is its ruin, Rousseau writes:

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<sup>162</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.144-45. ‘beautés réelles’; ‘beautés de convention’; ‘bonne musique’; ‘musique sçavante’; ‘ne [...] compose que des sons mixtes, de syllable muettes, sourdes ou nazales, peu de voyelles sonores, beaucoup de consonnes et d’articulations’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique française*, p.292-93.

<sup>163</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.148 and p.158. ‘douce, sonore, harmonieuses, et accentuée’; ‘perfection de la mélodie’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique française*, p.297 and p.309.

<sup>164</sup> Rousseau writes that other countries, such as Spain, England and Germany, after attempting a national music, have realised that their languages are not as well suited to singing as Italian, and thus retreated to enjoying Italian opera. An example that he thinks the French would do well to follow. Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.142-43; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique française*, p.292. See also O’Dea, ‘How to be modern in music’, p.100.

<sup>165</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.174; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique française*, p.328.

It was perhaps necessary for it [French music] to come to the point where it is for our ears to be accustomed imperceptibly to reject the prejudices of habit and to enjoy tunes other than those with which our Nurses put us to sleep; but I foresee that in order to bring it to the very mediocre degree of goodness of which it is susceptible, sooner or later it will be necessary to begin by re-descending – or reascending – to the point where Lully left it.<sup>166</sup>

In this passage there are three important points:

Firstly, it is a question of letting the perfection (as systematisation) develop to the ‘point of no return’, which, according to Starobinski in some cases can lead either to the poison’s final blow, or to a ‘natural’ remedy/palliative.<sup>167</sup> It is a matter of letting the imagined perfection of French music go so far that at some point, comparison with another, more expressive music – such as Italian music – will reveal its weakness. Rousseau later makes a similar argument in his *Confessions* when describing the crucial moment of the arrival of the Italian *buffo* company to the opera in Paris in August 1752, which would start the heated debate of the ‘Querelle des Bouffons’, which opposed Italian and French music. Rousseau writes that the comparison of French and Italian music ‘heard the same day at the same theatre, unblocked French ears; none of them could endure the dragging of their music after the lively and marked accent of the Italian.’<sup>168</sup> It is interesting to notice that it is the listening to the two types of music one after the other on the same day, that ‘unblocks’ French ears: it is the unavoidable contrast between the two that awakens an awareness in the French audience, as if they could now hear their own music in a new way and perceive its flaws, having previously been deaf to them.

Secondly, part of the problem with French music is ‘the prejudices of habit’, which are a result of becoming accustomed to music that is perfected towards organised systems. As we have seen above, this type of music is in Rousseau’s opinion not only ‘methodical’ and ‘stiff’, it is also ‘without ge-

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<sup>166</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.162. ‘Il étoit peut-être nécessaire qu’elle vînt au point où elle est, pour accoutumer insensiblement nos oreilles à rejeter les préjugés de l’habitude, et à goûter d’autres airs que ceux dont nos Nourrices nous ont endormis; mais je prévois que pour la porter au très-médiocre degré de bonté dont elle est susceptible, il faudra tôt ou tard commencer par redescendre ou remonter au point où Lully l’avoit mise.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique française*, p.315.

<sup>167</sup> Starobinski, ‘The Antidote in the poison’, p.122.

<sup>168</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, *The Confessions*, p.322. ‘entendues le même jour sur le même théâtre déboucha les oreilles françaises; il n’y en eut point qui put endurer la traînerie de leur musique après l’accent vif et marqué de l’Italienne. Sitot que les Bouffons avoient fini tout s’en alloit. On fut forcé de changer l’ordre et de mettre les Bouffons à la fin.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confessions*, book VIII, p.383.

nius' and 'without invention'. In other words, there is nothing unique about it; it is solely built upon a systematisation of learned and prescribed calculations that are applicable to any piece of music. This can be a useful tool to study music, but not a successful way to create it. For when something is too perfected, too instrumentalised, the result becomes a product of habit and generalisation. This also appears to align with his thoughts in the First discourse, concerning the perfected arts' effect on morals: 'the Art of pleasing' has been reduced 'to principles', morals are dominated by 'uniformity', people's minds appear 'to have been cast in the same mould', and 'endlessly we follow the customs, never our own genius'.<sup>169</sup>

Thirdly, while French music cannot ever become as good and expressive as Italian, Rousseau is open to improving it even though it would only be a matter of 'bring[ing] it to the very mediocre degree of goodness of which it is susceptible.' And in order to do so, it is essential to 'redescend' or 'reascend' to the point in French music history 'where Lully left it.' The thought structure is similar to that used in the *Dissertation sur la musique moderne*: to remedy a notation system that over time has become *too* perfected, one needs to go back to the very creation of that system to understand what went wrong. Through his choice of words, Rousseau underlines what many might consider to be a *redescending* to Lully's time, whereas he thinks of it rather as a *reascending*. It is by observing and transforming the process of systematised perfection that French music can have a chance of improvement. For even though Rousseau's final argument in the *Lettre sur la musique françoise* is that 'the French do not have a Music at all and cannot have any',<sup>170</sup> he admits that Lully's music from the previous century (which was seen as a model for French music) has a purer and 'less burdened' harmony, and in general is better than the French music of Rousseau's own time. And in a way, Rousseau attempts at the end of the *Lettre sur la musique françoise* to 'reascend' to Lully's time when analysing 'the most *perfect* model of true French recitative' (emphasis added),<sup>171</sup> namely the monologue 'Enfin il est

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<sup>169</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.6. 'des recherches plus subtiles et un goût plus fin ont réduit l'Art de plaire en principes, il règne dans nos mœurs une vile et trompeuse uniformité, et tous les esprits semblent avoir été jetés dans un meme moule: sans cesse la politesse exige, la bienséance ordonne: sans cesse on suit des usages, jamais son propre génie'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur le sciences et les arts*, p.8.

<sup>170</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.174. 'les François n'ont point de Musique et n'en peuvent avoir; ou que si jamais ils en ont une, ce sera tant pis pour eux.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique françoise*, p.328.

<sup>171</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.168. 'le modèle le plus parfait du vrai recitative François.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique françoise*, p.322.

en ma puissance' in Lully's *Armide*. He goes through the beginning of the monologue line by line, thoroughly and harshly, and concludes that it is too ornamented and also ill suited to both the words and the dramatic situation.<sup>172</sup>

Reading the *Lettre sur la musique française* shows clearly that Rousseau thought the historical process of aesthetic perfection – despite its often poisonous effects – can be turned against itself and used as a remedy. But to do so, one needs to go back to and understand its roots; one needs to unfold the rules, regulations and imagined perfection that has been stacked upon an already flawed system. In the case of Italian music after the Renaissance it happened through the perfection of melody. In the case of French music, it could still be done, at least to a certain degree.

It is Rousseau's history of the arts and the thought structure here called *aesthetic perfectibility*, largely formed in his musical theory, that enables the moral aspect and the image of the remedy in the poison to develop in the First discourse and later works. It is the possibility of *redescending* and/or *reascending* in the never-ending historical process of aesthetic perfection that lays the foundation for his conjectural history of humankind in the Second discourse, where the sister concept, the human faculty of perfectibility is formulated, fundamentally distinguished by its structural likeness with the *pharmakon* concept. And, as we shall see in the subsequent sections, the thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility* also runs through Rousseau's idea of theatre.

### Perfected theatre – 'in chains on the stage'

When writing the *Lettre à d'Alembert* (1758), as he had done earlier in the *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753), Rousseau attempts to 'reascend' in history to the time of the Sun King (reigned 1643–1715) to better understand the faults in the arts in 1750s Paris. Much as he referred to Lully (1632–1687) and French music as 'the most perfect' while criticising them, Rousseau here makes Molière (1622–1673), Racine (1639–1699) and the theatrical arts in Paris his target of criticism. He does this while simultaneously claiming that French theatre is 'pretty nearly as *perfect* as it can be' (empha-

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<sup>172</sup> Rousseau, CW, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.168-74; OC, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique française*, p.322-28.

sis added).<sup>173</sup> As we will see, as in his earlier writings and in the letter on French music, he points to a prescribed system suffocating an art form by overburdening it with too many rules and/or learning. However when approaching the systematisation of the *aesthetic perfectibility* of theatre in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, he highlights the moral aspect more than before, arguing that if the perfected Parisian theatre was to relocate to a less developed city like Geneva, the consequences would be morally devastating.

There seem to be two main reasons why Rousseau regularly used the example of theatre in the era of French classicism. Firstly because its playwrights were generally loved and praised by his contemporaries (and by Rousseau himself). To criticise them was to criticise the very heart of French high culture. And secondly, because French literature and theatre in the seventeenth, as well as in the beginning of the eighteenth century, was strictly regulated by rules of genre, style and morality. Written and conducted in the right way, the pleasures of poetry and theatre were to give moral instruction to the audience. According to Gordon Pocock, writing about Boileau and the cultural climate of French classicism, the theories of Aristotle were interpreted moralistically: now, '[t]he function of Tragedy is not psychological catharsis, but the demonstration of poetic justice, which rewards the good and punishes evil.'<sup>174</sup> Technical and aesthetic rules were established through the two principles of *vraisemblance* and *bienséance*. Through *vraisemblance* – that which can appear true or likely – the lessons on stage became persuasive.<sup>175</sup> Through *bienséance* – norms for how to behave in public – 'moral conformity' could be achieved.<sup>176</sup> With these regulations, the theatre of French classicism was therefore well suited to the thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility*.

Under Louis XIV the theatre acquired particular characteristics, aesthetic qualities and contents that were calculated and measured in relation to *bienséance*, the elaborate court policies of politeness and appearance. At the Sun King's court, as well as in the salons which were an extension of the

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<sup>173</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.270. 'est cependant à peu près aussi parfait qu'il peut l'être, soit pour l'agrément, soit pour l'utilité'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.25.

<sup>174</sup> Gordon Pocock, *Boileau and the nature of Neoclassicism* (Cambridge, 1980), p.10. Boileau's poem on the art of writing *L'art poétique* (1674), inspired by both Aristotle and Horace, is often seen as exemplifying French classical doctrine.

<sup>175</sup> The *vraisemblance* was reinforced by the classical unities: the unity of time, the unity of place and the unity of action.

<sup>176</sup> Pocock, *Boileau and the nature of Neoclassicism*, p.10.

court, one's place in the societal hierarchy corresponded to the way one spoke, walked and dressed. Theatre historian Erika Fischer-Lichte writes that

Court life unfolded as the result of a highly artistic self-fashioning and theatricalisation, in which only the clever choice of the right mask guaranteed that one could play the desired role, and in which every other player was not only to be thought of as a co-player but also as a critical and competent spectator in whose gaze the role and the extent of success in realising the role was mirrored. Only a man who was totally in charge of his art, both as actor and spectator, could reckon with social success in lasting terms.<sup>177</sup>

Appearance and social behaviour were the prime tools required both to survive and to rise within the hierarchy. Without knowing the right social codes and signals, one would not last very long in courtly society. The exercise demanded extreme control of the emotions. To show one's true feelings not only made one vulnerable, it exposed the person as inferior due to his/her loss of control. It was equally important to be able to understand and decipher the behaviour of others.<sup>178</sup>

At this time many books were written on etiquette and deportment, on how to behave to achieve social success, and many plays and other theatrical works that reflected the content and form of the social system.<sup>179</sup> Alongside his theatrical society of *bienséance*, Louis XIV regularly attended and organised concerts, plays and balls; he was a lover of the theatre, of music and of dance and he had close relationships with playwrights and composers including Molière and Lully. With their support, he organised grand theatrical spectacles featuring himself as the Sun King.<sup>180</sup> Similar to the social codes established at court and in the salons, theatrical language on stage developed a system of signs and gestures, often with the hands and arms, to signify a particular passion or reaction. Naturally, without knowledge and study of these social and theatrical signs, the spectator could not fully understand or

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<sup>177</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European drama and theatre*, trans. by Jo Riley (London and New York, 2004), p.103.

<sup>178</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *History of European drama and theatre*, p.102. For further reading on the court society of Louis XIV, see Norbert Elias, *The Court society*, (New York, 1983), in English translation by Edmund Jephcott of the the German original *Die höfische Gesellschaft* (originally published 1969).

<sup>179</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *History of European drama and theatre*, p.104-129.

<sup>180</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *History of European drama and theatre*, p.98-99. For further reading on Louis XIV and how he used the theatre politically, see for example Georgia J. Cowart, *The Triumph of pleasure: Louis XIV and the politics of spectacle* (Chicago, 2008/2014).



interpret what was going on before his/her eyes. Strict rules on where and how to stand on stage in relation to other characters and to the audience were also established. This caused the acting style to become fairly stiff and ‘statuesque’, particularly in the tragedies. At the Comédie Française the rhetorical acting style of French classicism was partly preserved from its opening in 1689 until the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>181</sup> The acting style of the eighteenth century will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

When Rousseau describes the Parisian theatre in *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise* through the eyes of his fictitious Swiss character Saint-Preux, who is visiting Paris, the social rules of the salons and the aesthetic rules of the theatre are rolled into one, much as they were in the time of Louis XIV.<sup>182</sup> Saint-Preux relays his experience of Parisian social life and theatre, which makes it appear as if the two are mirror images of each other. Life in the salons and in the homes of ‘fine’ people is described by Saint-Preux as both intriguing and exciting, but above all as shallow and deceitful. He is desperately trying to learn the social norms and rules of etiquette followed by everyone around him. Conversations consist of the latest Paris gossip. If one happens to speak about someone present, a listener without ‘the key’ (‘la clé’) to the jargon would not understand what was being said. One of the favourite topics is ‘sentiment’ (‘le sentiment’). But this brand of sentiment has nothing to do with real love and friendship as one might think, it is a discussion based on pompous maxims and clever metaphysics. So much sentiment is spent on wit and talk ‘that there remains none for practice’. Ironically, the only thing that makes up for the lack of sensibility is *bienséance*, which is strictly ‘regulated, measured [and] weighed’: no one dares to be oneself and instead tries to do what everybody else does. People are moving ‘in time like the marches of a regiment in battle order’, they are like ‘marionettes nailed to the same plank, or pulled by the same string.’<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *History of European drama and theatre*, p.125-29.

<sup>182</sup> *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise* is of course a work of fiction, but since the thoughts expressed on theatre in letter number XVII, from Saint-Preux to Julie, in many ways corresponds to Rousseau’s view of the theatre, I believe it is reasonable to regard it as a complementary resource when studying Rousseau’s thoughts on the Parisian stage.

<sup>183</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.6, trans. by Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, p.202-205. ‘il n’en reste plus pour la pratique’; ‘compassé, mesuré, pesé’; ‘va par tems comme les mouvemens d’un régiment en bataille’; ‘marionètes clouées sur la même planche, ou tirées par le même fil.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, ed. Henri Coulet and Bernard Guyon, p.246-250.

Saint-Preux describes the Parisian theatre as the natural habitat for these people; it ‘exists for them alone.’<sup>184</sup> Only fine, rich and noble people are portrayed on stage, ‘the theatre copies the conversations of a hundred or so Paris households.’<sup>185</sup> It is as if the other five to six hundred thousand people living in the city did not exist. Lower classes, he writes, are rarely represented on stage because it could dishonour both the playwright and the higher members of society in the audience. The audience went to the theatre to admire and study fine households, both on stage and among themselves. Further, just like the salons, where there is much talk and no practice of sentiment, the French stage is described as having ‘much talk and little action.’ The prime function of dialogue on stage is to make the playwright and actors ‘shine’ and therefore it consists of maxims, aphorisms and wit, much like the conversations on sentiment in fine households. Just as the discussions in high society rarely touch on anything personal, so on the French stage, Saint-Preux states, the word *I* is basically banned, and instead the audience hears *one* talk. And, like these fine families, the people of the stage appear to be chained up to keep them from expressing any true passions or sentiments:<sup>186</sup>

there is a certain affected dignity in gesture and diction, which never allows passion to speak exactly its language, nor the author to enter his character and transport himself to the scene of action, but keeps him in chains on the stage and under the eyes of the Spectators. And so the liveliest situations never let him neglect the lovely arrangement of sentences and elegant postures.<sup>187</sup>

Rousseau thinks that this is the form that the systematisation of *aesthetic perfectibility* has taken in the French theatre that has developed throughout history: The salons, fine households and the stage are still ruled by the same values a century later because of the transmission of *bienséance* and rules of appearance integral to Louis XIV’s court society and theatre, because they

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<sup>184</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.6, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, p.207. ‘C’est pour eux uniquement que sont fait les spectacles.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, p.252.

<sup>185</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.6, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, p.206. ‘Maintenant on copie au théâtre les conversations d’une centaine de maisons de Paris.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, p.252.

<sup>186</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.6, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, p.206-208; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, p.251-54.

<sup>187</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.6, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, p.208. ‘Il y a encore une certaine dignité maniérée dans le geste et dans le propos, qui ne permet jamais à la passion de parler exactement son langage ni à l’auteur de revêtir son personnage et de se transporter au lieu de la scene, mais le tient toujours enchainé sur le théâtre et sous les yeux des Spectateurs.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, p.253.

are built upon and created out of that same system. Logically, Rousseau can call French theatre ‘the most perfect’ in his *Lettre à d’Alembert* because over time it has become more and more ‘perfected’, systematised, and consequently defective, through these rules of beauty and behaviour.

Another side of Rousseau’s problem is the strict moral lessons often built into the dramas of French classicism, where senseless love and passion are punished and reasonable duty and virtue rewarded. Leaning on the ancients, many French classical authors aimed to turn the theatre into a school of virtue. An example of this can be found in Racine’s preface to his *Phèdre* (1677), where he writes that

no play of mine so celebrates virtue as this one does. The least faults are here severely punished. The mere thought of crime is seen with as much horror as the crime itself. Weaknesses begot by love are treated here as real weaknesses; the passions are here represented only to show all the disorder which they bring about; and vice is everywhere painted in colors which make one know and hate its deformity. To do thus is the proper end which every man who writes for the public should propose to himself; and this is what, above all, the earliest tragic poets had in view. Their theatre was a school in which virtue was taught no less well than in the schools of the philosophers.<sup>188</sup>

This will to educate virtue through the theatre was something that Rousseau’s contemporaries picked up on. And for Rousseau this might be the worst part of the problem: the Parisian theatre is still advertised under the false pretence of being a school of virtue. And to top it off, d’Alembert in the *Encyclopédie*, then suggested establishing such a ‘school’ in Rousseau’s hometown of Geneva, which so far had remained relatively untouched by the misfortunes of this kind of ‘moral’ theatre and *bienséance*. This explains why Rousseau in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* tries to disarm his opponent’s arguments in every way possible, and to attack the very core of Parisian theatre, and playwrights such as Racine and Molière.

Rousseau states that the most fundamental mistake made by his adversaries is to assume that theatre can teach us something good that we do not already know, because, as he argues in his Second discourse, ‘man is born good’ and thus, ‘[t]he source of the concern which attaches us to what is decent and which inspires us with aversion for evil is in us and not in the

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<sup>188</sup> Racine, preface to *Phèdre*, in translation by Richard Wilbur in *Jean Racine’s Phaedra*, (New York, 1986). See also Fischer-Lichte, *History of European drama and theatre*, p.117.

plays.’<sup>189</sup> What can be done, however, is to evoke through art that core of goodness in us. But trying to teach us lessons that we already know and even expect to be taught in the theatre as was customary on the Parisian stage, can only have the opposite effect: it can tweak and change this natural goodness for the worse. Below I will highlight Rousseau’s main arguments on why and how the audience’s morals deteriorate through a French theatre that is ‘too perfected’ and systematised.

Rousseau repeatedly comes back in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* to the argument that no matter how ‘perfected’ a theatre is in terms of its moral usefulness, the success of a play will always remain above its purpose to do good.<sup>190</sup> This is because the very essence of theatre depends upon the show being appreciated by the audience and so it is adapted to the taste of the audience.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, Rousseau writes, ‘it is a gross self-deception to form an idea of *perfection* for them [theatrical institutions] that could not be put into practice without putting off those whom one wants to instruct’ (emphasis added).<sup>192</sup> Since the playwright is forever reliant on the spectator’s appreciation and applause, a stage work will always be formed in accordance with public taste. The ‘perfection’ of thought – no matter how great – and its moral effects would thus in the end always ‘be reduced to nothing for want of means to make them felt.’<sup>193</sup>

Further, Rousseau argues that the idea of ‘perfection of a form of Theatre directed toward public utility’ should be abandoned, because a playwright attempting to please the audience never paints ‘the true relationship of

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<sup>189</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.267. ‘l’homme est né bon [...] la source de l’intérêt qui nous attache à ce qui est honnête et nous inspire de l’aversion pour le mal, est en nous et non dans les pieces.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.22.

<sup>190</sup> See for example Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.263, 266, 270; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.16-17, 20, 25.

<sup>191</sup> For example, Rousseau states that ‘A ferocious and intense People wants blood, combat, and terrible passions. A voluptuous People wants music and dances. A gallant People wants love and civility. A frivolous People wants joking and ridicule.’ Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.263. ‘Un Peuple féroce et bouillant veut du sang, des combats, des passions atroce. Un Peuple voluptueux veut de la musique et des danses. Un Peuple galant veut de l’amour et de la politesse. Un Peuple badin veut de la plaisanterie et du ridicule.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.17.

<sup>192</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.263. ‘c’est s’abuser beaucoup que de s’en former une idée de perfection, qu’on ne sauroit mettre en pratique, sans rebuter ceux qu’on croit instruire.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.17.

<sup>193</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.266. ‘encore se réduiroient-ils à rien, faute de moyens pour les rendre sensibles.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.20.

things.<sup>194</sup> Here, Rousseau partly echoes what he wrote in *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, which was published a few years later, concerning the lack of the pronoun *I* and the lack of true sentiment on stage, in favour of wit, politeness and pomp. He complains that the French stage never shows everyman: in comedy people and their relationships are belittled, and in tragedy, they are raised to the level of heroes and princes.<sup>195</sup> Humanity portrayed in the Parisian theatre is always distorted and thus distant from both its author and its audience. With this conclusion as a starting point, Rousseau then takes several examples from the French repertoire and to prove his point delves deeper into both comedy and tragedy.

Rousseau considers that the most problematic aspect of comedy is that it often ridicules goodness and virtue. He wishes to go back to the birth of French classical comedy, when in his view it was ‘in its *perfection*’. He focuses large parts of his argument on Molière: ‘the most *perfect* comic author whose works are known to us.’ (Emphasis added).<sup>196</sup> He takes Molière’s commonly acknowledged masterpiece *Le Misanthrope* as his prime example. According to Rousseau this is the play of Molière’s that displays ‘the best and healthiest morals’, and from this we can judge the effect of the other plays.<sup>197</sup>

Assessing *Le Misanthrope*, Rousseau maintains that the main character Alceste, the misanthrope, is the most sincere and virtuous of characters: he is a good man. In fact, in Rousseau’s eyes Alceste is wrongfully labelled a misanthrope – a hater of humankind – and should rather be seen as an opponent of the poor morals of his own time. And this is why a good man is ridiculed and scorned on Molière’s stage: because he does not fit into the society of courtly politeness and *bienséance*. Even though Molière was a good man who partly went against these contemporary values, Rousseau considers that he was driven to this portrayal by public opinion, that choosing this topic of the virtuous critic of social manners and politeness would please the audi-

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<sup>194</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.270. ‘les véritables rapports des choses’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.25.

<sup>195</sup> Rousseau here refers to Aristotle’s *Poetics*: ‘Comœdia enim deteriores, Tragoedia meliores quam nunc sunt imitari conantur’ (‘For comedy aims at imitating men worse, and tragedy men better than those of today’); Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.270, translation from translators notes, p.397, n.25. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.25.

<sup>196</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.275. ‘dans sa perfection [...] à sa naissance’; ‘le plus parfait auteur comique dont les ouvrages nous soient connus.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.31.

<sup>197</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.283. ‘la meilleure et la plus saine morale’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.41.

ence.<sup>198</sup> At the same time, those same social conventions prevented Molière from being fully true to his main character. For being a critic of social manners, Alceste necessarily must be part of that same society and as a consequence, he needs to follow its general customs, at least partially, otherwise he would appear mad rather than ridiculous, and he would no longer be of interest to the audience. Therefore, for comic effect Molière had to add features to the character of Alceste that go against the character's own principles, such as childish outbursts and hesitating to tell the truth on account of politeness. In the end, Molière betrays his main character in order to make the audience laugh, and Rousseau concludes:<sup>199</sup>

since the intention of the author is to please corrupt minds, either his morality leads to evil, or the *false good* that he preaches is more dangerous than the evil itself; in that it seduces by an *appearance of reason*; in that it causes the practice and the principles of society to be preferred to exact probity; in that it makes wisdom consist in a certain mean *between vice and virtue*; in that, to the great relief of the audience, it persuades them that to be a decent man it suffices not to be a complete villain.<sup>200</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Rousseau sees that while the audience's expectations and taste steer the playwright, their social customs, maxims and perfected *bienséance* are mixed with those of the theatrical stage, and this ultimately highlights and strengthens their already distorted morals. Now we are no longer dealing with elements that are merely good or bad, but with concepts that are so unrecognisable that we have a hard time defining them: it is now a matter of a 'false good' and an 'appearance of reason', and it all takes place somewhere in the space 'between vice and virtue'. And this alteration of values that Rousseau finds in the comic genre – which as we will see is also present in tragedy – misleads the audience towards an untrue good, that is even worse than pure vice.

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<sup>198</sup> It should be noted that *Le Misanthrope* was not a huge success in its own time and was not played at court before Molière's death. See Fischer-Lichte, *History of European drama and theatre*, p.114.

<sup>199</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.275-84. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.31-42. I will come back to Rousseau's critique of *Le Misanthrope* in Chapter 3.

<sup>200</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.283-84. 'que l'intention de l'auteur étant de plaire à des esprits corrompus, ou sa morale porte au mal, ou le *faux bien* qu'elle prêche est plus dangereux que le mal même, en ce qu'il séduit par une *apparence de raison*; en ce qu'il fait préférer l'usage et les maximes du monde à l'exacte probité; en ce qu'il fait consister la sagesse dans un certain milieu *entre le vice et la vertu*; en ce qu'au grand soulagement des spectateurs, il leur persuade que, pour être honnête-homme, il suffit de n'être pas un franc scélérat.' (Emphasis added.) Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.42.

When it comes to Rousseau's criticism of French tragedy, the concern is again for how the norms of *bienséance* will affect the morals of the audience. The problem is partly similar to that of the talk of sentiment in the salons, which drained the participants of actual sentiment. Theatregoers know the moral lessons that will be taught from the stage beforehand. They not only know that duty will win over love, virtue over vice, and reason over passion, but also how they are supposed to react to the tragic happenings on stage – that is part of the social system. They are 'proud' of the tears they shed in the theatre because they are under the false impression that through pitying the misfortunate on stage, they do a good deed. But Rousseau finds that these indirect acts of duty or clemency carried out in the spectator's imagination have no impact on the audience's real life.<sup>201</sup> Loving virtue is, as we have seen above, a natural thing for humankind, but in the theatre this inclination is made too simple because the spectator's role remains passive. This kind of pity is what Rousseau calls *pitié sterile*, 'a vestige of natural sentiment'. And the consequences of this *pitié sterile* are that the audience in the French theatre 'spend' all their humanity on fictitious characters, instead of on each other. For in doing so, they do not need to actually sacrifice anything for someone else, it does not need to cost them anything, and at the same time they have demonstrated to the world through their tears in the auditorium that they are good people who understand and are touched by the lessons taught on stage. They have shown that they have the right reaction in the right situations; they have shown that they are living according to the rules of *bienséance*.<sup>202</sup>

Rousseau gives another reason why the prescribed rules of the Parisian theatre distort the morals of its audience. As we know, he does not share his contemporaries' faith in the educational effect of seeing duty or virtue prevailing over love on stage, as inherited from the era of French classicism.

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<sup>201</sup> 'Thus the most advantageous impression of the best tragedies is to reduce all the duties of man to some passing and sterile emotions that have no consequences, to make us applaud our courage in praising that of others, our humanity in pitying the ills that we could have cured, our charity in saying to the poor, God will help you!' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.269. 'Ainsi la plus avantageuse impression des meilleures tragedies est de réduire à quelques affections passageres, stériles et sans effet, tous les devoirs de l'homme, à nous faire applaudir de nôtre courage en loüant celui des autres, de nôtre humanité en plaignant les maux que nous aurions pu guérir, de nôtre charité en disant au pauvre: Dieu vous assiste.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.24.

<sup>202</sup> See Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.267-69; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, 22-24.

This is because ‘reason has no effect in the theatre’<sup>203</sup> and on stage, ‘love will always make a greater impression than the maxims of wisdom.’<sup>204</sup> The most telling example of this in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* is possibly Rousseau’s discussion of a performance of Racine’s *Bérénice*, which he had seen together with d’Alembert some years earlier. And here, thanks to the talented actress who performed Bérénice and her broken heart, this was not a question of *pitié sterile* in the audience, because at the end of the drama, Rousseau writes, ‘all the spectators have married Bérénice.’<sup>205</sup> The only one taking advice from the prescribed didactics of the play was Titus, Bérénice’s lover, who instead of love and marriage chooses his duties as emperor of Rome. From the outset, before seeing the drama, all spectators would despise any emperor wavering between duty and love: before seeing *Bérénice* they would choose virtue over vice. But seeing Bérénice’s pain, despite their pre-knowledge of what is ‘right’ or what they should think, they are drawn into the passions of the play and to Bérénice’s misery.<sup>206</sup> Here, the pity that the spectator feels might be a true kind of pity, but nevertheless it is misguided. The pity and catharsis that are supposed to purge the passions of the audience have the opposite effect. The spectator is instead ‘secretly grumbling’ at Titus’ situation and his choice, and ‘secretly wishes’ for another outcome. Somehow, true pity felt by the audience clashes with the lesson of the drama that the spectators had expected to draw from the play. The truth they know and have been taught does not correspond to the truth they feel in their hearts. Reason and sentiment do not agree, and the spectators secretly ‘marry Bérénice’ despite the lessons taught on stage.<sup>207</sup>

Time and again in his *Lettre à d’Alembert*, Rousseau makes the point that a theatre is a mirror image of its people. Parisian morals – just as in the Parisian theatre – might on the surface appear to be the most perfect of their kind, thanks to elaborate rules and structures on how and why to be, to act or

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<sup>203</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.265. ‘la raison n’avoit nul effet au theatre’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.20.

<sup>204</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.290. ‘l’amour font toujours plus d’impression que les maxims de la sagesse’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.50.

<sup>205</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.290. ‘tous les spectateurs ont épousé Bérénice’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.49.

<sup>206</sup> Rousseau writes in *Julie, ou La nouvelle Heloise* that Racine is the master of passions. See Rousseau, *CW*, vol.6, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, p.208; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, p.253.

<sup>207</sup> See Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.289-291; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.48-50. One could of course argue that the conflict between Bérénice’s pain and Titus’ virtuous choice is part of Racine’s play, which then in itself might not be ‘siding’ with the choice of duty over love as much as Rousseau makes it out to do.



to think in a certain way. But to Rousseau's mind, Parisian social life and theatre are only a surface of *bienséance* preserved since the era of Louis XIV that does not allow or give room for any human sentiments beyond the chains of decorum and moral maxims. In the performance of Racine's *Bérénice* that Rousseau himself had witnessed, when the audience's pity appears to have been overwhelming, when profound feelings were performed and expressed, they conflicted with and possibly even reversed the voice of reason that each member of the audience had been prepared to listen to when going to the theatre. Rousseau's point here is to show that the model of French classicism, positing duty against love on stage, might not have the desired consequences.

### Theatre imperfected – the public festival and the birth of theatre

The above analysis of the concept of *aesthetic perfectibility*, present as an unnamed thought structure in Rousseau's early writings on music, has revealed that there is a pattern in the way he thought about the historical development of the arts, and that this structure helps us understand his idea and criticism of theatre. Just as in Rousseau's logic music has been successively schematized and 'perfected' since the beginning of time through man's will to improve and understand the arts with rules and systematisation of beauty, so has theatre.

It is the development of rules of harmony and learned mathematic formulas and notation systems that contributed primarily to the increasing perfection/systematisation of music. Rousseau claims that both French and Italian music suffered from this type of 'perfection' in the Renaissance period. French music, with its subsequent investment in rules and precepts of harmony continued to deteriorate, whereas Italian music proved an exception. After the Renaissance, Italian music made melody its focus of the aesthetic perfection process, and this then actually developed into something healing and positive. Thus, in Rousseau's view, the Italians managed to use the structural features of the *pharmakon*, inherent in the thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility*.

In the case of French theatre, one of the important components in the historical perfection (systematisation) of the art form was *bienséance*, formed and developed as both a social and an artistic system of rules in the era of Louis XIV. Alongside the concept of *vraisemblance*, and restrictions about

which qualities to encourage and which behaviour to punish, *bienséance* was used as a tool to make theatre a school of virtue. If theatre was perfected throughout history in a way similar to music, at some point there must have been a more ‘imperfect’ version of theatre. And consequently, there might be a comparable course of action to remedy the theatrical arts if one only were to look back at history and learn from it.

Towards the end of the *Lettre* Rousseau argues that even though a Parisian-style theatre should not be established in Geneva, the city should still have plenty of spectacles and entertainments. Specifically, he thinks that Geneva should continue and further develop its local custom of holding public festivals, just as the Greeks, particularly the Lacedaemonian people, profited from similar entertainments in their time. Rousseau proposes a number of festivities and activities to enable the Genevan people to gather outdoors ‘under the sun’. These include music and dancing, various competitions and military exercises, and in the winter, public balls where younger people could meet and court each other. He writes that all it takes to start festivities is to erect a Maypole in a square and gather people around it.<sup>208</sup> In a famous footnote he describes a childhood memory of such a festivity, witnessed from a window with his father. He saw a large group of soldiers from the Saint-Gervais regiment, who, after exercising dined together, and spontaneously started to dance around the fountain in the square to the music of the regiment’s fifes and drums. Hundreds of soldiers holding hands formed ‘serpent-like’ bands that moved around the square in time to the music:

all this created a very lively sensation that could not be experienced coldly [...] Soon the windows were full of Female Spectators who gave a new zeal to the actors; they could not long confine themselves to their windows and they came down; the wives came to their husbands [...] even the children, awakened by the noise, ran half-clothed amidst their Fathers and Mothers. The dance was suspended; now there were only embraces, laughs, healths, and caresses. There resulted from all this a general emotion that I could not describe but which, in universal gaiety, is quite naturally felt in the midst of all that is dear to us.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.243-44; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.113-15.

<sup>209</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.351, in author’s footnote. ‘tout cela formoit une sensation très vive, qu’on ne pouvoit supporter de sang-froid [...] bientôt les fenêtres furent pleines de Spectatrices qui donnoient un nouveau zèle aux aucteurs. Elles ne purent tenir longtems à leurs fenêtres; elles descendirent; les maitresses venoient voir leurs maris [...] les enfans même éveillés par le bruit, accoururent demi-vêtus entre les Pères et les Mères. La danse fut suspendûe; ce ne furent qu’embrassemens, ris, santés, caresses. Il résulta de tout cela un attendrissement general que je ne saurois peindre, mais que dans l’allegresse uni-

Such descriptions of communal joy are not unique to the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. There are descriptions in both the Second discourse and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* of the 'first festivals' in the early days of humankind, which appear similar to the Genevan spectacles. Scholars have therefore interpreted the festivals in the *Lettre* as a kind of rebirth of these early entertainments. Jean Starobinski, for example, suggests that Rousseau's public festival 'simulates the *return* to an original state of innocence.'<sup>210</sup> And Jacques Derrida argues that through eliminating representation the Genevan entertainments are an attempt to display the impossible 'rebirth, or reactivation of the origin' and a wish to return to complete presence.<sup>211</sup> However, as we shall see, Rousseau's display of 'original' humanity contains more than a longing to return to the innocent beginnings of humankind, because it also involves the very birth of theatre and all the negative effects that Rousseau understood were to follow.

In the Second discourse, as well as in the *Essai*, Rousseau imagines how people in the early days of humankind gathered by the waterhole, by a large tree or by their huts, and how while singing and dancing together they began to *see* and communicate with others in a more refined way. As we have seen in Chapter 1 Rousseau links this moment in time in the Second discourse, to the development of the faculty of perfectibility and the growing inequality to come. But in the *Essai*, the emphasis is instead on the parallel development on communication and emotions:

There the first festivals took place, feet leaped with joy, eager gesture no longer sufficed, the voice accompanied it with passionate accents; mingled together, pleasure and desire made themselves felt at the same time. There, finally, was the true cradle of peoples, and from the pure crystal of the fountains came the first fires of love.<sup>212</sup>

Rousseau saw the first festivals as representing the moment when prescribed truths or rules of systematisation of thought and feelings was just beginning;

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verselle, on éprouve assés naturellement au milieu de tout ce qui nous est cher.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.123-24, in author's footnote.

<sup>210</sup> Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: transparency and obstruction*, p.92.

<sup>211</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.310.

<sup>212</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay on the origin of languages*, p.314. 'Là se firent les premières fêtes, les pieds bondissoient de joye, le geste empressé ne suffisoit plus, la voix l'accompagnoit d'accens passionnés, le plaisir et le desir confondus ensemble se faisoient sentir à la fois. Là fut enfin le vrais berceau des peuples, et du pur cristal des fontaines sortirent les premiers feux de l'amour.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, p.406.

a moment when everything was still possible. No one was more valuable than his neighbour, and no secret key or code was needed to understand what people were talking about. In this sense, the public festival can indeed be seen as Rousseau's longing for a lost past.

However, Rousseau thought that these innocent and romantic entertainments came at a price. Because it was at these first spectacles that the first seeds of inequality were sown, from which would grow the value of public esteem. For when '[e]ach one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself' people began to compare themselves to others and those 'who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most adroit, or the most eloquent became the most highly considered.'<sup>213</sup> As has been established above, this quality of wanting to make themselves seen, to *appear* rather than to *be*, is precisely what Rousseau finds to be wrong with the Parisian theatre and society as it is there that the elaborate *bienséance* is perfected *ad absurdum*. From the very outset, the first outdoor festivals contained characteristics that hint at the regulated and perfected theatre to come.

Consequently, it appears that the Genevan festivals and the Parisian theatre are two sides of the same coin, just as the remedy and the poison in the *pharmakon*; two sides of the first theatrical events at the birth of humankind. Therefore, just as Rousseau saw traits of French classical theatre in the festival, there must be vestiges of the 'original' festival in the most developed and perfected kind of theatre. The public festival in the *Lettre* does not aim for the end of theatrical arts. Instead it signifies a re-enactment of its birth, a rebirth of theatre with all the good and bad sides that are and were always going to be the dualism of humanity.

Thus sense can now be made from what earlier appeared to be paradoxical – claiming that *perfected* art can offer a remedy to the ills of society, while using the example of French classical theatre, which he criticises, as the most *perfect*. In most cases perfected art has, according to Rousseau, been perfected in the wrong direction: towards methodisation, systematisation and prescribed rules. But as we have seen, there are exceptions, such as Italian music, where systematised perfection, as represented by learned and formulaic harmony, has been transformed into a beneficial perfection, as represented by expressive melody. If festivals are to French classical theatre what Italian music and/or melody are to French music and/or harmony, the

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<sup>213</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.3, *Discourse on the origins of inequality*, p.47. 'Chacun commença à regarder les autres et à vouloir être regardé soi-même'; 'qui chantoit ou dansoit le mieux; le plus beau, le plus fort, le plus adroit ou le plus éloquent devint le plus considéré'; Rousseau, *OC*, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, vol.3, p.169-70.

public festivals could potentially constitute an antidote or palliative to the perfected *bienséance* of French theatre, through the study, practice and understanding of them as the beginning of theatre. Firstly, the festival could offer a type of antidote, which, in creating a contrast to French theatre, has the ability to make people realise their previous blindness, and to possibly ‘unblock’ a mind governed by stifling social decorum (as seen in the example of the comparison of French and Italian music described above). Secondly, the positive traits of the festival could be reinforced within more traditional theatre and thus lead the process of perfection towards something better (as seen in the case of melody in Italian music described above).

What can be concluded here, is that Rousseau’s early musical writings played a vital role in his future thoughts on and criticism of theatre. It is through these early writings that he develops the thought structure that I have conceptualised as *aesthetic perfectibility*, which in turn paints his own conjectural history of the arts and opens the way for thinking through the *pharmakon*. It is within this history of the arts and within this thought structure that Rousseau approaches the theatrical arts, through the aesthetic ‘perfection’ (systematisation) of *bienséance* on the one hand, and through the ‘imperfection’ of the public festival on the other.



*3.1. Voltaire receiving the recognition of poet laureate after a performance of Irène in 1778 in the Comédie Française.*

## Chapter 3

### The stage of Enlightenment – and its power structures

As I have suggested in the previous chapter, Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote his own conjectural history of the arts. He compared and analysed the development of various kinds of art in different periods using the thought structure that I have designated as *aesthetic perfectibility*, although he does not use the term. He saw the history of the arts as an increasing systematisation and methodisation of aesthetic beauty, morality and expression. The eighteenth century inherited the previous century's determination to understand the world through the natural sciences, and to use logic and empirical studies to structure that knowledge. However, thinkers like Abbé Jean-Baptiste du Bos, Jean-Philippe Rameau and Charles Batteux now wished also to theorise and/or organise the arts according to similar systems.<sup>214</sup> But in Rousseau's understanding of the history of the arts, this development was merely a continuation of what had started many generations ago. His own history of the arts made it possible for him to analyse the continuous process of the 'perfecting' and systematisation of the arts in contemporary Paris, where he had first-hand knowledge of the most influential operators in the field – *les philosophes* and the men of letters – and direct access to the results of their efforts. Rousseau was in many ways also one of these men: he wrote articles for Diderot and d'Alembert's great Enlightenment project, the *Encyclopédie*; he spent time in the theatre and the salons; he took part in some of the current public quarrels; and above all, he wrote philosophical and artistic works that tapped into the current debates on man's relation to knowledge and enlightenment. Therefore, when writing about the arts and *aesthetic perfectibility* in his own day, Rousseau could investigate in a more advanced way the power structures that lay behind the increasing systematisation and methodi-

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<sup>214</sup> See for example Abbé Jean-Baptiste du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Traité de l'harmonie réduite à ses principes naturels* (1722), and Charles Batteux, *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (1746).

sation. Why did the world continue to strive in this direction? Why was it so important to create systems that explain how to think, feel and act and that spread this knowledge to the people? And who would profit from this process?

