

**FROM *LE CRI DE LA NATURE* TO *PYGMALION*:
A STUDY OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC
AND AESTHETIC AND REFORM OF OPERA**

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dartington College of Arts

August 2003

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Abstract

Stephen John Xavier Baysted

From *Le Cri de la Nature* to *Pygmalion*: A Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Philosophy of Music and Aesthetic and Reform of Opera

The thesis sets Rousseau's philosophy of music and aesthetic of opera against the wider philosophical backcloth of eighteenth-century France and in contraposition to the more scopic music-theoretical backdrop, of which Rameau's writings are taken as a paradigm.

The first half of the thesis contends that the philosophy of music is fashioned upon a trinary model which mirrors the philosophy of nature and history. The first sector is an ideal, hypothetical state; the second (the 'fall') is the moment when the ideal state is ruptured, when societal and cultural institutions – and history – commence; the third, is the 'actual state', the culmination of the process of history. It is argued that relativism is at work between the second and third sectors and Rousseau assigns a rigorous system of value to the process of history and all points along it; the process itself, taken as a whole, is seen as a degenerative slide away from near-perfection to imperfection.

The second half of the thesis explores the ramifications of the trinary model and the effect the degenerative process has upon the voice, music and opera. The voice is considered the unique phenomenon that connects all sectors of the trinary structure: though objectified and endowed with an ontology, it is not immune to the degenerative process. At the fall-state, the voice begins to rupture and two entities – melody and language – gradually emerge. Over time, melody and speech are forced further apart until neither bears much resemblance to the other. With the invention of harmony, melody degenerates: harmony begins to overshadow melody, until in the eighteenth century – consummated in the music and theoretical postulations of Rameau – melody is subjugated and subsumed entirely within the harmonic domain of musical production. The impact upon opera is more complex and the concluding chapters explore the radical and largely reform-driven aesthetic of opera. Rousseau's final dramatic work *Pygmalion* (1762) is considered not simply as an outcome of this aesthetic, but as an embodiment of the philosophy of music itself; the animated statue enunciates Rousseau's vision of the origin of human expression.

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Acknowledgement

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisors, Professor Max Paddison and Dr Bob Gilmore, for all their encouragement, support, advice and assistance during the writing of this thesis.

I would like to acknowledge the financial support provided by Dartington College of Arts in the form of a studentship which assisted my research in the UK, France and Switzerland. I would also like to thank Professor Edward Cowie and Corrie Jefferey for their help.

I would like to thank the staff at the Bibliothèque d'Etudes Rousseauistes at Montmorency for their hospitality and their assistance in obtaining secondary source materials.

I would like to sincerely thank my former colleagues at Rose Bruford College, in particular Anthony Hozier and Dr Chris Megson, the administrative team, and the library staff.

I would like to thank Dawn Ferris for her love, support and considerable patience over the past eighteen months.

And finally, thank you to my parents for all their love, advice, encouragement and financial assistance: here are 78,000 words in return for 34 years.

Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

This study was partially financed with the aid of a studentship from Dartington College of Arts (1994-1997).

Signed *S. J. X. Baysted*.....

Date *18.11.03*.....

Introduction:

Jean-Jacques étoit né pour la musique.¹

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born on 28 June, 1712 in a town house on the Grand Rue in what is now Geneva's Vielle-Ville.² Rousseau was the son of a watchmaker, and although he would later become an apprentice engraver, he was, nevertheless, ultimately destined for a very different *métier*. For Jean-Jacques, his calling was to be music, the one activity in his life that would cause him the most anguish and the greatest personal torment, and yet it was an activity from which he was simply unable to desist. As he would put it a little over three years before his death, and looking retrospectively across what was, by the standards of any epoch, a remarkable life, Rousseau declared of himself that 'Jean-Jacques étoit né pour la musique.'³ Music was an art form for which, he claimed, he had begun to feel great affinity in his childhood and the only one to which he would remain constant throughout his life.⁴

This constancy is reflected not only in the extraordinary diversity of writings that either intersect with, develop, or expound musical themes and issues, but is also manifest in the significant, formative events that would punctuate and determine the course of his life as philosopher, political theorist, novelist, and pamphleteer. Amongst these events we may list the failure of his *Projet concernant des nouveaux signes pour la musique* (1742); the musical revelation in Venice (1743); the ignominious treatment of his first opera, *Les Muses Galantes*, at the hands of his idol Jean-Philippe Rameau (1743); the *débâcle* concerning his alterations for Rameau and Voltaire's *Les Fêtes de Ramire* (1745); the drafting of the music articles for Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (1749); the rampant success of his opéra comique *Le Devin du Village* (1753); the rancorous events of the *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752-54), and the remorseless musico-ontological polemic with Rameau that ensued (1753-58); the penning of *Pygmalion* whilst in exile (1762); and the

¹ Rousseau, 'Second Dialogue', *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, in *Œuvres de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 20 vols. tom.17, (Paris: Tenre et Ledoux, 1819), p.525. 'Jean-Jacques was born for music'. My translation. All subsequent translations are by the present author unless otherwise stated. All subsequent references to this edition of Rousseau's complete works will read as follows: the title of the individual work, followed by *Œuvres*, followed by the volume number (indicated as, for example, t.11) and lastly the relevant page number(s).

² For a detailed survey of Rousseau's early life and formative years in Geneva see Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques: The early life and work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1712-1754*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin: 1987), pp.13-29 or Olivier Marty, *Rousseau: de l'enfance à Quarante Ans*, (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Dibresse, 1975), pp.9-27.

³ Rousseau, 'Second Dialogue', p.525.

⁴ Rousseau, *Confessions*, transl. by J. M. Cohen, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1953), p.175.

completion of the *Dictionnaire de Musique* for publication in order to put bread on his table (1764). Music was so central to his life that, in fact, it was not until the publication of his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1754) at the age of forty-three, that Jean-Jacques Rousseau became, in the eyes of the public, a *Philosophe* in the full sense of the term, and ceased to be merely Rousseau the musician.⁵ And what is more, it was not until 1782, when the first edition of his *Oeuvres* was published posthumously by De Peyrou, that Rousseau's philosophical and political works became widely read.

That such a great political and social philosopher, one who is as Gérard Genette puts it, 'un des plus grands penseurs de la langue Française'⁶ or who, as Eric Weil suggests, '... provoqua la seule révolution de toute l'histoire de la philosophie depuis Platon,'⁷ should have consecrated so much of his energy and passion to the advocacy and exposition of music theory, musical aesthetics, operatic reform and compositional activity may seem unusual, particularly in the light of the incessant 'professionalisation' or specialisation of the discipline and sub-disciplines of philosophy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For Rousseau, however, such pluralism was the key to understanding the human condition – it was a manifestation of strength and a positive force in his work, rather than a systemic failing. Unlike Kant or Hegel, Rousseau did not contemplate such artistic activity in an abstract theoretical vacuum;⁸ he would instead engage with it directly and on a practical level, even if subsequent generations might not, as a result, consider him to be a philosopher in the modern sense of the term.⁹ Whilst such a rich and diverse *oeuvre* should then be cherished and valued in itself and on its own merits, such pluralistic activity does nonetheless pose especial problems for the scholar, and indeed engenders seemingly indomitable questions: 'Y a-t-il un seul Rousseau? Peut-on, du moins, construire une unité à partir de Rousseau?'¹⁰ Evidently such questions strike at the very heart of

⁵ Jacques Roger (ed.), *Rousseau's Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1971), p.5.

⁶ Gérard Genette, 'Cover note', in Genette and Todorov (eds.) *Pensée de Rousseau*, (Paris : Seuil, 1984) 'one of the greatest thinkers in the French language'.

⁷ Eric Weil, 'Rousseau et sa politique' in *Op. Cit.* p.17, '... provoked the only revolution in the history of philosophy since Plato.'

⁸ As Roger Scruton, *Kant*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.5 notes: 'His [Kant's] aversion to music other than military marches was indeed notorious, as was his total indifference to the visual arts – he possessed only one engraving, a portrait of Rousseau, given to him by a friend.'

⁹ Cf. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p.660 and Anthony Flew, *Introduction to Western Philosophy: Ideas and Argument from Plato to Popper*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989).

¹⁰ Eric Weil, 'Rousseau et sa Politique', p.9, 'Is there one single Rousseau? Can we at least trace a unified line of thinking from his work?'

any critical enterprise concerned with the exegesis of Rousseau's work or indeed any single aspect of it, for it is an *oeuvre* which is by its very nature monumental, heterogeneous and, at times, startlingly neoteric.¹¹ The principal challenge of any study of Rousseau's writings is therefore to reflect, and indeed respect, such diversity; this must be its guiding tenet.

Rousseau's highly significant contribution to the history of ideas – and indeed to the unfolding of history itself¹² – is widely accepted and rarely interrogated, but his contribution to the history of music theory and compositional praxis has often been ignored or at best relegated to a secondary order; Rousseau has been frequently labelled a peripheral figure in that history, one whose role in the development of musical ideas and operatic reform is uncertain and even eccentric, perhaps marginally significant, but never pivotal. The reticence and timorousness exercised by Rousseau scholars from non-musicological disciplines in the treatment of, and engagement with, such issues has understandably not helped to underpin or further his reputation in this respect, and the dearth of systematic and critical studies of his musical writings might suggest to the impartial observer that his work is not really worthy of such focussed attention at all. It is ironic then, that the most notorious of all his musical writings should be the one that is, at once, the most misunderstood and misrepresented: for it is true to say that, more than any other work, the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* (1753)¹³ has had a profound, inveterate and overbearing deleterious effect upon the perception of Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a credible music theorist, aesthete, composer of opera and as a philosopher of music.¹⁴

¹¹ Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Transparence et l'Obstacle*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 'avant propos', comments that 'Si diverse que soit cette oeuvre, nous croyons qu'elle peut être parcourue et reconnue par un regard qui n'en refuserait aucun aspect: elle est assez riche pour nous suggérer elle-même les thèmes et les motifs qui nous permettront de la saisir à la fois dans la dispersion de ses tendances et dans l'unité de ses intentions.'

¹² For an interesting perspective of Rousseau's influence upon the French Revolution see Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the making of modernity 1650-1750*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.714-720. For a discussion of the influence of Rousseau's *Contrat Social* upon 'pre-revolutionary' events see, Durand Echeverra, 'The Pre-Revolutionary Influence of Rousseau's *Contrat Social*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33 (1972)

¹³ The *Lettre* was written in 1752, and published in two editions – both printed in Paris in November 1753 – although only the *Avertissement* differs moderately.

¹⁴ Undoubtedly the primary reason for the *Lettre's* reputation and the impact it has had upon the perception of Rousseau is its decisive role in what is known as the *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752-54) – a fiercely contested and vitriolic pamphlet war between partisans of French opera and supporters of Italian opera buffa. As one of many hundreds of pamphlets, articles and prospectuses which circulated around the fashionable Parisian *Salons*, its immediate significance did not reside in the minutiae of its argumentation, but in the apparent effrontery of its conclusion. And the *Lettre* certainly caused affront: Rousseau was burnt in effigy outside the Opéra by the members of the orchestra, and, as he describes in the *Confessions* (p.358), at Court 'they were [...] deciding between the Bastille and banishment.' It is, however, of vital importance to regard the tenor of the *Lettre* (and especially its conclusion) as a consequence of its function; as Denise Launay (*La Querelle des Bouffons: Textes des Pamphlets*. 3 Vols. (Paris: 1973) p.XVII.) remarks, it opens the second phase of the *Querelle des Bouffons*. It is somewhat ironic that Rousseau

The *Lettre*'s notoriety stems primarily from its acrimonious and acerbic conclusion that '... les François n'ont point de musique et n'en peuvent avoir, ou que si jamais ils ont une, ce sera tant pis pour eux.'¹⁵ This epigrammatic parting-shot has often been cited in order to underpin Manichean analyses of the *Querelle des Bouffons* polemic and has precipitated a number of misconceived and distorted assessments of the nature and gravity of Rousseau's operatic critique in general.¹⁶ In what was by far and away the most inflammatory salvo launched at the *Coin du Roi*¹⁷ during the two years in which the *Querelle* raged, the *Lettre* delivered a significant body-blow to the Opéra, its principal proponent – Jean-Philippe Rameau – and, by proxy, the monarchy and the establishment; Rousseau's gladiatorial posturing in the *Lettre* and in the closing phase of the *Querelle* merely reinforces the received image of the rebellious citizen of Geneva and the reactionary Rameau, horns locked, in the 'intestine shock and furious close of civil butchery'.¹⁸ It is most unfortunate then, that the apparent truculence and effrontery of the conclusion – so often lifted out of its legitimate context – has overshadowed the significance of the *Lettre* as an evolutionary staging-post in the development of his musical aesthetic; has served, paradoxically, to eclipse the very pertinence of the closing proclamation itself; and has done immeasurable damage to Rousseau's 'musical' reputation.¹⁹

himself resisted being drawn into the quarrel for as long as he possibly could, because as he suggests in the *Lettre*'s 'Avertissement,' 'cette espèce de guerre ne me convenait pas en aucun sens' instead he held back publication of the *Lettre* for well over a year – a year during which he was putting the finishing touches to his opéra comique of 1752 *Le Devin du Village* and drafting the cornerstone of a more ambitious long-term project – the Second *Discours* (1754) – that would culminate in the unpublished *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*. In the present work it is neither pertinent nor possible to examine the events of the *Querelle des Bouffons* in any detail, but there are many works that focus on the polemical exchanges during the two years in which the *Querelle* raged. For a general overview, see Alfred Oliver, *Encyclopaedists as critics of music*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947); for a more recent and indeed up-to-date account see Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment: Reconstruction of a Dialogue*, (Oxford: OUP, 1993); for specific detail on the exchanges between Rousseau and Rameau, see Eve Kisch, 'Rameau and Rousseau', *Music and Letters*, 2, 22, (1941), and Charles B Paul, 'Music and Ideology: Rameau, Rousseau and 1789', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32, (1971), pp.375-398; the pamphlets have been produced in an annotated 3 volume edition by Denise Launay, *La Querelle des Bouffons: Textes des Pamphlets*, 3 Vols., (Paris: 1973); for an interesting political perspective of the *Querelle des Bouffons* see Servando Sacaluga, 'Diderot, Rousseau et la Querelle musicale de 1752: nouvelle mise au point', *Diderot Studies*, 10, (1968), pp.134-173.

¹⁵ Rousseau, *Lettre sur la Musique Française*. In *Œuvres*, t.11, pp.318-319. '... that the French have no music and cannot have any; or that if they ever have, it will be so much the worse for them.'

¹⁶ Cf. Norman Demuth, *French Opera: Its Development to the Revolution*, (New York: The Artemis Press, 1963), p.190. 'Enough has been said and written about Rousseau's musical theories. Some authorities claim him to be a musical genius, others relegate him to the ranks of the inefficient, cock-sure amateurs who have always abounded in artistic circles. At the most he may be said to have caused a stir in musical affairs, but nothing more. The later history of French Opera proves this.' In some Post-War historiography such as Noel Boyer's, *La Guerre des Bouffons et la Musique Française 1752-54*, (Paris: 1945) and Bernard Champigneulle's, *L'Age classique de la Musique Française*, (Paris:1946), the closing sentiments of the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* have been seen to have had far reaching political implications (stretching of course to the French Revolution) and Rousseau portrayed as a figure merely out to damage French music and, by extension, French culture.

¹⁷ The 'King's corner.' This appellation was used to denote the partisans of French opera who would congregate underneath the King's box at the Paris Opéra, those who supported Italian opera assembled under the Queen's box, hence *Coin de la Reine*.

¹⁸ 1 Henry IV, I.i

¹⁹ Indeed, Catherine Kintzler, 'Introduction' in Rousseau, *Lettre sur la Musique Française*, (Paris: G F Flammarion, 1993), p.131 suggests that, 'Au delà de la violence polémique qui la traverse et suscite ... [elle] annonce le noyau théorique de la pensée musicale et esthétique de Rousseau.'

In *The Aesthetics of Music*, Roger Scruton's recent and ostensibly comprehensive survey of the history of philosophical and aesthetic reflection upon music, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is despatched within twelve lines of dismissive and perfunctory prose. Portrayed as a 'great, if erratic'²⁰ thinker at the very margins of that long and important history, Rousseau is swept, as it were, into a small prefatory corner of the work and his considerable *corpus* of writings on music is thus adjudged to 'provide no philosophy of the subject.'²¹ Beyond the immediate desire, and indeed necessity, to take up Scruton's gauntlet and mount a vigorous challenge to such a conclusion, this thesis must also seek to expose the erroneous nature of the assertion that Rousseau was an erratic thinker. Not only, then, will this thesis argue that Rousseau's writings on music constitute a well-grounded, internally consistent and reasonably complete philosophical system, it will also demonstrate that Rousseau's thinking on the subject – encompassing some forty years of his troubled life – is both systematic and displays a remarkable degree of unity and coherence.

The question persists, however, why Scruton would reach such conclusions? One can speculate – and only trust – that his primary motivation stems from the fact that Rousseau did not bequeath a singular, unified or comprehensive work that overtly sets out a philosophy or aesthetics of music; there is no equivalent to a *Critique of Judgement* or a *Poetics* in his *Oeuvres Complètes*. In fact, quite the opposite is the case: reflection upon the mechanics of music, opera, communication, perception and meaning is littered across nearly three decades' worth of novels, critique, political and social doctrine; the philosophy of music is thus embedded, 'intertextually' and at times inextricably, within political and philosophical discourse, encyclopaedic entries, fictional drama and autobiographical narrative. Even in those texts which many scholars have classified as musically significant or as being preoccupied with musical issues – notably, and somewhat paradigmatically, the posthumously published *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* – musical subject matter may not always appear to be their predominant or even primary concern. As Jacques Derrida remarks:

²⁰ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, (Oxford: OUP, 1997), preface, p.vii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

Si l'on veut bien admettre que la destinée de la musique soit la préoccupation majeure de l'*Essai*, il faut expliquer que les chapitres qui la concernent occupent à peine le tiers de l'ouvrage.²²

We might, as a result, be tempted to conclude that a fully developed philosophy of music does not exist in any phenomenal or material form; that its status as a discrete object is misplaced, and thus its synthesis and objectification in a work such as this is unwarranted. Yet at the same time we would be forced to concede that its hallmark permeates every stratum of Rousseau's *oeuvre*. What should we make of this paradox? The essence of the problem is, I suggest, one of focus and analytical strategy. If we attempt to engage with, or indeed conceive of, the philosophy of music immanently and 'ontologically', as if it were an integrated, independent, autarkic object, we shall encounter inconsistency and contradiction at almost every turn, for such an approach would always already require that this 'object' be isolated, forcibly extracted as it were, from its original locus and discursive context. Consider once more the status of the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*. Could we really sanction an exegetic manoeuvre that disregards two thirds of the text because it is not expressly concerned with musical issues? Clearly not.

The precise nature and form of this object is fragmentary and dispersed: it is as if there were, in each of Rousseau's texts a page, a paragraph or a phrase torn from this 'object' of musical doctrine. To engage with or interpret these fragments does not simply involve assemblage and synthesis, because in whichever order we choose to piece together the individual pages, paragraphs and locutions we will always be left with an artificial entity; we would merely have created a counterfeit composite structure formed of discursive material dissociated from its original and legitimate context. Moreover, such a re-constructive enterprise would be epistemologically unsound for it presupposes, *a priori*, an intrinsic order, logic and coherence across the 'totality' of Rousseau's 'musical *oeuvre*' – whatever such a phrase might actually mean in practice. These are attributes which, as many commentators have taken delight in pointing out, are simply not present in, nor borne out by, the texts themselves. As a result we must consider whether the very absence of a unified text or texts containing, or purporting to

²² Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p.279: 'If we maintain that the destiny of music is the major preoccupation of the *Essai*, we need to explain why those chapters concerned with music alone occupy but one third of the entire work.'

embody, Rousseau's philosophy of music suggests that Rousseau did not conceive of it in that manner at all. In other words, no such object exists because Rousseau did not construct such an object, nor did see any purpose in doing so.

What becomes apparent from a critical reading of writings such as the *Essai*, the educational novel *Emile* (1762), the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* (1749) and the *Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité* (1754) that for Rousseau, music, art, literature – in fact, human communication in all its forms – are inextricably intertwined with and indeed functionally contingent upon societal, historical and political systems, mechanisms and institutions. They are never contemplated in terms other than through their connection with society, with the quotidian interaction and relationships of human beings; they are conceived as cogwheels in the internal mechanism of society. But, even more, for Rousseau they are also products of that society and are part of its structural fabric; they are what defines and differentiates one society from the next, one nation from its neighbour. Music, indeed on one level, is a simple index denoting the presence of society, for it only comes into being at the moment when man is forced out of his 'original' state into his social state; when he becomes citizen. But music also acts as a barometer of the degree of sophistication and civilisation of that society: for Rousseau it points directly to the extent to which the historical and 'socialising' process has impinged upon the 'natural' character of its citizens. This historical process, and the society that it engenders, exerts a corrupting influence upon men who are naturally virtuous. Music is thus implicated directly in the social and political history of mankind, and cannot be separated from it.

As a consequence my approach in this work will be inclusive, pluralist; I will seek not to isolate or extract, but to uncover and expose, to trace and to illuminate, whilst, wherever possible, preserving the prevailing contextual backcloth intact. I will seek to explore the relationship between Rousseau's thinking upon music and all other domains with which that thinking immediately interfaces, implicates and influences. My primary structural task then will be to investigate the conceptual unifying framework – the glue that binds the thinking upon musical issues to that on language, politics, sociology, and anthropology. This framework will manifest itself in Rousseau's writings as nothing less than an all-encompassing philosophy of nature and history. This means in practice that, rather than the musical texts necessarily displaying

unity in a self-referential or self-reflexive manner, unity in Rousseau's *oeuvre* is present on an intertextual level. The 'musical fragments' are bound together by virtue of their relationship with the all-governing philosophies of nature and history.

At the time of writing, the venerable *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* has recently appeared as an interactive, internet-based work, and has been the subject of extensive revision, up-dating and refashioning.²³ The *Dictionary* contains an excellent article on Rousseau, penned by Catherine Kintzler, but it is one which nevertheless highlights the dearth of secondary material that engages directly both with Rousseau's writings on music and with his compositional output. Of the fifty-one sources that are listed in Kintzler's bibliography, just seven are books; none of them attempts to deal with his philosophy or aesthetics of music as their primary focus; few if any examine his operatic output; only nineteen have been written within the last twenty years, and still fewer – only eight – are published in English. It is, then, surprising and somewhat disappointing that in the eight years since Robert Wokler commented that, 'despite a rapidly growing number of treatments of particular themes within and around his philosophy of music, there is still ... room for a major study of Rousseau's ideas on music as a whole,'²⁴ such a study has yet to appear in any language.

The immediate objective of the present work is, then, to offer the English-language reader a comprehensive analysis of Rousseau's philosophy of music, paying particular attention to his theory of communication and the aesthetic and reform of opera that it engenders. This objective will require us to engage with a broad range of Rousseau's writings, many of them dealing directly with musical subject matter but also many others not concerned with the elaboration of music theory or aesthetics at all. My approach to the exposition of Rousseau's philosophy of music has been systematic and broadly chronological, and with each chapter the focus tightens, zooming-in to an ever greater level of detail. This structure, and the content of each chapter, mirrors the evolutionary development of Rousseau's thinking on music.

²³ The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* can be accessed online at <http://www.grovemusic.com>

²⁴ Robert Wokler, *Rousseau*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.123.

We begin, in the first chapter, with an assessment of the theoretical writings of Jean-Philippe Rameau. This will provide us with the requisite music-theoretical and musico-ontological context against which we shall be able to trace, in the second part of the chapter, the emergence, in embryonic form, of Rousseau's conception of music and opera. In Chapter Two, we move away from music-theoretical issues and turn our attention to fundamental philosophical and socio-political ones. We will examine the formation and structural characteristics of Rousseau's trinary model of the philosophy of nature and history, and focus extensively upon the most important concept which grows out of them: the Ideal State of Nature. In Chapter Three, the focus shifts back towards musical issues, and we will explore how Rousseau fashions his theory of communication in the light of this trinary model, and we will also begin to see its implications for music theory and compositional praxis. In Chapter Four, we zoom-in on the detail of Rousseau's conception of musical material itself – in particular on melody, harmony and the concept of musical expression – and the aesthetic and reform of opera that such a conception renders necessary. And finally, in Chapter Five, we examine the culmination of Rousseau's operatic aesthetic and the reforms it engenders through a study of his final dramatic work: the 'Scène Lyrique', *Pygmalion*. This study will also show how his philosophy of music achieves closure, infiltrates the work and comes full circle in the words of the animated statue Galatea, and more generally in the guiding reformatory impulse of the work itself.

Chapter One:

Rameau and Rousseau: The 'Artiste-Philosophe' and his 'Zélé Partisan': Conflicting visions of the musical universe

The primary objective of the first part of this chapter is to contextualise much of the work that will be undertaken later on in the thesis. Its aim is to familiarise the reader with the general music-theoretical and musico-ontological thrust and complexion of Jean-Philippe Rameau's writings on music. This will establish a framework within which we will be able to examine and contrast, in the second part of the chapter, the emergent ideas of Rousseau, both in counterpoint to Rameau's established theories, and also as an independent *corpus* of ideas that, in embryonic form at least, begin to prefigure a philosophy and aesthetic of music. In later chapters, this will serve as a foundation in order to establish and articulate differences and points of contact. But more importantly, as many of Rousseau's music-theoretical publications are conceived as a critical response to a position taken (and expressed) by Rameau – and during the 1750s and 1760s the opposite is also true of Rameau's work – it is only proper that we lay some of the foundation stones that will facilitate the elaboration of more detailed work in subsequent chapters, especially in our discussions in Chapter 4.

The approach I have taken to the evaluation of Rameau's theoretical writings, although at times robustly critical, does not seek to discredit the man nor denigrate his extremely significant contribution to the discipline of music theory. Rather, my immediate desire in this chapter is to offer a pragmatic overview of the range and character of his work and, in doing so, to temper at least one perhaps inflated contemporary view of Rameau as a 'colossus' of enlightenment science – a view initially helped on its way in no small part by his contemporary, and soon to become antagonist, Jean le Rond d'Alembert.¹ It is, of course, neither possible nor practicable in the context of a work such as this to explore Rameau's theoretical writings – or their impact upon the subsequent history of music theory – in anything approaching the depth or detail they clearly merit; however, there are many excellent

¹ Cf. D'Alembert, 'Discours préliminaire des éditeurs', *Encyclopédie* vol I. pp. xxxii-iii. 'La musique est peut-être de tous ces arts celui qui a fait depuis quinze ans le plus de progrès parmi nous. Grâce aux travaux d'un génie mâle, hardi & fécond [...] Je saisis avec empressement l'occasion de célébrer cet artiste philosophe, dans un discours destiné principalement à l'éloge des grands Hommes.'

and recently published studies that already admirably perform such a task.² As a consequence, the aim here is to provide the reader with a conspectus of the evolution, ideological orientation and ultimate destination of Rameau's ideas as they develop, for although Rousseau would rail vehemently against the implications of many of them, they do form, at once, the veritable music-theoretical backdrop to his philosophy of music, as well as the animating impulse for many of his critical writings that we will be examining in this thesis.

1.1. Agnate Concepts: The *Basse Fondamentale* and the *Pythagorean Monochord*

In 1722 Jean-Philippe Rameau's inaugural theoretical work, the *Traité de l'Harmonie*, was published.³ Though often convoluted, peppered with stylistic anomalies and somewhat disorganised,⁴ the *Traité* was extraordinarily well-received in scientific circles and acclaimed, almost universally, by musicians and men of letters alike. In fact, such was its impact, and so far reaching its music-theoretical implications, that both the concept and the codification of tonality were profoundly altered thereafter.⁵ As betokened by its complete title, the guiding ideology of the *Traité* is unrepentantly reductionist, and its ultimate objective was to present the reader with a rationalist and scientific explanation of the nature of musical material, and its relationship with contemporary musical praxis. By revealing a putative 'natural' principle – the generative *Basse Fondamentale* which 'produces' music through the agency of harmonic extrapolation – the *Traité* seeks to determine the nature of music's internal organisation and its

² For a very concise and digestible survey see Joan Ferris, 'The Evolution of Rameau's Harmonic Theories,' *Journal of Music Theory*, 3 (1959), p.231-255; for more detail and analysis see Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For a short but detailed comparative reading of Rameau's writings alongside those of Rousseau and d'Alembert see Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment: The reconstruction of a dialogue*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.51-72. More detail on the debate between Rameau and d'Alembert can be found in J Barnard, 'Rameau's Controversy with d'Alembert', *Journal of Music Theory*, 24-25, (1980-1). An excellent survey of Rameau's philosophical predilections can be found in Charles Paul, 'Jean-Philippe Rameau: The Musician as Philosophe,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 114, (1970). Rameau's theoretical writings are available in translation: *Complete Theoretical Writings*, ed. Erwin R Jacobi, 6 Vols, (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1967-72) and an excellent translation, by Philip Gossett, of the *Traité de l'Harmonie* with accompanying notes is also available in: *Treatise on Harmony*, (New York: Dover, 1971). Cuthbert Girdlestone's otherwise fine biography lacks any discussion or analysis of Rameau's theoretical writings themselves, although it does contain some useful discussion of his relationship with Rousseau, Diderot and d'Alembert and other contemporaries.

³ Its full title is *Traité de l'harmonie réduite à ses principes naturels* ('Treatise on Harmony reduced to [deriving from] its [fundamental] natural principles).

⁴ As Philip Gossett notes in the introduction to his translation (p.xxii-xxiii): 'The prose is awkward and difficult ... sentences are poorly constructed, and it is not unusual to find seven or eight independent ideas strung together with conjunctions.'

⁵ Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, p.1

broader position within a mechanically ordered (and to borrow Hubert Butterfield's apposite metaphor) 'clockwork universe.'⁶

Whilst Rameau's objective itself was certainly not original, for the *Traité* has rather more than just a ring of Descartes' *Compendium Musicae* about it and builds upon much of Gioseffe Zarlino's earlier work,⁷ it was the way in which he set about accomplishing it that made the work both distinctive and appealing. As James Tenney concludes, 'what distinguishes Rameau from his predecessors, is his effort to create a complete theoretical system on the basis of little more than ... [a] single concept.'⁸ Tenney is, of course, not incorrect to suggest that Rameau's thinking revolves around one or two basic precepts, yet if the *Traité* does constitute a complete theoretical system *per se* – and I am not entirely convinced that it does – then it is one that is ostensibly more concerned with the revelation and explication of principles than it is with anything else. This oft-quoted syllogism, and the ensuing justification for it taken from the preface to the work, is the reason for my hesitation. For Rameau is clearly not so interested in elaborating a system as such; rather, the primary quest is to uncover a principle through the application of mathematical operations. In my view, the methodological mechanism that elicits the principle is almost as important as the results it yields:

music is a science which should have definite rules; these rules should be drawn from an evident principle; and this principle cannot really be known to us without the aid of mathematics. Notwithstanding all the experience I have acquired in music from being associated with it for so long,⁹ I must confess that only with the aid of mathematics did my ideas become clear and did light replace a certain obscurity of which I was unaware before. Though I did not know how to distinguish the principle from the rules, the principle soon offered itself to me in a manner convincing in its simplicity. [...] It is not enough to feel the effects of a science or an art. One must also conceptualise these effects in order to render them intelligible. That is the end to which I have principally applied myself in the body of this work...¹⁰

⁶ H. Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science*, (London: G. Bell, 1949), p.7-8 exemplifies the Cartesian conception of the way in which the universe was, or rather had been, designed, constructed and set in motion by a prime mover – the divine watchmaker.

⁷ Gioseffe Zarlino, *Istituzioni armoniche*, (Venice: 1589). To some extent, particularly in the domain of the taxonomy of harmonic inversions, Rameau is, of course, tacitly critical of Zarlino's work.

⁸ James Tenney, *A History of Consonance and Dissonance*, (New York: Excelsior, 1988), p.68

⁹ Rameau was already thirty-nine when the *Traité* was published.

¹⁰ Rameau, *Treatise on Harmony*, transl. Phillip Gossett., (New York: Dover, 1971), p.xxxv

I would suggest, therefore, that the *Traité* constitutes less of a system than it might at first appear and rather more of an exposition of a philosophical and methodological agenda and its objectives: Rameau clearly desired his work to be identified – both in terms of its content and its method – with the Cartesian legacy. As a result, the *Traité* is replete with all the characteristic rhetorical devices that would suggest to its audience that it was an integral part of that prevailing scientific discourse. Joan Ferris puts across this idea rather neatly, remarking that Rameau ‘... is more interested in discovering the *truth* than in building a system.’¹¹ And it is in this sense – and at this moment – that he is a thoroughbred Cartesian.¹²

The conceptual centrepiece of the *Traité de l’Harmonie* is the theory of the *Basse Fondamentale*.¹³ It is identified first of all as the ‘Harmonic Centre’ and is illustrated in Book Two of the *Traité* under the rubric: ‘The Nature and Properties of Chords’:

The source of harmony does not subsist merely in the perfect chord or in the seventh chord formed from it. More precisely, it subsists in the lowest sound of these two chords, which is, so to speak, the harmonic centre [*Centre Harmonique*] to which all other sounds should be related. This is one of the reasons why we believed it necessary to base our system on the division of a string. This string, which gives the lowest sound, is the source of all those sounds which arise from its division, just as the unit to which it was compared, is the source of all numbers.

It is not enough to perceive that all chords and their various properties originate in the perfect chord and the seventh chord. We must notice, furthermore, that all the properties of these chords depend completely on this harmonic centre and on its progression. The intervals of which these chords are constructed are such only with respect to this centre, and the centre then uses these intervals for its own progression, which in turn determines the order and progression of the first two chords. The intervals used are the third, the fifth and the seventh: other intervals used are either inversions... duplications... or alterations. [...] Everything is derived from the first three intervals, from which all the fundamental chords are formed, and everything is related solely to our harmonic centre.¹⁴

¹¹ Ferris, *Rameau’s Harmonic Theories*, p.233. (my italics).

¹² Sweeney-Turner in *The Sonorous Body: Music, Enlightenment and Deconstruction*, Thesis (PhD), Edinburgh University, 1994. p.34 assessing Rameau’s theoretical *oeuvre* as a whole concludes that Rameau is ‘...not so easily classified as a total empiricist; his theory hinges on a dual articulation of Lockean experience and Cartesian reason.’ Indeed, it is this contradiction that would later trouble d’Alembert.

¹³ The reader will note that the *Traité* is divided into four ‘books’: the first is concerned exclusively with ‘theory’; the second, a mixture of theory and practice; and the final two solely given over to the art of composition and the art of accompaniment.

¹⁴ Rameau, *Treatise*, pp.141-142.

The significance of this notion is, essentially, that for the first time the 'perfect' chord was being conceptualised not as the juxtaposition or combination of independent intervals (a major third plus a minor third), but as an acoustic object – a harmonic unit contained within a string (*corde grave*) one octave lower than the intervals are sounded themselves. The genesis of this idea is immediately recognisable and Rameau does his level best to validate and underpin this concept by emphasising its agnatic relationship – and therefore implicating it – with its progenitor, the Pythagorean monochord. Rameau claims that it is possible to demonstrate how each harmonic entity, more particularly the major triad, can be generated by the division and subdivision of a fundamental root or *corde grave*. In other words, Rameau considers a chord as an object dependent upon a given *centre harmonique* for its existence and indeed classification: it is the harmonic centre, Rameau claims, that contains and generates the very chord itself.¹⁵

There was, however, a logical problem with this postulation, for the *Centre Harmonique* did not systematically appear as the note one octave lower than the root of any given chord, and, as a consequence, did not precisely square with the first aliquot division of the monochord either. Whilst root position chords conform to the postulate, chords in first and second inversion proved much more difficult to account for. Rameau's novel and epoch-making solution was to conceptualise non-root position chords as inversions of root position chords. Rameau thus contends that, in practice, the major triad and its inversions contain identical pitch material, and that, by consequence, they must share a common root or foundation; in the case of C major and its first and second inversions, the common root is, of course, C:

Just as there are only three accordant numbers (as Descartes says), there are also only three principal consonances, the fifth and the two thirds; from these, the fourth and the two sixths arise For the first three numbers, 2, 3, and 5, let us substitute in addition to 5 the composites 4 and 6, so that the fifth is divided into two thirds as it should be. The major perfect chord is formed from the three numbers 4:5:6. If we raise 4 to its octave, we shall have 5:6:8; this forms the chords called the sixth chord, because the sixth is heard between the two extreme sounds. If we then raise 5 to its octave, we shall have 6:8:10; this forms another chord called the six-four chord, because the sixth and the fourth are heard between the two upper sounds and the lowest

¹⁵ It is important to note Rameau's definition of a chord: that it may not exceed the range of an octave; that the fifth is the basis of all chords; that either of the two thirds may determine the construction of the chord. This is also what Rameau dubs the 'rule of the octave'.

sound (to which all intervals ... should be compared). If we then raised 6 to its octave, we should have 8:10:12, which is in the same proportion as 4:5:6. Thus we cannot push this transposition of the lowest sound to its octave any further; for the perfect chord, made up of only three different sounds, can therefore produce in this manner only three different chords, of which it is the first and fundamental.¹⁶

What Rameau effects next, in conceptual terms, is exceedingly clever: he inverts the relationship between the pitch material and its root by demonstrating how the root or foundation *generates* the pitch material itself. The root is, then, analogous to the monochord, and the resultant pitch material the equivalent of its aliquots. We should observe at this juncture that Rameau's *tour de force* resides both in his novel presentation and treatment of Pythagorean monochord theory, and in the way in which its agnatic relationship to the *Basse Fondamentale* is conceived.

The function of the *Basse Fondamentale* is to codify, and provide justification for, the organisation and trajectory of harmonic entities within a given passage of music. It is, of course, an abstract concept in the sense that it exists only by implication and is discovered only by inference, and has very little to do with the pragmatic *Basso Continuo* harmonies that may or may not underpin and accompany a given melody.¹⁷ To cipher the *Basse Fondamentale* of a given piece, one must of course first reorder those chords that are not in root position and, once this simple task is accomplished, the *Basse Fondamentale* can be identified by tracing the bass line that underpins the progression of chords. Where the *continuo* and the *Basse Fondamentale* diverge, Rameau considers the former as a non-essential *melodic* by-product of the piece and the latter as its true *harmonic* foundation and support: this is an important statement of aesthetic and theoretical principle and one which, as we will see in Chapter 4, Rousseau would vigorously dispute. But more than this, when applied to the characteristic harmonic vocabulary of the day, the trajectory of the *Basse Fondamentale* could be shown to have very interesting properties – generally it would move in intervals of thirds, sixths, fifths and fourths rather than in stepwise motion:

¹⁶ Rameau, *Treatise*, p.40.

¹⁷ For example, the actual bass note of the first inversion of C major is of course E and it would normally be figured with a 6, but the *Basse Fondamentale* of this same chord would be C an octave and one third lower than the 'actual' lowest note of the chord.

The intervals of which these chords are constructed are such only with respect to this centre, and the centre then uses these same intervals for its own progression, which in turn determines the order and progression of the first two chords.¹⁸

Thus on another, more profound and embedded, plane, the logic of the *Basse Fondamentale* seemed to further substantiate its consanguinity with the Pythagorean monochord. It is little wonder, then, that Rameau felt that the basis for his assumptions and postulations was both mathematically and musically sound. And it was from these principles, and the mathematic operations that underpinned them, that Rameau would begin, over the next decade, to extrapolate an entire music-theoretical system that encompassed the very building blocks of music – triads and their inversions – and, by extension, tonic-dominant hierarchical organisation, in fact, tonality itself.

However in 1722, as Rameau was preparing the *Traité* for publication, he could not have been aware of a series of scientific studies that had the potential to destabilise the very premises upon which his embryonic system had been elaborated. In the long term, the findings of these studies would serve to further support and entrench Rameau's convictions, but in the short term, it would take him the best part of a decade to fully come to terms with them. One such study, Joseph Sauveur's *Système générale des intervalles et des sons et son application à tous les systèmes et à tous les instruments de musique* (presented to the Académie des Sciences in 1701) demonstrated that when a sonorous body (*Corps Sonore*) is set in motion and vibrates, a small, but highly significant, segment of the harmonic series (the first four partials) is emitted.¹⁹ The emitted sound contains the physical equivalent of the primary aliquot divisions of the monochord, and by extrapolation could provide a rational explanation both for the phenomena of consonance and dissonance, and for the prevalence of tonic-dominant hierarchy and mode. Thus, it appeared to be the *Corps Sonore* rather than the *Basse Fondamentale* that represented the single, progenitorial and governing principle of musical structure that he had been searching for; in Joan Ferris's terms, the *Corps*

¹⁸ Rameau, *Treatise*, p.141. In fact these were taken as veritable rules of composition. For example, in Rousseau's article 'Basse fondamentale' for the *Encyclopédie* (t.2 pp.119-120) we see these conditions clearly articulated: '... la basse fondamentale ne peut jamais marcher que d'une de ces trois manières: 1, monter ou descendre de tierce ou de sixte; 2, de quarte ou de quinte; 3, monter diatoniquement au moyen de la dissonance qui forme la liaison, ou par licence sur un accord parfait. Toute autre marche de la basse fondamentale est mauvaise.'

¹⁹ Octave, twelfth, fifteenth, seventeenth. The harmonic series is of course emitted more or less in its entirety, though when Sauveur's findings were presented the upper partials were not measurable; Sauveur did report, however, that it was possible to detect the 128th harmonic.

Sonore represented 'the truth' for Rameau. This is, of course, not to suggest that the *Traité* per se was flawed in any methodological sense, but to put it simply that its most conspicuous shortcoming was that its fundamental premises were now outdated and at least one step removed from the actual physical and rational fundamental principle that he had been pursuing. Perhaps this is the reason why, in chapter one of the *Traité*, Rameau concedes:

Music is the science of sounds; therefore sound is the principal subject of music. Music is generally divided into harmony and melody, but we shall show in the following that the latter is merely a part of the former and that a knowledge of harmony is sufficient for a complete understanding of all the properties of music. We shall leave the task of defining sound to physics.²⁰

It was not until Rameau encountered Le Père Louis-Bertrand Castel that the penny was to drop.²¹ Castel drafted a review of the *Traité* shortly after it had been published and made a simple remark that, Thomas Christensen suggests,

... must have immediately caught Rameau's attention. He [Castel] noted that the aliquot string divisions Rameau used as his principle of harmony naturally occur in any vibrating string.²²

Christensen goes on to suggest that Rameau seized upon Castel's remark and, 'before the ink ... had time to dry,'²³ began to revise the *Traité* in the light of it. Rameau's account of these events is a little different. In the preface to the *Nouveau Système de Musique Théorique* (1726),²⁴ Rameau refers to Père Castel, but rather than acknowledge that it had been he who pointed

²⁰ [and presumably also to physicists] Rameau, *Treatise*, p.3

²¹ Rousseau also became acquainted with Castel. According to the *Confessions*, p.266 they had been introduced in 1741.

²² Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, p.133. Girdlestone (*Rameau*, p.487) chronicles the events in a slightly different manner, though does not contradict Christensen. Girdlestone's is a tale of Castel's initial enthusiasm for Rameau's work (though with presumably the above mentioned reservation), of a 'mathematical friendship' and then profound disillusionment. However, Girdlestone doesn't expand upon the review, but instead comments that 'when Rameau published his *Traité*, Castel wrote an enthusiastic review and when the author settled in Paris the two met... and formed a sort of mathematical friendship. But as the Jesuit investigated further he waxed less enthusiastic and began to doubt the originality of Rameau's theories.' As Girdlestone confirms, Castel rapidly reached the conclusion that Rameau's *Basse Fondamentale* and *Centre Harmonique* owed much to Zarlino and Kircher, and that Rameau had been quite unfair in claiming that his theoretical endeavours were completely original. Rameau eventually became embroiled in a polemical exchange of letters, in the *Journal de Trévoux*, with Castel between 1735 and 1736 after their 'mathematical friendship' had soured. Cf. *Suite et seconde partie des nouvelles expériences sur l'Optique* (Castel, August 1735); *Lettre de M. Rameau au R. P. Castel*, July 1736; and *Remarques du P. Castel sur la lettre de M. Rameau*, September 1736. Rousseau would become involved in a debate with Castel too and he would devote Chapter XVI of the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* to a critique of both Castel's *Clavecin Oculaire* and the assumption that sound and colour were analogues.

²³ Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, p.133.

²⁴ Though the work is entitled *Nouveau Système de Musique théorique* it is, in effect, a revised and reworked version of the 1722 *Traité* which incorporates many of Sauveur's findings. Indeed, save the *Corps Sonore*, there is very little to distinguish the two works in substance; Rameau in the preface (p.viii) states: 'Je donne dans cet ouvrage un précis de la Basse Fondamentale, qui doit servir à l'éclaircissement des règles répandues dans le *Traité de l'Harmonie*.' Philip Gossett (*Treatise*, p.xxi) makes the point that it was not until the *Génération Harmonique* (1737) 'that Rameau first discussed in detail the relationship between his rules [the division of the octave] and strictly physical phenomena [the nature and properties of the harmonic series].'

out the *Phénomène du Corps Sonore*, Rameau intimates the opposite:

Je n'ay pas poussé plus loin mes découvertes dans la Théorie de la Musique, parce qu'il ne m'en a pas fallu davantage pour m'instruire de ce qui regarde la pratique de cet art. On peut voir cependant comment le R. P. Castel a saisi le principe proposé, & jusqu'où il prétend le porter, lorsqu'il s'en sert pour démontrer son Clavecin Oculaire dans le Mercure du mois du Février 1726.²⁵

Between 1722 and 1726, Rameau had embraced and assimilated Sauveur's theory into his own system and in the *Nouveau Système* of 1726 he proclaims – via a protracted series of resolute assertions – that his new, revised, work would illuminate the true nature and origin of all musical structures and phenomena:

Je fais voir pour lors que la mélodie et l'harmonie nous sont naturelles. Que la mélodie naît de l'harmonie. Que la dissonance est nécessaire pour entretenir dans chaque modulation ... Que la septième est la seule dissonance harmonique Que la force de l'expression dépend beaucoup plus de la modulation que de la simple mélodie. Que nous trouvons naturellement la basse fondamentale de tous les repos inserez dans un chant; et que même, à l'aide de quelques réflexions, nous pouvons trouver sous tous les chants possibles la même basse fondamentale qui les a suggerez Que sans une certaine sensibilité qui nous est naturelle pour l'harmonie, on n'est jamais parfait musicien Que le seul et unique moyen de gagner promptement cette sensibilité, consiste dans l'accompagnement du Clavecin ou de l'Orgue. Qu'on a point encore trouvé les principes de cet accompagnement; qu'on ne les trouvera jamais sans la connoissance de la basse fondamentale.²⁶

Although Rameau does not entirely acknowledge the source of this new information,²⁷ the adoption of the '*Corps Sonore*' concept from Sauveur's *Système* serves, rather fortuitously, to vindicate the *Traité*'s claims: the agnatic relationship of the two phenomena (*Corps Sonore*, *Basse*

²⁵ Rameau, *Nouveau Système de Musique Théorique*, Facs. of 1726 Paris Edition, (New York: Broude Bros., 1965), preface, iii: 'I have not pushed my discoveries in music theory any further because I did not have the time needed to get to grips with the practice of this art. However, we can see how R P Castel seized upon the principle proposed and where he claims to have taken it, when he makes use of it to demonstrate his Ocular Harpsichord in February 1726's *Mercur*.'

²⁶ Cf. Rameau, *Nouveau Système*, préface, p.vi - viii. 'I will show then that melody and harmony are natural to us. That melody is born out of harmony. That dissonance is necessary to support each modulation That the seventh is the only harmonic dissonance ... that the strength of expression depends more upon modulation than on simple melody. That we naturally find the fundamental bass of all the held notes in a melody; and that even, with some working out, we can find under all the possible melodies the same fundamental bass which they suggested ... that without a certain natural feeling for harmony, we will never be an accomplished musician ... that the only means of acquiring this feeling consists in the accompaniment of the harpsichord or the organ. That until now we have not found the principles of this accompaniment; that we will never find them without knowledge of the fundamental bass.'

²⁷ Indeed even some of the most recent scholarship wrongly attributes the *Corps Sonore* to Rameau. Cf. Downing Thomas, *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.105 & 117. In a note in the margin, Rameau does refer to the work of both Mersenne and Sauveur, and in particular to Sauveur's *Système* of 1701, but only to substantiate a statement rather than to acknowledge the source of the information (cf. *Nouveau Système*, p.17).

Fondamentale) ensures their congruity; instead of the former superseding the latter as might have been the case, they validate and substantiate one another. In the *Traité* Rameau concludes that his theory demonstrates the ground in nature of the *Basse Fondamentale*; in the *Nouveau Système* (1726) and later in the *Génération Harmonique* (1737), he seamlessly conflates the *Basse Fondamentale* and the *Corps Sonore* and claims that, in fact, it is the *Corps Sonore* which is the fundamental and generative ‘natural’ principle of which the *Basse Fondamentale* is a music-theoretical manifestation. In this next extract from the *Génération Harmonique*, we can clearly see that Rameau has fully assimilated and repackaged Sauveur’s work in such a way as to validate his own theory of the fundamental bass and his mode of compositional practice:

Basse fondamentale, ou son fondamental. C’est le son de la totalité d’un corps sonore [the two concepts are conflated], avec lequel résonnent naturellement ses parties aliquotes $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/5$ et qui composent avec lui l’accord parfait, dont il est toujours, par conséquent, le son le plus grave...²⁸

Ultimately, then, Sauveur’s theory served to further convince Rameau of the legitimacy and veracity of ‘his’ discovery; and crucially what this also meant was that he was able locate his theoretical writings within the prevailing discourse of established scientific research. Essentially, then, Rameau’s theory of harmonic generation is used to codify and govern the compositional process; and each theoretical postulate is realised in a point of musical and compositional practice.

1.1.2. Rameau’s Scientific Ambition

The success and ensuing celebrity that Rameau enjoyed in the decades leading up to the 1750s can be ascribed to the fact that his writings quenched a great thirst for musical knowledge, and in particular, knowledge inferred from scientific investigation and deduction.²⁹ What Rameau had managed to accomplish was, in essence, simple but extremely effective: he would claim

²⁸ Rameau, *Génération Harmonique*, p.16: ‘Fundamental bass or fundamental sound. It is the sound of the totality of a sounding body with which naturally resonates partials 2, 3 and 5 and with it makes up the perfect chord, of which it is always, as a consequence, the lowest sound.’

²⁹ So great was this thirst that Catherine Kintzler in *Jean-Philippe Rameau. splendeur et naufrage de l’esthétique du plaisir à l’âge classique*, (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1983), p.35 characterises the early eighteenth century French predilection for Cartesian doctrine as a ‘virus’.

that he had unmasked the 'true' nature of musical organisation and the 'true' foundations of the compositional process; and by conceptualising and expressing conventional harmonic structures and tonality in the characteristic discourse of number theory and geometry, he was exposing the 'truth' which, he believed, lay beneath. We should not be surprised then that, in an age in which the belief in the universal validity of simple mathematical proportions and prime numbers was common ideological currency, the *Traité*, the *Nouveau Système* and the *Génération Harmonique* were extolled as the most comprehensive references on music theory and practice available.³⁰

But from a twenty-first century perspective, Rameau's accomplishments assume a different character; one might say that this was niche marketing and opportunism *par excellence*. I would suggest, therefore, that Rameau's greatest triumph was not in the province of science, but in the province of music theory, and this is an important distinction to articulate and emphasise. Rameau cleverly adapts and repackages the precepts of a single, and widely accepted, acoustic phenomenon into a codified doctrine of composition and functional harmony. This – a veritable stroke of genius – provided *amateurs* of music with scientific-sounding explanations for what had, formerly, been largely the domain of metaphysical speculation, or as D'Alembert puts it: 'arbitrary rules or blind experience'.³¹ And so it was this stroke of genius that secured for Rameau a much envied reputation, for up until the publication of the *Traité* Rameau was as anonymous a musical and theoretical figure as a provincial organist, some three hundred miles from the capital, could expect to be. In the decades that followed, Rameau's reputation and influence grew in stature until, by 1750, he had become the most revered composer and music theorist in France.³² As Samuel Baud-Bovy eloquently puts it: '...pas un musicien français qui

³⁰ Rameau certainly subscribed to this view as we can see from this 'incidental' paragraph taken from the *Treatise*, (*Op. Cit.*, p.41): 'Notice in passing,' he remarks, 'how powerful the number 3 is, since the fifth, which is the origin of all chords, takes its form from 3. Furthermore, this number alone accounts for the quantity of accordant numbers, of primary consonances, and of consonant chords.' In another instance, again from the *Traité* (p.6), Rameau makes a categorical assertion about the nature of consonances, stating that, 'the order of origin and perfection of these consonances is determined by the order of numbers'.

³¹ D'Alembert, 'Discours Préliminaire' de l'*Encyclopédie*, (p.xxxii). Ironically, Rameau's later writings are characterised by increasingly metaphysical explanations of acoustic phenomena and their effect upon the perceiver; they become less 'scientific' and more 'philosophical' both in tenor and content.

³² Between 1748 and 1749, six of Rameau's operas were performed in Paris – according to Cuthbert Girdlestone (*Rameau*, p.489) an accomplishment which no other composer had achieved before. Robert Wokler, 'Rameau, Rousseau and the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*', *Studies on Voltaire & the Eighteenth Century*, (1974), p.182 states that 'the predominance of his works on the stage of the *Opéra* came ... to be so much envied that Mme Pompadour, who objected to his manner as much as his music, was able to secure that there should be no public appearance of more than two of his operas in any single year.'

ne se mette à son école, qui n'étudie dans ses écrits théoriques les lois de l'harmonie classique
...³³

As a theoretical *ouvrage*, the *Traité* requires pragmatism and stamina from the reader, and its content should essentially be considered as the music-theoretical postulations of an aspiring scientist. For one thing, Rameau's methodology did not involve scientific experimentation, but instead relied consistently upon those tried and trusted Cartesian apparatus: deduction and reflection.³⁴ This can be clearly seen just four or so folios into the body of the work where Rameau chooses to lift a substantial chunk directly from the text of Descartes' *Abrégé de la Musique* (primarily) in order to make his point:

Sound is to sound as string is to string. Each string contains in itself all other strings shorter than it, but not those which are longer. Therefore, all high sounds are contained in low ones, but low ones, conversely, are not contained in high ones.³⁵

Rameau's employment of the deductive method, and his deliberate intertext with Descartes,³⁶ betoken a burning desire to be regarded as scientist as well as music-theorist and composer, and bear witness to a slavish determination to win the favour, endorsement of and, ultimately, investiture within, the *Académie des Sciences* – something which he would seek until the quarrel with d'Alembert effectively destroyed any such aspiration. Aware, then, that his inaugural work, if it were to be successful, would be required to withstand the scrutiny of many eminent

³³ Samuel Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Musique*, textes recueillis et présentés par Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, (Neuchâtel: à la Baconnière, 1988), p.69. 'There was not a single French musician who did not follow his school, or who did not study the rules of classical harmony in his theoretical writings'. Robert Wokler, 'Rameau Rousseau,' p.182 comments that Rameau's theoretical writings were 'almost as widely read by his contemporaries as his operas were attended by them.' For his own part, Rousseau (in *Lettre à M. Grimm au sujet des Remarques ajoutées à sa lettre sur Omphale* in *Oeuvres*, t.13, pp.377-378) comments somewhat wryly that Rameau's theoretical writings made a great impact upon composition and composers: 'Les musiciens ont saisi avidement la découverte de M. Rameau ... Les élèves se sont multipliés avec une rapidité étonnante, on n'a vu de tous côtés que petits compositeurs de deux jours, la plupart sans talent, qui faisoient les docteurs au dépens de leur maître ; et les services très réels, très grandes et très solides que M Rameau a rendu à la musique, ont en temps amené cet inconvénient, que la France s'est trouvée inondée de mauvaise musique et de mauvais musiciens, parce que chacun croyant connoître toutes les finesses de l'art dès qu'il en a su les éléments, tous se sont mêlés de faire l'harmonie, avant que l'oreille et l'expérience leur eussent appris à discerner la bonne.'

³⁴ Gossett, *Treatise*, p.xxii suggests that '...Rameau attempts to make music a deductive science, based on natural postulates, in much the same way that Newton approaches the physical sciences in his *Principia*.'

³⁵ Rameau, *Treatise*, p.5

³⁶ Rameau would not only cite significant chunks of Descartes' work in order to reinforce his own argumentation and conclusions, but he would also refer to his reading and study of Descartes, as if he had been guided by him in his quest to uncover the truth. As he would later put it in the *Génération Harmonique* p.86: 'éclairé par la méthode de Descartes que j'avais heureusement lue et dont j'avais été frappé, je commençai par descendre en moi-même...' This is, evidently, a paraphrase of the opening gambits of the *Discours sur la Méthode*.

scientists and mathematicians, Rameau applied lionised methodology so that his *modus operandi* at least, would not, and effectively could not, be easily called into question. The *Académie* might take issue with the substance of his argumentation and his conclusions, but to take issue with his methodology would be tantamount to calling into question the entire basis of the prevailing epistemological orthodoxy. This lent the work the aura of scientific gravitas and stature that it perhaps did not entirely merit.

Rameau's strategy would prove, in the long term at least, largely unsuccessful; his theories would eventually – some twenty to thirty years later – buckle under the considerable weight of philosophical, music-theoretical and mathematical scrutiny. There are, I would suggest, three important reasons for this. First, Rameau had a rather limited grasp of both the praxis and theoretical basis of science and indeed the status of scientific concepts.³⁷ In the *Génération Harmonique* for example, Rameau throws all his weight behind a misleading theory founded upon the mis-observation of a scientific experiment.³⁸ Second, Rameau was frequently selective about his assimilation of other scientists' research; often he would take certain parts of their findings to substantiate his own assertions and expediently jettison those that would threaten to undermine them. For instance, in the *Nouveau Système* (1726) he claimed that the three fundamental partials observed by Mersenne and Sauveur were present in all *Corps Sonores* and that strings only resonated with consonant overtones, despite the fact that Sauveur suggested that it was possible to hear many of the partials up to and including the 128th harmonic. Third, the philosophical and ideological landscape of France was changing with

³⁷ Cf. Jonathan Bernard, 'The Principle and the Elements: Rameau's Controversy with d'Alembert', *Journal of Music Theory*, 24-25, (1980-81), p.41, remarks that science was an intellectual domain '...in which Rameau was especially vulnerable, for his opinions on the subject were of a highly speculative nature.'

³⁸ Cf. Joan Ferris, 'Rameau's Harmonic Theories,' p.231-232. Ferris remarks that 'Rameau seemed to discover the co-vibration of strings whose lengths were multiples of that of an agitating string. (This discovery would imply similar properties in the resonating body, destroying utterly the concept of the fundamental as the lowest tone of a partial series.) Ignoring these potential difficulties, Rameau plunges into a 'scientific' justification of the sub-dominant'. Indeed, in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, Rousseau would take Rameau to task on this very point. Rousseau's main beef is that Rameau had mis-observed these vibrating strings and his error was, 'd'avoir cru les [the strings] voir vibrer dans toute leur longueur, et d'avoir mal observé les noeuds.' (p.124 footnote). Thomas Christensen, 'Rameau'. p.2 goes one step further than Ferris and makes a general point concluding that because Rameau did not 'evince any sophisticated understanding of these scientists' research,' he inadvertently encouraged 'the widely-held view among his contemporaries that ... [he] was something of a scientist *manqué*.' Indeed, we may wonder why it was that the *Académie* never saw fit to invest Rameau. It is, of course, all too easy with the benefit of hindsight to be critical, and there are a number of factors which go some way to exonerate Rameau's apparent lack of scientific knowledge. One should not, for example, overlook the fact that Rameau had been 'geographically-challenged' from an early age: although Clermont-Ferrand was expanding at a great pace, culturally and intellectually speaking the capital of the Auvergne was isolated, parochial and light years away from the ferment and *tourbillon* that was Paris. Given the limitations of transport, communications and distribution – and not discounting Rameau's anonymity – he could not possibly have had ready access to this type of material or scholarship.

such alacrity in the 1740s and early 1750s that Rameau soon found himself preaching a creed of logic, geometry and reason that owed far more to the *Grand Siècle* than it did to the middle of the eighteenth.

It is true, of course, that Rameau's theoretical writings did go a long way towards persuading the *Académie* that music should, once again, be regarded as a fully-fledged scientific discipline as well as a liberal art; and also true that the man was, for most of his life, a respected authority on music theory.³⁹ Indeed, as the 1749 register of the *Académie* clearly demonstrates, Rameau won much praise for his work on tempered tunings – in this case his enthusiasm and support for equal temperament – and the legitimacy of his findings were taken on little more than trust: 'Rameau assures us', the register shows, 'that experience is not opposed to the temperament he proposes; and in this regard he has *earned the right* to be taken at his word.'⁴⁰ And one can quite easily see how the scientific veneer – the talk of rules, fundamental principles and axioms, the intertext with Descartes and the seemingly obsessive desire to eradicate any trace of the metaphysical from the discipline of music theory – had made it remarkably easy for Rameau to cut the figure of the scientist-philosopher to the uninitiated.⁴¹ But by the middle of the 1750s, this veneer was losing its sheen, cracks were appearing and the assault upon Rameau's writings soon became relentless from all quarters – philosophers, music theorists and scientists alike.⁴² Once again the prevalence of speculation, fudged

³⁹ Witness d'Alembert's tribute, in 1751 in the 'Discours Préliminaire' of the *Encyclopédie*. (p.xxxii) '...what distinguishes him [Rameau] most particularly, is to have reflected with much success on the theory of this same art [music]; to have found in the fundamental bass the principle of harmony and melody; to have reduced by this means to more certain and simpler laws, a science formerly devoted to arbitrary rules or dictated by blind experience.'

⁴⁰ Cited in 'Temperaments,' *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, p.669. (my italics). The impact of this 'work' was clearly great; the author claims that 'equal temperament continued to be identified with his [Rameau's] name throughout the 18th century in France and occasionally in Italy as well.' However, although Rameau may take some of the credit for popularising the system, it must be remembered that the theoretical principles of Equal Temperament may date from as far back as the fifteenth century. Indeed, Gossett (*Treatise*, p.164 Footnote) argues that at the time of the *Traité* Rameau was not actually a proponent of Equal Temperament. By the time we get to the *Génération Harmonique* (p.103), however, we find Rameau urging fellow musicians to 'accoutumez-vous au nouveau [Equal] Tempérament, bientôt vous n'y sentirez plus rien de tout ce qui peut vous y déplaire à présent...' I would suggest that Rameau's preference for Equal Temperament has two functional objectives: first, the ease of which it can be explained and justified by his theory of harmonic generation, and indeed how Equal Temperament, in turn, masks many of the epistemological flaws in the theory itself, especially the problem of the major third; second, his background as an organist must have made him acutely aware of the difficulties of modulating brought about by the compromises inherent in the variety of temperaments that organs had been tuned, especially as he would go on to claim that the power of music results more from modulation and harmonic trajectory, than it does from melody.

⁴¹ O'Dea, *Rousseau: Music, Illusion and Desire*, p.6 even goes so far as to suggest that some of the Encyclopédistes had been swayed by Rameau's scientising rhetoric.

⁴² Wokler, 'Rameau, Rousseau and the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*', p.183 argues that the late 1750s 'marks the climax of his [Rameau's] fame' and also points out that by this time his operas were beginning to fall from grace. Alain Cernushi, 'La Musique projetée dans *Pygmalion*', *Exquinox* 9 (1993), p. 37, suggests that 'la seconde moitié du 18^{ème} siècle en France est assurément l'un de ces moments où une esthétique dominante de l'opéra – celle de la Tragédie Lyrique ... – entre en crise: elle

calculations and a predisposition to disregard ideas or research that challenged the validity of his own theories, served merely to undermine his reputation rather than safeguard and strengthen it.⁴³ However, in spite of mounting opposition and cross-examination, Rameau remained remarkably buoyant and bullish throughout the 1750s and, up until his death, and he was unremitting in his pursuit of the 'truth'. He would frequently make extravagant claims about his capabilities: he announced, for example, that he alone had discovered a unique, certain and natural principle, and that only he deserved the title of 'l'interprète de la nature, siège unique de la vérité.'⁴⁴

1.1.3. Rameau's Philosophical Vision

Tracing the development of Rameau's ideas across the complete spectrum of his theoretical writings does not pose any particular practical challenges. Although these writings span some forty years of the composer's life, surprisingly few fundamental or systematic alterations, beyond the appropriation of the *Corps Sonore* early on and the generative theory that flowed from it, occur in Rameau's thinking; the core theory of the *Nouveau Système* remains largely untouched, save superficial detail and modifications of terminology, and it finds its most complete and accomplished expression in the *Génération Harmonique* of 1737.⁴⁵ Even when one

résiste de moins en moins aux diverses concurrences internationales (musique italienne, réforme gluckiste); elle est de plus en plus en butte aux critiques théoriques.' A rather amusing and germane anecdote is to be found in the *Mémoires* of Grétry. Writing of a performance of Rameau's *Dardanus* in the 1750s that he attended at the Opéra, he suggests that Rameau's music seemed woefully out-dated, belonging to the *Grand Siècle* rather than to the middle of the eighteenth: 'I sat beside a man who was expiring with pleasure; I was obliged to go out because I was bored to death. Since then, I have discovered beauties in Rameau, but at that time I had my head full of the Italian music and its form to be able to go back all at once to the music of the preceding century.' Cited in Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History*, 2nd Edition, vol. IV, (New York: Norton, 1965), p.142.

⁴³ Perhaps the clearest illustration of the extent to which Rameau was prepared to overlook, or conveniently ignore, genuine scientific research when it didn't quite square with his own ideas, is provided by Tartini's discovery of the 'Terzo Suono' or 'difference-tone'. The 'difference tone' or, in scientific parlance, 'Acoustical Heterodyning' arises when two sound waves of different frequencies are played together. If they are loud enough, they create a third sound whose frequency is the difference between the first two, but crucially is not present when either one of the two sounds are sounded individually. Rameau did his best to ignore the implications of Tartini's work for as long as was practically possible, maintaining the charade for seven years, until, in 1761, he formally acknowledged it. But instead of trying to work with it, around it, or trying to subsume it within an area of his doctrine as a scientist would, Rameau merely disputed its accuracy for no other reason than because the 'difference-tone' threatened to undermine a central element in his theory of harmonic generation.

⁴⁴ Rameau, 'Lettre de M. Rameau aux philosophes', *Journal de Trévoux*, (August 1762), pp.2035-2036 cited in Charles B. Paul, 'Jean-Philippe Rameau: The Musician as *Philosophe*', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 114, (1970), p.143 'The interpreter of nature, the only seat of the truth.'

⁴⁵ This is due, I would argue, in no small part to the ghost writing of Diderot whom Rameau engaged to write the bulk of the copy. Jonathan Bernard, 'The Principle and the Elements: Rameau's Controversy with d'Alembert', *Journal of Music Theory*, 24-25, (1980-81), p40, suggests that one reason Diderot was chosen was to give him the 'best possible chance of winning favour with the *Académie*.'

considers several of the later works, as we will do shortly, we are still able to uncover the same underlying precepts, the same arguments (albeit couched within a different rhetorical frame), and the same recurring logical problems already encountered in earlier works.⁴⁶ Where change is discernible, it is in Rameau's mode of expression and it arises from increasingly speculative conclusions concerning the nature, characteristics and ontological significance of the *Phénomène du Corps Sonore*. Already in the *Démonstration du principe de l'Harmonie* of 1750 he argued that in music '... la nature semble nous assigner le principe physique de ces premières notions purement mathématiques sur lesquelles roulent toutes les sciences';⁴⁷ and in its ultimate incarnation, in the *Code de Musique Pratique* of 1762, the *Corps Sonore* mutates into the ideological nucleus of an all-embracing theory of ontology and epistemology; he would go on to argue there that it was the ideal form upon which all matter in the universe had been modelled or could be explained – including geometry, nature and science.⁴⁸ Rameau's creed became, as Catherine Kintzler neatly puts it, 'a musical pantheism'⁴⁹ and he would turn, in the last fifteen years of his life, from music theorist and aspiring scientist, into would-be *philosophe*.

Rameau's conception of that most pristine, natural and seemingly logical of all musico-scientific determinist 'truths', the *Phénomène du Corps Sonore*, becomes, during the late 1740s and early 1750s, increasingly distorted and obscured by a veritable infatuation with Malebranche's brand of Occasionalism, and by his own often irrational extrapolations.⁵⁰ During the 1750s, Rameau's vocabulary alters significantly; he begins to speak less of 'mathematics' and 'science', and rather more about 'instinct', 'experience' and the role of the 'ear.' Rameau also frequently substitutes the substantive *Corps Sonore* with that of 'nature.' The 1750s then mark an

⁴⁶ For example, the minor third and the minor triad proved, in the end, to be Rameau's nemesis; he never succeeded in finding a satisfactory explanation for their existence.

⁴⁷ Rameau, *Démonstration du Principe de l'Harmonie*, in CTW, pp.157-158. '... nature seems to give us the physical principle of these purely mathematical primary notions upon which all the sciences are based.'

⁴⁸ Cf. 'Nouvelles Réflexions sur le principe Sonore' in *Code de Musique Pratique* (1760). p.215 where Rameau discusses under the sub-heading: 'Conséquences des réflexions précédentes pour l'origine des sciences.'

⁴⁹ Catherine Kintzler, 'Introduction', in *Rousseau's Essai sur l'Origine des Langues, où il est parlé de la mélodie et l'imitation musicale*, (Paris: G F Flammarion, 1993), pp. 188.

⁵⁰ As Charles Paul, 'Jean-Philippe Rameau: The Musician as Philosophe,' p.147, has shown, Rameau seized upon the doctrine of Occasionalism for it seemed, at once, to corroborate both the principle of the *Corps Sonore* and his overriding belief in the universal validity of simple mathematical proportions. The *Démonstration du Principe de l'Harmonie* (1750), for example, makes its Malebranchian influence abundantly clear; the *Corps Sonore* is here lauded as 'ce principe unique, générateur et ordonnateur de toute la musique, cette cause immédiate de tous ses effets'. Paul goes on to explain that Rameau viewed the *corps sonore* as 'the immediate cause of creation in music, the geometrical proportions and progressions derived from that principle are its mathematically determined natural laws and hence occasional causes, and the sensory effects subsumed under these mathematical expressions are the phenomena revealed to the senses of man'.

important turning point – certainly where our present enterprise is concerned – and it is appropriate now to spend a little time exploring one of the major works of this decade: the *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique et sur son principe* (1754)⁵¹ – before we go on, briefly, to examine Rameau’s final theoretical work concerned with music.

Published ten years before his death, and in many respects an antiphon to Rousseau’s truculent *Lettre sur la musique Française* (1753),⁵² the *Observations* ostensibly represents a significant departure from Cartesian methodology, and appears to locate Rameau’s work within a different intellectual and epistemological paradigm. In the preface to the *Traité de l’Harmonie* (1722) we can recall the syllogism:

music is a science which should have definite rules; these rules should be drawn from an evident principle; and this principle cannot really be known to us without the aid of mathematics.⁵³

But consider the opening lines of the preface to the *Observations*; they seem to belong to an entirely different philosophical and intellectual tradition:

In order to fully enjoy the effects of music, we must be in a state of pure [self-] abandon; and in order to judge these effects, we must refer to the principle which causes them. This principle is *nature* itself; it is the source of the *sentiment* which moves us in all our musical activities. We have received a gift [from nature] which is called *instinct*: let us consult it in our judgements, and see how its *mysteries* evolve in us before we make pronouncements; and if there are still some men who are so immodest that they dare to decide on their own authority, we may hope that others won’t be so weak as to listen to them.⁵⁴

Disregarding the thinly veiled attack upon both Rousseau and d’Alembert, we can clearly see just how far Rameau would go in order to give the impression that he had erred from the well-trodden Cartesian path to the truth. Gone, apparently, is the reliance upon mathematics; gone

⁵¹ The subtitle of the work is: ‘où les moyens de reconnoître l’un par l’autre conduisent à pouvoir se rendre raison avec certitude des différents effets de cet art.’

⁵² The *Observations* must be understood not only as an independent work in its own right and one that belongs very much to the general thrust of Rameau’s theoretical writings, but also as a riposte to the many salvos that were fired at him during the exchanges of the *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752–1754).

⁵³ Rameau, *Treatise*, p. xxxv

⁵⁴ Rameau, *Observations sur notre Instinct pour la Musique*, transl. in Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment: The reconstruction of a dialogue*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), appendices. (my emphases).

too are arguments for reason, and the veneration of deductive and rationalist methodology. 'Instinct' is now postulated as the unique and authentic apparatus of critical judgement and the basis for the compositional process. However, I would suggest that we should consider Rameau's argumentation as the product of a rhetorical stratagem, rather than the outcome of any radical shift in his thinking. The employment of such substantives as 'nature', 'instinct' and 'sentiment' was, I believe, a rhetorical device intended to lend gravity and validity to increasingly questioned ideas – ideas which were not just philosophically, but scientifically, questionable too. Look beyond the rhetoric and a quintessentially Cartesian strategy emerges: Rameau is still postulating a single, universal and all-embracing principle; and his methodology – advocating the opening of the mind to elemental and axiomatic phenomena – smacks of the introspective deductivism of Descartes, with empiricist and phenomenological overtones thrown in for good measure. In the examples that I have selected to cite below, the principles of the *Basse Fondamentale* and the *Corps Sonore* are still very much in evidence, albeit set within an entirely different rhetorical frame; Rameau is endeavouring to explain how his scientific theory of harmonic generation interfaces with the human experience of musical phenomena:

For example, a man without musical experience ... will ordinarily, in improvising, place the first note that he sings in the middle of his vocal range, and then always ascend, even though his vocal range is almost equal below and above the first sound [namely the fifth]. And this conforms completely with the resonance of the sounding body, where all sounds that emanate from it are above that of the totality that we think we are hearing ...⁵⁵

The *Observations* is liberally peppered with generalisations and experiments which cannot be substantiated scientifically. In the above quotation, for example, Rameau seems unwilling to acknowledge that such a man without musical experience who would automatically choose to sing a note in the middle of his vocal range has little to do with nature, or indeed the *Corps Sonore*; above and beyond the distinct possibility that the man may not even be capable of singing, his would be a purely culturally determined decision based upon his own experience and as such is not a valid starting point for a scientific exposition or indeed a scientific hypothesis. Indeed, Rousseau would seize upon this very passage, and, in his *Examen de Deux Principes Avancés par M. Rameau* (1755), questions Rameau's methodology as the basis for his

⁵⁵ Rameau, *Observations*, tr. in Cynthia Verba. *Music and the French Enlightenment*, appendices.

conclusion:

...non seulement cet ignorant qui compose un air n'a nulle notion de la basse fondamentale de cet air, il est même également hors d'état et d'exécuter cette basse lui-même, et de la reconnoître lorsqu'un autre l'exécute. Mais cette basse fondamentale qui lui a suggéré son chant, et qui n'est ni dans son entendement, ni dans son organe, ni dans sa mémoire, où est-elle donc? M. Rameau prétend qu'un ignorant entonnera naturellement les son fondamentaux les plus sensibles Puisqu'il dit en avoir fait l'expérience, je ne veux pas en ceci rejeter son autorité. Mais quels sujets a-t-il pris pour cette épreuve?⁵⁶

Rameau continues his argument by furnishing the reader with yet another example:

In another instance, no matter how little experience we have, we hardly fail, when we make a prelude of our own, ... to then play the perfect chord, composed of the harmony of the sounding body, whose genre, which is major, is always preferred to minor If we ordinarily play a third first in a perfect chord, in ascending order, even though the sounding body only produces that interval two octaves higher – making it an interval of the seventeenth, and that is above the octave of the fifth, that is the twelfth – that is because the ear appreciates intervals more promptly, and the voice produces them more readily, when we naturally reduce them to their smallest degrees.⁵⁷

The problem with this assertion is self-evident: Rameau does not acknowledge that the scale or mode is not naturally or readily determined by the principles of harmonic generation; neither the aliquots of the monochord nor the partials emitted by the vibrating string produce intervals in such close proximity to one another; and indeed when they are reduced to within the ambit of an octave, they are in some instances unusable in their untempered, natural state. Rameau continues however, digging himself further and further into a hole from which he is, in the end, unable to extricate himself:

⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau*. in *Oeuvres*, t.11, p.350, ' ... not only has this unknowledgable person who is composing an aria no conception of the Fundamental Bass of this aria, he is also not capable of executing this Bass by himself or to recognise it when someone else executes it. Moreover, this Fundamental Bass which suggested his melody, and which he is not able understand, hear or imagine, where can it be found then? M. Rameau claims that an unknowledgable person will naturally hear the most subtle fundamental sounds Because he says he has proven this in an experiment, I do not wish to question his authority here. But what sort of subjects did he use in his experiment?' Rousseau goes on to suggest that Rameau had rigged his experiment and had used the wrong type of subjects. In the *Essai Sur l'Origine des langues* (Chapter XIV, p.109) of which the *Examen* is one of two *urtexts*, Rousseau puts the argument in a more succinct and pointed way: 'M. Rameau prétend que les dessus d'une certaine simplicité suggèrent naturellement leurs basses, et qu'un homme ayant l'oreille juste et non-exercée entonnera naturellement cette basse. C'est là un préjugé de musicien, démenti par toute expérience. Non seulement celui qui n'aura jamais entendu ni basse, ni harmonie, ne trouvera lui-même ni cette harmonie, ni cette basse, mais même elles déplairont si ont les lui fait entendre, et il aimera beaucoup mieux le simple unisson.'

⁵⁷ Rameau, *Observations*, tr. in Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, appendices.

This would not be true, however, for someone without experience, who would never have heard music, or who would never have listened to it, for there is a difference between hearing and listening. If such a person hears a low pitch which is clear and distinct, and then promptly lets his voice go where it wishes – purely mechanically without any premeditated destination – he would certainly sound the fifth first, in preference to all other intervals ... we well know that the fifth is the most perfect of all the consonances.⁵⁸

After describing the power that instinct (or ‘nature’) brings to bear upon harmonic trajectory, Rameau then endeavours to demonstrate precisely how melodic motion is, at once, instinctive and dictated by the progress of harmony:

The smaller natural degrees, which are called diatonic degrees ... are only suggested by the consonances to which they move, and that the successive intervals form. It is the consonances which always present themselves first to any person without experience.⁵⁹

But Rameau elects to disregard the fact that dissonance plays a substantially greater role in the harmonic series than does consonance; his belief in the universal validity of prime numbers undermines the logic of his argumentation. Nevertheless, Rameau continues his discourse unfettered:

If we wish to follow the order of these smaller degrees, without any preconditions, we will always ascend by a whole step and descend by a half step ... For example, let us call the original pitch *ut*, which represents a sounding body; and call the fifth *sol*, which resonates with the original.⁶⁰

Rameau’s claim at this juncture is incorrect: the ‘fifth’ which is described, actually resonates with the original a ‘twelfth’ above. And what Rameau describes next is merely the progress of convention not nature:

If we wish to depart immediately and move from *ut* to the next degree, then *sol* would become a new sounding body with all its harmony – consisting of its major third *si* and its fifth *re*. That in turn would force us to ascend by a tone from *ut* to *re*, and to descend by a semi-tone from *ut* to *si*. Furthermore, following this first rising whole tone step, we will naturally be carried to sound another. A half-step would only present itself through reminiscence, since two whole steps form a major third which resonates in the sounding body, while a whole step and a half-step form only a minor third which doesn’t resonate in

⁵⁸ Rameau, *Observations*, tr. in Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, appendices. (my emphasis)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, appendices.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, appendices.

it. After the two whole steps, we will feel ourselves forced to sound a half step, which would bring us to the interval of a fourth. A third wholestep in this case would give a dissonance. It is precisely for this reason that it has become a matter of common knowledge, because it is something that we feel, that three consecutive whole tones are not natural. After this last half-step, another one would never present itself again; a whole step would prevail in everyone's ears, in order to arrive at the consonance of a fifth.⁶¹

It is easy to take issue with Rameau regarding his assertions that tonality – and by that he means the structure implied by tempered tuning – is both natural and instinctive; that the reduction of the 17th to a so-called major 3rd and the 12th to a 5th within the octave is 'natural' and not driven by convention and expediency; and that a succession of three whole tones are 'not natural'. We will, of course, note that temperaments, whether they be of the mean-tone, well or equal variety, bear only loose resemblance to the partials of the harmonic series, and as such they are artificial, culturally and aesthetically determined structures, a kind of arbitrary 'second nature' always already born out of compromise. It is clear, then, that what Rameau considers the irresistible and irrepressible force of 'common knowledge' and 'instinct' must instead be ascribed to 'culture' and learning rather than 'nature'. Moreover the scale, triads, consonances and dissonances produced by the variety of prevailing temperaments that Rameau would have been exposed to, would be unsatisfactory and would not correspond to those produced by the *Corps Sonore* except nominally. Firstly, there is always already the stumbling block of the either the Pythagorean or the Syntonic *Comma*, or the lesser or greater diesis.⁶² Then comes the perennial problem of the 'Pythagorean' major third which, if left untempered, is traditionally considered dissonant. In the same way, there would be a problem with the so-called minor third.⁶³ And there's the rub. The triad or perfect chord – the very lynch-pin of Rameau's system of harmonic generation and indeed of functional harmony itself – must, in everyday musical applications, be the product of artifice, culture and aesthetics, not

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, appendices.

⁶² Taking the Pythagorean system of tuning to its logical conclusion – passing through a complete circle of fifths – we would be left with a C and a C7 (seven octaves above the fundamental) which were approximately 23.5 Cents out of tune giving a 'natural' ratio of 524288:531441 instead of the artificially 'perfect' 1:1 of Equal Temperament (the third is also too large). The Syntonic comma, on the other hand, gives an interval 21.5 cents out of tune. The discrepancies produced by the lesser and greater diesis are more important: 41.1 and 62.6 cents respectively. In the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, (ed. Kintzler, p. 120) Rousseau seems to take Rameau to task on this point. In the context of the *Essai*, Rousseau argues that the Greeks did not recognise any other intervals than those which we know call 'perfect' consonances. We will come back to this very point in Chapter 4.

⁶³ Cf. Richard Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, (New York: W W Norton & Co., 1978), pp.187-195.

of nature.⁶⁴ We should not be surprised that d'Alembert seized upon this inherent discord in Rameau's theory.

D'Alembert's critique revolves around Rameau's contention that the *Corps Sonore* could be used to educe the immanent elements of harmonic structure, such as the triad and consonance and dissonance. As we have discussed above, d'Alembert recognised that the intervals produced by the *Corps Sonore* were not used, in musical praxis, exactly as given by nature, thus the *Corps Sonore* by itself could not give rise to the musical system as cultural artefact, but could only yield up clues to its structure.⁶⁵ Furthermore, d'Alembert identifies three additional sources of contradiction and complaint: first, that none of the harmonics is actually audible in the fundamental alone; second, that even when the upper-partial is sounded artificially, the ear receives no idea of any proportions to be found between them; and third, that the intervals produced by a fundamental string causing other strings to sound are not used, in practice, exactly as given by nature.⁶⁶ In the *Discours Préliminaire*, d'Alembert concludes that 'l'harmonie a peut-être quelqu'autre principe inconnu, plus générale que celui de la résonance du corps sonore.'⁶⁷

Rameau was certainly unwilling, and perhaps in the end unable, to grasp the compelling logic of d'Alembert's critique. Rameau's unshakable conviction that these musical phenomena were instinctive or natural is constructed upon and, in his view, sufficiently justified by both the *Basse Fondamentale* and *Corps Sonore*:

Music is natural to us; the agreeable feeling which we feel through it is due purely to instinct. The same instinct can affect us through several other sources which are related to music. That is why people who cultivate the arts and sciences should not be indifferent to knowing the principle behind instinct. This principle is now known: it exists, as we must acknowledge, in the harmony which results from the resonance of all sounding bodies [*corps sonores*], such as the sound of our voice, a string, a pipe, a bell etc.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Triadic music, particularly that performed on keyboard or fretted instruments, demands tempered tuning because the concords (octaves, 5th and 3rd) are in the majority of cases disproportional in their pure, natural, forms; modulation is rendered difficult and the use of conventional harmony in distant keys yields unpleasant results.