This chapter focuses on the power structures behind the concept of *aesthetic perfectibility*, which, combined with personal feuds with his former friends, made Rousseau distance himself from the social world of the learned from the 1750s onwards. He did however continue to write, and his first work to appear after his breakup with the intellectual world was the *Lettre à d'Alembert* (1758), which is a response to Jean Le Rond d'Alembert's suggestion to construct a Parisian-style theatre in Rousseau's native city Geneva.<sup>215</sup> I argue below that Rousseau in the *Lettre* implies that the philosophers and men of letters are the upholders and reproducers of *aesthetic perfectibility* and the leading representatives of didactics.<sup>216</sup> Rousseau understood their implicit goal as one of maintaining *their* Enlightenment in order to keep their power position as preachers of truth. Theatre plays a central role here because Rousseau saw the stage as a fundamental platform for the learned men's exercise of power. Many of these thinkers had inherited the view of the previous century that the Parisian stage was an effective school of virtue. For example, Voltaire writes in the *Lettre à un premier commis* (1733) that:

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<sup>215</sup> The *Lettre à d'Alembert* is also a landmark of Rousseau's public break with his close friend Diderot. The year before, Diderot had published *Le Fils naturel, suivi des Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, in which Rousseau interpreted the line '[o]nly the wicked man is alone' as directed at himself. See Rousseau, *CW*, vol.1, *Confessions*, p.382. '*Il n'y a que le méchant qui soit seul*'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confessions*, p.455. Rousseau writes in the preface of the *Lettre à d'Alembert* that 'living alone', he has not been able to show the manuscript to anyone: he used to have a 'severe and judicious' friend (Diderot), but, 'I have him no more; I want him no more;\* but I will regret him unceasingly, and my heart misses him even more than my Writings.' Rousseau, preface to *Letter to d'Alembert*, *CW*, vol.10, p.255-56. '*Vivant seul, je n'ai pu le montrer à personne. J'avois un Aristarque sévère et judicieux, je ne l'ai plus, je n'en veux plus\**; mais je le regretterai sans cesse, et il manque bien plus encore à mon cœur qu'à mes Ecrits.' Rousseau, preface to the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, *OC*, vol.5, p.7. The footnote indicated by the asterisk consists of a quotation from a text of *Ecclesiasticus* in Latin, here in English translation from Bloom and Kelly's editorial footnotes to the *Letter*, in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.395, note 5: 'Though thou drawest a sword at my friend, yet despair not; for there may be a returning. If thou hast opened thy mouth against thy friend, fear not; for there may be a reconciliation: except for upbraiding, or pride, or disclosing of secrets, or a treacherous wound: for these things every friend will depart.'

<sup>216</sup> I here use the term 'didactics' in a neutral sense with the meaning of 'systematic instruction' ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)), or a technic of education.



I regard tragedy and comedy as lessons in virtue, reason and *bienséance*. Corneille, ancient Roman amongst the French, established a school for the greatness of the soul, and Molière founded that of civil life.<sup>217</sup>

Many of the learned in Paris expressed their support of this moral school in their theoretical and political writings, and they were also frequently playwrights, librettists or composers. As we have seen in Chapter 2, Rousseau could not accept this common view of the Parisian theatre. And as we shall see, time after time, he concludes that the prescribed didactics by learned men, intended to enlighten the people, had the opposite effect: he thought that they rather closed the minds of the public, and thus led them away from independent thinking. Because the men of the Enlightenment were spreading their world view through the theatre, Rousseau hints at an image of them as puppeteers manipulating the people's thoughts and feelings like marionette strings. I argue that this is a central line of thought in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, and that consequently, the critique of these power structures plays a vital role in Rousseau's own performance aesthetics.

This is a tricky theme to analyse in Rousseau's oeuvre, not the least in relation to the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, because many of Rousseau's arguments against the learned are tangled up with the political situations in Paris and Geneva, and because he has constantly to avoid repeating his adversaries' errors: he cannot accuse them of telling people how and what to think, while doing so himself. Therefore, he implies a line of thought throughout the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, allowing the readers to draw their own conclusions: they are encouraged to think for themselves. This does not prevent him, though, from strongly and explicitly criticising the Parisian theatre, as we saw in the last chapter. Then his aim was to make as much noise as possible, whereas in the case of the men of the Enlightenment and their involvement with the theatre, he decided to tread more delicately. And this, I argue below, is at least partly due to the fact that Rousseau is not against enlightenment in itself or against theatrical spectacles as its means, but because in his own time it has taken the hierarchical form of the philosopher 'on top of the world'

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<sup>217</sup> 'Je regarde la tragédie et la comédie comme des leçons de vertu, de raison et de bienséance. Corneille, ancien Romain parmi les Français, a établi une école de grandeur d'ame; et Molière a fondé celle de la vie civile.' Voltaire, *Lettre à un premier commis, Oeuvres de Mr. de Voltaire*, vol.33, (Cramer et Bardin, 1775) p.330. See also Marvin A. Carlson, *Voltaire and the theatre of the eighteenth century* (Westport, Connecticut and London, 1998), p.50, confirming that Voltaire 'totally agreed with the idea of theatre as a school of morals, as is consistently demonstrated in his own work.'

spreading didactics through the theatre and down to the general masses, who are supposed to follow the instructions. Here Rousseau is in a complex position as an author: he criticises the men of Enlightenment while being one himself, and therefore, he has to both break the ground he is standing on, while simultaneously creating new ground. He is, as Mark Hulliung writes, practicing an ‘autocritique’ of the Enlightenment from the inside of the movement itself.<sup>218</sup> Rousseau realises that his readers may well accuse him of being a hypocrite, or a man of contradictions, and yet he must resist the temptation of explicitly stating his point of view, which would both defend and condemn him.<sup>219</sup>

In this chapter I will make a close study from three different perspectives of Rousseau’s analysis of the power structures of Parisian theatre. In the first part I discuss how in Rousseau’s eyes *les philosophes* were strongly linked to the theatre. I argue that he partly perceived them as inheritors of Louis XIV’s politeness-power-performance system, based on the hierarchy of *bienséance*, and I illustrate this through his discussions in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* of Molière’s *Le Misanthrope*.

In the second section, I discuss why Rousseau thought *les philosophes* were interested in leading people away from autonomous thinking and how he used the specific political context of the *Lettre à d’Alembert* to expose the didactics and power structures that he saw within the theatre of the Enlightenment. I will maintain that Rousseau compares the Enlightenment movement to a religion, in which the leading men, in this case particularly d’Alembert and Voltaire, promote their own organisation as a means to remain in power.

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<sup>218</sup> Hulliung’s work *The Autocritique of Enlightenment* has pushed Rousseau and Enlightenment studies forward by showing that Rousseau, however involved with or opposed to *les philosophes*, he ‘never for a moment left the Enlightenment’, because ‘he remained staunchly loyal to the ideals of freedom, individual autonomy, and toleration that typified the “century of philosophy.”’ Hulliung, p.242. See also Gullstam and O’Dea, ‘Introduction: “La vérité est que Racine me charme”’ in, *Rousseau on stage*, p.16, where we suggest that ‘Rousseau criticising Parisian theatre and opera has a somewhat similar posture [as his autocritique of Enlightenment, as proposed by Hulliung]: the critique comes from a man of the theatre, a man who not only attended the theatre frequently, but who also tried his pen at comedies, tragedies, operas – and who in the end, as we know, invented his own genre of drama.’

<sup>219</sup> The focus of my analysis below is specifically Rousseau and the theatre of the Enlightenment, and not generally Rousseau in relation to the Enlightenment movement, which would exceed the aims of my doctoral thesis. For further reading on Rousseau’s complex relationship to *les philosophes* and the Enlightenment in general, see for example Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment*, Robert Wokler, *Rousseau, the age of Enlightenment, and their legacies*, and Ourida Mostefai, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau écrivain polémique*.

In the third and last part, I make a parallel reading of some of Diderot's writings on the theatre and the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. This is to show how Rousseau painted the public festivals as an alternative Enlightenment theatre, which, in theory at least, could be ideologically free from both philosophic or royal leaders and didactics.

### *Les philosophes* and the theatre

As seen in Chapter 2, one of Rousseau's issues with the Parisian theatre was the *bienséance* inherited from the era of Louis XIV. Rousseau thought that the theatre had become a miniature replica of high society, in which the main focus was to create a well-calculated self-image while one's true thoughts, feelings and existence ought to be hidden under layers of fine clothes and behind the veneer of well-turned phrases and clever maxims. One could learn all the rules and unspoken codes necessary to become a well-esteemed person either through observing this behaviour directly in the salons or indirectly when it was enacted on the stage. How did Rousseau think that all this was connected to *les philosophes* and their mission to enlighten the people through the theatre?

In his study of Rousseau's conception of reality versus appearance,<sup>220</sup> Jean Starobinski concludes that Rousseau saw human interactions as having gradually been transformed from a direct, transparent style of communication in primordial communities that lived close to nature, into artificially invented social relationships with hidden motives and intentions.<sup>221</sup> Starobinski describes how in both the First and the Second discourse Rousseau is preoccupied with the gap 'between reality and appearance' in society, and the difference between 'men's words and their actions'.<sup>222</sup> In the two discourses (as well as in *Emile*) Rousseau maintains that modern civilisation 'veils' transparency, obstructs a united community and separates the people from each other, because personal and commercial interests replace sincere

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<sup>220</sup> Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle*. Originally published in 1957, in a revised version in 1971, and translated into English (based on the latter version) in 1988 by Arthur Goldhammer under the title *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: transparency and obstruction* (Chicago and London, 1988). Throughout, I refer to this English translation.

<sup>221</sup> Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: transparency and obstruction*, p.22-24.

<sup>222</sup> Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: transparency and obstruction*, p.22.

and genuine relationships.<sup>223</sup> Starobinski points to a footnote in Rousseau's preface to the comedy *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, which reads:

I complain that Philosophy relaxes the bonds of society that are formed by esteem and mutual benevolence, and I complain that the sciences, the arts, and all the other objects of commerce tighten the bonds of society based on personal interest. The fact is that one cannot tighten one of these bonds without the other being relaxed by the same amount.<sup>224</sup>

The mutual benevolence between people is destroyed since art and objects have become the masters of social man: people seek to find themselves in the mediation of that materially focused world, instead of seeking their happiness within themselves. What was once direct and transparent communication is obstructed by personal interest, because of the arts, sciences, and commercial objects.<sup>225</sup>

Interestingly, this footnote is preceded by an argument that will reappear in a somewhat different form five years later in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. The paragraphs leading up to the footnote discuss the role of the philosopher in society, where Rousseau argues that if the study of philosophy loosens the bonds between people in society, it is because the philosopher loses his own part in that humanity when he studies and observes humanity: 'For him, family, fatherland become words void of meaning: he is neither parent, nor citizen, nor man; he is philosopher.'<sup>226</sup> Similarly, in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Rousseau discusses the risks of losing oneself, this time not to philosophy but to the imaginary world of the theatre. Feeling sympathy or pity in the theatre, he argues, carries with it the risk of being led to a false sense of fulfilment:

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<sup>223</sup> 'Civilization's "deceptive lights" do not illuminate man's world but veil the transparency of nature, separate men from one another, give rise to special interests, destroy all possibility of mutual confidence, and substitute for true communication between souls a factious commerce, devoid of sincerity'; Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: transparency and obstruction*, p.23.

<sup>224</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, p.193. 'Je me plains de ce que la Philosophie relâche les liens de la société qui sont formés par l'estime et la bienveillance mutuelle, et je me plains de ce que les sciences, les arts et tous les autres objets de commerce resserrent les liens de la société par l'intérêt personnel. C'est qu'en effet on ne peut ressermer un de ces liens que l'autre ne se relâche d'autant.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, *Préface*, p.968.

<sup>225</sup> Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: transparency and obstruction*, p.23.

<sup>226</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcissus*, p.192. 'La famille, la patrie deviennent pour lui des mots vides de sens: il n'est ni parent, ni citoyen, ni homme; il est philosophe.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse*, *Préface*, p.967.

when a man has gone to admire fine actions in stories and to cry for imaginary miseries, what more can be asked of him? Is he not satisfied with himself? Does he not applaud his fine soul? Has he not acquitted himself of all that he owes to virtue by the homage which he has just rendered it? What more could one want of him? That he practise it himself? He has no role to play; he is no actor.<sup>227</sup>

Here, it seems that just as the philosopher loses his own role as a human being in *observing* humanity – as expressed in the preface to *Narcisse* – the theatrical spectator risks losing real human purpose, because he *observes* but does not take part, and become a passive onlooker rather than an active participant. The observations of learned men and their analyses of reality effectively loosen the natural connections between people, because the philosophers somehow suspend or displace their own humanity. And like a chain reaction, a similar process repeats itself in the theatre: people go to the theatre and ‘spend’ their humanity while pouring out their pity on fictitious characters just to become better at appearing correct and acceptable in the eyes of society.

But Rousseau seems to think that in addition to being associated with and influencing the Parisian theatre through their art of observing, some of *les philosophes* are also heirs and upholders of the hierarchic social system of codes and politeness originating in the time of the Sun King. One man in particular serves as a model for Rousseau’s (and many others’) idea of a philosopher: François-Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694-1778). Describing *politesse* and thus *bienséance* as key concepts to power, Voltaire – when he was royal court historiographer – created an inextricable link between the absolutism of Louis XIV and the arts in his *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751).<sup>228</sup> Voltaire states in his introduction that mankind has seen but four happy ages that should serve as examples for posterity and the greatness of the human mind (‘la grandeur de l’esprit humain’). What is significant in these eras – ancient Greece, ancient Rome, the Renaissance, and the age of Louis XIV – is that the arts have been perfected in them (‘les arts ont été perfectionnés’). While all ages have produced heroes, politicians and wars, the four happy

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<sup>227</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.269. ‘quand un homme est allé admirer de belles actions dans des fables, et pleurer des malheurs imaginaires, qu’a-t-on encore à exiger de lui? N’est-il pas content de lui même? Ne s’applaudit-il pas de sa belle ame? Ne s’est-il pas acquité de tout ce qu’il doit à la vertu par l’hommage qu’il vient de lui rendre? Que voudroit-on qu’il fit de plus? Qu’il la pratiquât lui-même? Il n’a point de rôle à jouer: il n’est pas Comédien.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.24.

<sup>228</sup> See Robert Darnton, *What was revolutionary about the French Revolution?*, (Waco, 1990, third printing 1996), p.42-44.

ages have produced perfected art that has left a lasting mark on history. And the age of Louis XIV supersedes all the others and because it could draw on the three previous happy ages, it also characterises perfected human reason ('la raison humaine s'est perfectionnée'). This has led to an upswing in taste, science, mores/morals ('mœurs') and politeness ('politesse') in the whole of Europe.<sup>229</sup>

Robert Darnton has made a comparison between Voltaire and Rousseau that can help us to understand Rousseau's thoughts on the connections between *les philosophes* and the theatre. Darnton suggests that *politesse* is a key term at the centre of Voltaire's writings. In his *Candide*, for example, Voltaire paints the utopian world Eldorado, full of luxury and elegance, and its people characterised by an 'extreme politeness ('d'une politesse extrême')'.<sup>230</sup> Darnton sees a link in Voltaire's thought between culture and politics through the etymologically linked words: *poli* (polite), *police* (rational administration, Darnton's translation), *policé* (civilised), and *politique* (political).<sup>231</sup> This also became central in Voltaire's writing of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* which Darnton argues points to a process of civilisation: 'It is the moving force in history, a combination of [a]esthetic and social elements, manners and mores [...] which pushes society toward the ideal of Eldorado, a state in which man is perfectly "poli" and "policé"'.<sup>232</sup> In this way Voltaire established the politeness-performance-power relationship through his writings on the Sun King:

Louis masters the French language by studying the works of Corneille. He controls the court by staging plays. And he dominates the kingdom by turning the court itself into an exemplary theatre. That idea may be cliché now, but Voltaire [...] created it. He saw power as performance – the acting out of a cultural code.<sup>233</sup>

According to Darnton, Voltaire saw the ultimate master of this cultural code as Molière, who both created the Comédie Française, and authored the spectacle of the court. Molière was the 'legislator of *bienséance*', his plays influence and reflect the court of Louis XIV, which in itself is a kind of perfor-

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<sup>229</sup> Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, with notes and a preface by Mme la comtesse de Genlis (Paris, 1820), 3 vols., vol.1, 'Introduction', p.1-10.

<sup>230</sup> Voltaire, *Candide* (1759), Chapter 12.

<sup>231</sup> Darnton, *What was revolutionary about the French Revolution?*, p.42-43.

<sup>232</sup> Darnton, *What was revolutionary about the French Revolution?*, p.43.

<sup>233</sup> Darnton, *What was revolutionary about the French Revolution?*, p.44.

mance.<sup>234</sup> The cultural code developed in the glorious ‘theatre-state’ and then spread from France to the rest of Europe, defining Louis XIV’s supremacy and legacy as a primarily cultural power system.<sup>235</sup>

Darnton writes that Rousseau bought into Voltaire’s understanding of cultural history, but that while Voltaire saw this civilising process as something positive, Rousseau saw it negatively. Criticising the influence of the arts and sciences in his First discourse and attacking Parisian theatre in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* could therefore, Darnton argues, all be understood as the beginning of a cultural revolution, later picked up by the French Revolution, aimed to overthrow the Old Regime.<sup>236</sup> According to Darnton this cultural revolution is the reason why Rousseau deconstructs Molière’s *Le Misanthrope* in the *Lettre*. The aim with Darnton’s reading of Voltaire and Rousseau is to give a literary context and background to the French Revolution, which, as he himself points out was of course much more complex than the conflicts between the two thinkers. But there is something in Darnton’s analysis which provides an important key to our understanding of Rousseau’s perception of Voltaire and the men of letters. Rousseau saw that ‘perfected’ arts and theatre in particular had become vital tools of a political power system; a political power system that no longer only belonged to the king and the nobles, but that was partly being taken over by the learned. His rewriting of *Le Misanthrope* can be said to demonstrate this and thus to develop the connection between the learned men and the theatre, that we have seen above.

When analysing Molière’s *Le Misanthrope* in his *Lettre à d’Alembert*, Rousseau takes the opportunity both to highlight and implicitly criticise the links between the men of letters, the social norms of the aristocracy and the practice of *bienséance* in the theatre. In the previous chapter I discussed Alceste, the main character in Molière’s drama, and how in Rousseau’s view he is not a true misanthrope. Instead, Rousseau suggests that the real enemy of humankind is the character of Philinte – Rousseau refers to him as ‘le philosophe Philinte’ – a man of society and *bienséance* who was created by Molière as a contrast to the obsessively honest and righteous Alceste. Rousseau states that even though Philinte lives according to society’s rules of

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<sup>234</sup> ‘Molière fut, si on ose le dire, un législateur des bienséance du monde.’ Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, vol.2, p.366. Darnton, *What was revolutionary about the French Revolution?*, p.44.

<sup>235</sup> Darnton, *What was revolutionary about the French Revolution?*, p.44.

<sup>236</sup> Darnton, *What was revolutionary about the French Revolution?*, p.45-46.

politeness, and cares only about himself and about what serves his own interests, Molière presents him as the wise man of the drama.<sup>237</sup>

In a well-known passage of the *Lettre*, Rousseau suggests that *Le Misanthrope* could be rewritten with Alceste as the hero of the play and Philinte the ridiculed villain, in order to make the characters more true to themselves, and to make Alceste's character more effective.<sup>238</sup> Philinte would be given a larger part and would be more explicitly opposed to Alceste. The ridiculous traits that Molière has ascribed to Alceste – pettiness and childish outbursts for example – would be attributed to the philosopher Philinte who would see 'all the disorders of society with a stoical phlegm and [become furious] at the slightest harm directed personally to himself.'<sup>239</sup> Rousseau admits that it would be difficult for this new version of *Le Misanthrope* to be a success, because in order to laugh at Philinte, the Parisian audience would have to laugh at 'the man of the world' ('l'homme du monde'), and 'no one laughs with good grace at his own expense.'<sup>240</sup> But who exactly does Rousseau mean when he calls at least parts of the audience 'men of the world'?

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<sup>237</sup> 'Philinte [...] is one of those decent members of high society whose maxims resemble so much those knaves, one of those gentle, moderate people who always find that everything is fine because it is to their interest that nothing be better, who are always satisfied with everyone because they do not care about anyone; who, at a good dinner, asserts that it is not true that the people are hungry; who, with a well-lined pocket, find it quite disagreeable that some declaim in favour of the poor; who, their own doors well secured, would see the whole of humankind robbed, plundered, slain, and massacred without complaining, given that God has endowed them with a most meritorious gentleness with which they are able to support the misfortunes of others.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.279. 'Ce Philinte est [...] un de ces honnêtes gens du grand monde, dont les maximes ressemblent beaucoup à celles des fripons; de ces gens si doux, si modérés, qui trouvent toujours que tout va bien, parce qu'ils ont intérêt que rien n'aille mieux; qui sont toujours contents de tout le monde, parce qu'ils ne se soucient de personne; qui, autour d'une bonne table, soutiennent qu'il n'est pas vrai que le peuple ait faim; qui, le gousset bien garni, trouvent fort mauvais qu'on déclame en faveur des pauvres; qui, de leur maison bien fermée, verroient voler, piller, égorger, massacrer tout le genre humain sans se plaindre, attendu que Dieu les a doués d'une douceur très méritoire à supporter les malheurs d'autrui.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.36.

<sup>238</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.281. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.39.

<sup>239</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.281. 'devoit voir tous les désordres de la société avec un flegme stoïque, et se mettre en fureur au moindre mal qui s'adressoit directement à lui.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.38.

<sup>240</sup> 'It seems to me that, in treating the characters in question along these lines, each of them would have been truer, more theatrical, and that Alceste would have been incomparably more effective, but then the audience could only have laughed at the expense of the man of the world, and the author's intention was that they laugh at the expense of the Misanthrope.' Rousseau then comments on this in a footnote: 'I see only one difficulty for this new play,



In the preface to *Narcisse* and in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* Rousseau establishes a link between philosophers and the spectators of plays because they both *observe* rather than *live* humanity. As we shall see, it appears that this image comes back in his discussion on the *Misanthrope* because he sees the audience as 'men of the world', while at the same time, 'le philosophe Philinte' is associated with *bienséance* and the social hierarchy of the monarchy. Gregory Brown explains how the literary and aristocratic society merged during the reign of Louis XIV, and this can help us to better understand how Rousseau saw the position of the learned men:

as the court culture of Versailles spread to the networks of urban elite sociability known as *le monde*, the nuance of this vocabulary fell out of use, and 'men of letters' came to refer to those included in the *monde* based not on title or wealth, but on acculturation, as displayed through comportment and self-presentation.<sup>241</sup>

Brown argues that the social norms of the cultural world of eighteenth-century Paris were inherited from the aristocracy and that these norms became the instinctive 'habitus' of the literary elite.<sup>242</sup> Rousseau's 'men of the world' are in other words the philosophers and/or men of letters who have adopted the nobles' social hierarchy: these are, in Rousseau's view, the men writing the plays for the Parisians stage, *and* these are the men (at least some of them) sitting in the audience.

Many of the men of letters were also dependent upon funding from the nobles. Voltaire largely created his own success through the elite patronage system established at the French court in the seventeenth century. Through this system ambitious men without wealth or a noble name could refashion themselves as honourable men through writing for the theatre.<sup>243</sup> Gregory

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which is that it could not succeed. For, whatever one may say, in things that dishonour, no one laughs with good grace at his own expense.' The audience who 'could only have laughed at the expense of the man of the world' are unable to do so, since 'no one laughs with good grace at his own expense.' In other words, the audience must partly consist of men of the world. Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.281. 'Il me semble qu'en traitant les caractères en question sur cette idée, chacun des deux eut été plus vrai, plus théâtral, et que celui d'Alsecte eut fait incomparablement plus d'effet: mais le parterre alors n'auroit pu rire qu'aux dépens de l'homme du monde et l'intention de l'auteur étoit qu'on rit aux dépens du Misanthrope.' He continues in the footnote: 'Je ne vois qu'un inconvenient à cette nouvelle pièce; c'est qu'il seroit impossible qu'elle réussit; car, quoi qu'on dise, en choses qui déshonorent, nul ne rit de bon cœur à ses dépens.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.39.

<sup>241</sup> Gregory Brown, *A Field of honor* (New York, 2005) p.14.

<sup>242</sup> Brown, *A Field of honor*, p.14-16.

<sup>243</sup> See Brown, *A Field of honor*, p.54-61.

Brown has studied how the court culture influenced authors and playwrights of the Old Regime until the Revolution. In the era of Corneille, Racine and Molière the status of writers was largely defined by their relationship with a noble patron. While the protector provided social and economic support, the author ‘had to show himself to be worthy of and appropriate for inclusion in the retinue, and self-presentation therefore became the key determinant of a writer’s status at a court.’<sup>244</sup> The growing practice of artistic patronage became more and more centralised during the seventeenth century and resulted in learned societies and institutions such as the Académie Française and the Comédie Française.<sup>245</sup> Voltaire’s path to success was secured when he began writing dramatic works and eagerly cultivating contacts with and support from the court. Thanks to his great fame and accumulated personal fortune, he was later able to gain independence from the court and autonomy in his status as a man of letters. Brown writes that Voltaire’s path to a triumphant career, via the nobles, served as an example and an inspiration for future generations of authors.<sup>246</sup> But Rousseau chose a different approach. Already in his First discourse, he had aimed a comment at Voltaire and his life choices: ‘Tell us, famed Arouet, how many vigorous and strong beauties have you sacrificed to our false delicacy, and how many great things has the spirit of gallantry, so fertile in small things, cost you?’<sup>247</sup>

And later, Rousseau promoted the image of himself as refusing both the rules of decorum and the social and financial security of a royal pension – he did not want to risk becoming a man of the world. For example, in the *Con-*

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<sup>244</sup> Brown, *A Field of honor*, p.37.

<sup>245</sup> Brown, *A Field of honor*, p.37-38.

<sup>246</sup> Brown, *A Field of honor*, p.61.

<sup>247</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and arts*, p.15. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.21. It should be said that Rousseau also expresses admiration for Voltaire. For example he writes in a letter to Voltaire, 11 December 1745: ‘For the past fifteen years I have been working in order to make myself worthy of your attention, and the care you give young Muses in whom you see some talent.’ ‘Il y a quinze ans que je travaille pour me rendre digne de vos regards, et des soins dont vous favorisez les jeunes Muses en qui vous découvrez quelque talent.’ In Rousseau, *CC*, vol. 2, p. 92–93 (Letter 139). It is also worth noting that the only time Voltaire is mentioned by name in the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, Rousseau writes that ‘Let Voltaire deign to compose tragedies for us on the models of *la Mort de César* and the first act of *Brutus*; and, if we must absolutely have a theatre, let him engage himself always to fill it with his genius and to live as long as his plays.’ Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.340-41. Jean Rousset comments in his notes to the *Lettre* that, however surprising, this reference to Voltaire is tactical, and can be explained by the choice of the two tragedies Rousseau refers to: ‘Roman and republican pieces that animate the passion of liberty and the hatred of tyrants.’ ‘pieces romaines et républicaines qu’animent la passion de la liberté et la haine des tyrans’; Rousset in Rousseau, *OC, Lettre*, p.1373 (footnote 3 for p.111).

*Confessions*, Rousseau describes how he appeared at court unshaven, with an uncombed wig and in his everyday clothing when his opera *Le Devin du village* premiered at Fontainebleau in the presence of Louis XV in 1752.<sup>248</sup> To avoid an audience with the king, who supposedly wanted to offer him a pension, Rousseau left Fontainebleau the following morning. He evokes what such a pension would have implied: 'Farewell truth, freedom, courage.'<sup>249</sup>

Rousseau describes the man of the world as being entirely 'in his mask' in *Emile* (1762), written only a few years after the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. The man of the world does not care about who he really is, but only about how he appears.<sup>250</sup> Thus, it follows that the 'man of the world' is linked to the role of both the philosopher and the spectator; because through his politeness, Philinte, the 'man of the world' – always 'in his mask' – is also connected to the actor, the actor who in the *Lettre* is condemned as '[a] mixture of abjectness, duplicity, ridiculous conceit, and disgraceful abasement which renders him fit for all sorts of roles except for the most noble of all, that of man, which he abandons.'<sup>251</sup> Just as in the case of *les philosophes* and the spectators, Rousseau judges the actors within the Parisian theatre system as lacking in humanity or as being without human purpose.

In Philinte, Rousseau saw the image of the philosopher, of the spectator and of the actor, all gathered into a triple-edged character encapsulating all that he thought was wrong with the world: i.e. systematisation of thought, observation without interaction, and appearing rather than simply being. Therefore, in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, 'le philosophe Philinte' portrays the scenic epitome of a 'man of the world', heir of the Parisian literary crown,

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<sup>248</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.5, *Confessions*, book VIII, p.316. 'dans le même équipage négligé qui m'étoit ordinaire; grand barbe et perruque assez mal peignée.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confessions*, book VIII, p.377.

<sup>249</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.5, *Confessions*, book VIII, p.318-19, p.319. 'Adieu la vérité, la liberté, le courage.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confessions*, book VIII, p.379-80, p.80.

<sup>250</sup> 'Almost never being in himself, he is always alien and ill at ease when forced to go back there. What he is, is nothing; what he appears to be is everything for him.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.13, *Emile*, trans. and ed. by Christopher Kelly and Allan Bloom, p.383. 'L'homme du monde est tout entier dans son masque. N'étant presque jamais en lui-même, il y est toujours étranger et mal à son aise, quand il est forcé d'y rentrer. Ce qu'il est n'est rien, ce qu'il paroît est tout pour lui.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.4, *Emile*, ed. Charles Wirz and Pierre Burgelin, p.515.

<sup>251</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.309. 'Un mélange de bassesse, de fausseté, de ridicule orgueil, et d'indigne avilissement, qui le rend propre à toutes sortes de personages, hors le plus noble de tous, celui d'homme qu'il abandonne.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.73. For further reading on Rousseau and the actor, see Pierre Frantz, 'Rousseau et l'acteur', in *Rousseau et le spectacle*, p.17-29.

glorified by himself on his own public stage.<sup>252</sup> This is Rousseau's image of his adversaries: these are the men that with the help of the stage are trying to spread their enlightenment, manners and virtues to the people. As inheritors of the hierarchic system of *bienséance*, inspired by the society of appearance and Louis XIV, these men of the world infiltrate the theatre from all sides: from the stage to the auditorium, from backstage to the salons. By using the theatre as a medium to teach people morals, and at the same time both accepting and promoting politeness and decorum as part of those morals, the men of letters are actively entertaining the *aesthetic perfectibility* of the Parisian theatre: true sentiments are again replaced by maxims about sentiments (see Chapter 2). The 'is' of being is replaced by the 'should' of appearance. And thus, through the Sun King's politeness-power-performance system – still seemingly active in the eighteenth century – Rousseau observes the process of *aesthetic perfectibility* in 'real time'.

### Didactics – a means of preserving intellectual influence

While the *Lettre à d'Alembert* can be seen as a critique of courtly *bienséance* and the 'man of the world' in general, it was directed towards three men of letters in particular. As Jean Rousset writes in his introduction to the *Lettre à d'Alembert*: 'Diderot, d'Alembert (and, implicitly, Voltaire) form the philosophical party that Rousseau is separating himself from, albeit not without heartache.'<sup>253</sup> In the two following subsections I will discuss how Rousseau's *Lettre* was directly or indirectly addressed to these three *philosophes*, who were agents of the Enlightenment and in different ways, according to Rousseau, heirs of *le monde* and its hierarchical social/literary system. I will begin by focusing on d'Alembert and Voltaire, and then discuss Diderot in the following section.

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<sup>252</sup> Interestingly, d'Alembert seems to have picked up on the point that Rousseau tries to make through the character of Philinte. In a reply to the *Lettre*, d'Alembert ends his message to Rousseau with the words: 'I am, with all the respect that your virtue and your talents deserve, and with more truth than the Philinte of Molière, Sir, Your very humble and very obedient servant.' Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Letter of M. d'Alembert to M. J.J. Rousseau*, in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.247.

<sup>253</sup> 'Diderot, d'Alembert (et, sous-entendu, Voltaire), c'est le parti philosophique dont Rousseau est en train, non sans déchirements, de se séparer'; Jean Rousset, introduction to *Lettre à d'Alembert*, in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, p.XXX- XLIV, p.XXXI.

The *Encyclopédie* project was in many ways the crucible of the French Enlightenment, led as it was by its editors Diderot and d’Alembert and supported by a long list of learned men, including Rousseau, whom the editors commissioned to write the articles. The *encyclopédistes* were persistently progressive, aiming to fight the obscurantism caused by religion and superstition, to describe and share present-day knowledge in each entry, and to expose the cause of the gaps in present-day knowledge.<sup>254</sup> Consequently, despite its royal support and huge success, the *Encycopédie* faced forceful resistance from religious and conservative institutions such as the Parisian parliament and the Sorbonne. For example, the violent debates caused by d’Alembert’s article on the city of Geneva, published 1757 in the seventh volume, was to have serious consequences for the *Encyclopédie*, causing both d’Alembert’s resignation as editor, and the withdrawal of the royal privileges.<sup>255</sup>

The article on Geneva in many ways gives a positive assessment of the city, describing its picturesque location by the lake, its religious history, its political order as a republic, its many happy marriages, and its sumptuary laws forbidding superfluous luxury.<sup>256</sup> But these harmless topics are followed by two that were to cause great controversy.

Firstly, d’Alembert proposes that Geneva should allow public theatre performances as they could help educate the people in decorum and *bienséance*. He writes that they ‘would form the taste of the citizens and would give them a fineness of tact, a delicacy of sentiments’ which he thinks would be hard to achieve without theatre.<sup>257</sup> What made this suggestion more challenging was that d’Alembert implied that future actors in Geneva, with the help of ‘wise regulations,’ could eventually become a respected group of society and thus help cultivate the people. In this way the Genevan actors would set an example for the rest of Europe.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ourida Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève et la république des lettres: étude de la controverse autour de la Lettre à d’Alembert de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (New York, 2003), p.27. In the Chapter ‘L’Article “Genève” de d’Alembert: De l’usage polémique de l’éloge dans l’*Encyclopédie*’, p.17-46, Mostefai gives an account of the societal situation surrounding the *Encyclopédie*, its scientific attitudes and goals, and provides an analysis of d’Alembert’s article on Geneva in this context.

<sup>255</sup> Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.18-19.

<sup>256</sup> In the following, I refer to d’Alembert’s article in its English translation published in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, Jean le Rond d’Alembert, ‘Geneva’, p.239-49. For the French original, see the article ‘Genève’, in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol.7, p.578-578D.

<sup>257</sup> D’Alembert, ‘Geneva’, in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.244.

<sup>258</sup> D’Alembert, ‘Geneva’, in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.244-45.

Secondly, d’Alembert claims that many of Geneva’s Calvinist pastors no longer believed in Hell, and that they ‘have no religion other than a complete Socinianism.’<sup>259</sup> Ourida Mostefai has shown how the two topics of theatre and religion can superficially appear to be separate, but that in d’Alembert’s argument they are in fact strongly linked to each other. For what d’Alembert highlights in his description of the religious situation in Geneva is the progressive and philosophic character of Socinian beliefs: ‘rejecting all those things which are called mysteries, and imagining that the first principle of a true religion is to propose nothing to belief which offends reason.’<sup>260</sup> D’Alembert also underlines that ‘[m]any do not believe any more in the divinity of Jesus Christ, of which their leader Calvin was so zealous a defender and for which he had Servet burned,’<sup>261</sup> in order to remind his readers of the fanaticism of the founding religious leader, and his cruelty towards those who opposed his school of thought.<sup>262</sup> By emphasising what were still sensitive topics for the Genevan church – i.e. having ‘heretic’ pastors (going against the beliefs of Calvin) in a city state with a history of burning heretics – d’Alembert builds a case in favour of enlightened tolerance in which both theatre and religion have a role to play. Mostefai writes that:

the city of Geneva gives d’Alembert the dream occasion to at the same time approach two fundamental aspects of the philosophic campaign in favour of tolerance concerning both mores/morals and religion. This involves both to present an enlightened and philosophic religion that does not clash with reason, and to propose the establishment of a theatre that permits spreading these new ideas.<sup>263</sup>

These arguments were not entirely d’Alembert’s own, but as Mostefai points out, should be seen as part of Voltaire’s work for tolerance of theatre and religion.<sup>264</sup> D’Alembert does not try to hide this, but on the contrary he uses

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<sup>259</sup> D’Alembert, ‘Geneva’, in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.247.

<sup>260</sup> D’Alembert, ‘Geneva’, in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.248.

<sup>261</sup> D’Alembert, ‘Geneva’, in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.247.

<sup>262</sup> Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.39-41.

<sup>263</sup> Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.41: ‘La ville de Genève fournit à d’Alembert l’occasion rêvée pour aborder conjointement deux aspects fondamentaux de la campagne philosophique en faveur de la tolérance en matière de mœurs aussi bien qu’en matière de religion. Il s’agit à la fois de présenter une religion éclairée et philosophe, qui ne heurte pas la raison, et de proposer l’établissement d’un théâtre qui permette de disséminer les idées nouvelles.’

<sup>264</sup> Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.41. For example, Voltaire is known for having fought for the human rights of French actors. At the time, actors were dishonourable in the eyes of the church, which therefore refused to offer them the sacraments unless they were to officially

it in support of his arguments in repeatedly alluding to Voltaire who a few years earlier had moved to Geneva.<sup>265</sup> In fact, Voltaire appears to have been instrumental in d'Alembert's suggestion of building a theatre in Geneva.<sup>266</sup> At the time of d'Alembert's article, Voltaire was the dominant playwright in French theatre, and after moving to Geneva he attempted to transmit a liberal view of theatre to the city.<sup>267</sup> From 1755, Voltaire resided in his Genevan house Les Délices, and in 1756 d'Alembert visited him there to do research for his *Encyclopédie* article.<sup>268</sup>

Seen as a symbol of French culture, Voltaire staged plays in his home and these performances became popular among the Genevan upper class.<sup>269</sup> When Voltaire met resistance from within the city, he simply continued to stage plays nearby, in his second home in Lausanne,<sup>270</sup> and in 1761 he had a 300-seat theatre built in Ferney (just across the French border), and he helped organise a theatre in Châtelaine (also on French land, not far from Geneva).<sup>271</sup> Following political unrest in the Geneva in 1766 Voltaire supported the building of a wooden theatre in the city, where a Parisian reper-

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renounce their profession. Therefore, actors who had not done so before their death were refused a Christian burial. See Carlson, *Voltaire and the theatre of the eighteenth century*, p.39-40.

<sup>265</sup> Mostefai also suggests that there are strong similarities between d'Alembert's article on Geneva and Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* where protestant England is presented as an example of liberty, p.34-35.

<sup>266</sup> For a parallel reading of Rousseau and Voltaire's respective relation to and thoughts about Geneva, see David Wiles, *Theatre and citizenship*, who in the chapter 'Geneva: Rousseau versus Voltaire', p.110-47, shows how both Rousseau and Voltaire's ideas about theatre were closely connected to their respective conceptions of citizenship.

<sup>267</sup> For an overview of Voltaire as a playwright, see Carlson, *Voltaire and the theatre of the eighteenth century*.

<sup>268</sup> Ralph A. Leigh writes that d'Alembert in late August 1756 stayed about fifteen days in Geneva and Les Délices, and that it was 'during this visit he sought documentation for his article Genève [...] the article that was going to unleash a storm, of which Voltaire was the presumed instigator'; 'au cours de cette visite qu'il se documenta pour son article Genève, [...] article qui devait déchaîner un orage, et dont on soupçonna Voltaire d'être l'instigateur'; Ralph A. Leigh, editorial comment to a letter from Voltaire to Rousseau, Sunday, 12 September 1756, in *CC*, vol.4, p.102-103, footnote 3, (Letter 437).

<sup>269</sup> Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva: from the First discourse to the Social contract, 1749-1762*, (Cambridge, 2007), p.221: 'As the very personification of French culture and sophisticated wit, Voltaire became an irresistible attraction for the upper classes' who 'flocked to his home [...] in order surreptitiously and privately to enjoy the delights of French culture behind closed doors.'

<sup>270</sup> Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, p.222.