⁶⁵ Cf. J Barnard, 'Rameau's Controversy with d'Alembert', p.42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.42.

⁶⁷ d'Alembert, *Discours Préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*, p.XVII, cited in *Ibid*, p.42 Perhaps harmony has some other unknown principle, more universal [sic] than that of the resonance of the sonorous body.'

⁶⁸ Rameau, *Observations*, tr. in Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, appendices.

Rameau correctly contends that the *Corps Sonore* is a naturally occurring acoustic phenomenon – an absolute, a physical phenomenon given by nature. But then logic ebbs away. To claim that the principle ‘exists ... in the harmony which results from the resonance of all sounding bodies’ is to acknowledge the difference between what is natural (the *Corps Sonore*), and its diametrical opposite, the product of artifice and culture (functional harmony, the perfect chord and different chord formations). It is precisely because Rameau does not acknowledge that the phenomena of functional harmony – the triad and the major third – are simply the constructs of art and convention, that the employment of the tonic-dominant structure is seen as both inevitable and unavoidable.

Today, we might consider Rameau’s conclusions naive and erroneous, and we would indubitably opt for a different approach – an approach which considers ‘naturalness’ illusory, a manifestation of associative reception or acculturation. But this is to miss the point by a significant margin. True to his Cartesian colours, Rameau was searching, exclusively, for a single principle, an all-embracing neo-platonic theory of musical ‘forms’ which would explain the mechanical properties of music *scientifically*, not in purely metaphysical or abstract terms. Just as Descartes’ *Cogito* was the result of introspective deduction, Rameau too looked inwards, deducing on the basis of observation and some experimentation. In a philosophical context such as this, any idea that music was not natural to the *Homme-Machine* or an elemental component in a mechanically ordered clockwork universe would have been virtually unthinkable. If his extrapolations did not square precisely with what was considered epistemologically and scientifically possible, then so be it; the deep structure of music and the *phénomène du Corps Sonore* were proximate and congruent enough to suggest to Rameau that coincidence had played no part in their ontology.

By 1754, the *Traité* was already thirty-two years old, the *Nouveau Système* and the *Génération Harmonique* were looking decidedly *démodé* and, following the events of the *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752-54), Rameau’s pristine reputation as composer and theorist had been indelibly tarnished. I would suggest, therefore, that any perceptible movement away from prototypical Cartesian terminology and method is not, primarily, the result of an ideological shift in Rameau’s thinking. On the contrary, it reflects at once a conscious attempt to cloak unfashionable,

questionable and unsustainable arguments in contemporaneous intellectual garb, and Rameau's protracted struggle to reconcile the Occasionalist vision of the cosmos with a viable theory of music and composition. Indeed, Girdlestone concludes that Rameau's preoccupation with instinct and nature is 'partly the result of the desire to prove the instinctive nature of the *Principe*, partly the outcome of the attacks of the pro-Italians ...'⁶⁹ To this I would simply add that because Rameau could no longer sustain his theories in the scientific arena, he would try to open up a battle-front in the domain of philosophy. He would, inevitably, lock horns with Rousseau and d'Alembert.

1.1.4. Rameau's Cosmology

In the intervening eight years between the publication of the *Observations* and his final theoretical work, Rameau became embroiled in a series of polemical music-theoretical exchanges with Rousseau and d'Alembert. As a direct consequence of these entanglements, Rameau continued to reflect and speculate upon both the music-theoretical and cosmological significance of the *Corps Sonore*. For the ageing composer, the *Corps Sonore* was emblematic of a sort of Cartesian-Occasionalist vision of the universe – a paradigm of the innate logic, design and ultimate purpose of the cosmos. As Catherine Kintzler explains:

... Rameau développa une conception dans laquelle la musique devenait non seulement le modèle de tous les arts, mais encore celui de toutes les sciences. Cet extravagant itinéraire finit dans une sorte de panthéisme musical: le corps sonore devait renfermer le principe de toute existence et de toute intelligibilité.⁷⁰

Rameau pursued this notion to such an extreme that amongst even some of his less musically-informed contemporaries, doubting voices could be heard to question exactly where his extrapolations were leading. Pallisot, for example, likened Rameau's conclusions to those of Malebranche, and remarked:

⁶⁹ Girdlestone, *Rameau*, p.542.

⁷⁰ '...Rameau developed a conception in which music became not only the model for all the arts, but the model of all the sciences. This far-fetched schema culminated in a sort of musical pantheism: the sounding body was supposed to contain the principle of all existence and of all intelligibility.' Catherine Kintzler, 'Introduction', in *Rousseau's Essai sur l'Origine des Langues, où il est parlé de la mélodie et l'imitation musicale*, (Paris: G F Flammarion, 1993), pp.188-9.

Peut-être l'enthousiasme de M. Rameau qui croyait voir dans la musique l'origine de toutes les sciences ressemble-t-il un peu à celui du Père Malebranche qui voyait tout en Dieu?⁷¹

As far as d'Alembert was concerned, this 'musical pantheism' was simply wrong-headed and illogical. We will recall that d'Alembert had dubbed Rameau 'un génie ... [un] artiste philosophe'⁷² in the *Discours Préliminaire d'Encyclopédie* of 1751. But in a second, revised edition of his *Elémens de Musique* (1762), d'Alembert manifests his displeasure and impatience with Rameau's conclusions, giving him what Kintzler characterises as: 'une magistrale leçon d'épistémologie'.⁷³ Rameau's veritable obsession with the *Corps Sonore* had, in its final term, spawned an uncompromising and irrational reductionist vision of both music and the universe in which the *Corps Sonore* was the fundamental principle; his system was incompatible with the project of the *Encyclopédie* and the Baconian epistemology which had given rise to it. In Rameau's view, the *Corps Sonore* was the blueprint upon which the great watchmaker had modelled his universe; it was mathematically explicable, philosophically sustainable and, most important for the destiny of music, borne out by the instinct of the composer and the musician. D'Alembert would have none of this.

The radical extravagance of Rameau's dialectic, a vision which occasioned d'Alembert's caustic critique, reaches its natural conclusion – or at least its final destination – in the *Code de Musique Pratique* (1762). The concluding chapter of Rameau's *Code*, entitled *Nouvelles Réflexions sur le Principe Sonore*, begins:

Le principe de tout est un; c'est une vérité dont tous les hommes qui ont fait usage de la pensée ont eu le sentiment et dont personne n'a eu la connoissance. Convaincus de la nécessité de ce principe universel, les premiers philosophes le cherchèrent dans la musique.... En effet, frappés de l'accord merveilleux qui résulte de l'assemblage des parties qui composent l'Univers, ces hommes contemplateurs dûrent nécessairement en chercher la raison dans la musique....⁷⁴

⁷¹ Cited in Girdlestone, *Rameau*, p. 525, footnote 4. 'Perhaps the enthusiasm of M. Rameau who believes he can see the origin of all the sciences in music, resembles that of Père Malebranche who sees everything in God?'

⁷² D'Alembert, *Discours Préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*, p. xxxiii, 'a genius ... a philosophical artist.'

⁷³ Catherine Kintzler, 'Introduction', in *Rousseau's Essai sur l'Origine des Langues, où il est parlé de la mélodie et l'imitation musicale*, p.189, 'a magisterial lesson in epistemology.' For a more detailed exploration of d'Alembert's critique, see Chapter 4 of Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, especially pp.63-69.

⁷⁴ Rameau, *Code de Musique Pratique*, Facs. ed., (New York: Broude Bros.1965), pp.189-190, 'One principle governs everything. Any thinking person will have sensed the truth of this, though no one yet has explained it. Convinced that there must be a universal principle, the earliest philosophers turned to music in search of it ... In effect, struck by the wondrous harmony that results from the assembly of the constituent parts of the universe, they continued to look for the explanation in music.'

Rameau contends that 'ces hommes contemplateurs' sought the explanation for existence itself in the medium and materials of music and moves swiftly on to the conclusion that they had, in their own music, taken the wrong path:

[...] Mais malheureusement le système qu'adoptèrent ces grands hommes, loin de les rapprocher de l'objet de leurs recherches, ne fit que les en éloigner davantage: j'ose assurer même que le phénomène du corps sonore leur fut absolument inconnu.⁷⁵

Rameau continues praising the simplicity, naturalness and instinctive qualities of the *Corps Sonore*.

Ce principe est si simple, si lumineux, l'analyse en est si naturelle, si facile, les produits en sont si étendus, si féconds, que de quelque obscurité que le temps ait pû couvrir cette partie des connoissances des Anciens, et quelque considérable que puisse être la perte de leurs Ouvrages sur la musique, il nous seroit infailliblement resté quelques vestiges de cette découverte dans le petit nombre de leurs écrits qui nous sont parvenus: on ne voit pas même que les proportions y soient appelées, quoique la progression triple soit l'unique fond sur lequel soit établi le système de Pythagore.⁷⁶

In the *Nouvelles Réflexions* the *Corps Sonore* is now positioned at the epicentre of everything – not simply music or science, but the universe and existence itself. It has become the life-principle, the code if you like, upon which all is designed and to which all matter can be reduced. Some years after Rameau's death, in May 1777, d'Alembert delivered a paper entitled *Reflexions sur la Théorie de la musique* to the *Académie* in which he was critical of Rameau's conclusions: 'Rameau ended', d'Alembert suggests, 'by wishing to find in musical proportions the whole of geometry, in the major and minor modes the two sexes of the animals, and finally the Trinity in the threefold resonance of the sounding body'.⁷⁷ Not only then would Rameau fall out with Rousseau, he succeeded in alienating one of the most eminent scientists

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.189–190 'Unfortunately, the system that these great men adopted, far from bringing them closer to their goal, served only to distance them further from it. There is absolutely no doubt that they were unaware of the phenomenon of the sonorous body.'

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.190, 'this principle is so simple, so clear, the analysis of it is so natural, so immediate, its results so extensive, so fruitful, that only some accretion of time could have obscured from view this part of their [the Ancients] knowledge, and so extensive the loss of their works on music, that surely there would have remained some vestige of this discovery in the small number of works that have come down to us: we do not even see the proportions identified, even though the PT is the foundation upon which Pythagoras built his system.'

⁷⁷ Cited in Girdlestone, *Rameau*, p.526 (footnote).

of his generation, d'Alembert.⁷⁸ As Christensen concludes,

While Rameau was always testy when it came to his theory ... until the 1750s he had enough sense to consolidate his alliances when he went on the attack. In his last years, he abandoned this sensible strategy and lashed out at any and all who he perceived to veer from the sacred truth of the *Corps Sonore*.⁷⁹

1.1.5. Rameau's Vision of Music

Rameau's conceptualisation of the *Corps Sonore* precipitated the thesis that music was 'natural' because it was other than a human construct; 'natural' because it existed outside (and hence before – in ontological terms) the realm of human experience, though knowledge of its existence could be intuited; 'natural' because it could be understood in geometrical terms and expressed as simple mathematical proportions; and natural because man is, of course, himself a *corps sonore*. But perhaps most important of all is that the *corps sonore* pointed, like a great transcendental signified, to the existence of a divine watchmaker as referent who had set the universe in motion using the harmonic series and its proportions as a prototype. The aesthetic produced by such a vision of music and its position in nature is determinedly formalist, and one which, as Christensen observes, 'laid the groundwork for the development of an aesthetic of musical autonomy that would break once and for all with the Aristotelian dictum that music was an imitative art.'⁸⁰

In Rameau's view, harmonic structure and the trajectory of individual harmonic units was of primordial importance in the musical work. And because he contended that harmonic structure was indicated by, and emanated from, the *Corps Sonore*, it was considered to be both natural and instinctive. Thus when Rameau declares, in the *Observations*, that 'music is natural to us; the agreeable feeling which we feel through it is due purely to instinct', he really intends that harmony is natural to us, because harmony is generated by a fundamental natural principle, and that it is nature herself which produces these 'effects'. Harmony is natural because, Rameau believes, it owes its existence to a natural principle. As a result of this view,

⁷⁸ For an interesting discussion of d'Alembert's relationship with Rameau see Robert Isherwood, 'The Conciliatory Partisan of Musical Liberty: Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, 1717-1783', in Cowart (ed.), *French Musical Thought 1600-1800*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp.95-119.

⁷⁹ Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, p.247

⁸⁰ Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, p.241

Rameau relegates the role of melody in musical structure to the incidental and the insignificant; it is regarded – in terms of compositional priority – as a phenomenon generated, almost accidentally, by the trajectory of harmonic units:

melody has no other principle than the harmony produced by the sounding body. The ear is so preoccupied with this principle without our realising it [it is instinctive], that it alone suffices for enabling us to identify immediately the harmonic foundation on which a given melody depends.⁸¹

Melody is, thus, accorded virtually no functional part to play in the expressive animus of the work, nor is it considered an integral part of the expressive arsenal of the composer:

Je fais voir pour lors que ... la force de l'expression dépend beaucoup plus de la modulation que la simple mélodie.⁸²

But therein lies a jangling contradiction. Because Rameau suggests that harmony is produced directly by the *Corps Sonore* and that melody results from the passage of harmonic entities across their prescribed and codified trajectory, he has little option but to concede that melody, derived indirectly from the *Corps Sonore*, must also be considered natural and universal. As Girdlestone has argued, the presumption of universality – necessarily a product of determinism (and of course Occasionalism) – became a thorn in Rameau's side and the patterning and distribution of, for example, Greek and Chinese modes confounded him because they did not seem to square in any way with the partials emitted by the *Corps Sonore*.⁸³ In my view, Rousseau seized on this contradiction and included examples of Greek, Chinese and American Indian melodies in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* as though he were challenging Rameau's contention of universality by highlighting, at once, its ethnocentricity and cultural foundation.⁸⁴ Rousseau argued that only the voice – rather than the aliquot divisions of a

⁸¹ Rameau, *Nouveau Système*, 'Préface', p.vi.

⁸² Rameau, *Nouveau Système*, 'Préface', p.vi. 'I am going to show then that ... expressive force depends much more on modulation than on melody alone.'

⁸³ Girdlestone, *Rameau*, p.525. There is much discussion of these points to be found in Rameau, *Code de Musique Pratique*, Facs. ed., (New York: Broude Bros, 1965). See especially pp.189-193 including relevant footnotes.

⁸⁴ Rousseau suggests in the article 'mélodie' from *Dictionnaire*, t.12, p.510 that he is supplying the reader with the means by which to judge 'les diverse accents musicaux des peuples.' Rousseau delivers a telling jibe, however, by suggesting that the reader will find in all of these extracts 'une conformité de modulation avec notre Musique, qui pourra faire admirer aux uns la bonté et l'universalité de nos règles, et peut-être rendre suspecte à d'autres l'intelligence ou la fidélité de ceux qui nous ont transmis ces aires.' Rousseau's point is clearly made, and his jibe has landed on target.

string – could have been used to determine such scales in antiquity, and one has to admit it is a very convincing proposition.⁸⁵

Rameau's categorical rejection of melody as a viable vehicle for expression flew in the face of emerging aesthetic systems. Rameau's mechanistic vision and its implied aesthetic then should be seen as one which increasingly defined itself as anachronistic. Rameau had, in effect, banished himself to the furthest outpost of Cartesian Determinism, barricaded himself in, and thrown away the key. Rousseau was perhaps the first of his contemporaries to envisage the aesthetic and musical ramifications of these ideas, something which other *Philosophes* had failed to anticipate. Finally, however, we may indeed wonder why it never occurred to Rousseau to point out to Rameau the elemental difference between the structure of sound and the structure of music, rather than merely focusing upon the representational differences between melody and harmony.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ In chapter XVIII of the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, p.119, Rousseau pointedly notes that 'On sait que notre harmonie est une invention gothique. Ceux qui prétendent trouver le système des Grecs dans le notre se moquent de nous. Le système des Grec n'avait absolument d'harmonique dans notre sens que ce qu'il fallait pour fixer l'accord des instruments sur des consonances parfaites. Tous les peuples qui ont des instruments à cordes sont forces de les accorder par des consonances; mais ceux qui n'en ont pas ont dans leurs chants des inflexions que nous nommons fausses parce qu'elles n'entrent pas dans notre système et que nous ne pouvons les noter. C'est ce qu'on a remarqué sur les chants des sauvages de l'Amérique, et c'est ce qu'on aurait dû remarquer aussi sur divers intervalles de la musique des Grecs, si l'on eût étudié cette musique avec moins de prévention pour la notre.' I shall return to this subject – and indeed this particular point – in chapter 4.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Essai*, pp.106-107 and 108-109.

1.2. Rousseau: from Disciple to Antagonist

It is not clear from either the *Confessions* or his correspondence exactly when Rousseau first encountered Rameau, but it is most likely to have been early in 1742, some months following Rousseau's arrival in Paris in the autumn of 1741. What is clear, however, is that when the two eventually crossed paths, they were at completely different stages of their respective careers: at fifty-nine years of age, Rameau's star was in the ascendant and he was approaching the zenith of his celebrity, enjoying considerable influence in literary, artistic and scientific *côtées*; Rousseau, in contrast, was an extremely ambitious but unknown twenty-nine year old in search of fame and fortune.⁸⁷ To help him on his way, Rousseau arrived in Paris with fifteen Louis, a copy of his *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même* and was armed with an entirely new system of musical notation.⁸⁸

This new system, dubbed *Projet concernant des nouveaux signes pour la Musique*, was, in fact, little more than a short, expository paper – an *avertissement* for a project that, once completed, would transform the way in which music was written down, learnt and disseminated. Conventional notation was, not to put too fine a point on it, over-complex, long-winded and imperfect. Or at least that was how Rousseau portrayed it:

Cette quantité de lignes, de clefs, de transpositions, de dièses, de bémols, de bécarres, de mesures simples et composées, de rondes, de blanches, de noires, de croches, de doubles, de triples croches, de pauses ... de soupirs, de demi-soupirs ... donne une foule de signes et de combinaisons, d'où résultent deux inconvénients principaux, l'un d'occuper un trop grand volume, et l'autre de surcharger la mémoire des écoliers.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques: The early life and work of Jean Jacques Rousseau 1712-1754*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p156.

⁸⁸ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.266. He also had several letters of introduction from the Abbé Mably. Maurice Cranston, *Op. Cit.*, pp.156-157 lists among those he first became acquainted with a certain Père Castel – 'a worldly Jesuit Priest and controversial philosopher.'

⁸⁹ Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, t11, p.4 'Projet concernant des nouveaux signes pour musiques.' 'This quantity of lines, clefs, transpositions, sharps, flats, naturals, simple and compound time signatures, semibreves, minims, crotchets, quavers, semiquavers, demisemiquavers, bar rests ... crotchet rests, quaver rests ... produce a multitude of sign and combinations which result in two principal drawbacks, one is to take up too much space, and the other is over burden the pupil's mind.' Rousseau would stick rigidly to this view for the rest of his days, as can be witnessed from this passage, taken from the article 'Notes' in the *Dictionnaire de Musique*, t13, p.15, in which the spirit of the passage is repeated almost word for word: 'On peut en réduire les défaut à trois principaux. Le premier est dans la multitude des signes et de leurs combinaisons, qui surcharge tellement l'esprit et la mémoire des commençants...'. This later passage of course indicates three defects, the one added is identified by Rousseau as the difficulty of distinguishing between different types of intervals. Rousseau goes on, in the article, to explain the rudiments of his system of notation as first expounded in the *Dissertation sur la Musique Moderne*. Rousseau would refer – and actively attempt to justify – his system some thirty years later in his *Lettre à Burney* and in *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*. In the *Lettre à Burney*, Rousseau bemoans the fact that his system was not adopted, but states, nonetheless, that he continued to make use of it himself with facility throughout his life.

That he had always experienced great difficulty in sight-reading, despite spending many years as a music copyist and teacher, may well account for his distaste for both conventional notation and the drudgery of tonic sol-fa.⁹⁰ I suspect, however, that his motivation owed less to an impulse to overcome any lacunae in his musical competence and rather more to a desire to make a name for himself in Paris. Whatever lay behind the truth, Rousseau sought to remedy the prolixity of notation by streamlining the entire process:

Le moyen qui remédiera à l'un de ces inconvénients remédiera aussi à l'autre; et dès qu'on aura inventé des signes équivalents, mais plus simples et en moindre quantité, ils auront par là même plus de précision, et pourront exprimer autant de choses en moins d'espace.⁹¹

'Le moyen,' as Rousseau puts it, was a system constructed upon numbers, numbers that would replace the myriad arbitrary symbols with which conventional music notation had become encumbered. Parenthetically, this passage is also extremely significant for it commences with Rousseau's earliest documented definition of music:

Comme la musique n'est qu'une enchaînement de sons qui se font entendre ou tous ensemble, ou successivement, il suffit que tous ces sons aient des expressions relatives qui leur assignent à chacun la place qu'il doit occuper par rapport à un certain son fondamental [...] Prenant UT pour ce son fondamental, auquel tous les autres doivent se rapporter, et l'exprimant par le chiffre 1, nous aurons à sa suite l'expression des sept sons naturels, ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, par les sept chiffres, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; de façon que, tant que le chant roulera dans l'étendue des sept sons, il suffira de les noter chacun par son chiffre correspondant, pour les exprimer tous sans équivoque. Mais quand il est question de sortir de cette étendue pour passer dans d'autres octaves ... je me sers du plus simple de tous les signes, c'est-à-dire du point.⁹²

⁹⁰ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.175 confesses: 'I certainly must have been born for that art [music], for I began to love it my childhood, and it is the only one I have loved constantly throughout my life. The astonishing thing is that an art for which I was born should, nevertheless, have cost me so much trouble to learn, and that my progress in it has been so slow that after a lifetime's practice I have never managed to sing accurately at sight.' In the 'Second Dialogue' from *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*, t.17, p.525, written between 1772 and 1775, Rousseau again refers to being 'born' for music: 'Jean-Jacques étoit né pour la musique ...' He then goes on to refer directly to his efforts to reform musical notation and bemoans the tepid reception they received: 'Ses idées dans l'art et sur l'art sont féconde, intarissable. Il a trouvé des méthodes plus claires, plus commodes, plus simples qui facilitent, les unes la composition, les autres l'exécution, et auxquelles il ne manque pour être admises que d'être proposées par un autre que lui.'

⁹¹ Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, t11, p.4 'Projet' 'The means by which we will remedy one of these drawbacks, will also remedy the other, and as soon as we have devised equivalent signs, albeit simpler and fewer in quantity, they will have greater precision and will be able to convey as much in less space.'

⁹² Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, t11, 'Projet', p.6, 'Since music is but a series of sounds which our sounded together or in succession, it is enough that all these sounds have relative expressions which are assigned to each one with regard to a given fundamental sound [...] Taking Doh for the fundamental sound, to which all the others must be related, and expressing it by the number 1, we will be able to express the seven natural sounds Doh, re, mi, fa, soh, la, ti, by the seven numbers, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; in such a way that, when a melody remains within the octave range of these seven sounds, it is enough that each one is noted by its corresponding number to convey them all without equivocation. When it is necessary to move to other octaves ... I use the simplest sign of all, the dot.'

He would place a point over a number to indicate that the same note an octave above was required, and a point below a number to indicate that the octave below was required. Though essentially simple, and indeed simplifying, the system was apparently powerful and practical enough that it could represent all the possible combinations of notes and durations in each of the twenty-four modes:

Mais cet UT, qui, par la transposition doit toujours être le nom de la tonique dans les ton majeurs, et celui de la médiate dans les ton mineurs, peut, par conséquent, être pris sur chacune des douze cordes de système chromatique; et pour la désigner, il suffira de mettre à la marge le chiffre qui exprimeroit cette corde sur le clavier dans l'ordre naturel; c'est-à-dire que le chiffre de la marge, qu'on peut appeler la clef, désigne la touche du clavier qui doit s'appeler UT, et par conséquent être tonique dans les tons majeurs, et médiate dans les mineurs. ... La connoissance de cette clef n'est que pour les instruments; et ceux qui chantent n'ont pas besoin d'y faire attention.⁹³

Rousseau was confident that his system had many other advantages over and above conventional notation:

Ce système renferme, sans contredit, des avantages essentiels par-dessus la méthode ordinaire ... parce qu'elle contient beaucoup moins de signes. Parce que ces signes sont plus simples. Parce que, sans autre étude, les caractères mêmes des notes y représentent leurs intervalles et leurs rapports Parce qu'un même caractère ne peut jamais avoir du même nom ... Parce que les temps y sont mieux distingués que dans la musique ordinaire, et que les valeurs des silences et des notes sont déterminées d'une manière plus simple La musique en est plus commode et plus aisée à noter, occupe moins de volume; toute sorte de papier y est propre Enfin les compositeurs y trouveroient encore cet autre avantage non moins considérable ... [que] leur harmonie et leurs accords seroient connus par la seule inspection des signes, et sans ces sauts d'une clef à l'autre.⁹⁴

Rousseau was also convinced that it could be learnt quickly, with little effort, and could enable even an absolute beginner to sing at sight within seven to eight months.⁹⁵ And in the event

⁹³ Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, t11, 'Projet', p.7, 'But this Do, by transposition must always be called the tonic in all major keys and the mediant in all the minor ones, can, as a result, be taken for any one of the twelve strings of the chromatic system; and to denote this, one needs only to put the number in the margin which expresses this string in the natural order on the keyboard; that is to say, the number in the margin, which we can call the key signature, denotes the keyboard key which should be taken for Do, and consequently, be the tonic in all major keys and the mediant in all the minor ones ... Knowledge of this key signature is only for instruments ; and those who sing do not need to pay attention to it.'

⁹⁴ Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, t11, 'Projet', p.17-18. 'This system contains, indisputably, fundamental advantages over that of the current method ... because it uses far less signs. Because these signs are simpler. Because, without further study, the numbers themselves represent their intervals and relations ... Because one number can only have one name ... Because time signatures are more clearly distinguished than in ordinary music, and the value of rests and notes are determined in a simpler manner.... Music is more convenient and easy to notate, takes up less space; any type of paper is suitable for it In short, composers will find another not inconsiderable advantage [that] ... their harmony and their chord progressions will be identified by merely looking at the signs rather than by jumping from one clef [or system] to another.'

⁹⁵ Rousseau, *Dissertation sur musique moderne*, p.26-27.

one doubted the veracity of his claims, Rousseau confirms that he had been able to put theory into practice:

To demonstrate this by experiment, I taught music free of charge to Mlle de Roulins ... After three months of my notation she was able to read music of all kinds, and even to read at sight better than I could myself anything that was not swarming with difficulties. This was a striking success, but did not become known. Anyone else would have filled the newspapers with it, but though I had some talent for useful inventions I never had any for turning them to account.⁹⁶

The *Projet* was duly read to the *Académie des Sciences* on 22 August 1742, but received a less than enthusiastic reception – it was considered neither novel nor particularly practical. As Rousseau acknowledges, numerous attempts – without exception unsuccessful – had been made in the past to establish a system of notation using numbers:

They [the panel of Académiciens] unearthed from somewhere a certain Father Souhaitti [sic], a monk who had once had the idea of expressing notes by numbers. This was enough to persuade them that my system was not new. [...] But not only did they attribute more importance to his primitive invention than it deserved; they went further than that, and as soon as they tried to speak of the fundamental principles of my system, talked nothing but nonsense.⁹⁷

Rousseau also complains bitterly about those who had been appointed to examine the work – he does not seem to doubt their character or their integrity, merely their capacity to judge matters of music.⁹⁸ According to Rousseau, the only noteworthy critique was advanced by Rameau, who ‘saw its weak side the moment I explained it to him.’⁹⁹

‘Your notion’, he said, ‘is excellent in so far as it determines the value of notes simply and clearly, accurately represents the intervals and always shows the original phrase and its doubling together, all things that common notation does not do. But it is bad in so far as it demands a mental process which cannot always keep up with the rapidity of the execution ...’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.270.

⁹⁷ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.268. Later in the *Dissertation sur la Musique Moderne*, pp.111-112, Rousseau was to refer to Souhaitti’s system in the most critical terms. The system in question is elaborated in Jean-Jacques Souhaitti, *Nouveaux éléments de chant, ou l’essai d’une nouvelle qu’on a fait dans l’art de chanter*, (Paris, 1677).

⁹⁸ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.267, ‘The commission appointed to examine me consisted of M. de Mairan, M. Hellot and M. de Fouchy; all three certainly distinguished men. But not one of them knew enough about music to be capable of judging my scheme.’

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.268.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.269

'His objection', Rousseau continues, 'seemed irrefutable, and I instantly admitted it; although it is simple and striking it is one that only great experience of the art could have lighted on. It is not surprising that it did not occur to any of the *Académiciens*.'¹⁰¹ Such an overt and seemingly unqualified panegyric, certainly regarding Rameau, is rare and should be registered. Rousseau clearly welcomed and respected Rameau's judgement and criticism, and was honourable enough to still acknowledge it many years later.

Though something of a personal set-back, the *Académie's* rather tepid and unconvincing reception¹⁰² in fact spurred Rousseau on: first to write an open letter to the *Mecure de France* in February 1743 and then to publish, in book form and at great personal expense, a thoroughly overhauled version of the *Projet*, entitled *Dissertation sur la Musique Moderne*, in the summer of 1743.

... being entirely absorbed in my system of notation, I persisted in my endeavours to make a revolution in that art, and thus to attain a celebrity, which in Paris is always accompanied by a fortune if it is attained in the arts. I shut myself up in my room and worked for two or three months with indescribable ardour, at recasting the paper I had read to the Academy in the form of a book for the general public. The trouble was to find a bookseller who would publish my manuscript ... Bonnefond found me the elder Quillan, who made an agreement with me for half profits ... I lost the cost of my licence and did not make a farthing on the whole edition...¹⁰³

Looking at the content of the two works side by side, the impact of the revisions is, at first blush, slight, for the practical flaws of the *Projet* are still in evidence; indeed most of the text of the *Projet* is merely subsumed, verbatim, within the new work. The *Dissertation* itself is, of course, considerably – perhaps nine or ten times – longer and is illustrated with examples of the *Nouveau Système* in action to demonstrate its practicability.¹⁰⁴ There is, as both the function and the physical length of the work render possible, also much fleshing-out of the detail, especially where the theoretical core of his system is concerned. We see, for example, a comprehensive, astute and remarkably pragmatic, explanation and assessment of Rameau's theory of harmonic

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.269

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.268: 'They decided that it was good for vocal music but bad for instrumental music... As a result of their report the Academy granted me a certificate packed with very fine compliments, between the lines of which anyone could read that in reality they considered my system neither new nor useful.'

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.269.

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix Item 1 for an example of Rousseau's numeric transcription of the air 'valez, plaisirs valez' from Rameau's *Dardanus* (1739).

generation, a theory that Rousseau was to use as the cornerstone of the *Dissertation*.¹⁰⁵ Rousseau was, in fact, thoroughly *au fait* with the theoretical minutiae and implications of Rameau's work. But what is of more significance is that Rousseau was clearly already familiar with the limitations and unsatisfactory nature of some of Rameau's theories. To be sure, in no way, shape or form, does the *Dissertation* constitute a critique of Rameau or his work, for not only does Rousseau make extensive use of Rameau's theories, from time to time his turn of rhetorical phrase seems to echo and share the sentiments of the man as well. When we go on to look at Rousseau's later writings, especially in Chapter 4, it will be hard to imagine that it was the same Jean-Jacques Rousseau who had been proclaiming in the *Dissertation* that since music depended on numbers, it was only logical that it should be expressed using numbers:

Enfin le raisonnement nous mène encore jusqu'à connoître sensiblement que la musique dépendant des nombres, elle devrait avoir le même expression qu'eux; nécessité qui naît pas seulement d'une certaine convenance générale, mais du fond même des principes physiques de cet art.¹⁰⁶

The *Dissertation* remains, like its predecessor, an expository work – a 'plan général' – though destined this time for a public audience rather than consumption in the rarefied ambience of the *Académie*. But just to make absolutely sure that future criticism about the nature or presentation of this work might be deflected, he promises a volume tailored more to the teaching and dissemination of his *Système* than the present one: 'Comme je destine un autre ouvrage au détail de ma méthode, telle qu'elle doit être enseignée aux écoliers, on n'en trouvera ici qu'un plan générale...'¹⁰⁷

For an early work, and one that is neither overtly, nor primarily, concerned with philosophical issues, the *Dissertation* is, paradoxically, remarkably useful in charting the evolution of Rousseau's philosophy of music – and in many ways represents the genesis of that evolution. Indeed, the work takes on a new significance when considered in this light, for it seems to

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Rousseau, *Dissertation*, pp.46-54.

¹⁰⁶ Rousseau, *Dissertation*, p.40, 'Finally reason leads us again to knowing [sensiblement] that music as depends on numbers, it should be expressed in the same manner; the necessity of this does not merely stem from a certain general suitability, but from the very physical principles of the art.'

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.46, 'Since I envisage another work detailing my method, such as that that should be taught to pupils, one will only find here a general overview of it ...'

indicate that many of the elements of the philosophy of music were already being prefigured, adumbrated and, one might conclude, cogitated at this juncture. These elements were not ‘philosophic’ *per se*, but they amounted to the theoretical justification that would serve to strengthen epistemological and ontological argumentation in later writings. Now this is not to say that the *Dissertation* does not exhibit the influence of Rameau’s work, nor that it is not one essentially founded upon Cartesian principles: Rousseau’s debt to Rameau’s *Traité, Nouveau Système* and *Génération Harmonique* is ever present; and the diatonic major scale is posited as being naturally derived from the harmonics of *Corps Sonore* and, treated as a precept, forms the cornerstone of his notational system. But what is most surprising is that much of the critical ammunition Rousseau would fire at Rameau during the 1750s and 60s, particularly on the question of temperaments and the slippery issue of the determination of the minor mode and minor third from the *Corps Sonore*, is already there, albeit couched in neutral and deferential terms. In the next extract, we see Rousseau exploiting Rameau’s theory but at the same time demonstrating his knowledge of the epistemological problems associated with it:

A l’égard du mode mineur, il ne nous est point indiqué par la nature; et comme nous ne trouvons aucun son qui en fasse entendre les harmoniques, nous pouvons concevoir qu’il n’a point de son fondamental absolu, et qu’il ne peut exister qu’en vertu du rapport qu’il a avec le mode majeur dont il est engendré...¹⁰⁸

The significance of this passage is that it articulates a marked distinction between the manner in which Rousseau and Rameau conceptualised the theory of harmonic generation and its consequences: Rousseau categorically rejects the idea that the minor mode and minor third are given by nature and affirms that they are not suggested by the partials emitted by the *Corps Sonore*; Rameau, on the other hand, would never surrender to this fact, even though it was pointed out many times to him – he would instead, like an adroit politician, either side-step the question or somehow fudge the answer. As we may judge from the passage written some twenty-five years later that I have chosen to cite below, neither Rousseau nor Rameau’s position changed on the matter. It is worth pointing out that in this ‘rendering’ there is more

¹⁰⁸ Rousseau, *Dissertation*, p.56, ‘With regard to the minor mode, it is not at all indicated by nature; and as we cannot find any sound that produces its harmonics, we can conclude that it doesn’t have an absolute fundamental sound, and that it can only exist by virtue of its relationship with the major mode of which it is a product’. At this point in the text Rousseau says that this is all very easy to show and refers the reader to both Rameau’s *Nouveau Système* and the *Traité de l’Harmonie*, neither of which, of course, make this point explicit.

of a critical edge to Rousseau's tone than there is deference:

La mode majeur est engendré immédiatement par la résonance du corps sonore qui rend la tierce majeure du son fondamentale; mais le mode mineur n'est point donné par la nature, il ne se trouve que par analogie et renversement. Cela est vrai dans le système de M. Tartini ainsi que dans celui de M. Rameau. Ce dernier auteur, dans ses divers ouvrages successifs, a expliqué cette origine du mode mineur de différentes manières, dont aucune n'a contenté son interprète M. d'Alembert.¹⁰⁹

The *Dissertation* then, is a bit of a potpourri: to be sure Rousseau's system is clearly framed and embedded within existing and established bodies of theoretical discourse and does not depart from them, but it is packaged in a pragmatic and indeed philosophically and theoretically astute manner. There is, as one might expect, no critical dimension to the work, for there was no reason for it: let us not forget that this was Rousseau's first published work; that he was an unknown in Paris; and that he had just suffered a major set-back at the hands of the *Académie*. The last thing he would have wanted to do was to turn a loaded weapon upon himself and commit intellectual suicide.

However, this pragmatism and deference towards Rameau's theoretical writings does not correspond to the conventional depiction of Rousseau as rancorous antagonist of the septuagenarian composer. But that Rousseau would in fact draw on Rameau's theories, and employ them as the structural lynchpin of his new notational system is certainly not as remarkable as it might seem. As I have already suggested, Rameau was not only the most revered dramatic composer in France at that time, he was also considered *the* authority on music theory – everybody, especially Rousseau, was under his influence.¹¹⁰ As Rousseau recounts, he came under his spell early on:

¹⁰⁹ Rousseau, 'Mode' in *Dictionnaire de Musique*, t.12, p.464, 'The major mode is produced directly from the resonance of the sounding body which gives the major third from the fundamental sound; but the minor mode is not given by nature, it is only found through analogy and inversion. This is true of the systems of Tartini and Rameau. The latter author, in his series of diverse works, explains the origin of the minor mode in different ways, none of which has satisfied d'Alembert his interpreter.' Rousseau goes on to cite a lengthy passage from d'Alembert's *Eléments* and offers the reader an explanation why it was that d'Alembert was never satisfied by Rameau's argumentation.

¹¹⁰ Indeed, even when Rousseau came to compile his *Dictionnaire de Musique* in the late 50s and early 60s he still used Rameau's theory of harmonic generation as the basis for many articles. Now that Rousseau would have liked to have used Tartini's system instead is not surprising given the events of the 1750s; but that he felt he could not is indicative of the esteem in which the man continued to be held in France at this time. 'Le système de M. Tartini, quoique meilleur à mon avis [than Rameau's system], n'étant pas encore aussi généralement connu, et n'ayant pas, du moins en France, la même autorité que celui de M. Rameau, n'a pas dû lui être substitué dans un livre destiné principalement pour la nation Française.' (Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de Musique*, 'Préface', p.11).

While there was fighting in Italy there was singing in France. Rameau's operas began to excite notice, and called attention to his theoretical works, the obscurity of which put them out of the reach of all but the few. I heard by chance of his *Traité de l'Harmonie*, and I knew of no rest until I had acquired the book. By another chance, I fell ill with an inflammation. The attack was short and sharp, but my convalescence was long, and it was months before I was fit to go out. During this time I ran through and devoured my Treatise. But it was so long, so diffuse, and so ill-arranged that I felt it would take a considerable time to study and unravel it. I suspended my efforts and refreshed myself with music.¹¹¹

Later, Rousseau recalls:

I was beginning to read music fairly well, the next thing was to learn composition. The difficulty was to find someone to teach me. For I did not expect to learn by myself, with only my Rameau for assistance, as there was no one in Savoy who knew anything of Harmony.¹¹²

Finally, Rousseau admits to having a little success with his first attempts at composition:

I still did not give up studying my Rameau. By hard work I finally managed to understand it and to make a few small efforts at composition, the success of which encouraged me.¹¹³

So we may ask how and why, from a position where he was advocating many of Rameau's theories in 1742, and following his instruction as it were, Rousseau was to arrive at his much-vaunted position of antagonist less than a decade later. The answer is, I believe, two-fold. First, there was, clearly, a progressive deterioration in his personal relationship with Rameau; events in the 1740s convinced Rousseau that Rameau was pursuing a personal vendetta against him and was endeavouring to clip the wings of his fledgling career as composer before it had even had a chance to get off the ground. Second, Rousseau's evolving conception of music and nature resulted in the opening up of an epistemological schism which would widen and deepen in the 1750s and, in turn, contribute to Rousseau's disaffection with both the aesthetic implications of the *Corps Sonore* and the dominant dramatic genre – *Tragédie Lyrique*. As we will see in chapters 2, 3 and 4, Rameau's music would become irreconcilable with Rousseau's image of the *Cri de la nature* and the natural, instinctive model of expression which it would give rise to. It is this elemental incompatibility which forms the very nucleus of

¹¹¹ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.178.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.199

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.201. Amongst these tentative compositional experiments, Rousseau singles out a cantata in the *Confessions* and describes it as having been 'well-liked' (p.201).

Rousseau's operatic criticism and it underpins each critical text. Rousseau's disaffection for Rameau's theories did not therefore manifest itself overnight. It was, on the contrary, a gradual process punctuated by events, personal circumstances and great revolutions in his thinking, revolutions which, at face value, seem to have little to do with the development of Rousseau's musical thought, but upon closer examination prove to be decisive. The seeds of disaffection were sown the very instant Rousseau heard Italian music, but it was not until he would consider the question posed by the *Académie de Dijon* on the road to Vincennes, that he would behold for the first time the conceptual justification for such intuitive sentiments. But we should return to the narrative and chart the progress of this relationship as it deteriorates.

1.2.1 *Les Muses Galantes*

Between April and June of 1742, Rousseau was struck down by a serious inflammation of the lungs which, by all accounts, nearly finished him off.¹¹⁴ Rousseau recalls going to see one of Royer's operas on the night before he fell ill, and during his convalescence he was to ruminate about the effectiveness of its music:¹¹⁵

Despite my bias in favour of other men's talents, which has always made me distrust my own, I could not help feeling that his music was feeble and lacking in both fire and originality. Sometimes I even dared to say to myself: 'I think I could do better than that.'¹¹⁶

And so it was that during the height of his fever he was to put his modesty and timorousness to one side and, in his delirium, began adumbrating music in his mind:

At the height of my fever I composed songs, duets and choruses. I am certain that I composed two or three pieces, impromptu, which might have won the admiration of the masters if they could have heard them played. Oh if only one could keep a record of a feverish man's dreams, what grand and sublime things would sometimes be seen to result from his delirium!¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.276. Cranston, *Rousseau*, p.166 says that the inflammation was pneumonia. Rousseau was bed-ridden for more than a month.

¹¹⁵ Rousseau means Joseph-Nicholas Pancrace Royer (1705–1755), who was *Maître de Musique* at the Paris Opéra for two stints between 1730–33 and then from 1753 until his death in 1755. The opera to which Rousseau is referring, was most likely to have been *Zaïde, Reine de Grenade* (1739), a *Ballet-Héroïque*. There remains, however, the possibility that Rousseau was either confused about the year in which he saw Royer's opera performed, or that he was conflating two separate events, for Royer's next *Ballet Héroïque, Le Pouvoir de l'Amour*, was premiered a year later in on 23 April 1743.

¹¹⁶ Rousseau, *Confessions*. p.276.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.276.

When the fever finally abated, and when, one must assume, he was well enough to once more put quill to paper, Rousseau claims that music and opera continued to occupy his thoughts:

I decided to explore the whole matter and to try to compose an opera of my own, both the words and the music. I sketched out an heroic ballet, treating three different subjects in three separate acts, each in its own style of music. Each subject dealt with the love of a poet, and I called the opera *Les Muses Galantes*. My first act, in the grand manner, was given to Tasso; the second which was tender in mood, to Ovid; the third, entitled 'Anacreon', was intended to breathe a dithyrambic gaiety.¹¹⁸

Rousseau's work on this fledgling *Ballet-Héroïque* was interrupted by an invitation to become the private secretary to M. Montaigu, the then French Ambassador to Venice. Rousseau arrived in Venice at the beginning of September 1743 and it was to prove a crucial appointment in more ways than one: not only did it enable him to move within the upper echelons of Venetian society, observing the aristocracy and their apparent impropriety first hand; he was able to frequent the opera, attending almost every evening.¹¹⁹ And it was on one such occasion that Rousseau experienced his oft-quoted 'conversion' to Italian Opera:

I did not change my tastes in Venice ... I had brought from Paris the national prejudice against Italian music; but I had also received from Nature that acute sensibility against which prejudices are powerless. I soon contracted the passion which it inspires in all those born to understand it. When I listened to the bacarolles I decided that I had not heard singing 'till then; and soon I was so crazy for the opera that I grew tired of always chattering, eating and playing in the boxes when all I wanted to do was to listen, and often stole away from company to some other part of the theatre, where I would shut myself alone in my own box and ... give myself up to the pleasure of enjoying it ... One day, at the Teatro di San Crisostomo, I fell asleep, and far more soundly than if I had been in bed. The loud and brilliant arias did not wake me. But who could describe the delicious sensation produced in me by the delicate harmony and angelic singing of that song which finally did! What an awakening, what bliss, what ecstasy when I opened my ears and my eyes together! My first thought was that I was in paradise.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.276-277.

¹¹⁹ As Secretary to the Ambassador he had access to the Ambassadorial boxes in all five main theatres. As was customary, Rousseau had second choice of the seats; the Ambassador would decide on the day which performance he would like to attend, and Rousseau could select a performance from the remainder.

¹²⁰ Rousseau, *Confessions*, pp.294-295. In the article 'Unité de Mélodie' from the *Dictionnaire de Musique* (t.13, p.343), Rousseau also recalls his experiences at the Venice Opera as performances full of interest from start to finish.

Rousseau evidently found the melodic style of the music enchanting, and it was to prove a revelation almost as inspirational as the one he would experience six years later on the road to Vincennes.¹²¹ Rousseau remained in the employ of the Ambassador for one month shy of a year and finally left Venice under a rather dark and rain-laden cloud. He had fallen out with Montaigne in the most acrimonious of fashions, and if Montaigne did not ultimately carry out his threat of defenestration, he certainly did carry out his promise to lodge a formal request at the Senate to have Rousseau expelled from the Republic.¹²² The request was not granted, but in any case Rousseau left Venice of his own volition just two weeks later.

Upon his return to Paris in August 1744, Rousseau set about putting the finishing touches to his *Ballet-Héroïque: Les Muses Galantes*. Once again he installed himself in lodgings at the Hôtel Saint-Quentin, not far from the *Jardin de Luxembourg* – a *quartier* that was ‘conducive to peaceful work’¹²³ and, as he recalls, it did not take him long to complete:

In less than three months my opera was entirely finished, words and music. All that remained were some accompaniments and connecting parts to be added, hack work which profoundly bored me.¹²⁴

Not particularly relishing the thought of tackling the ‘hack-work’ himself, Rousseau sought assistance. He approached the eighteen-year-old François-André Philidor (1726-95) who initially – and one must assume rather reluctantly – agreed to complete the task in return for a share in any eventual profits. However, as Rousseau notes, their collaboration was short-lived and unfruitful: he was forced to finish the hack-work himself.¹²⁵

The *Ballet-Héroïque* was to prove a quintessentially French creation in every respect and, in that sense, somewhat belies the experience of Rousseau’s Venetian ‘conversion’. As befits the genre, *Les Muses Galantes* is a curious mixture: on the one hand, its origins can be traced back

¹²¹ Samuel Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Musique*, p.26, speculates that the singer was Rousseau himself, though it is, of course, impossible to substantiate this.

¹²² For a detailed account of Rousseau’s ‘employment record’ in Venice, see Cranston, *Rousseau*, pp.169-192 and this should ideally be read alongside Rousseau’s own account in the *Confessions*, pp.277-294.

¹²³ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.309. Rousseau was to meet his future ‘common-law’ wife Thérèse le Vasseur (they would never marry) at the Saint-Quentin.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.312

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.312. ‘[Philidor] came twice and did some work on the Ovid act, but he could not give himself up to such an exacting task for a distant, and even uncertain, profit. So he never returned and I finished the job myself.’

to the model established by Campra and La Motte some forty-six years earlier with their *Opéras-Ballets*,¹²⁶ and in terms of its form, the *Ballet-Héroïque* took its lead from the *Opéra-Ballet* too – for unlike *Tragédie Lyrique* the prologue eulogising the King is dispensed with, and there are three contrasting acts or *entrées* as opposed to five.¹²⁷ On the other hand, though *Opéra-Ballet* undoubtedly spawned the *Ballet-Héroïque*, the latter, in some important respects, had much in common with *Tragédie Lyrique*: it was, as its name suggests, concerned once again with heroes of the past (usually of the classical age), rather than with contemporary naturalistic characters and settings; moreover, it placed more emphasis on pomp and splendour, and to achieve its effects used sophisticated stage machinery akin to that found in *Tragédies Lyriques*. What is clear (and on this point I concur with Baud-Bovy), *Les Muses Galantes* was intended to pay homage to his idol Jean-Philippe Rameau and his *Les Indes Galantes* (1735).¹²⁸ Indeed, over and above the similarity in the title of the two works, the early performance history of the *Les Indes Galantes* adds a little weight and substance to this conclusion. The first performance was given in August 1735; after 28 performances an additional *entrée* was added in 1736 and the work's popularity grew and grew until 1737. Crucially, *Les Indes Galantes* was revived in 1743, the year in which Rousseau was penning his *Les Muses Galantes*.

The work was completed to Rousseau's satisfaction and the next step was, obviously, to attempt to get the work performed, and for that he would need to venture into the world of the *salon* and *coterie*. Rousseau set about enlisting the support of one of the wealthiest and influential patrons in Paris: Alexandre-Jean-Joseph Le Riche de la Poplinière.¹²⁹ Rousseau had already been introduced to M. de la Poplinière by his Genevan acquaintance Gaffecourt, and according to the *Confessions*, he set about trying to enlist the support of Mme de la Poplinière and, through her, to secure Rameau's sponsorship in order to 'make something by it.'¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *L'Europe Galante* (1697), *Les Muses* (1703), *Les Fêtes Vénitienes* (1710) and *Les Ages* (1718).

¹²⁷ Though this is generally the case, many *Opéras-Ballets* had four or sometimes five *entrées* – and even a prologue. For example, Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes* (1735) originally had a prologue and three acts, and after some 28 performances, Rameau was persuaded to add a fourth *entrée*. Rameau's *Platée* (1745) had a prologue and three acts.

¹²⁸ Samuel Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Musique*, p.17.

¹²⁹ Donald Grout, *Western Music*, pp.490-1, describes de la Poplinière as the leading patron of music in France and his salon as 'a gathering place for a motley company of aristocrats, literary men (Voltaire and Rousseau), painters (Van Loo and La Tour), adventurers (Casanova), and above all musicians.' Rameau had been protected by Poplinière's patronage since 1731, and was Mme's music tutor or as Rousseau puts it in the *Confessions* (p.312): 'Mme de la Poplinière was his most humble pupil.'

¹³⁰ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.312

Rousseau's strategy was only partially successful: he succeeded in having parts of the work performed; but incurred the wrath of his idol Rameau who accused him of being 'a little plagiarist without talent or taste':

Rameau was the sun and stars ... in that house [M. de la Poplinière's]. Supposing that he would be delighted to sponsor the work of one of his disciples, I offered to show him my opera. He refused to look at it, saying that he could not read scores, he found it too tiring. Thereupon M. de la Poplinière said that it could be played to him and offered to collect an orchestra for me to perform some selections. I desired nothing better. Rameau agreed, though he grumbled and went on repeating that it must be a fine work, being composed by one not brought up to the profession who had learnt music on his own. I hurriedly copied out five or six of the best pieces in parts. They gave me some ten instrumentalists; Albert Bérard and M. de Bourbonnais were the singers. Rameau began after the overture to convey by extravagant praises that the thing could not be mine. He did not listen to a single piece without signs of impatience; but after an air for counter-tenor most robustly and melodiously sung and very brilliantly accompanied, he could contain himself no longer. He addressed me with a lack of manners that shocked everyone, declaring that part of what he had heard was by someone who was a master of the art and the rest by an ignoramus who did not even understand music. Admittedly my work was unequal and inconsistent. Sometimes it was inspired and sometimes very flat, as any man's must be who relies only on flashes of genius, backed by no mastery of the science. Rameau claimed that he could see nothing in me but a little plagiarist without talent or taste.¹³¹

From what Rousseau tells us, he felt that he had been dreadfully mistreated and was convinced that Rameau's petulant and impertinent outburst was the product of jealousy, ill-breeding and the fact that he felt his status within the la Poplinière household was under threat. Rousseau is careful in the *Confessions* to present the best possible case for himself in order that the whole affair be taken out of the 'tit-for-tat' arena and be seen as a one-sided vendetta on Rameau's part. Rousseau continues the account very much in this vein, and we might infer, possibly as Rousseau had intended us to do, that there was a conspiracy afoot:

The musicians, and particularly the master of the house, thought otherwise. M. de Richelieu, who at the time saw a great deal of Monsieur and, notoriously, of Madame de La Poplinière, heard my work and wanted to hear it complete, intending to have it played at Court if he was pleased with it. It was performed by a full chorus and orchestra, at the King's expense, at M. de Bonneval's, the Master of Court Entertainments. It was conducted by Francoeur, and the effect was surprising. The Duke was continually cheering and applauding; and at the end of one chorus, in the Tasso act [Act 1], he got up, came to me, and shook me by the hand, and said: 'M. Rousseau, this is delightful music. I have never heard anything lovelier. I should like to

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.312.

perform your work at Versailles.' M. de La Poplinière, who was present said nothing. Rameau had been invited, but had refused to come. Mme de La Poplinière gave me a very cold reception at her toilet next day and pretended to depreciate my work. She said that though a little glitter had dazzled M. de Richelieu at first, he had soon come to himself, and that she advised me not to build any hopes on my opera.¹³²

Yet, as we shall see, Richelieu had been impressed. Many commentators claim that this rather unfortunate episode marks the beginning of open hostilities between Rameau and Rousseau and was the root cause of the ideological rupture.¹³³ Indeed, it is extremely difficult not to be won over by Baud-Bovy's eloquent and persuasive account of this episode, an episode from which, he argues, Rousseau would never recover:

De ce coup de massue, Rousseau ne devait guérir jamais. L'hostilité de Rameau non seulement brisait sa carrière, mais cette accusation de plagiat, soigneusement entretenue par ses ennemis, devait empoisonner le reste de sa vie. [...] La déception que son idole lui a infligée lui fait prendre en haine toute la tradition qu'elle incarne. C'est par Dieu vrai, il n'est de bonne musique qu'italienne, les Bouffons l'ont bien fait voir.¹³⁴

Yet in spite of Rameau's *impolitesse*, the account Rousseau presents us with both in the *Confessions* and in a letter written to a M. Bouchard du Plessis¹³⁵ – all of which one must concede presents a strong and convincing case – Rousseau explains how he apparently came to share some of Rameau's reservations about his *Ballet-Héroïque* in the *Avertissement* to the work:

Cet ouvrage est si médiocre en son genre, et le genre en est si mauvais, que pour comprendre comment il m'a pu plaire, il faut sentir toute la force de l'habitude et des préjugés. *Nourri, dès mon enfance, dans le goût de la musique*

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp.312-313.

¹³³ Cf. Cranston, *Rameau*, Alfred Oliver, *The Encyclopédistes as Critics of Music*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947); Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, Norman Demuth, *French Opera: Its Development to the Revolution*, (New York: The Artemis Press, 1963); Dalton Thomas, *Origins of Languages*, O'Dea, *Rousseau: Music, Illusion and Desire* among many others.

¹³⁴ Samuel Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, p.70. 'Rousseau would never recover from this knockout blow. Rameau's hostility not only shattered his career, but the accusation of being a plagiarist, carefully maintained by his enemies, would poison the rest of his life. [...] The disappointment that his idol had inflicted upon him made him hate the tradition that he represented. It is by the true God that there is no good music except Italian – the Bouffons had shown this.' However, Baud-Bovy is correct to emphasise the point that the charge of plagiarism would come back to haunt Rousseau. Indeed, in the *Confessions*, (pp.356-357) Rousseau describes how the suspicion of plagiarism fell upon him once more when *Le Devin du Village* was performed, but this time the insinuations came from Baron D'Holbach. And once again this later accusation is discussed in some detail in the 'Second Dialogue' from *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* in *Oeuvres*, t.17, pp. 520-525 (including footnotes).

¹³⁵ Rousseau, *Correspondance Complète*, II. pp.87-89. 'Savez-vous que mon Ballet est achevé, qu'il a fallu le faire exécuter chez Mme de la Popelinère, que Rameau s'y est trouvé? Que ma musique l'a mis de mauvaise humeur, qu'il soutient qu'elle est trop bonne pour pouvoir être de moi; qu'en conséquence il a fallu me soumettre a des épreuves dont le succès n'a fait qu'aigrir sa fureur, et qu'enfin, de son Zélé partisan que j'ai toujours été, je vais me voir si l'on n'y met ordre, la victime de sa brutalité.'

*Françoise et de l'espèce de poésie qui lui est propre, je prenois le bruit pour de l'harmonie, le merveilleux pour l'intérêt, et des chansons pour un opéra Ce fut même sur l'exécution de quelques morceaux que j'en avois fait répéter chez M. de la Popelinière que M. Rameau, qui les entendit, conçut contre moi cette violente haine dont il n'a cessé de donner des marques jusqu'à sa mort.*¹³⁶

What should we make of this? Clearly the so-called apologia is really nothing of the sort: yes, of course, Rousseau is visibly critical of the work, but 'médiocre' can hardly be described as the harshest of self-deprecatory adjectives. The critical focus of the first half of this passage is, manifestly, on the genre itself and, by extension, the French musical tradition. Rousseau is arguing that he had been duped, as it were, out of habit, prejudice and experience to consider the genre and its character pleasing and worthy of emulation. The tables are completely turned in favour of Rousseau in the middle section of the passage and the attention is focussed entirely on the inadequacies of French opera (we will come back to this point many times in later chapters). And in the closing lines, Rousseau cannot resist portraying Rameau as the true villain of the piece, a conspirator and harbourer of grudges. As I have already remarked, this passage was written, at the very least, fifteen years after the event and as such is should not be taken as especially representative of Rousseau's frame of mind, his taste or the extent of his ambition at that time. Rameau was Rousseau's idol; Rousseau considered himself no less than a disciple – his 'zélé partisan'¹³⁷ – and he was, above all else, eager for his work to receive Rameau's approbation. And what better way than to select a genre and compose in a style that echoed the work of the great man and would speak volumes for the young composer? For if Rousseau had written an opera in the Venetian mould, Rameau's outburst would probably have been even more severe and vitriolic. Though, indubitably, this event was bitterly disappointing and deeply disheartening, it did not sound, as Baud-Bovy suggests, the death knell of the Genevan's career. Rousseau would recover, he would come out fighting, and he would also seek revenge.¹³⁸ More of this later.

¹³⁶ Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, (Paris: Ledoux & Tenré, 1819), t.10, p.427. 'This work is so mediocre in its way, and its genre so poor, that to understand how it could have pleased me, one has to feel the force of habit and of prejudice. Brought up, since my infancy, on French music and the sort of poetry that it is suitable for it, I mistook noise for harmony, spectacle for interest, and songs for an opera ... It was on playing some pieces from it when rehearsing at M. de la Poplinière's, that Rameau, who heard them, conceived all this violent hatred against me which he never stopped showing until his death.' (My emphases). This passage must have been written sometime after 1761, because Rousseau chronicles the performance history of the work, including a performance 'devant M. le Prince de Conti' in 1761.

¹³⁷ Rousseau, letter to 'Bouchaud de Plessis' in *Correspondance Complète*, II, pp.87 'devoted follower'

¹³⁸ Indeed, in the letter to 'Bouchaud de Plessis' in *Ibid.*, pp.87-89 cited above, Rousseau goes onto state defiantly: 'Je prens courage malgré cela, la fureur même de mes ennemis m'a fait connoître mes forces, sans leur jalousie j'ignorerois encore que je suis capable de lutter contre eux.'

Now, from what Rousseau tells us, Richelieu had been genuinely impressed by the little he had heard and was not, as Mme de la Poplinière suggests, merely momentarily dazzled by it. He was, as this next passage articulates, still thinking along the lines of an eventual performance at Court:

He [Richelieu] made flattering remarks about my talents, and seemed still disposed to have my piece played before the King. 'There is only the Tasso act that will not pass at Court,' he said. 'You will have to write another.' These few words were enough for me to go and shut myself in my room; and in three weeks I replaced the Tasso act by another on the subject of Hesiod inspired by a muse.¹³⁹ I found means of introducing into it some account of the history of my talents and of the jealousy with which Rameau had been pleased to honour them. This new act did not soar so high and was better sustained than the Tasso. The music was equally fine and the composition much better; and if the two other acts had been as good the whole piece might have been played with success. But as I was putting the finishing touches to it, another undertaking interrupted this one.¹⁴⁰

These are clearly not the words and subsequent actions of a broken man. Rousseau's project was once again interrupted; this time it was Richelieu who sought Rousseau's assistance:

In the winter after the battle of Fontenoy there were many gala performances at Versailles, among them several operas at the Théâtre des Petites-Ecuries. One of these was Voltaire's play *La Princesse de Navarre* set to music by Rameau. The piece had just been altered and had its title changed to *Les Fêtes de Ramire*.¹⁴¹ This change of subject demanded several alterations in the incidental interludes, both in the words and music; and someone had to be found capable of dealing with both.¹⁴²

At the time, both Rameau and Voltaire were working at full tilt on *Le Temple de la Gloire*,¹⁴³ an *Opéra-Ballet* in the classic mould, and were, evidently, too busy to undertake the necessary alterations themselves. Rousseau stepped into the breach and walked headlong into yet another controversy. If the *Les Muses Galantes* episode opened a wound, then what was to follow merely rubbed salt into it.

¹³⁹ As we will see in Chapter 5, Rousseau would use an air from this act – the 'air des songes' – as the basis of the *andantino* of the Overture to *Pygmalion* (1762).

¹⁴⁰ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.313.

¹⁴¹ The work received its only performance on 22 December 1745 in the Théâtre de la Grande Ecurie at Versailles.

¹⁴² Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.313.

¹⁴³ The work was performed on 27 November 1745 in the Théâtre de la Grande Ecurie at Versailles. Indeed, it was one of four such works written by Rameau for the Court in that year (*La Princesse de Navarre*, *Platée* and *Les Fêtes de Polymnie* are the others).

Rousseau was clearly apprehensive about taking on such a high-profile and potentially sensitive task; after all he was being asked to redraft some of Voltaire's verses and rewrite much of Rameau's incidental music. To that effect he wrote a lengthy and somewhat obsequious covering letter to Voltaire seeking his *ex post facto* permission and the approval of his alterations.¹⁴⁴ And so he might, for as Cranston puts it, 'any constraint he felt at the thought of revising a score by Rameau was offset by joy at the prospect of working on a libretto by Voltaire, at that time still a hero in Rousseau's eyes.'¹⁴⁵ Any deference shown to Voltaire was not extended to Rameau; there was no letter to the elder composer and no permission was sought. Voltaire replied in a manner and tone that flattered Rousseau, and in the *Confessions* Rousseau chooses to reproduce this letter in its entirety.¹⁴⁶ Rousseau completed the alterations quickly, but in doing so exercised great care and attention to detail:

With M. de Voltaire's authority, and under no necessity of considering Rameau, who was only out to injure me, I set to work and in two months my job was done. As for the verse, there was very little of it. I only tried to make the difference of styles imperceptible, and I had the presumption to believe that I had succeeded. My work on the music was longer and more laborious; not only had I to compose several introductory pieces, among them an overture, but all the recitatives devolved upon me and were extremely difficult, since I had to link, often by a few verses and the rapidest of modulations, orchestral pieces and choruses in the most different keys. For in order that Rameau should not accuse me of having spoilt his arias I was unwilling to alter or transpose any of them. The recitatives were a success. They were well accented, most vigorous and, what is more, perfectly modulated. The thought of these two great men, with whom they were so kind as to associate me, had acted favourably on my genius; and I can say that in this thankless and inglorious task of which the public could not even be informed, I very seldom fell below the level of my models.¹⁴⁷

This passage is most revealing: we can clearly see Rousseau's underlying animosity towards Rameau. This is the Rousseau of the *Confessions* bubbling to the surface. But what is also manifest is a reluctance to inflame the situation; that he chose to leave the arias untouched so as to avoid any further conflict with Rameau, is the mark of the Rousseau of 1745. And in 1745, these 'two great men' – Rameau and Voltaire – were, as Rousseau puts it, not mere

¹⁴⁴ 11 December 1745. (*Correspondance Complètes*, II, pp.92-93).

¹⁴⁵ Cranston, *Rousseau*, p.202.

¹⁴⁶ Rousseau was genuinely surprised at Voltaire's kindness, but after falling out with him, he would attribute it to the fact that Voltaire believed he was in 'high favour with the Duc de Richelieu'. (*Confessions*, p.314-315).

¹⁴⁷ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.315.

'models', but idols.¹⁴⁸ The outcome of all of this is, again, rather unfortunate: Rousseau was not credited for his revisions, neither was he remunerated. The villain of the piece this time was not Rameau directly, but was Mme de La Poplinière who, during the rehearsals, drove a veritable coach and horses through Rousseau's work and demanded further changes to it:

The opera, with the changes I had made, was rehearsed at the Grand Opera House. I was the only one of the three authors present. Voltaire was away, and Rameau did not come ... The words of the first monologue were most mournful. ... I had been obliged to compose music to suit it. Yet it was on this point that Mme de La Poplinière founded her criticism. She protested with some bitterness that I had written funeral music. M de Richelieu judiciously began by inquiring whose were the verses of this monologue. I showed him the manuscript he had sent me, which proved that they were Voltaire's. 'In that case', he said, 'only Voltaire is to blame.' During the rehearsal everything that was mine was successively censured by Mme de La Poplinière and defended by Richelieu. But in the end I found the opposition too strong, and was informed that several alterations were necessary in my work, about which I must consult M. Rameau. Deeply distressed about this verdict in place of the praises I had expected, and which were certainly due to me, I returned home sick at heart. Tired out and consumed by grief, I fell ill, and for six weeks was not fit to leave my room.¹⁴⁹

In the aftermath, it was left to Rameau to hastily pick up the pieces. He was commissioned to make the necessary alterations demanded by Mme de La Poplinière and additionally, he requested that Rousseau return his original overture to *La Princesse de Navarre* to serve for the performance. It was, Rousseau suspected, Rameau's intention to play it in place of the Italianate one he had just composed, and as Rousseau later delighted in pointing out, he saw right through Rameau's ruse:

Luckily I saw the trick and refused. As it was only five or six days till the performance, there was no time to compose another and mine had to be left in. It was in the Italian style which was something new in France at that time. Nevertheless it was liked, and I heard from M. de Valmalette, the King's chamberlain ... that the connoisseurs had been very pleased with my work and that the general public had not been able to distinguish it from Rameau's. But Rameau himself, in concert with Mme de La Poplinière, took measures to prevent it being known that I had contributed to it. On the texts which are handed round to the audience, and on which the authors' names are always given, Voltaire alone was mentioned; Rameau preferred his name to be suppressed rather than see it associated with mine.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Indeed, in the *Confessions*, Rousseau describes how he would devour Voltaire's writings: 'Nothing that Voltaire wrote escaped us. The pleasure I derived from these readings fired me with the desire of learning to write a good style, and for trying to imitate the fine effects of this writer who so delighted me.' (p.205)

¹⁴⁹ Rousseau, *Confessions*, pp.315-316.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.316.

If Rousseau had had any respect for Rameau before this debacle, his only sentiment now was bitterness; the discipleship was now at an end. Clearly he felt that his suspicions of conspiracy, following the *Les Muses Galantes* episode, had been entirely vindicated: Rameau aided and abetted by Mme de La Poplinière – or was it the other way around – had hatched a plot in order to damage his nascent career as composer. It would not be the last time that Rousseau had such suspicions but the outcome then would be far more serious.

1.2.2. The *Encyclopédie*: ‘Un travail extraordinaire’¹⁵¹

During the course of the next three years, Rousseau was employed as secretary, accountant, cashier and music tutor to Mme Dupin and M. de Francueil. His maturing and deepening friendships with Diderot, Grimm and d’Alembert, and his occasional presence at, and association with, the *Côterie Holbachique*,¹⁵² led to an invitation to draft the majority of articles concerned with music and musical subject matter for Diderot and his co-editor d’Alembert’s nascent project: the *Encyclopédie*. However, Rousseau had not been their first nor preferred candidate for the redaction; he was, in fact, an eleventh-hour understudy entrusted with the ‘travail extraordinaire’ solely because Rameau would not see fit to lend his name to the enterprise. Rameau’s refusal no doubt dealt a significant body-blow to the editors for, understandably, they would have wished to capitalise upon the composer’s great fame and unrivalled reputation as the leading music theorist in France.¹⁵³ By merely flaunting Rameau’s

¹⁵¹ Rousseau, letter to Mme de Warens, 17 January 1749 in *Oeuvres*, t.18, p.101.

¹⁵² Baron d’Holbach (1723-1789) began throwing lavish dinners in Paris every week in 1749 after his return from the University of Leyden. His considerable funds supported many painters and writers, including Rousseau for a short time. The Abbé Morrellet, *Mémoires*, 1, p.128 recalls that ‘as a consequence of his [the Baron’s] noble use of his fortune for the good of science and of letters, he assembled the most striking men of French Letters, Diderot, Rousseau, Helvetius, Barthez, Venelle, Rouelle and his disciples, Roux, Darcet, Duclos, Saurin, Raynal, Suard, Boulanger, Marmontel, La Condamine, Le Chevallier de Chastellux etc.’ Cited in Alan Kors, *d’Holbach’s Coterie: An Enlightenment In Paris*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p.84.

¹⁵³ Witness, in the devastatingly sarcastic *Le Neveu de Rameau*, what is in my view, at best, thinly disguised autobiography; Diderot had clearly not forgiven the composer for refusing to endorse the *Encyclopédie*. Indeed as Arthur Wilson has shown (*Diderot*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972, p.180), though the work was not intended for publication it provided Diderot with a place to purge his frustration and anger. Diderot, attacking Rameau’s penmanship as much as the difficult man himself, has his ‘I’ scathingly remark that: ‘[Rameau]...has written so many unintelligible visions and apocalyptic truths on the theory of music, not a word of which he or anyone else has ever understood, and...a certain number of operas in which there is harmony, snatches of song, disconnected ideas, clash of arms, dashings to and fro, triumphs, lances, glories, murmurs and victories to take your breath away, and some dance tunes which will last for ever. Having buried the Florentine master [Lully] he will himself be buried by the Italian virtuosi, which he foresaw. Hence his gloom, misery and surdness, for nobody, even a pretty woman who gets up to find a pimple on her nose, is so cross as an author threatened with outliving his fame.’ Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew & d’Alembert’s Dream*, transl. Leonard Tannock, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1966), p.35-36.

name in the list of contributors, one can imagine how they might add prestige and considerable gravitas to the work. After all, in the eyes of the public, what had Rousseau accomplished in the domain of music theory or indeed composition up until 1749? As the record shows,¹⁵⁴ Rameau refused to endorse the project and would not collaborate in any capacity, leaving the editors little option but to avail themselves of the services of Rousseau. Rousseau's work was to be completed by the spring of 1749 leaving him less than three months to draft three hundred and sixty-eight entries:¹⁵⁵

[...] On me donna que trois mois pour remplir ma tâche, et trois ans pouvoient me suffire à peine pour lire, extraire, comparer et compiler les auteurs dont j'avois besoin; mais le zèle de l'amitié m'aveugla sur l'impossibilité du succès.¹⁵⁶

The constraints of what was by any stretch of the imagination a fiendishly tight deadline and the sheer enormity of the project meant that Rousseau's primary objective would not, nor could not be to furnish subscribers to the *Encyclopédie* with original scholarship. Thus, it was to be Rousseau's remit to make established theory and practice digestible – and in the shortest possible time. In 1749, established theory and practice meant, of course, only one thing in France: Rameau's theory and practice. To be sure, there were alternative treatises and theoretical writings in print,¹⁵⁷ but Rameau's publications were by far the most comprehensive and cogent, and, more significantly as we have seen, the man and his works were venerated by at least one of the editors.¹⁵⁸

Even the most cursory of glances at the theoretically-biased *Encyclopédie* articles reveals that their content – or at least the greatest part of it – is based upon, and significantly intertexts

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Rameau, 'Réponse de M. Rameau à mm. les éditeurs de l'Encyclopédie sur le dernier Avertissement' in *Complete Theoretical Writings*, (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1967-72), pp.360-61.

¹⁵⁵ Rousseau, in common with other collaborators, was given three months to complete the articles. In the *Confessions*, (p.325) Rousseau boasts that he was the only one to have actually completed his articles within the deadline.

¹⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, t.12, p.6, 'They only gave me three months to complete the task, whereas three years would have been hardly be enough to read, extract, compare and compile the works that I needed. But the zeal of friendship meant that I could not see that it was impossible to succeed.'

¹⁵⁷ Rousseau, in fact, preferred Tartini's system to that of Rameau's. But as Rousseau declares, it would not have been appropriate in a work destined for a mainly French audience. Cf. Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, t.12, pp.10-11, préface to *Dictionnaire de Musique*.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. d'Alembert, 'Discours préliminaire des éditeurs', *Encyclopédie*, vol I. pp.xxxii-iii

with, the work of Rameau.¹⁵⁹ As Christensen confirms, ‘... all of the major ideas present in the *Génération Harmonique* and *Démonstration* ... are present in Rousseau’s articles.’¹⁶⁰ Given such substantial and extensive intertexting, it is perhaps a little surprising to find that the *Encyclopédie* articles – principally those from the first four volumes – would cause such great offence and affront to Rameau’s sensibilities. So what were the grounds for Rameau’s complaint? The heart of the matter was that Rameau appeared to believe that Rousseau had displayed a wanton disregard for the integrity of his scholarship, confusing and misrepresenting a large number of pivotal arguments and ‘irrefutable’ precepts. Wanting to counter Rousseau’s apparent villainy by demonstrating to the public – and in particular to the subscribers to the *Encyclopédie* – each erroneous remark and misrepresentation, Rameau published two ill-tempered and acicular essays: *Erreurs sur la musique dans l’Encyclopédie* (1755) and *Suite des Erreurs sur la Musique dans l’Encyclopédie* (1756).¹⁶¹ Rameau’s primary objective in this enterprise was to take Rousseau to task on virtually every aspect of the presentation and repackaging of his theories in each of the offending articles.

It is all too easy to conclude from a study of these articles that Rameau’s critique lacks even a moderate degree of circumspection, equity or judgement and that some of his criticism is overcooked, unwarranted and misplaced. Indeed as Christensen concludes, ‘... there is little to be found in the first volumes of the *Encyclopédie* that any objective reader could interpret as disrespectful or critical towards his theory ...’¹⁶² Robert Wokler ventures somewhat further in defence of the Genevan, declaring that ‘the highest tribute paid to Rameau came ... from the pen of Rousseau ... who displayed a great familiarity with Rameau’s works and a generally deep respect for his authority as a theorist.’¹⁶³ Wokler suggests that far from being counterfactual and misconceived, as Rameau would go on to claim, his articles, in fact, present Rameau’s theories succinctly, cogently and judiciously – something which Rameau found

¹⁵⁹ Cf. especially : *Accompagnement, Basse Fondamentale, Basse, Harmonie, Mélodie, Chant*.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, p.248.

¹⁶¹ Rousseau’s *Examen de Deux Principes avancés par M. Rameau* is a direct response to the *Erreurs sur la musique dans l’Encyclopédie*, though it was never published in his lifetime.

¹⁶² Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, p.248.

¹⁶³ Wokler, *Rousseau Rameau*, p.184

impossible to accomplish without the assistance of more talented writers.¹⁶⁴ Yet Maurice Cranston does not subscribe to this line of thinking at all. He draws the reader's attention to a remark made by Rousseau *en passant* in a letter to Mme de Warens, in which he apparently makes his intention abundantly clear to use the opportunity afforded him by Diderot to 'get my own back on people who have done me harm ... Instead of writing songs against my enemies,' he continues, 'I am writing articles against them for the *Encyclopédie*.'¹⁶⁵ Indeed Cranston's argument seems all the more persuasive when one considers the consonance between the letter I cited above to M. Bouchaud du Plessis (September 1745) and the letter Cranston cites to Mme de Warens (January 1749). Although some three-and-a-half years separate them, in the former, Rousseau implies that in spite of Rameau's brutality, 'la fureur même de mes ennemis m'a fait connoître mes forces, sans leur jalousie j'ignorerois encore que je suis capable de lutter contre eux.'¹⁶⁶ In the latter, Rousseau implies that he was going to harness this newly found 'strength' and write the articles in order to get his own back against those who had done him harm.

Clearly, then, there was a little more at stake, for both men, than a simple case of the misrepresentation of music theory, but a word of caution here is also necessary. Whilst it may be tempting to conclude that Rousseau's articles were written with the express intention of avenging Rameau's ill deeds, there are two further factors that we must not discount: first, many of Rousseau's articles were either supplemented by the editorial hand of d'Alembert or indeed pared-down by it, so what we see in the *Encyclopédie* articles is not always pure unadulterated Rousseau;¹⁶⁷ second, Rameau's pamphlets post-date both the publication of the first four volumes of the *Encyclopédie* and the events of the *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752-1754 including Rousseau's *Lettre sur la Musique Française* 1753), a fact that indelibly colours the tone

¹⁶⁴ We will note that Diderot was engaged by Rameau to write the copy for the *Génération Harmonique* and according to Girdlestone, *Jean-Philippe Rameau*, p.495 also had a hand in the writing of the *Démonstration du Principe de l'Harmonie* (1760). Jonathan Bernard, 'The Principle and the elements: Rameau's Controversy with d'Alembert', *Journal of Music Theory*, 24-25, (1980-81), p.40, suggests that the reason Rameau engaged the quill of Diderot was to give him the 'best possible chance of winning favour with the *Académie*.'

¹⁶⁵ Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques*, p.222.

¹⁶⁶ Rousseau, letter to 'Bouchaud de Plessis' in *Correspondance Complète*, II. pp.87, 'the fury of my enemies has made me realise my own strength, without their jealousy I would not yet be aware that I am capable of fighting against them'.

¹⁶⁷ Philip Robinson, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Doctrine of the Arts*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), p.91 speculates that d'Alembert's editorial interventions cast 'a question mark over generalisations concerning the development of his [Rousseau's] musical views at that time ...'

and content of their pages. My feeling is that the truth of the matter lies somewhere in between Cranston and Wokler's views: Rousseau's articles are neither merely Rameau regurgitated, nor indeed devoid of critical energy and purpose. Perusing many of those articles that use Rameau's work as their point of reference and departure, one can see that whilst there is, of course, a certain degree of acknowledgement, deference and deep familiarity displayed, there is also the critical distance that that deep familiarity implies and entails. This is, in many instances, coupled with a divergent perspective on the aesthetics of performance and composition, and in several places, razor-sharp critique of both Rameau's theory and practice. It is indeed curious why Chistensen elects to disregard Rousseau's comments about Italian and French music in the same article ('Accompagnement') that he cites to demonstrate Rousseau's complimentary attitude towards Rameau:

Les Italiens méprisent les chiffres; la partition même leur est peu nécessaire; la promptitude et la finesse de leur oreille y supplée, et ils accompagnent fort bien sans tout cet appareil: mais ce n'est qu'à leur disposition naturelle qu'ils sont redevables de cette facilité; et les autres peuples [namely the French] qui ne sont pas nés comme eux pour la musique, trouvent ... des difficultés infinies.¹⁶⁸

Rousseau next goes onto remark that,

on ne se trompera pas beaucoup en accompagnant par la règle de l'octave, si le compositeur a suivi l'harmonie la plus simple et la plus naturelle: mais c'est ce qu'on ne doit guère attendre de la musique d'aujourd'hui.¹⁶⁹

And of course the 'musique d'aujourd'hui' was Rameau's music; let us not forget that as many as six of his operas were staged in Paris during the year that Rousseau was drafting these articles. Rousseau then goes on to suggest that one should sometimes bend Rameau's rules of accompaniment for the sake of yielding more pleasing musical results:

Quoique suivant les principes de M. Rameau il faille toucher tous les sons de chaque accord, il ne faut pas toujours prendre cette règle à la lettre. Il y a des accords qui seroient insupportables avec tout ce remplissage.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ 'Accompagnement', *Encyclopédie*, 1, p.74, 'Italians despise figuring; for them even scores are hardly necessary, the swiftness and the keenness of their ear makes up for it, and they accompany very well without all these trappings: but it is only to their natural disposition that they owe this facility; and other peoples [namely the French] who are not born for music like them, find ... infinite difficulties.'

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.74, 'one will not go far wrong in accompanying by the rule of the octave, if the composer follows the most simple and natural harmony: but this is hardly what one expects of today's music.'

¹⁷⁰ 'Accompagnement', *Encyclopédie*, 1, p.74, 'Although according to Rameau's principles, one must sound all of the notes in each chord, it is not always necessary to follow this rule to the letter. There are chords that would be insupportable with all this filling out.'

Moreover, when we consider one of the key music-theoretical articles (those that meet Rameau's theory head on) in the *Encyclopédie*, 'basse fondamentale,' we can clearly see once more that there were considerable differences between Rousseau and Rameau on a number of fronts, aesthetic and theoretical. For example, Rousseau suggests that:

La basse fondamentale, qui n'est faite que pour servir de preuve à l'harmonie, se retranche dans l'exécution, et souvent elle y feroit un fort mauvais effet. Elle produiroit tout-au-moins une monotonie très ennuyeuse par les retours fréquents du même accord ...¹⁷¹

These differences should not be surprising, for, as I suggested above, their trace was already there to be observed in the *Dissertation sur la Musique Moderne*.

Rousseau's view on the debacle is interesting to note. In the *Examen des deux Principes avancés par M. Rameau* (written 1755, published posthumously), Rousseau seeks to justify his articles' shortcomings by laying the blame squarely upon the time-scale of the project, and makes it abundantly clear that he had borrowed much from the theoretical writings of Rameau in good faith:

Je suis au reste fort éloigné de vouloir défendre mes articles de l'Encyclopédie; personne à la vérité n'en devrait être plus content que M. Rameau qui les attaque; mais personne au monde n'en est plus mécontent que moi. Cependant, quand on sera instruit du temps où ils ont été faits, de celui que j'eus pour les faire, et de l'impuissance où j'ai toujours été de reprendre un travail une fois fini, quand on saura de plus que je n'eus point la présomption de me proposer pour celui-ci; mais que ce fut, pour ainsi dire une tâche imposée par l'amitié; on lira peut être avec quelque indulgence des articles que j'eus à peine le temps de l'écrire dans l'espace qui m'était donné pour les méditer, et que je n'aurais point entrepris si je n'avais consulté que le temps et mes forces. Mais ceci est une justification envers le public, et pour un autre lieu. Revenons à M. Rameau, que j'ai beaucoup loué, et qui me fait un crime de ne l'avoir pas loué davantage.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ 'Basse fondamentale', *Encyclopédie*, 1, p.120. 'The fundamental Bass, which is only there to serve to show the harmony, entrenches itself in its execution, and often it makes for a very poor effect. It will produce, at best, a very tedious monotony by frequently returning to the same chord ...'