<sup>271</sup> Wiles, *Theatre and citizenship*, p.131; and Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.41.

toire was played.<sup>272</sup> There can be no doubt that when Rousseau was composing the *Lettre à d'Alembert* in 1758, he was perfectly aware of Voltaire's presence in Geneva. In a letter to Jacob Vernes, dated October 1758, Rousseau writes that 'I was not unaware that the article 'Genève' partly came from M. Voltaire; even though I had the discretion not to mention it, it will be easy for you to see when reading the work, that when writing it I was aware of the situation.'<sup>273</sup> A couple of years later he writes in a letter to Paul Claude Moulou, concerning luxury's influence on inequality, that Voltaire has destroyed his fatherland, and further that 'I was mistaken in my *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*. I did not think that our progress was so great, nor that our mores had advanced so much. Our ills are from now on without remedy, we only need palliatives, and comedy is one of these.'<sup>274</sup>

How then did Rousseau position himself in relation to d'Alembert's (and implicitly Voltaire's) claims about tolerance and religion? And in what way did he perceive these claims as connected to the question of building a theatre in Geneva? D'Alembert's statement about the Genevan clergy is what occupies Rousseau in the first few pages of the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, and it creates an important backdrop for his subsequent discussions of the establishment of a theatre in the city. Rousseau begins by questioning how d'Alembert could have obtained such knowledge about the ministers' beliefs, and he concludes that they must have told d'Alembert themselves. However, if this was the case, then they must have done so in secret 'to the Philosopher and not to the Author', and the very fact that d'Alembert has published something about it, means that he was either betraying the minis-

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<sup>272</sup> Wiles, *Theatre and citizenship*, p.133. Wiles (p.133) writes that 'Amid threats of a general strike, and a withdrawal by the General Council from constitutional participation, the oligarchy called in the French army to 'mediate' and prevent civil war. Voltaire seized his opportunity, and persuaded the French mediator to insist, as part of the settlement, that a theatre should be set up on Genevan soil.' This theatre, by the Genevans called the 'Grange des Étrangers', did however burn down in 1768. It was after the Genevan Revolution in 1782 that a theatre in stone was first constructed in the same location. See Wiles, p.135-36.

<sup>273</sup> 'Je n'ignorois pas que l'article Genève étoit en partie de M. de Voltaire; quoique j'aye eue la discretion de n'en rien dire, il vous sera aisé de voir par la lecture de l'ouvrage que je sa vois en l'écrivant à quoi m'en tenir.' Rousseau to Jacob Vernes, Sunday, 22 October 1758, in Rousseau, *CC*, vol. 5, p.183-86 (Letter 715). See also Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.41, who points to this letter.

<sup>274</sup> 'je me suis trompé dans ma *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*. Je ne croyois pas nos progrès si grands ni nos moeurs si avancées. Nos maux sont desormais sans remède, il ne nous faut plus que des palliatifs, et la comedie en est un.' Rousseau to Paul Claude Moulou, 29 January 1760, in Rousseau, *CC*, vol.7, p.23-26 (Letter 933).



ters' trust, or that he had not learned about their supposedly 'heretical' beliefs directly from them.<sup>275</sup>

This is part of a larger argument in which Rousseau questions how anyone could judge someone else's beliefs, arguing that it is hard to know anything about them and that if 'a man cannot believe what he finds absurd, it is not his fault; it is that of his reason.'<sup>276</sup> Rousseau further claims to have found an argument that might leave both the fanatic believers and the non-believers without weapons: the argument that human reason cannot be measured by comparing it to someone else's rules, because such a measure does not exist.<sup>277</sup> As Patrick Coleman has pointed out, Rousseau is going against both *les philosophes* and the Genevan clergy here, because he is emphasising a preference for 'individual conscience' over 'universal standards'.<sup>278</sup> In stressing the precedence of autonomous and independent thinking in relation to opinions and beliefs stemming from general/universal didactics, Rousseau appears to place himself both in the middle and outside of the ongoing battle between the Enlightenment and religion. He writes that if only pride and personal interest could be set aside, the never-ending conflict between the philosophers and the church could come to an end, but that maybe this is not in the interest of either the church or *les philosophes*, for then 'the former would have no one to torment, the latter no one to convince', and in such a situation he concludes, they 'might as well leave the trade'.<sup>279</sup>

The *Lettre à d'Alembert* is not the first time that Rousseau discussed and compared these opposing groups in a text concerning theatre. In the preface to *Narcisse* Rousseau expresses his astonishment that *les philosophes* seem to take his critique of art and science as personal attacks, which is something he sees as unnecessary. But, he writes, these men of letters care more about their own reputation and importance than they do about the arts and sciences. That is, they defend *their* Enlightenment to 'maintain their own importance'

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<sup>275</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.258. 'au Philosophe, et non pas à l'Auteur'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.10.

<sup>276</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.258. 'Quand un homme ne peut croire ce qu'il trouve absurde, ce n'est pas sa faute, c'est celle de sa raison'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.11.

<sup>277</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.258. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.11.

<sup>278</sup> Coleman, *Rousseau's political imagination*, p.28-29.

<sup>279</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.258, in author's note. 'Mais peut-être ne seroit-ce le compte ni des uns ni des autres: il n'y auroit plus ni persecutions ni disputes; les premiers n'auroient personne à tourmenter; les seconds, personne à convaincre: autant vaudroit quitter le métier.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.11.

in the century of Enlightenment: 'It is like the priests of paganism, who only supported religion as long as it made them respected.'<sup>280</sup> The comparison between *les philosophes* and men of religion goes further in the preface to *Narcisse* than in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, because, as will be seen below, Rousseau had an interest in liberating the Genevan ministers from d'Alembert's claim about their beliefs departing from their church's founding father. But the way in which he argues for the right to an independent opinion, the way in which he motivates his response to d'Alembert, certainly corresponds with his views in the preface to *Narcisse*, where he writes about taking a position that supports one's personal interests through the political or religious group that one represents, instead of taking an autonomous point of view that is purely one's own, however self-damaging.

At the same time, as Coleman has noticed, Rousseau is both defending the individual right to a personal conviction, and trying to justify the right of smaller groups of people or societies, such as the city state of Geneva, to preserve and sustain their own particular customs, traditions and beliefs.<sup>281</sup> Rousseau writes that if he needed to defend his own involvement in the debate about the clergy and theatre of Geneva he would say 'that I speak to the many and that I am explaining practical truths, that I base myself on experience, that I am fulfilling my duty.'<sup>282</sup> This statement is interesting for several reasons. First of all because his claim to 'speak to the many' through 'practical truths' creates a great contrast to d'Alembert who begins his argument about the clergy by writing that '[i]t is the part of this article which perhaps most interests philosophers.'<sup>283</sup> Secondly, because Rousseau is emphasising his position as a native Genevan who can speak 'from experience' while 'fulfilling his duty' as citizen. And in this role as citizen, he defends the Genevan clergy. For, as Coleman states, Rousseau's main aim in addressing the question about the pastors, is to preserve the religious and social peace in the city. Rousseau makes it clear that a foreigner, such as d'Alembert, has no

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<sup>280</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Preface to Narcissus*, p.198. 'C'est comme les prêtres du paganisme, qui ne tenoient à la religion qu'autant qu'elle les faisoit respecter.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Préface to Narcisse, ou L'Amant de lui-même*, p.974.

<sup>281</sup> Coleman, *Rousseau's political imagination*, p.29

<sup>282</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.258-59. 'que je parle au plus grand nombre, que j'expose des vérités de pratique, que je me fonde sur l'expérience, que je remplis mon devoir'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.11.

<sup>283</sup> D'Alembert, 'Geneva', in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.246. See also Coleman, *Rousseau's political imagination*, p.27, who when discussing Rousseau's writing 'for the many' argues that Rousseau would have claimed that the *Encyclopédie* 'despite its avowed purpose, is aimed at a very narrow section of the public, one that precisely does not have "the many" in mind.'

‘good authorities’ to interfere in the matters of his fatherland.<sup>284</sup> As a citizen, Rousseau can tell d’Alembert that the ministers of Geneva are much more than mere men of the church.<sup>285</sup> Rousseau’s identification with the Genevan people, and his view of the broader role of the pastors, can be seen in the following passage:

It is of import to *us* to preserve them [the ministers] such as they are. It is of import for *us* that they themselves enjoy the peace which they make *us* love, and that odious disputes of Theology trouble no more either their repose or ours. It is of import for *us*, finally, always to learn from their lessons and their example that gentleness and humanity are also the virtues of the Christian.<sup>286</sup>  
[Emphasis added.]

In this way, Rousseau persistently positions himself as both a citizen of Geneva, and as an independent person, free from any philosophic or religious movement. It is against this backdrop, that he delves into the topic of a potential theatre in his native city, a topic that for a long time has been a burning question between ‘the Men of the church and the Men of the world’ (‘les Gens d’Eglise et les Gens du monde’).<sup>287</sup>

Rousseau comes back to the relation between the learned men and the clergy in the first paragraphs of the *Lettre à d’Alembert* devoted to the establishment of a theatre in Geneva: The debate about the effects of theatre on people’s morals and virtue is still alive and unresolved because the philosophers and religious men are the only ones discussing it, and they are both blinded by their own prejudices. Rousseau writes that d’Alembert’s article on Geneva has made it necessary to clarify certain things, a task he has taken

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<sup>284</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.257; ‘sans de bonnes autorités’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.10.

<sup>285</sup> Coleman, *Rousseau’s political imagination*, p.28.

<sup>286</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.261. ‘Il *nous* importe de les conserver tels qu’ils sont. Il *nous* import qu’ils jouissent eux-mêmes de la paix qu’ils nous font aimer, et que d’odieuses disputes de Théologie ne troublent plus leur repos ni le nôtre. Il *nous* import enfin, d’apprendre toujours par leurs leçons et par leur exemple, que la douceur et l’humanité sont aussi les vertus du Chrétien.’ (Emphasis added.) Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.14. See also Primavesi, who in his study of the *Lettre* underlines Rousseau’s use of ‘*We*, *Us* or *Our*, indicating the community of Citizens of Geneva, united in the same cause, against all these foreigners that, willingly or not, fail to really understand the needs and the potentials of this particular city.’ Primavesi, ‘The dramaturgy of Rousseau’s *Lettre à d’Alembert*’, p.51-75, p.56, in *Rousseau on stage*.

<sup>287</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.261; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.15.

upon himself to fulfil ‘a duty toward my Fatherland’ (‘un devoir envers ma Patrie’).<sup>288</sup>

Mostefai has demonstrated that this position, from which Rousseau chooses to write the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, resonates in the work’s full title, which could be seen as a condensed version of the whole main argument of the text, which is to contrast a republican, pure and transparent Geneva with a monarchical, corrupt and artificial Paris. The symbolic purpose of the title is to prevent the intrusion of Parisian ways and morals into his native city.<sup>289</sup> As many researchers have noted before, Rousseau presents a long list of his opponent’s titles and affiliations with various learned academies and monarchies, while simply naming himself ‘Citizen of Geneva’.<sup>290</sup> In the work’s long title, d’Alembert is designated as a man of the world, a man representing the big city of Paris, of the *Encyclopédie* project and at the same time, as a man of numerous learned societies, in a way that appears extreme in contrast to the short yet forceful, ‘Citizen of Geneva’.<sup>291</sup>

Mostefai argues that with this title and in his subsequent development of the argument, Rousseau launches his autobiographical writings and proposes a new way of thinking about the relation between society and the author as an individual thinker. For while *les philosophes* insisted on society as the right place for both humanity and philosophy, on the role of the philosopher/author as a central part of that society, and on the theatre being one of the most useful tools for spreading their enlightened ideas, Rousseau propos-

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<sup>288</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.261-62; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.15.

<sup>289</sup> Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.108-109. For further reading on the implications of the full title of the *Lettre*, see Mostefai’s chapter ‘Un titre qui porte son nom: J.J Rousseau en toutes lettres’, p.103-24.

<sup>290</sup> *J.J. ROUSSEAU CITIZEN OF GENEVA TO M. D’ALEMBERT Of the French Academy, The Royal Academy of Sciences of Paris, the Prussian Academy, the Royal Society of London, the Royal Academy of Literature of Sweden, and the Institute of Bologna; On his Article GENEVA In the seventh volume of l’Encyclopédie, AND ESPECIALLY On the project of establishing a DRAMATIC Theater in that City*, Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.251. *Letter to d’Alembert, J. J. ROUSSEAU CITOYEN DE GENÈVE, À M. D’ALEMBERT De l’Académie française, de l’Académie Royale des Sciences de Paris, de celle de Prusse, de la Société Royale de Londres, de l’Académie Royale des Belles-Lettres de Suède, et de l’Institut de Bologne: Sur son Article GENÈVE Dans le VII<sup>e</sup> Volume de l’ENCYCLOPÉDIE ET PARTICULIÈREMENT, sur le projet d’établir un THÉÂTRE DE COMÉDIE en cette Ville*, Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, p.1. For additional readings on the full title of the *Lettre*, see Rousseau on stage, discussed in both Felicity Baker’s article ‘The anthropological foresight of the *Lettre sur les spectacles*’, p.25-49, p.25, and Primavesi’s contribution ‘The dramaturgy of Rousseau’s *Lettre à d’Alembert*’, p.52-53.

<sup>291</sup> Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.109-10.

es a philosophic model based on autonomous solitude and on a profound knowledge of the independent self.<sup>292</sup> Mostefai writes that

For Rousseau, philosophy is the place of man, and not that of acquired learning as conceived by the *Encyclopédie*. Rousseau refuses the instrumental thinking of the philosophers and opposes himself to those for whom philosophy is primarily seen as a tool.<sup>293</sup>

Mostefai argues that the *Encyclopédie* project moved in the direction of an ‘enlightened *us*’ in which the individual author became more and more invisible in favour of a collective society of philosophy. This is part of the reason why Rousseau perceived the philosophy of his adversaries as a systematisation of opinions and ideology and therefore as a forgetting of the autonomous self, which he sees as the only source of truth. Consequently, publishing the *Lettre à d’Alembert* constituted a severe break with the ‘men of the world’.<sup>294</sup>

Again, we see how Rousseau’s thought structure, here designated as *aesthetic perfectibility*, is linked to his view of the learned men’s relation to the Parisian theatre. For their power position in society is not only maintained through the legacy of *bienséance* and the Sun King, it is also upheld through an exclusion of the autonomous *I* in favour of a didactic *we* (see Chapter 2).<sup>295</sup> And this *we* has with time become more important to the members of the movement than its original goal of spreading enlightenment. The growth of the movement has become its first priority, because without its progress, the power that comes with it is lost. Thus, personal interest in keeping that power makes the members of the movement ready to promote and support it at whatever cost, even when it means giving precedence to the movement as a group over that of its own cause.

Rousseau’s position as author in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* and his belief in autonomous and independent thinking – free from philosophical and religious movements – also carries implications for our understanding of his thoughts about theatre aesthetics and the public festival as an alternative

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<sup>292</sup> Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.9-10, 59, and the chapter ‘Un titre qui porte son nom: J.J Rousseau en toutes lettres’, p.103-139.

<sup>293</sup> ‘Pour Rousseau, la philosophie est le lieu de l’homme, et non celui d’un savoir d’appropriation tel que l’*Encyclopédie* le conçoit. Rousseau refuse la pensée instrumentale des philosophes et s’oppose à ceux pour qui la philosophie est avant tout un outil.’ Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.132.

<sup>294</sup> Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.132-33.

<sup>295</sup> Rousseau’s ‘autonomous I’ does not need to refer to one particular individual, but could very well be represented by a group of people with similar experiences or thoughts.

form of theatre. In order to investigate these consequences, the importance of Denis Diderot, one of the hidden addressees of the *Lettre*, will now be discussed.

### Diderot's *comédie sérieuse* versus Rousseau's public festival

As argued by several scholars, Diderot is an implicit addressee of the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. Rousseau contradicts Diderot's conviction that the Parisian theatre is a potential school of virtue and he contradicts some of his dramaturgical and reformist ideas.<sup>296</sup> Furthermore it appears that Diderot also perceived the *Lettre* as directed towards himself. Soon after its publication, Diderot writes that the *Lettre* by his former friend was partly written against him, reasoning that Rousseau must have judged actors unsympathetically because he (Diderot) thought highly of the profession, and that the genre of *comédie sérieuse* (serious comedy) was criticised 'because it is my genre'.<sup>297</sup>

Diderot's writings on the theatre constitute an interesting counterpoint to the *Lettre à d'Alembert* and its aesthetic-political propositions. While opposing Diderot on many vital points, several of Rousseau's arguments in the *Lettre* are quite similar to Diderot's opinions about theatre aesthetics ex-

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<sup>296</sup> Michael O'Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: music, illusion, desire*, p.84; and, Ourida Mostefai, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau écrivain polémique*, p.52. On the relation between Rousseau and Diderot, see for example Jean Fabre, 'Deux frères ennemis: Diderot et Jean-Jacques', in *Diderot Studies* III, (Geneva, 1961), p.155-213; and the collective volumes *Diderot/Rousseau: un entretien à distance*, ed. Franck Salaün (Paris, 2006); *Diderot et Rousseau: Littérature, science et philosophie*, ed. Gerhardt Stenger (Haute-Goulaine, 2014). Concerning the two thinkers and the theatre, see Marian Hobson, *The object of art*, p.160-65, and her Chapter 6, 'Spectators', p.180-93; Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.54-63; and concerning their respective early thinking about music, see Michael O'Dea, 'Autour du *Devin du Village*: philosophie, littérature et musique entre amis', in *Diderot et Rousseau*, p.117-25.

<sup>297</sup> 'il dit du mal du comique larmoyant, parce que c'est mon genre'; Denis Diderot, 1758 (probably October), in Rousseau, *CC*, vol.5, p. 281-85 (Letter A206). See also Michael O'Dea who refers to this citation by Diderot in 'Autour du *Devin du village*', p.124. Rousseau writes in the *Lettre* – as Mostefai underlines in *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.84 – probably aiming at Diderot's new genre: 'Our contemporary authors, guided by the best of intentions, write more refined plays. But what happens then? They are no longer really comic and produce no effect. They are very instructive, if you please; but they are even more boring. One might as well go to a sermon.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.285. 'Nos auteurs modernes guidés par de meilleures intentions, font des pièces plus épurées; mais aussi qu'arrive-t-il ? Qu'elles n'ont plus de vrai comique, et ne produisent aucun effet. Elles instruisent beaucoup, si l'on veut; mais elles ennuyent encore davantage. Autant vaudroit aller au sermon.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.43.

pressed in the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* (1757), that is, both authors could be said to criticise the systematisation of thought and strict rules of the theatre inherited from the time of Louis XIV. But while Rousseau intends to abolish all frames and rules of theatre through the public festival, the aim of Diderot's *De la poésie dramatique* (1758) was to create new rules (and, as we shall see, new *rulers*). Because of this complex correlation it will be useful to do a parallel reading of their thoughts about theatre to see if and how Rousseau's text can be seen as an autocritique of the theatre of the Enlightenment, written from inside the movement.

One of Diderot's chief aims with the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* was to open the classical theatre stage to a broader set of characters beyond the customary royalty and heroes. Diderot suggests that a wider variety of social classes should be shown on stage in a genre somewhere in between tragedy and comedy, which he calls 'serious drama' ('genre sérieux').<sup>298</sup> Through this genre, Diderot wishes to move away from the character categories and temperamental types of classic theatre and focus on groups according to their occupation and social roles.<sup>299</sup> While the stage decoration should display 'the real world' ('le monde réel'),<sup>300</sup> the plot should be 'modelled on real life' ('voisine de la vie réelle')<sup>301</sup> and the dramatist should strive to give the actors lines that reflect 'what everyone would say in the same situation' ('ce que tout le monde dirait en pareil cas').<sup>302</sup> This would make it possible for the spectators to recognise themselves in what was portrayed in the theatre. The action on stage should be 'far from perfect', and especially 'when passions are running high [...] it is ridiculous for actors to stand in a circle, symmetrically placed at some considerable distance apart from one another.'<sup>303</sup> Diderot hopes for gestures and other bodily actions to become more real or 'natural' on stage – he wants to move away from the stiff rhetorical acting inherited from the time of Racine and Corneille.

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<sup>298</sup> Denis Diderot, *Conversations on The Natural son*, in English translation by Barbara Kerklake in *Sources of dramatic theory, 2: Voltaire to Hugo* (Cambridge, 1994), ed. Michael J. Sidnell, p.51. Denis Diderot, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, in *Œuvre esthétiques* (Paris, 1959), ed. Paul Vernière, p.136.

<sup>299</sup> Diderot, *Conversations*, p.56; Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.154.

<sup>300</sup> Diderot, *Conversations*, p.45; Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.113.

<sup>301</sup> Diderot, *Conversations*, p.52; Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.139.

<sup>302</sup> Diderot, *Conversations*, p.42; Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.99.

<sup>303</sup> Diderot, *Conversations*, p.40. 'Il faut que l'action théâtrale soit bien imparfaite encore'; 'il est ridicule [...] lorsque les passions sont portées à l'excès [...] de se tenir en rond, séparés, à une certaine distance les uns des autres, et dans un ordre symétrique.' Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.89.

Furthermore, while complaining that there ‘are no longer any public entertainments,’ Diderot glorifies the spectacles of the ancients and contrasts the grandeur of the Athenian and Roman spectacles with the restrictions of the theatrical auditorium of his own time:<sup>304</sup>

What a difference there is between providing entertainment for a few hundred people, on a given day, within certain hours, in some crowded, dimly-lit non-descript space [un petit endroit obscur], and holding an entire nation transfixed, on solemn national occasions, in the most magnificent buildings [...] filled with vast numbers of people whose pleasure or boredom will depend on our talents alone!<sup>305</sup>

Here, he argues that while modern theatre has corrupted useful things like ‘simplicity of plot and dialogue,’ it has managed to preserve the heritage of the ‘extravagant versification of the ancients,’ which is not suited to modern drama. In his new genre Diderot wants to let go of unnecessary versifications and instead have the dialogue in prose.<sup>306</sup>

Rousseau expresses similar opinions in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* about the theatre of French classicism.<sup>307</sup> Rousseau, like Diderot, complains that real people are rarely shown on stage: in comedy the characters are beneath regular men, and in tragedy they exceed humanity through their heroic traits. Thus, the poet never creates characters ‘to his measure, and we always see Beings other than our own kind in the theatre.’<sup>308</sup> Further, he dislikes that tragic authors make vicious villains speak in beautiful verses, making it easier to forgive their sins.<sup>309</sup> (It is worth noting that Rousseau writes in prose in both his unfinished tragedy *La mort de Lucrèce* from 1754, and later in his

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<sup>304</sup> Diderot, *Conversations*, p.48. ‘il n’y a plus [...] de spectacles publics’; Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.121.

<sup>305</sup> Diderot, *Conversations*, p.48. ‘Quelle difference, entre amuser tel jour, depuis telle jusqu’à telle heure, dans un petit endroit obscure, quelques centaines de personnes; ou fixer l’attention d’une nation entière dans ses jours solonnels, occuper ses edifices les plus sompueux [...] remplis d’une multitude innombrable, don’t l’amusement ou l’ennui va dépendre de notre talent?’ Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.122.

<sup>306</sup> Diderot, *Conversations*, p.48. ‘Nous avons conservé des Anciens l’emphase de la versification [...] et nous avons abandonné la simplicité de l’intrigue et du dialogue’; Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.121. Diderot’s two plays *Le Fils naturel* and *Le Père de famille* are both written in prose.

<sup>307</sup> Theatre in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in France.

<sup>308</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p. *Letter to d’Alembert*, 270. ‘à sa mesure, et toujours nous voyons au theatre d’autres Etre que nos semblables.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.25

<sup>309</sup> Rousseau, *Letter*, *CW*, p.274; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.30-31.



scène lyrique *Pygmalion*.)<sup>310</sup> This indicates that Rousseau, much like Diderot, feels that the Parisian theatre has little to do with the real world. Seeing a play detaches the spectators from the subject of the drama rather than bringing them closer to it, because on stage the morality as well as the manner of speech and costume are so fundamentally different from real life that one would make oneself ridiculous if one imitated its heroes in any way.<sup>311</sup> When arguing later that it is pointless to use heroes on stage to educate ordinary people, Rousseau asks the playwrights to come down from their high horse and try to touch theatregoers with some ‘simple suffering humanity’.<sup>312</sup>

Like Diderot, Rousseau praises the theatres of the ancients and criticises the modern theatre space. And, as several scholars have pointed out, he does so while apparently alluding to Diderot’s *Entretiens* by using similar phrases.<sup>313</sup> Rousseau writes about how at the theatre the Greeks ‘were not closed up in dark prisons’ or ‘gloomy caverns’, that their performers ‘did not need to [...] count out of the corner of their eye the number of people whom they saw coming in the door’, because these great spectacles were ‘given under the Sky before a whole nation.’<sup>314</sup> The main difference between the two thinkers is that while Diderot aims to adapt the art of theatre to the modern theatre auditorium, Rousseau suggests disregarding the theatre auditorium entirely, at least, that is, in his native Geneva, where the traditional public outdoor festivals were already established in the city, and found to be more suited to the local mores and morals.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Wiles, *Theatre and citizenship*, discusses *La mort de Lucrèce*, its prose and relation to Genevan politics, p.117-20 and p.143-44.

<sup>311</sup> ‘The theatre has rules, principles, and a morality apart, just as it has a language and a style of dress that is its own. We say to ourselves that none of this is suitable for us, and that we should think ourselves as ridiculous to adopt the virtues of its Heroes as it would be to speak in verse or to put on Roman clothing.’ Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p. *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.269. ‘Le théâtre a ses règles, ses maxims, sa morale à part, ainsi que son langage et ses vêtements. On se dit bien que rien de tout cela ne nous convient, et l’on se croiroit aussi ridicule d’adopter les vertus de ses Heros que de parler en vers, et d’endosser un habit à la Romaine.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.24.

<sup>312</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p. *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.274. ‘la simple humanité souffrante’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.29.

<sup>313</sup> See for example Mostefai, *Le Citoyen de Genève*, p.55-56; Primavesi, ‘The dramaturgy of Rousseau’s *Lettre à d’Alembert*’, p.61-62; and Robert Niklaus, ‘Diderot et Rousseau: pour et contre le théâtre’, in *Diderot Studies*, Vol. 4 (1963), p.153-189, p.166-67.

<sup>314</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p. *Letter*, p.308 and 343. ‘Leur théâtres [...] n’étoient point renfermés dans d’obscures prisons; leurs acteurs n’avoient pas besoin [...] de comter du coin de l’œil les gens qu’ils voyoient passer la porte’; ‘donnés sous le Ciel à la face de toute une nation’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.72.

<sup>315</sup> ‘What! Ought there to be no Entertainments in a Republic? On the contrary, there ought to be many. It is in Republics that they were born, it is in their bosom that they are seen to flour-

Diderot's aim was to transform French theatre into a better school of virtue than it had been, while Rousseau's goal was to destroy any illusion of such a school. Nevertheless, it appears as if the aesthetic thinking of the two men was at least partly in agreement: they both praised the ancients and criticised the theatre of French classicism.<sup>316</sup> And in both cases, this critique served as background to a vision of a new type of theatrical spectacle, with Diderot promoting the serious genre (also called *drame bourgeois*) as a genre between classic tragedy and comedy, and Rousseau trying to rid himself of the former genres entirely by encouraging public festivals as an alternative to theatre. Despite their common platform in the critique of French classicism, there are however two political notions in their writings of this period that made their respective aesthetics irreconcilable. While they agree that *the people* should be addressed, that the characters displayed should be more similar to regular man, and that lines in verse distance the modern audience from the content of the play, their views on the following differ immensely: 1) on the presence of someone controlling things from behind the stage, and 2) on what the relation between the audience and the actors should be.

These differences become even clearer when we place the two works next to each other and look more closely at Diderot's *De la poésie dramatique*, published the same year as the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. For here, Diderot repeatedly underlines the importance of a theatre leader or supervisor, who would ensure that the theatre should be both the present and the future school of virtue. Diderot asks who might lead the people in the right direction toward moral and human duty. What qualities must such a playwright have? 'He must be a philosopher', a philosopher who has a profound knowledge of his own human nature and at the same time, he needs to be well acquainted with various social classes and professions.<sup>317</sup> If only all the imitative arts could

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ish with a truly festive air. To what peoples is it more fitting to assemble often and form among themselves sweet bonds of pleasure and joy than to those who have so many reasons to like one another and remain forever united?' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.343. 'Quoi! ne faut-il donc aucun Spectacle dans une République? Au contraire, il en faut beaucoup! C'est dans les Républiques qu'ils sont nés; c'est dans leur sein qu'on les voit briller avec un véritable air de fête. À quels peuples convient-il mieux de s'assembler souvent et de former entre eux les doux liens du plaisir et de la joye, qu'à ceux qui ont tant de raisons de s'aimer et de rester à jamais unis?' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.114.

<sup>316</sup> See also Marian Hobson who in *The Object of art* discusses Rousseau and Diderot, and points out similarities and differences in their thoughts about theatre in relation to their respective perception of illusion, p.153-65.

<sup>317</sup> Denis Diderot, *Discourse on dramatic poetry*, in English translation by Barbara Kerlake in *Sources of dramatic theory*, p.57-58. 'Qu'il soit philosophe'; Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, in *Œuvre esthétiques*, p.191.

work together, he continues, to create love of virtue and hate of vice. In order to achieve this, it is up to the philosopher to encourage the artists and forcefully ask them: ‘Men of genius, why has heaven given you your talents?’<sup>318</sup>

As we have seen, at the beginning of the *Lettre à d’Alembert* Rousseau pointed to his own role as an independent author executing his civic duty in writing ‘practical truths’ from his individual point of view, free from philosophical or religious movements. This position recurs in various shapes throughout the *Lettre*, and is in contrast to the strong belief of Diderot, d’Alembert and many of the *philosophes*, who see the man of letters as a leader in enlightened society, with the theatre as one of his most useful tools. To address this in relation to the Genevan public festivals, we need to return to d’Alembert’s article on Geneva.

When arguing that the virtuous people of Geneva could be educated in decorum and ‘delicacy of sentiment’ through the establishment of a Parisian-style theatre, d’Alembert recommends that the city should ‘join to the prudence of Lacedaemon the urbanity of Athens.’<sup>319</sup> Rousseau takes up this image, and replies to d’Alembert’s argument in the negative. Rousseau states first that even though the ancients had a less nuanced way of speaking about humanity, they still knew better than modern people how to put humanity into practice. He demonstrates his point about the parallel drawn by d’Alembert between Geneva and Lacedaemon by telling the following anecdote from Plutarch about Athenian and Lacedaemonian people:

An old Athenian was looking for a seat at the theatre and could not find one. Some youngsters, seeing him in difficulty, waved to him from afar. He came, but they pushed close together and made fun of him. The good man made his way around the theatre in this fashion, not knowing what to do with himself and constantly jeered by the fair youth. The ambassadors of Sparta noticed it and, standing up immediately, gave the Old Man an honourable place in their midst. This action was observed by the whole audience and universally applauded. ‘Woe is me,’ cried out the Old Man in a pained tone, ‘the Athenians know what is decent, but the Lacedaemonians practice it.’<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> ‘Hommes de génie, pourquoi le ciel vous a-t-il doués?’ Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, p.196.

<sup>319</sup> D’Alembert, ‘Geneva’, in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.244.

<sup>320</sup> Rousseau, *Letter to d’Alembert*, *CW*, vol.10, p.274. ‘Un Vieillard d’Athènes cherchoit place au spectacle et n’en trouvoit point; de jeunes gens, le voyant en peine, lui firent signe de loin; il vint, mais ils se serrèrent et se moquèrent de lui. Le bon homme fit ainsi le tour du théâtre, fort embarrassé de sa personne et toujours hùé de la belle jeunesse. Les Ambassadeurs de Sparte s’en apperçurent, et se levant à l’instant, placèrent honorablement le Vieillard au milieu d’eux. Cette action fut remarquée de tout le spectacle, et applaudie d’un battement de

Rousseau ends the anecdote with the somewhat acid statement: ‘Here are modern philosophy and ancient mores.’<sup>321</sup> In Rousseau’s argument, the role of the supposedly learned and ‘urban’ Athenians has been replaced by the modern Parisian philosophers: they have nothing to teach the Genevan people about virtue, because the Genevans – like the Spartans – already know how to practice it. Being able to talk about their mores and morals in a learned (Parisian) way will do them no good. The Genevan (or Lacedaemonian) prudence is already preserved in the local practices and traditions, and as long as these mores and customs are upheld without interference from the French, Genevan virtue will remain and prevail.

This is why towards the end of the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, Rousseau argues, just before he elaborates on the republican festivals, that in a small state like Geneva ‘all innovations are dangerous’ and need to be considered carefully.<sup>322</sup> A theatre fit for a big city has no place here, for the people already have their proper entertainments in their public festivals, sportive and military competitions in the summer, and balls and dances in the winter.<sup>323</sup> Rousseau comes back to Plutarch and to his descriptions of the prudent Spartans, their ways of life and entertainments, and encourages his native city to find inspiration in the Lacedaemonian spectacles:

It is at Sparta that, in laborious idleness, everything was pleasurable and entertainment; it is here that the harshest labours passed for recreations and that small relaxations formed a public instruction; it is there that the citizens, constantly assembled, consecrated the whole of life to amusements which were the great business of the State and to games from which they relaxed only for war.<sup>324</sup>

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mains universel. *Eh! que de maux!* s’écria le bon Vieillard, d’un ton de douleur; *les Athéniens savent ce qui est honnête; mais les Lacédémoniens le pratiquent.*’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.30.

<sup>321</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.274. ‘Voilà la philosophie moderne, et les mœurs anciennes.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.30.

<sup>322</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.342. ‘toutes innovations sont dangereuses’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.113.

<sup>323</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.343-48; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.114-20.

<sup>324</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.349. ‘C’est à Sparte que dans une laborieuse oisiveté, tout étoit plaisir et spectacle. C’est là que les rudes travaux passoient pour des recreations, et que les moindres délassemens formoient une instruction publique. C’est là que les citoyens continuellement assemblés, consacroient la vie entiere à des amusemens qui faisoient la grande affaire de l’Etat, et à des jeux dont on ne se délassoit qu’à la guerre.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.122.

Rousseau writes that in the Genevan celebrations, the people are no longer prudent like the Lacedaemonian people, for because of their enthusiasm and devotion, these public festivities are celebrated in abundance and lavishness. The festivals animate the people: their usually careful prudence in economy and judgement is replaced in these moments by complete openness, lively conversations and shared happiness: ‘all become common to all’ (‘tout devenant commun à tous’) and this type of lavishness, fit for the Genevan society, arouses the feeling of both equality and liberty.<sup>325</sup>

Thus, Diderot’s wish to place the philosopher as a leader of the people, via theatre, is in direct conflict with Rousseau’s ideas about Genevan society and its spectacles, not only because of Rousseau’s belief in autonomous thinking, free from adherence to any philosophical movements, but because he thinks that the man of letters, as a forerunner of a school of virtue and decorum, is merely a theoretical system without any useful practical impact. The practice of virtue and morality is already in place in Geneva, and a ‘man of the world’, placed on a high pedestal of appropriated didactics, would destroy these practices since he would make it impossible for ‘all [to] become common to all’.

The second big discrepancy between Rousseau’s and Diderot’s understanding of theatrical spectacles in the late 1750s concerns the relationship between the actor and the audience, which itself is strongly linked to the presence or absence of a leader or philosophical director of the event. Diderot had already argued in the *Entretiens* that speech addressed directly to the audience should be avoided at all costs since it interrupts the plot set up by the author, and the role played by the actor.<sup>326</sup> Further, in *De la poésie dramatique* we can see how Diderot developed ideas along a similar line, when he presented his now-famous notion of the fourth wall:

Whether you are a playwright or an actor, take no more thought for the spectator than if he did not exist. Imagine, at the edge of the stage, a great wall separating you from the audience. Act as if the curtain did not go up.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Rousseau, *Letter to d’Alembert*, *CW*, vol.10, p.344-45, Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.115-16.

<sup>326</sup> See Diderot, *Conversations*, p.44; Diderot, *Entretiens*, p.102.

<sup>327</sup> Diderot, *Discourse on dramatic poetry*, p.65. ‘Soit donc que vous composiez, soit que vous jouiez, ne pensez non plus au spectateur que s’il n’existait pas. Imaginez, sur le bord du théâtre, un grand mur qui vous sépare du parterre; jouez comme si la toile ne se levait pas.’ Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, p.231.

Marion Hobson has pointed out that Diderot's notion of the fourth wall can be seen as an extension of the analogy between the art of painting and that of theatre, between the observer of art and the spectator in a theatre, a notion already entertained by Diderot in his *Entretiens*.<sup>328</sup> Hobson writes that the fourth wall is meant to help playwrights see the stage as a closed room, a canvas that the spectators are outside of and in front of, and on which scenes can be painted so realistically that the audience forgets they are in the theatre.<sup>329</sup> Diderot wishes to transfer nature onto a canvas to create a distance between the object and its spectator, a distance appropriate for contemplation that is 'neither too close, nor too far away from me.'<sup>330</sup> It is this distanced observation that to Diderot's mind makes aesthetic sensations, ideas and moral reflections possible, and in this aesthetic process the spectator is alone, separated from both the actors and other people in the audience. At the same time Diderot expresses a wish to create a shared 'communal drunkenness' in the theatre, which has the potential to heighten the individual sensation. And it is this commonly held opinion that Rousseau opposes in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, when he writes: '[p]eople think they come together in the Theatre, and it is there that they are isolated'.<sup>331</sup> Hobson concludes that Diderot 'does not discern the incompatibility of the spectator as 'voyeur' and the audience as taken up with communal emotions.'<sup>332</sup>

How then does Rousseau ensure that the festivals proposed in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* do not produce the same duplicity? How can the autonomous thinking that he promotes lead to collective joy, understanding and equality? The answers to these questions all seem to relate to Rousseau's description of the relationship between audience and actors in his public outdoor festivals. For here, the spectators are described as participants more than as mere observers: they are part of the spectacle, they are its actors and its audience, its object and its observers – they are in every sense the spectacle itself:

Let the sun illuminate your innocent entertainments [spectacles]; you will constitute one yourselves, the worthiest it can illuminate. [...] With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, well-being also reigns. Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and

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<sup>328</sup> Hobson, *The object of art*, p.187-93.

<sup>329</sup> Hobson, *The object of art*, p.191.

<sup>330</sup> 'ni trop près, ni trop loin de moi.' Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, p.195. Hobson, *The object of art*, p.192.

<sup>331</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.262. '[I]'on croit s'assembler au Spectacle, et c'est là que chacun s'isole'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.16. Hobson, *The object of art*, p.192-93.

<sup>332</sup> Hobson, *The object of art*, p.193.

you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the Spectators become an Entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united'<sup>333</sup>

In this scene, the philosophical leader is conspicuous by his absence: there is not supposed to be an appropriated truth, stemming from any philosophical movement with a prescribed goal or message steering the event. Instead of merely being actors, spectators and/or philosophers – which Rousseau saw as roles in which people lose their independent humanity – each of the participants of the public festival can take on all these roles simultaneously by simply presenting themselves and their own autonomy. Rousseau thought that collective equality, unity and joy start with individual freedom of thought, which cannot be preceded by systematised and prescribed didactics even if such didactics have the best of intentions.<sup>334</sup> Nevertheless, indirectly the public festival becomes an educational event, encouraging the audience to continue to be good citizens. Liberty, autonomous thinking and happiness manifest themselves via the participants, which in turn inspire the audience to continue to live according to those same values.<sup>335</sup>

The examples above show two different ways of approaching and solving what Diderot and Rousseau respectively perceived as problematic with the theatre of French classicism. Diderot aimed to find, and express on stage, a universal truth which everyone *in general* would 'say in a certain situation' – a replica of the most probable, a painting of universal humanity taking place in a domestic reality. Hobson writes that Diderot's search for the norm or 'fundamental humanity' is a pursuit of 'the basic pattern of human relations,' which denies 'the "here and now" of the individual in an individual situation.'<sup>336</sup> Diderot hoped by means of the general to touch the particular theatre-goer just like an observer in front of a painting, in order to educate the

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<sup>333</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.344. 'Que le soleil éclaire vos innocens spectacles, vous en formerez un vous-mêmes, le plus digne qu'il puisse éclairer. [...] Avec la liberté, partout où règne l'affluence, le bien-être y règne aussi. Plantez au milieu d'une place un piquet couronné de fleurs, rassemblez-y le peuple, et vous aurez une fête. Faites mieux encore: donnez les Spectateurs en Spectacle; rendez-les acteurs eux-mêmes; faites que chacun se voye et s'aime dans les autres, afin que tous en soient mieux unis.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.115.

<sup>334</sup> It should however be noted that, as observed by Starobinski, one could of course see Rousseau as a kind of 'leading' figure behind the festivals, and at times it appears he imagines himself as such. Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: transparency and obstruction*, p.102-103.

<sup>335</sup> See Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.349-52; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.121-25.

<sup>336</sup> Hobson, *The object of art*, p.162-63.

spectator according to Enlightenment values and thus generate a united and virtuous people, consisting of thinking and educated individuals. Rousseau on the other hand can be said to emphasise and encourage the autonomous individual, so as to evoke the universal commonality which already resides within each individual, through our shared heritage of nature, repeating throughout various writings, including the *Lettre à d'Alembert* that 'man is born good'. Rousseau's public festival, in contrast to Diderot's fourth wall, is intended to break down walls – not only those of the theatre building itself, but the imaginary walls between people who are defined by society as merely actors, spectators or philosophers. As we have seen in Chapter 2, Rousseau saw the public festival as an ancient kind of event, which evokes a time in human history when the process of *aesthetic perfectibility* was only beginning, a time when moral corruption and superficial appearance were still in their infancy. All human beings share this heritage, and in arousing the innate memory of our species through the public festival, it creates moments where 'all become common to all.'

In one sense, Diderot and Rousseau's respective approaches to the shared problem of the theatre of French classicism could not be further apart. However, one can also see how they are both explicitly looking for solutions in the notion of *humanity*: Diderot by linking the general to the particular, and Rousseau by linking the individual to the communal. And the common aim in both Diderot's *comédie sérieuse* and Rousseau's public festivals is to educate and enlighten the people, albeit in different manners.