¹⁷² Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, 'I am, moreover, far from wishing to defend my Encyclopaedia articles; in truth no one should be more pleased about it than Rameau who attacks them; but no one in the world is less pleased about that than I. However, when one is aware of the time in which they were written, and that which I had to do them in, and of my inability to revisit a work once it is finished, when one is also aware of the fact that I do not presume to volunteer for this; but that it was a task imposed by friendship so to speak; one will read, with some indulgence, the articles that I hardly had time to write in the space that I was given to contemplate them and that I would not have taken on if I had only thought about the timescale and my capabilities. But this is a justification for the public and for another place. Let us return to M. Rameau, whom I praised highly, and who commits a crime against me for not having praised him more.' In the preface to the *Dictionnaire de Musique*, Rousseau again places the blame on the unrealistic time-scale of the project and the fact that he had been blinded by his friendship for Diderot.

As we will see in Chapter 4, Rousseau would grow increasingly disillusioned with these articles as they appeared with the publication of each volume, primarily because they were becoming increasingly dissonant with his emergent philosophy of music and nature, and secondarily because they were not of the same calibre as the works that in other intellectual domains were winning him celebrity and notoriety in equal measure. Rousseau would later wish to rectify these shortcomings by compiling his own encyclopaedic dictionary of music.

The seeds of hostility, sown by Rameau at de la Popelinière's *salon*, soon bore fruit that ripened and quickly spoiled. During the late 1740s and on into the 1750s the ever-widening schism – now personal as well as ideological – became irreparable and unbridgeable. If the greatest tribute to Rameau's scholarship did indeed come from the pen of Rousseau, then, paradoxically, the most abrasive condemnation of the composer's work was to be dispatched from the very same implement. In essence, however, these arguments are by-products of a problem racking all domains of scholarship at that time: the ascendancy of a new conception of the cosmos, one which challenged and shook the very foundations of Cartesian materialism. Rousseau's emerging conception of nature and music's position within this philosophical microcosm (which during the 1750s was still very much work-in-progress), was, to put it simply, incompatible with the rationalist and mechanistic generative model envisioned by Rameau.

In the next chapter, we shall examine the structure and complexion of Rousseau's *Philosophy of Nature and Music*.

Chapter Two:

On the road to Damascus: The genesis of the Concept of the 'State of Nature'

... tout à coup je me sens l'esprit ébloui de mille lumières; des foules d'idées vives ... une violente palpitation m'opresse, soulève ma poitrine ; ne pouvant plus respirer en marchant, je me laisse tomber sous un des arbres de l'avenue, et j'y passe une demi-heure dans une telle agitation qu'en me relevant j'aperçus tout le devant de ma veste mouillé de mes larmes ...¹

Je crois avoir découvert de grandes choses et je les ai dites avec une franchise assez dangereuse ...²

Rousseau's philosophical system was, as this anecdotal narrative suggests, formulated all at once, in a blinding flash of inspiration to rival that of Saul's illumination on the road to Damascus.³ The year in question is 1749 and Denis Diderot – at this juncture Rousseau's most cherished acquaintance – has been imprisoned in the *Donjon* of the Château de Vincennes. His offence was to have published the biting ironic and acerbic *Lettre sur les Aveugles* (1749) – a pamphlet which, according to Rousseau, 'contained nothing blameworthy except for a few personal allusions.'⁴ These allusions had, nonetheless, proved inflammatory enough in the estimation of both René Réaumur and Mme Dupré de Saint-Maur for the former to have informed the police. This gesture, given the prevailing political climate in France, led inexorably to Diderot's arrest and subsequent imprisonment. As Maurice Cranston describes, Paris was a politically volatile and unstable city in 1749:

... the war of the Austrian Succession ended in a peace unfavourable to France. Louis XV lost his Flemish provinces, and his government increased taxation to pay for the war. Public disillusionment and scepticism provided fertile ground for radical pamphleteering and the government and courts responded by stepping up censorship.⁵

¹ Rousseau, letter to Malesherbes (12 January 1762), in *Oeuvres*, t.17, pp.11-12. 'Suddenly, I felt my spirit blinded by a thousand lights ; a multitude of vivid ideas ... a violent, oppressive palpitation agitated my chest ; no longer able to breath whilst walking, I sat myself down beneath one of the trees on the avenue, where I spent a half-an-hour in such a state of agitation that when I got up I could feel that the front of my jacket was soaked with tears ...'

² Rousseau, *Préface d'une Seconde Lettre à Bordes*, in *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, ed. Jacques Roger, (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1992), p.139, 'I believe I have discovered great things and I have spoken of them with a dangerous frankness.'

³ This narrative appears in two places: as above in the letter to Malesherbes; and in the *Confessions*. For further detail see Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques: The early life and work of Jean Jacques Rousseau 1712-1754*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp.226-229.

⁴ Rousseau, *Confessions*, transl. J. M Cohen, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1953), p.325.

⁵ Cranston, *Rousseau*, p.226. Indeed censorship and book related imprisonments would reach their zenith during the 1750s. Robert Darnton, 'Censorship and the Publishing Industry' in *Revolution in Print: The Press in France 1775-1800*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p.24 shows that between 1750 and 1759, 40% of all prisoners locked away in the Bastille were involved in the book trade, and of that 40% about one third were authors.

In the *Confessions*, Rousseau conveys the impression that he was unsettled – shocked even⁶ – by Diderot’s untimely imprisonment, and he tells us that he was moved enough to write a rather obsequious letter to Mme de Pompadour, in the hope of either procuring Diderot’s release ‘[...] or to get permission [...] to be imprisoned with him.’⁷ No reply was forthcoming – which was perhaps not surprising given her evident dislike of Rousseau – but, in any case, Diderot was soon released from the keep, permitted to walk the considerable, un-walled gardens and was free to receive visitors. Rousseau was a regular visitor; in fact he would go every other afternoon:

The summer of that year 1749 was excessively hot. Vincennes is some six miles from Paris. In no condition to pay for cabs, I walked there at two in the afternoon when I was alone, and I went fast so as to arrive early. The trees along the road, always lopped according to the custom of the country, hardly gave any shade; and often I was so prostrated with heat and weariness that I lay down on the ground, unable to go further. In order to slacken my pace, I thought of taking a book with me. One day I took the *Mercure de France* and, glancing through it as I walked, I came upon this question propounded by the Dijon Academy for the next year’s prize: Has the progress of the sciences and arts done more to corrupt morals or improve them? The moment I read this I beheld another universe and became another man. [...] when I reached Vincennes I was in a state of agitation bordering on delirium. Diderot noticed it; I told him the cause and read him Fabricius’s soliloquy which I had written in pencil under an oak tree. He encouraged me to give my ideas wings and compete for the prize. I did so, and from that moment I was lost. All the rest of my life and of my misfortunes followed inevitably as a result of that moment’s madness.⁸

Despite this somewhat mythologised account – for the ‘tout à coup’ is misleading – this event was to prove a watershed in Rousseau’s life, and what he ‘saw’ that day was to become the guiding principle that governed and directed the structure and complexion of the rest of his work, regardless of the subject.⁹ But what did Rousseau actually see? If we consider the question posed by the *Académie de Dijon* – whether the progress of the Arts and the Sciences had done more to corrupt or to purify morals – the respondent was not being invited to consider philosophical consequences so much as historical ones; or at to least formulate an historical

⁶ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.325, ‘no words could ever express the anguish I felt at my friend’s misfortune [...] I thought that he would be there for the rest of his life.’

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.325.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.327-328.

⁹ Robert Wokler, *Rousseau*, (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p.21, concurs with this view and suggests that the *Discours* (the outcome of Rousseau’s ‘vision’) ‘... enunciates a philosophy of history to which he was to adhere for the rest of his life and which his contemporaries ... came to recognise as his most central doctrine.’

account of the impact of knowledge and civilisation upon morality. For Rousseau there were, in essence, three key concepts suggested by the question: the first was progress; the second was that of morality; and the third, and most important, was the notion that art and science could exert an influence upon both. If his response was negative or ran contrary to the main ideological thrust of the Enlightenment and the progressionist sentiments of his contemporaries, then *tant pis*; his only mission, he claimed, was to defend virtue and, in so doing, allow himself to be guided by the hand of ‘truth’:

C’est ne point la science que je maltraite, me suis-je dit; c’est la vertu que je défends [...] la probité est encore plus chère aux gens de bien que l’érudition aux doctes [...] A ce motif qui m’encourage, ils s’en joint un autre qui me détermine: c’est qu’après avoir soutenu, selon ma lumière naturelle, le parti de la vérité, quel que soit mon succès, il est un prix qui ne peut me manquer: je le trouverai dans le fond de mon coeur.¹⁰

The vision beheld was, indeed, decidedly negative and it was one that not only engendered a negative account of the evolution of society and societal institutions, but one that would lead Rousseau to ultimately construe human progress – in all spheres – as an illusion and a dangerous fiction of the historical imagination. It was also a rather curious position for Rousseau to have adopted, for as a close friend of Diderot, a newly engaged contributor to the *Encyclopédie* and an ambitious, progressive and seemingly radical thinker, one would have expected him to have championed the cause of the Enlightenment.¹¹ But more than this, as Jean Varloot has pointed

¹⁰ Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, ed. Jacques Roger, (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1992), pp.29-30. ‘It is not science that I do a disservice to, I said to myself; it is virtue that I defend ... probity is all the more valuable to honest men than erudition is to the learned Along with this motif that encouraged me, there was another that guided me [me détermine], that is after having taken, according to my natural principles, the part of the truth, whatever the outcome, it is a prize that cannot allude me: I will find it in the depth of my heart.’ In the *Fragments Autobiographique* in *Oeuvres Complètes*. (Paris: Bibliothèque de Pléiade, 1959-, Vol. I), p.1113 – a fragment believed to date from about 1755, that is to say after the drafting of both the *Discours* and the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* (1753) and therefore, which would also make it contemporaneous with the *L’Examen des deux principes avancées par M. Rameau* – Rousseau makes a telling reference, if not precisely to this event, then at the very least to his sentiments regarding contemporary society during this particular period: ‘Que de préjugés et d’erreurs et de maux je commençai d’apercevoir dans tout ce qui fait l’admiration des hommes. Cette vue me touchoit de douleur et m’enflammoit le courage, je crus me sentir animé d’un plus beau zèle que celui de l’amour propre, je pris la plume et résolu de m’oublier moi-même j’en consacrai les productions au service de la vérité et de la vertu’.

¹¹ That said, it is clear that Diderot encouraged Rousseau to compete for the prize. It has been suggested that Diderot may even have influenced Rousseau’s negative and unexpected response (Cf. Cranston, *Rousseau*, p.229). However, Claude Rommeru, *De la Nature à l’Histoire 1685-1794*, (Paris: Bordas, 1985), p.257 makes the point, extremely cogently, that ‘[...] les idées développées par Rousseau dans ce discours préfigure trop bien ce que sera le reste de son oeuvre pour que l’on puisse s’arrêter à cette hypothèse.’ Rousseau, in the *Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont*, *Oeuvres*, t.9, p.5, hints at what is most likely to be the ‘true’ version of events, when he declares that, ‘J’ai écrit sur des divers sujets, mais toujours dans les mêmes principes; toujours la même morale, la même croyance, les mêmes maximes, et, si l’on veut, les mêmes opinions. Cependant on a porté des jugements opposés de mes livres, ou plutôt de l’auteur de mes livres, parce qu’on m’a jugé sur les matières que j’ai traitées, bien plus que sur mes sentiments. Après mon premier Discours, j’étois un homme à paradoxes, qui se faisoit un jeu de prouver ce qu’il ne pensoit pas ...’

out, Rousseau was also running counter-current to the overwhelming majority of his contemporaries and illustrious forebears:

Le thème des mœurs était alors à la mode. On en traitait au collège, on lisait *Le Courtisan* de Castiglione [...] tous les 'moralistes' mondains, de Montaigne à La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, et bien entendu Fénelon. On était friand de cas de conscience, sujet favori des auteurs de comédies et de romans, tel un Marivaux; et de grands 'historiens' comme Montesquieu et Voltaire comparaient les mœurs des différents peuples sous différents climats. Bien plus, la question était souvent traitée dans les académies et sociétés [...] de même que dans les gazettes dites 'littéraires'. Et presque toujours on y soutenait le thème du progrès: [...] les mœurs sont devenues meilleures grâce à la 'politesse.'¹²

As the record shows, Rousseau did not yield to fashion or influence; in fact quite the opposite was true – he would, instead, preach a reactionary *credo* and in doing so eventually drove a wedge between himself and his fellow *philosophes* and their nascent project. In the *Discours Préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie* (1751),¹³ d'Alembert does his best to disguise his annoyance with Rousseau: in one breath, and for the sake of his enterprise, he praises him for his 'fort éloquent'¹⁴ *Discours* which he says has brought '[...] beaucoup d'honneur à son auteur'¹⁵; but in another breath, he cannot quite camouflage his displeasure:

Ce serait peut-être ici le lieu de repousser les traits d'un écrivain éloquent et philosophe a lancé depuis peu contre les sciences et les arts, en les accusant de corrompre les mœurs. Il nous serait mal d'être de son sentiment à la tête d'un ouvrage tel que celui-ci ... Nous ne lui reprocherons point d'avoir confondu la culture de l'esprit avec l'abus qu'on en peut faire; il nous répondrait sans doute que cet abus en est inséparable: mais nous le prions d'examiner si la plupart des maux qu'il attribue aux sciences et aux arts ne sont point dus à des causes toutes différents, dont l'énumération seroit ici aussi longue que délicate. Les lettres contribuent certainement à rendre la société plus aimable; il seroit difficile de prouver que les hommes en sont meilleurs, et la vertu plus commune ...¹⁶

¹² Jean Verloot (ed.), *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, 'Préface', (Paris: éditions Gallimard, 1987), p.8. 'At that time the subject of morality was fashionable. One studied it at college, one read Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* ... all the [mondain] moralists from Montaigne to La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld and of course Fénelon. One was for the case of conscience, the favourite subject of novelists and comic authors such as Marivaux; of the great historians like Montesquieu and Voltaire comparing the morals of different peoples in different countries. Moreover, the subject was treated in Academies and societies ... and even in so called 'literary' gazettes. And almost always the side of progress was taken: ... morals had become better because of *la politesse*.'

¹³ The reader will note that Rousseau's First *Discours* was written in 1749, awarded the prize by the Dijon Academy in 1750 and was published at the beginning of 1751. Rousseau had, by that time, already completed the articles on music for the *Encyclopédie*.

¹⁴ 'Extremely eloquent'

¹⁵ D'Alembert, *Discours Préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*, p.xxxiii (footnote) 'much honour to its author.'

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.xxxiii, 'This would be, perhaps, the place from which to deflect the arrows that have been fired by an eloquent and philosophical author against the sciences and the arts accusing them of corrupting morality. It would be odd if we were of his opinion at the beginning of a work such as this ... We do not reproach him for having confused the cultivation of the spirit

In essence, what d'Alembert is articulating here is not simply displeasure with Rousseau, for that much is evident, but he is signalling to his subscribers that Rousseau – author of almost every one of the articles on music – has assumed an ideological position that was not merely wrong-headed and necessarily dogmatic, but also opposed to more or less everything that the *Encyclopédie* project represented. The result was that the *Encyclopédie* could only be construed, in Rousseau's terms, as a work that would exert a corrupting influence upon the morals of mankind by erecting yet another obstacle between man and his 'true nature'; it would not provide enlightenment or salvation for its readership, and it did not, in itself, constitute progress. That much he would go on to make abundantly clear in the *Discours sur l'Origine et les fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les hommes* (1754):

Ce qu'il y a de plus cruel encore, c'est que tous les progrès de l'espèce humaine l'éloignant sans cesse de son état primitif, plus nous accumulons de nouvelles connaissances, et plus nous nous ôtons les moyens d'acquérir la plus importante de toutes, et que c'est en un sens à force d'étudier l'homme que nous nous sommes mis hors d'état de le connaître.¹⁷

If the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* is the least satisfactory of all Rousseau's writings – in his own words, '[...]full of strength and fervour, [but] completely lacking in logic and order,'¹⁸ – its impact was, nevertheless, immense: a storm of controversy quickly ensued and would thunder on well into the mid-fifties; Rousseau would have to defend his position many times and on different fronts.¹⁹ As Rousseau bemoans in the *Préface d'une Seconde Lettre à Bordes*,

forcé par de nouvelles attaques à rompre le silence que je m'étais imposé dans cette longue dispute, je reprends sans scrupule la plume que j'avais quittée. Si je puis, au gré des sages, jeter de nouvelles lumières sur les importantes maximes que j'ai établies, peu m'importe que le public s'ennuie de voir si

with the abuse that one can do to it; he would no doubt respond that this abuse is inseparable from it: but we urge him to consider whether the majority of the ill-effects that he attributes to the sciences and the arts are not the result of altogether different causes, of which the enumeration here would take as long as it would be delicate. The Letters certainly contribute to making society more courteous [aimable]; it would be difficult to prove that men were better because of it, and virtue more common...'

¹⁷ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'Origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, in *Discours sur l'Origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes et Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, Jacques Roger (ed.), (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1992), p.158. 'What is even more cruel, is that all the progress man makes pushes him further away from his primitive state, the more knowledge we amass, the more we strip ourselves of the means to discover the most important of all, it is in one sense by trying to study man that we put ourselves beyond a state to know him.'

¹⁸ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.328-239.

¹⁹ See Jacques Roger (ed.), *Discours sur l'Origine et les fondements de l'inégalité*. pp.5-22 for an extremely detailed account of the controversy; or see Jean Varloot (ed.), *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, pp.9-10 for an excellent summary.

longtemps débattre la même question.²⁰

Indeed, we should not be surprised that the work caused such consternation and provocation for in truth neither was Rousseau, since it opens with what has become affectionately known (in Blair and Campbell's 'New Labour' parlance) as a rather unequivocal 'prebuttal':

Il sera difficile, je le sens, d'appropriier ce que j'ai à dire au tribunal où je comparais. Comment oser blâmer les sciences devant une des plus savantes compagnies de l'Europe, louer l'ignorance dans une célèbre Académie, et concilier le mépris avec le respect pour les vrais savants?²¹

That Rousseau was concerned his first *Discours* would be characterised by the 'savants' and 'académiciens' as overbearingly negative and revisionist and that it appeared to question their *raison d'être* and credibility, is clear from the outset; he was, as we have seen, paddling furiously against the tide of prevailing epistemics, science and historiology. This prevailing view, that of the inexorable – and necessarily positive – tide of progress, rising geometrically and unstoppably towards the prize of universal betterment, is turned on its head, reversing and subverting its entire system of value; the *Discours* thus represents a kind of nostalgic 'historicism' in which progress is considered an inevitable and unstoppable slide – a geometrical degenerative movement towards immorality, corruption and damnation. It is worth noting, at this juncture, that in the second *Discours* 'historicism' will not be an apposite term, for Rousseau will not be hankering after an historical past or an institution, but a pre-history, an epoch before epochs, a golden age. In the present context, however, we are dealing with the first formulations and adumbrations of his system and unsurprisingly Rousseau's critical energy and enmity is focussed, principally, upon science and art, rather than on social and political institutions. Nevertheless, there is a clear predication that the relationship between art and science is both conspiratorial and symbiotic:

L'esprit a ses besoins, ainsi que le corps. Ceux-ci sont les fondements de la société, les autres en sont l'agrément. Tandis que le gouvernement et les lois pourvoient à la sûreté et au bien-être des hommes assemblés, les sciences, les

²⁰ Rousseau, *Préface d'une Seconde Lettre à Bordes*, in *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, (ed.) Jacques Roger., p.139. 'Forced by renewed attacks to break the silence that I had imposed on myself in this long dispute, I take up once more, without any qualms, the quill that I had abandoned. If I am able, with the consent of wise men, to cast new light upon the important maxims that I have established, I don't mind if the public becomes bored seeing the same question debated for such a long time.'

²¹ Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les Arts*, p.29, 'I feel that it would be difficult to adapt what I have to say for a tribunal where I was appearing. How could I dare to criticise science in front of one of the most knowledgeable bodies in Europe, praise ignorance in a celebrated Academy, and reconcile contempt with respect for true intellectuals?'

lettres et les arts, moins despotiques et plus puissants 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 semblaient être nés, leur font aimer leur esclavage et en forment ce qu'on appelle des peuples policés. Le besoin éleva les trônes et les arts les ont affermis.²²

The conspiracy is, then, clearly defined: the deceptive, disarming and Circean capabilities of art, science and letters, conspire – like a sugared pill – to make the theft of ‘original’ liberty appear to those who will perpetrate it possible and accomplishable, and to those from whom it will be stolen, pardonable and even desirable. Rousseau’s metaphor is adroitly chosen and powerfully apt: the cold, hard, brutal reality of slavery, servitude and the exercise of political power and authority, will be softened, transfigured, rendered invisible by the ‘garlands of flowers’ that will smother any vestiges of nascent liberty. The reality thus becomes an unreality, and the original loss is erased from the memory of the subjugated. Evidently, and necessarily, this schema implies that there is a kind of primordial inequality between those who will steal, and those from whom liberty will be stolen. Rousseau does not here explore the possibilities this imbalance affords, but inequality will, of course, become one of the central themes of his second *Discours*.

This historicism runs right through the work, though the nostalgic gaze is not, as one might expect, turned towards the glorious city of Athens, or even Rome, rather it is the Republic of Sparta, the republic of ‘demi-dieux,’ that Rousseau singles out for praise. But Sparta is not praised for its cultural achievements or artistic legacy; rather the city-state is lauded for the ‘heureuse ignorance’ of its citizens and for having had the foresight, acumen and *Vertu* to banish *intra-muros* the arts and the artists, and science and the savants.²³ Athens, on the other hand, is singled out for criticism: it is the well-spring of ‘politesse,’ ‘du bon goût’ and a ‘pays des orateurs et des philosophes’. But worse still, Athens had become a prototype that other civilisations and societies would seek to emulate, and thus its nefarious influence and corruption had stretched – and would continue to extend – far beyond its immediate historical horizon:

²² *Ibid.*, p.31. ‘The mind has its needs, as well as the body. The latter are the foundations of society, the others consent to it. Whereas the government and the law provide security and see to the well-being of men assembled, the sciences, letters and the arts, less despotic and more powerful perhaps, extend a garland of flowers around the iron shackles that they wear, smother any sentiment of this natural liberty for which they seem to have been born, and make them love their enslavement and form what we might call ‘policed people’. Need raises thrones, and the arts reinforce them.’

²³ *Ibid.*, p.37.

L'élégance des bâtiments y répondait à celle du langage. On y voyait de toutes parts le marbre et la toile animés par les mains des maîtres les plus habiles. C'est d'Athènes que sont sortis ces ouvrages surprenants qui serviront de modèles dans tous les âges corrompus.²⁴

If one of the central themes of the second *Discours* is primordial inequality, *Vertu* is one of the central concepts of the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* and it is characterised by everything that is bucolic or 'natural'. The concept triggers a system of value that pours scorn on luxury, opulence, the arts, the sciences, philosophy, elaborate clothing, ornaments, jewellery – in fact all the paraphernalia and encumbrances of 'civilisation' that ultimately serve to corrupt morality. Sparta may have been less *brillant* than Athens, but its populace was virtuous; that is their most significant attribute for Rousseau:

Le tableau de Lacédémone est moins brillant. Là, disaient les autres peuples, *les hommes naissent vertueux, et l'air même du pays semble inspirer la vertu*. Il ne nous reste de ses habitants que la mémoire de leurs actions héroïques. De tels monuments vaudraient-ils moins pour nous que les marbres curieux qu'Athènes nous a laissés?²⁵

Whilst Athens, in its heyday, had been architecturally resplendent, culturally sophisticated and intellectually developed, it was, nevertheless, a society wrapped up in its own importance, a culture that was concerned more with appearance, manners, luxury and politeness, than with virtue and morality. These characteristics made it, as a state, corrupt and weak, and as a result, its citizens were left vulnerable to enslavement; (in the language of the second *Discours* or indeed *Du Contrat Social* (1762) the intimation is that the Athenians had swallowed the fable peddled by their first rulers – hook, line and sinker). Those who presided over Sparta, on the other hand, eschewed such frivolities and that, Rousseau argues, had made its citizens virtuous, powerful and resilient. The contrast here between Athens and Sparta, and by extension between the Athenian and the Spartan subject, is not absolute but relative: the Spartan citizen is characterised, not as a 'natural' man, but one who is nevertheless virtuous, despises *la parure* and is a strong athlete:

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.37. 'The elegance of their buildings corresponded to that of their language. One saw marble everywhere and canvas brought to life by the most skilful master-craftsmen's hands. It is Athens that produced these striking works that will serve as models in all corrupt eras.'

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.37. (Rousseau's emphases), 'The picture of Sparta is less brilliant. There, said other peoples, men are born virtuous, and even the appearance [*air*] of the country seems to inspire virtue. All that remains of these people is the memory of their heroic deeds. Would such monuments be worth less to us than the strange statues that Athens has left behind?'

[...] qui se plaît à combattre nu: il méprise tous ces vils ornements qui gêneraient l'usage de ses forces, et dont la plupart n'ont été inventés que pour cacher quelque difformité.²⁶

Or to express it in different terms, although the Spartan is perhaps a little closer to his 'true' nature – and is more virtuous – than his Athenian counterpart, he remains, nevertheless, far removed from the image of 'natural man' that will be depicted later in the second *Discours*. However, given the function and the context of first *Discours* the difference is marked enough for it to be treated as preceptorial.

Evidently a supplementary logic is at work here and the supplemental chain – associated with *la parure* and *l'apparence* in all its manifestations – somewhat predictably makes up for, or hides, 'quelque difformité'. Yet Rousseau also does something rather unexpected and unpredictable at this point in the text, and thus gives the supplementary logic a little twist of the illogical. It is as though he is holding art *per se* accountable for, as he puts it, shaping manners and teaching the passions to speak an unnatural and affected (*apprêté*) language. The rather unsatisfactory implication, in the first half the next passage, is that art is not so much a product or reflection of culture or society, as it is an exogenous entity that exerts a corrupting influence over it from outside:

Avant que l'art eût façonné nos manières et appris à nos passions à parler un langage apprêté, nos mœurs étaient rustiques, mais naturelles ... La nature humaine au fond n'était pas meilleur; mais les hommes trouvaient leur sécurité dans la facilité de se pénétrer réciproquement, et cet avantage, dont nous ne sentons plus le prix, leur épargnait bien des vices.²⁷

The second half of this passage is extremely important too.²⁸ In the 'original' absence of art, *la parure* and *l'apparence* did not exist, and thus man – and his nature and character – was visible, transparent if you like, and it was this transparency that made him virtuous. His passions, sentiments and motives were laid bare for his semblants to see and, as he had not yet learnt how to hide them, he could be nothing other than honest, good, and virtuous; he was virtuous almost

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.32. '[...] who delights in fighting naked: he despises all those vile ornaments that hinder the usage of his abilities, and of which the majority were invented to hide some sort of deformity.'

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.32. 'Before art had shaped our manners and taught our passions to speak an affected language; our morals were rustic but natural ... Human nature, in essence, was not better; but men found security in their ability to 'see through' one another, and this advantage for which we no longer sense the value, spared them from vice.'

²⁸ Indeed it was fertile enough for Jean Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'Obstacle: suivi de sept essais sur Rousseau*, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1971) to have constructed a partial reading of Rousseau around it.

in spite of himself, for he did not know how to be otherwise. Once his motives had been obscured from view – or rather once he had learned how to obscure them – he could be, or appear to be, anything he wished. Paradoxically perhaps, this facility does not engender individuality, but ushers in uniformity, society, insincerity and insecurity:

Sans cesse la politesse exige, la bienséance ordonne: sans cesse on suit des usages, jamais son propre génie. On n'ose plus paraître ce qu'on est; et dans cette contrainte perpétuelle, les hommes qui forment ce troupeau qu'on appelle société, placés dans les mêmes circonstances, feront tous les mêmes choses si des motifs plus puissants ne les en détournent ... Quel cortège de vices n'accompagnera point cette incertitude? Plus d'amitiés sincères; plus d'estime réelle; plus de confiance fondée.²⁹

The final destination of this line of argumentation is put in rather chilling terms and it is as much an autobiographical commentary on contemporaneous society as it is an historiographical projection:

Les soupçons, les ombrages, les craintes, la froideur, la réserve, la haine, la trahison se cacheront sans cesse sous ce voile uniforme et perfide de politesse, sous cette urbanité si vantée que nous devons aux lumières de notre siècle. On ne profanera plus par des jurements le nom du maître de l'univers, mais on l'insultera par des blasphèmes, sans que nos oreilles scrupuleuses en soient offensées. On ne vantera pas son propre mérite, mais on rabaissera celui d'autrui. On n'outragera point grossièrement son ennemi, mais on le calomnier avec adresse.³⁰

If art is, as Rousseau intimates, an exogenous entity that exerts a corrupting influence from outside and is not, therefore, a reflection of the cultural horizon upon which it 'preys', then science is construed in diametrical terms, that is to say, as an endogenous entity. Science is construed, unequivocally, as a direct product – the progeny – of the supplemental chain and owes its very existence to it:

²⁹ Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, pp.32-33. 'Continually politeness demands, decorum directs: we always follow customs, never our own spirit. We dare no longer to appear as we are; and perpetually constrained like this, men who form this herd that we call society, placed in the same situation, will all do the same things unless more powerful motives turn them away from it ... Will any vices not accompany this incertitude? No more true friendships; no more real opinion; no more well-founded trust.'

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.33 'Suspicious, shadiness, worry, frigidity, reserve, hatred, treason will for ever more hide behind the uniform and perfidious veil of politeness, underneath this much-valued urbanity that we owe to the thinkers of our century. We're not prepared to sin by taking the master of the universe's name in vain, but we will insult Him by blaspheming, yet not so as to bring offence to our scrupulous ears. We do not praise our own achievements, but we will belittle those of others. We won't insult our enemy coarsely, but we will defame him with diplomacy.'

L'astronomie est née de la superstition; [...] la géométrie, de l'avarice; la physique, d'une vaine curiosité; toutes, et la morale même, de l'orgueil humaine.³¹

Science also helps to propagate and sustain this supplemental chain. It conspires and colludes with art, and the more it is perfected the greater its corrupting influence upon the human spirit; rather than this 'history' being viciously circular, it is a vicious and unbreakable downward-spiralling helix: 'nos âmes se sont corrompues à mesure que nos sciences et les arts se sont avancés à la perfection.'³² Thus the goal of civilisation is, in fact, a false goal, for progress and betterment prove illusory and unattainable.

But there is a problem for Rousseau. As I suggested earlier, the intimation that art is somehow not a reflection of society and is uninfluenced by it, residing outside, aloof, and exerting its nefarious influence without, as it were, getting its hands dirty, is quite unsatisfactory. In fact, as Rousseau's argumentation develops and gathers pace, this notion is broadly contradicted in several places, and on several levels, in the text. If we turn our attention back for one moment to the indented quotation above, one such contradiction emerges. The concluding statement of the paragraph closes with this unqualified, and contradictory, assertion:

les sciences et les arts *doivent donc leur naissance à nos vices*: nous serions moins en doute sur leurs avantages, s'ils la devaient à nos vertus.³³

Is it possible that art can, at once, shape our manners, teach our passions to speak an unnatural and affected language, contribute to our vices, corrupt morality and destroy virtue, and yet owe its very existence to these same vices? The response is, in the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, equivocal and somewhat unsatisfactory. It is, in fact, unsatisfactory for one good reason: Rousseau is presenting this narrative in purely historical terms; he is locating this history in well-chronicled epochs and thus cannot do other than play by the logic of historiography. He seemingly cannot say whether art is the product of vice or its primary cause, only that the historical distance is too great to permit any certainty on the matter. There is also another, more acute, ontological difficulty here – if man was born virtuous and did not need civilisation or any

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.41. 'Astronomy is born from superstition; ... geometry from greed; physics from a vain curiosity; everything, even ethics, from human pride.'

³² *Ibid.*, p.34. 'Our souls were corrupted at the same time as our sciences and arts advanced toward perfection.'

³³ *Ibid.*, p.41. (my emphases). 'The sciences and the arts are therefore born of our vices: we would be less sceptical about their benefits if they were born of our virtues.'

of its supplements, what made civilisation *come about* in 'the first place'? Again there will be no satisfactory answer until we encounter more accomplished and cogently argued works such as the Second *Discours* and the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*. For the moment, however, Rousseau merely states the problem rather than offering any conclusions or solutions to it:

Que ferions-nous des arts, sans le luxe qui les nourrit? Sans les injustices des hommes, à quoi servirait la jurisprudence? Que deviendrait l'histoire s'il n'y avait ni tyrans, ni guerres, ni conspirateurs?³⁴

Tel est le luxe, né ... de l'oisiveté et de la vanité des hommes. Le luxe va rarement sans les sciences et les arts, et jamais ils ne vont sans lui.³⁵

The intimation in both of these passages is, of course, that both sides of the equation are mutually interdependent and inextricably intertwined: without *luxe* there can be no art, for there is no reason for art to exist; without art, there is no *luxe* and so on spiralling down the supplemental chain. These propositions have, of course, a helical quality and remain, in this work, unresolved. They are, however, characterised rather succinctly in Rousseau's *Dernière Réponse* to the first *Discours* after, one must assume, more rehearsal and polish:

La vanité et l'oisiveté, qui ont engendré nos sciences, ont aussi engendré le luxe. Le goût du luxe accompagne toujours celui des lettres, et le goût des lettres accompagne souvent celui du luxe: toutes ces choses se tiennent assez fidèle compagnie, parce qu'elles sont l'ouvrage des mêmes vices.³⁶

There is, clearly, little to be gained, at this stage, from probing or forcing the issue any further; we will not uncover a satisfactory or definitive answer to the obvious questions that present themselves: are *la vanité* and *l'oisiveté*, like *vertu*, part of man's natural, original and nascent constitution/condition? Was this natural man then (pre)-destined to sow the seeds of his own destruction? And is man, by his very nature, a social animal?

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.41. 'What would we do with the arts without the luxury that fosters them? Without men's wrong doing, what would be the point of jurisprudence? What would become of history if there were no tyrants, no wars and no conspirators?'

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.43. 'Such is luxury, born of mans' idleness and vanity. Luxury is rarely found without the sciences and the arts, and either is never found without luxury.'

³⁶ Rousseau, *Dernière Réponse de J J Rousseau*, in *Op. Cit.*, p.102. 'Vanity and idleness, which gave rise to the sciences, also gave rise to luxury. The appetite for luxury always accompanies that for letters, and the appetite for letters often accompanies that for luxury: all of these things keep faithful company, for they are the work of the same vices.'

We should now take stock and look at the principal ideas advanced in the first *Discours* thus far before we conclude this section of the chapter and move on to consider the Second *Discours*. The picture that emerges from the *Discours* is, first and foremost, of an 'original' man that has a true identity, a true nature and is, as this nature ensures, fundamentally good. He is good because he is virtuous – imbued to the core, as it were, with virtue:

tes principes [vertu] ne sont-ils pas gravé dans tous les coeurs, et ne suffit-il pas pour apprendre tes lois de rentrer en soi-même et d'écouter la voix de sa conscience dans le silence des passions?³⁷

Yet this 'natural' man is also blissfully ignorant of his lot, he is not predisposed to metaphysical reflection and, as a result, does not want for anything; he has no need for art or science, philosophy or letters, manners or *la politesse*, for he is not yet corrupt. To be sure he is ignorant, but he is, in compensation, virtuous:

Les premiers hommes furent très ignorants. Comment oserait-on dire qu'ils étaient corrompus, dans des temps où les sources de la corruption n'étaient pas encore ouvertes? [...] La vertu n'est donc pas incompatible avec l'ignorance. [...] L'ignorance n'est un obstacle ni au bien ni au mal; elle est seulement l'état naturel de l'homme.³⁸

This original, ignorant and virtuous man, is – at some stage in his history, though this 'moment' is, as we have discussed, never identified – made corrupt by the onset and unstoppable momentum of evolving civilisation. His virtuous nature is thus infiltrated and becomes increasingly debased and obscured by the encroachment, and all-pervading nature, of civilisation, until, ultimately, it is entirely shrouded by the perfidious veil of *l'apparence et la parure*. In his civilised and social state, this man becomes increasingly intelligent until he is capable and, more importantly, willing to dissimulate; he has now learnt to use the veil to his advantage – he has learnt how to be, and what can be gained from being, dishonest, corrupt, cruel and duplicitous. Art and science play their role in this dramatic schema too, and are, at once, manifestations of vice and serve to propagate and strengthen its hold over his spirit. The more

³⁷ Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.55. 'Your principles, are they not engraved upon all the hearts, and to learn your laws it is not sufficient to reflect and listen to the voice of your conscience in the silence of the passions?'

³⁸ Rousseau, *Dernière Réponse de J J Rousseau*, in *Op. Cit.* pp.102-103. 'The first men were very ignorant. How can we say that they were corrupt in a time when the sources of corruption were not yet present? Virtue is thus not incompatible with ignorance ... Ignorance is not an obstacle to either good or bad it is simply the natural condition of man.'

these exterior appearances and affectations are perfected, the greater the level of decay in the interior: 'Plus l'intérieur se corrompt et plus l'extérieur se compose ...'³⁹

In essence, the *Discours* represents the first statement of Rousseau's philosophy of history. It is, of course, at this stage in the development of Rousseau's ideas, inchoate for it is the result of an emergent philosophy in merely embryonic form; the *Discours* is more than a little nebulous, repetitive, even illogical in places, and is packed full of rhetorical devices – devices which stem, primarily, as Starobinski has shown, from its function as a prize-seeking essay.⁴⁰ Yet for all its lacunae and structural inadequacies, it is an extremely important document: the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* contains the seeds of the philosophy of nature that would effloresce during the next decade; and its principal argument, though modified and subsumed within others, would not be jettisoned entirely.

2.1. Winding the clock back: from history to hypothesis

The five years that separate the Dijon submission from Rousseau's next major 'philosophical' publication – the *Discours sur l'Origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1754) – are scarred by controversy and racked by divisive argument. During these five turbulent years, Rousseau would see his articles for the *Encyclopédie* published, his *Le Devin du Village* performed to great acclaim at Fontainebleau in front of the King, his *Lettre sur la Musique Française* take the Parisian *salons* and *coteries* by storm, and his effigy burned outside the *Opéra* by the members of the orchestra; this was clearly to be a period during which Rousseau was diverted from pursuing, at least with any great consistency, systematic philosophical writing. Perhaps more importantly, it was to be a period during which he was embroiled in discourse that was seemingly unrelated, and not conducive, to the development of a philosophical system. Appearances are misleading in this case however, for the polemic that encircled the publication of the first *Discours* rumbled on well into the 1750s and refused to abate; Rousseau would be called upon to defend his work

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.101. 'The more the interior becomes corrupt, the more the exterior takes shape ...'

⁴⁰ Jean Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'Obstacle*, p.15. '[...] rien n'y manque: apostrophes, prosopées, gradations.'

and its precepts on many occasions and on many strata.⁴¹ This process, though undoubtedly tiresome in the short-term, would turn out to be less of an irritation than Rousseau might have suspected it had been, for it enabled him to rehearse, refine and modify arguments and concepts that would be re-presented and repackaged in later works. Therefore, his engagement and preoccupation outside the philosophical arena was not too disruptive or distracting for it would ultimately serve to enrich and nourish his future philosophical writings. Moreover, that Rousseau constantly flitted, nomadically, from one apparently unrelated project to another, lends his *oeuvre* a particular richness as we will witness and explore in subsequent chapters.

In spite of the intervening period and its embroilments, there is, as one might expect, much to connect the first *Discours* with the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* – indeed, on the most fundamental level, the latter simply could not have existed without the former. The most salient connection is that both works, as Ernst Cassirer explains,

[...] s'accordent sur un point essentiel. Tous deux aboutissent à une exaltation de l'état de nature, auquel ils opposent la brusque chute que l'homme a faite en passant à l'état social, à l'état de civilisation.⁴²

We will return to Cassirer's statement again in the course of the coming pages. Both works also conceptualise nature in the same manner: they are not concerned with nature in terms of environmental, habitational or physical space nor indeed any external reality, rather in terms of the original condition of original man; the 'state of nature' can, therefore, be defined on the most fundamental level, in respect to both works, as the state or condition of natural/original man. Writing of the second *Discours* Derathé puts it thus: 'Il ne donne pas de définition de la nature, mais il fait le portrait de l'homme naturel.'⁴³ Unlike many of his contemporaries and predecessors,⁴⁴ Rousseau does not, therefore, concern himself with piecing together the mysteries of universe or indeed describing what natural man's immediate 'physical world' looked

⁴¹ Cf. *Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau sur la réfutation de son discours; Réponse au Roi de Pologne, Duc de Lorraine; Observations de Jean-Jacques Rousseau de Genève; Dernière réponse de Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Lettre à M. l'Abbé Raynal; Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, de Genève; Préface d'une seconde lettre à Bordes.*

⁴² Ernst Cassirer, 'l'Unité chez Rousseau', in Genette, Gérard & Todorov, Tzvetan, (eds.), *Pensée de Rousseau*, (Paris: Seuil, 1984), p.42. '[...] cohere on one essential point. Both culminate in an exaltation of the state of nature which is contrasted with the sudden fall that befell man in moving from the social state to the civilised state.'

⁴³ Robert Derathe, 'l'Homme selon Rousseau', in *Op. Cit.* p.113. 'he doesn't give a definition of nature, but rather a portrait of natural man.'

⁴⁴ We can list amongst these, Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf and Buffon.

like,⁴⁵ and, as a result, his conception of the state of nature has no cosmological or cosmogonical dimension or function. As Catherine Kintzler confirms, the conception of nature is fundamentally and inseparably rooted in the individualistic, the personal and the internal:

Lorsque Rousseau parle de nature, ce terme désigne non pas la nature objective des scientifiques, mais la nature de l'homme. La nature de l'homme, c'est sa sensibilité, son émotivité, son sentiment. Le lieu d'une telle nature n'est plus la chose ou le corps, c'est le 'coeur humain'.⁴⁶

Yet for all their surface similarities, the two works also exhibit a fundamental, irreconcilable and non-negotiable difference. The great unifying shibboleth that Cassirer places so much emphasis on – the 'State of Nature' – proves to be, at once, a point of correspondence, similitude and unity, and a point of rupture and irreversible separation. On one level, of course, the works' shared discourse points to an evolutionary, 'urtextual' and, occasionally, intertextual relationship; themes are developed and ameliorated in a predictable direction and fashion. But in the second *Discours* Rousseau fundamentally recasts the philosophy of history and thus renegotiates the locus of natural man in his natural state. This recasting of the philosophy of history marks an irreversible separation between the two works, for it is this very act of recasting that represents a paradigm shift in Rousseau's conception of the State of Nature; this paradigm shift is signalled by a movement from an historicised concept of nature to a hypothetical and conditional one. What Rousseau does, in essence, is wind the clock back beyond the domain and jurisdiction of history to some hypothetical and ideal pre-history – a golden age – and conceptualises man before any trace of society and culture, before any trace of the onset of societal or cultural institutions, before any exogenous factors were able to exercise their nefarious influence, and before, surprisingly, any trace of the nuclear family. If the natural man depicted in the first

⁴⁵ Though this is almost uniformly true, one must acknowledge several things: first, that Rousseau does allude, in the First and Second *Discours* and the *Essai sur l'Origine des langues*, to a world without need, that is to say a world in which the essentials for sustaining life are abundant and immediately to hand; second, in the *Essai* – and in particular Chapter IX – Rousseau speculates about the affect of different climatic and geological factors upon the first humans – factors that as we shall see represent the turning point for mankind; and third, Rousseau presents us with two images that are painted large in these works. The first of these, in the First *Discours* (p.46), is of a riverbank, 'un beau rivage, paré des seules mains de la nature' where men lived 'ensemble sous les mêmes cabanes.' The second image is to be found in the *Essai Sur L'Origine des Langues*, and to paraphrase Michael O'Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Music, Illusion and Desire*. (London: Macmillan, 1994), p.58 is the locus classicus of Rousseau criticism; it is a well, a watering-hole, around which, as we will see in Chapter 3, Rousseau elaborates a proto-Romantic idyll. Both images are of mankind in their first social state.

⁴⁶ Catherine Kintzler (ed.) *Rousseau, Ecrits sur la Musique*, (Evreux: Stock Musique, 1979), p.XIX 'When Rousseau speaks of nature, the term does not denote the objective nature sought by science, but the nature of man himself. The nature of man is his sensibility, his emotivity, his sentiment. The location of such a nature is no longer the thing or the material body, it is the human heart.'

Discours is ignorant and virtuous, in the second *Discours* he is solitary, idle, unthinking, ignorant and animal-like:

Seul, oisif, et toujours voisin du danger, l'homme sauvage doit aimer à dormir, et avoir le sommeil léger comme les animaux [...] Sa propre conservation faisant presque son unique soin.⁴⁷

He is, in fact, so close to nature that he is part of nature's predetermined mechanism; he has not yet torn himself away from his nascent, original state and, for the most part, merely spectates upon the unfolding of his own existence, exerting little influence or exercising few choices:

L'homme sauvage, livré par la nature au seul instinct ... commencera donc par les fonctions purement animales: apercevoir et sentir sera son premier état, qui lui sera commun avec tous les animaux. Vouloir et ne pas vouloir, désirer ou craindre, seront les premières, et presque les seules opérations de son âme, jusqu'à ce que de nouvelles circonstances y causent de nouveaux développements.⁴⁸

Thus Rousseau's natural man is now nothing like the Spartan citizen lauded in the first *Discours*, he is a savage who merely operates on an instinctive 'auto-pilot' and is, save a few inherent faculties, indistinguishable from his fellow animals. That he is little more than an animal is not a slight on his character, for this initial condition is not construed as a negative moment but as a unique moment of unparalleled purity, plenitude and equilibrium. Those notorious chains – symbols of injustice and the intolerable burdens of society – did not yet exist; man was born free, lived free, and was proximate to nature. He is as he had been intended to be; and he would live as he had been intended to live – virtuous and free.

This moment is stretched into a boundless epoch of plenitude and perfection uncontaminated and unmediated by society, culture, language or need; this was a moment during which the supplementary chain that marks the First *Discours* did not exist, for there was no reason for it to exist or to be ushered into existence. The image Rousseau paints of this state of nature is, of course, utopian and allegorical, mythical even. He depicts a timeless, limitless continuum, a

⁴⁷ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'Origine et les fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les hommes*, pp.181-182. 'Solitary, idle and always in peril, the savage must like to sleep and sleep lightly like animals ... Self-preservation is almost his only thought.'

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.189 & 195. 'The savage, delivered by nature with only instinct ... will therefore begin with purely animalistic functions: to perceive and to sense will be his first condition which he shares with all the animals. To want or not want, to desire or to fear, will be the first and almost the only operations of his mind until new circumstances bring about new developments.' (My emphasis).

condition in which man existed alone and ignorant, his actions purely intuitive and governed by instinct:

Le premier sentiment de l'homme fut celui de son existence, son premier soin celui de sa conservation.⁴⁹ Les productions de la terre lui fournissaient tous les secours nécessaires, l'instinct le porta à en faire usage. La faim, d'autres appétits lui faisant éprouver tour à tour divers manières d'exister, il y en eut une qui l'invita à perpétuer son espèce; et se penchant aveugle, dépourvu de tout sentiment du coeur, ne produisit qu'un acte purement animal. Le besoin satisfait, les deux sexes ne se reconnaissaient plus, et l'enfant même n'était plus rien à la mère sitôt qu'il pouvait se passer d'elle. Telle fut la condition de l'homme naissant.⁵⁰

This is a moment, therefore, even anterior to the institution of the nuclear family; man, in his original state, was not a social animal – even on the most fundamental level – and, as such, his consciousness dictated one single, overriding activity and objective: self-preservation. Yet this golden age, as we can see, is not embroidered with the figurative imagery of Biblical Eden; yes food was abundant, the climate temperate and the population scattered, but make no mistake these were, on occasion, brutal and savage times. 'Ces temps de barbarie', Rousseau would go on to declare in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*,

étaient le siècle d'or, non parce que les hommes étaient unis, mais parce qu'ils étaient séparés. Chacun, dit-on, s'estimait le maître de tout [...]; mais nul ne connaissait et ne désirait que ce qui était sous sa main: ses besoins, loin de le rapprocher de ses semblables, l'en éloignaient. Les hommes, si l'on veut, s'attaquaient dans la rencontre, mais ils se rencontraient rarement. Partout régnait l'état de guerre, et toute la terre était en paix.⁵¹

⁴⁹ This is precisely what Rousseau identifies as being the concept of 'amour de soi-même'. He clearly defines it in a footnote as, 'un sentiment naturel qui porte tout animal à veiller à sa propre conservation et qui, dirigé par la raison et modifié par la pitié, produit l'humanité et la vertu.' This is contrasted with 'amour propre' a 'sentiment relatif, factice et né dans la société, qui porte chaque individu à faire plus de cas de soi que de tout autre, qui inspire aux hommes tous les maux qui se font mutuellement ...' (*Ibid.*, p.212, foot note.). I will come back to this point later in the chapter.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.222. 'Man's first sensation was that of his own existence, his first care that of survival. The fruits of the earth provided him with all his needs, and instinct showed him how to make use of them. Hunger, and other urges made him experience little by little various ways of living, and there was one that invited him to perpetuate his species; and blindly applying himself, devoid of any heart-felt sentiment, produced only a purely animalistic act. Once the urge was satiated, the two sexes no longer knew each other, and even the child was nothing to the mother once he was able do live without her. Such was the nascent state of man.'

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, in *Œuvres*, t.11, p.191. 'These barbaric times were a golden age, not because men were united but because they were separated. Every man thought himself to be the master of all [...]; but he only knew and desired what was close to hand: his needs, far from bringing him closer to his peers, drove him away. Men, if you like, attacked each other on meeting, but they met rarely. A state of war prevailed universally, and the entire earth was at peace.' It is important to put this view in some kind of perspective, especially with those of Rousseau's contemporaries. As Jean Terrasse, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la quête de l'âge d'or*, (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1970), p.52 points out, a distinction needs to be made between Rousseau's natural man and that of Hobbes, Pufendorf and Cumberland: 'l'homme [selon Rousseau] n'est pas naturellement féroce, comme le croyait Hobbes, ni craintif comme le prétend Pufendorf et Cumberland, sauf devant les objets qu'il ne connaît pas.' Rousseau himself expands upon these differences in the *Second Discours*, p.176.

Rousseau makes no attempt whatever to impose any kind of chronological locus within or around this conception, and, as a result, the state of nature is not accessible to any ontology or history; it remains quintessentially, and defiantly, metaphysical. This is, as Robert Wokler puts it, '[...] a fictitious world from which the corrupt features of society [have] been removed.'⁵² And this particular point cannot be stressed enough. As for Rousseau, he goes to the trouble of reiterating it, in the second *Discours*, within the space of just one folio:

[...] ce n'est pas une légère entreprise de démêler ce qu'il y a d'originale et d'artificiel dans la nature actuelle de l'homme, et de bien connaître un état qui n'existe plus, qui n'a peut-être point existé, qui probablement n'existera jamais, et dont il est pourtant nécessaire d'avoir des notions justes pour bien juger de notre état présent.

Il ne faut pas prendre les recherches, dans lesquelles on peut entrer sur ce sujet, pour des vérités historiques, mais seulement pour des raisonnements hypothétiques et conditionnels.⁵³

Observe the potent temporal disjunction at work in the first citation: we have present, perfect and future tenses smashed up against one another in order to articulate and reinforce the atemporal depiction of the state of nature. In the second citation, Rousseau counsels the reader against any attempt to historicise the subject and reiterates the ineluctable hypothetical and conditional status of any inquiry into this field. He has, with this radical manoeuvre, cut himself adrift once and for all from the nostalgic historicism that characterises the first *Discours* and the historiographical logic of linearity and progression that that strategy entails and requires. If the historical distance alluded to in the First *Discours* is almost too great to allow any certitude, the distance between our present state and that of our original Nature is rendered virtually unbridgeable in the second *Discours*. I say *virtually* rather than completely, for Rousseau leaves just one possible route back to the origin in suspension: *la Voix*. More discussion of this particular issue will appear at the beginning of Chapter 3.

⁵² Robert Wokler, *Rousseau*, p.52.

⁵³ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, pp.159 & 162 respectively. 'It is not a simple task to unravel what in the current nature of man is natural and what is artificial, and to understand a state which no longer exists, which has perhaps never existed or which will probably never exist, yet of which it is necessary to have some idea in order to judge our present state.'

'[...] Our research into in this subject should not be taken for historical facts, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasoning.'

2.2. Locating the Necessary Origin of the Fall

That Rousseau's conception of the state of nature is not accessible to any ontology or conventional historiography is beyond reasonable doubt. Yet Rousseau stops just a little way short of explicitly acknowledging, in either the second *Discours* or those works associated with it,⁵⁴ that the ideal state of nature is, consequently, allegorical or indeed functions as allegory. I am satisfied, however, that the absence of such an explicit acknowledgement means very little for this is clearly allegory, but with one small twist: it is an allegory couched in historiographical rhetoric; this is allegory presented as ideal linear history and Rousseau's narrative has a clear function and operational objective. If his philosophical *modus operandi* is to yield a cogent and watertight argument, then his depiction of the state of nature must convey, without ambiguity or equivocalness, its non-negotiable perfection, purity and plenitude. The ideal state of nature must, therefore, assume the status and functional rôle of an Edenic golden age – albeit a de-christianised, Godless and rather barbaric one – so that it can stand so far removed from our current existential state that it is virtually incomparable to it.

Like the second and third chapters of *Genesis*, Rousseau's narrative will recount man's fall from an original state of perfection, plenitude, innocence and purity, but unlike *Genesis* Rousseau's first men did not eat forbidden fruit, were not deceived by the serpent and were not driven out of the state of nature '[...] to till the ground from whence they came'. Though there is a comparable system of value that operates in each 'allegory', Rousseau's state of nature is not controlled or governed by an omnipotent deity; the mechanism of nature is the sole arbiter in the state of nature and man is an integral part of that mechanism, not at odds with it. He does not, and cannot, contravene its laws. As Paul Bénichou points out, Rousseau's schema closely shadows that of Christian teachings (Eden-fall-atonement), with the exception that it is given a purely 'human' dimension and significance. 'Rousseau a conservé,' Bénichou remarks,

dans une vision [...] purement humaine des choses, les trois termes du schéma chrétien. A l'état de nature a succédé [...] une longue déchéance, qui est notre

⁵⁴ Especially the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* and *Du Principe de la mélodie* (urtext of both the *Essai sur l'origine des Langues* and the *Examen des Deux Principes*).

état présent, et à laquelle doit succéder une réparation. Cette réparation est proposée dans toute la partie positive de son oeuvre [...].⁵⁵

We have already seen that Rousseau's natural man is ignorant and unthinking, and governed by his nascent instinct, an instinct which, above all else, inspires self-preservation or *amour de soi-même*. But we should not infer from this that he is an automaton, for Rousseau bestows several faculties upon natural man that permit him to be an *agent libre*, that is to say the ability to exercise choice, within certain limitations, over his quotidian existence and immediate destiny. These faculties are: *perfectibilité* and *la pitié*. Paradoxically, the first, and perhaps most important – *perfectibilité* – is entirely superfluous in the state of nature, for in the absence of any immediate needs, man does not require to alter – or ameliorate – any aspect of his daily life or the world that envelops him. This superfluous faculty does not, therefore, help man transcend his nascent condition, nor will it, *by itself*, permit him or his future progeny to progress beyond their natural state:

Concluons qu'errant dans les forêts sans industrie, sans parole, sans domicile, sans guerre, et sans liaisons, sans nul besoin de ses semblables, comme sans nul désir de leur nuire, peut-être même sans jamais en reconnaître aucun individuellement, l'homme sauvage sujet à peu de passions, et se suffisant à lui-même, n'avait que les sentiments et les lumières propres à cet état, qu'il ne sentait que ses vrais besoins, ne regardait que ce qu'il croyait avoir intérêt de voir, et que son intelligence ne faisait pas plus de progrès que sa vanité. Si par hasard il faisait quelque découverte, il pouvait d'autant moins la communiquer qu'il ne reconnaissait pas même ses enfants. L'art périssait avec l'inventeur⁵⁶; il n'y avait ni éducation ni progrès, les générations se multipliaient inutilement; et chacune partant toujours du même point, les siècles s'écoulaient dans toute la grossièreté des premiers âges, l'espèce était déjà vieille, et l'homme restait toujours enfant.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Paul Bénichou, 'L'idée de nature chez Rousseau', in *Pensée de Rousseau*, p.128. 'In a purely human vision of things, the three terms of the Christian schema. The State of Nature was succeeded by a long fall, which is our present state, which in turn must be followed by atonement. This atonement is propounded in the positive side of his work.'

⁵⁶ Rousseau patently does not mean 'inventor' in the sense of 'creator,' 'initiator', or one who 'devises,' rather Rousseau means 'discoverer' from the Latin *invenire* to discover. This point is of particular importance, as man in his natural state is not capable of invention, he stumbles across something, by accident, for he is not able to conceptualise causal relations and outcomes.

⁵⁷ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, p.218. 'Let us conclude then that wandering the forests, without industry, without speech, without home, without war and without ties, without any need of his fellow-creatures nor having any desire to hurt them, and perhaps even not distinguishing them one from another, the early man being self-sufficient and subject to so few passions, he had no feelings or knowledge but such as befitted his situation; that he felt only his actual needs, and disregarded everything he did not think himself immediately concerned by, and that his understanding made no greater progress than his vanity. If by some accident he made a discovery, he was no more able to communicate it, than he was to recognise his own children. The skill would necessarily perish with its inventor; there was no education nor progress and the generations multiplied without purpose; each generation started out from the same point, centuries elapsed in all the barbarism of the first ages; the species was already old, but man remained always childlike.'

But once the state of nature has ended, and man has taken the first few tentative steps towards a destination that will be characterised by the supplemental chain, his *perfectibilité* will be the stimulus that elevates him above all other animals and beings; it will be no longer, as a consequence, superfluous, but rather a vital, animating faculty that drives him forward beyond the restricted horizon offered by instinct:

Il y a une autre qualité très spécifique [...] la faculté de se perfectionner; faculté qui, à l'aide de circonstances, développe successivement toutes les autres, et réside parmi nous tant dans l'espèce que dans l'individu, au lieu qu'un animal est, au bout de quelques mois, ce qu'il sera toute sa vie et son espèce, au bout de mille ans, ce qu'elle était la première année de ces milles ans.⁵⁸

However, in his nascent state and without 'l'aide de circonstances', *perfectibilité* is both purposeless and ineffective, for man is just like the beast he will eventually hold dominion over. More of this in a moment.

The second nascent faculty, and the one that proves to be of capital significance to the philosophy of music, is *la pitié* – in Rousseau's words: 'une répugnance naturelle à voir périr ou souffrir tout être sensible et, principalement, nos semblables.'⁵⁹ But this natural repugnance, as Rousseau puts it, is not reflective, governed or mediated by any operation or engagement of reason or rational thought, nor is it directed towards others by virtue of their putative status as rational beings:

il semble, en effet, que si je suis obligé de ne faire aucun mal à mon semblable, c'est moins parce qu'il est un être raisonnable que parce qu'il est un être sensible.⁶⁰

This repugnance is therefore instinctive, spontaneous and immediate. It is all these things, for man in his natural state is not an 'être raisonnable' but rather a sentient and instinctively compassionate being.⁶¹ It is as though he sees himself reflected in others and reaches out to

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.183. 'there is another very specific quality which distinguishes them, and which will admit of no dispute. This is the faculty of self-improvement [perfectibilité], which, by the help of circumstances, gradually develops all the rest of our faculties, and is inherent in the species as in the individual: whereas a brute is, at the end of a few months, all he will ever be during his whole life, and his species, at the end of a thousand years, exactly what it was the first year of that thousand.'

⁵⁹ Rousseau, 'Préface,' in *Ibid.*, p.162. 'a natural repugnance at seeing any other sensible being, and particularly any of our own species, suffer pain or death.'

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p.162. 'It seems, in effect, that if I am bound to do no injury to my fellow-creatures, it is less because they are rational than because they are sentient beings.'

⁶¹ Later, in book iv of *Emile* (1762), and in a different context, Rousseau would subtly change the colouring of this argument. He would suggest that some knowledge and some reflection were necessary for the child to be able to 'feel' pity for another. In essence, one should not view this as a contradiction of the argument proffered in the *Second Discourse* and described above, but

them because he ‘feels’ what they feel, not because he can think what they are thinking, or indeed conceptualise the reason for, or cause of, their suffering. This ‘reaching out’ will, eventually – when the conditions and circumstances are conducive – drive him to communicate with his semblants.⁶² In fact, he shares this natural and inherent characteristic with his fellow beasts:

[la pitié] vertu d’autant plus universelle et d’autant plus utile à l’homme qu’elle précède en lui l’usage de toute réflexion, et si naturelle que les bêtes mêmes en donnent quelquefois des signes sensibles. [...] on observe tous les jours la répugnance qu’ont les chevaux à fouler aux pieds un corps vivant; un animal ne passe point sans inquiétude auprès d’un animal mort de son espèce. [...] Tel est le pur mouvement de la nature, antérieur à toute réflexion.⁶³

In Rousseau’s schema, *la pitié* fulfils another essential function: it is the *de facto* rule of law, it is the ‘douce voix’ of the conscience and of consciousness itself which inhibits the commitment of immoral acts and leads man, in spite of himself – by accident – to be virtuous. *Vertu* is, therefore, a by-product of *la pitié*, for it cannot be the product or outcome of ratiocination:

C’est elle [la pitié] qui, dans l’état de nature, tient lieu de lois, de mœurs, et de vertu, avec cet avantage que nul n’est tenté de désobéir à sa douce voix: c’est elle qui détournera tout sauvage robuste d’enlever à un faible enfant [...] c’est elle qui, au lieu de cette maxime sublime de justice raisonnée: ‘fais à autrui comme tu veux qu’on te fasse,’ inspire à tous les hommes cet autre maxime de bonté naturelle bien moins parfaite, mais plus utile peut-être que la précédente: ‘fais ton bien avec le moindre mal d’autrui qu’il est possible.’⁶⁴

rather a) a contemporisation of it and b) the recontextualisation of it – relocating it from the domain of hypothesis to the domain of reality and possibility. Rousseau would, then, in *Emile* describe *pitié* as ‘... the first relative sentiment which touches the human heart according to the order of nature. To become sensitive and pitying, the child must know that there are beings like him who suffer what he has suffered, who feel the pains he has felt, and that there are others whom he ought to conceive of as being able to feel them too. In fact, how do we let ourselves be moved by pity if not by transporting ourselves outside ourselves and identifying with the suffering animal, by leaving as it were our own being to take on its being? We suffer only so much as we judge that it suffers. It is not in ourselves, it is in him that we suffer. Thus no one becomes sensitive until his imagination is animated and begins to transport him out of himself.’ (*Emile*, transl. Allan Bloom, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp.222-223). Again we see more than just faint echoes of this recontextualisation of *la Pitié* in chapter IX of the *Essai sur l’Origine des Langues, Oeuvres*, t.11, p.189, where Rousseau writes about it in exactly the same terms: ‘Comment nous laissons-nous émuvoir à la pitié? En nous transportant hors de nous-mêmes, en nous identifiant avec l’être souffrant. Nous ne souffrons qu’autant que nous jugeons qu’il souffre; c’est ne pas dans nous, c’est dans lui que nous souffrons.’

⁶² We will see *la pitié* rendered dramatically in Chapter 5, when Galatea and Pygmalion communicate for the first time following the animation of the statue.

⁶³ Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, pp.212-213. ‘a virtue all the more universal and useful to mankind that it comes before any kind of reflection, and so natural that beasts themselves sometimes give evident proofs of it. ... it is well known that horses show a reluctance to trample on living bodies; an animal never passes by the dead body of another of its species without anxiety ... Such is the pure impulse of nature, anterior to all kinds of reflection.’

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.214-215. ‘it is this which, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws, morals and virtues, with the advantage that none are tempted to disobey its gentle voice: it is this which will always prevent a sturdy savage from robbing a weak child ... it is this which, instead of inculcating that sublime maxim of rational justice: *do to others as you would have them do unto you*, inspires all men with that other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect, but perhaps more useful: *Do good to yourself harming others as little as possible.*’

It is in this particular respect that the allegory of the state of nature is de-christianised and becomes man-centred. Instead of the divine law that reigns supreme in the Eden of *Genesis*, we have, in Rousseau's neo-Christian formulation, a natural law that guides, suggests, inhibits and dissuades, but ultimately one that does not pronounce judgement or administer punishment, for there is no need to judge or to punish. There is, in the state of nature, a perfect equilibrium; it is unerringly complete, full, perfect, and ideal. The Biblical allegory of Eden is concluded with the act of expulsion, with punishment, with separation and with the commencement of a history, a mortal, corporeal history. It is concluded in this way precisely because it is not perfect, for there is, at the very heart of it, temptation and evil. Woman is tempted, woman sins, woman tempts man, man sins, man and woman are judged, man and woman are punished, man and woman are expelled and thus they are destined, for ever more, to begin their life-long journey back to rejoin another allegorical universe: paradise. Rousseau's allegory of the state of nature is, however, not concluded with such punitive measures, because man is always already blameless; he is an integral part of the mechanism of nature and, as we have seen, does not and cannot contravene its laws for, although he has been imbued with the capacity to do so (*perfectibilité*), the necessary conditions or circumstances for such a contravention are absent. Moreover, *perfectibilité* is not a negative force, nor is it construed in negative terms. The difference, therefore, between Biblical Eden and the State of Nature is essentially (and necessarily) a rejection of the Christian dogma of original sin, and by extension of any theodicy, for in common with his contemporaries, Rousseau wanted, at all cost, to avoid any stigmatisation or devalorisation of humanity. As Paul Bénichou cogently puts it:

La philosophie rejetait cette vue sinistre [of original sin] et voulait juger, selon l'homme seul, de la condition de l'homme et de son histoire. Rousseau, qu'il ne faut pas toujours et seulement opposer aux Philosophes, prononce, quant au dogme de la chute, le même refus qu'eux. Ni lui ni eux ne veulent expliquer la condition terrestre de l'homme par une séparation avec Dieu, ni mettre au centre de leur anthropologie une accusation portée contre le genre humain.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Paul Bénichou, 'L'idée de nature chez Rousseau', in *Pensée de Rousseau*, p.127. 'Philosophy rejected this sinister view and wanted to judge according to man himself man's condition and his history. Rousseau, who was not always in contradiction [opposer à] with the *philosophes*, voiced, with regard to the dogma of the fall, the same refutation as they did. Neither he nor they wanted to explain the earthly condition of man as a separation with God, nor, at the heart of their anthropology, place the blame on the human species.'

What this means in practice is that Rousseau's hand is forced: he has no option but to devise a schema in which man does not leave his natural, ideal state through his own volition and neither is he forced to leave it by the interference or influence of any endogenous factors. How will Rousseau accomplish this, for if the state of nature was perfect, if it was complete, then why should it end or be ended? And why should man be forced to leave it?

2.3. The 'Fall-State' and the first two species of 'Need'

Evidently this moment is a structural and conceptual watershed in Rousseau's philosophical system and everything hinges upon it. We have reached the threshold of a cataclysmic change when the ideal state of nature is ruptured and man becomes compelled to take his leave and embark upon the first tentative steps toward civilisation and all those institutions that will be characterised, throughout his evolution, by the supplemental chain – that is to say human communication in all its forms and society. The hermeneutic key to unlocking this moment is to be found in Rousseau's rather complex conception and elaboration of 'the fall.' The fall is the event that is responsible for rupturing and destroying the ideal state of nature. But the fall must also represent, at once, the point of rupture and the beginning – the first point – of a state of transition that will culminate in the actual (contemporary) state of man; the fall is, in other words, the dawn of the history of mankind – the state that usurps and replaces the ideal state of nature and triggers the process of history itself.

Both the ideal state of nature and the 'fall' (what I shall now identify as the 'Fall-State'), are marked by two very different and mutually exclusive types of need: the first species a natural, instinctive need; and the second species a need born of desire, greed and immorality – negative terms that characterise man's current condition (what he has made of himself) as well as the orientation of his history as it unfolds. Though the ideal state of nature is just that – ideal, perfect and complete, Rousseau nevertheless reserves a place in his conception of the pure origin for the first species of need. This need is instinctive, pre-programmed, part of man's DNA as it were, and as such does not defile the flawless image of the Ideal-State of nature. There is, as a consequence, no contradiction in terms here, for the condition *sine qua*

non is that this species of need be natural and instinctive, an integrated part of the mechanism and fabric of nature. This Need is described in the second *Discours* in the following terms:

[...] les seuls biens qu'il connaisse dans l'univers sont la nourriture, une femelle et le repos; les seuls maux qu'il craigne sont la douleur et la faim; je dis la douleur et non la mort; car jamais l'animal ne saura ce que c'est que mourir [...].⁶⁶

In stark contrast, the second species of need is considered to be symptomatic of the effects brought about in the moments following the fall. The fall – a cataclysmic conjuncture that puts an end to the Ideal State of nature – triggers the second species of need; it is, in fact, its primary cause. And this second species of need, and the continual quest to satiate it, is what marks out man's subsequent history and his existential condition, his *actual* temporal locus. In other words, Rousseau believes that although the second species of need is the direct progeny of the fall – and by extension is not in and of itself responsible for the ending of the state of nature or originating the 'Fall-State' – it is, nevertheless, responsible for the ongoing ills that have plagued, and continue to plague, humanity and society. This second type of need stands in diametrical opposition to the first in the same way that the 'Fall-State' stands in opposition to the ideal state of nature; it is thus simply in order to highlight the absolute perfection of all that is associated with the ideal state of nature, with the unerring plenitude of the origin. This is precisely the reason why Rousseau believes it necessary to have 'des notions justes,' of the ideal state of nature, 'pour bien juger de notre état présent.'⁶⁷ These notions are necessary in

⁶⁶ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, p.196: '[...] the only possessions he knows in the universe are food, a female and rest; the only ills he fears are pain and hunger; I say pain and not death, for the animal will never know what it is to die.' Parenthetically, the fact that Rousseau does not permit man to know, or to be able to conceptualise, what it is to die, means that in his natural state Rousseau does not consider him to be a metaphysical animal; he operates instinctively and automatically, driven only by these natural needs and impulses. We are reminded here of Schopenhauer's arguments in the *World as Will and Idea* (transl. R. Haldane and J Kemp, (London: Trübner, 1883-1886), II, p.359-360) not because they are similar to Rousseau's, but because they are, in fact, diametrically opposed: "With the exception of man, no being wonders at his own existence; but it is to them so much a matter of course that they do not observe it. [...] With this reflection and wonder there arises therefore, for man alone, the need for a metaphysic; he is accordingly a [metaphysical animal]. [...] it is the knowledge of death, and along with this the suffering and the misery of human life, which gives the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanation of the world." It is, of course, important to emphasise that the difference between Rousseau's vision of man in his ideal state and Schopenhauer's conception of man at once vast and negligible. If Rousseau were writing about man in his Fall-State, that is after the ideal state of nature has ended, he would doubtless share Schopenhauer's pessimism. But that he is writing of man in his ideal state means that his vision is entirely different to Schopenhauer's; for Rousseau man in his ideal state is akin to Schopenhauer's animal: that is to say he is not predisposed to – or indeed does not participate in any – philosophical or cosmological reflection. To be sure, Rousseau's natural man is sentient, but he is unthinking, because to think would be to situate oneself in the universe, to imagine beginnings, ends and existence itself. In short, in his ideal state, man is not preoccupied by the trials and tribulations of everyday existence: food is abundant, the climate is kind and he does not want for, or need, anything.

⁶⁷ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, p.159. See note 53 above.

order to provide the contrast that allows such dichotomisation to operate and indeed take place.

2.3. The divine nature of the Fall

There is, in Rousseau's writings, an air of inevitability about the fall, as if it were part of man's destiny to leave his original condition of innocence and plenitude. It is clear, however, that this question proved to be a difficult and intensely problematic one for the Genevan.⁶⁸ It is interesting to observe that the first steps out of the Ideal-State are seen as steps towards communication, towards language, rather than steps towards the formation of society. This seems to suggest, though it must be stressed that it is never more than an intimation, that the institution of society occurs after the beginning of language:

Plus on médite sur ce sujet, plus la distance des pures sensations aux plus simples connaissances s'agrandit à nos regards; et il est impossible de concevoir comment un homme aurait pu par ses seules forces, sans le secours de la communication, et sans l'aiguillon de la nécessité, franchir un si grand intervalle.⁶⁹

Later in the second *Discours* Rousseau considers the logical difficulties associated with such a question:

[...] effrayé des difficultés qui se multiplient, et convaincu de l'impossibilité presque démontrée que les langues aient pu naître et s'établir par des moyens purement humains, je laisse à qui voudra l'entreprendre la discussion de ce difficile problème, lequel a été le plus nécessaire, de la société déjà liée, à l'institution des langues, ou des langues déjà inventées, à l'établissement de la société.⁷⁰

It is a problematic to which Rousseau would not apply any rigorous analysis (beyond his intimation that communication was sought before society) until the *Essai sur l'Origine des*

⁶⁸ For an interesting discussion of these problems and indeed the difference between Rousseau's ideas and those of his contemporaries - particularly Condillac, Hobbes and Pufendorf, see Wokler, *Rousseau*, pp.33-54.

⁶⁹ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, p.197. 'The more we reflect on this subject, the greater appears the distance between pure sensation and the most simple knowledge: it is impossible indeed to conceive how a man, by his own powers alone, without the aid of communication and the spur of necessity, could have bridged so great a gap.'

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.208-209 '...alarmed by the increasing difficulties which present themselves, and so well convinced of the almost demonstrable impossibility that languages should owe their original institution to merely human means, that I leave, to any one who will undertake it, the discussion of the difficult problem, which was most necessary, the existence of society to the invention of language, or the invention of language to the establishment of society.'

Langues, where the 'aiguillon de la nécessité' is seen, primarily, as geological and meteorological, and first formulated in terms of a somewhat poetic and metaphorical divine gesture: 'Celui qui voulut que l'homme fût sociable toucha du doigt l'axe du globe et l'inclina sur l'axe de l'univers.'⁷¹ This deliberate act would change the essential nature of man from solitary, ignorant and idle into a social, political and eventually immoral one. It would awaken in man *la perfectibilité*; it would permit him to rise up from his ideal natural state, seize control of his destiny and eventually hold dominion over the world that enveloped him. He would become everything that he was not or could not have been in his ideal state. Indeed, as Rousseau continues his explanation of the fall, we can see that his tone is more Nostradamian than it is poetic and metaphorical, and what follows this divine gesture conforms exactly to the pattern of degeneration – of seemingly irreversible historical decline – set out in the first *Discours*.

A ce léger moment, je vois changer la face de la terre et décider la vocation du genre humain: j'entends au loin les cris de joie d'une multitude insensée; je vois édifier les palais et les villes; je vois naître les arts, les lois, le commerce; je vois les peuples se former, s'étendre, se dissoudre, se succéder comme les flots de mer; je vois les hommes rassemblés sur quelques points de leur demeure pour s'y dévorer mutuellement, faire un affreux désert du reste du monde, digne monument de l'union sociale et de l'utilité des arts.⁷²

With this move, Rousseau finally excludes the possibility that purely human means were sufficient to rupture and put an end to the ideal state of nature and, by extension, be the primary cause of the institution both of the first languages and the first societies; *la perfectibilité* makes this possible. As we saw above, he suggested as much in the Second *Discours*, but in the

⁷¹ Rousseau, *Essai*, in *Œuvres*, t.11, pp.198-199, 'He who wanted man to be a social animal, touched the axis of the earth and tilted it toward the axis of the universe.' Although, in the context of the *Essai*, we should, as I have suggested, see this as a poetic and metaphorical argument, for Rousseau is not here postulating primary causes, there is nevertheless an underlying cosmological idea at work here. There was much debate amongst scientists and thinkers during the 18th century regarding the question whether the inclination of the earth on its axis was merely its original position or whether it had been deliberately realigned from a different position by the intervention of God. Rousseau was broadly of the second opinion on this matter. Indeed, if we look at Rousseau's 'Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar' in Book IV of *Emile*, p.273) we can see this view rising to surface; Rousseau's argument here is for a prime mover, an anti-teleological explanation of the universe in which the supreme Being sets the universe in motion: 'Descartes formed heaven and earth with dice, but he was not able to give the first push to these dice or to put his centrifugal force in action without the aid of a rotary motion. Newton discovered the law of attraction, but attraction alone would soon reduce the universe to an immobile mass. To this law he had to add a projectile force in order to make the celestial bodies describe curves. Let Descartes tell us what physical law made his vortices turn. Let Newton show us the hand which launched the planets on the tangent of their orbits ... I believe therefore that a will moves the universe and animates nature.'

⁷² Rousseau, *Essai*, p.199. 'In this fleeting moment, I see the face of the Earth change and the vocation of the human species determined: I hear in the distance the joyful cries from a maddening crowd; I see palaces and towns erected; I see the birth of the arts, laws, commerce; I see people form, spread out, dissolve, and follow one another like waves on the ocean; I see men assembled on their land, devouring it and making a terrible desert of the remainder of the planet, a dignified monument of society and the utility of the arts.'

Essai it is much more than a suggestion, it is a veritable affirmation. This conceptual manoeuvre is a necessary evil, for if both society and language are to be seen as unnatural conditions, swerving away from nature as the direct result of the fall and the Fall-State, then there must be nothing instinctive or endogenous that triggers their institution or discovery. Just as Rousseau conceived of a golden age in which men rarely encountered any of their own kind, the institution of the Fall-State must be seen as its antithesis, that is to say, it must be construed as the moment – the first moment – when men are forced to come together, both by accidents:

Les associations d'hommes sont en grande partie l'ouvrage des accidents de la nature; les déluges particuliers, les mers extravasées, les éruptions des volcans, les grands tremblements de terre, les incendies allumés par la foudre et qui détruisaient les forêts, tout ce qui dut effrayer et disperser les sauvages habitants d'un pays dut ensuite les rassembler.⁷³

and the irrepressible rhythm of nature's cyclical operation:

Les révolutions des saisons sont une autre cause plus générale et plus permanente qui dut produire le même effet dans les climats exposés à cette variété. Forcés de s'approvisionner pour l'hiver, voilà les habitants dans le cas de s'entraider, les voilà contraints d'établir entre eux quelque sorte de convention.⁷⁴

in order to found the first language and with it the first society. The establishment or negotiation of this 'convention' – which was necessarily a linguistic or gestural process⁷⁵ – signals the very beginnings of society. Rousseau concludes that it would only take one further incremental and developmental step for men to be irreversibly bound to one another forever: 'augmentez d'un degré leur [les hommes] développement et leurs lumières, les voilà réunis pour toujours'.⁷⁶ With the institution of society and the conventions that underpin it (however primitive those conventions might be), the end of the ideal state of nature is confirmed and

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.201. 'encounters between men are in large measure the work of accidents of nature; localised flooding, swollen seas, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, forest fires sparked by lightning, all that which must have frightened and dispersed the savages of one country must have then assembled them.'

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.201. 'The changing seasons are another more general and permanent cause which must have produced the same effect in those climates exposed to them [the seasons]. Forced to stock up and prepare for winter, the inhabitants would help one another and this established between them a sort of convention.'

⁷⁵ In the *Essai* Rousseau does not deny that both gesture and vocalisation are natural, but he does suggest that gesture is simpler, more economical as a system of communication and less dependent upon conventions: 'quoique la langue du geste et celle de la voix soient également naturelles, toutefois la première et plus facile et dépend moins des conventions.' (*Ibid.*, p.156).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.202 'raise by one step their development and their knowledge, and they will be united forever.'

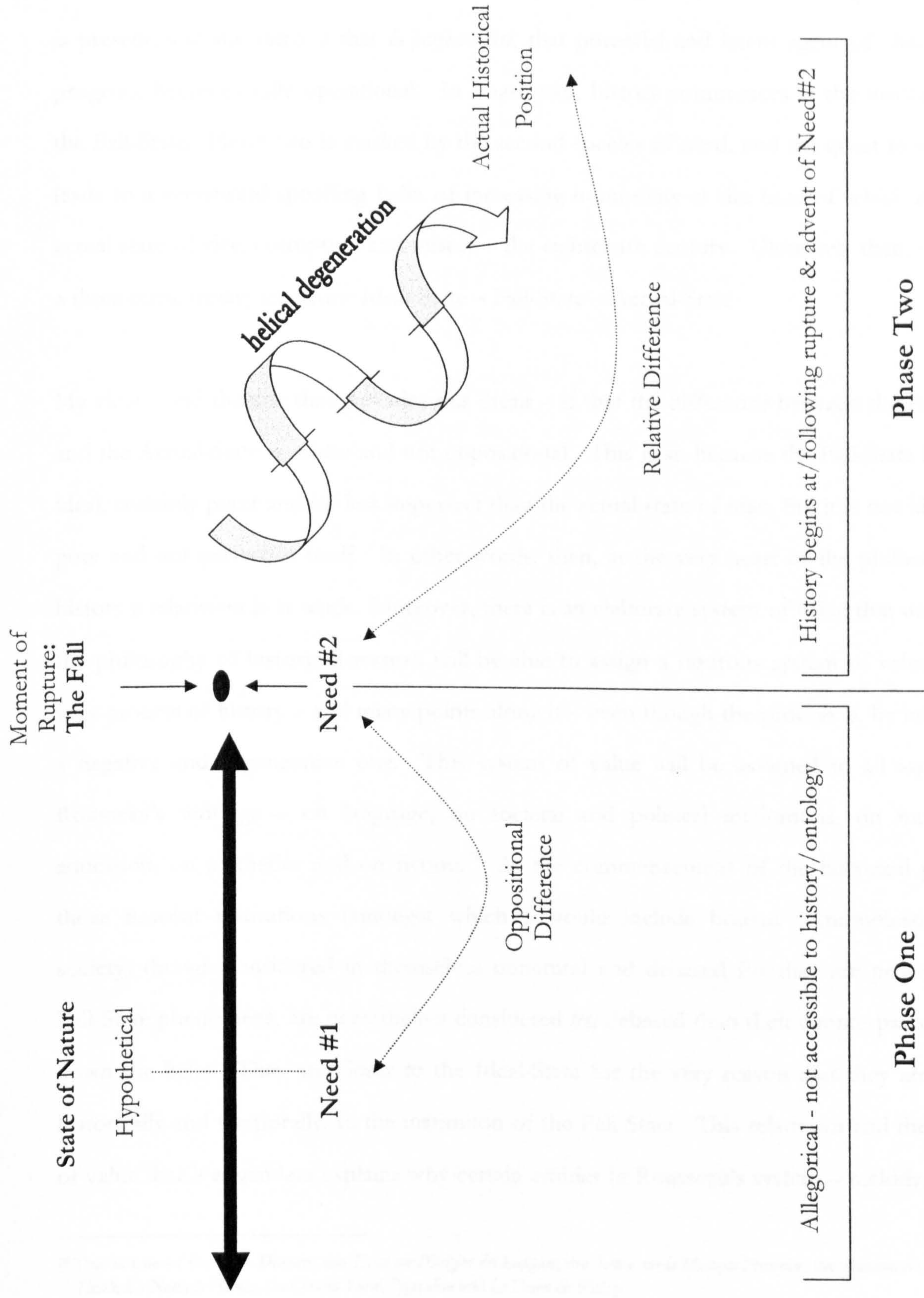
the inevitable process of degeneration commences; history – and Rousseau’s systematic philosophisation of it – can begin in earnest.