Rousseau criticised the *bienséance* of the old school of theatre and he criticised Diderot's attempt to break its rules. Because in both French classical theatre and in Diderot's new genres of theatre, the theatrical institution was built upon a didactic system of royal and/or philosophical hierarchy which conflicted with Rousseau's view of enlightenment as autonomous thinking. In Rousseau's view, Diderot was not a 'man of the world' in the same way as Voltaire, who entertained the royal *bienséance*, but because he argued for the philosopher as a didactic leader of truth, which in Rousseau's eyes was another version of philosophical absolutism. One could of course argue that the public festival, just as a theatrical play, could be a means of gaining power – history has shown us several examples of this. But for Rousseau gaining power was not the aim of the festival. Instead, its purpose was to create a frame within which the people can learn from each other; from seeing and interacting with each other; communal joy, respect and unity will be created through manifesting their own selves and their independence, and this in turn creates a circumstance under which the people can learn to be-



come better citizens. This can be compared to his *Emile*, and the model of education proposed there through ‘well-regulated freedom (‘liberté bien réglée’).<sup>337</sup> Here Rousseau wishes to eliminate all restraints put upon children to control their natural behaviour. He recommends that there should be no formal lessons or strict orders for the very young. Instead the child should be encouraged to follow his own curiosity and interests, and in this way to learn from himself and his inner nature.<sup>338</sup> The only means of control that the tutor should use is ‘well-regulated freedom’, which broadly means placing the child in certain circumstances from which he can learn without any imposing authority.<sup>339</sup> Christophe Martin has argued that this ‘negative education’ which can be seen in both *Emile* and *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* has little to do with ‘laissez-faire’.<sup>340</sup> Martin suggests that Rousseau through the ‘negative education’ tries to find a way between immersing in culture completely through letting culture impose on nature, and leaving nature totally untouched through allowing it to remain an incomprehensible wonder: ‘the concept of negative education includes a collaboration between nature and man, the latter taking care to release nature’s force and sustain the conditions that allow it to continue its progress free of inauspicious deviations.’<sup>341</sup>

Roger D. Master emphasises that for Rousseau one of the main problems with the traditional education of children was that they are forced to acquire knowledge before they are able to understand it properly, and that this leads indirectly to moral values built on appearance. This is because the child learns that memorising things (even those that he/she cannot yet understand) has the positive outcome of commendation from the authoritarian tutor: ‘The child thus learns that only appearances count; precisely because such educational practices make a great show of teaching morality through reason, they result in immorality.’<sup>342</sup> Rousseau’s view of the authoritarian teacher can be

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<sup>337</sup> See Roger D. Masters, *The political philosophy of Rousseau* (New Jersey, 1968), p.19, and *Emile, OC*, vol.4, p.321.

<sup>338</sup> I write ‘his’ and ‘he’ here and in the following since this point in Rousseau’s *Emile* concerns the male sex. The education of women is unfortunately differently treated. For further reading on the education of women in *Emile*, see for example Master’s, *The political philosophy of Rousseau*, p.21-27.

<sup>339</sup> Masters, *The political philosophy of Rousseau*, p.18-20.

<sup>340</sup> Christophe Martin, ‘Nature and supplementation in *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*’, in *Rousseau between nature and culture: philosophy, literature, and politics*, ed. Anne Deneys-Tunney and Yves Charles Zarka, in collaboration with Karen Santos da Silva, p.153-65, p.161.

<sup>341</sup> Christophe Martin, ‘Nature and Supplementation in *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*’, p.158-64, p.159.

<sup>342</sup> Masters, *The political philosophy of Rousseau*, p.19.

compared in this respect to his thoughts about the Enlightenment stage put forward by *les philosophes*. For the imposing of knowledge and specific ways of thinking will lead in both cases to the same result: i.e. in men of the world navigating society through *bienséance* or other rules of appearance that they have learned from the philosophic hierarchy on which they were raised. Similarly, Rousseau's model of education based in 'well-regulated freedom' could be compared to the public festival as an alternative form of educational theatrical event, as both concepts are meant to provide a fruitful frame for learning, while at the same time encouraging autonomous thinking.

The public festival is thus Rousseau's ideal image of what theatre could be, and what it should aim to be: a 'pure' presentation of its participants, their sentiments and the communality between them. But how could this ideal be transformed so that it would fit on a traditional theatre stage? As we will see in the following chapters focusing on his works for the stage, Rousseau found inspiration in his musical writings in order to infuse traditional theatre with his ideal of the public festival.

## PART II: Strategies in practice



*4.1. Performance of Le Devin du village, at the Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, Stockholm, 2019, a production by Performing Premodernity, with choreography by Karin Modigh.*

## Chapter 4

### Exposing and amending theatrical imitation – an alternative education

In the previous chapters I have argued that the concept of *aesthetic perfectibility* can help us recognise how Rousseau wrote his own history of the arts in which he pointed to a constant systematisation and methodisation of aesthetic thinking. I have suggested that in his analysis of the theatre of his time, Rousseau perceives *les philosophes* and men of letters as upholders of what can be termed *aesthetic perfectibility*, implying that they upheld a schematised way of thinking partly to maintain their power position in society as didactic and moral leaders of the people (see Chapter 3). Further, while the stage was used to spread a didactic message of Enlightenment – from the learned few to the masses – the public festival emerges as a liberating educational alternative, in which people are encouraged to think autonomously, rather than to learn a prescribed curriculum created by learned men. In this chapter I investigate how Rousseau thought the emancipating function of the public festival might be connected to its apparent exclusion of theatrical imitation in the traditional sense. In the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, after asking: ‘But what then will be the objects of these entertainments [the festivals]? What will be shown in them?’ Rousseau concludes: ‘Nothing, if you please.’ He then continues: ‘With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, well-being also reigns.’<sup>343</sup> Somehow, the lack of representation of a particular object, act or character in the public festival appears to be connected to the abundance of liberty and the resulting well-being of the Genevan people. However, as we shall see, it is not true that the public festival is completely without mimetic elements; it rather manifests a change in focus and direction of these elements, and that is a notion that Rousseau explores in some of his theatrical works.

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<sup>343</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10. *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.344. ‘Mais quels seront enfin les objets de ces spectacles? Qu’y montrera-t-on? Rien, si l’on veut. Avec la liberté, partout où règne l’affluence, le bien-être y régné aussi.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.115.

In the *Encyclopédie* Denis Diderot writes under the entry ‘Imitation’ that: ‘Imitation is the artificial representation of an object. Blind nature does not imitate; it is art that imitates.’<sup>344</sup> Diderot then defines various types of artistic imitation and their media: *discourse* by means of the voice, *music* by means of sounds, *painting* by means of colours, and *sculpture* by means of materials like wood or stone. When I discuss traditional imitation in Rousseau I follow this definition and, like Diderot, I use the terms ‘imitation’ and ‘representation’ more or less synonymously, in the sense that they both refer to something mimetic and often artistic: they can both stand for a reproduction through images of things, actions and people. As we can see in the quotation from the *Encyclopédie* above, imitation can also be seen as a kind of representation; an artistic representation, i.e. there are other types of representation. Using ‘imitation’ and ‘representation’ as synonyms therefore opens up the possibility of comparing artistic representation to political representation in Rousseau, which has proven fruitful in previous research.

In this chapter I will discuss three previous studies that show how Rousseau saw artistic imitation as potentially charged with pretence, prescribed didactics and domination: Starobinski’s view of the festival as a manifestation of transparency; Dugan and Strong’s analysis of theatrical representation in Rousseau as an imposition of a particular judgment; and David Lay Williams’ argument that Rousseau’s conception of theatrical imitation is largely inspired by Plato’s well-known cave allegory.<sup>345</sup> These examples lead me to contend that Rousseau partly saw imitation as one of the tools that the men of letters used didactically to maintain their power position within the logic of *aesthetic perfectibility* (as systematisation). In Rousseau’s version of Plato’s cave, the playwrights and philosophers of his time are the shadow-casters, deceiving the prisoners (spectators) into believing that they are being shown the right and true way to a virtuous life, although in reality they only see a distorted version of the world.

While developing this argument, I suggest that in his plays for the stage Rousseau tries both to expose and amend the function of imitation in order either to reveal the potentially dangerous effects of artistic representation to the audience, or to evoke the liberating transparency of the festival. Below, I discuss *Pygmalion*, *Narcisse*, *ou, L’Amant de lui même* and *Le Devin du*

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<sup>344</sup> ‘Imitation, [...] c’est la représentation artificielle d’un objet. La nature aveugle n’imite point; c’est l’art qui imite.’ Diderot, ‘Imitation’, *Encyclopédie*, vol.8, p.567.

<https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/encyclopedie1117/navigate/8/2691/>

<sup>345</sup> Starobinski, *Transparency and obstruction*; Dugan/Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’; and David Lay Williams, *Rousseau’s Platonic enlightenment* (Pennsylvania, PA, 2007).

*village* and investigate how Rousseau problematises imitation through his own theatrical representations. To play with and question the notion of imitation in theatre is of course not unique to Rousseau's works, it is part of the art form. What I am interested in here is how Rousseau in his plays problematises the power structures within artistic representation, and how he tries to alter such representation with inspiration from the public festival, as an alternative to the didacticism of Enlightenment theatre. I have called this second part of the doctoral thesis 'Strategies in practice', to indicate its focus on Rousseau's stage works as a response to the problems he saw with the theatre of his day. Even though the term 'strategies' seems to imply a coherent plan, stretching over a longer period of time, I would like to underline that I am not looking for a homogenous definition of Rousseau's concept of imitation; such a definition may not exist. Rousseau expresses both fascination with and fear of the effects of artistic representation, and in his plays, he tried different approaches to understand and deal with it. In the present chapter I examine the political background to Rousseau's view of traditional imitation in the Parisian theatre of his day, which appears to have led him to wish to amend the structure and function of imitation. I will use the three aforementioned stage works to examine how Rousseau expressed this and explored it in various ways.

## Transparency and communion

The public festival is a major component in Rousseau's thinking about the theatre: the festival marks the birth of the theatrical arts. Perceiving it as such allows us to understand the negative effects, as Rousseau saw them, of the Parisian theatre in modern times: politeness, social appearance and shallowness. At the same time, Rousseau appears to think that it allows us to learn from our own history and to alter the development of *aesthetic perfectibility* (as systematisation), if only momentarily (see Chapter 2 and 3). As seen above, Rousseau states in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* that nothing particular is portrayed or imitated in the public festival, and that this freedom from traditional imitation in the Genevan spectacle is part of its attraction. This absence of representation of an act or an object in the festival is probably the most obvious difference between the Genevan spectacles and traditional theatre on a stage. But as will be shown, this differentiation between the public festival and traditional stage art is delicately entwined with Rous-

seau's aesthetic-political critique of and ideals for theatre, which is also reflected in his practical strategies for his own theatrical works. And, it turns out that the public festival might also contain imitative structures, however slightly different from those often seen on a theatre stage.

As scholars have noted, in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* Rousseau pits the freedom of the outdoor festival under the sky against the image of traditional theatre, which is pictured as a 'gloomy cavern' where the spectators are kept as prisoners, 'fearful and immobile in silence and inaction'.<sup>346</sup> Jean Starobinski argues that this contrast between the 'cave theatre' and the outdoor festivals is connected to the presence or absence of imitation; Rousseau's distinction between the two is due to the dependence of traditional theatre on having and representing an object (an action or a person). Starobinski maintains that since the very purpose of the Genevan festival is to affirm the transparency of the feelings and relationships of the people involved without portraying a particular object, 'the theatre is to the festival as opacity is to transparency'.<sup>347</sup>

Although the Genevan festival avoids imitation in the traditional sense, it does present something to the world: the city-state itself, the specific Gene-

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<sup>346</sup> 'What! Ought there to be no Entertainments in a Republic? On the contrary, there ought to be many. It is in Republics that they were born, it is in their bosom that they are seen to flourish with a truly festive air. To what peoples is it more fitting to assemble often and form among themselves sweet bonds of pleasure and joy than to those who have so many reasons to like one another and remain forever united? We already have many of these public festivals; let us have even more; I will be only the more charmed for it. But let us not adopt these exclusive Entertainments which close up a small number of people in melancholy fashion in a gloomy cavern, which keep them fearful and immobile in silence and inaction, which give them only prisons, lances, soldiers, and afflicting images of servitude and inequality to see. No, happy Peoples, these are not your festivals. It is in the open air, under the sky, that you ought to gather and give yourselves to the sweet sentiment of your happiness.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.343. 'Quoi! ne faut-il donc aucun Spectacle dans une République? Au contraire, il en faut beaucoup! C'est dans les Républiques qu'ils sont nés; c'est dans leur sein qu'on les voit briller avec un véritable air de fête. À quels peuples convient-il mieux de s'assembler souvent et de former entre eux les doux liens du plaisir et de la joye, qu'à ceux qui ont tant de raisons de s'aimer et de rester à jamais unis? Nous avons déjà plusieurs de ces fêtes publiques; ayons-en davantage encore, je n'en serai que plus charmé. Mais n'adoptons point ces Spectacles exclusifs qui renferment tristement un petit nombre de gens dans un antre obscur; qui les tiennent craintifs et immobiles dans le silence et l'inaction; qui n'offrent aux yeux que cloisons, que pointes de fer, que soldats, qu'affligeantes images de la servitude et de l'inégalité. Non, Peuples heureux, ce ne sont pas là vos fêtes! C'est en plein air, c'est sous le ciel qu'il faut vous rassembler et vous livrer au doux sentiment de vôtre bonheur.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.114. See for example Starobinski, *Transparency and obstruction*, p.92-97, and Primavesi, 'The dramaturgy of Rousseau's *Lettre à d'Alembert*', p.59-62.

<sup>347</sup> Starobinski, *Transparency and obstruction*, p.95.



van way of life, its people and the people's collectiveness. d'Alembert claims in his article on Geneva in the *Encyclopédie* that a Parisian-style theatre would attract foreigners to Geneva.<sup>348</sup> Rousseau responds that rather than drawing other nationalities to Geneva, it is important to encourage the Genevans, because of their love to travel, to wish to return to their homeland:

Each must feel that he could not find elsewhere what he left in his country [...] a secret voice must incessantly cry out to them from the depths of their souls: Ah! Where are the games and festivals of my youth? Where is the concord of the citizens? Where is the public fraternity? Where is the pure joy and the real gaiety? Where are the peace, the liberty, the equity, the innocence? Let us go and seek out all that again.<sup>349</sup>

Rousseau states that entertainments and spectacles that are uniquely Genevan, and cannot be found anywhere else, would be more interesting for a visiting foreigner than traditional theatre that can be found in other cities like London or Paris.<sup>350</sup> Furthermore Rousseau describes the city of Geneva, with its constant movement of the working people, their diligence and the liveliness of everyday life, as a 'spectacle' worthy of any foreigner's amazement.<sup>351</sup> Patrick Coleman points out that Rousseau presents the 'aesthetic effect' of Genevan life as a tool for self-preservation: because of its vivid activity, the city 'multiplies itself' and appears both bigger and richer than it is, and being a small nation with much stronger countries around its borders, it is of great importance to radiate a capacity for independence.<sup>352</sup> But for this show of independence and community to work, the spectacle of Geneva must first and foremost be a show for its own citizens: it is a constant reminder of both the spirit of solidarity, and of the unpretentious way of life.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> D'Alembert, 'Geneva', in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, p.245.

<sup>349</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.349. 'Ah! où sont les jeux et les fêtes de ma jeunesse? Où est la concorde des citoyens? Où est la fraternité publique? Où est la pure joye et la véritable allégresse? Où sont la paix, la liberté, l'équité, l'innocence? Allons rechercher tout cela.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.121.

<sup>350</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.348-49; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.120-21.

<sup>351</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.319-20; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.85-86.

<sup>352</sup> Coleman, *Rousseau's political imagination*, p.31.

<sup>353</sup> Coleman writes that this display of local mores is supported by the Genevan sumptuary laws, which prevent unnecessary spending and help avoid envy amongst the citizens: 'The refusal to countenance any excess in material possessions is the key to that "multiplication" of labor and vitality which is the republic's greatest possession.' Coleman, *Rousseau's political imagination*, p.31-32, p.32. Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.319-20; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.85-86.

Thus, the Genevan festivals appear to be an extension of daily life on show in Geneva.<sup>354</sup> As argued by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, the Genevan spectacle is an ‘auto-representation’ in which the participants represent themselves, both as individuals and as a group, they are ‘actors of themselves.’ The public festival is the ‘sublation’ (*Aufhebung*, Hegel’s concept) of theatre: it both cancels and preserves, alters and synthesises with the concept of traditional theatre.<sup>355</sup> Because ‘the “Spectacle” is still a spectacle, [...] the absence of stage is still a “Stage”, [...] spontaneity is not without a code, [and] “Art” is indeed art.’<sup>356</sup>

Rousseau writes that in the public festival, the participants’ ‘hearts are [...] in their eyes as they are always on their lips.’ And at the same time, through this directness and transparency of feeling and thought, ‘[a]ll the societies constitute but one, all become common to all.’<sup>357</sup> In contrast, the traditional imitation of objects or actions have a distancing effect on the spectators. Starobinski points out that Rousseau makes a difference between communion in the theatre and in the festival. In the festival, communion is immediate, while in the theatre it is mediated through an object/action repre-

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<sup>354</sup> An illustration of this is Rousseau’s well-known account of his childhood memory of the dancing soldiers (see Chapter 2). Interestingly, some years after the publication of the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, in the spring of 1761, 200 Genevans re-enacted the event in the square of Saint-Gervais in honour of Rousseau. Jean Louis Mollet enthusiastically described the event in a letter to Rousseau, which depicts the effect of the manifestation of Genevan collectiveness quite well: In the middle of a day of military exercise and demonstrations, Rousseau’s name was mentioned and inspired singing and dancing around the fountain. This day, writes Mollet, was an ‘effusion of public joy’ in the city – everything else was suspended due to a mutual feeling of wanting to ‘love each other, and nothing more.’ If the word ‘contagion’ could be understood as something positive, he writes, it could be said that ‘the contagion of public amicability had overcome all individuals of society.’ It was as if ‘thousands of souls were melted into one’. ‘L’effusion de la joie publique se montrait dans tous les carrefours; les affaires étoient suspenduës; on vouloit s’aimer, et rien de plus; on étoit tous rians, gracieux, affables; si le mot *Contagion* pouvoit être pris en bonne part, je vous dirois: la Contagion de l’amitié publique, avoit gagné tous les Individus de la Société; elle s’étoit introduite avec l’air que l’on respiroit; ce doux attendrissement étoit général: Des milliers d’ames n’en faisoient qu’une.’ Mollet to Rousseau, 10 June 1761, in Rousseau, *CC*, vol.9, p.9–14 (Letter 1429). See also Wiles, *Theatre and citizenship*, p.132, who refers to this letter.

<sup>355</sup> To ‘sublate’ means ‘to negate or eliminate (something, such as an element in a dialectic process) but preserve as a partial element in a synthesis’; [www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com), last accessed 12 May 2020.

<sup>356</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetics of history: Rousseau and the theatre of originary mimesis*, trans. by Jeff Fort, (New York, 2019), Kindle edition, location 1265,1332 and 1297. Originally published in French under the title *Poétique de l’histoire* (Paris, 2002).

<sup>357</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10. *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.345. ‘son cœur est alors dans ses yeux, comme il est toujours sur ses lèvres’; ‘Toutes les sociétés n’en font qu’une; tout devient commun à tous’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.116.

sented on the theatrical stage that in its mediation creates distance: 'If nothing is represented, then space is a free vacuum, the optic medium of transparency: mind is directly accessible to mind without intermediary.'<sup>358</sup> The people in the audience are not only distanced from themselves (because of the represented object leading them away from their own lives), they are also distanced from each other. For example, the *Lettre* states that '[p]eople think they come together in the Theatre, and it is here that they are isolated', for 'they go [there] to forget their friends, neighbours, and relations', to be distracted instead by fiction.<sup>359</sup>

Starobinski concludes his argument by describing the public festival as the 'lyrical aspect of the general will', as expressed in the *Contrat social*:

In the rapture of public joy every man is both *actor* and *spectator*. Similarly, after the social contract has been signed the citizen enjoys a dual status: he is at once 'member of the sovereign' and 'member of the state.' In other words, he both wills the law and obeys it. See to it that each man sees and loves himself in others, for the greater unity of all.<sup>360</sup> [Starobinski's emphasis.]

As Starobinski shows, the public festival and its avoidance of imitation in the traditional sense is strongly linked in Rousseau's thinking to equality. Consequently, it would seem as though traditional theatre – played by an actor, for a spectator – could have the opposite effect. In the theatre, immediate communion and thus equality among and between the spectators and the actors, is obstructed.

Somehow, even though the spectators might think that they are united through their emotional response to what is shown on stage, the representation separates them because the imitated object is external in relation to the spectators, and further separates the actor from the spectator. The imitated object remains in the way of the spectators; of their communion with themselves, with their fellow spectators and with the actors. But in the festival this obstacle is removed, because not only are the spectators becoming actors (of themselves), the representation (the participants and their lives) is at the same time the model of the representation. Therefore, the represented object is no longer external to the spectators, and the spectator, the actor, the imitation and the model are all united and equal. In theory, there is no distance

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<sup>358</sup> Starobinski, *Transparency and obstruction*, p.96.

<sup>359</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10. *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.262. 'L'on croit s'assembler au Spectacle, et c'est là que chacun s'isole; c'est là qu'on va oublier ses amis, ses voisins, ses proches, pour s'intéresser à des fables'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.16.

<sup>360</sup> Starobinski, *Transparency and obstruction*, p.96-97.

between them because they are all these things simultaneously while also being one and the same.

Turning to Rousseau's stage works, does he have a solution for working against the negative effects of imitation in terms of equality? Is it possible to sublimate (simultaneously cancel and alter) the imitation through the representation itself, through the logic of the *pharmakon* as a thought structure (see Chapter 1 for more on the concept of the *pharmakon*)? It appears that this problem was uppermost in Rousseau's mind while he worked on *Pygmalion*.

### ***Pygmalion* dissolved, Galathée reconstructed**

The Pygmalion myth is well known: the sculptor Pygmalion falls in love with his own creation, which miraculously comes to life. But above all, it is a story about art, the creation of art and its representation of and in nature, which, as we will see is amplified and emphasised in various ways in Rousseau's version of the story.<sup>361</sup> The effect of the dissolution of imitation is made even more striking at the end of the drama, when Pygmalion's statue comes to life.

In fact, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* is both about art and theatre. Throughout the drama, Pygmalion's attention is centred on his creation, the statue of Galathée, which he has placed inside a pavilion (a theatre), on a pedestal (a stage), behind a veil (a curtain). Pygmalion feels miserable when the spectator first encounters him. He anxiously walks around his studio, glances at the closed pavilion while chiselling and hammering on some of his other works. Galathée is in this way doubly distanced from the audience. She is both an object of art (a statue) inside another work of art (Rousseau's play), and on her own little stage on the stage, she is represented as an imitation within the imitation, or as theatre within the theatre, waiting for her own private curtain to go up.

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<sup>361</sup> For reading on how the Pygmalion myth was used in various contexts throughout the eighteenth century, see for example Elisabeth Frenzel, *Stoffe der Weltliteratur: ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längeschnitte*, sixth edition (Stuttgart 1983) p. 627–630; Walter Buske, 'Pygmalion-Dichtungen des 18. Jahrhunderts', *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* 7, 1915/1919, p.345-54, and; Hans Sckommodau, *Pygmalion bei Franzosen und Deutschen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1970).



4.2. *Galathée on her 'stage on the stage'. Performing Premodernity's production of Rousseau's Pygmalion in the eighteenth-century theatre at Český Krumlov Castle, 2015. João Luís Paixão as Pygmalion and Laila Cathleen Neuman as Galathée. Photo: Libor Sváček.*

In his monologue, Pygmalion relates how Galathée and her beauty have distracted him from other work, which is why she has been hidden away. But not seeing her makes the sculptor unable to focus. He feels that his genius has left him, and he cares no longer about fame and glory, nor for his beloved statues, which now appear insignificant. Nothing that belongs to his normal life matters anymore.<sup>362</sup> And so he draws the conclusion that there is no longer any reason for hiding the most precious of his works. Perhaps he can even re-examine it? At first he hesitates as he begins to lift the veil and then lets it drop: he has the impression that he is uncovering something divine. Finding new courage, he removes the curtain of the pavilion, with shaking hands, to reveal his masterpiece placed on its little stage.<sup>363</sup>

The audience sees a woman of flesh and blood pretending to be a statue. Desirous to improve his work further by removing a bit of the statue's clothing, Pygmalion raises his tools, hesitates, and then dares to attempt one

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<sup>362</sup> See Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, ed. Charly Guyot, p.1224-25. For the English translation of *Pygmalion*, I will use an unpublished translation by Maria Gullstam, Felicity Baker and Magnus Tessing Schneider (2015). For a published translation, see Rousseau, *CW*, vol. 10, trans. and ed. by Christopher Kelly, p.230-36.

<sup>363</sup> See Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1225-26.

stroke with his hammer and chisel. He cries out and instantly drops his tools because he had the impression that the chisel touched human flesh, not marble. And then he suddenly realises that Galathée's only fault is that she is too perfect: 'Ah! Her perfection is her flaw... Divine Galatea! Less perfect, you would lack nothing.'<sup>364</sup> This revelation echoes Rousseau's own criticism of the aesthetic 'perfection' (systematisation) of art that has lost its expressiveness in favour of formal and regulated beauty. Galathée's physical form is so perfect that it gives him the feeling that he is chiselling human flesh. Perfect as she is, though, she lacks a soul, that element of expressiveness and feeling to make her slightly less perfect. With a soul, she would lack nothing.<sup>365</sup>

Then follows an extended moment of mixed feelings where Pygmalion's admiration and happiness are mixed with frustration and self-loathing. He must be insane to think that a piece of marble could have a soul. Or might it be possible for him to give part of himself and his own soul to his creation? Can the gods, can Venus help him? When Pygmalion again dares to look at Galathée, he sees her come to life. Here the last piece of music of the drama is played, introducing the imminent collapse of the illusion (also discussed in Chapter 5).<sup>366</sup> Galathée's body starts moving and she herself walks down from the stage on which her maker has placed her. She touches herself and utters her first word: 'Me' ('Moi'). She takes a few steps, touches one of her lifeless marble sisters and says: 'Now, that is not me' ('Ce n'est plus moi'). Pygmalion is astonished and follows her every move. She comes towards him and touches him. He takes her hand, places it on his heart and then covers it with kisses, whereupon Galathée exclaims: 'Ah! This is me, once more' ('Ah! encore moi'). The drama ends with Pygmalion declaring that from now on he will live only through his masterpiece.<sup>367</sup> As Jacqueline Waeber has argued: 'The end of *Pygmalion* marks a monologic state so extreme that the inner voice is finally split in two dialoguing voices, that of Pygmalion and that of Galathée.'<sup>368</sup> Somehow, artist and art object manage

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<sup>364</sup> Unpublished translation of Rousseau, *Pygmalion*. 'Ah! c'est la perfection qui fait son défaut... Divine Galathée! moins parfaite il ne te manqueroit rien.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1227.

<sup>365</sup> See Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1226-27.

<sup>366</sup> For further reading about the sudden end of the music in *Pygmalion* see Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*, p.49.

<sup>367</sup> Unpublished translation of Rousseau, *Pygmalion*; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1228-31.

<sup>368</sup> 'La fin du *Pygmalion* marque un état monologique si extrême que la voix intérieure finit par se scinder en deux voix dialoguantes, celles de Pygmalion et celle de Galathée.' Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*, p.50.

to do the impossible, they are two merged into one, while still being able to perceive each other.



4.3. *The moment of Galathée exclaiming ‘Ah! This is me, once more.’ From Performing Pre-modernity’s production of Rousseau’s Pygmalion at Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, Stockholm, 2019. João Luís Paixão as Pygmalion and Laila Cathleen Neuman as Galathée.*

In *Pygmalion* both characters have moved towards the audience in different ways. Galathée has broken the illusion of imitation (of being a statue). She has diminished the distance between herself and the audience by walking down from her stage, no longer as a perfected artwork but as a living being animated with a soul. She is no longer a spectacle, she is a subject. At the same time Pygmalion, the artist and creator of Galathée (both as a statue and as theatre), has moved mentally towards the audience. At the beginning he was distanced from the spectators through his delusion: everyone else in the theatre knew that the figure in the pavilion was a real woman, pretending to be a statue. The distance between his and the audience’s reality reaches its climax when he raises his tools with shaking hands towards Galathée. Seen from the auditorium, this is a violent act. Aiming a chisel and a hammer at a living human being is aggressive enough in itself, but even more so when the man holding the tools believes that the other person is made of stone. But when Pygmalion senses that his tools meet human flesh, his perception of

reality draws closer to that of the audience. And when Galathée is finally animated and walks down from her stage, Pygmalion and the audience perceive the same thing – a living, breathing woman. The two actors are still in character, of course, but the distance between Galathée and the audience, and between Pygmalion and the audience, is nevertheless reduced while the distance between the artist and his work is partly erased. The ending thus becomes one large reunion that embraces Galathée as an actress who no longer pretends to be anything but a human character, Pygmalion as the artist whose artwork is now human, and the spectators who are invited by the two characters to take part in their shared happiness. The entire drama moves in the direction of transparency and communion, just like the public festival.

Although Galathée is now perceptible to Pygmalion as a living human being, it does not follow that she is ‘real’ like an actual person. Shierry M. Weber has remarked that when Pygmalion turns his prayers of despair to Venus, he gives us an important clue to Galathée’s nature.<sup>369</sup> At the end of his prayer, Pygmalion exclaims ‘Goddess of beauty, spare nature this affront, that such a perfect model remains the mere image of what is not.’<sup>370</sup> Weber concludes that Galathée is not a representation of a natural object; being an ‘affront to nature’ she is not the image of a real person, but ‘an image of what is not.’ But she is also more than that:

Pygmalion prayed for the original of the statue and the result was the animation of the statue. The statue has no other model than itself; it is its own original. But it remains an image as well as its original; it is not real as a natural object or a living person is real.<sup>371</sup>

This means that while the illusion of imitation in *Pygmalion* will collapse because Galathée comes to life, her animation does not necessarily aim to end imitation. Much like in the case of the festival, Galathée becomes a sublation of imitation; she dissolves it and resurrects it in a new form. Being her own model and the image of that original simultaneously, she alters the basic conditions of artistic representation. Like the participants in the public festival, she becomes an auto-representation, both the original object and the representation of that object. We can also draw parallels between the merg-

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<sup>369</sup> Shierry M. Weber, ‘The Aesthetics of Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*’, *MLN (Modern language notes)*, 83/6, Comparative literature (Dec., 1968), p.900-18.

<sup>370</sup> Unpublished translation of Rousseau, *Pygmalion*. ‘déesse de la beauté, épargne cet affront à la nature qu’un si parfait modele soit l’image de ce qui n’est pas’ ; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1229.

<sup>371</sup> Weber, ‘The Aesthetics of Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*’, p.914.



ing of the actor and the spectator in the festival, and the relationship between Pygmalion and Galathée. Throughout the drama Pygmalion is not only the creator of Galathée, he is the beholder of the actress in the little theatre he has created. And Pygmalion and Galathée are in a sense one, even though at the end of the drama they manage to turn the monologue into a dialogue with the self.

Rousseau's *Pygmalion* evokes the thought structures of both *aesthetic perfectibility* and the *pharmakon*. Thematising aesthetic 'perfection' in Galathée as a perfected imitation, and then displaying her completion through the imperfection of a human soul, the original representation is dissolved and reconstructed within itself and thus demonstrates the function of the *pharmakon*. Portraying this on a stage, through the representation of Galathée as theatre and of Pygmalion as the creator of theatre, becomes a means of sub-lating (both cancelling and altering) the imitation itself. And with numerous reminders of the positive effects of the public festival, it becomes a strategy to counterbalance the representation's potentially negative effects on the audience.

## Exposing the imposed judgement

Jean Starobinski is not the only scholar to have drawn parallels between Rousseau's political theories and his thoughts about theatre. While Starobinski sees the public festival as a parallel concept to that of the general will, Dugan and Strong emphasise the similarity between Rousseau's analysis of political representation and his criticism of theatrical representation, arguing that both political and theatrical representations impose a particular judgement on the people/audience in Rousseau. They also discuss musical representation, which I will return to in Chapter 5.

Rousseau famously describes the general will in his *Contrat social*. Dugan and Strong show that it is important to realise that behind the 'general', in our understanding of Rousseau's general will, lies individual autonomy and particularity. Rousseau sees that the foundation of the general will is that each individual both decides the law and lives under it. It is a collective agreement and knowledge of life in a particular society that consists of many individual voices. Dugan and Strong write that 'sovereignty is the

action undertaken that embodies that knowledge.<sup>372</sup> At the same time, Rousseau suggests in the *Contrat social* that sovereignty exists only in the present moment, writing that ‘yesterday’s law does not obligate today.’<sup>373</sup> Dugan and Strong interpret this statement in the following way:

This amounts to saying that sovereignty has the quality of existing only in the present and as present to us. To say that something exists in the present means (at least) that we have no way of encountering it except as what it is. To say that the general will is what it is is to say that the judgements of the general will cannot be references to analogous (but not identical) situations, each judgement expresses a claim that holds unambiguously for the exact circumstances and citizenry at hand. As they are constitutive of a given political actuality they tell us what the nature or [...] being of politics is.<sup>374</sup>

In other words, since each moment or situation in a society is unique, one cannot create a ‘perfected’ system that always gives the right answer if that same system does not adapt to each particular situation. Therefore, it appears that the general will, which could be forever changing, due to its basis in several individuals’ experience of the present, is the reason for Rousseau’s refusal to endorse political representation. This is because representation inevitably adds ‘a temporal dimension to sovereignty, something that could not but make it not what it is.’<sup>375</sup>

Further, Dugan and Strong compare Rousseau’s theories on political representation to his thoughts concerning theatrical representation, citing *De l’Imitation théâtrale*, a text that Rousseau originally planned to include in the *Lettre à d’Alembert*. *De l’Imitation théâtrale* is largely a compilation and translation of excerpts from Plato’s *Republic*, mainly from book X, and from his *Laws*.<sup>376</sup> Rousseau amended many of the extracts and sometimes developed the argument further, as Dugan and Strong observe.

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<sup>372</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.330-31, p.331.

<sup>373</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.4, *Social contract*, trans. and ed. by Judith R Bush, Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, p.188. ‘La loi d’hier n’oblige pas aujourd’hui’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, *Du Contrat social*, ed. Robert Derathé, p.424. See also Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.331.

<sup>374</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.331-32. The authors add that (p.332): ‘none of this gives any reason to think that Rousseau is against representative *government*. Government deals with precisely that which is not the same for and in each: At times Rousseau calls it administration.’

<sup>375</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.332.

<sup>376</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.336. As for the work’s planned inclusion in the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, Rousseau writes in the preface to *De l’Imitation théâtrale* that he changed his mind because he was not ‘able to fit it into that work

They maintain that Rousseau adopts the general argument from Plato that artists exhibit appearance rather than being in their imitations: ‘artists do not display an understanding of their subject’s fundamental nature (its *eidōs* or form), but instead present only a deceptively one-sided perspective on that subject.’<sup>377</sup> However, Rousseau takes the view further, elaborating the consequences of such representations and writing that when choosing a point of view the artist

renders, in accordance with what suits him, the same object to the spectators as pleasant or deformed. Thus, they [the spectators] are never responsible for judging the thing imitated in itself, but they are forced to judge it based on a certain appearance and as it pleases the imitator: often they even judge it only by habit, and something arbitrary enters even into the imitation.<sup>378</sup>

The object imitated therefore appears to the spectators as ‘pre-judged’ and it denies the audience the chance to judge it themselves. Dugan and Strong argue that in Rousseau’s version of Plato, theatrical representation tempts the audience to give in to the sentiment of the imitation and accept it as showing something true. This is because we wish that ‘a single truth’ existed, and because only one perspective is shown in the imitation, the dramatist’s representation invites us to accept it as unproblematic.<sup>379</sup> Thus, Rousseau thinks that the spectator willingly abandons his/her faculty of judgement in order to have a stronger theatrical experience. Dugan and Strong write that this renders the spectators ‘passive vehicles’ on which the dramatists ‘capitalize’, drawing the audience further into the perspective presented in the representation, while ‘disabl[ing] the audience’s faculty of judgment.’<sup>380</sup>

We note here how this criticism in the *Imitation théâtrale* of imposing a particular judgement on the receiver of art/theatre is an echo of several of the

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comfortably’; Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *On theatrical imitation*, ‘Notice’, p.337. ‘n’ayant pu commodément l’y faire entrer’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *De l’Imitation théâtrale*, ed. André Wyss, ‘Avertissement’, p.1195.

<sup>377</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.336-37.

<sup>378</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *On theatrical imitation*, p.338-39. ‘il rend, selon qu’il lui convient, le même objet agréable ou difforme aux yeux des spectateurs. Ainsi jamais il ne dépend d’eux de juger de la chose imitée en elle-même; mais ils sont forcés d’en juger sur une certaine apparence, et comme plaît à l’imitateur: souvent même ils n’en jugent que par l’habitude, et il entre de l’arbitraire jusques dans l’imitation.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *De l’Imitation théâtrale*, p.1197-98. See also Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.341.

<sup>379</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.340.

<sup>380</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.341 and p.339-45.

main points in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* (as discussed in Chapter 3). It appears that theatrical imitation plays a vital role in Rousseau's concern about prescribed didactics as the foundation of many of the theatrical works performed in the Paris of his time. Because the argument comes with strong political parallels, just as in his discussions of the Parisian theatre and its philosophical leaders. In the *Lettre*, Rousseau paints the men of letters (and of theatre) partly as the heirs of royal and aristocratic power taking over the responsibility of forming the people according to prescribed models that serve to strengthen and maintain the established social hierarchy. At the same time, we understand, from Dugan and Strong's reading of *De l'Imitation théâtrale* and the *Contrat social*, that both theatrical and political representation steer the people away from autonomous thinking and an independent faculty of judgement.

Interestingly, just as Rousseau problematised the implications of representation in his later stage work *Pygmalion* as we have seen above, he seems also to have done so in one of his earliest works for the stage: *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*. Although in *Narcisse*, instead of moving towards a sublation of artistic representation, he multiplies the representation in what appears to be an attempt to expose what is problematic with imitation, or with trying to educate through imitation with an agenda.

### **Judging *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même***

The theme of Rousseau's comedy *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même* is the correction of human flaws through imitation. The main character Valère falls in love with a portrait of himself painted as a woman. His sister Lucinde had given him the portrait as a joke. When finding the portrait on his dressing table, Valère exclaims: 'On my honour this is the prettiest face I have seen in my life. What eyes, Frontin!... I believe that they look like mine.'<sup>381</sup> Valère continues to make a fool of himself through the main part of the play, as he tries to find the person in the portrait, nearly losing his fiancée Angélique in the process because of this 'new' love. But once the truth is revealed to him,

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<sup>381</sup> Slightly amended translation. Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, trans. and ed. by Christopher Kelly, p.131. 'Voilà d'honneur la plus jolie figure que j'ai vue de ma vie. Quels yeux, Frontin!... Je crois qu'ils ressemblent aux miens.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, ed. Jacques Scherer, p.984.

and he sees that the portrait is of himself cross-dressed, he realises how vain he has been and finds a remedy.<sup>382</sup>

In the very first scene, Lucinde makes clear that by giving Valère the portrait she is intending to confront and correct her brother's greatest flaw – his vanity. She says that 'by making [...] a silent and teasing reproach with this portrait, I have thought only of curing him of a failing.'<sup>383</sup> Angélique, Valère's fiancée, had been part of the portrait conspiracy all along, albeit trying to tone down Lucinde's plotting. In the last line of the play, Valère says to Angélique: 'you have cured me of a ridiculousness that was the shame of my youth.'<sup>384</sup> What cures Valère-Narcisse of his vanity is of course the whole circumstance of the portrait, because it revealed the truth to him about his vanity, combined with Angélique's constant love and compassion.<sup>385</sup>

Rousseau's comedy also has a secondary plot in which the 'angelic' Angélique reveals a diabolical side as she devises a cunning scheme of her own. Her intention is to teach a lesson to Lucinde, who often plays pranks on people: 'you have done me a hundred turns for which I owe you punishment' ('vous m'avez fait cent piéces dont je vous dois la punition') Angélique says to Lucinde.<sup>386</sup> It is worth noting here that 'faire piéce à quelqu'un' means to trick someone, while the word *piéce* literally can mean a (theatrical) 'play'. And so we see in Angélique's friendly revenge how Lucinde gets a taste of her own medicine. Lucinde is betrothed to Angélique's brother Léandre, although she is in love with Cléonte. What Lucinde does not know is that the

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<sup>382</sup> For an analysis of how the Narcissus myth has been interpreted throughout history, see Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus theme in western European literature up to the early 19th century* (Lund, 1967). She also discusses Rousseau's play and its preface, p.277-85.

<sup>383</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, p.126. '[...] je n'ai songé qu'à le guérir d'un travers'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, p.978.

<sup>384</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Narcissus; or, the lover of himself*, p.160. 'vous m'avez guéri d'un ridicule qui faisoit la honte de ma jeunesse'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, p.1018.

<sup>385</sup> Rousseau's choice of names for Valère's sister and future wife both have multiple connotations. *Lucinde* is naturally associated with 'light' (Latin: *lux*), but also with Lucifer, the devil. When Valère asks his servant if he has put the portrait on the dressing table, the servant answers: 'It can't be anyone but either the devil or you.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, p.131. 'Ce ne peut être que le diable ou vous.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, p.984. Lucinde's sly plan with the portrait enlightens Valère's vanity and makes him aware of it. *Angélique* is of course the 'angelic' (Latin: *angelicus*) but also the 'messenger' (Greek: *αγγελος* (*angelos*)). With great empathy and patience, she helps Valère understand his mistake and remember his love for her.

<sup>386</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, p.128; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, p.981.

two men are the same person. Léandre introduced himself to Lucinde as Cléonte because he wanted her to fall in love with *him* as himself, free from all parentally governed pacts. Angélique plays on her brother's secret and explains her reason for doing so: 'If I take pleasure in playing on her anxieties for several moments, it's to make the outcome sweeter for her. What other vengeance could be authorised by friendship?'<sup>387</sup> The secret is not revealed until the moment when the reluctant Lucinde is to meet Léandre for the first time, and realises that her lover and her fiancé are in fact the same person.

The subplot reveals a fictional and a real person to be one, just like the portrait and Valère.<sup>388</sup> In both cases, the fictionalised version of the person was necessary to correct a fault and to make love possible. Furthermore the two plots are linked, as the subplot is a consequence of Lucinde's creation of the first plot, and her habit of executing such tricks. Creating a kind of domino effect, *Narcisse* is a play about a play about a portrait meant to correct a fault. But correcting flaws through plays or tricks is also a fault, and therefore a second play within the play (Cléonte/Léandre) is needed to correct the errors created by the first play (the portrait/Valère). What imitation or pretence will be needed to amend the flaws generated by the second plot? Rousseau's comedy does not say, but leaves the characters with a seemingly happy ending. The structure of the plot(s) however indicates a continuation in which the domino effect of correcting flaws through imitation necessarily must continue incessantly. The characters endlessly judge each other's faults; trying to correct them through little 'plays', only to be in need of help to find their way back to themselves – possibly through new 'plays' created by someone else. They are doomed forever to be 'playwrights', trying to make other people better by corrupting themselves and others.

In his *Confessions*, Rousseau gives an account of how *Narcisse* came to be performed twice, on 18 and 20 December 1752 at the Comédie-Française. Rousseau describes how with the help of the actor La Noue the play was performed anonymously, without any mention of the author. Even though

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<sup>387</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Narcissus; or, The Lover of himself*, p.142. 'Si je me plais à jouir pendant quelques instans de ses inquiétudes, c'est pour lui en rendre l'événement plus doux. Quelle autre vengeance pourroit être autorisée par l'amitié?' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même*, p.997.

<sup>388</sup> See also René Démoris, 'Narcisse: ou comment l'auteur se donne en spectacle', in *Rousseau et le spectacle*, p.93-103, which remarks on the reoccurring image in *Narcisse* of two persons merging into one. Démoris argues that through this element Rousseau also displays his own 'double nature' with his both typically masculine (morality) and feminine (sensitivity) qualities (p.103).

Rousseau thought that the actors produced a performance that ‘one could not call [...] absolutely poorly played’, he left the theatre before the end because he was bored:

I got so bored at the first [performance] that I could not hold still until the end, and leaving the theatre, went into the Cafe de Procope where I found Boissy and several others, who probably had gotten bored as I had. There I loudly said my *peccavi*, humbly or proudly admitting myself to be the author of the Piece, and talking about it in the way everyone thought about it.<sup>389</sup>

As René D  moris has pointed out, Rousseau really makes a show out of revealing to the world that he is the author of this ‘bad’ play, a show that is later prolonged through the description of the Caf   de Procope revelation in his *Confessions*.<sup>390</sup> Contemporary sources confirm these happenings and claim that when in the middle of the crowded caf   Rousseau exclaimed: ‘The new play has fallen; and it merited its fall; it bored me; it is by Rousseau from Geneva; and it is me, I am this Rousseau.’<sup>391</sup>

We could of course read this as a simple confession of having written a semi-successful and possibly boring play. However, through his confession Rousseau is also forcing the performance to continue outside the theatre. For the people in the caf   can again witness how two persons become united in one: The unknown, anonymous playwright merges with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, at the same time as the spectator Rousseau, who speaks of the play ‘in the way everyone thought about it’, and the playwright Rousseau become one. And here too, ‘outside’ the world of the play itself, we find a curing of vanity and amour-propre in this merging of characters. Rousseau continues the description of the events after *Narcisse*:

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<sup>389</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.5, *Confessions*, p.325. ‘je m’ennuyai tellement    la premi  re que je ne pus tenir jusqu’    la fin, et sortant du spectacle, j’entrai au caf   de Procope o   je trouvai Boissy et quelques autres, qui probablement s’  toient ennuy  s comme moi. L   je dis hautement mon *peccavi*, m’avouant humblement ou fierement l’auteur de la Pi  ce, et en parlant comme tout le monde en pensoit. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confession*, p.387-88.

<sup>390</sup> See Ren   D  moris, ‘Narcisse: ou comment l’auteur se donne en spectacle’, in *Rousseau et le spectacle*, p.94-95.

<sup>391</sup> ‘La piece nouvelle est tomb  e; elle m  rite sa ch  te; elle m’a ennuy  ; elle est de Rousseau de Gen  ve; et c’est moi qui suis ce Rousseau.’ The source is *Anecdotes dramatiques* (1775), here quoted from a footnote by Ralph A. Leigh, in Rousseau, *CC*, vol.2, p.207–208 (Letter 188), note 2.

That public admission of the Author of a bad Piece that failed was extremely admired and hardly appeared very difficult to me. I even found in it a compensation of amour-propre in the courage with which it was done.<sup>392</sup>

Rousseau had passed judgment on the character of Valère and presented it to the audience in a 'bad' play with a humorous yet moralising lesson. Just as he created a punishment for Lucinde through the secondary plot of the play, he creates one for himself here: In revealing his *peccavi* (a confession of guilt or sin) he can somehow bring relief to the vanity created from being a playwright trying to correct flaws through imitation, and thus he finds 'a compensation of amour-propre.' And just as in the case of Lucinde, a 'side show' was needed to achieve this redemption. Further, *Narcisse* was only performed twice, because Rousseau cancelled the production. He even chose not to receive the income from the performance, but instead donated it to the theatre for improving the auditorium and the orchestra pit.<sup>393</sup>

How did Rousseau understand this domino effect of the correction of flaws through imitation or 'little plays', and what did it lead to? *Narcisse, ou, L'amant de lui-même* and Rousseau's actions following its performance indicate a never-ending spiral of bad behaviour and the correction of moral flaws through little plays with good intentions. And this in turn will beg for a secondary action to amend the vices produced from the first. Very soon in such a spiral, one loses sight of what from the beginning was good or bad. For according to Rousseau's *Imitation théâtrale*, an artistic representation implies that the playwright holds the audience's faculty of judgement in captivity, even if the intentions are good. The *Lettre à d'Alembert* confirms these conclusions, as I shall explain.

At the beginning of the *Lettre*, Rousseau writes that it appears as if theatrical spectacles are good for virtuous individuals, and bad for corrupted people.<sup>394</sup> But towards the middle of the letter, Rousseau expresses the opposite view, that theatre can be good for corrupt persons and devastating for moral

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<sup>392</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.5, *Confessions*, p.325. 'Cet aveu public de l'Auteur d'une mauvaise Pièce qui tombe fut fort admiré et me parut très peu pénible. J'y trouvai même un dédommagement d'amour-propre dans le courage avec lequel il fut fait.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confessions*, p.388

<sup>393</sup> Rousseau to Jean Baptiste Simon Sauvé de La Noue, 26 December 1752, in Rousseau, *CC*, vol. 2, p.209–10 (Letter 190). According to Ralph A. Leigh, the income from the performances, which had 796 spectators for the premiere and 913 people in the audience for the second performance, was 156 livres. Editorial note 1, in Rousseau, *CC*, vol. 2, p. 207–208 (Letter 188).

<sup>394</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10. *Letter to d'Alembert*, p.265; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, p.19.



people. But instead of concluding that the two effects cancel each other out, he writes that:

there is this difference: the effect which re-enforces the good and the bad, since it is drawn from the spirit of the plays, is subject, as are they, to countless modifications which reduce it to practically nothing, while the effect which changes the good into bad and the bad into good, resulting from the very existence of a Theatre, is a real, constant one which returns every day and must finally prevail.<sup>395</sup>

The theatrical imitation seems to set in motion a never-ending movement, which calls all human values into question – where good can become bad, and vice versa, human values are little by little drained of meaning by the ‘countless modifications’, through the constant movement or exchange between good and bad caused by the theatrical imitation. As a parallel to today’s world, violence in movies can be seen as a simple illustration of this. Every time a violent fight or a murder is seen on screen, the experience of violence in real life could be said to change: some become more afraid of it, while others get used to seeing it.<sup>396</sup> To Rousseau, then, the danger in abandoning one’s judgement to someone else, through theatrical (or political) representation, is that we may not see the world in the same way afterwards, not only because we might perceive it differently, but because it is no longer the world as we have chosen to recognise it. For while we do not have full control over ourselves, ‘the good [might change] into bad and the bad into good’. Placing one’s judgment in the hands of someone else, especially someone with a prescribed didactic plan on how to influence or form his/her audience, means risking one’s unique and autonomous view of the world. It means risking losing oneself ‘to countless modifications,’ because theatrical representation – just like political representation – lacks the ability to adapt to the general will’s individual character in each particular case. A theatrical representation, with a playwright’s idea of how to educate the audience thus becomes even more problematic when the dramatist affiliates with a philosophical movement or social group with political power or influence. For in

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<sup>395</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10. *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.298-99. ‘il y a cette difference, que l’effet qui renforce le bien et le mal, étant tiré de l’esprit des pièces, est sujet comme elle à mille modifications qui le réduisent presque à rien; au-lieu que celui qui change le bien en mal, et le mal en bien, resultant de l’existence même du Spectacle, est un effet constant, réel, qui revient tous les jours et doit l’emporter à la fin.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.60.

<sup>396</sup> I am indebted to Felicity Baker for helping me, at an early stage in my writing, to contextualise and understand the *Lettre* in relation to the world of today.

such a case the audience is not only yielding their autonomous judgement to another individual, but possibly to an authoritarian group or movement.

### Escaping Plato's cave

In the examples above we have seen how in *Pygmalion* and *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui-même* Rousseau tries in various ways to dissolve, alter and expose his own theatrical representation. In the case of *Pygmalion* it meant evoking the communion and auto-representation of the public festival, and in the case of *Narcisse* it meant examining how didactical correction of morals through theatrical imitation in turn will lead to new moral defaults, requiring new corrections and imitations *ad infinitum*. Both the sublation (simultaneous cancellation and alternation) and the exposition of imitation could therefore be seen as strategies to counterbalance a significant consequence of theatrical representation: its tendency to temporarily take over the spectator's faculty of judgement. However, to get a more complete image of the function of imitation in relation to his idea of theatrical art, we need to understand its political implications. We need to ask how Rousseau thinks theatrical imitation can be used as a tool to obtain power on the societal level, and how that tool can be turned into a *pharmakon* against itself. Can any form of theatrical imitation prevail without robbing the audience of their judgement?

To answer these questions, I will turn to the analysis of Rousseau's *Imitation théâtrale* by David Lay Williams. In *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, Williams dedicates a chapter to Plato's famous cave allegory (from the *Republic*, book VII), its importance to Rousseau's political writings and its prominent presence in *De l'Imitation théâtrale*.<sup>397</sup> But examining William's analysis, we need to recall briefly the circumstances surrounding Plato's cave.

Plato's allegory is a tale of imprisonment and of being blind to the chains that prevent people from gaining the freedom that is won by beholding the truth. Facing a wall in a cave, people are chained with their heads fixed in one direction. Behind them is a fire, and between the prisoners' backs and the fire jailers pass by holding up various objects. The shadows of these objects are then projected onto the wall as images for the prisoners to see. Since the shadows are all the prisoners can see, they believe that they consti-

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<sup>397</sup> For an English translation of the cave allegory, see *The Collected dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, 1969).

tute the only reality there is. Plato imagines one of the prisoners being forced to stand up and to turn around, which is a very painful experience since the direct light from the fire causes his/her eyes to hurt and makes the new world impossible to interpret. Although seeing the actual objects and not just their shadows, the prisoner would be unable to believe someone claiming that these are closer to the truth than the shadow-simulacra projected on the wall. The prisoner would flee back to the reality he/she knows and understands.

Plato envisions what would happen if the prisoner is freed and forced to leave the cave completely. First, the released prisoner is blinded by the sunlight and struck with pain, rage and confusion. Slowly, he/she would become accustomed to the light and begin to see, at first indirectly through shadows and reflections, then directly seeing objects in the dim light of night, and then one day will be able to see the world in full sunlight. Were this released prisoner to return to the cave, his/her eyes would again need time to adjust. Therefore, even though he/she might try to inform the other cave dwellers of the revelations of the outside world, those in the cave would regard their former companion as confused and disoriented. Their conclusion would be that to stay in the cave is the best option because the world of shadows is the only one they know and can control. If someone in the future were to try freeing a prisoner, they would most likely be killed before succeeding.<sup>398</sup>

Williams presents three common interpretations of Plato's cave allegory: the educational, the epistemic/metaphysical and the political, all which are important in our understanding of the societal power aspects of theatrical imitation in Rousseau. The educational interpretation of the cave focuses on the different levels of knowledge that the released prisoner goes through in his/her ascent from the cave. Williams writes that '[p]roperly trained, the pupil comes to genuine understandings of the most central lessons and enters a realm unknown and unavailable to the uneducated.'<sup>399</sup> In other words, the person who manages to get out of the cave will soon have access to a whole world, enlightened by the sun, which the cave dwellers do not even know exists. Williams explains that the epistemic/metaphysical aspect of the cave is closely linked to the educational one, for the 'epistemic ladder' climbed by the former prisoner reveals the metaphysical and most elevated dimension of education, namely that of ideas: 'Once one knows the sun, the shadows and images no longer appear real. They are now known *as* shadows and nothing

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<sup>398</sup> Plato, *Republic, The Collected dialogues of Plato*, book VII, p.747-50. See also Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.131.

<sup>399</sup> Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.132.

more.<sup>400</sup> This is the level of education, which will take around fifty years, and the level that Plato's philosopher-rulers must achieve before they are fit to lead a republic.<sup>401</sup>

The political interpretation places the shadow-casters in the limelight because it is their manipulation of the prisoners, their showing of shadows on the walls, that keeps the world and people of the cave in the dark. Williams writes that '[t]he purpose of the shadows is to mislead and distract the captives so that they have absolutely no notion that what they are seeing are shadows and that these shadows function to their detriment.'<sup>402</sup> And the jailers keep up the illusion of the shadow world because it allows them to maintain their political station within the power hierarchy of their reality. This system would however quickly fall apart if the prisoners were not imprisoned, chained and immobile within their existence. But as Williams points out, the chains that keep the prisoners in the cave should not be understood as actual chains, but rather as bonds made of ideologies and opinions: 'The captives are held in place by the belief that their cave is pleasant.'<sup>403</sup> The shadow casters are painted as tyrants, profiting by presenting a false world to their people, making them naively contented slaves, ready to defend to the death their own cage and in turn the kingdom of their tyrants.<sup>404</sup>

Williams emphasises that these three interpretations of the cave complement each other. The political interpretation points to the social injustice caused by uneducated leaders hungry for power. The educational interpretation suggests that the only way to freedom and to escaping the cave is through learning. And the metaphysical interpretation focuses on the difference between the cave world and the sunlit world outside. Enlightened ideas of truth, justice and the good are what makes it possible for those who have escaped the cave to recognise the journey they have made.<sup>405</sup>

Williams believes that Rousseau's political thinking is influenced by Plato and the allegory of the cave, arguing with reference to many of Rousseau's central works, including the First and Second discourses, *Emile*, and *Du Contrat social*, and using some of Rousseau's most famous statements, such as the opening lines of *Du Contrat social*: '[m]an is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.' Williams shows that the chains of ideology and opinion from the cave allegory are almost 'obsessively' present in Rous-

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<sup>400</sup> Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.133.

<sup>401</sup> Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.132-33.

<sup>402</sup> Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.135.

<sup>403</sup> Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.135.

<sup>404</sup> Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.134-36.

<sup>405</sup> Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.136.

seau's oeuvre, which is seen both in the similarity of the thought structure and in the choice of words. Williams' analysis of the First discourse is the most relevant example for the present study.

The following section from Rousseau's First discourse is one of Williams' prime examples:

While Government and Laws provide for the safety and well-being of assembled men, the Sciences, Letters, and Arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which men are burdened, stifle in them the sentiment of that original liberty for which they seemed to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized peoples. Need raised Thrones; the Sciences and Arts have strengthened them. Earthly powers, love talents and protect those who cultivate them. Civilized peoples, cultivate talents: happy slaves, you owe to them that delicate and refined taste on which you pride yourselves; that softness of character and urbanity of morals which make relations among you so amiable and easy; in a word, the semblance of all the virtues without the possession of any.<sup>406</sup>

As Williams points out, the arts and sciences are presented here as tools of enslavement. Much as in Plato's cave, the people in Rousseau's First discourse are ideologically tricked into loving their chains, which are covered and made to appear beautiful by 'garlands of flowers.' In Rousseau's version of Plato's cave, people formed by civilisation are the 'happy slaves', easy to manipulate through the beautified chains they have learned to defend. This argument partly echoes the discussion in Chapter 2 and 3 concerning the way Rousseau linked both the arts (particularly theatre) and social norms to the systematisation of *aesthetic perfectibility* and its resulting power system.

According to Williams, the most striking example of the influence and inspiration of Plato's cave on Rousseau is his *Imitation théâtrale*. Williams states that 'Rousseau even writes [...] in the voice of Plato.'<sup>407</sup> We have seen

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<sup>406</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.2, *Discourse on the sciences and the arts*, p.5. 'Tandis que le Gouvernement et les Loix pourvoient à la sûreté et au bien-être des hommes assemblés; les Sciences, les Lettres et les Arts, moins despotiques et plus puissans peut-être, étendent des guirlandes de fleurs sur les chaînes de fer dont ils sont chargés, étouffent en eux le sentiment de cette liberté originelle pour laquelle ils sembloient être nés, leur font aimer leur esclavage et en forment ce qu'on appelle des Peuples policés. Le besoin éleva les Trônes; les Sciences et les Arts les ont affermis. Puissances de la Terre, aimez les talens, et protégez ceux qui les cultivent. Peuples policés, cultivez-les: Heureux esclaves, vous leur devez ce goût délicat et fin dont vous vous piquez; cette douceur de caractere et cette urbanité de mœurs qui rendent parmi vous le commerce si liant et si facile; en un mot, les apparences de toutes les vertus sans en avoir aucune.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.3, p.6-7.

<sup>407</sup> Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.156

above, in the discussion on Dugan and Strong's interpretation of the *Imitation théâtrale* that Rousseau maintains that a representation of an object can only give one perspective of that object, namely that of the creator of the representation. Williams shows that this discussion is politically related to Plato's allegory of the cave, with Rousseau reusing and slightly changing an example from book X of Plato's *Republic* when he makes a distinction between three different types of palaces. In Plato's version it was different types of beds. The first palace is the idea of a palace, the model of all palaces that only exists in the abstract, outside the world of objects. The second palace is the architect's palace – an image of the first one. The third palace is that of the painter, an image of the second palace, and thus the image of an image. Rousseau writes that it therefore follows 'that the imitation does not, as is believed, hold the second rank in the order of beings, but the third,' continuing that 'the imitation is always one degree further from the truth than is thought.'<sup>408</sup> Williams notes that Rousseau repeatedly comes back to the language of the cave, using terms like 'shadows' and 'appearance', and he cites the following sections from the *Imitation théâtrale*:

The representations [...] deprived of all reality, produce even this appearance [of showing reality] only with the help of some vain shadows and of some flimsy simulacra that he causes to be taken for the thing itself.<sup>409</sup>

It is, I admit, a sweet thing to yield to the charms of an enchanting talent, to acquire by means of it goods, honors, power, glory. But power, glory, riches, and pleasures are all eclipsed and disappear like a shadow before justice and virtue.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *On theatrical imitation*, p.338. 'D'où il suit que l'imitation ne tient pas, comme on croit, le second rang, mais le troisième dans l'ordre des êtres [...] l'imitation est toujours d'un degré plus loin de la vérité qu'on ne pense.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *De l'Imitation théâtrale*, p.1197.

<sup>409</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *On theatrical imitation*, p.339. 'Les représentations [...] dépourvues de toute réalité, ne produisent même cette apparence qu'à l'aide de quelques vaines ombres et de quelques légers simulacres qu'il fait prendre pour la chose même.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *De l'Imitation théâtrale*, p.1199. See also Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.157.

<sup>410</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *On theatrical imitation*, p.350. 'c'est, je l'avoue, une douce chose de se livrer aux charmes d'un talent enchanteur, d'acquérir par lui des biens, des honneurs, du pouvoir, de la gloire: mais la puissance, et la gloire, et la richesse, et les plaisirs, tout s'éclipse et disparaît comme une ombre, auprès de la justice et de la vertu.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *De l'Imitation théâtrale*, p.1211. See also Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic enlightenment*, p.161.

Williams concludes that for Rousseau the reality of the first palace is that of the world of ideas in the open air under the sky, outside of the cave. The third palace, on the other hand, belongs on the wall of shadows in the cave, two removes away from the reality of the ideas. This is the world of imitation and appearances.<sup>411</sup> Caught in chains of pleasure, the ‘happy slaves’ of the cave are unknowingly being entertained by the shadow plays. In between the two, we find the second palace and its creators: the shadow-casters, the tyrants, the playwrights. However, these people are slaves of their own reality without knowing it. Filled with their sense of superiority, controlling the captives through the shadows, they are unaware of the world of ideas outside of the cave.<sup>412</sup>

The connection between Rousseau’s concept of imitation in the arts and the allegory of the cave has several important implications for our understanding of his notion of theatre. As Dugan and Strong conclude, Rousseau thought that theatrical representation requires momentarily relinquishing one’s judgement. However, taking Plato’s cave into account we can situate the function and consequences of imitation within Rousseau’s idea of the arts, and in particular the theatre. Previous chapters have shown that in his analysis of art, music and theatre Rousseau tried to uncover a historical pattern of how we perceive and create artistic beauty, through a thought structure that I have termed *aesthetic perfectibility*. This methodisation of our ways of feeling and thinking has contributed to creating certain power structures in society, where learned and/or powerful men have profited from being able to control the less educated. This happens through the mastering of established rules within that system, and through creating new rules. Observing how the learned used the theatre as an effective disseminator of their teachings, Rousseau criticised them for capitalising on their already powerful position to gain or establish even more power. His *Imitation théâtrale* indicates how the cave with the shadow-casters controlling the prisoners for their own gain is an image of the same power structure. The great danger lies in the shadow-casters as a group, for together they can forge ideological chains that are more convincing than one person alone. With such chains, their audience will happily give away their faculty of judgement for a moment of entertainment because they think they are being educated. Whereas truth and reality only reside outside of the cave.

Considering Rousseau’s extensive and complex engagement with artistic imitation, suggesting that the shadows of the cave are the equivalent of imi-

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<sup>411</sup> Williams, *Rousseau’s Platonic enlightenment*, p.157-61

<sup>412</sup> Williams, *Rousseau’s Platonic enlightenment*, p.161-62.

tation in the theatre would be going too far. However, given his conjectural history of the arts, generated through the thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility*, and the power structures he thought it generated, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that Rousseau found that artistic representation contains traits of a tool to obtain power. As an alternative to the theatre of prescribed didactics – as shown in earlier chapters – Rousseau promoted the public festival as an educational entertainment where people could attain enlightenment through autonomy. Having read Starobinski, Dugan/Strong and Williams, we see that the dissolution of traditional imitation and the altering of it through auto-representation in the festival were important components of Rousseau’s educational spectacle and for its liberating function. For in the auto-representation, the faculty of judgement is never handed over to someone else. Instead it allows us, both as individual subjects and as a group, to dwell in ourselves: to indulge in our own essence and to express ourselves to ourselves.

### ***Le Devin du village in the open air under the sky***

Williams has shown that just as Plato’s cave-dwellers have the possibility to liberate themselves from the chains of ideology and find a way out of the cave through education, so do the captives in Rousseau’s version of the cave. However, Plato believes that only a few people can be educated and freed, because so few have the talent, skill and intelligence to become philosopher kings.<sup>413</sup> Whereas Rousseau takes a more egalitarian view of access to the reality of ideas. There is no need to be a philosopher to understand true and eternal ideas,<sup>414</sup> because everyone potentially holds the key to enlightenment, as it is naturally ‘engraved in the human heart.’<sup>415</sup> This is because he believes that true wisdom has two components, one ‘masculine’ and one ‘feminine’,<sup>416</sup> with the masculine component standing for more traditional philos-

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<sup>413</sup> Williams, *Rousseau’s Platonic enlightenment*, p.168.

<sup>414</sup> For example, Williams (p.170) refers to Rousseau’s Emile, a boy with average talents and intelligence who nevertheless, as Rousseau’s describes him, has ‘[t]he true principles of the just, the true models of the beautiful, all the moral relations of beings, all the ideas of order [...] imprinted on his understanding.’ Rousseau, *CW*, vol.13, *Emile*, p.410. ‘Les vrais principes du juste, les vrais modèles du beau, tous les rapports moraux des êtres, toutes les idées de l’ordre se gravent dans son entendement.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.4, *Emile*, p.548.

<sup>415</sup> Williams, *Rousseau’s Platonic enlightenment*, p.169.

<sup>416</sup> In this argument, Williams refers to Laurence Cooper, ‘Human nature and the love of wisdom: Rousseau’s hidden (and modified) Platonism’, *Journal of politics*, vol.64, no.1 (Feb., 2002) p.108-25.



ophy and reason, and the feminine for sentiment and a certain ‘fundamental intuition of the metaphysical ideas.’<sup>417</sup> Williams writes that

Without this [feminine] component, reason can only construct castles in the air. And, indeed, this is precisely what the philosophes do for Rousseau. Although they employ great masculine talents of reasoning, they lack the fundamental feminine intuitions of what is just and good. This can only lead to bad philosophy and moral corrosion.<sup>418</sup>

Intuition and sentiment, two skills that are available to all, are necessary to escape from Rousseau’s cave. And this is part of the reason why Rousseau does not believe in elitist philosopher-rulers, but instead wants to place the power in the hands of the people and their general will.<sup>419</sup>

Reading the cave allegory as a parallel to *De l’Imitation théâtrale* and to the *Lettre à d’Alembert* thus reinforces the image of Rousseau’s public festival as an alternative education based on autonomous thinking (see Chapter 3). This helps explain why Rousseau described the theatre of his day as a ‘gloomy cavern’ where people are closed up ‘fearful and immobile in silence and inaction,’ in contrast to the public festival that takes place ‘in the open air, under the sky’ where people give themselves ‘to the sweet sentiment of [...] happiness.’<sup>420</sup> The festival manifests the freedom from the cave of ideological chains – the cave that the learned men of Paris wanted to introduce in Geneva in the shape of a theatre meant to educate its people according to French standards. Like the sunlit world outside the cave, the festival takes place in the open air and may inspire people to exercise their inherent intuition of eternal ideas, of what is good and just.

The links between imitation, the allegory of the cave and Rousseau’s idea of theatre also concretise his attempts to expose and sublimate (simultaneously dissolve and alter) the function of theatrical representation in his own stage works. We have seen above how in *Pygmalion* Rousseau partly dissolves his own theatrical imitation to create transparency and communion, while at the same time allowing Galathée to become an alternative kind of imitation, an auto-representation. Whereas in *Narcisse* he rather attempts to expose the imitation and the consequences of trying to correct moral flaws through artistic representation. Plato’s cave allegory provides us with a context for

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<sup>417</sup> Williams, *Rousseau’s Platonic enlightenment*, p.180.

<sup>418</sup> Williams, *Rousseau’s Platonic enlightenment*, p.180.

<sup>419</sup> Williams, *Rousseau’s Platonic enlightenment*, p.178-82.

<sup>420</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *Letter to d’Alembert*, p.343. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p.114.

understanding these: dissolving, altering and exposing imitation *through* theatrical imitation has a potentially educational effect, much like that of the public festival. To illustrate this more clearly, I will turn to another stage work by Rousseau that strives towards the liberty of the festival possibly for educational purposes: *Le Devin du village*. This work can be said to combine the exposition and the sublation of theatrical representation.

*Le Devin du village* is a one-act opera divided into eight scenes. Throughout the work the simple and laborious life of the countryside is celebrated. The carefree existence of the villagers however is momentarily threatened because the shepherd Colin has been enchanted by a rich and elegant lady. This leads him to neglect his girlfriend, the shepherdess Colette, who in her jealous and heartbroken state turns to the local soothsayer (the Devin) for advice. The Devin knows exactly what to do. He advises Colette to pretend to have a new suitor, 'a fine Gentleman from the Town.'<sup>421</sup> When she meets Colin later she appears 'adorned' ('parée'), possibly in order to strengthen the impression that she has a new lover.<sup>422</sup> In his fear of losing Colette, Colin realises how much he loves her. The story ends happily with a grandiose feast of dance and song expressive of their happiness, and celebrating love, nature and rural bliss.

The many and sometimes detailed stage directions, *didascalies*, that Rousseau wrote into the work are important for our understanding of the drama. Jacqueline Waeber has shown that these stage directions are crucial, particularly in relation to the title role because 'the acting style [...] emphasises gestural language, revealing the influence of the theatrical practices of the théâtre de la Foire [Fair theatre], an important yet neglected source of influence on Rousseau's *intermède*.'<sup>423</sup> In fact, Waeber suggests that the pantomimic features and stage action inspired by the *bas comique* in *Le Devin* might deserve more interest than the work's often discussed role in Rousseau's feuds concerning Italian versus French music.<sup>424</sup> It is because of the

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<sup>421</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *The Village soothsayer*, trans. Christopher Kelly, p.219. 'un beau Monsieur de la Ville', Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Le Devin du village*, p.1103. Le Devin speaks about Colette's 'new lover' to Colin in scene 4 and Colette plays on this in scene 6.

<sup>422</sup> See the opening of scene 6. For further reading on the costumes in *Le Devin du village*, see the case study on Rousseau's one-act opera in the doctoral thesis by Petra Dotlačilová, *Costume in the time of reforms: Louis-René Boquet designing eighteenth-century ballet and opera* (Stockholm University, 2020).

<sup>423</sup> Waeber, "'Le Devin de la Foire'": Revaluating the pantomime in Rousseau's *Devin du village*', p.149, in *Musique et geste en France de Lully à la Révolution*, ed. Jacqueline Waeber (Bern, 2009), p.149-72. See also Waeber, "'Le Devin de la foire'": Pantomime et jeu meut dans *Le Devin du village*', in *Rousseau et le spectacle*, p.105-30.

<sup>424</sup> Waeber, "'Le Devin de la Foire'": Revaluating the pantomime', p.150.

many stage directions that Rousseau's one-act opera 'forms a radical departure from the established traditions of the Académie royale de musique, where the use of such *didascalies* remained sparse.'<sup>425</sup>

One of the most inventive *didascalie* is found in scene 2 when Colette asks for help from the Devin. This is central to the understanding of *Le Devin* because it establishes the atmosphere for the entire drama: Rousseau suggests that the villagers should move and interact with each other in the background while the main action takes place:

During this aria and others like it, the villagers come from time to time to consult the Devin [soothsayer] and to bring him various local products, typical of the countryside. Some of them he helps right away while asking others to wait at his house. This will give the impression of an almost continuous theatrical action.<sup>426</sup>

Village life is present throughout the piece because of this continuous action onstage that functions as a backdrop for the main action, which is the play between Colette, Colin and the Devin. Waeber notes that the practice with 'simultaneous actions' in the background of a drama was 'only going to be theorized and practiced in 1758 by Denis Diderot', and she refers to his treatise *De la poésie dramatique* and the play linked to it, *Le Père de famille*. Later this practice was developed in librettos by Jean-Michel Sedaine,<sup>427</sup> and according to David Charlton the developing genre of *opéra-comique* often included simultaneous background action 'after *Le Devin* but before 1765'.<sup>428</sup> As Waeber points out, this manner of acting – inspired by the fairground theatre and the *bas comique*, including the *didascalie* on 'continuous theatrical action', was not acceptable at court when *Le Devin* premiered at Fon-

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<sup>425</sup> Waeber, "'Le Devin de la Foire'": Revaluating the pantomime', p.152.

<sup>426</sup> My translation. 'Durant cet air et les autres semblables, des gens du village viennent de tems à autre consulter Le Devin et lui apporter divers présens des productions de la campagne. Il en expédie quelques uns et fait signe à d'autres d'aller l'attendre chez lui. Cela donne lieu à un jeu de théâtre presque continuel.' In Jacqueline Waeber, "'Le devin de la foire'": Revaluating the pantomime in Rousseau's *Devin du Village*', in *Musique et geste*, p.158-59. The stage direction appears right before Colette's aria 'Si les galans de la ville'. This *didascalie* can be found in the manuscript for *Le Devin* used in 1752 at the premiere performance at Fontainebleau. However, Rousseau's instruction was crossed out, and has since been excluded in most printed versions (or all known to me). For further reading on this and other stage directions in *Le Devin*, see Waeber's articles mentioned above.

<sup>427</sup> Waeber, "'Le Devin de la Foire'": Revaluating the pantomime', p.160. Others than Rousseau had of course explored a more vivid stage action, sometimes with inspiration from the fairground theatre before 1752. Waeber (p.155) mentions for example Marivaux, Lesage, Gherardi and Diderot.

<sup>428</sup> Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau*, p.40

tainebleau in 1752. And therefore, she writes, the *didascalie* on ‘continuous theatrical action’ and other elements drawing on the fairground theatre had to be crossed out: such practices were not stylistically appropriate for the royal audience, and ‘all allusions that would have emphasized beyond reasonable limits the arrogance of nobility against peasantry’ could have offended people at court.<sup>429</sup>



4.4. *Background action*, *Le Devin du village*, a production by *Performing Premodernity* at Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, 2019.

Even though Rousseau’s stage instruction about the ‘continuous theatrical action’ was not adhered to in practice in 1752 at Fontainebleau or at the Paris Opera when the work premiered there in 1753, it is an important stylistic statement, breaking as it does with the theatrical practices of courtly *bienséance*. When the villagers are walking about in the background, going about their everyday business, the actors break one of the fundamental rules of *bienséance*. Instead of addressing the king, they act as if he was not there. Rousseau himself might have appeared unshaven and poorly dressed at court for the premiere of his one-act opera, even refusing to hear the king’s subsequent offer of a pension (discussed in Chapter 3), but he had to accept that it

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<sup>429</sup> Waeber, “‘Le devin de la foire’? Reevaluating the pantomime”, p.157.

was not possible in 1752 for peasants on stage to ignore the king at the court at Fontainebleau, and so the stage direction was crossed out.

The historical context shows how important it is to consider this stage direction in our analysis, because of its challenge to conventions. Even more so in scene 8, the final scene, when the background action, the village life, suddenly becomes the main focus.<sup>430</sup> As soon as the main plot, i.e. the complication between Colette and Colin, has been resolved, the Devin invites the villagers to take part in the festivities of the finale, and this takes up almost half of the entire work. It also involves many allusions to the public festival, as we recognise from other works by Rousseau. At this point the actual plot and the more traditional kind of theatrical representation of actions and happenings are slowed down, and the ensemble proceed to a common manifestation of feelings, a mutual state of love and happiness. Together, through song and dance, they celebrate their lives in the countryside; the hard work, the simple conditions close to nature and the sweetness of young love. Through a theatrical representation shown on a traditional theatre stage, they seem to evoke the auto-representation of the public festival.

The dramatic representation and the storyline that the audience have followed from the beginning of the drama slowly blend with the celebration of the villagers. Colette, Colin and the Devin of course still figure prominently during the festivities. They sing solos now and then, and the other villagers direct their actions towards them: it is after all a celebration of the young couple's happiness and the Devin's role in achieving it. But in scene 8 the main characters have 'returned' to their regular, rural context. The rich lady with whom Colin flirted had temporarily drawn him and Colette away from the simple happiness of the countryside, and thrown them into the intrigues of a dramatic plot, making them the focus of theatrical imitation. David Charlton remarks that the temptations of luxury are a prominent theme in *Le Devin du village*, and that Rousseau used it to emphasise 'the contrast between falsity and genuineness', partly echoing the First discourse.<sup>431</sup> The word *parure* (adornment or ornament) is repeated throughout the drama, and could be said to work as an underlying theme of the drama. Colin's betrayal is due to the 'fine lady', and when Colette finds out her first reaction, as

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<sup>430</sup> Neither the overture nor the final divertissement of *Le Devin* was finalised when it premiered at Fontainebleau, but Rousseau completed them for the premiere at the Opera in 1753. The divertissement at Fontainebleau in 1752 was a *pasticcio* with inserted music by other composers, many of them by Rameau. Jacqueline Waerber, "'Cette Horrible Innovation': The First Version of the Recitative Parts of Rousseau's *Le devin du village*", in *Music & Letters*, vol.82, no.2 (May, 2001), p.177-213, p.178.

<sup>431</sup> Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau*, p.142-45, p.142.

Charlton points out, 'is not helpless self-pity but anger, expressed around the way her personal beauty could easily have earned her material wealth, had she not preferred Colin.'<sup>432</sup> Colette then wins Colin back by pretending she has met 'a fine Gentleman from the Town', appearing *parée* with fine clothes and jewellery.<sup>433</sup> This meeting between the two lovers, Charlton writes, thus becomes 'a test for both.'<sup>434</sup> And straight after the couple's reconciliation, another *didascalie* tells us that Colette comments on a fancy ribbon – a gift from the rich lady – that Colin has in his hat, whereupon Colin 'throws it away disdainfully.' Colette gives him one of her simpler ribbons instead, one that she had worn to appear more adorned so that Colin would believe she had a new suitor.<sup>435</sup> In this way they both physically strip off the false appearance of riches. Colette and Colin have both played roles and both of them can now return to their village reality and to being themselves. And this is when the stage explodes into festive song and dance, celebrating village life where pretence has no place.

Charlton writes that in the middle of these festivities the audience would have expected a 'virtuoso *ariette* [to] act as a climactic focus'. But instead, the festivities and exultant atmosphere are paused when Colin sings his gentle *romance* 'Dans ma cabane obscure':

Rousseau chose this to be the point where his text, drama and music should focus instead on the completely serious, completely honest, completely uncourtly and completely unconventional. Colin performs just a song, vaguely evocative of ancient music, words transgressing every courtly convention by referring in direct language to physical toil and the conditions of labouring life: 'In my obscure hut, always new worries. Wind, sun or cold, always difficulty and work.' This is what he offers Colette.<sup>436</sup>

In Rousseau's final scene of *Le Devin du village*, the grand welcoming return to rural bliss seems to move away from social (i.e. courtly) appearances and traditional theatrical representation. Moving away from the main plot and the allure of *parure*, the second half of the drama slowly dissolves the theatrical imitation that was the centre of the drama and its underlying theme of *parure*. In the end Colin and Colette are villagers 'common to all', and a part of the manifestation of the villagers' auto-representation.

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<sup>432</sup> Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau*, p.145.

<sup>433</sup> See Dotlačilová, *Costume in the time of reforms* for the details of Colette's *parure*.

<sup>434</sup> Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau*, p.145.

<sup>435</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *The Village soothsayer*, p.224; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Le Devin du village*, p.1109.

<sup>436</sup> Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau*, p.155.



4.5. From scene 8, *Le Devin du village*, a production by *Performing Premodernity* at Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, 2019.

At the same time, imitation is exposed in a way that reinforces its dissolution in scene 8. In a *pantomime* that takes place during the festivities, three dancers mirror the events and the temptation of luxury that the audience has already witnessed. A nobleman courts a village girl. At first she is reluctant, refusing his fine gifts, but when offered a rich necklace she cannot resist. She tries it on and admires her own reflection in the water of a fountain. Now the third dancer, the girl's suitor from the village enters and sees what is going on. The girl quickly gives the necklace back to the nobleman but fails in her efforts to calm the villager. The nobleman threatens to kill his rival, but he softens when the two villagers throw themselves at his feet: all is forgiven and they finally dance together.<sup>437</sup> This little play within the play, a reflection of the main action, creates a feeling of distance. Although slightly altered and reversed, it reminds the characters on stage as well as the au-

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<sup>437</sup> Rousseau's score describes all this in detail. See Waeber's forthcoming edition of *Le Devin du village*.

dience in the auditorium of Colin and Colette's story. At the same time, the imitation within the imitation creates distance: by beholding the imitation from a different angle and engaging in replicas of it in different versions we understand its nature better. In other words, in exposing the imitation in this way, the audience is discreetly reminded that all they have seen on stage is nothing more than a theatrical representation, which could repeat and dissolve itself within itself endlessly – much like the shadows on the walls in Plato's cave allegory. These shadow images are weakened by the direct sunlight of knowledge, especially when viewed beside the parallel movement towards the public festival and the potential sublation of theatrical representation. If we understand the nature of shadows and imitations, we might play with them and even enjoy them, without becoming their captives. Thus, the ensemble with Colette in the lead ends the performance by encouraging everyone, and perhaps even the audience, to go out and dance under the elms, making a final quip aimed at exposing the shallowness of city life:

COLETTE

A la Ville on fait bien plus de fracas,  
 Mais sont-ils aussi gais dans leurs ébats?  
 Toujours contens,  
 Toujours chantans;  
 Plaisirs sans art,  
 Beauté sans fard;  
 Tous leurs concerts valent-ils nos musettes?

Allons danser sous les ormeaux:  
 Animés-vous, jeunes fillettes.  
 Allons danser sous les ormeaux:  
 Galans, prenez vos chalumeaux.

LES VILLAGEOISES

Allons danser sous les ormeaux, etc.

Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Le Devin du village*, p.1113-14.

COLETTE

In the Town they make much more fuss,  
 But are they as gay in their frolics?  
 Always content,  
 Always singing,  
 Artless pleasures,  
 Unpainted beauties;  
 Are their concerts worth our bagpipes?

Let's go dance under the elms:  
 Step lively young lassies.  
 Let's go dance under the elms:  
 Gallants, take up your pipes.

THE [VILLAGE GIRLS]

Let's go dance under the elms, etc.

Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *The Village soothsayer*, p.228-29.