2.5. Adumbrating the bigger picture: Synthesising the First and Second *Discours*

In order to begin to assemble a meaningful picture of these two works – works which, in my view, constitute the core structure of Rousseau’s system – we need to synthesise both *Discours* and examine the distinctive conceptions of nature and natural man depicted within them. Earlier we saw that Ernst Cassirer argued that the two *Discours* cohere on one essential point, in an exaltation of the state of nature. As I have shown, however, this statement is only partially correct: to be sure nature is the primary subject of both works but fundamentally different ‘natures’ are envisioned. In the first *Discours*, nature is that which is embodied in the ‘Fall-State’. There, natural man is exposed to the second species of need and the immorality and vice that it ultimately engenders. Man’s subsequent history, a history of seemingly inescapable downward-spiralling moral decline from near moral perfection to depravity, is the very stuff of the First *Discours*. In one sense, therefore, it is less about nature than it is about history, and natural man is clearly one step removed from his ideal state, for he is already socialised, already citizen. The second *Discours*, on the other hand, relocates and repositions both nature and natural man; it winds the clocks back beyond the domain and jurisdiction of history and ontology in order to describe and mark out an ideal, hypothetical, conditional and essentially allegorical State of nature. In the first half of the second *Discours*, man resides in this ideal, pre-rupture state and as such is only exposed to the first species of need. *La perfectibilité* is present in the ideal state, but it is entirely superfluous there; in the absence of the second species of need, man does not need to reshape or ameliorate any aspect of his daily life or the world that surrounds him. In essence then, these two works are (chrono)-logically out of sequence: the Second *Discours* does not so much replace or supersede the First *Discours*, its subject matter, though without ontology itself, ‘pre-dates’ or prefaces it. The first half of the Second *Discours* thus outlines what we might call the First Phase in Rousseau’s system or the ‘Philosophy of Nature’, and the First *Discours* outlines the Second Phase or the ‘Philosophy of History’. The First Phase is the ideal state, a continuum, a boundless epoch of plenitude and

perfection. The Second Phase is the history of mankind from the earliest times (from the very beginning of the 'Fall-State'). What distinguishes and differentiates the two works is the fall itself: that poetic and metaphorical gesture – the tilting of the world on its axis – in order to introduce meteorological and geological phenomena which would eventually force man into a socialised state. We can see this represented in **Diagram 1** below.

Diagram 1: The Placing of the Fall and the Beginning of the Degenerative History



As can be seen, it is the 'Fall' that separates both phases. Phase one contains nothing but the first species of need; it is a steady-state continuum. The resultant difference between the Ideal State and the Fall-State is oppositional, binary. This is so because the Fall-State is clearly not ideal, not pure and not perfect, for it is, of course, not the Ideal State. At the very instant at/following the fall, when the Fall-State replaces the Ideal State, three factors differentiate it: the first, is the inclination of the earth on its axis; the second is that the second species of need is present; and the third is that *la perfectibilité*, that potential and latent agent of change and progress, becomes fully operational. In Phase two, history commences at the institution of the Fall-State. Phase two is marked by the second species of need, and the quest to satiate it leads to a downward-spiralling helix of increasing immorality at the base of which is man's actual state of vice, corruption and misery – the eighteenth century. Ultimately then, we have a three-term, trinary structure: Ideal-State – Fall-State – Actual-State.

My view – and the one that pervades this thesis – is that the difference between the Fall-State and the Actual-State is *relative* and not oppositional. This is so because the Fall-State is *almost* ideal, certainly purer and far less imperfect than the actual state of man, but it is not ideal, not pure and not perfect in itself. In other words, then, at the very heart of the philosophy of history a relativism is at work. Moreover, there is an elaborate system of value that underpins the philosophy of history; Rousseau will be able to assign a rigorous system of value to the very process of history – and many points along it – even though the process is, by its nature, a negative and degenerative one. This system of value will be assigned to all aspects of Rousseau's writings – on language, on societal and political institutions, on music, on education, on aesthetics and on fiction.⁷⁷ At the commencement of the historical process, those nascent institutions (amongst which I would include human communication and society) though considered in themselves unnatural and debased for they are post-rupture, Fall-State phenomena, are nevertheless considered *less* debased than their counterparts further down the helix. They are closer to the Ideal-State for the very reason that they are closer, historically and temporally, to the institution of the Fall-State. This relativism and the system of value that it engenders explains why certain entities in Rousseau's system – melody, Italian,

⁷⁷ This is true of the *First Discours*, the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, the *Lettre sur la Musique Française*, the *Dictionnaire de Musique*, *Emile*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Du Contrat Social*, *Pygmalion* and *Le Devin du Village*.

vowel, liberty, south – are valorised or privileged over others – harmony, French, consonant, servitude, north – and it explains the very existence of the supplemental chain itself.

2.6. The problematic notion of the beginning

My theoretical position runs counter-current to what have become, over the past thirty-five years or so, conventional, traditional and, in some cases, abused arguments concerning the nature of Rousseau's philosophical system and the nature of his theories concerning the origins of language and society.⁷⁸ I do not wish in the present work to embark upon, or become embroiled in, either a lengthy description or exploration of these arguments, or indeed an evaluation of the merits and demerits of the interpretative strategies that have given rise to them, for this has already been done many times before.⁷⁹ Neither do I wish to be diverted away from the primary objective of this thesis which is to offer my reading of Rousseau's philosophy of music and the reform of opera that it engenders, rather than focus *in extenso* on certain secondary readings of Rousseau whose objectives are altogether different from mine.⁸⁰ Instead, I will succinctly set out what differentiates my position and why I think some conventional views are misplaced. This process will also serve to draw together some of the threads of this chapter and allow us to consider how this system as a whole will govern Rousseau's conception of music in subsequent chapters.

⁷⁸ See especially: Jacques Derrida's 'classic' reading of Rousseau in Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1967) and De Man's seminal critique of Derrida's reading in Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essay in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁷⁹ Instead, I will point the reader to the following secondary texts that examine, clarify and critique such readings. See especially: G. Ulmer, 'Jacques Derrida and Paul De Man on/in Rousseau's faults,' *Eighteenth Century*, 20, (1979): 164-81; Dalton Thomas, *Music and Origins of Language*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) – see chapter 4 pp.87-88; Aram Vartanian, 'Derrida, Rousseau and the difference,' *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 19, (1989); Chapter 2 of Sweeney-Turner, *The Sonorous Body: Music, Enlightenment and Deconstruction*, Thesis (PhD), Edinburgh University, 1994; Christopher Norris, *Derrida*, cf. chapter 5, esp. pp.97-113; Christie V. McDonald, 'Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau,' *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 20, (1979): pp.82-95; and Madeleine Velguth, 'Le Texte comme prétexte: Jacques Derrida lit *Les Confessions* de Rousseau,' *French Review*, 58, (1985): pp.811-19.

⁸⁰ It should, of course, be noted that Derrida's primary objective is to elucidate Rousseau's theory or system of writing (*écriture*), since, as he claims in *De la Grammatologie*, p.147, '... Rousseau est sans doute le seul ou le premier à faire un thème et un système de la réduction de l'écriture, telle quelle était profondément impliquée par toute l'époque.' He goes on to suggest that his aim, in examining 'des textes de type philosophique ou littéraire' is to 'isoler Rousseau et, dans le rousseauisme, la théorie de l'écriture.' (p.148). Indeed the central epistemological weakness with Derrida's reading of the *Essai* is that, as we will go on to discuss in more detail in the next chapter, he doesn't engage directly with the work of Rameau and does not consider the fact that Rameau's work in many respects triggered the *Essai* and its various urtexts. See Sweeney-Turner, *Op. Cit.* for further discussion of this point.

I have already argued that there is both relativism and a system of value at the heart of the philosophy of history, and that that history itself is a degenerative one. I have also shown that Rousseau's concept of the ideal state of nature is a hypothetical and allegorical one that is not accessible to any ontology or history. There is, however, a tendency amongst some commentators to want to historicise the ideal state, to prize it away from the domain of the ideal, the allegorical, and the hypothetical so that it can be subjected to the same logical processes and operations as a 'history'. Once this relocation has taken place, the tendency is to then conflate the Ideal-State, the Fall-State and the Actual-State (that is to say, the three sectors of our trinary structure) and make out of them a pristine binary superstructure within which there is a diametrical opposition between, at one pole, nature and at the other, culture. As we are about to see, however, these strategies are often presented and couched in such a way as to make it appear to the reader that they are, in fact, part of Rousseau's scheme – as if he 'intended' or 'wanted' to do what they have identified him as doing, without him actually realising it or being capable of doing so. A capital example of this is Paul Bénichou's assertion that:

Rousseau *veut* donner de l'état naturel une image qui oppose absolument au présent civilisé, et où ne figure pratiquement rien qui annonce ce présent, de façon qu'on puisse marquer ces deux étapes successives de deux signes absolument contraires, positif pour la première, négatif pour la seconde.⁸¹

Once these strategic manoeuvres have been accomplished, it becomes possible to demonstrate how Rousseau's work is, from the outset, flawed in its attempt to postulate the existence of an absolute and ideal origin because it is preoccupied by representing this origin (and all that is associated with it) as the pure form of all that which eventually becomes its *supplément*.⁸² Indeed, would it not be the height of sophistry not to argue that if these were, in essence, pure forms – and did not contain the seeds of their own destruction – then why would they need to be supplemented in the first place? Rousseau is, as a result, denounced for refusing to acknowledge that there must have been something imperfect, insufficient, incomplete about

⁸¹ Paul Bénichou, 'l'idée de nature,' p.129 (my emphasis), 'Rousseau *wants* to imbue the state of nature with an image that diametrically opposes the state of civilisation, and of which practically nothing about it hints at this state of civilisation, to the extent at we can mark out these two successive stages with two absolutely contrary signs, positive for the first, negative for the second.' It is interesting to observe how Benichou's exemplary binary structure is punctured by the conditional operation of the adverb 'pratiquement' that he elects to employ. Such a qualification is surely an admission of the logical difficulties associated with trying to superimpose a binary structure upon one that is, in essence, trinary, and has, at its heart, relativism.

⁸² Cf. Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, p.207-208 for his explanation of the double significance of this term.

the Ideal-State (and all that is associated with it), for if it were complete, no *supplément* would have ever been necessary; the origin itself would have remained intact, untouched, and undefiled. 'What Rousseau cannot think,' Christopher Norris remarks, '[...] is the notion of these evils [the *suppléments*] having existed as far back as the origins of human society.'⁸³ In other words, the very notion of a *pure* origin is an entirely false one, illusory – in short, unthinkable. Ulmer argues that, in fact, the ideal state of nature *per se* cannot be perfect, that it cannot be complete and that Rousseau *wants* to think of the negative pole of each binary opposition as a *supplément*:

added on to nature to make up for, paradoxically, a lack in nature (paradoxically, because nature, as the state which Rousseau posits as his ideal or model, should be complete, full, perfect). In the resultant play of oppositions between nature and culture, Rousseau wants to privilege or valorise one side over the other. He wants to couch this conceptual structure of oppositions in historical terms (as a mythical event) in order to give primacy to that chain of 'natural' terms [...] associated with [...] innocence, origins. This chain is superior to, and supplemented by, the 'cultural' chain [...] – north, servitude, articulation, consonant [...] evil and history.⁸⁴

This historicising and conflating manoeuvre almost succeeds, but it is stopped dead in its tracks by one element that seems to have been overlooked: Rousseau's conception and placing of the 'fall.' My argument is not that there is not, in essence, a supplementary logic at work here, nor is it that there is not a concerted and consistent effort made by Rousseau to valorise or privilege one term over an other (indeed this is merely the outcome of the system of value attached to the philosophy of history as I suggested above). My contention is this: that the structure Rousseau elaborates is not a binary, oppositional one, it is a trinary one; that the downward-spiralling slide towards the final term of this trinary structure is governed by relativism, for, as I have shown, it does not commence from a point of purity, ideality or plenitude; that such readings either attribute the wrong status to the Fall-State by treating it as the Ideal-State,⁸⁵ or they ignore its presence altogether; and that finally, such readings do not pose the real question: 'when' – *from what point* – does the process of degeneration or

⁸³ Christopher Norris, *Derrida*, p.105

⁸⁴ Ulmer, Jacques Derrida and Paul De Man,' p.168.

⁸⁵ Notice how Ulmer, *Op. Cit.* p.168 attributes the incorrect status to the ideal-state by concluding that, 'supplement and the origin are one.'

supplementation begin, for, I suspect, the simple reason that that would undermine the very methodology that such critiques are founded and operate upon. I am arguing that precisely because the Ideal-State is not accessible to any ontology, eschatology or history – it remains quintessentially and unassailably hypothetical and conceptual – degeneration and supplementation can only commence with the fall – with the advent or institution of the Fall-State and as such it is an integral part of the history of degeneration. Thus in one sense, Ulmer is almost correct: there was at some stage in the history of mankind a ‘lack’. This ‘lack’, as we have already seen however, cannot be part of the ideal state, for it comes afterwards, from outside. It is not, therefore, that the Ideal-State lacks anything and that the rest of history is its *supplément*, but that, at some stage, natural plenitude is ruptured and replaced by a state which is *not* ideal, not perfect and not complete – a state which stands in opposition to this original state and epitomises everything that it is not. In my terms, this state is the function and position of the Fall-State. Culture, or in Ulmer’s terms, the ‘cultural chain’, makes up for the lack inherent in the Fall-State – at the moment of rupture – it makes up for the lack in the state that replaces and stands in opposition to the Ideal-State. Ultimately, what such readings fail to acknowledge is that the history of mankind begins not in/with the Ideal-State of nature, but at/following its rupture; history, society, language, music – the *suppléments* – and degeneration itself can only commence with the fall and the institution of the Fall-State.

Now in order for Rousseau to realise this conceptually, the Fall-State must bear as close a resemblance to the Ideal-State as possible with the unique exception that it must contain this elusive ‘lack’; in other words it must be contaminated by the second species of need, the earth must be tilted on its axis and *la perfectibilité* must be operational, so that it is not complete, not perfect and can stand in opposition to the ideal state; these are its defining features. At any subsequent moment in the history of mankind, there will be a difference – but only a relative one – between this moment and the Fall-State. If we revisit Christopher Norris’ assertion that ‘what Rousseau cannot think is the notion of these evils having existed as far back as the origins of human society,’ we can see, in fact, that the opposite is true: Rousseau can and does think that these evils existed as far back as the origins of human society, because the origins of human society stem from the fall – the moment when the Ideal-State is ruptured, not

from/inside the Ideal-State itself.⁸⁶ As Robert Wokler concludes, 'the state of nature could have contained no endogenous factors to drive its inhabitants out.'⁸⁷ In the second *Discours* Rousseau elects to put such a view in these terms:

Après avoir montré que la perfectibilité, les vertus sociales et les autres facultés que l'homme naturel avait reçues en puissance ne pouvaient jamais se développer d'elles-mêmes, qu'elles avaient besoin pour cela du concours fortuit de plusieurs causes étrangères qui pouvaient ne jamais naître, et sans lesquelles il fût demeuré éternellement dans sa condition primitive [...]⁸⁸

Rousseau's statement, as we can see, is unequivocal: these faculties could never have developed by themselves without the intervention, the 'concurus fortuits', of certain 'causes étrangères.' Man did not, by his own volition or by his own means, leave the Ideal-State; he was forced to leave it by a prime mover – He who had seen fit to incline the earth upon its axis.

What we have, in sum then, is a trinary structure, the first sector of which is ideal, hypothetical and conditional. The second sector is a point of rupture or the institution of the Fall-State which replaces the ideal state. The third and final sector is man's actual historical locus – the eighteenth century. Between the Fall-State and the actual state, the process of a degenerative history is at work and is underpinned by a rigorous system of value. As we will see in the next chapter, Rousseau will hang the elements of his philosophy of music onto this trinary structure.

⁸⁶ Jean Terasse, *Rousseau et la Quête*, pp.77-78 also concurs with this view and argues that 'l'histoire commence réellement avec la société civile; l'état de nature couvre toute la période qui précède l'institution sociale ...'

⁸⁷ Wokler, *Rousseau*, p.37.

⁸⁸ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, pp.220-221. (my emphasis). 'After showing that human *perfectibility*, the social virtues, and the other faculties which natural man potentially possessed, could never develop of themselves, but must require the fortuitous concurrence of many foreign causes that might never arise, and without which he would have remained for ever in his primitive condition ...'

Chapter Three:

The Common Origin Hypothesis:

Winding the clocks forward from hypothesis to history

The primary aim of this chapter is to illustrate how Rousseau now fashions his philosophy of music upon the trinary model postulated in chapter 2. In essence, we shall be exploring Rousseau's theory of the *history* of communication from the Fall-State to the Actual-State; it will be a theory that points, at first, to a common origin – an intimate and seemingly indissoluble fusion of speech and music that Rousseau dubs *langue* or *voix*, a fusion where, in fact, such denominations did not yet exist or, as a result, have any significance. Rousseau will adumbrate a history of communication already degenerating from an *almost* ideal condition towards a debased one devoid of more or less any aesthetic value; it will be a history that, at first, conforms precisely to the shape, itinerary, logic and value system of the philosophy of history set out in the first *Discours*. In many respects, this history of communication is an exemplar – the paradigmatic case – of degeneration; so precisely can the two be superposed it is as though Rousseau had traced the trajectory of his philosophy of history upon the future imprint of this history of communication. In other respects, however, Rousseau has to work assiduously in order to make his argumentation remotely consistent and logical.

3.1. The Origin of Expression: *Voix* and *langue*

Le premier langage de l'homme, le langage le plus universel, le plus énergique, et le seul dont il eut besoin, avant qu'il fallut persuader des hommes assemblés, est le cri de la nature.¹

For millions of years mankind lived just like the animals. Then something happened which unleashed the power of our imagination. We learned to talk.²

In Peter Kivy's estimation, Rousseau's conception of the 'origin of music' (which is in any case, without further precision, a misleading proposition) should be categorised alongside

¹ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, (ed.) Jacques Roger, (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), p.205
'Man's first language, the most universal, the most dynamic and the only one that he had need of before it was necessary to persuade his fellow man, is the cry of nature...'

² Pink Floyd, 'Keep Talking' from *The Division Bell*, (EMI, 1994).

similar renderings of what he dubs 'speech theory.'³ Among Rousseau's kindred spirits in this enterprise are, he suggests, both Richard Wagner and Herbert Spencer, who believe '[...] that music has its origin in the passionate tones of primitive speech, or in some proto-language of the passions, more akin to music than to articulate speech, which gives rise to them both.'⁴ Persuasively written though Kivy's argumentation is, it is nevertheless unsatisfactory in two fundamental senses. First, by deploying the term 'proto-language', or indeed its root 'language', a certain organisation, an inescapable pre-ordained and codified structure is always already implied. In addition, the substantive 'language' presupposes generalisation and standardisation, and necessitates the pre-existence of either culture or society or both – however primitive – in equal or unequal measure.⁵ Without the pre-existence of these necessary institutions, the contractual mechanism that permits language to operate and function as a viable system of communication cannot be drawn up in the first place; and in that first place, was it the necessity of communication that presented itself to these antediluvian peoples or did communication arise out of an instinctive impulse to establish contact with their semblants? These are vital ontological and epistemological questions that Kivy does not attempt to broach, and yet, as we already know, they are at the beating heart of Rousseau's thinking on the subject. Second, the uneasy balance Kivy strikes between music and articulate speech – asserting that this 'proto-language' is more akin to music than speech – is, as I will demonstrate, at odds not only with Rousseau's conception of the *Cri de la nature* (because, fundamentally, this *Cri* pre-exists both, and gives rise to neither directly), but also with what we may now dub Rousseau's 'Common Origin Hypothesis'.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that by positioning the Ideal-State of nature in the domain of the hypothetical and the conditional in the Second *Discours*, Rousseau cuts himself adrift from the nostalgic historicism that colours and characterises the First *Discours*. I also suggested that the resultant gulf between those two works, between their differing and essentially incompatible conceptions of nature – the Ideal-State and Fall-State – and the

³ Kivy, Peter, *The Corded Shell*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.97.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.97.

⁵ Evidently the terminology here is necessarily loose; for culture and society may be substituted the most elemental family groupings. As we have already seen in the last chapter, Rousseau does not envision man's earliest state as one in which there were nuclear family units.

Actual-State of eighteenth century man, is virtually unbridgeable. Not then pursuing the issue to its conclusion, I merely left in suspension an additional concept: *la voix*. When Rousseau conceptualises prelapsarian man in his Ideal-State, his starting point is not with a Palaeolithic inhabitant of the primeval forests of geological time, nor is it with the savages discovered by missionaries and brought to the occident for exhibition and scientific study. Rather it is with enlightenment man – himself – that Rousseau begins. Rousseau's primary objective is to find the quintessence of natural man and unearth his nascent faculties, his interior nature. He thus attempts, conceptually, to strip enlightenment man bare of all the accretions of contemporary existence, all the accoutrements and niceties of language, the chains and fetters of societal and political conventions and contracts, and the deleterious effects of the second species of need, until all that remains is something approaching the natural man presented in the Second *Discours*. This natural man, after all the auto-archaeological foraging has taken place, is merely a solitary, idle, unthinking animal operating on a purely instinctive level and whose sole quotidian concern is his survival.⁶ As I suggested in the previous chapter, Rousseau imbues his natural man with two specific faculties – *la pitié* and *la perfectibilité*. But there is also one other faculty, an immutable, universal faculty that is uniquely capable of bridging the virtually unbridgeable void that separates the three terms of our trinary equation: *la voix* or the voice.

The voice is an anatomical, physical, corporeal reality that is as present in natural man, as it is in Fall-State man, as it is in enlightenment man; however civilised or uncivilised, however socialised or unsocialised, however proximate to or removed from his Ideal-State this man is, the common denominator is still 'man'. But just as other innate human faculties are liable to be altered – to suffer a degenerative evolution across the horizon of history – so too is the voice. Though the physiological reality of the voice – of the palette, the vocal chords and the larynx – remains unaffected by the process of time or history, it is both the character (the accent) of the voice and the motivation behind the column of air that causes the vocal chords to vibrate across the larynx, which undergoes transformation. In the Ideal-State, and in the vocabulary of the Second *Discours*, the voice has an ideal manifestation: *le cri de la nature*. At the institution of the Fall-State, the voice remains, briefly, the conduit for the purest, unmediated

⁶ Rousseau, *Op. Cit.* p.182, 'sa propre conservation faisant presque son unique soin'.

expression of the passions, but in the Actual-State it has become servile and debased, a vehicle for the articulation of need and desire. The voice is, then, the unique phenomenon that provides a connection – however fragile or remote – between the Ideal-State, the Fall-State and the Actual-State. And that connection is played out, in Rousseau's thinking, as man's instinctive recourse to the voice for self-expression.

The beauty and elegant simplicity of this conception is that the vestiges of such an ideal condition – *le cri* – are, of course, extant in enlightenment man. From the first moments of our life, before we are aware that we exist or what it means to exist, we cry, we cry for food because that is what we must do, instinctively, in order to survive. We do not know what it means to be hungry, for we are unable to conceptualise hunger, yet we can feel the sensation of hunger and this brings forth our tears. 'Whether there was a language', Rousseau writes in *Emile*, 'natural and common to all men has long been a subject of research. Doubtless there is such a language, and it is the one children speak before *knowing how* to speak.'⁷ Rousseau articulates this underlying connection between the 'child-language' and the *Cri de la Nature* in three places: in *Emile*, in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* and in the *Second Discours*. In *Emile*, for example, Rousseau suggests that adults can deploy three types of voice, whereas children are broadly inarticulate having only 'cries, groans, exclamation, wailing.'⁸ In the *Second Discours*, Rousseau describes a *cri*, 'arraché ... par une sorte d'instinct dans les occasions présentes, pour implorer du secours dans les grandes dangers, ou de soulagement dans les maux violents.'⁹ In the *Essai*, the notion is of a voice, 'pour émouvoir un jeune cœur, pour repousser un agresseur injuste,' a voice for which nature dictates 'des accents, des cris, des plaintes'.¹⁰ In each of these instances, it is not man that consciously utters these accents or cries, that modulates his voice, articulates, enunciates, pronounces, for these are essentially spontaneous, unreflected vocalisations, drawn forth involuntarily in certain circumstances only as a reaction to them. However, the underlying connection between the voices in these three

⁷ Rousseau, *Emile*, Transl. A. Bloom, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.65 my emphases.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.148.

⁹ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, p.205 'wrenched forth only by a sort of instinct, to beg for help in times of great danger or comfort in the event of severe pain'

¹⁰ Rousseau, *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, in *Œuvres*, t.11, p.164. 'To move a young heart, to repel an unjust aggressor.' 'Accents, cries, wailing.'

states is only fleeting and ephemeral, for almost as soon as such accents and cries are vocalised and externalised, their immediacy and innocence begins to ebb away. In the Fall-State, when man is for the *first* time forced to commune with his semblants, it is nature that dictates his utterances, it is a moment, as Phillip Robinson eloquently puts it, 'when Man, in the transparent enthusiasm of nascent sociability, communicates without reflection.'¹¹ At the institution of the Fall-State, self-expression is a tool that man is destined to discover instinctively rather than as the result of any process of rational deduction: 'Sitôt,' Rousseau writes,

qu'un homme fut reconnu par un autre pour un être sentant, pensant et semblable à lui, le désir ou le besoin de lui communiquer ses sentiments [...] lui en fit chercher les moyens. Ces moyens peuvent se tirer que de sens, les seuls instruments par lesquels un homme puisse agir sur un autre. Voilà donc l'institution des signes sensibles pour exprimer le pensée. Les inventeurs du langage ne firent pas ce raisonnement, mais l'instinct leur en suggéra la conséquence.¹²

In his infant state, it is nature and instinct that forces the baby to cry for food and for assistance when the sensation of hunger is felt for the first time. But for Fall-State man and for the baby, it is the very process of socialisation, the process of becoming citizen, the proximity of others and the haunting spectre of the second species of need that will begin to alter the motivation behind their voices and the resultant sonic character of their vocalisations.

Thus we now have identified Rousseau's conception of the origin of expression – it is to be found in man's earliest utterance and this utterance is considered natural, instinctive, unreflected and spontaneous. With such attributes, it can transcend the boundaries of time and history, and it is present, albeit briefly, in all three terms of our trinary structure. This is so because both the mechanics and possibility of such expression are present in each term too.

Clearly the voice holds especial significance for Rousseau, and in his thought it is considered as a legitimate object; it is objectified or hypostatised, and conceived of as a physical reality.

¹¹ Phillip Robinson, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Doctrine of the Arts*, (Frankfurt: Lang, 1984), p.173.

¹² Rousseau, *Op. Cit.*, pp.155-156. 'As soon as a man was recognised by another as a sentient, thinking being similar to himself, the desire or need to communicate his feelings made him search for the means to do so. These means can only be brought forth by the senses, the only instruments by which a man can influence another. Here is the institution of the signs for expressing thought. Those who discovered language did not make this connection, but instinct suggested to them the outcome.'

As a consequence, this hypostatizing manoeuvre endows the voice with an ontology and history, even, paradoxically, in the Ideal-State. But the voice is not an unassailable, untouchable object. The fall is, ultimately, responsible for rupturing the *Cri* – for changing the motivation behind the voice – in exactly the same manner that the fall destroys the Ideal-State of nature itself. When the Earth is tilted on its axis, when *la perfectibilité* emerges as an *agent provocateur*, and when the second species of need begins to sink its teeth into the nascent morality of the human race, the voice begins to alter. It is, physiologically, the same voice, but it is sonically different. It is different, for the *Cri* – in any of its manifestations – does not give rise, as Peter Kivy suggests, directly to language or music itself; that privilege is, once again, the unique preserve of the fall.

3.2. The question of the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*

If the Second *Discours* (or at least the first half of it) resides primarily in the domain of the hypothetical or ideal, then it is essentially the only theoretical work in Rousseau's *oeuvre* to do so. The remainder of his writings dealing – in part or *in extenso* – with the origins of language, music and society, position themselves steadfastly, and almost uniformly, within the domain of the historical; they are all concerned with investigating the process by which these institutions and conventions degenerate from a condition of nascent innocence, at the beginning of the Fall-State, into their present condition of abject decay and impoverishment in the Actual-State. In the Introduction to this thesis, I suggested that Rousseau had not left us with a single, comprehensive work which sets out a philosophy or aesthetics of music; rather that reflection upon such issues has been littered across three decades worth of novels, critique, political and social doctrine. This is indeed the reason why in the first chapter we considered Rousseau's early musical writings and relationships, in the second chapter we focussed upon the First and Second *Discours* and in this chapter we shall be examining an ensemble of texts, rather than zooming-in on any one in particular. These texts – principally, though not exclusively, the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, the *Examen des deux principes de M. Rameau*, and *Du Principe de la Mélodie* – will help us piece together the chronicle of how music and language, stemming from the same source, evolve in different directions and culminate, in an aesthetic of opera, as antagonistic entities.

Although many of the structural mechanisms that allow the philosophy of music to operate are adumbrated in the First and Second *Discours*, their logical outcome is not fully explored until the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues, où il est parlé de la mélodie et l'imitation musicale* (published posthumously in Geneva, 1781 and hence not available during Rousseau's lifetime) and works closely associated with it – namely the *Examen des deux principes de M. Rameau* and *Du Principe de la Mélodie*. Rousseau's incorporation, into the main body of the text, of six chapters expressly concerned with music,¹³ allows us to trace, at first hand, his conception of the relationship and interactions between music and language as both fully fledged semiotic systems evolve in parallel across their respective historical horizons. It would, however, be a gross understatement to suggest that the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* is anything other than an intensely problematic work. To begin with, and almost in spite of sustained scholarly debate and hypothesis, the vexed question of the work's chronology remains unresolved. Then there is the thorny issue of its primary focus: if the *Essai* is principally concerned with the question of the origin of languages, why then are six of its twenty chapters almost entirely given over to the discussion of musical issues? There is then the question which is rarely posed: is the work finished, or does the *Essai*, itself, constitute an urtext for yet another work?¹⁴ And finally, we might ask why Rousseau did not choose to publish the work during his lifetime, instead entrusting it to Du Peyrou for posthumous publication.¹⁵ There are, of course, no simple or determinate answers to these questions, only further scope for speculation and debate. But if we cannot be sure about these things, then should we ascribe so much significance to this work? I will return to this question later in the chapter.

¹³ Chapters XII, XIII, XIV, XVII, XVIII & XIX.

¹⁴ In a letter to Malesherbes, dated 25 September 1761, Rousseau clearly had in mind a large scale volume of which the *Essai* was to play a leading role: 'Je ne pense pas que ce barbouillage puisse supporter l'impression séparément, mais peut-être pourra-t-il passer dans le recueil général à la faveur du reste.' It is interesting also to consider the phrase that immediately supervenes, in which Rousseau demonstrates his frustration with Rameau, saying that he also wanted it to be published so that it might silence Rameau: 'toutefois, je souhaiterais qu'il pût être donné à part à cause de ce Rameau qui continue à me tarabuster vilainement.' In the *Projet de préface* of 1763 (in Kintzler (ed.) *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*. (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1993), p.51), Rousseau writes of his plans for a volume containing *l'Imitation Théâtrale*, *Le Lévi d'Ephraïm* and the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*. Notice that Rousseau is not especially confident about the *Essai* being capable of standing as a work in its own right, and that Malesherbes did a fine job of convincing him to let it be published: '... retenue par le ridicule de dissenter sur les langues quand on en sait à peine une et d'ailleurs peu content de ce morceau, j'avais résolu de le supprimer comme indigne de l'attention du public.. Mais un magistrat illustre [Malesherbes] ... en a pensé plus favorablement que moi. Je soumetts donc avec plaisir, comme on peut bien le croire, mon jugement au sien, et j'essaye à la faveur des deux autres écrits de faire passer celui-ci [the *Essai*] que je n'eusse peut-être risqué seul.' There are also many instances of a close intertext between the *Essai* and the *Dictionnaire de Musique*, in some instances passages appear in both verbatim, and in others the argument in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* is a development of an earlier iteration taken from the *Essai*.

¹⁵ Robinson, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Doctrine of the Arts*, p.110 speculates that Rousseau decision not to publish both the *Examen* and the *Essai* 'stems as much from a sense of their shortcomings as from a noble resolution to desist from the public fray.'

In the present work, it is neither possible, nor immediately relevant, to chronicle in any detail in excess of a century's worth of scholarly debate concerning the genesis of the *Essai*. Not only has this recently been undertaken elsewhere,¹⁶ it would merely serve to distract us from our primary task of piecing together Rousseau's account of the degeneration of music. What follows immediately below, therefore, is simply a brief digest of Catherine Kintzler's research which effectively illuminates the current state of thinking about the genesis of the *Essai* and its chronological positioning in Rousseau's *oeuvre*. According to Kintzler, the most plausible hypothesis, given all of the available evidence, points to this sequence of events: a fragment of the *Second Discours* (1754) was held back from publication by Rousseau, and Rousseau's intention was that this fragment should form the kernel of a response to Rameau's polemical article *Erreurs sur la musique dans l'Encyclopédie* of 1755; next, Rousseau reshaped this kernel into an intermediary response what we know now to be the *Du Principe de la mélodie, ou réponse aux Erreurs sur la musique* (Ms R 60); next, the beginning and end of this text were brought together and then modified to form what is now the *L'Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau*, whilst the central sector of the text was held back in reserve; finally, this central sector was expanded considerably and further modified between 1756 (or 1758)¹⁷ and 1761, and gave rise to what is the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*.¹⁸ Thus, we may conclude that the *Essai* was at least seven years in the making, and that during three to five of those years its core themes and arguments were being refined and redacted by Rousseau.

Kintzler goes on to conclude that the *Essai* 'doit autant, sinon plus, à l'existence de Rameau et de ces ouvrages polémiques, qu'à l'existence préalable du *Second Discours*.'¹⁹ However, I do not entirely subscribe to the sentiment of her conclusion, for although it is persuasive and has, given the evidence she cites, a compelling logic, it nevertheless requires that we consider this key text in Rousseau's philosophy as, principally, a response to a debate concerning musical

¹⁶ Cf. Robert Wokler, 'Rameau, Rousseau and the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*' *Studies On Voltaire And The Eighteenth Century*, (1974), 177-238; Marie-Elisabeth Duchez, 'Principe de la mélodie et l'origine des langues', *Revue de Musicologie*, 60, (1974): pp.33-87; Robert Wokler, *Social Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, (New York: Garland, 1987), pp.235-378; Dalton Thomas, *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. chapter 4; and the excellent Introduction in Kintzler (ed.), *Rousseau: Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* pp.5-12.

¹⁷ 1758, principally because of its similarity to the first version of *Du Contrat Social* (1762).

¹⁸ Kintzler (ed.), *Op. Cit*, p.9.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.9. 'owes as much if not more to the existence of Rameau and these polemical works, than to the prior existence of the *Second Discours*.'

articles which were written in extreme haste, and not to his satisfaction, over one decade earlier. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it implies that we should consider the functional role of the theoretical writings of this period (1753-1761) as being, first and foremost, to counter Rameau's music-theoretical postulations. But we might ask where does that view leave the First *Discours* and Second *Discours* (1749 and 1754 respectively)? In these works, Rousseau builds the basis for entire philosophical systems which, for the most part, have little to do with Rameau's preoccupations. As we will discover throughout this chapter, and indeed the remainder of the thesis, the central themes of the *Essai* not only transcend the polemical and rhetorical, they are also too firmly rooted in the thinking espoused in other works – particularly the Second *Discours* (of which the *Essai* should, in many respects, be seen as a continuation),²⁰ *Emile*, *Du Contrat Social*, the *Dictionnaire de Musique* and the scène lyrique *Pygmalion* – thinking that suggests Rousseau had a more substantial, profound and far-reaching project in mind. The real significance of the *Essai* is that it is of the same *zeitgeist* and 'intertexts' with these works, works that, as an ensemble, constitute and inscribe a radical vision of nature, history and a philosophy and aesthetics of communication. To be sure, this vision was not compatible with Rameau's conception of the universe, and to a large extent served to prolong their conflict, but it is patently apparent to me that Rousseau had far bigger fish to fry with the *Essai* than Kintzler seems to suggest.

3.3. Common origins and the third species of need

We begin not by looking at the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* but by examining a satellite work, Rousseau's *Du Principe de la mélodie* (MS R 60), the likely urtext of both the *Essai* and the *Examen des Deux Principes*, which remained, until quite recently, unassociated with either work.²¹ The significance of its ten or so pages cannot be overstated: as far as the incessant quest to establish a water-tight chronology for the genesis of the *Essai* is concerned, it answers many outstanding questions and sinks many hypotheses; as a riposte to those who would

²⁰ Just as I suggested in Chapter 2 that one should consider, in terms of chronology, the subject matter of the Second *Discours* preceding that of the First *Discours*, we should consider the *Essai* to follow on from the Second *Discours*, building upon its foundations and picking up on, and developing, several of its principal themes.

²¹ Cf. Wokler, 'Rameau, Rousseau and the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*'. The article includes the full text of *Du Principe de la Mélodie ou Réponse aux erreurs sur la Musique* (Ms R60, ff.8-17r.). *Du Principe* was published, simultaneously, by Marie-Elisabeth Duchez in: '*Principe de la mélodie et l'Origine des Langues*'.

criticise Rousseau for the inconsistent and contradictory nature of his writings on language, it is perhaps without equal.²² But in my view, its special importance – certainly in the context of the present work – resides in what was not written, or rather what was originally written and then crossed out. *Du Principe de la Mélodie* makes explicit Rousseau's unshakeable conviction that languages were not born, invented, devised or preconceived. Before our very eyes, Rousseau rejects these postulates, for on the *Du Principe* manuscript he originally wrote 'naissance' but then crossed it out and replaced it with 'formation.'²³ It is clear, then, that Rousseau believed that languages were formed across history, through time, diachronically and syncretically. What he envisaged was a protracted process which begins with initial discovery, subsequent experimentation, further assimilation and subsumption; this is a process as long as history itself, a process which persists to this very day.

But, and this particular 'but' is of crucial significance, the requisite conditions had to be in place for this process – this 'formation' – to be possible. This process commences, therefore, after the institution of the fall, when the earth had been tilted upon its axis, when the second species of need began to make its mark and when men were forced together for the first time. As Rousseau puts it, in two separate places, in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*:

[...] si nous n'avions jamais eu que des besoins physiques²⁴, nous aurions fort bien pu ne jamais parler.²⁵

On prétend que les hommes inventèrent la parole pour exprimer leurs besoins; cette opinion me paraît insoutenable. L'effet naturel des premiers besoins fut d'écartier les hommes et non de les rapprocher. Il le fallait ainsi pour que l'espèce vînt à s'étendre et que la terre se peuplât promptement, sans quoi le genre humain se fût entassé dans un coin du monde, et tout le reste fût demeuré désert. De cela il suit avec évidence que l'origine des langues n'est point due aux premiers besoins des hommes; il serait absurde que de la cause qui les écarte vînt le moyen qui les unit.²⁶

²² I refer here, in particular, to the perception and reading of the *Lettre sur la musique Française*. (1753)

²³ Cf. Wokler, *Op. Cit.*, p.203 note 53.

²⁴ That is to say the first species of need.

²⁵ Rousseau, *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, p.160. '... if we had only ever had physical needs, we would have never been able to speak.'

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.164. 'It is claimed that men invented speech in order to express their needs; this view seems indefensible to me. The natural effect of the first needs is to separate men not to bring them together. It had to be so for the species to spread themselves out and the earth to be peopled quickly, without which human kind would have locked themselves into a corner of the Earth and all the rest would have remained deserted. It follows from this that the origin of languages is not due to men's first needs; it would be absurd that the cause which separated them came to be the means which united them.'

So what was the primary cause of the discovery of language? Just one sentence further on, Rousseau confirms that it was moral needs and passions – a third species of need²⁷ – that was the catalyst which drew forth the first expressions, the first *voix*. But this confirmation requires qualification for, as Rousseau puts it, it is not true without some distinction.²⁸ As we will see, one of the objectives of the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* – especially chapters IX and X – is to articulate and elucidate such distinctions. Let us return to Rousseau's narrative with this in mind:

Ce n'est ni la faim, ni la soif, mais l'amour, la haine, la pitié, la colère, qui leur ont arraché les premières voix ... on peut s'en nourrir sans parler; on poursuit en silence la proie dont on veut se repaître; mais pour émouvoir un jeune Coeur, pour repousser un agresseur injuste, la nature dicte des accents, des cries, des plaintes: voilà les plus anciens mots inventés.²⁹

This will be true, and only true, of the first voices and the first moments in which these voices could be heard. These first voices are the pure, unmediated expression of the passions – of love, hate, rage and *la pitié*. They are pure because they are un-rehearsed, spontaneous and innocent – issued directly from the heart and from the passions. These first vocalisations – 'les plus anciens mots inventés' – were both inarticulate and figural, which is one reason why Rousseau is able to argue that poetry originated before prose, and that precise meanings – through the grammatical deployment of substantives – were discovered and fixed much later on.³⁰ But more than this, Rousseau suggests that the character of this figural *voix* was, initially at least, a direct result of the mechanics of voice production. The first vocalisations were those of simple sounds, for they tripped neatly off the tongue.³¹ In the same way, the first words featured few articulations; successions of vowels were only occasionally broken-up by consonants and when they were, it was to facilitate pronunciation:

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.164. 'Des besoins moraux, des passions.'

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.164. 'Tout ceci n'est pas vrai sans distinction, mais j'y reviendrai ci-après.'

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.164. 'It is neither hunger nor thirst but love, hate, pity, rage, which drew the first words from them ... One can take nourishment without speaking; one silently pursues the prey upon which one wishes to feast; but to move a young heart, or to repel an unjust aggressor, nature dictates accents, cries, wailing: there we have the invention of the most ancient words.'

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.165. 'Le langage figuré fut le premier à naître, le sens propre fut trouvé le dernier. [...] d'abord on ne parla qu'en poésie; on ne s'avisait de raisonner que longtemps après.'

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.166. 'Les simples sons sortent naturellement du gosier, la bouche est naturellement plus ou moins ouverte.'