Rousseau's relation to theatrical imitation was complex. Initially, traditional artistic representation appeared problematic to Rousseau because he saw it as a possible tool of power, often used by men in powerful positions, who wanted to use artistic representation didactically to convince the people of their view of the world. At the same time the public festival seems to contradict the negative effects of traditional imitation, not because it denies artistic representation completely, but because it alters it into auto-representation, a representation and manifestation of the self, both as an individual and as a group. In this way the auto-representation escapes the main problem of traditional imitation, that the spectator risks giving away their faculty of judgement momentarily to the creator and ideological movement standing behind the imitation. I do not think that Rousseau in his own plays tried to provide solutions to the challenges that he saw with traditional imitation, but rather that he explored different questions relating to it, and possibly tried to provoke the audience to reflect upon those questions. Using his opponents' tool to obtain power, theatrical representation, while simultaneously undermining it, Rousseau seems to have tried to take advantage of the *pharmakon* relationship between the theatre and the public festival (see Chapter 2). Rousseau's use of exposition and sublation of theatrical imitation in *Pygmalion*, *Narcisse* and *Le Devin du village* could thus be understood as a wish to introduce an alternative education to the didactics of the theatre of Enlightenment, an alternative education that echoed the public festival on the home ground of his adversaries: the Parisian stage.



*5.1. Pygmalion ready to strike. Performance of Pygmalion, at Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, 2019, a production by Performing Premodernity. João Luís Paixão as Pygmalion and Laila Cathleen Neuman as Galathée.*

## Chapter 5

### Melodising theatre – performing the inner landscape

Having seen the idea of imitation inspired by Plato in Rousseau's *Imitation théâtrale* one would be forgiven for thinking that Rousseau has a generally negative view of artistic imitation.<sup>438</sup> In Rousseau's *Imitation théâtrale* imitation is painted as an activity that momentarily deactivates the spectator's faculty of judgement.<sup>439</sup> And as we saw in the previous chapter Rousseau seeks to expose, alter or dissolve theatrical representation in his own stage works as an emancipatory act for his audience, which could easily strengthen the impression of a generally negative view of imitation. However, as we have seen in the example of the auto-representation of the public festival, Rousseau's relation to imitation and representation is more complex. As I will show, he in fact differentiates between different kinds of imitation, and as so often before, it is in his musical writings that he develops and nuances this. In his music theory, imitation is presented not only as a natural part of music, but as a necessity. Without it, music loses its expressiveness and its power to touch its audience.

*Melody* emerges as a key concept because he defines it as the only imitative component in music. In Chapter 2 we have seen how in the *Lettre sur la musique française* Italian opera appears as a prime example of how *aesthetic perfectibility* can represent a positive development through its *pharmakon* structure. This is because Rousseau believes that the Italians managed to influence the development of systematised harmonic theories in the direction of a more expressive type of music by investing in melody, i.e. the imitative component of music. Since this had a remedial effect on Italian music during the Renaissance according to Rousseau, we must ask if *melody*, understood

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<sup>438</sup> See Chapter 4 for a definition of my use of the term 'imitation' in relation to 'representation'.

<sup>439</sup> See Dugan and Strong's reading of *De l'Imitation théâtrale*, discussed in the previous chapter. Dugan and Strong, 'Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau', p.340-41.

here as a mimetic phenomenon rather than as a strictly musical element, in his view could have a similar influence on the art of theatre in the age of Enlightenment.

In this chapter I argue that Rousseau was inspired by melody as an imitative element and by its particular way of representing, and that he tried to transfer its positive effects to the art form of theatre in his own stage works. I will begin by outlining the particularity of Rousseau's conception of melody and musical representation in relation to other types of imitation. Then I will focus on how Rousseau, in practice, tried to insert his notion of melody into the dramaturgy and performance of his theatrical works. The main examples will be *Pygmalion* and the *scène lyrique* as a new dramatic genre.

## Melody and the exception of musical representation

As we have seen in previous chapters, Rousseau's music theory strongly favours melody over harmony. While Rousseau sees melody as the origin or essential nature of music, harmony appears in his writings primarily as a product of *aesthetic perfectibility* (as systematisation): man's way of endlessly trying to perfect and develop something through systems and rules in most cases leads to a lack of expressiveness and energy.<sup>440</sup> He understands harmony to rely on a conventional form of beauty. To be able to appreciate such beauty one must have been taught within that same convention, have ears that are 'trained in it' or at least 'have the dictionary' that translates this

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<sup>440</sup> See for example Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay on the origin of languages*, Chapter 19, 'How music has degenerated', p.331: 'Melody being forgotten and the attention of the musician having been turned entirely toward harmony, everything was gradually directed toward this new object; the genera, the modes, the scale, everything took on a new appearance; it was harmonic successions that regulated the progression of the parts. Once this progression had usurped the name of melody, it was indeed impossible to mistake its mother's features in this new melody, and as our musical system gradually became purely harmonic, it is not surprising that oral accent suffered for it, and that music lost almost all its energy for us.' 'La mélodie étant oubliée et l'attention du musicien s'étant tournée entièrement vers l'harmonie, tout se dirigea peu-à-peu sur ce nouvel objet; les genres, les modes, la gamme, tout reçut des faces nouvelles; ce furent les successions harmoniques qui réglèrent la marche des parties. Cette marche ayant usurpé le nom de mélodie on ne put méconnoître en effet dans cette nouvelle mélodie les traits de sa mère, et notre système musical étant ainsi devenu par degrés purement harmonique, il n'est pas étonnant que l'accent oral en ait souffert, et que la musique ait perdu pour nous presque toute son énergie.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, p.427.

language.<sup>441</sup> At the same time, one of Rousseau's central criticisms of musical harmony is that it does not imitate anything. Based on his writings on theatrical imitation, one might suppose that Rousseau would perceive this lack of imitation in harmony as something positive. But reading more widely we soon understand that Rousseau sees harmony's inability to imitate as problematic. For example, in his *Dictionnaire de musique*, Rousseau ends the article 'Harmony' in the following manner:

It stands to reason that, since *Harmony* does not furnish any principle of imitation by which Music, forming images expressing feelings, it may be elevated to the Dramatic or imitative genre, which is the most noble part of the Art, and the only energetic one; all that regards merely the physics of Sounds being quite limited in the pleasure they give us and having but very little power over the human heart.<sup>442</sup>

This passage not only underlines harmony's inability to imitate, but states that it is the imitative quality of music that gives it its energy and ability to move its audience. To Rousseau, the touching beauty of music cannot stem from a succession of beautiful sounds, but must stem from what it imitates. In fact, he states in the conclusion to the chapter 'On melody' in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* that without imitation the fine arts would be natural sciences that we could evaluate and for which we could create systems.<sup>443</sup>

In both the *Essai* and the *Dictionnaire*, melody, and melody alone, is promoted as the imitative component in music. At the same time, melody is presented as something closely connected to our interiority; our most fundamental and subjective emotions, thoughts and passions. In the earliest times of humanity, Rousseau argues, music (melody) and speech were one,

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<sup>441</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 14, 'On Harmony', p.321-23; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.415-17.

<sup>442</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dictionary of music*, 'Harmony', p.413. 'Par la raison, puisque l'*Harmonie* ne fournit aucun principe d'imitation par lequel la Musique formant des image ou exprimant des sentimens se puisse élever au genre Dramatique ou imitatif, qui est la partie de l'Art la plus noble, et la seule énergique; tout ce qui ne tient qu'au physique des Sons, étant très-borné dans le plaisir qu'il nous donne, et n'ayant que très-peu de pouvoir sur le cœur humain.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dictionnaire de musique*, p.851. Rousseau repeats the view that harmony does not imitate in several other texts. See for example the article in the *Dictionnaire* on 'Imitation' (*CW*, p.414; *OC*, p.861); the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (*CW*, p.321-23; *OC*, p.415-17), and the *Lettre à M. Burney* (*CW*, p.498, *OC*, p.449).

<sup>443</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 13, 'On Melody', p.319-21; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.412-14.

and due to melody's roots in the way we express our feelings, the sounds of it should in fact be understood as 'signs of our affections':<sup>444</sup>

cadence and sounds arise along with syllables, passion makes all the vocal organs speak, and adorns the voice with all their brilliance; thus verses, songs, and speech have a common origin. Around the fountains of which I have spoken, the first discourses were the first songs; the periodic and measured recurrences of rhythm, the melodious inflections of accents caused poetry and music to be born along with language; or rather, all this was nothing but language itself in those happy climates and those happy times when the only pressing needs that required another's help were those to which the heart gave rise.<sup>445</sup>

Melody, by imitating the inflections of the voice, expresses complaints, cries of sadness or of joy, threats, and moans; all the vocal signs of the passions are within its scope. It imitates the accents of languages, and the turns of phrase appropriate in each idiom to certain movements of the soul; *it not only imitates, it speaks.*<sup>446</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Melodic imitation thus has part of its basis in the inflections of the human voice and its language(s), and as such, its sounds become the signs of our passions. At the same time, as we can see in the quotation above, it looks as if Rousseau thinks that this type of representation reaches beyond itself: 'it not only imitates, it speaks.' To understand this, we need to turn to a few lines that Rousseau reuses in no less than three different texts on music; in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, and in the articles on 'Imitation' and 'Opera' in the *Dictionnaire de musique*. He writes that music 'will not imitate [...] things directly, but will arouse the same movements in the soul that

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<sup>444</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 15, p.323. 'signes des nos affections'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.417.

<sup>445</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 12, 'Origin of music', p.318. 'la cadence et les sons naissent avec les sillabes, la passion fait parler tous les organes, et pare la voix de tout leur éclat ; ainsi les vers, les chants, la parole ont une origine commune. Autour des fontaines dont j'ai parlé les premiers discours furent les premières chansons ; les retours périodiques et mesurés du rythme, les inflexions mélodieuses des accens firent naître la poesie et la musique avec la langue, ou plustôt tout cela n'étoit que la langue même pour ces heureux climats et ces heureux tems où les seuls besoins pressans qui demandoient le concours d'autrui étoient ceux que le cœur faisoit naître.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.410.

<sup>446</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 14, 'On Harmony', p.322. 'La mélodie en imitant les inflexions de la voix exprime les plaintes, les cris de douleur ou de joye, les menaces, les gémissemens; tous les signes vocaux des passions sont de son ressort. Elle imite les accens des langues, et les tours affectés dans chaque idiome à certains mouvemens de l'ame; elle imite pas seulement, elle parle [...].' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.416.

are experienced in seeing them.<sup>447</sup> Music, he argues, has this ability because through the one sense (hearing) it can activate other senses indirectly: hearing music can make one feel as if one is perceiving something with another sense. Therefore, he writes, ‘the Musician’s Art consists in substituting for the imperceptible image of the object that of the movements its presence arouses in the heart of the Contemplator.’<sup>448</sup>

Placing Rousseau’s concept of musical imitation in a historical context, as Catherine Kintzler has done, can help us to further understand the implications of Rousseau’s conception of melody as a mimetic phenomenon. Kintzler shows how Rousseau’s harsh criticism of French music and its two giants Lully and Rameau is based on the view that his predecessors lack interest in and understanding of imitation in music.<sup>449</sup> Kintzler describes how many of Rousseau’s predecessors from the era of French classicism, as well as some of his contemporaries, had a more ‘material’ approach to music and other art forms. These theorists of aesthetics built their work and principles on substance (‘matière’) and reason, and strove for a kind of mechanical comprehension of their subject.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dictionary*, ‘Imitation’, p.414. ‘Il ne représentera pas directement ces choses, mais il excitera dans l’âme les mêmes mouvemens qu’on éprouve en les voyant.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dictionnaire*, p.861. See also the article on ‘Opera’, (*CW*, p.456; *OC*, p.959) and the *Essai* (*CW*, p.327; *OC*, p.422) where almost the exact same formulation is found. This thought was inspired by d’Alembert’s *Discours préliminaire* (1751). In a letter to d’Alembert in 1751, Rousseau writes: ‘I find your idea on musical imitation very correct and very new.’ (My translation). And he continues: ‘The art of the musician does not at all consist in immediately portraying the objects, but in putting the soul into a disposition similar to that in which their presence would put it.’ Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dictionary*, in the comments by Scott, p.589, footnote 49. ‘[J]e trouve votre idée sur l’imitation musicale très-juste et très-neuve. [...] l’art du musicien ne consiste point à peindre immédiatement les objets, mais à mettre l’âme dans une disposition semblable à celle où la mettroit leur présence.’ Rousseau, *CC*, vol.2, p.159-62 (letter 162).

<sup>448</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Dictionary*, ‘Imitation’, p.414. ‘l’art du Musicien consiste à substituer à l’image insensible de l’objet celle des mouvemens qu’on éprouve en les voyant.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dictionnaire*, p.861. See also the article on ‘Opera’, (*CW*, p.456; *OC*, p.959). It should be noted that Nathan Martin has argued (in the paper ‘Two kinds of imitation in Rousseau’, presented in Stockholm in June 2019 at the 21<sup>st</sup> biennial conference organised by the Rousseau Association) that Rousseau presents two different types of musical representation, which might not be compatible with each other (the first based on the accent of languages, the second one on the ‘indirect’ kind of imitation that I have described above). But seen from the perspective of perception, I believe that these two ‘kinds of imitation’ are two steps in the same process of imitation: the fact that melody is the sound of the signs of our passions makes it possible for music to evoke the ‘indirect’ imitation of objects and actions.

<sup>449</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.374-83.

<sup>450</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.353-59.

In the case of Lully – and this was a dominating conception at the end of the seventeenth century – music was seen as subordinate to language and therefore it could only signify if it adapted to or agreed with the structure of language.<sup>451</sup> It is therefore a matter of understanding the relation between language and music methodically, while focusing on ‘what is articulatory, distinct, calculable and physical in a language.’<sup>452</sup>

Rameau, on the other hand, defends music as an autonomous art, and theorising music becomes a means of elevating it to the level of a science. Rameau is first and foremost interested in understanding music as a *corps sonore* – a physical and objective phenomenon – and to be able to analyse, describe and create music through mathematical and geometrical formulas.<sup>453</sup> Rameau sees music, in Kintzler’s words, as ‘a hierarchical set of vibrational relations, deductible one from another and expressible in a series of mathematical progressions, an ordered set.’<sup>454</sup> This is why harmony is such a central notion in Rameau’s theories. His aim was not necessarily to make music signify or understand how it does so, but to methodically find, comprehend and analyse the most beautiful and interesting combinations of sounds.<sup>455</sup>

It is in relation to these and other musical thinkers that Rousseau’s conception of musical representation stands out. For as Kintzler writes, Rousseau’s goal is rather ‘immaterial’. Instead of having a focus on the material building blocks of music, he turns towards emotional and moral effect in order to understand how music imitates and how, through representation, it can have such an impact on us.<sup>456</sup> Kintzler argues that Rousseau is reconstructing the traditional concept of representation, stating that Rousseau’s melody does not primarily imitate objects and actions but rather represents or evokes what she calls the ‘emotional phenomenon’.<sup>457</sup> This is because the sounds of melody ‘do not act on us solely as sounds, but as signs of our af-

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<sup>451</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.290.

<sup>452</sup> ‘ce qu’une langue a d’articulatoire, de distinct, de calculable, de physique’; Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.375.

<sup>453</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.376, p.325-34. For further reading on Rameau’s music theories see also Kintzler, *Jean-Philippe Rameau and Thomas Christensen, Rameau and musical thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>454</sup> ‘un ensemble de relations vibratoires hiérarchisables, déductibles les uns des autres et exprimables par une série de progression mathématiques, un ensemble ordonné.’ Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.329.

<sup>455</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.332-33.

<sup>456</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.357. For further reading on musical imitation in relation to morality, see also Guy Dammann’s doctoral thesis, *The morality of musical imitation in Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

<sup>457</sup> Catherine Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.374-92, ‘phénomène emotif’, p.376.



fections’, and on hearing them, Rousseau thinks, ‘they excite in us the emotions they express and the image of which we recognize in them.’<sup>458</sup> This leads Kintzler to make three distinctions that are important for our understanding of Rousseau’s concept of melodic imitation when compared to that of his predecessors.<sup>459</sup>

Firstly, the material or mechanical way of thinking differentiates between the imitated object and its objective (intention) to excite the passions. Whereas Rousseau sees the two as fused together because in his view the objective *is* the object of the imitation: it is no longer a matter of ‘effecting a material mediation’ but instead of ‘evoking emotions through an immediate access.’<sup>460</sup> For example, instead of imitating the sounds of running water, Rousseau thinks that the musician should express the feelings agitated in the soul which hears those sounds. Thus, the emotional and moral sensations become both the subject and the goal of the musical representation – they are united from the beginning instead of being separated by the perceptible object.<sup>461</sup> This observation by Kintzler partly echoes the effect of the auto-representation of the public festival discussed in Chapter 4. For in the feel-

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<sup>458</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 15, p.323. ‘Les sons dans la mélodie n’agissent pas seulement sur nous comme son, mais comme signes de nos affections [...] c’est ainsi qu’ils excitent en nous les mouvements qu’ils expriment et dont nous y reconnaissons l’image.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.417.

<sup>459</sup> Rousseau comments particularly on the physical or material aspect of modern French music, for example in the *Essai*: ‘See how everything continually brings us back to the moral effects of which I have spoken, and how far the musicians who consider the power of sounds only in terms of the action of air and the disturbance of fibers are from knowing wherein resides the strength of this art. The more they assimilate it to *purely physical* impressions, the farther they take it from its origin, and the more they also take from it its primitive energy. By giving up oral accent and adhering to harmonic institutions alone, music becomes noisier to the ear and less sweet to the heart. It has already ceased to speak; soon it will no longer sing and then, with all its chords and all its harmony, it will no longer have any effect on us.’ (Emphasis added.) Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, p.327. ‘Voyez comment tout nous ramène sans cesse aux effets moraux dont j’ai parlé, et combien les musiciens qui ne considèrent la puissance des sons que par l’action de l’air et l’ébranlement des fibres sont loin de connoître en quoi réside la force de cet art. Plus ils le rapprochent des impressions *purement physiques* plus ils l’éloignent de son origine, et plus ils lui ôtent aussi de sa primitive énergie. En quittant l’accent oral et s’attachant aux seules institutions harmoniques la musique devient plus bruyante à l’oreille et moins douce au cœur. Elle a déjà cessé de parler, bientôt elle ne chantera plus et alors avec tous ses accords et toute son harmonie elle ne fera plus aucun effet sur nous.’ (Emphasis added.) Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.422.

<sup>460</sup> ‘Il ne s’agit plus, à ses yeux, d’effectuer une médiation matérielle [...] pour produire les passions, il faut susciter l’émotion par un accès immédiat.’ Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.377.

<sup>461</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.377.

ings and being of the Genevan people, the object and objective of the auto-representation are indeed united.

Secondly, Rousseau sees that it is not so much the material language that gives energy to melody, but rather ‘the essence of language’. The imitation is not about reflecting the actual articulation or material linguistics of speech, but instead about its affective signification. The focus of the melodic imitation should be on the ‘inner voice’ (‘voix intérieure’): ‘the musician must turn towards direct listening to the passions and their initial expression.’<sup>462</sup> The ‘inner voice’ is both a search for and an expression of ‘an archetypal language’, the passionate language that was the vocal expression of our affections, long before reason, grammar and systematisation had taken control over our communication. This does not mean that actual languages are not of interest or importance. Anyone who has read Rousseau’s musical writings knows that in his view different languages (not least French and Italian) have a large impact on their respective national music because they have preserved different levels of melodic energy and expressiveness.<sup>463</sup>

Thirdly, harmony should never be placed in a position over melody because, as discussed above, Rousseau is convinced that harmony does not imitate. This does not mean that Rousseau wishes to exclude harmony – he finds it to be an important component that can accompany and even strengthen the melody. But melody should always come first. The mathematical and material side of music can have pleasant effects, but they have nothing to do with the passionate core of musical imitation.<sup>464</sup>

In this way melody becomes a model of what artistic imitation could and perhaps should be in Rousseau’s eyes, as Kintzler writes: for ‘[i]n making interiority the ultimate end of aesthetic productions, Rousseau completely turns the classification of the fine arts upside down.’<sup>465</sup> Melody becomes a reference point to which all aesthetic representation should be compared, where the inner and emotional existence of man, rather than our physical reality, is the subject, the means and the goal of artistic production.<sup>466</sup> To Rousseau, it is this interiority or inner landscape of man, consisting of our

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<sup>462</sup> ‘le musicien doit se tourner vers l’écoute directe des passions et de leur expression initiale.’ Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.377-78.

<sup>463</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.377-78.

<sup>464</sup> See Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.379.

<sup>465</sup> ‘En faisant de l’intériorité la finalité ultime des productions esthétiques, Rousseau bouscule de fond en comble la classification des beaux-arts.’ Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.390.

<sup>466</sup> Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français*, p.390-91.

subjective thoughts, feelings and reactions to the outer, physical world, that is the very core of art.

Something that would further strengthen this theory – that Rousseau saw melody as a model of representation without negative connotations – is that musical imitation actually appears to escape the tyranny of Plato’s cave and thus, in Rousseau’s view, the largest problem of theatrical imitation as discussed in Chapter 4. For as pointed out by Dugan and Strong, Rousseau does not believe that musical imitation created by melody implies that the audience must ‘pause’ or momentarily give away their faculty of judgment to the artist behind the work.<sup>467</sup> Operating through the passions and their emotional experience, the audience is in a way creating the musical representation together with the artist. One could of course claim this for all art – art in general needs a receiver to realise its potential – but Rousseau is aiming at something more specific here. Dugan and Strong emphasise how Rousseau sees musical imitation as partly created by the listeners themselves and their passions: music can represent objects and actions – not through images or words like other art forms – but instead through affective memory. This is how music can arouse the reactions created by other senses. It activates the listener’s memories of having felt this or that emotion after seeing or experiencing a particular object or action. Being the signs of different passions, music evokes images in the audience’s imagination. At the same time, recognising these passions and experiencing their images, the audience ‘becomes implicated and submerged within the experience of those passions.’<sup>468</sup>

Thus, the musical experience does not interrupt the autonomous thinking of the audience, because the creation of the musical representation depends on the relationship to the individual lives and memories of each listener. In contrast, Rousseau thinks that theatrical representation momentarily takes over the spectator’s faculty of judgement because the dramatist has to imitate an object or action from one singular point of view. The playwright then needs to convince the spectator that his/her time is worth spending on this particular representation. And wishing to have a successful theatrical experience, the audience willingly accepts and invests in the dramatist’s representation, even though it means relying on this person’s judgement and accepting that one’s own judgement is inactive. This in itself might not have been so dangerous in Rousseau’s eyes if he did not think that many of the playwrights of his time were complicit in actively trying to educate people to accept them, and other learned men, as philosophical and didactical leaders.

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<sup>467</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.345-54.

<sup>468</sup> Dugan and Strong, ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’, p.350.

In this way melody and musical imitation stand in stark contrast to Rousseau's understanding of theatrical representation, for the musical experience of melody leaves the audience's faculty of judgement intact. This is because, in one sense, Rousseau believes that artist and audience remain equals in front of and throughout the musical representation. While theatre tends to present the audience with apparently objective truths, music appeals to the subjective truth inherent in the listener, evoking the autonomous self.

The explanation for this large discrepancy between musical and theatrical representation can be found in Rousseau's history of the arts (discussed in Chapter 2). In the chapter 'How music has degenerated' in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, he describes how music and language were simultaneously 'perfected' (systematised). While we were occupied with creating and multiplying 'rules of imitation', our 'imitative language' lost its energy and expressiveness: 'By cultivating the art of convincing, that of moving the emotions was lost.'<sup>469</sup> In other words, Rousseau believed that imitation was from the beginning of its existence primarily about evoking emotions. It was in the historical process that I have termed *aesthetic perfectibility* that this imitative quality was partly lost. Music deteriorated because we forced music and language apart, and then tried to replace melody with harmonic calculations. Yet, as we know, parts of the imitative energy were preserved in the remains of melody and in some languages, which the Italians later invested in. Therefore, if melody can be seen as the model of imitation in Rousseau's thought, as Kintzler argues, it is because it has preserved the most original way of representing. It is a residual form from what imitation had been before the systematisation of aesthetic 'perfection' warped and distorted it.

The thought structure of *aesthetic perfectibility*, built on Rousseau's history of how the arts developed over time, included music, theatre and other art forms. It is therefore not farfetched to say that Rousseau thought that all artistic representations from the outset might have been built on the same kind of imitation as melody. In Rousseau's history of the arts, theatre's way of representing was taken over by rules of poetics, morality and *bienséance*, and by the wish of its creators to convince the audience to believe in certain political leaders or philosophical movements. Music managed – with the help of the Italians – to save itself, and through melody partly to re-establish its imitative origin through a constructive development of *aesthetic perfecti-*

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<sup>469</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 14, p.329. 'perfectionnoit'; 'les règles de l'imitation'; 'la langue imitative'; 'En cultivant l'art de convaincre on perdit celui d'émouvoir.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.423-24.

bility (which because it is a *pharmakon* can work as an antidote against itself). Theatrical imitation's biggest flaw, that it imposes a moral standpoint on the spectator, is precisely what melody does not have. It is therefore not surprising that Rousseau saw melody as a mimetic element that could be used to steer theatrical imitation in the same direction. How he did so in practice in his *scène lyrique Pygmalion* – as an individual work of art and as the initiation of a new dramatic genre – will be the topic of the following subsections.<sup>470</sup> Firstly, I will discuss the dramaturgy of the piece as a further movement away from the theorists and artists with a more material or mechanical approach to art. Secondly, I will address the structure and performance of the expressive elements in the *scène lyrique* as a comment on the art of acting.

## Pygmalion and Galathée's subjectivity

Rousseau thinks that the emotional power of music has to do with the fact that music can imitate the emotional response to an experience: instead of painting physical objects in the material world, it can produce images of how it feels to experience that world. Musical imitation then becomes a model for artistic representation. As we have seen above, Kintzler has shown that Rousseau's understanding of music and its way of imitating can be defined as 'immaterial' (i.e. with a focus on the emotive or the moral) as opposed to 'material' (i.e. with a focus on the physical or mechanical), which was the approach to music favoured by some of his predecessors and contemporaries. In a similar manner, the dramaturgy of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*

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<sup>470</sup> For further reading on Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, see writings by Jacqueline Waeber, for example, her book *En musique dans le texte*; and her articles 'Rousseau's *Pygmalion* and the limits of (operatic) expression', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.103-115; "'J'ai imaginé un genre de drame": une réflexion sur la partition musicale du mélodrame de *Pygmalion*', *Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* 18 (1998), p.147-79, and 'Pygmalion et J.-J. Rousseau: un grand poète, qui serait en même temps un peu musicien', *Fontes artis musicae* 44/1 (1997), p.32-41. See also David Marshall's article 'Rousseau's *Pygmalion* and the theatre of autobiography', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.157-75; Alain Cernuschi's introduction to *Pygmalion* in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes: édition thématique du tricentenaire*, vol.16 (Geneva: 2012) p.429-40; Shierry M. Weber's 'The Aesthetics of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*', *MLN* 83/6 (1968), p.900-18; Kirsten Gram Holmström's dissertation *Monodrama, attitudes, tableaux vivants: studies on some trends of theatrical fashion* (Stockholm University, 1967); and Jan van der Veen's *Le Mélodrame musical de Rousseau au romantisme* (The Hague, 1955).

emerges more clearly when compared to Jean-Philippe Rameau's *acte de ballet Pigmalion* (1748), with a libretto by Ballot de Sauvot.<sup>471</sup> As will be shown below, studying the two Pygmalion works next to each other can give us an idea of how Rousseau tried dramaturgically to capture what he saw as the particularity of musical imitation: the ability to signify the interior and immaterial side of man.

The two Pygmalion works are both based on the Ovidian myth, and thus essentially have the same plot: a sculptor is devastated because he has fallen in love with his own statue, but the story ends happily because the statue comes to life. It must however be emphasised that the two pieces belong to two different genres: Rameau's *Pigmalion* is an *acte de ballet* consisting of song and dance, and the text in Rousseau's *scène lyrique* is spoken prose, intermixed with brief musical interludes accompanying the silent stage actions. As argued by Jacqueline Waeber, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* as well as the *scène lyrique* as a new dramatic genre can be seen both as an extension and as a renunciation of opera as a genre. For on the one hand it preserves or reinvents the co-production of voice and music, while on the other hand it rejects song.<sup>472</sup> Reading the two Pygmalion works in parallel, in terms of both music theory and dramaturgical thinking, Rousseau's version can be seen as a continuation of his public melody-versus-harmony debates with Rameau that lasted almost twenty years. To better understand how the mechanical and the emotive approaches to music are reflected in the respective dramaturgies of the two pieces, we need some background about the cause and progress of the enmity between Rousseau and Rameau.

The feud began in 1745 after the performance of Rousseau's *opéra-ballet, Les Muses galantes*.<sup>473</sup> In its posthumously published foreword, Rousseau writes that it was after hearing this work that Rameau 'conceived against me that violent hatred, marks of which he did not cease giving until his death.'<sup>474</sup> Parts of Rousseau's *Les Muses galantes* were first performed in the home of Alexandre Le Riche de La Pouplinière, Rameau's patron. After this Rameau publicly described the Italianate parts of the score as plagiarism, and the

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<sup>471</sup> Parts of this subsection has been published in an article under the title 'Pygmalion's power struggles: Rousseau, Rameau and Galathée', in *Rousseau on stage*, p.119-37.

<sup>472</sup> See Waeber's article 'Rousseau's *Pygmalion* and the limits of (operatic) expression'.

<sup>473</sup> For further reading on Rousseau/Rameau, see Catherine Kintzler, *Jean-Philippe Rameau, and Poétique de l'opéra français*. See also the first chapter in Michael O'Dea's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: music, illusion and desire*.

<sup>474</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *The Gallant muses*, p.181. 'conçut contre moi cette violente haine dont il n'a cessé de donner des marques jusqu'à sa mort.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Les Muses galantes*, ed. Charly Guyot, p.1051.

French parts as being badly composed. Rousseau took the criticism personally because he saw himself as Rameau's disciple, having studied Rameau's music theories intensely in his youth. It was not until 1752, though, that the intense debate known as the 'Querelle des Bouffons' began.<sup>475</sup> The discussions divided Enlightenment Paris into two camps – those who preferred Italian music, to whom Rousseau belonged, and those representing French music, of which Rameau's works were the prime example. The arguments between Rousseau and Rameau largely concerned the source of music's expressiveness: according to Rameau (as mentioned above) *harmony* is the mother of structure and expression in music, which can be shown and explored through mathematical principles, while Rousseau argues that *melody*, communicating the human passions, is at the heart of musical expression.<sup>476</sup> Kintzler states that if Rameau understood harmony as the origin of music, it is because he saw the *corps sonore* and its harmonic logic as required pre-conditions for all musical production. He saw music and its logic of harmony as autonomous objects that exist in nature, no matter if there is an ear there to hear them: 'just as if the law of falling bodies had never been formulated by Galileo Galilei, it would nevertheless still be active.'<sup>477</sup>

Rousseau's view is fundamentally different because he thinks that the origin of music resides in subjective expressions of passion. In the *Essai* for example, he writes that '[b]irds whistle, man alone sings, and one cannot hear either a song or an instrumental piece without immediately saying to oneself: another sensitive being is present.'<sup>478</sup> As we have observed above, Rousseau sees music as an imitation of what Kintzler calls the 'inner voice'

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<sup>475</sup> For further reading on the 'Querelle des Bouffons', see *La 'Querelle des Bouffons' dans la vie culturelle française du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Andrea Fabiano (Paris, 2005).

<sup>476</sup> For an overview, see John T. Scott's introduction to Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7. For example, Rousseau writes: 'It seems to me, then, that Melody or song, a pure work of nature, does not owe, either among the learned or among the ignorant, its origin to harmony, a work and production of art, which serves as the evidence for a beautiful song and not its source and whose most noble function is that of setting it off to advantage.' Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, [*The Origin of melody*], p.260. 'Il me semble donc que la Mélodie ou le chant, pur ouvrage de la nature, ne doit ni chez les savans ni chez les ignorans son origine à l'harmonie, ouvrage et production de l'art, qui sert de preuve et non de source au beau chant et dont la plus noble fonction est celle de le faire valoir.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, [*L'Origine de la mélodie*], ed. Marie-Elisabeth Duchez, p.331.

<sup>477</sup> 'de même que si Galilée n'avait jamais énoncé la loi de la chute des corps, celle-ci continuerait néanmoins à s'exercer.' Kintzler, *Poétique de l'opéra français*, p.330-31, p.334-35, quotation from p.335.

<sup>478</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay on the origin of languages*, p.326. 'Les oiseaux sifflent, l'homme seul chante, et l'on ne peut entendre ni chant ni simphonie sans se dire à l'instant; un autre être sensible est ici.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, p.421.

– the ‘inner voice’ which is the naked expression of our thoughts and feelings. It is therefore this human nature of the expression of subjectivity through the voice that establishes the foundation and thus the very origin of music to Rousseau. Consequently, Rousseau finds that Rameau’s system of objective harmony overshadows the natural and subjective expression in music and thus that it distances music from its origin. For example, he writes in the *Lettre à M. Grimm au sujet des remarques ajoutées à sa lettre sur Omphale* that Rameau’s works indicate ‘more learning than genius – or at least a genius smothered by too much learning.’<sup>479</sup> These debates between Rameau and Rousseau are filled with personal attacks, for example Rameau repeatedly claims that Rousseau lacks education and ‘an ear’, while Rousseau throws insults such as ‘a fat goose does not fly at all like a swallow’ when comparing Rameau’s music to Italian operas, implying that the older colleague’s work is weighed down by all the theories applied to it.<sup>480</sup> It appears that both thinkers aim to understand both music as nature and the nature of music. To Rameau that means appreciating music as a scientific object. To Rousseau it means acknowledging music as human nature, as a consequence of a feeling subject.

Rameau’s *acte de ballet Pigmalion* became a recurring example in the debate concerning the origin of music. By 1749 Rousseau had written over 400 articles about music for Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, which was not published until 1751. In 1755, Rameau anonymously published *Erreurs sur la musique dans l’Encyclopédie*, and one year later the *Suite des ‘Erreurs sur la musique dans l’Encyclopédie’*, where he scrupulously goes through Rousseau’s articles alphabetically, repeatedly using his own *Pigmalion* as an example to prove Rousseau wrong concerning the relationship between melody and harmony. For example, Rameau writes in his response to Rousseau’s article on ‘Accompaniment’:

Let us recall the effect produced upon every sensitive soul by *L’Amour triomphe*, in a Chorus from *P[i]gmalion* [...]. It is here that harmony *triumphs*, without the aid of a melody that has an affect on its own, nor with any of the accessories which this melody needs in order to make itself pleasant.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter to M. Grimm on his letter on Omphale*, p.130. ‘plus de sçavoir que de génie: ou du moins un génie étouffé par trop de sçavoir’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à M. Grimm au sujet des remarques ajoutées à sa lettre sur Omphale*, ed. Olivier Pot, p.272.

<sup>480</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter to M. Grimm*, p.123. ‘une oye grasse ne vole point comme une hirondelle’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre à M. Grimm*, p.264.

<sup>481</sup> Rameau in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Errors on music in the Encyclopedia*, p.228. ‘Souvenons-nous de l’effet qu’a produit sur toutes les ames sensibles *L’Amour triomphe*, dans un Chœur de *Pigmalion* [...] c’est bien là que l’harmonie *trionphe*, sans le secours d’une mélodie qui



As we can see here, for Rameau, the aria with chorus ‘L’Amour triomphe’ in his own *Pigmalion* appears to be the ultimate proof of harmony’s triumph over melody.<sup>482</sup> Therefore, he mentions it five times in this part of the text, where at times it looks as if ‘amour’ (as in ‘amour triomphe’) and harmony have become synonyms: ‘Let a Song be performed stripped of all these accessories, especially of rhythm, and where it does not appear that words may be added: one will be much less affected by this than by a drum beaten rhythmically. Let one do as much with *L’Amour triomphe*, [...] its effect will not change at all, its *harmony* will always *triumph*.’ (Emphasis added).<sup>483</sup>

In the *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau*, Rousseau comments directly on Rameau’s example of *Pigmalion*, and refers to the chorus in the aria ‘L’Amour triomphe’ as ‘all that terrible apparatus of instruments and voices.’<sup>484</sup> In a detached fragment of the same text, Rousseau follows up on Rameau’s suggestion to strip his music of all ‘accessories’ and satirically challenges him to prove that the harmony in his beloved aria from *Pigmalion* would always triumph:

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affecte par elle-même, ni d’aucun des accessoires dont cette mélodie a besoin pour se rendre agréable’. Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Erreurs sur la musique dans l’Encyclopédie* (Paris, Sébastien Jorry, 1755), p.33-34.

<sup>482</sup> Rameau also emphasises in *Démonstration du principe de l’harmonie* (Paris, 1750), p.29, that his *Pigmalion* and ‘L’Amour triomphe’ are successful examples of his harmonic theory. He writes that even when knowing harmony in theory, ‘it can be hard to find the right proportions between voice and instrument’ when applying it (‘la difficulté est de sçavoir y proportionner les voix et les instrumens’). However, he adds, in his *Pigmalion* and ‘L’Amour triomphe’ he had the pleasure of succeeding with this. Christensen also remarks on this, in *Rameau and musical thought in the Enlightenment*, p.228.

<sup>483</sup> Rameau in Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Errors*, p.229. ‘Qu’on exécute un Chant dénué de tous ses accessoires, de mesure surtout, et où il ne paroisse pas qu’on puisse joindre des paroles, on en sera beaucoup moins affecté que d’un tambour qui battra en mesure: qu’on en fasse autant de *L’Amour triomphe*, [...] son effet ne changera point, l’harmonie y *trionphera* toujours.’ (Emphasis added.) Rameau, *Erreurs*, p.38-39.

<sup>484</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Examination of two principles advanced by M. Rameau*, p.278. ‘tout ce terrible appareil d’instruments et de voix’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5. *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau*, ed. Olivier Pot, p.358. Rousseau wrote a first draft of a response to Rameau in *Du Principe de la mélodie, ou Réponse aux erreurs sur la musique* in 1755, but never published it. He later developed this text in *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau* and *Essai sur l’origine des langues* respectively (both published posthumously 1781-1782). [*L’Origine de la mélodie*] – an important part of Rousseau’s initial response to Rameau – was not published until 1974, and was given its title in Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5. For a fuller background to the *Essai* and its importance within Rousseau studies, see Michael O’Dea’s edition of the *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, in Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, eds. Jacques Berchtold, François Jacob, Christophe Martin and Yannick Séité (Paris, Classiques Garnier, forthcoming).

But on whom does it depend but M. Rameau to end this dispute once and for all before the eyes of all Paris, let him climb before a tribunal, put his learned hands to a keyboard, [...] make the most divine *harmony triumph*, but let him omit the meter from it, and let us see what raptures he will arouse among the spectators, to what martial ardour he will lead them, what tenderness those admirable enharmonic transitions and those learned modulations to which he attributes so much power are going to cause! [...] Perhaps the lack of meter will spoil it? Well, I grant it to him as well, but no melody, and always full playing, that is, at least four parts. Here, I believe, are all the conditions that M. Rameau can ask for to prove authentically the power of harmony, and in spite of all the reasons that favour me, I will not hesitate, after this experiment, to acknowledge my fault publicly. [Emphasis added.]<sup>485</sup>

As can be seen from the above examples, *Pigmalion* was Rameau's prime example of the fulfilment of harmony, and even though Rousseau's responses were published posthumously, it is clear that he realised this and was upset by the fact that Rameau placed his own work on such a high pedestal. With this knowledge as a backdrop, we can now turn to Rousseau's *scène lyrique Pygmalion* and Rameau's *acte de ballet Pigmalion*.

Dramaturgically the two pieces are very different. I will show in the following that if Rameau's *acte de ballet* might be called a 'physical' performance in a material world, Rousseau's *scène lyrique* could be called 'psychological'. Rameau's sculptor interacts with other characters: he discusses his love for the statue with his jealous lover Céphise, the love god Amour appears as a character and sings directly to him, dancing Graces interact with the animated statue, and there is a 'chorus of the people'.<sup>486</sup> The story of Rameau's *Pigmalion* is largely told through this interaction with the other characters, who also work as an alibi for what happens on stage. *Pigmalion*

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<sup>485</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Examination*, p.287. 'Mais à qui tient-il que Mr Rameau ne termine une fois cette dispute aux yeux de tout Paris, qu'il monte dans une tribune, qu'il pose ses savantes mains sur un clavier, [...] qu'il fasse *trionpher la plus divine harmonie*, mais qu'il en retranche la mesure: et voyons quels transports il va exciter parmi ses spectateurs, de quelle ardeur martiale il va les animer, quel attendrissement vont causer ces admirables transitions enharmoniques et ces modulations savantes aux quelles il attribue tant de pouvoir! [...] Peut-être le défaut de mesure le gênera-t-il ? Eh bien, je la lui accorde encore, mais point de mélodie, et toujours le plein jeu, c'est à dire, au moins les 4<sup>es</sup> parties. Voilà, je crois, toutes les conditions que Mr Rameau peut demander pour prouver autentiquement la puissance de l'harmonie, et malgré toutes les raisons qui me favorisent, je ne balancerai point, après cette expérience, de reconnaître mon tort publiquement.' (Emphasis added.) Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5. *Examen*, p.369.

<sup>486</sup> I choose to call Amour by his French name because of the apparent parallel in Rameau between 'amour' in 'Amour triomphe' and 'harmony'.

is not alone in seeing the statue coming to life, and the reality of her animation is confirmed through her interaction with the others.

In contrast to this, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* takes place in an artist's studio that might be an image of Pygmalion's inner mind – no one but Pygmalion himself is there to confirm or deny whether he is delirious or experiencing a miracle when seeing his beloved statue coming to life. As Wiles has pointed out, *Pygmalion* 'marks a historical cusp' due to its author's attempt to express the 'inner reality' of the soul or the self.<sup>487</sup> Rousseau's sculptor does of course walk about his studio, he hammers on blocks of marble in rhythm with the music and he opens the pavilion in which he has placed his precious statue. But aside from himself and his art – which is a part of himself – he is alone, both trapped and transported in his studio. The piece is a continuous display of various passions and the psychological landscape of (most of the time) a *single* character, exposed in a stream of consciousness filled with feelings. The spectator is invited to take part in Pygmalion's subjective experience of the world and his constant arguing with himself:

It's over, it's all over. I've lost my genius... And still so young! I've outlived my talent.

But — then, what's the passionate ardour I feel consumed by? I seem to be ablaze with an unknown fire. No! Does burnt-out genius feel such emotions in a state of torpor? Such outbursts of impetuous passions? This uncontrollable restlessness, this secret agitation that torments me without my knowing why?

I was afraid that my admiration for my own creation was distracting me from my work. So I hid it under this veil... My profane hands dared to cover this monument to their glory. Now that I cannot see it, I am sadder, but I am not more focused.<sup>488</sup>

The dramatic development in Rousseau's *Pygmalion* takes place through the sculptor's monologue, in which he shares his inner world with the spectators while experiencing his fears and delights concerning the statue of Galathée,

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<sup>487</sup> Wiles, *The Player's advice to Hamlet*, p.217.

<sup>488</sup> Unpublished translation of Rousseau, *Pygmalion* by Maria Gullstam, Felicity Baker and Magnus Tessing Schneider. 'C'en est fait, c'en est fait; j'ai perdu mon génie... Si jeune encore, je survivrai à mon talent. Mais quelle est donc cette ardeur interne qui me dévore ? Qu'ai-je en moi qui semble m'embraser? Quoi! dans la langueur d'un génie éteint, sent-on ces émotions, sent-on ces élans des passions impétueuses, cette inquiétude insurmontable, cette agitation secrète qui me tourmente et dont je ne puis démêler la cause? J'ai craint que l'admiration de mon propre ouvrage ne causât la distraction que j'apportais à mes travaux. Je l'ai caché sous ce voile... mes profanes mains ont osé couvrir ce monument de leur gloire. Depuis que je ne le vois plus, je suis plus triste, et ne suis pas plus attentif.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1225.

his most successful creation. Almost everything that the spectator sees and hears on the stage emanates from inside Pygmalion's head. As spectators, we see the world from his tormented and subjective point of view.

One of the most significant dramaturgical differences between Rameau's *Pigmalion* and Rousseau's *Pygmalion* concerns the circumstances surrounding the statue, the moment of its awakening, and what it seems to represent. In Rameau's work the statue comes alive quite early on. The *acte de ballet* consists of five scenes and the statue is awakened already at the beginning of the third scene, whereas in Rousseau's *Pygmalion* the first words of Galathée are not uttered until the very last moments of the piece. It is important to keep in mind that Rameau's use of the words 'amour' and 'harmonie' are almost synonymous when discussing how his statue is brought to life. Just before the statue comes alive, Pigmalion hears 'a tender and harmonious symphony'<sup>489</sup> and says: 'From where come these chords? What *harmonious* sounds? A bright glow is spreading here.' (Emphasis added.)<sup>490</sup> And just after this, a stage direction describes how, without Pigmalion seeing it, Amour quickly flies over the stage, waving his torch over the statue which immediately comes to life. In other words, Rameau's statue comes to life both thanks both to Amour's magic, and to the harmonious chords played before his entrance – Amour and harmony are linked, they are the same. Thomas Christensen argues that the music heard before Amour's entrance is a clear example of the proportions in Rameau's *corps sonore*, and states that Pigmalion does not need to look far to find out wherefrom these beautiful sounds emanate:

the source of these harmonies was indicated by Rameau's orchestration. The 'delicate and harmonious' E major triad is dispositioned by Rameau following the initial proportions of the *corps sonore*. Over the three following measures, the violins and flutes slowly unfold the upper partials as if Rameau were composing out the *corps sonore* itself.<sup>491</sup>

It thus seems as if the power of love and the power of harmony have converged in the *corps sonore*, which in turn awakens the statue and is physically manifested in her now living body. This link is reinforced in what follows,

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<sup>489</sup> 'On entend une symphonie tendre et harmonieuse.' Rameau in Christensen, *Rameau and musical thought in the Enlightenment*, p.228.

<sup>490</sup> 'D'où naissent ces accords? Quels sons harmonieux? Une vive clarté se répand dans ces lieux.' Rameau, libretto by Ballot de Sauvot, *Pigmalion* (1748),

<http://opera.stanford.edu/iu/libretti/pygmali.htm> last accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>491</sup> Christensen, *Rameau and musical thought in the Enlightenment*, p.228.

because it is not enough to have a few beautiful chords to make the animated statue complete. She needs to be properly educated within the musical system to be able to move well in the ‘dance of life’. In the fourth scene, Amour calls upon the dancing Graces and tells them: ‘It is up to you to finish the work of Amour’,<sup>492</sup> whereupon the Graces teach the statue various types of dance:

Air. Very slow  
Gracious gavotte  
Minuet  
Cheerful gavotte  
Lively chaconne  
Very solemn loure  
Lively passepied (the Graces)  
Rigaudon. Lively  
Sarabande for the Statue  
Tambourin. Powerful and fast.<sup>493</sup>

It is through this education in physical movements, based on the rules of various dance steps, that the work of Amour (and harmony) is completed. And it is just after this demonstration of different dances that the harmony of music can celebrate its triumph in the chorus that Rameau was so proud of, ‘L’Amour triomphe’:

PIGMALION (to the people)  
Amour triumphs, announce his victory.  
He puts all his power into fulfilling our desires.  
We cannot sing his praise enough,  
he finds it in our pleasures!

CHORUS  
Amour triumphs, announce his victory.  
This god puts all his power into fulfilling our desires.  
We cannot sing his praise enough,  
he finds it in our pleasures!<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> ‘C’est à vous d’achever l’ouvrage de l’Amour’; Rameau/Ballot de Sauvot, *Pigmalion*.

<sup>493</sup> ‘Air. Très lent // Gavotte gracieuse // Menuet // Gavotte gaie // Chaconne vive // Loure très grave // Passepied vif (Les Grâces) // Rigaudon. Vif // Sarabande pour la Statue // Tambourin. Fort et vite.’ Rameau/Ballot de Sauvot, *Pigmalion*. Before the different dances, it is stated that ‘The Graces instruct the statue and show her the different characters of dance.’ ‘Les Grâces instruisent la Statue et lui montrent les différents caractères de la danse.’

<sup>494</sup> ‘PIGMALION (*au peuple*): L’Amour triomphe, annoncez sa victoire. // Il met tout son pouvoir à combler nos désirs, // On ne peut trop chanter sa gloire, // Il la trouve dans nos plaisirs! // CHEUR: L’Amour triomphe, annoncez sa victoire. // Ce dieu n’est occupé qu’à

In contrast to this physical and almost mechanical education through music and dance, Rousseau's statue, Galathée, needs neither the magic of the god of love, nor a calculated and perfected system of harmony to teach her how to live. At the beginning of the drama, Galathée is hidden under a veil and her creator dreads unveiling her yet dreams of the joyful experience of seeing her again. Once the statue is unveiled, Pygmalion beholds his work while experiencing a series of conflicting feelings, ranging from high to low, from rage to bliss, and from pride to shame. Galathée's silent and stone-cold perfection makes him wish he could warm her with his own soul:

Such arrows of flame seem to fly out of this statue to make my senses blaze, then fly back with my soul to their source! Alas! She's still cold and motionless, while her charms set my heart on fire, as if it would leave my body to warm hers. In this delirious fever, it's as if I can fling myself out of my body, as if I can give her my life, breathe my soul into her. Oh, let Pygmalion die, to live in Galathée!... What am I saying? Heavens! If I were Galathée, I would no longer see her, no longer be the one who loves her! No, let Galathée live, and may I not be Galathée. Oh! may I always be another, so as to want to be her forever, so as to see her, love her, be loved by her...<sup>495</sup>

The first 35 minutes of the 40-minute-long drama is built around this flow of thoughts and feelings from Pygmalion's inner world as he experiences Galathée's beauty. And finally, at the end, his wish comes true: Galathée opens her eyes and walks down from the pedestal on which he has placed her. She instantly becomes conscious of herself, breaks her silence and exclaims: 'Me!' ('Moi!'). In the moment of Galathée's awakening the music stops never to return. When attending a performance of Rousseau's *Pygmalion* this absence of music in the final scene is quite striking since one might expect the piece to conclude with a grandiose musical finale. As Jacqueline Waeber has pointed out, this is because Galathée takes over the role of the music, her

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comblent nos désirs. // On ne peut trop chanter sa gloire, // Il la trouve dans nos plaisirs!' Rameau/Ballot de Sauvot, *Pigmalion*.

<sup>495</sup> Unpublished translation of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*. 'Quels traits de feu semblent sortir de cet objet pour embraser mes sens, et retourner avec mon ame à leur source! Hélas! il reste immobile et froid, tandis que mon cœur embrasé par ses charmes, voudroit quitter mon corps pour aller échauffer le sien. Je crois, dans mon délire, pouvoir m'élancer hors de moi; je crois pouvoir lui donner ma vie, et l'animer de mon ame. Ah! que Pygmalion meure pour vivre dans Galathée! ... Que dis-je, ô Ciel! Si j'étois elle, je ne la verrais pas, je ne serois pas celui qui l'aime! Non, que ma Galathée vive, et que je ne sois pas elle. Ah! que je sois toujours un autre, pour vouloir toujours être elle, pour la voir, pour l'aimer, pour en être aimé...' Rousseau, *OC*, vol. 2, *Pygmalion*, p.1228.

first words become and replace the music.<sup>496</sup> As we have seen above, for Rousseau music (or melody) is ultimately an expression of subjectivity, something that Galathée appears to confirm with her first word, ‘Me!’ The object of art has become a product of nature, of *human* nature; she becomes a feeling and thinking being who is not dependent upon learned harmonic systems in order to be completed. The focus here is not on her process of physical or bodily animation and completion, but on the fact that her psychological development as a subject is complete the moment she becomes self-aware.

In this way, through his *scène lyrique* Rousseau continues, on a dramaturgical level, the theoretical dispute with Rameau about harmony versus melody, and about the mechanical and emotive approaches to music and art. The argument is partly embedded in Pygmalion’s monologue and the inner image of his mind that unfolds throughout the drama. For through the stream of thoughts and feelings of the main character, the edges between the physical and the psychological, the material and the immaterial worlds are blurred. The spectator is invited to see Pygmalion’s existence from his inner point of view, to see what he sees, to feel what he feels. And therefore, as was the case with musical imitation in Rousseau, as we saw in Kintzler’s analysis, the objective (intention) to move the audience is at the same time the object of the imitation: the emotional sensations are both the subject and the goal of the representation.

And the argument is partly prolonged in Galathée as a symbol of melody and independent subjectivity. For while Rameau’s statue is awakened *for* Pigmalion, to love and please him, and to follow his rules, Rousseau’s Galathée is her own person, to whom Pygmalion gives everything, including his soul to ‘live through her.’<sup>497</sup> And while Rameau’s statue remains the nameless ‘statue’, Rousseau names his ‘Galathée’.<sup>498</sup> Giving her a name from the very outset of the drama reinforces Galathée’s autonomy in relation to both her creator and to the daunting history of *aesthetic perfectibility*. Galathée’s

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<sup>496</sup> Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*, p.49.

<sup>497</sup> Rameau’s statue says to Pigmalion: ‘My first desire was to please you. I will always follow your laws.’ ‘Mon premier désir [a été] de vous plaire. Je suivrai toujours votre loi.’ Rameau/Ballot de Sauvot, *Pigmalion*. Rousseau’s *Pygmalion* instead ends with the sculptor saying to his statue: ‘I have given you my whole being. From now on, I will live only through you.’ Unpublished translation of Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*. ‘je t’ai donné tout mon être ; je ne vivrai plus que par toi.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol. 2, *Pygmalion*, p.1228.

<sup>498</sup> As Alain Cernuschi has remarked: the fact that Rousseau is the first one to give a name to Pygmalion’s statue has rarely been noted. Alain Cernuschi, introduction to *Pygmalion*, p.433. For further reading on the choice of name, see also my article ‘Pygmalion’s power struggles’.

most important trait is immaterial – she is more than a physically beautiful object that can be taught to appear even more beautiful through the mechanics of a learned system, and she is that because she is the subjectivity of melody.

Here I would also like to comment on the sections of music in *Pygmalion* that were composed by Rousseau. Twenty-four of the twenty-six ritournelles were composed by Horace Coignet. Jacqueline Waeber has pointed out that the music written by Rousseau for *Pygmalion* was actually composed many years earlier for his *opéra-ballet Les Muses galantes*: ‘The Andante in the overture of *Pygmalion* corresponds note by note, apart from minor modifications at the head of the melodic motifs and in the intermediate parts to the ‘Air des songes’ in the first entrée (Hésiode) of the *Muses galantes*.’<sup>499</sup> But why would Rousseau have chosen to insert music composed for the work that in many ways started his almost two-decade-long feud with Rameau? Composed for his *scène lyrique*, his own ‘new dramatic genre’? *Les Confessions* offers a possible explanation. Rousseau describes how, after the great failure of *Les Muses galantes* and the humiliating criticism from Rameau at de La Pouplinière’s house, the maréchal de Richelieu proposed to have it performed at Versailles on condition that Rousseau rewrote one act. In *Les Confessions*, Rousseau describes how he did this:

Based on this word alone I went to shut myself up at home and in three weeks in place of the Tasso [Act] I had written another Act, the subject of which was Hesiod inspired by a muse. I found the secret of introducing into this act *a part of the history of my talents*, and *the jealousy with which Rameau* wanted to honor them. In this new act there was a less gigantic and better sustained elevation than in the Tasso one. Its music was as noble and much better written, and if the two other acts had been worth that one, the entire piece could have undergone performance favourably. [Emphasis added.]<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> ‘L’Andante de l’ouverture de *Pygmalion* correspond note pour note, à de légères modifications près dans la tête du motif mélodique et dans les parties intermédiaires, à l’Air des Songes de la première (Hésiode) des *Muses galantes*.’ Jacqueline Waeber, ‘*Pygmalion* et J.-J. Rousseau’, p.35. Waeber writes that Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger was probably the first one to point to these similarities.

<sup>500</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.5, *The Confessions*, p.281. ‘Sur ce seul mot j’allai m’enfermer chez moi et dans trois semaines j’eus fait à la place [de l’acte] du Tasse un autre acte, dont le sujet étoit Hésiode inspiré par une muse. Je trouvai le secret de faire passer dans cet acte *une partie de l’histoire de mes talens*, et de *la jalousie dont Rameau vouloit bien les honorer*. Il y avoit dans ce nouvel acte une élévation moins gigantesque et mieux soutenue que celle du Tasse. La musique en étoit aussi noble et beaucoup mieux faite, et si les deux autres actes avoient valu celui-là, la pièce entière eut avantageusement soutenu la représentation.’ (Emphasis added.) Rousseau, *OC*, vol.1, *Les Confessions*, p.334-35.



In this rewritten act of *Les Muses galantes*, the shepherd Hésiode is depressed – he does not possess musical skills, and the hand of his beloved is promised to the future victor of a music contest. While in a magical sleep, induced by the song of a Dream – to the music later repeated in *Pygmalion*<sup>501</sup> – a magical lyre is given to Hésiode by the gods who say: ‘We can inspire the efforts of genius; but the happy outcome is due to your rapture.’<sup>502</sup> Hésiode wakes up and finds the instrument next to him. He touches it and it sounds:

Gods! What dazzling sounds come from this Lyre!  
 I am put into a frenzy by an unknown rapture!  
 I form harmonious song effortlessly!  
 Oh Lyre! Oh dear gifts from the Gods!  
 With your help I already speak their language.  
 The most powerful one of all arouses my courage,  
 I recognize Love in such beautiful raptures  
 And I am going to *triumph over my jealous Rivals*. [Emphasis added.]<sup>503</sup>

Thanks to his passion and love, Hésiode and his lyre triumph over his jealous rivals, and win both the competition and the hand of his beloved, showing that genius and passion can win over the properly schooled rivals through the instrument provided by the Dream. This illustrates that melody – the subjective and unpolished expression of the soul – can triumph over objective and learned beauty (as that created by harmony). However, the revised version of *Les Muses galantes*, with its new act depicting Hésiode’s revenge, was not performed at Versailles in the 1740s, nor was it rehearsed or performed at the Opera as originally planned. Instead, the music Rousseau composed for Hésiode’s triumph was reused twenty-five years later in *Pygmalion* as a belated addition to the long debate between him and Rameau about the relative importance of melody and harmony.

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<sup>501</sup> Many thanks to Mark Tatlow who enthusiastically demonstrated to me the similarities and differences between the two pieces of music.

<sup>502</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *The Gallant muses*, p.187. ‘Nous pouvons du genie exciter les efforts; Mais les succès heureux sont dus à tes transports.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Les Muses galantes*, p.1060.

<sup>503</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.10, *The Gallant muses*, p.188. ‘Dieux! quels sons éclatans partent de cette Lyre! // D’un transport inconnu j’éprouve le délire! // Je forme sans effort des chants harmonieux ! // O Lyre! ô cher présent des Dieux! // Déjà par ton secours je parle leur langage. // Le plus puissant de tous excite mon courage, // Je reconnois l’Amour à des transports si beaux // Et vais *triumpher* de *mes jaloux Rivaux*.’ (Emphasis added.) Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Les Muses galantes*, p.1060.

By building a drama around Pygmalion's inner life on the one hand, and Galathée's independent subjectivity on the other, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* manifests the emotive power of melody through its constant return to the image of interiority. And at the same time, it suggests that the mimetic qualities of melody – its imitation of what Kintzler calls the 'emotional phenomena' rather than physical objects or actions – can be translated into other art forms, for example, theatre. As will be shown in the following, it appears that the imitative qualities that Rousseau saw in melody also served as his model for the art of acting.

### Staging melody – unmechanising the art of acting

Unfortunately, there are not many sources in which Rousseau approaches the art of acting from a theoretical point of view. However, his history of the arts, written with a focus on what I have called *aesthetic perfectibility*, and his new dramatic genre of *scène lyrique*, complemented by his writings on melody as a mimetic phenomenon, make it possible to get an idea of his attitudes towards acting. We saw earlier how Rousseau infused his *Pygmalion* with the qualities of melody as an imitative element and with its way of imitating emotional responses to actions or objects. I will continue this line of thought and argue that he did the same through the structure of expressive elements (spoken declamation, musical interludes and gestures) that he employed in his new dramatic genre, intended in performance to support and reinforce the effect of a drama centred on subjectivity. Below, I support my claim with two main arguments: firstly, I show how Rousseau, in his *scène lyrique*, tried to merge, in a new way, *melos* and *drama* into one common expression of the passions, meant to echo the expressiveness of the first languages (and thus melody). Secondly, I argue that because Rousseau's new genre centres on expanded moments of intense emotion, his concept of the art of acting is theoretically related to his conception of musical imitation, whereas many of his contemporaries saw the visual arts as a model for actors. To support this argument, I also discuss the way in which Rousseau instructed Antoine Le Texier who created the role of Pygmalion in 1770. However, to understand these aspects of performance and acting style in *Pygmalion*, we need to investigate the theoretical and historical context in which it was created. For just as Rousseau's predecessors and contemporaries tried to understand music from a systematised and scientific point of

view, the aesthetic thinkers of the time tried to categorise and mechanise the art of acting.

Joseph R. Roach argues that the theatrical theorists in the eighteenth century found inspiration in the seventeenth century's mechanistic view according to which the world and everything in it – including the human body – could be understood scientifically and studied as parts of a machine.<sup>504</sup> René Descartes' (1596-1650) ideas about the body as a machine or 'moving statue' conducted by an invisible force, the soul, often called 'the ghost in the machine', became a breeding ground for theories on the relation between the human body's physiological expressions and the corresponding passions. According to Descartes' theory, the passions function as impulses that start a physical and automated process: 'Through the power of imagination, the ghost can alter the bodily machine, inside and out, by forming an idea of the passion and triggering a release of animal spirits to the appropriate organ.'<sup>505</sup> This meant that each passion through its connection to the nervous system had a corresponding physical response, and in turn, the passions could be specified and physically described.<sup>506</sup> As pointed out by David Wiles, the natural philosopher and physician John Bulwer (1606-1656), like Descartes, regarded the body as a machine, and while considering the hands and face 'the amphitheatres of the body', he sees, in Wiles' words, 'the soul as a kind of puppeteer pulling the strings of an intricate muscular system.'<sup>507</sup>

Aestheticians at the beginning of the eighteenth century developed these ideas in relation to the arts. One of them was the painter Charles Le Brun, whose work is of particular importance for the art of acting. In his *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions* (1702), Le Brun depicted the passions identified by Descartes, basing his work on Cartesian physiology.<sup>508</sup> Le

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<sup>504</sup> Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's passion: studies in the science of acting* (Michigan, 2011, first published in 1985), p.60. On the art of acting in the eighteenth century, see also David Wiles, *The Player's advice to Hamlet*; Laurence Marie, *Inventer l'acteur: émotions et spectacle dans l'Europe des Lumières* (Paris, 2019); Jeffrey M. Leichman, *Acting up: staging the subject in Enlightenment France* (Lewisburg, 2015); Pierre Frantz, *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre de XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2015, first published in 1998); and Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, attitudes, tableaux vivants*.

<sup>505</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.64. For further reading on Descartes in relation to the passions in acting, see also Wiles, *The Player's advice to Hamlet*, p.191-96. Both Roach's Chapter 2, 'Nature still, but nature mechanized', and Wiles' Chapter 6, 'Emotion', give an overview of the historical and international development in the understanding of the passions in relation to the body. See also Laurence Marie, *Inventer l'acteur*, Chapter 5, 'Corps et âme'.

<sup>506</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.64-65.

<sup>507</sup> Wiles, *The Player's advice to Hamlet*, p.194. (First quotation by Bulwer himself, quoted from Wiles.)

<sup>508</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.66.

Brun thought that the passions heated the blood streaming to the brain, which in turn triggered the nerves to instruct the muscles.<sup>509</sup> Roach writes that the combination of Descartes' broad influence and the availability of Le Brun's instructions on how to paint the passions helped form the idea that in order to understand the passions one needed to study and observe them in representative (idealised) pictures and works of art. As a consequence, stage artists developed physical techniques that helped them observe and mechanically mediate the various expressions of the body.<sup>510</sup> Or as Wiles puts it: Le Brun's 'templates encouraged actors to think of themselves as artists self-consciously constructing stage paintings for the pleasure of spectators.'<sup>511</sup> Nicolò Grimaldi, known as Nicolini (1673-1732), for example, developed an acting technique inspired by the study of sculptures, the postures and gestures of which he practised in front of a mirror for at least an hour every day.<sup>512</sup>

Later, the century saw a wave of publications on the art of acting inspired by the plastic arts and by Le Brun's depiction of the passions. Roach mentions Franciscus Lang's *Dissertatio de actione scenica* (1727), François Riccoboni's *L'Art du théâtre* (1750) and Roger Pickering's *Reflections upon theatrical expression in tragedy* (1755) among others.<sup>513</sup> A common idea was that if well observed, described and studied, the passions and their corresponding physiological expressions, positions and gestures could be effectively reproduced by an actor. Roach writes that 'the classification of the passions by gestural and postural stereotypes presented the actor's body as a dead mechanism from which parts may be detached for separate treatment.'<sup>514</sup> In creating these 'ideal patterns' of physical movement, the art of acting was mechanised while the passions were 'objectified and exteriorised', lacking 'subjective content'.<sup>515</sup>

It is however important to underline that acting at the time was not, as a modern reader might expect, perceived as unnatural. On the contrary, the mechanical approach was seen as a rapprochement towards a better under-

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<sup>509</sup> Wiles, *The Player's advice to Hamlet*, p.195.

<sup>510</sup> However, Roach points out that Descartes was partly misunderstood in this respect: For '[t]he Cartesian templates depict a process, not a picture.' Le Brun's intent was to show how to paint the passions, which left the actors with 'static images for dynamic events.' Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.72.

<sup>511</sup> Wiles, *The Player's advice to Hamlet*, p.195.

<sup>512</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.68-69.

<sup>513</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.70.

<sup>514</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.71.

<sup>515</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.70-71.

standing of nature.<sup>516</sup> Also the second half of the eighteenth century saw a desire to create a kind of catalogue or systematic description for actors who could be moulded like living statues into the appropriate passions. We can see such tendencies in writings by Aaron Hill, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Jean-Georges Noverre and Denis Diderot. But behind many of these theorists' systems there was also an interest in the psychology underlying the physical signs and the transitions between different passions:<sup>517</sup> Hill criticised the pedantry of poses and gestures that were too precise, and instead depicted 'the actor's art as a mechanical process of inwardly experiencing the passions at the will's command.'<sup>518</sup> Lessing argued that a passion did not necessarily need to be mentally understood by the actor, but that it was enough if it 'was felt in the body', because a certain action or physical movement could in turn produce the internal passion.<sup>519</sup> Noverre described his thoroughly planned *ballet d'action* as 'a machine in which the dancers are cogs', but he nevertheless wished for 'sentiment and expression' in the artist.<sup>520</sup> And Diderot, who tried to replace the rules of the rhetorical acting style with more realistic stage actions (as we have seen in Chapter 3), nevertheless popularised the notion of viewing the stage as a *tableau*, a painting, which he set against the *coup de théâtre*. Instead of sudden and unnatural twists in the plot, he asked for momentary images from 'real life' which would give the spectator some breathing-space to capture and contemplate what he or she sees.<sup>521</sup> And the purpose of this is to create the greatest possible emotional impact on the spectator. A few years later, Diderot was to write the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, arguing that the best and most capable

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<sup>516</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.58-60.

<sup>517</sup> For example, the English actor Barton Booth had a 'technique of playing the passions' which 'hinges not upon states but upon transitions from one passion to another.' Wiles, *The Player's advice to Hamlet*, p.200.

<sup>518</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.79. See also Wiles' subsection 'David Hume and English acting theory in the Enlightenment', p.196-205.

<sup>519</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.83.

<sup>520</sup> Roach, *The Player's passion*, p.91.

<sup>521</sup> See for example Diderot's *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, first and third conversation. Gram Holmström writes: 'According to Diderot the stage is to be regarded as a picture. It is therefore not surprising that he wants to see the principles of composition that are observed in painting applied to pantomime as well. When an incident occurs in real life where several persons are involved these are grouped in the most natural way (*de la manière la plus vraie*); but the resulting composition is not always the one most advantageous for the painter or the clearest for the beholder. The painter has to reduce the natural arrangement to an artificial one, and the same must apply to the course of events on the stage.' Gram Holmström, *Mono-drama, attitudes, tableaux vivants*, p.38. For further reading on the theatrical *tableau*, see Frantz, *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*.

actors are the ones who can distance themselves from their character, study the role, create a *modèle idéal* of the same and reproduce that ideal image on stage.<sup>522</sup>

Rousseau's thoughts about the art of acting were influenced by his contemporaries and their idea of the stage as a painting. Like many of his colleagues, he was interested in the psychological processes behind the physical production of these live images on stage. But on the basis of his idea of melody as a mimetic element, he also developed an approach to acting that was his own. In the following, I argue that in his *scène lyrique* Rousseau tried to turn the art of acting away from the objective reproduction of physical appearances, and towards the subjective realisation of the dramatic content, inspired by his theories of musical representation.

### **Merging *melos* and *drama***

To better understand the creation of Rousseau's *scène lyrique* and the type of acting that the piece calls for, we need to go back to the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, which provides a theoretical background for Rousseau's new dramatic genre. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, he argues in the *Essai* that when the first words or sounds were uttered by human beings – uncorrupted expressions of the passions of the soul – the distinction between language and music were not yet made, they were one and the same thing, 'the first discourses were the first songs.'<sup>523</sup> Over time, language and music were divided into two separate systems, and through man's increasing will to organise things according to fixed structures and rules, both music and language gradually lost their original connection to the human soul.<sup>524</sup> Through-

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<sup>522</sup> Diderot developed the *Paradoxe* in the 1770s. The text was published posthumously in 1830. For examples of the *modèle idéal*, see Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (Paris, 1830), p.52.

<sup>523</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 12, 'Origin of music', p.318. 'les premiers discours furent les premières chansons'; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.410.

<sup>524</sup> Concerning the more mechanical approach to music, arguing that music needs to move the soul rather than please the ear, Rousseau writes that: 'In this century, when every effort is made to materialize all the operations of the soul and to deprive human feelings of all morality, I am mistaken if the new philosophy does not become as fatal to good taste as to virtue.' Rousseau, *CW*, Vol.7, *Essay*, p.324-325. 'Mais dans ce siècle où l'on s'efforce de matérialiser toutes les opérations de l'âme et d'ôter toute moralité aux sentimens humains, je suis trompé si la nouvelle philosophie ne devient aussi funeste au bon goût qu'à la vertu.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.419.

out the *Essai* this argument returns in different forms, describing the development of language, musical expression and body language respectively. On language Rousseau states: ‘Writing, which seems as if it should fix language, is precisely what alters it; it changes not its words but its genius; it substitutes precision for expressiveness.’<sup>525</sup> On music, he writes that ‘by thus shackling the melody, [harmony] deprives it of energy and expression, it eliminates passionate accent in order to substitute the harmonic interval for it.’<sup>526</sup> And in relation to body language he maintains: ‘Ever since we learned to gesticulate we have forgotten the art of pantomime.’<sup>527</sup> All three examples follow the same pattern. As soon as (oral, musical or bodily) expressiveness becomes part of an organised system – the written language, harmonic theory or the language of gestures – it is dominated by the description of itself and that is why, according to Rousseau, ‘as enlightenment extends, language changes character; it becomes more precise and less passionate; it substitutes ideas for feelings, it no longer speaks to the heart but to reason.’<sup>528</sup> Thus, the historical force of aesthetic ‘perfection’ (systematisation) has slowly stifled the expressiveness of language, music and gestures.

In *Pygmalion*, Rousseau separates the three different forms of theatrical expression – music, language and *pantomime*<sup>529</sup> – which he thinks history has distorted, and he attempts to reunite them in a new way.<sup>530</sup> Pygmalion’s stream of inner experience is communicated in prose and the spoken lines are intermingled with brief instrumental interludes that either accompany silent stage actions or express emotions that are so intense that they cannot

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<sup>525</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, p.300. ‘L’écriture, qui semble devoir fixer la langue est précisément ce qui l’altère; elle n’en change pas les mots mais le génie; elle substitue l’exactitude à l’expression.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.388.

<sup>526</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, p.322. ‘en donnant aussi des entraves à la mélodie elle [l’harmonie] lui ôte l’énergie et l’expression, elle efface l’accent passionné pour y substituer l’intervalle harmonique.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.416.

<sup>527</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, p.290. ‘Depuis que nous avons appris à gesticuler nous avons oublié l’art des pantomimes.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.416.

<sup>528</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, p.296. ‘à mesure [...] que les lumières s’étendent le langage change de caractère; il devient plus juste et moins passionné; il substitue aux sentimens les idées, il ne parle plus au cœur mais à la raison.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.384.

<sup>529</sup> I have chosen to use the French word often used in Rousseau’s time to describe stage actions and gestures.

<sup>530</sup> For further reading on the *Essai* as a background to *Pygmalion*, see also Waeber, ‘Rousseau’s *Pygmalion* and the limits of (operatic) expression’. In the following parts of this subsection, my argument is largely based on or inspired by Waeber’s extensive research concerning *Pygmalion*.

be expressed in words.<sup>531</sup> Thus, Pygmalion's lines are either prepared by or followed by a *pantomime* accompanied by a musical phrase. When reading Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, one is therefore required to combine three different types of textual material: the spoken prose text, the short musical interludes, and the fairly detailed stage directions indicating both physical and psychological events. Jacqueline Waeber writes that '(t)he suspension points that usually begin and end the declamation of the actor, the unresolved cadential gestures that end the instrumental ritournelles: these gestures function as invisible sutures between music and declamation, in order to create the illusion of a continuous discourse between both.'<sup>532</sup> The connection between text and music, *pantomime* and music, is therefore central when we try to understand how Rousseau wished the *scène lyrique* to be performed.

Rousseau highlights this connection in various places throughout his musical writings. One of his most explicit comments on the art of acting can be found in the article 'Acteur' in his *Dictionnaire de musique*. Here, he underlines that it is not enough for an operatic performer to be a good singer – he/she also has to be a gifted *pantomime* actor, because the task of an operatic actor is not only to

make felt what he says himself, but also what he allows the symphony to say. The orchestra does not give a sentiment that does not come from his soul, his steps, his looks, his gestures, all must incessantly agree with the music, without him appearing to think about it; he must always interest, even when silent, and even occupied with a difficult role, if he for a moment forgets his character in favour of the singer, he is merely a musician on stage; he is no longer an actor.<sup>533</sup>

This requirement might appear self-evident to modern readers – is it not obvious that an opera singer's task is to act as well as sing? But read in the

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<sup>531</sup> Waeber underlines that 'the refusal of song' in *Pygmalion* 'should not be taken as a mere "return" to speech. It is the refusal of the artificiality of modern operatic song that has traded its expressive accent for gratuitous virtuosity. The return to speech in *Pygmalion* attempts to uncover the original vocalic emanation prior to articulated language that is at the very origin of melody, thus music.' Waeber, 'Rousseau's *Pygmalion* and the limits of (operatic) expression', p.112.

<sup>532</sup> Waeber, 'Rousseau's *Pygmalion* and the limits of (operatic) expression', p.113.

<sup>533</sup> 'il ne doit pas seulement faire sentir ce qu'il dit lui-même, mais aussi ce qu'il laisse dire à la Symphonie. L'Orchestre ne rend pas un sentiment qui ne doit sortir de son ame; ses pas, ses regards, son geste, tout doit s'accorder sans cesse avec la Musique, sans pourtant qu'il paroisse y songer; il doit intéresser toujours, même en gardant le silence, et quoiqu' occupé d'un rôle difficile, s'il laisse un instant oublier le Personnage pour s'occuper du Chanteur, ce n'est qu'un Musicien sur la Scène; il n'est plus Acteur.' Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique*, 'Acteur', in *OC*, vol.5, p.637.



context of Rousseau's music theory and the *scène lyrique*, we understand that Rousseau is looking for something more. He is emphasising the merging of music with stage action, *melos* with *drama*, which also leads to the creation of his *scène lyrique*.

Already in his *Lettre sur la musique française*, published in 1753, Rousseau mentions the *récitatif obligé* (obligatory recitative), which he would later promote as a type of recitative in which the actor's gestures and actions are closely integrated with the orchestral accompaniment, often illustrating moments of great passion.<sup>534</sup> Rousseau here introduced the French term originating in the Italian *recitativo obbligato* (also known as *recitativo accompagnato*), and the 'label stuck immediately' in France.<sup>535</sup> Rousseau's use and translation of the alternative name for something that was already known in France as *récitatif accompagné*, could be understood as a strategy to underline (and perhaps take credit for) a 'new', more dramatic recitative. Something that would reinforce this theory is that Waeber has pointed out that there seems to be a 'dramatic gradation' between the various recitatives that Rousseau lists in his *Dictionnaire de musique: récitatif, récitatif accompagné, récitatif mesuré* and *récitatif obligé*.<sup>536</sup> This ordering of the different styles of recitative, Waeber states, is made so 'that the final emphasis is reached by the last definition, that of the *récitatif obligé*.'<sup>537</sup>

Rousseau defines the *récitatif obligé* as

that which, interspersed with ritornell[es] and symphonic features, [...] obliges the reciter and the orchestra towards one another, in a way that they must be attentive to and wait for each other. These alternative passages of recitative and melody [...] are the most touching, delightful and energetic there are in modern music. The Actor in transport, moved by a passion that prevents him from saying everything, interrupts himself, stops, hesitates, during which the orchestra speaks for him; and these silences, filled out in this way, affect the

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<sup>534</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Letter on French music*, p.167. Note that the translator here has translated 'récitatif obligé' as 'accompanied recitative'. Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Lettre sur la musique française*, p.321. On the *recitatif obligé* and its use in eighteenth-century Paris, see David Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau*, p.46-50. See also Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*, p. 31-37.

<sup>535</sup> Charlton, *Opera in the age of Rousseau*, p.48.

<sup>536</sup> See Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*, p.31-37, where she also discusses the way in which Rousseau presents the other types of recitative.

<sup>537</sup> 'de manière à ce que l'emphase finale soit atteinte par la dernière définition, celle du *récitatif obligé*.' Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*, p.31.

listener infinitely more than if the actor himself said all that the music makes heard.<sup>538</sup>

Waeber argues that what appears to be a separation of text and music in Rousseau's description of the *recitative obligé*, should be seen as Rousseau's attempt to treat the orchestral music and 'the singer's declamation as two vectors of expression of one single language that in a utopic way reunites music and speech.'<sup>539</sup> In the *recitative obligé*, the music helps the singer/actor express what cannot be said with words; the orchestra helps the actor communicate the parts that the strong emotions prevent him/her from formulating. And this is precisely what is done in *Pygmalion*. What is described in the *Dictionnaire de musique* as an element of opera to be applied in moments of extreme passion, is, in Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, developed into an entire musical-dramatic genre.<sup>540</sup> However, the fundamental difference is of course that the apparent separation between music and text is taken one step further in the *scène lyrique*. Because there is no song here, only spoken declamation intermixed with the brief ritournelles.

Jacqueline Waeber has argued that in his new dramatic genre Rousseau tries to re-establish the link between meaning and sound (*semantikè* and *sonos*) since he thought that modern French music (Rameau) was too focused on the sound, and therefore partly ignored the meaning of the words.<sup>541</sup> I agree with Waeber that the *scène lyrique* implies a rejection of French opera, but I think the argument can be expanded. With its merging of *melos* and *drama*, the *scène lyrique* is also a statement on the theatrical arts, including the contemporary theorising of the art of acting that uses the visual arts as a model. Following the same pattern as in his critique of music and other art forms, Rousseau encourages the actor to approach his/her art through the emotional expression generated by the musical imitation of the passions,

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<sup>538</sup> 'C'est celui qui, entremêlé de Ritournelles et de traits de Symphonie, *oblige* [...] le Récitant et l'Orchestre l'un envers l'autre, en sorte qu'ils doivent être attentifs et s'attendre mutuellement. Ces passages alternatifs de Récitatif et de Mélodie [...] sont ce qu'il y a de plus touchant, de plus ravissant, de plus énergique dans toute la Musique moderne. L'Acteur agité, transporté d'une passion qui ne lui permet pas de tout dire, s'interrompt, s'arrête, fait des réticences, durant lesquelles l'Orchestre parle pour lui; et ces silences, ainsi remplis, affectent infiniment plus l'Auditeur que si l'Acteur disoit lui-même tout ce que la Musique fait entendre.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Dictionnaire de musique*, p.1012-13.

<sup>539</sup> 'traiter ritournelles de l'orchestre et déclamation du chanteur comme deux vecteurs d'expression d'un seul langue qui réunirait de manière utopique musique et parole.' Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*, p.35.

<sup>540</sup> See Waeber, *En musique dans le texte*, p.31-37.

<sup>541</sup> See Waeber, 'Rousseau's *Pygmalion* and the limits of (operatic) expression', p.103-105, p.113-14.

rather than through set formulas for the physical representation of the passions based on painting and sculpture. He calls for a close cooperation between the actor and the orchestra in order to bring out a psychological dimension of the passions that might otherwise be lost: that which cannot be expressed in words, and which needs the *melos* and *drama* to speak with a common voice. As we will see below, this new way of binding text, music and *pantomime* together leads to an expansion of the moment in time that gives space to the representation of the passions.

### **Rousseau's cut – expanding the passionate moment**

As Martin Rueff stresses in *À Coups redoublés*, Rousseau differentiates between the affective functions of visual and auditory impressions, and hence between the effect of the visual arts (through images, gestures etc.) and the aural arts (through voice, music etc.).<sup>542</sup> On the basis of the following lines from the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, Rueff argues that Rousseau creates a 'doctrine of expression'. Rousseau states that

when it is a question of moving the heart and enflaming the passions, it is an altogether different matter. The successive impression of discourse, striking with repeated blows [à coups redoublés], gives you a very different emotion from the presence of the object itself, which you have seen completely with a single glance.<sup>543</sup>

While visual impressions work spatially on us in a precise way, communicating everything to us at the same time, speech and music affect us more deeply because they develop in time. As Rueff argues, Rousseau saw that this expansion in time 'makes the passion exist in the time of the subject', repeatedly bringing it back to itself.<sup>544</sup> Ultimately, this reflects Rousseau's concept of language (and of music, since they were once one and the same): its expression is constitutive of the passions.<sup>545</sup> And just as the passions come

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<sup>542</sup> Martin Rueff, *À Coups redoublés: anthropologie des passions et doctrine de l'expression* (Sesto San Giovanni, 2018).

<sup>543</sup> Rousseau, *CW*, vol.7, *Essay*, Chapter 14, 'On Harmony', p.291. 'lorsqu'il est question d'émouvoir le cœur et d'enflammer les passions, c'est toute autre chose. L'impression successive du discours, qui frappe à coups redoublés vous donne bien une autre émotion que la présence de l'objet même où d'un coup d'œil vous avez tout vû.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.5, *Essai*, p.377. See Rueff, *À Coups redoublés*, p.81-82.

<sup>544</sup> 'Le redoublement fait donc exister la passion dans le temps du sujet.' Rueff, *À Coups redoublés*, p.84-85.

<sup>545</sup> Rueff, *À Coups redoublés*, p.74.

into being through their expression, so the expression (language/music) comes into being through the passions.<sup>546</sup> Rousseau's conception of language is *expressivist* rather than *designative*, Rueff argues. In other words, the *raison d'être* of language is not the signifying of objects or events in the world, but the expression of our being and our experience of different occurrences in it.<sup>547</sup> This is important when we try to understand the structure of expressive elements in *Pygmalion* in the context of contemporary approaches to acting that put emphasis on the reproduction of images of the passions in the visual arts. For as we shall see, Rousseau appears to have the same starting point as his contemporaries, imagining his drama as a series of *tableaux*. Typically, the purpose of the *tableau* is to create an expansion of a moment in time, but according to Rousseau's statement discussed above, visual arts are merely spatial. Therefore, it seems, he tried to give these *tableaux* a temporal aspect through 'dressing' them with 'the successive impression of discourse [and music], striking with repeated blows'.

The earliest draft of Rousseau's *Pygmalion* consists of no more than ten lines, but already here we recognise the outline of what later became his stage directions.<sup>548</sup> Interestingly, this sketch shows that Rousseau originally pictured the play as consisting of a series of three *tableaux*: scenic images of passionate moments quite similar to Diderot's idea of the stage as a painting. However, the development of these three *tableaux* into the final product of *Pygmalion* indicates that Rousseau added speech and music to the images in order to make the moments expand in time and thus enhance the emotional impact.

The first *tableau* shows Pygmalion beholding his work in his studio:

A sculptor's workshop. On the sides are blocs of marble, groups, rough-hewn statues. In the back is a pavilion covered with light silk, decorated with fringes and garlands. The pavilion has been closed, but has now been opened by Pygmalion so he can contemplate the charming statue of Galathée, placed on a very small pedestal set on a marble platform consisting of steps in a semi-circle.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Rueff, *À Coups redoublés*, p.70-74.

<sup>547</sup> Rueff, *À Coups redoublés*, p.59-74.

<sup>548</sup> Alain Cernuschi has studied this first outline of *Pygmalion*, which is reproduced in his introduction to *Pygmalion*, and from which I quote. For a contextualisation of this outline, see Cernuschi's introduction.

<sup>549</sup> 'Un atelier de sculpteur. Sur les côtés on voit des blocs de marbres, des groupes, des statues ébauchées. Dans le fond est un pavillon d'une étoffe légère et brillante ornée de crépines et de guirlandes. Ce pavillon qui était fermé a été ouvert par Pygmalion pour contempler la statue charmante de Galathée posée sur un piédestal fort petit, mais exhausé par un gradin de

In the second *tableau*, Pygmalion has approached the statue with his tools, hoping to improve it:

Pygmalion who has mounted the platform, the chisel in his left and the mallet in his right hand, gives one blow to the statue's bosom to improve the cut of the garment.<sup>550</sup>

And in the third *tableau*, Pygmalion is terrified because he senses that his tools have encountered flesh, not marble:

Under the impression that he feels the elasticity of flesh under his tools, he lets the chisel and mallet fall to the ground, and he almost falls himself out of fear. Without his terror ceasing, he looks at the statue with passion.<sup>551</sup>

I will now study these *tableaux* in their developed form, because they contain almost all the physical actions in the finalised drama, except the moments when Pygmalion walks around his studio at the beginning and when Galathée comes to life at the end. To analyse the aspect of time, I make use of a video recording of a recent production of *Pygmalion* in which I was involved as a dramaturge and producer.<sup>552</sup>

During the first twenty minutes the spectator follows Pygmalion's tumultuous monologue, which is interspersed with music. Then comes the sculptor's long-awaited opening of the pavilion. Anxious music accompanies his shaking hands as he uncovers his masterpiece. The stage direction says: 'Trembling, he lifts the veil away, and bows low. We see the statue of Galathée placed on a pedestal that is very small, but set on a marble platform made up of steps in a semi-circle.'<sup>553</sup> Forty seconds of tender music give

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marbre, formé de quelques marches demi-circulaires.' Rousseau, in Alain Cernuschi's introduction to *Pygmalion*, p.431.

<sup>550</sup> 'Pygmalion monté sur le gradin le ciseau dans la main gauche et le maillet dans la droite vient de donner un coup de ciseau sur la gorge de la statue pour mieux échancre le vêtement.' Rousseau, in Cernuschi, introduction to *Pygmalion*, p.431.

<sup>551</sup> 'Mais croyant sentir sous son fer le mouvement élastique des chairs il laisse tomber le ciseau, le maillet, et tombe presque lui-même tout effrayé sans cesser pourtant dans sa terreur de regarder la statue avec passion.' Rousseau, in Cernuschi, introduction to *Pygmalion*, p.431-32.

<sup>552</sup> The research project *Performing Premodernity*, of which I am a member, staged a research-based production of *Pygmalion* in 2015, which has since been performed on various international stages.

<sup>553</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. 'Il leve le voile en tremblant, et se prosterne. On voit la statue de Galathée posée sur un piédestal fort petit, mais exhaussé par un gradin de marbre, formé de quelques marches demi-circulaires.' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1226.

expression to the moment when Pygmalion is confronted with his own work and his awe when he beholds Galathée. Then follows a speech in which he discloses his feelings in her presence, and which lasts a further seventy seconds:

Galathée! Receive my homage. Yes, I made a mistake. I meant to make you a nymph, but I made you a goddess. Even Venus is less beautiful than you. Vanity, the human weakness! I cannot tire of admiring my creation. I'm drunk with vanity [amour-propre]. I adore myself in the object I've made. No, nothing so beautiful ever appeared in nature. I have surpassed the creation of the gods... Really? Have so many beautiful aspects emerged from my hands? My hands have touched them?... Could my mouth have...<sup>554</sup>

Immediately we go into the second *tableau*. Pygmalion sees a flaw in his work and exclaims: 'This garment covers the nude too much. It must be cut lower. The charms it hides must be better prefigured.' About twenty seconds of excited music accompanies Pygmalion as he approaches the statue: 'He picks up his hammer and chisel, then slowly moves closer. Hesitantly, he climbs the steps of the statue, but he seems unable to dare touch it. Finally, with the chisel already raised, he stops.' At the end of the *tableau*, he cries: 'What turmoil! I can't stop trembling! I can't hold the chisel in this unsteady hand... I cannot... I dare not... I'll spoil everything.'<sup>555</sup> About ten seconds of suspenseful music in high-pitched, drawn-out tones establishes the third *tableau* while Pygmalion 'summons his courage and finally strikes the statue just once with his chisel, but then overcome by fright, he drops it and utters a loud cry: Great gods! I feel the chisel pushed away by palpitating flesh!', after which he 'steps down from the pedestal, trembling and confused.'<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. 'O Galathée! recevez mon hommage. Oui je me suis trompé: j'ai voulu vous faire Nymphé, et je vous ai fait Déesse: Vénus même est moins belle que vous. Vanité, foiblesse humaine! je ne puis me lasser d'admirer mon ouvrage; je m'enivre d'amour-propre; je m'adore dans ce que j'ai fait... Non, jamais rien de si beau ne parut dans la nature; j'ai passé l'ouvrage des Dieux... Quoi! tant de beautés sortent de mes mains? Mes mains les ont donc touchées? Ma bouche a donc pu...' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1226.

<sup>555</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. 'Ce vêtement couvre trop le nu; il faut l'échancrer davantage; les charmes qu'il recèle doivent être mieux annoncés. *Il prend son maillet et son ciseau, puis s'avançant lentement, il monte en hésitant les gradins de la statue qu'il semble n'oser toucher. Enfin, le ciseau déjà levé, il s'arrête. Quel tremblement! quel trouble! Je tiens le ciseau d'une main mal assurée... je ne puis... je n'ose... je gâterai tout.*' Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1226.

<sup>556</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. '*Il s'encourage, et enfin, présentant son ciseau, il en donne un seul coup, et, saisi d'effroi, il le laisse tomber, en poussant un grand*

In this way, Rousseau ‘dresses’ the three original *tableaux* in words and music. Three moments that could have been painted and taken in ‘completely with a single glance’ are instead expanded in time through the development of speech and music ‘striking with repeated blows’. It could of course be argued that it is the basic function of the theatrical arts to give life and body to otherwise still and dead images. But that is exactly what could be seen as Rousseau’s point here: theatre should not reproduce a repertoire of passions mechanically that could be learnt from studying paintings or sculptures. Instead, it should turn those images into expanded moments that convey our internal experience of the world.

The role of Pygmalion is demanding for an actor: until the very end of the play it is basically a one-man show and involves no interaction with other characters.<sup>557</sup> Even though it is rich in stage directions, including those relating to vocal inflections and emotional expression, it is the actor playing Pygmalion who must fill the stage with energy. In order to maintain the attention of the audience the emotional expression of the actor must follow a curve of varying intensity, and the immobile Galathée is of little help here. The curve starts at a low point with Pygmalion suffering from depression, feeling that his life has lost its meaning. Then follows a spark of hope as he dreams about unveiling his most beautiful creation, and the curve of intensity rises with his expectations. Pygmalion now reaches the moment of suspense before daring to lift the curtain: as he moves slowly towards the statue, his emotions grow more intense. And then, he is filled with love when seeing her. This bliss quickly gives way to a moment of suspenseful discomfort, however, as Pygmalion places his chisel on Galathée’s body. When he finally strikes, there is a discharge of energy as Pygmalion screams, dropping his tools to the floor in terror. Now, he ‘steps down from the pedestal’, and with this descending movement he brings the energy level down with him, as he stands ‘trembling and confused.’<sup>558</sup> As he looks at the statue, his feelings of love resurge, and he speaks ‘tenderly’ and then ‘even more tenderly’ about how he would wish she had a soul.<sup>559</sup> He is quiet for a long time and then

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*cri. Dieux! je sens la chair palpitante repousser le ciseau!... Il redescend tremblant et confus.* Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1226-27.

<sup>557</sup> I do not mean to diminish the role of Galathée which is also demanding, albeit in a different way. The spectators’ awareness of the physical exertion of standing still for forty minutes is central to the theatrical effect of the drama.

<sup>558</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. ‘Il redescend, tremblant et confus.’ Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1227.

goes to sit down at his table. He makes another pause, this one ‘in a state of deep dejection’, only to slowly ascend the ladder of intensity again: suddenly, he ‘impetuously’ thinks he has nothing to be ashamed of.<sup>560</sup> Then, ‘less intensely, but still with passion’ he exclaims that he wishes that he could give his soul to Galathée, and ‘in transports of desire’ he cries to the gods for help.<sup>561</sup> He slowly ‘comes back to himself’, his sense of relief soon turning into ‘bitter irony’, as he says to himself: ‘look up, you miserable wretch. Be bold! Dare to stare at a statue.’<sup>562</sup> Now comes his shock when he sees Galathée come to life, his terror soon turning into blissful amazement. This curve of intensity is at the core of the structure and performance of *Pygmalion*. Since the variety that side plots and secondary characters might provide is lacking, the display of varying passions will bore the audience if the actor’s postures, gestures and facial expressions are experienced as mechanical or formalised in accordance with a fixed system of affective signs copied from the visual arts. Therefore, the work demands a certain autonomy for the actor. To build up such a curve over 40 minutes by himself the actor will need to find his own approach to the work. So how did Rousseau want the actor to fill these expanded moments of passion in the curve of intensity?

To answer this question, we need to consider the close connection between music, stage movement and declamation in *Pygmalion*. As mentioned, *Pygmalion*’s lines are introduced or followed by musical passages that accompany the silent stage actions. In the *Lettre à M. Burney*, written in the late 1770s, after *Pygmalion*’s premiere, he writes about both the *récitatif obligé* and the *scène lyrique*, stating that he is tired of the classical ‘school-boy recitation’ of contemporary French opera. An intensely emotional situation can only be expressed through ‘the alternate mixture of speech and of instrumental music’:

The silence of the actor then says more than his words; and these reticences, well placed and well handled and filled on the one side by the voice of the Orchestra and on the other with the mute acting of *an actor who feels both what he says and what he cannot say*, these reticences, I say, produce an effect su-

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<sup>559</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. ‘Tendrement’; ‘avec plus attendrissement encore’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1227.

<sup>560</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. ‘dans un profond accablement’; ‘Impétueusement’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1227.

<sup>561</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. ‘moins vivement, mais toujours avec passion’; ‘Transport’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1228.

<sup>562</sup> Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, unpublished translation. ‘il revient à lui par degrés’; ‘Ironie amere’; ‘regarde, malheureux! deviens intrépide, ose fixer une statue’; Rousseau, *OC*, vol.2, *Pygmalion*, p.1229.



perior even to that of declamation, and they cannot be removed from it without removing from it the greatest part of it[s] power.<sup>563</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Two things stand out in this quotation as important for Rousseau in making both the expressiveness of the original close relation between music and language and the expanded moments of emotion resonate in his new dramatic genre: the actor's use of silences and his/her emotional involvement in the words he/she is saying (or not saying). That Rousseau wanted the actor to be emotionally involved might appear banal, but the account of the first *Pygmalion*, Antoine Le Texier, who gave a colourful account of how Rousseau coached him in the roles of *Pygmalion* and Colin in *Le Devin du village* in 1770 adds a new dimension to our understanding.<sup>564</sup> It seems that Rousseau's style of directing corresponded with the acting style that he promoted in his *Dictionnaire de musique* and his *Lettre à M. Burney*.

Le Texier's encounter with Rousseau took place in Lyon in 1770, the actor explaining that he accepted Rousseau's proposal of playing the role of *Pygmalion* on condition that the author himself would instruct him. The double-bill production of *Pygmalion* and *Le Devin du village*, presented at the Hôtel de Ville in Lyon, was mounted within six to nine days. The music for *Pygmalion* – the text for which had been written around 1762 – was composed during these days by the local amateur musician Horace Coignet, under Rousseau's supervision, while two out of the 26 ritournelles were written by the author himself.<sup>565</sup> As David Wiles points out, the fact that Rousseau chose amateur actors for the premiere of his *Pygmalion* suggests that he wished to avoid the Parisian practices of the acting style *à la mode*.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Rousseau, *Letter to Mr. Burney and Fragments of observations on Gluck's Alceste*, in *CW*, vol.7, p.497. 'Je crois que le mélange alternatif de la parole et de la symphonie peut seul exprimer une pareille situation [...] Le silence de l'acteur dit alors plus que ses paroles, et ces réticences bien placées, bien ménagées et remplies d'un côté par la voix de l'orchestre et de l'autre par le jeu muet d'un acteur *qui sent et ce qu'il dit et ce qu'il ne peut dire*, ces réticences, dis-je, font un effet supérieur à celui même de la déclamation, et l'on ne peut les ôter sans lui ôter la plus grande partie de sa force.' *Lettre à M. Burney et Fragments d'observations sur l'Alceste de Gluck*, ed. Olivier Pot, *OC*, vol.5, p.447-48.

<sup>564</sup> Published in *Le Publiciste* in 1803. My warm thanks to Jacqueline Waeber for generously sharing this source, which has received little scholarly attention, with me. Waeber comments on Le Texier's account in the coming English translation of her book on melodrama, see bibliography.

<sup>565</sup> For the full musical material as well as the text of *Pygmalion*, see Jacqueline Waeber's edition (Geneva, 1997). See Waeber's introduction (in French and English), p.VIII-XXI.

<sup>566</sup> Wiles, *The Player's advice to Hamlet*, p.215.

Le Texier was given an envelope with the manuscript of *Pygmalion*, on which Rousseau had written: ‘This work is by me; one will recognise that without difficulty. The only kindness that I ask, is that nothing is changed.’ It seems that Rousseau took this demand very seriously. Le Texier tells how, after performing *Pygmalion*, he himself was happy with his performance and approached Rousseau, eager to hear his appreciation. But to Le Texier’s great disappointment Rousseau was not of the same opinion: ‘Ah! [...] You said PAS in this sentence, and it was supposed to be POINT!’<sup>567</sup>

Rousseau began the first *Pygmalion* rehearsal by admitting that he himself was a bad reciter – something that Le Texier confirms, although he also confirms that Rousseau was a good judge of the declamation of others. According to Le Texier Rousseau never indicated the tone of voice he wanted but waited for the actor to feel his way towards the right one: ‘I was thus forced to try out various versions before finding the one that would please him. [...] He was listening to me while sitting in his armchair and announcing my limited success with his silence.’<sup>568</sup> On at least one occasion Rousseau’s patience wore thin and he broke the silence, shouting: ‘Can you not hear what that means? Well, this means that...’ – and then, writes Le Texier, the author would give an inspiring explanation of the meaning of some specific part of the text.<sup>569</sup> At other times, when Rousseau was happy with the actor’s performance, he would silently come up to Le Texier, smilingly, and kiss his forehead.

In general, Rousseau seems to have been happy with his first *Pygmalion*, since he also offered to coach the actor in the role of Colin. Rousseau talked about what he was looking for in the singers of *Le Devin du village*, and he told Le Texier that all previous singers had kept ‘*singing*, even though I asked them to *spea*k to me; because it is not music that I have created, it is *the sense of my words* that I wanted to indicate, even in my arias.’ (Emphasis added.)<sup>570</sup> This story reminds us of several of Rousseau’s earlier statements,

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<sup>567</sup> ‘Cet ouvrage est de moi; on le reconnoîtra sans peine. La seule grâce que je demande est qu’on n’y change rien.’ ‘Ah ! [...] vous avez dit PAS dans cette phrase, et il falloit dire POINT.’ Le Texier, in *Le Publiciste*, 24 thermidor an XI (1803).

<sup>568</sup> ‘j’étois donc obligé d’en essayer souvent plusieurs, avant d’arriver à celui qui lui plaisoit, et qui, conséquemment, étoit le meilleur en raison de la justesse et de la finesse de son goût. Il étoit sur son fauteuil à m’écouter, et de son silence m’annonçoit mon peu de success.’ Le Texier, *Le Publiciste*, 24 thermidor an XI.

<sup>569</sup> ‘Est-ce que vous n’entendez pas ce que cela veut dire ? .... Eh bien ! Cela veut dire.....’ Le Texier, *Le Publiciste*, 24 thermidor an XI.

such as his objection to the ‘schoolboy recitation’ at the Opéra; his insistence that an opera singer who does not act is a mere musician on stage; and his argument that melodic imitation ‘not only imitates, it speaks.’

Le Texier’s account contains two points that are worth highlighting: Rousseau is expecting Le Texier to be completely true to the letter of the text, but at the same time he refuses to demonstrate how to perform it. Changing the negation ‘point’ to the slightly less forceful ‘pas’ in French is a minor alteration, which Le Texier did not expect Rousseau to care about. This apparent pettiness indicates a belief in the text as an autonomous poetic creation. In turn, this is linked to the curve of intensity that is built into the work. On the one hand, the curve worked into the text needs to be spoken with minute attention to the sound and meaning of every word. On the other hand, the emotional curve cannot be realised in performance without the actor’s autonomous embodying of the curve. Therefore, the sovereignty of the work of art is kindred to the autonomy that Rousseau expected from the actor. Rousseau was happy to discuss the subtext of the drama, but he expected Le Texier to fill a gap, and without giving exact instructions regarding the physical performance he allowed the actor to embody the text in his own way. By avoiding demonstration, Rousseau not only asked the actor to avoid mechanical reproduction of series of passions as iconised in the visual arts; he wanted to avoid any imitation of externally learned verbal and visual expressions of the passions. Le Texier’s account gives the impression of a directorial technique that put emphasis on learning by doing, and on letting the physical expression of the emotions emerge from the actor’s individual experience.

In a sense, the respective autonomies of the text and of the actor correspond to the autonomous thinking that Rousseau was aiming for with the public festival. And in each case – the text, the actor, the spectator – the autonomy presupposes the individual subject as a starting point. If the origin of languages, melody and musical imitation became sources of inspiration for Rousseau’s alternative idea of theatre, it is because he saw the history of the arts as the possible history of the expression of subjectivity. That is why subjectivity runs through *Pygmalion*, from its content, form and structure to its performance.

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<sup>570</sup> ‘ils ont toujours eu la rage de me *chanter*, je leur demandois de me *parler*; car ce n’est pas de la musique que j’ai faite, c’est le sens de mes paroles que j’ai voulu indiquer même dans mes airs.’ (Emphasis added.) Le Texier, *Le Publiciste*, 25 thermidor an XI.



# Conclusion

## From criticism to practice

At the outset the main aims of this doctoral thesis were to investigate why Rousseau composed works for the French stage, while at the same time criticising it, and to analyse how in his own theatrical works Rousseau tried to respond, aesthetically and practically, to the inherent problems that he saw in the theatre.

Regarding the first inquiry, my hypothesis was that Rousseau may have deliberately taken on a double position towards the theatre and other art forms in order to be able to break down and reshape from the inside the prevailing aesthetic-political system. My theoretical approach to analyse Rousseau's view of the arts was built on Starobinski's theories of the reoccurring remedy-in-the-poison-metaphor in Rousseau's oeuvre, and the Derridean concept of the *pharmakon*. This opened up the possibility of avoiding a traditional understanding of Rousseau's writings as built on dichotomies of positive and negative elements unconsciously ordered in a linear fashion through the logic of supplementarity. By analysing Rousseau's conjectural history of the arts, it has been possible to see how a thought structure emerges. In many cases this thought structure, which I have conceptualised as *aesthetic perfectibility*, certainly appears linear. Rousseau repeatedly describes how he thinks that throughout history the original expressiveness of the arts has faded away because of man's persistent will to 'perfect' – organise, categorise and systematise – the world, including the arts. The clearest example he gives is that of melody versus harmony. Rousseau sees melody as the source of expressiveness in music and he believes that over time harmony, learned notation systems and music theories stifled the ideal properties of melody. This can appear to be a typical example of how an outer evil has added itself to an original goodness, as a supplement.

But as I have shown, the faculty of perfectibility (coined by Rousseau), with its potential to lead to either good or bad, presupposes supplementarity because it is inherent in the original man: it is silently waiting to be activated or not activated, to be or not to be. It does not add itself to the origin from an

outside any more than a herb or potion can be called a medicine or a poison before someone decides to use it in a certain way. Perfectibility thus has a similar structure to that of the *pharmakon*, as does the omnipresent thought structure found in Rousseau's works on art and theatre that I have called *aesthetic perfectibility*, because it too has not been predefined as either a positive or negative force that will necessarily lead to a linear development. Italian music, as it is presented in Rousseau's writings, could be seen as the ultimate proof of this since the Italians have invested their 'perfecting' efforts in melody, and thus managed to increase the expressiveness of their music. In the light of all this, the fact that Rousseau criticises Parisian theatre and yet at the same time writes dramas for it can be seen as a tactical method to approach a problem from two angles. It is not a matter of condemning the theatrical arts in general, but rather of understanding and criticising their development throughout history and of providing the aesthetic-political reasons for it. Rousseau experimented with the art form of theatre to see if it was possible to find a 'melody of theatre' – an expressive element within the theatrical arts that could help them escape, or at least partly avoid, their current destiny, which was to be schematised at the expense of expressiveness.

This leads to a second point in the answer to my first research question about Rousseau's seemingly double position in relation to the arts. This concerns the aesthetic-political reasons, as Rousseau saw them, behind the development of *aesthetic perfectibility*; his explanation to why people involved in and writing about the arts most often tended to systematise and organise them with the belief that they were improving them, while they in reality were making them less expressive. This study suggests that Rousseau thought that many of the men of Enlightenment, playwrights and *philosophes*, had become so engaged in their cause to enlighten and educate the people that the cause itself became an obstacle. The cause had become part of a prescribed system of thought backed by learned men, which was taught to the people from the theatrical stage. At the same time, Rousseau indicates that in such a system, there is always the danger of the men in charge wishing to gain more power, or at least of them wanting to remain in their position of power. And therefore, they easily become desensitised to the criticism of how their method of pursuing their cause was affecting the cause itself. This is partly related to the question of why Rousseau chose to produce works for the French theatre while being a critic of it. He thought that the danger with the Parisian theatre of his day was that it was built on prescribed didactics, which even though initially well-intended in itself – teaching people to be virtuous and to choose duty over love – it had become blind

to its own shortcomings. Rousseau reasoned that teaching people always to follow a prescribed pattern according to didactics or predetermined systems, leads to diminished autonomy of thought. Therefore, as my hypothesis stated from the outset, Rousseau's seemingly contradictory relationship to the arts might be read as his way of challenging his audience, as a means to encourage the readers or spectators to think for themselves, a way to say that there is not one answer to these questions, and if there is, you must find it yourself.

Concerning the second inquiry, about Rousseau's way of responding in his stage works to the problems he saw with the theatre, my hypothesis was that his many writings on music could provide a general theoretical approach for the arts, and give a useful framework specifically for the theatre. This proved to be a fruitful method for several reasons. The study of Rousseau's early musical writings in combination with the first socio-political writings led to my conceptualisation of *aesthetic perfectibility* as a thought structure, as discussed above. And the fact that *aesthetic perfectibility* carries a structural likeness with the *pharmakon* led to central conclusions concerning the public festival. The public festival emerges not only as an alternative form of theatrical event in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, but also as an alternative kind of education based on autonomous thinking without a philosophical leader, in contrast to that of the Enlightenment stage, which Rousseau perceived as built on prescribed didactics. Yet, the public festival should not be read as the opposite of or negation of theatre. Because in both the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* Rousseau's descriptions of the first festivals in the youth of humankind as a species, show an awareness that however innocent and romantic these acts might have been, they were at the same time the first steps towards human inequality. Theatre can therefore not be seen as having a purely dichotomous relationship to the festival. The first festivals can rather be read as the birth of theatre, and therefore they necessarily hold traits of the theatre as it subsequently develops, just as there are traits of the festival in the theatre. Consequently, just as in the case of melody in relation to music, the festival in relation to theatre offers a possibility to learn about ourselves and our history – which in turn might lead to a productive process of *aesthetic perfectibility* that does not aim to create rules and systems for our way of thinking and feeling. This is central to my results concerning Rousseau's practical strategies to deal with the problems he found with the theatre of his day. Because investigating the aesthetic elements of the festival alongside his theatrical

works shows that Rousseau tried to infuse his own stage works with inspiration from the festival.

As Rousseau thinks that theatrical imitation is problematic because it often forces a particular opinion or worldview onto the spectator,<sup>571</sup> part of the liberating function and effect of the public festival concerns its absence of traditional imitation: it avoids making a difference between fiction and reality, or between actor and spectator. It is instead structured around an auto-representation in which the participants represent themselves, both as individuals and as a group, they are ‘actors of themselves.’<sup>572</sup> My study shows that in stage works like *Pygmalion*, *Le Devin du village* and *Narcisse, ou, L’Amant de lui-même* Rousseau plays with the concepts of both traditional imitation and auto-representation in various ways in order to address the possible harm that theatrical imitation can do, and as a way of encouraging autonomous thinking in the audience.

On the other hand, approaching Rousseau’s theatrical works from the perspective of his music theory also led to the realisation that Rousseau seems to have used his notion of melody as an inspiration for how imitation can avoid forcing a certain way of thinking on to the audience. Since melody according to Rousseau does not imitate actual objects and acts, but instead imitates our experience of perceiving certain objects and acts, it is particularly dependent on the audience’s own memories of various experiences. Therefore, the audience become co-creators of the imitation to a greater extent than in a traditional imitation. Instead of being forced to perceive things in a certain way, the audience members are encouraged to think for themselves and to form their own opinion. Rousseau particularly took inspiration from his notion of melody as music’s mimetic element when creating his own new dramatic genre, the *scène lyrique*. His *Pygmalion* is therefore focused on the world as we experience it psychologically, rather than physically, both in terms of the work’s dramatic construction and in the way in which it was meant to be performed. At the same time, Rousseau tried to merge the musical interludes in *Pygmalion* with both the spoken declamation and the silent stage action; as if he wanted to infuse the drama with the beneficial qualities of music.

There are numerous angles and possibilities in relation to Rousseau’s idea of theatre that have not been addressed in this study. For future research it would be interesting to look further into the plays themselves – I have fo-

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<sup>571</sup> As shown by Dugan and Strong in ‘Music, politics, theatre and representation in Rousseau’.

<sup>572</sup> See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetics of history*.



cused on those that were performed on a public stage and are regarded as the most central in Rousseau's oeuvre. To get a better understanding of his thoughts about the art of acting, it might also be fruitful to study in more detail the statements he made about various actors, both those involved in the performances of his own dramas, and those involved in performances of other theatrical works that he commented on.

Aiming to understand Rousseau's complex idea of theatre in this project required me to take into account previous research on Rousseau within a number of different research fields, for example musicology, comparative literature, philosophy, political science and theatre studies. My hope is that the conclusions I have drawn in this thesis will contribute to both a broadened and deepened understanding of Rousseau's double relation to the theatre and to other art forms. Broadened in the sense that what can appear to be ambiguous might be so deliberately for a reason. Because approaching Rousseau's involvement with theatre from the point of view of the *pharmakon* means accepting that the many dichotomies within his oeuvre might not always be oppositional, and implicitly acknowledging that his writings are full of tensions that are used to make a point. He criticises theatrical imitation through theatrical imitation itself, and while disapproving of the attempts of *les philosophes* and other playwrights to teach people how to think and feel through a prescribed system, he develops a philosophical system that enables him to promote autonomous thinking and to provide an alternative, which he does through the festival. Deepened in the sense that the thought structure in Rousseau's writings that I have conceptualised as *aesthetic perfectibility* not only reaches through his theoretical writings on socio-politics and on aesthetics – both musical and theatrical – but it also plays a role in and is further developed in his works for the stage. His theatrical works and his thinking about theatre as an art form in the era of Enlightenment should therefore be seen as important parts of his oeuvre as a whole, and as noteworthy contributions to the aesthetic-political debate of the time.



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# Sammanfattning på svenska

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) hade en tveeggad relation till teatern som konstform. Han var nämligen en kritiker av den Parisiska teaterns moraliska konsekvenser, medan han samtidigt skrev pjäser och musikdramer för densamma. Föreliggande doktorsavhandling argumenterar för att denna tillsynes dubbla position i relation till teatern inte behöver vara motsägelsefull. Studiens centrala frågeställningar är: 'Varför skrev Rousseau dramer för den franska teatern medan han samtidigt kritiserade den?' och 'På vilket sätt försökte Rousseau genom sina sceniska verk att svara, såväl estetiskt som praktiskt, på de problem som han såg med teatern? Jag börjar med att närma mig Rousseaus tankar om teatern från ett bredare perspektiv, genom att studera hans kritik av konst generellt. Därifrån angriper jag hans dubbla relation till teatern från en teoretisk synvinkel, för att slutligen analysera hans egna teateralster i ljuset av de teoretiska slutsatserna.

Med inspiration från både Jean Starobinski och Jacques Derrida har denna studie sin teoretiska utgångspunkt i *pharmakon* som koncept, vilket diskuteras i avhandlingens första kapitel 'Theoretical approach – Rousseau's pharmacy'. Jean Starobinski har uppmärksammat en återkommande metafor inom Rousseaus verk som kan användas för att bättre förstå hur Rousseau uppfattade konst i allmänhet, och teater i synnerhet, som potentiellt både skadligt och konstruktivt i ett samhälle. Starobinski går igenom ett stort antal av Rousseaus skrifter och demonstrerar hur filosofen återvänder till bilden av möjligheten att finna ett botemedel till samhällets problem inom själva giftet: möjligheten att bota ont med ont, kultur med kultur, konst med konst, och därmed teater med teater. Kapitlet undersöker delar av den tidigare forskning som gjorts kring Rousseaus skenbara ambivalens i relation till konsterna. Utifrån detta argumenterar jag för att bilden av botemedlet inom giftet inte bara är en återkommande metafor inom Rousseaus verk, utan snarare – som Starobinski verkar indikera – en bredare tankestruktur som återfinns i texter av Rousseau som inte specifikt tar upp denna metafor. Jag föreslår därför en expansion av Starobinskis teorier genom *pharmakon*-konceptet, såsom det har definierats och utvecklats av Derrida. Det centrala

argumentet i Derridas tes är inspirerat av det grekiska ordet *pharmakon* – ett ord som Platon använder i *Faidros* för att beskriva (och kritisera) skrivspråket – som kan betyda både gift och/eller botemedel. Poängen är att i ett apotek kan en vätska eller ett piller uppfattas som både gift och/eller botemedel innan de används. Innan ämnet appliceras har det en dubbel karaktär och kan användas i olika syften, men från början är gift och botemedel samma substans. Genom dess tveeggade sammansättning skulle *pharmakon* som tankestruktur därför kunna tillåta ‘giftig’ eller skadlig konst att samexistera med ett hopp om att också kunna skapa konst med en ‘botande’ effekt. För att visa att *pharmakon* som en tankestruktur som sträcker sig bortom giftet-i-botemedlet-metaforen kan sägas vara inbäddad i Rousseaus tänkande i bredare skala, visar jag på vilket sätt det är inkorporerat i hans antropologiska filosofi genom en diskussion om hans neologism *perfektibilitet* (*perfectibilité*).

Det andra kapitlet ‘Aesthetic perfectibility – a history of the arts’ åskådliggör på vilket sätt Rousseaus tidiga skrifter om musikteori tillsammans med hans första sociopolitiska skrifter skapar en hypotetisk historieskrivning om konsterna. Jag frångår den traditionella uppfattningen att Rousseaus neologism *perfektibilitet* endast är ett antropologiskt koncept etablerat i *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*. Istället föreslår jag att det också är ett estetiskt koncept som Rousseau utvecklade i sina tidiga skrifter om estetik. Här spelar hans skrifter om musikteori en viktig roll, då de visar hur han genom användningen av ord som *perfekt* och *perfektion* hävdar att modern fransk musik under historiens gång successivt har förlorat sin förmåga att med hjälp av melodi beröra själen. Som en effekt av detta försöker kompositörer kompensera för bristen på uttryck genom att förfina (‘perfektera’) musik via systematiserade harmoniregler. Detta kapitel visar att vad jag har valt att kalla *estetisk perfektibilitet* är en tankestruktur genom vilken Rousseau – utan att använda termen – kritiserar konst som han finner har förlorat sitt expressiva uttryck och som istället försöker att kompensera för bristen på uttrycksfullhet genom föreskrivna regler om skönhet och imitation. Jag hävdar att *perfektibilitet* i Rousseaus tänkande – förutom att vara ett antropologiskt begrepp som beskriver en mänsklig förmåga – även är en föreställning genom vilken han skriver sin egen historia om konsternas utveckling. Jag påstår att det är genom *estetisk perfektibilitet* som han analyserar estetik, och att han använder denna tankestruktur för att förstå, exponera och motarbeta systematiserade och universella regler om förnuft, skönhet och smak.

Jag använder *estetisk perfektibilitet* för att göra en nyläsning av Rousseaus *Lettre à d'Alembert* och argumenterar för att detta koncept är centralt för vår förståelse av Rousseaus tankar om teatern. För det första därför att det tillhandahåller en viktig kontext för Rousseaus kritik av de regler som präglade teatern under franskklassicismen. För i såväl tanke som språkbruk kommer han här tillbaka till *estetisk perfektibilitet*: Medan han kritiserar den Parisiska teatern kallar han den samtidigt för den mest *perfekta* av teatrar. På liknande vis omnämner han skådespelsförfattare som Molière och Racine som de mest *perfekta* av dramatiker, och kritiserar parallellt deras verk för att vara moraliskt korrupta då han finner att de styrs av regler präglade av *bienséance* (anständighet/etikett), dekorum och artighet. För det andra är konceptet *estetisk perfektibilitet* väsentligt därför att det kan ge oss en ny förståelse för den offentliga festivalen i Rousseaus tänkande som de sceniska konsternas födelse. Detta leder till slutsatsen att den mer konventionella teatern och den offentliga festivalen inte borde förstås som mot varandra stridande företeelser i *Lettre à d'Alembert*, utan snarare som besläktade exempel på samma konstform, innehållande element som är såväl skadliga som välgörande för samhället.

För Rousseau var den Parisiska teatern och dess skådespelare på många sätt en miniatyrkopia av det franska upplysningssamhället och vad han uppfattade som dess problem: att analysera och visa upp sig i en värld styrd av filosofi och *bienséance* hade blivit viktigare än att bara vara. Genom att rikta sig till d'Alembert, Voltaire och Diderot kan *Lettre à d'Alembert* sägas måla en bild av varför Rousseau ville hålla upplysningsfilosoferna och den Parisiska livsstilen utanför sin födelsestad Genève. I det tredje kapitlet, 'The stage of Enlightenment – and its power structures', föreslår jag en alternativ läsning av *Lettre à d'Alembert* genom att visa hur lärda män är indirekt beskrivna som upprätthållare av *estetisk perfektibilitet* (som systematisering) och av de föreskrivna konst- och teaterreglerna nedärvda från tidigare generationer. Jag argumenterar för att Rousseau delvis såg upplysningsfilosoferna som ledande representanter för didaktiska strukturer, eftersom han fann att deras implicita mål var att upprätthålla *deras* upplysningsrörelse för att behålla sina maktpositioner i egenskap av förkunnare av sanning. När vi läser mellan raderna i *Lettre à d'Alembert* kan Rousseau sägas ha framställt filosoferna som marionettspelare som försöker kontrollera folkets tankar och känslor. Rousseau skriver här utifrån en komplex position därför att han måste undvika att upprepa sina motståndares misstag: han kan inte framgångsrikt anklaga dem för att försöka tala om för folk hur de ska tycka och tänka om han själv gör samma sak. Därför kan han

endast insinuera och subtilt peka i en viss tankeriktning angående detta i *Lettre à d'Alembert*. Beträffande detta område måste läsarna dra sina egna slutsatser; de måste tillåtas att tänka själva.

I Rousseaus ögon hade lärda män – som ofta var författare till pjäser och operor på de kungliga scenerna eller hade inflytande över desamma – genom att vilja sprida sina egna sanningar på teatern, en tendens att motarbeta självständigt tänkande i publiken. Dessutom relaterade Rousseau dessa män till aristokratins höviska artighet och *bienséance*, nedärvda från Louis XIVs regeringstid, eftersom de ofta var betalda av och därför beroende av kungahuset och dess nära relationer. Jag drar därför slutsatsen att ett centralt argument i *Lettre à d'Alembert* mot upplysningsteatern är att den är strukturerad kring och upprätthåller den hierarkiska moral som återfinns i monarkins *bienséance*, vilken Rousseau vill hålla utanför det republikanska Genève. Slutligen föreslår jag att Rousseau använder den offentliga utomhusfestivalen som ett ideal för vad teater skulle kunna vara. Festivalen leds inte av någon annan än folket självt och ämnar vara en ren presentation av dess deltagare, deras känslor och deras gemenskap. Jag visar att Rousseaus uppmanande av den offentliga festivalen som en alternativ teatralisk form av underhållning i Genève inte bara är en kritik av upplysningens estetik och filosofi, utan också ett förslag till en alternativ form av upplysningsteater, ideologiskt fri – om inte i praktiken, så i teorin – från både filosofisk och monarkisk organisation och systematisering.

Teatralisk imitation är problematiskt för Rousseau därför att han menar att den påtvingar åskådaren en föreskriven uppfattning. I det fjärde kapitlet, 'Exposing and amending theatrical imitation – an alternative education' diskuterar jag flera tidigare studier som visar hur Rousseau såg konstnärlig imitation som potentiellt laddad med falska förespeglningar, föreskriven didaktik och dominans. Jag argumenterar för att Rousseau delvis såg imitation som ett verktyg använt av lärda män för att didaktiskt underhålla sin maktposition. Den offentliga festivalen framträder återigen som en alternativ och befriande utbildning, vilken istället för att lära människor att tänka enligt en föreskriven didaktik uppmanar dem att utveckla ett såväl självständigt tankesätt, som transparanta intentioner i relation till varandra. Jag framhåller att den offentliga festivalens frigörande funktion delvis har att göra med dess vederläggning av konstnärlig imitation i traditionell bemärkelse. Dock är festivalen inte helt utan mimetiska element; snarare manifesterar den en fokus- och riktningförändring av dessa element, och detta är något som Rousseau utforskar i flera av sina sceniska verk.



Jag visar hur Rousseau i sina arbeten för teatern försöker att både exponera och tillrättalägga imitationens funktion, för att antingen påpeka de potentiellt farliga effekterna av imitation för publiken eller för att försöka frammana festivalens frigörande transparens. Jag diskuterar *Pygmalion*, *Narcisse, ou, L'Amant de lui même* och *Le Devin du village* och undersöker på vilket sätt som Rousseau problematiserar imitation genom sina egna teatrala representationer.

I det femte kapitlet, 'Melodising theatre – performing the inner landscape', diskuterar jag hur Rousseau tycks kontrastera musikalisk och teatral imitation därför att han anser att den förstnämnda inte påtvingar publiken en specifik åsikt. Åhörarna är genom sina minnen och inre tankevärld snarare medskapare av den process som genererar den musikaliska imitationen. I Rousseaus musikteori är imitation inte bara någonting positivt, utan någonting nödvändigt, därför att utan imitation förlorar musiken sin uttrycksfullhet och därmed sin förmåga att beröra sin publik. Jag argumenterar för att Rousseau via sin musikteori fann inspiration i det sätt på vilket han trodde att melodi imiterar, och att han på olika sätt försökte injicera detsamma i sina sceniska verk. Först diskuterar jag grunddragen i Rousseaus uppfattning av melodi och musikalisk imitation i relation till andra typer av konstnärlig imitation. Sedan fokuserar jag på hur Rousseau praktiskt försökte inkludera melodi som ett mimetiskt element i sina sceniska alster genom såväl dramaturgi som sättet på vilket de var tänkta att framföras. Huvudexemplen här är *Pygmalion* och *scène lyrique* som en ny dramatisk genre, skapad av Rousseau. Många av Rousseaus samtida såg de visuella konsterna som en modell för hur passionerna skulle uttryckas på scen. Jag hävdar att Rousseau istället använde melodi och musikalisk imitation som modeller för teaterkonsten.