Comme les voix naturelles sont inarticulées, les mots auraient peu d'articulations ; quelques consonnes interposées, effaçant l'hiatus des voyelles, suffiraient pour les rendre coulantes et faciles à prononcer.³²

And yet, in spite of the simplicity of the sounds themselves and the prevalence of vowels, the multiplicity of obtainable vocal effects was extensive; diversity was delivered by the extensive combination of accents, rhythm, duration and pitch: in short, one would sing instead of speaking:

... les sons seraient très variés, et la diversité des accents multiplierait les mêmes voix : la quantité, le rythme seraient de nouvelles sources de combinaisons ; en sorte que les voix, les sons, l'accent, le nombre, qui sont de la nature, laissant peu de chose à faire aux articulations qui sont de convention, l'on chanterait au lieu de parler.³³

This is the character of the voice in its purest state, at the beginning of the Fall-State. But consider how quickly the unreflected, spontaneous nature of these first vocalisations fades away:

mais les modifications de la langue et du palais, qui font articuler, exigent de l'attention, de l'exercice; *on ne les fait point sans vouloir les faire*, tout les enfants ont besoins de les apprendre ...³⁴

A mesure que les besoins croissant ... que les lumières s'étendent, le langage change de caractère : il devient plus juste et moins passionné ... l'accent s'éteint, l'articulation s'étend, la langue devient plus exacte, plus claire, mais plus traînante ... et plus froide.³⁵

It is this link between articulation and the conscious mind, this wanting to articulate, this wanting (and needing) to imbue vocalisation with increased clarity and heightened precision, that Rousseau identifies as the index of the beginning of the end, the moment when the rot sets in, takes over the *voix* and changes, once and for all, its *timbre*. As we will see later on in this chapter and again in the next, Rousseau will argue that articulation precipitates

³² *Ibid.*, p.168. 'As natural voices are inarticulate, words would have had few articulations; several interposed consonances to avoid a hiatus of vowels sufficed to render the words flowing and easy to pronounce.'

³³ *Ibid.*, p.168. '... sounds would be very varied, and the diversity of accents would multiply these same voices : duration, rhythm would be the new source of these combinations ; in such a way that these voices, these sounds, the accent, the number, which are given by nature, leave little for the articulations, which are born of convention, to do, one would sing instead of speaking.'

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.166 (my emphasis) 'but the modifications of the tongue and the palette, which articulate, demand attention, and practice; *we do not make them without wanting to make them*, all children need to learn to make them...'

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.169. 'As needs grow ... as knowledge builds, language changes its character: it becomes more precise and less passionate ... the accent fades, articulation spreads, the languages becomes more exact, clearer, but more drawling and colder.'

consonances, consonances usurp vowels, the paucity of vowels engenders a lack of accent, and this process renders certain languages incompatible with music. For the moment, however, Rousseau wants us to focus on the first vocalisations and the first meetings between newly (re)united peoples.

3.4. The 'Idyll of the Well'

The first vocalisations were drawn forth, in Rousseau's narrative, when young men came to water their herds and young women came in search of water for their household. This first meeting place is nothing more elaborate than a well, an oasis in the desert of solitude, and around it Rousseau weaves a simple, but enchanting proto-romantic idyll.³⁶ There at the well, for the first time, the two sexes cast their gaze toward and upon the other; in their hearts is awakened a strange attraction that renders them somehow less brutish, they take pleasure in the knowledge that they are not alone. Over time:

L'eau devint insensiblement plus nécessaire, le bétail eut plus soif plus souvent; on arrivait en hâte, et l'on partait à regret. Dans cet âge heureux où rien ne marquait les heures, rien n'obligeait à les compter; le temps n'avait d'autre mesure que l'amusement et l'ennui. Sous de vieux chênes vainqueurs des ans, une ardente jeunesse oubliait par degrés sa férocité; on s'apprivoisait peu à peu les uns avec les autres; en s'efforçant de se faire entendre, on apprit à s'expliquer. Là se firent les premières fêtes ... le geste empressé ne suffisait plus, la voix l'accompagnait d'accent passionnés, le plaisir et le désir, confondus ensemble, se faisaient sentir à la fois. Là fut enfin le vrai berceau des peuples, et du pur cristal des fontaines sortirent les premiers feux de l'amour.³⁷

This is paradise on earth. But Rousseau clearly gets carried away with this narrative, and is forced to take a step backwards to avoid a jarring contradiction with views expressed elsewhere.³⁸ For, if this was the first moment when the two sexes encountered one another,

³⁶ Jean Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'Obstacle*, p.370 dubs this 'moment' 'le bonheur à mi-chemin'.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.207. 'Water becomes imperceptibly more necessary, the animals are increasingly thirsty more often; they come in haste and leave reluctantly. In these happy times where nothing marked the hours, and nothing made them count them; time had no other measure than amusement or boredom. Underneath ancient oak tress, an ardent youth gradually lost its ferocity; they all came together little by little; by forcing themselves be understood, they learnt how to explain themselves. The first festivals occurred there ... animated gesture was no longer enough, the voice accompanied passionate accents, pleasure and desire, mixed together, made themselves felt at once. It was the true cradle of peoples, and out of the pure crystal water of the fountains came the first fires of love.'

³⁸ In *Du Principe de la Mélodie*, p.207, in a description analogous to the well, Rousseau offers an apology to the reader for his slightly over-indulgent imagery: 'Lecteurs pardonnez-moi cet écart; qui pourrait songer de sang froid au tems de l'innocence et du bonheur des hommes?'

then ... Salvation comes in the form of an explanatory passage that immediately supervenes, where Rousseau speculates that before the advent of the well, there were, in fact, small family units in which the union of brother and sister ensured a line of succession. Similarly, there were domestic languages *entre famille* and there were marriages of sorts.³⁹ All of these, however, are not presented without qualification in this passage: though there were marriages, there was nothing that constituted love; though there were domestic languages, there were no languages of the people; and though there were families, there were no nations.

This is a moment when the *la perfectibilité* is activated, when the passions are kindled and when men and women search for the means to externalise their feelings, to communicate their sentiments and passions. These are the necessary conditions – the perfect conditions – to allow language to be discovered. This narrative then, unquestionably, locates itself in the Fall-State, for Rousseau has already argued – both in the *Essai* and in the Second *Discours* – that humans were forced together with the onset of the second species of need. Indeed Rousseau opens Chapter IX of the *Essai* with this clarification:

Dans les premiers temps, les hommes épars sur la face de la terre n'avaient de société que celle de famille de lois de celles de la nature, de langue que le geste et quelques sons inarticulés.⁴⁰

And yet this scene must also be an ideal or idealised one, for it would appear that the *dramatis personae* have yet to feel the oppressive yoke of the second species of need. Does Rousseau want us to believe that this is a moment before the fall itself, or that the scene at the well is an historical manifestation of the Ideal-State? This apparent contradiction has a strategic function: it allows Rousseau to begin to steer his argumentation towards previously uncharted territory, and as we will see, it is a necessary manoeuvre.

³⁹ In a footnote to Chapter IX, (*Ibid.* p.188), Rousseau provides an explanation for this distinction: 'les véritables langues n'ont point une origine domestique, il n'y a qu'une convention plus générale et plus durable qui les puisse établir.'

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.188. 'At first, men who were scattered across the face of the earth had no society other than that of the family, no laws other those of nature and no language other than gestures and a few inarticulate sounds.' Rousseau, in a footnote, identifies these 'premiers temps' as 'ceux de la dispersion des hommes, à quelque âge du genre humain qu'on veuille en fixer l'époque.'

3.5. The Great North-South divide

As I discussed in the previous chapter, at the heart of the philosophy of history there is a relativism and a value system in operation. Rousseau will, then, in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, chart and pursue a course that will permit him to rigorously apply this system of value to certain entities that he wishes to imbue with greater significance than others. We will see, therefore, the well located in southern, equatorial latitudes and the languages formed there conceived as passionate, accented ones. They will be considered natural languages, for as we have already seen, nature dictates accents 'pour émouvoir un jeune cœur'.⁴¹ This is a moment where the echo of the *ari* can be heard in the voices of those gathered at the well. Though the history of the south will, eventually, prove to be a degenerative one, the rate of degeneration is slow, as needs at first are slight and barely perceptible. Consequently, at first these languages are described by Rousseau as 'filles du plaisir et non du besoin'⁴² and carry with them:

longtemps l'enseigne de leur père; leur accent séducteur ne s'effaça qu'avec les sentiments qui les avaient fait naître.

Nevertheless, catastrophic change is not so far away beyond the horizon:

lorsque de nouveaux besoins, introduits parmi les hommes, forcèrent chacun de ne songer qu'à lui même et de retirer son coeur au-dedans de lui.⁴³

This is also where future aesthetic goals begin to overtake philosophical necessity. Rousseau is desperate to construe this moment if not in ideal terms, then at the very least, in idealistic ones. What the scene at the well accomplishes, in functional terms, is to permit Rousseau to pave the way for the adumbration of an expressionist aesthetic, at the centre of which, is the voice and melody. I will return to this point later in this Chapter and again in Chapter 4.

There is, in this vision, little of the second species of need that colours the formation of the northern languages – the primary subject of Chapter X of the *Essai*. If the gathering of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.164. 'to move a young heart'

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.209. 'daughters of pleasure not of need.'

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.209. '... for a long time the mark of their progenitor. Their seductive accent only fades away with the sentiments that gave rise it. When new needs, introduced amongst men, forced each one to think only of himself and draw his heart within himself.'

innocents around the well is recounted in the manner of a proto-romantic idyll, then when Rousseau recounts the formation of languages in the north, it is as the tragedy of natural selection. These languages are described as ‘triste filles de la nécessité,’⁴⁴ conditioned and characterised by the harshness of their origin. The difference is marked out in the starkest possible terms and it is no accident that Rousseau elects to devote the longest chapter of the *Essai* to the formation of southern languages, and one of the shortest to the formation of northern languages. This imbalance gives a clear indication of Rousseau’s intentions; such is the supreme necessity of the argument of chapter IX to the rest of his aesthetic and indeed his ideological opposition to Rameau, that it had to be made to cohere and prevail at all costs.

If the south is a zone of fertile lands, abundant food and moderate need, where nature is ‘prodigue’⁴⁵, then the north is a place that is intemperate, cold, harsh, a place where:

tout est mort durant neuf mois de l’année, où le soleil n’échauffe l’air quelques semaines que pour apprendre aux habitants de quelles biens ils sont privés et prolonger leur misère.⁴⁶

What sort of languages could form in such pitiless, barren environments, in these ‘affreux climats’?⁴⁷ What accents will nature dictate to its inhabitants here? Surely the overriding priority of these peoples would be survival and seeking out food, rather than lingering at the edge of a watering hole gazing longingly at the opposite sex? Rousseau answers these questions with probably the most well-known and oft-quoted passage of the *Essai*. This is, of course, a key passage in the text, not however because Rousseau will deliver a suitable ‘sound-bite’ that can be seized upon for critical purposes, but for the explanation that follows it, an explanation that is, more often than not, conspicuous by its absence in critical readings of the *Essai*. The explanatory passage, as we will see in a moment, puts into stark relief elemental differences between the origin of language in the north and that in the south. As a result, this crucial passage provides Rousseau with the philosophical and historical justification for his aggrandizement of the Greek language in this and other texts⁴⁸ and, to a lesser degree, his

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.210. ‘sad daughters of necessity’

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.210. ‘prodigious’

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.211. ‘...everything is dead for nine months of the year, where the sun warms the air for only a couple of weeks to show the inhabitants what they lack and to prolong their misery.’

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.211. ‘terrible climates’

⁴⁸ Especially the *Dictionnaire de Musique* (completed 1764, published 1768).

valorisation of the Italian language over French. It does this for it contrasts qualitative differences between the resultant sonic character of each of the languages; the accent at the very heart of each:

Avant de songer à vivre heureux, il fallait songer à vivre. Le besoin mutuel unissant les hommes bien mieux que le sentiment n'aurait fait, la société ne se forma que par l'industrie; le continuel danger de périr ne permettait pas de se borner à la langue du geste, et le premier mot ne fut pas chez eux, aimez-moi mais aidez-moi. Ces deux termes, quoique assez semblables, se prononce d'un ton bien différent. On n'avait rien à faire sentir, on avait tout à faire entendre: il ne s'agissait donc pas d'énergie, mais de clarté. A l'accent que le coeur ne fournissaient pas, on substitua des articulations fortes et sensibles, et s'il y eut dans la forme du langage quelque impression naturelle, cette impression contribuait encore à sa dureté.⁴⁹

Note how Rousseau once again alludes – albeit obliquely – to the *Cri*, to an accent suggested by the heart. This can only be true of the language of the south, however. In the north, the heart plays but a minor role in vocalisation, instead strong and definite articulations are called for in order to convey meaning –*aidez-moi* – quickly and surely. In the north, one must be precise, acute, brief, and economic, for one's life may depend upon it; in the south, as time is not of the essence, one can afford to be expressive, passionate, imprecise, for only one's love and contentment may depend upon it. To be sure, this line of argumentation is reductive in the extreme, perhaps Manichean, but I would suggest that Rousseau wishes us to read it in this way for he is trying to lay as firm a foundation as possible so that a series of intricate arguments and value judgements can be securely built and layered on top of it. What Rousseau is not saying, however, is that the language of the north is not natural nor that it is not as nature had intended. Even though the scene at the well is an idealistic image, it is not ideal, for circumstances had already conspired to make this meeting of peoples possible. In the north, the circumstances are different, peoples are drawn together for different reasons, and thus the priorities of communication must be altogether different.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.211. (Rousseau's emphasis). 'Before thinking of living happily, one had to think about living. Mutual need united men more readily than sentiment would have done, society was formed only by industriousness; the continual threat of perishing did not permit them to restrict themselves to gestural language, and the first word amongst them was not love me but help me. These two terms, though very similar, are pronounced in a very different tone. There was nothing to be felt, but everything to be heard. It was not a question, therefore, of energy, but of clarity. To the accent which the heart did not bring forth, was substituted strong and marked articulations, and if there was in the form of this language something of its natural [impression], this [impression] merely contributed to its harshness.'

But so that there can be little or no ambiguity on the matter, Rousseau attaches an additional stratum of detail and precision to his argumentation: he now marks a distinction between the passions of the peoples of the north and those of the south. He had already opened Chapter X of the *Essai* by articulating essential differences between the needs and passions – in the north, passions are born of needs and in the south needs are born of passions. Rousseau now seeks to establish a distinction between northern and southern passions, but he does so in such a way as to allow the reader to gauge the very character of the men of the north, so that his claim, that this character is the deciding influence upon the sonic properties of their language, makes more sense. However, as we will see, Rousseau is being slightly underhand here. In trying to hammer home this argument, he attempts, somewhat irrationally and expediently, to suggest that the men of the south, of which, in this instance, ‘un asiatique’ serves as an exemplum, is almost indistinguishable from Ideal-State man:

... les hommes septentrionaux ne sont pas sans passions, mais ils en ont d’une autre espèce. Celles des pays chauds sont des passions voluptueuses, qui tiennent à l’amour et à la mollesse. La nature fait tant pour les habitants qu’ils ont presque rien à faire; pourvu qu’un asiatique ait des femmes et de repos, il est content.⁵⁰ Mais dans le nord où les habitants consomment beaucoup sur un sol ingrat, des hommes soumis à tant de besoins sont facile à irriter; tout ce qu’on fait autour d’eux les inquiète: comme ils ne subsistent qu’avec peine, plus ils sont pauvres, plus ils tiennent au peu qu’ils ont; les approcher c’est attenter à leur vie. De là vient ce tempérament irascible [...] Ainsi leurs voix les plus naturelles sont celles de la colère et des menaces, et ces voix s’accompagnent toujours d’articulations fortes qui les rendent dures et bruyantes.⁵¹

The logical consequence of Rousseau’s stratagem is revealed in the opening locutions of Chapter XI, where first, he articulates the difference between the sonic character of southern and northern languages:

Voilà, selon mon opinion, les causes physiques les plus générales de la différence caractéristique des primitives langues. Celles du Midi durent être vives, sonore, accentuées, éloquentes et souvent obscures à force d’énergie;

⁵⁰ This closely parallels a passage in the Second *Discours* where Rousseau describes Ideal-State man: ‘les seuls biens qu’il connaisse dans l’univers sont la nourriture, une femelle et le repos’. Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, p.196.

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.212. ‘Northern men are not without passions, but they are of a different type. Those of southern peoples are voluptuous, which [tiennent] to love and to gentleness. Nature does so much for the inhabitant that they almost have nothing to do; as long as an Asian has women and rest, he is contented. But in the north where the inhabitants consume much from a poor soil, men, subjected to so many needs, are easily aggravated; everything around them disturbs them: because they only subsist with difficulty, the more they lack the more they hold onto what they have; to approach them is to threaten their life. This is where their irascible temperament comes from. ... Thus their most natural voices are those of anger and threats, voices which are always accompanied by strong articulations which render them harsh and noisy.’

celles du Nord durent être sourdes, rudes, articulées, criardes, monotone, claires à force de mots.⁵²

and second, he begins to construct the next phase of his argumentation upon this foundational base:

Les langues modernes, cent fois mêlées et refondues, gardent encore quelque chose de ces différences. Le français, l'anglais, l'allemand, sont le langage privé des hommes qui s'entraident, qui raisonnent entre eux de sang froid, ou de gens emportés qui se fâchent.⁵³

Thus Rousseau associates some modern languages – and, more particularly, his language – with a distant origin in the north, and logically he must therefore associate others with a distant origin in the south. Here is the source of the eventual valorisation and privileging of the Italian language over that of the French, and, of course, the aggrandizement and ultimate elevation of the Greek language above all others in his writings. It must be stressed, however, that this valorisation is not absolute nor oppositional, merely relative: both sets of languages retain little of their original character, and as a result, both are debased to a lesser or greater extent. And yet as we will see, one is considered more accented than the other, and crucially more apposite for musical setting. The Greek language is treated very much as a special case by Rousseau, but does not escape censure either. We will explore this point in more depth in Chapter 4.

3.6. The origin of music

The *Essai* is a remarkable feat of discursive engineering and construction; what strikes one about the structure of the *Essai* perhaps most of all, is the deliberateness of the journey that the reader is taken on. There is an impeccable dovetailing and intricate layering of argumentation that would seem to suggest that little about the journey the reader is taking has been left to chance or to question. There seems to be only one pathway and one conclusion

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.212-213. 'There is, in my opinion, the most general physical causes of the difference in character of primitive languages. Those of the south must be lively, sonorous, accented, eloquent and often unclear because of their energy; those of the north must be voiceless [sourdes], harsh, articulated, shouted, monotonous, and clear because of the words.'

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.213. 'Modern languages, mixed up and reformed hundreds of times, still retain something of these differences. French, English, German are the languages of men who trade, who coolly reason amongst themselves, or fiery men who argue amongst themselves.'

to be reached, and Rousseau is extremely careful to marshal the reader toward that conclusion from the outset of the work. As a result, a stifling pressure is applied to the argumentation at all times, and Rousseau continues layering arguments and distinctions upon one another through to concluding pages of the work.

Chapter XIII is no exception to this rule. Rousseau is clearly not wholly content with his explanation thus far in the *Essai* and introduces a further level of detail to add precision and weight to his argumentation. A distinction is thus elaborated between sounds formed using the glottis and those formed using the palette and the tongue.⁵⁴

Avec les premières voix se formèrent les premières articulations ou les premières sons, selon le genre de la passion qui dictait les uns ou les autres. La colère arrache des cris menaçants, que la langue et le palais articulent: mais la voix de la tendresse est plus douce, c'est la glotte qui la modifie, et cette voix devient un son. Seulement les accents en sont plus fréquents ou plus rares, les inflexions plus ou moins aiguës, selon le sentiment qui s'y joint.⁵⁵

Rousseau's intimation here is that in the north threatening cries articulated and modulated by the tongue and the palette are common, for as we have seen men of the north are rarely far from peril and hunger and may, at any moment, require to summon assistance. In the south, however, accented, cadenced voices are more prevalent, for that is what is called for in our idyll of the well and these are *sounds*. The point is, once again, that this distinction is relative rather than absolute, for Rousseau does not exclude accent, inflexion, passion, cadence nor even sentiment from the north. There is, in both the northern and southern *voix*, a mixture of articulations and accents, but in the north, articulations are more prevalent, and, correspondingly, in the south, accents are more prevalent. It follows that accents in the southern *voix* are more inflected and cadenced than those of the north. Thus a further

⁵⁴ Duchez, 'Principe de la Mélodie et Origine des Langues', p.78 fn, notes that it is curious that Rousseau seems to be unaware of the work of Ferrein (*Mémoire sur la Formation de la voix de l'Homme* of 1741 and *Lettre sur le Nouveau système de la voix*, of 1748) who discovered the role of the vocal chords in the process of voice production; a discovery that relegates the role of the palette and glottis to a secondary order. In my opinion I can only suggest that either Rousseau was completely unaware of the research (which, in truth, seems unlikely) or that he considered the image of a vibrating chord stretched across the larynx a little too reminiscent of a vibrating monochord stretched across a wooden bridge.

⁵⁵ Rousseau, *Essai*, pp.214-215. 'With the first voices were formed the first articulations or sounds according to the sort of passion that dictated one or the other. Anger draws forth menacing cries that the tongue and the palette articulate. But the voice of tenderness is more gentle; it is the glottis that modifies it and this voice becomes a sound. Only the accents are more or less frequent, the inflexions more or less acute according to the emotion that goes with them.'

distinction compounds that between the north and the south: the resultant northern and southern languages and the passions that give rise to them. What Rousseau is striving to achieve at this point, is to ensure that he elaborates a structure that will be as difficult to unravel under cross-examination as possible.

In the same manner that languages were formed, so too is music; and Rousseau returns to the idyll of the well in order to demonstrate that music and language were not only formed simultaneously, but that they were, in the beginning, one and the same thing, inseparable and indistinguishable from one another. They constituted what Rousseau dubs a *langue*. But he also cleverly draws the reader's attention towards his conclusion that this *langue* was, in essence, 'song-like':

[...] ainsi la cadence et les sons naissent avec les syllabes, 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 périodique et mesurés du rythme, les inflexions mélodieuses des accents firent naître la poésie et la musique avec la langue; *ou plutôt tout cela n'était que la langue même* pour ces heureux climats et ces heureux temps où les seuls besoins pressants qui demandaient le concours d'autrui étaient ceux que le coeur faisant naître.⁵⁶

Rousseau now underscores the logic of a common origin for music and language, and in doing so marks yet another distinction, this time between prose and poetry, and melody and other musical elements. Moreover, Rousseau argues that this is an entirely logical conclusion to have reached:

*La poésie fut trouvée avant la prose; cela devait être, puisque les passions parlèrent avant la raison. Il en fut de même de la musique; il n'y eut point d'abord d'autre musique que la mélodie, ni d'autre mélodie que le son varié de la parole; les accents formaient le chant ... et l'on parlait autant par les sons et par le rythme que par les articulations et les voix.*⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.215. (my emphasis) 'Therefore the rhythm [*cadence*] and the sounds are born along with syllables, passion makes all the organs speak and adorns the voice with all of its brightness [*éclat*]; thus verses, melodies, speech have a common origin. Around the fountains of which I have spoken, the first speeches were the first songs: the periodic metre and cadence of rhythm, the melodic inflexions of accents gave birth to poetry and music along with language; or rather all this was only merely language [*langue*] in these happy climes where the only pressing needs that necessitated the participation of others where those that the heart gave rise to.'

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.215. 'Poetry was discovered before prose; this must have been so since the passions spoke before reason. It was the same for music; at first there was no music other than melody, and no other melody than the varied sound of speech; accents formed melody [*chant*] ... and one spoke as much through sounds and rhythm as with articulations and words [*voix*].'

In order to further reinforce the Common Origin Hypothesis and to demonstrate that his postulations have reliable and credible provenance, he cites the authority of Strabon⁵⁸:

Dire et chanter étaient autrefois la même chose, dit Strabon, ce qui montre, ajoute-t-il, que la poésie est la source de l'éloquence. Il fallait dire que l'une et l'autre eurent la même source et ne furent d'abord que la même chose.⁵⁹

In the *Du Principe de Mélodie*, Rousseau goes even further pointing out that beyond any qualitative differences between speech and song, the two must stem from the same voice; in other words that

Sitôt que celui qui parle s'arrête sur une syllabe soutient et prolonge le son de sa voix au même degré, à l'instant la voix parlante se change en voix chantante et le son devient appréciable; de plus, la voix parlante, fait comme le son musical résonner et frémir les corps sonores [...].⁶⁰

Rousseau has thus far positioned his concept of a common origin in the south, around the well. Now, to be sure, these were the best of all possible conditions in which language could have formed, and the language formed there was an accented, inflected, cadenced and expressive one – at first, the spontaneous vocalisation of the passions. But what of the language formed in the north? Did this not share a common origin with music also?

This is another point in the *Essai* at which Rousseau's argument becomes invested with a little more of the aesthetic than it does of the philosophic. What I mean by this is that Rousseau's motives change again at this juncture, as indeed they had done in Chapter IX: once more Rousseau wants to begin to channel the force of his argumentation onto issues that concern

⁵⁸ From *Géographie*, Livre I. It should also be noted that the idea of speech and melody sharing common ancestry was prevalent throughout the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century, as was the general preoccupation with questions of the origin of languages. References to their common lineage can be found in Abbé Dubos's seminal treatise, *Reflexions critiques sur la poésie et peinture* (1719), in Duclos's *Remarques sur la grammaire générale* (1752) and his article, *Déclamation des Anciens*, in the *Encyclopédie*, and, of course, in the Abbé Olivet's celebrated *Traité de la prosodie Française*. How fashions change, though; Ulmer, Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man on/in Rousseau's Faults', *Eighteenth Century*, 20, (1979), p.164, makes an interesting observation that 'the question of the origin of language ... one of the most characteristic and most debated of ...eighteenth century issues, fell into such disrepute that by the middle of the nineteenth century the Parisian Société de Linguistique had prohibited all communications on the subject.' And Downing Thomas, *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment*, p.12 remarks that with the exception of Umberto Eco, 'official discourse on music in the C20th has largely resisted discussion of music as it might be related to language or meaning.'

⁵⁹ Rousseau, *Op. Cit.*, p.215. 'To speak and to sing were once the same thing according to Strabon, which shows, he adds, that poetry is the source of eloquence. One ought to say that both had the same source and were at first the same thing.'

⁶⁰ Rousseau, *Du Principe de mélodie*, in Wokler, 'Rameau, Rousseau and the Essai sur l'Origine des Langues', p.204 'As soon the speaker pauses on a syllable, supports and prolongs the sound of his voice at the same pitch, at this instant the speaking voice changes into the singing voice and the sound becomes noticeable; moreover, the speaking voice like the musical sound, resonates the sonorous bodies [...]'

both his opposition to Rameau and his aesthetic writings, especially those views expressed in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* and those played out in composition of *Pygmalion*. To that end, and for precisely that purpose, Rousseau elects to fire a salvo across the boughs of the French language and set it in unfavourable, historical terms, not against Italian, but against the ancient Greek language. In doing this, Rousseau also hints at the character of those languages that have something of the north about them – in other words, an inherent imbalance of articulation and a paucity of accent. In short, a lack of melody.

Une langue qui n'a que des articulations et des voix n'a donc que la moitié de sa richesse; elle rend des idées, il est vrai, mais pour rendre des sentiments, des images, il lui faut encore un rythme et des sons, c'est-à-dire une mélodie: voilà ce qu'avait la langue grecque, et ce qui manque la nôtre.⁶¹

Here, as in several other places in the *Essai*, we have an ungainly and somewhat abrupt transition between one flow of argumentation and another; we have spent most of Chapter XII concerned with the origin of music and the resultant differences between accent and articulation, and then with little warning, Rousseau chooses to draw a comparison between a language of which we know little – certainly in terms of its sonic character – and the contemporary language in which he is writing. We are also left wondering whether Rousseau will bother himself by either justifying such an abrupt transition – if transition is indeed an apposite term – or concluding his disquisition on the origin of music. He does not attempt either. Instead, in circumlocutory fashion, he points to the relative nature of any comparison between the Greek and the French language, a comparison that will find further expression in forthcoming chapters and in other works.⁶² Perhaps explanations for this abruptness reside in the fact that Chapter XII is the first expressly concerned with the origin of music; that Rousseau has no choice but to suggest that this origin is shared with language and thus the argumentation of this chapter must be consonant with that of other chapters; that Rousseau, having established the common origin hypothesis, is beginning to draw the reader's attention

⁶¹ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.216. 'A language that only has articulations and [voix] only has half of its richness; to be sure it renders ideas, but to render sentiments, images, it also has to have rhythm and sounds, that is to say a melody: that is what the Greek language had, and what ours lacks.'

⁶² Cf. Rousseau, *Du Principe de la Mélodie*, p.205. 'de toutes les langues connues la Grecque étant sans difficulté celle qui a le plus de résonance et d'accent ...' (my emphasis). In the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, pp.182-183 in Chapter VII which discusses modern prosody and that of ancient Greek, Rousseau cites a passage from Duclos' *Remarques sur la Grammaire générale et raisonnée* in which is reported that in the Greek tongue, 'l'élévation du ton dans l'accent aigu et l'abaissement dans le grave étaient une quinte; ainsi l'accent prosodique était aussi musical, surtout le circonflexe, où la voix, après avoir monté d'une quinte, descendait d'une autre quinte sur le même syllabe.' I shall return to this passage in the next chapter.

towards aesthetic and musical issues that are a natural and logical consequence of it; that these issues have particular significance in the ideological war being waged against Rameau; and that this comparison is the perfect one in which to highlight the inadequacies of the French language and by extension French music.

3.7. The origin and degeneration of Melody

Rousseau's next chapter is expressly concerned with melody, and here is the section of which the *Du Principe de la mélodie* serves as its principal urtext. It is clear to the reader that from the outset we are firmly in the domain of the aesthetic and indeed the historical, and, in general terms, this establishes the dominant pattern for the remaining chapters of the *Essai* in which aesthetic rather than philosophical precepts are discussed, and comparisons between music and languages are elaborated. Additionally, Rousseau gives expression here to one of the ultimate goals of the *Essai*: to reveal to the reader precisely how music degenerated across its historical trajectory. Rousseau has carefully structured the *Essai* to enable this discussion to take place at this juncture and appear utterly natural and logical to the reader; the hard philosophical groundwork has already been laid and Rousseau can now begin to build an aesthetic of music upon firm and cogently argued foundations. However, this aesthetic will take shape rather differently than might at first be envisaged, for it is coloured by several significant factors: first, though this single strand starts out by conforming to the degenerative historical paradigm that we have traced in the First and Second *Discours*, as it continues its passage towards the present, it begins to be modified and we see a gradual bifurcation of this first *langue* into two increasingly distinct and incompatible semiotic systems – music and language; second, there is a stark, unrepentant valorisation of melody over harmony; third, there is a moral dimension to it; fourth, a strictly expressionist mimetic system is being expounded; and fifth, these elements are set in opposition to Rameau's theoretical postulations. I intend to examine the first two of these in this chapter, and leave the remaining concepts for our discussion of the aesthetic ramifications of the philosophy of music in the next chapter.

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that Peter Kivy's view of Rousseau's notion of the origin of language was flawed in two respects. First, that the veritable origin of language – the *Cri de la nature* – pre-exists both language and music and does not give rise to either directly; the prime mover in Rousseau's schema is, as we have seen, the onset of the second species of need; need is the unwelcome interloper, the catalyst that finally forces the issue. Second, Kivy envisages an original 'proto-language' at the heart of which is a primordial imbalance and instability, a proto-language that is, in his words, 'more akin to music than it is to speech.'⁶³ However, the inherent, intrinsic, imbalance that Kivy describes runs counter current to Rousseau's conception of a *langue* in which the entities *music* and *speech* do not even exist – neither actually nor potentially.⁶⁴ Yet the question does arise, that if music and speech do share a common progenitor, as Rousseau suggests, then how and why did they evolve into distinct and antagonistic semiotic systems? Is the very making of music, the history of its separation also the tale of its degeneration?

As I suggested a moment ago, the original *langue* will degenerate across its history, simply because it will be subject to the same forces as any other factor of human evolution described by Rousseau's philosophy. However, Rousseau does not merely let things take their anticipated downward-spiralling trajectory, for he modifies the itinerary and the sequencing of events. To begin with, we are not merely witnessing the degeneration of a single entity nor indeed tracing the progress of a single strand: from a common origin, we will see *langue* slowly and forcibly begin to bifurcate into two increasingly divergent entities – music and language – the final destination of which is a deep seated antagonism that erodes every trace of their true character.⁶⁵ This bifurcation is a slow, incremental process, a gradual splitting apart, rather than a sudden fission or rupture into two separate entities. The looming spectre of the second species of need will first drive a wedge into *langue*, then *langue* will begin to split along its grain and, eventually, two separate entities will begin to emerge from the fragments of one. Briefly,

⁶³ Kivy, *The Corded Shell*, p.97.

⁶⁴ I would suggest that the 'potential' for *langue* to yield up the entities 'music' and 'language' is not always already present as some commentators have claimed; for, if it is the second species of need that is the cause of separation and the root cause of the existence of these separate and distinct entities, then if the second species of need had never made its presence felt, *langue* would not and could not have been ruptured in the first place. Moreover, if some other factor had intervened, before the onset of the second species of need, then *langue* may have mutated into something very (or entirely) different.

⁶⁵ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.225. 'ces deux langues ... s'ôtent mutuellement tout caractère de vérité'.

they will reflect, imitate, mirror one another, but once this moment has ebbed away, they begin to take on different forms, and though both degenerate and become dysfunctional, they will do so in different ways and at different velocities. Yet, and this point is crucial to understanding Rousseau's critique of opera, they do continue to affect and infect one another, principally because they are always forced back together in the service of art.

Notice also, in the passage that I will cite below, how Rousseau will place the blame for the degeneration of music squarely at the door of language and not the other way around; he does not, for instance, describe how the march toward the perfection of music as art results in it losing both its accent and expressive qualities, rather it is the progress of language that is seen as a factor deleterious to the destiny of music. Now one might conclude that this is not surprising or significant since the work itself is concerned with the origin of language, and the genesis of language should naturally be related from language's perspective. However, I think that such a conclusion would be erroneous, for it does not take into consideration the system of value that underpins Rousseau's aesthetic of communication, that of the valorisation of music over language. I will come back to this point in the next chapter. Instead, as we can clearly see below, Rousseau argues that as language begins to be refined and perfected, melody begins to be stripped of its original character:

A mesure que la langue se perfectionnait, la mélodie, en s'imposant de nouvelles règles, perdait insensiblement de son ancienne énergie, et le calcul des intervalles fut substitué à la finesse des inflexions. C'est ainsi, par exemple, que la pratique du genre enharmonique s'abolit peu à peu.⁶⁶

Melody, which had once been free from stricture and codification, begins now to be forcibly restrained by the strait-jacket of mode, scale and predetermined intervals; in short it becomes enslaved in the service of art, and eventually will play an exceedingly poor second fiddle to harmony.⁶⁷ At the same time, language becomes increasingly deployed for the articulation of

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.237-238. 'At the same time as language improved, melody, subject to new rules, gradually lost its former strength, and the calculation of intervals replaced the subtleties of inflexion. This is how, for example, the practice of the enharmonic mode slowly disappeared.'

⁶⁷ As we will see in the next chapter, in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* and in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* Rousseau suggests that it has been harmonic progression, its movement between consonances and dissonances, and the system of temperament that it requires to satisfactorily achieve these movements, that has determined the patterning of scale and key.

need rather than the expression of passions and moral needs. It is the incessant march towards ever more effective and efficacious communication that begins to chip away at its natural accent and erode its affective powers; the gradual encroachment and eventual dominance of reason in all domains of the human imagination renders speech increasingly artificial and decreasingly accented:

Les développements de la raison rendirent la langue artificielle, plus froide et moins accentuée: la logique succéda par degrés à l'éloquence, le tranquille raisonnement au feu de l'enthousiasme et à force d'apprendre à penser on apprit à ne plus sentir.⁶⁸

The rise of philosophy, the quest for enlightenment through cosmological reflection and the continual refinement of language that these intellectual developments entail and require, results, eventually, in the separation of speech and music:

L'étude de la philosophie et les progrès de la raison qui donnèrent plus de perfection et un autre tour à la langue lui ôtèrent ainsi ce ton vif et passionné qui l'avoit d'abord rendu si chantante; et c'est alors que la mélodie commençant à n'être plus si adhérente au langage et dans la déclamation prit insensiblement une existence à part et que la musique devint plus indépendante des paroles.⁶⁹

As we can see, Rousseau suggests that the second species of need – and in particular the expression and articulation of it – is what causes first, the separation of music from language, and second, contributes to the gradual downfall of melody. But as we will see in a moment, language does not escape unscathed either.

In the *Essai*, Rousseau contextualises this line of argumentation historically and politically, and it must be said, his assertions begin to make not only more sense but far more impact on the reader; this is, of course, not in the least bit surprising since these arguments are more developed than those of its urtext. It is, therefore, worthwhile quoting those parallel passages from the *Essai* in full so that we can see how Rousseau further developed and refined these

⁶⁸ Rousseau, *Du Principe de la Mélodie*, p.212. 'The progress of reason rendered the language artificial, colder and less accented: logic gradually replaced eloquence, calm reasoning replaced the fire of enthusiasm and in attempting to learn how to think, we forgot how to feel.' This passage does not appear in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* even though it is sandwiched in between two paragraphs that both appear in almost the same form.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.212. 'The study of philosophy and the progress of reason which both brought about more perfection and stripped language of a lively and passionate tone which had once made it so melodious; and it was then that melody began to break its ties with language and in declamation gradually took on an separate existence and music became more independent from words.' Robert Wokler points out in footnote 110, that in the above quotation on the word 'langage' Rousseau had originally written 'parole', and also points to this idea in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, where Rousseau writes 'discours'.

ideas in the intervening three to five years and continued to place the blame for the further degeneration of melody upon both linguistic advancements, several Athenian dramatists and the arrival of the Romans. Notice also how Rousseau comments upon the unique timbral characteristics of Greek language before philosophers and dramatists usurped the place of the poets and musicians:

L'étude de la philosophie et le progrès du raisonnement ayant perfectionné la grammaire, ôtèrent à la langue ce ton vif et passionné qui l'avait d'abord rendue si chantante. Dès le temps de Ménalippide et de Philoxène, les symphonistes, qui d'abord était aux gages des poètes et n'exécutaient que sous eux pour ainsi dire à leur dictée, en devinrent indépendants, et c'est de cette licence que se plaint si amèrement la musique dans une comédie de Phérécrate

...⁷⁰

In the next passage, it is worth paying particular attention to the way Rousseau describes how, as melody is torn away from *discours*, it loses, progressively, the affective power it once held over the passions, when it was, in his words, nothing more than the accent and harmony of poetry. But more than this, note how Rousseau also concludes that, as a result, speech (*parole*) is itself no longer capable of achieving the same effects either. Clearly, both music and language have been undone, and are critically weakened by the progress of reason – the only means now by which the passions can be influenced and affected:

Ainsi la mélodie, commençant à n'être plus si adhérente au discours, prit insensiblement une existence à part, et la musique devint plus indépendante des paroles. Alors aussi cessèrent peu à peu ces prodiges qu'elle avait produit lorsqu'elle n'était que l'accent et l'harmonie de la poésie, et qu'elle lui donnait sur les passions cet empire que la parole n'exerça plus dans la suite que la raison.⁷¹

The next passage is reminiscent of the distaste for Athens and its cultural magnificence that Rousseau displays in the First *Discours*, although here he is a little more circumspect and cites the annexing of Greece by the Romans as the final nail in Greece's coffin. An all-too familiar downward-spiralling pattern is emerging as we progress through his argumentation: the Greek

⁷⁰ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.238. 'The study of philosophy and the progress of reasoning having perfected grammar, stripped language of its lively and passionate tone that had first made it so melodious. From the time of Menalipid and of Philoxenus [the dithyrambic poets], the symphonists, who were first in the pay of the poets and worked under them, at their behest so to speak, became independent from them, and it is about this independence [license] that 'music' complained so bitterly in Pherecrates drama. ...' Rousseau alludes here to a passage from Plutarch's *De Musica* where he describes a work by Pherecrates.

⁷¹ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.121-122. 'Thus melody began to break its ties with discourse, took on a separate existence and music became more independent from words. At the same time, little by little the marvels that it [melody] had once produced when it was nothing but the accent and harmony of poetry ceased, and the influence which it once had over the passions is no longer exercised by speech which only influences reason.'

language is tainted and weakened by the influx of the Romans and finally Greek gives way to Latin – a language far less suited to music and one that by allying itself to music serves only to further debase it. In turn, Latin *chant* begins to pollute that of the provinces and the Roman theatres prove injurious to those of Athens. Melody, in the final term of this *histoire*, is shared between both languages, whilst in fact no longer suiting either:

Aussi dès que la Grèce fut pleine de sophistes et de philosophes, n'y vit-on plus ni poètes, ni musiciens célèbre. En cultivant l'art de convaincre, on perdit celui d'émouvoir. ... Bientôt la servitude ajouta son influence à celle de la philosophie. La Grèce aux fers perdit ce feu qui n'échauffe que les âmes libres, et ne trouva plus pour louer ses tyrans le ton dont elle avait chanté ses héros. Le mélange des Romains affaiblit encore ce qui restait au langage d'harmonie et d'accent. Le Latin, langue plus sourde et moins musicale, fit tort à la musique en l'adoptant. Le chant employé dans la capitale altéra peu à peu celui des provinces; les théâtres de Rome nuisirent à ceux d'Athènes. Quand Néron remportait des prix, la Grèce avait cessé d'en mériter, et la même mélodie, partagée à deux langues, convint moins à l'une et à l'autre.⁷²

As if the advance and eventual dominance of Latin over Greek had not been disastrous enough, further catastrophe befalls the fate of language and music, a catastrophe which 'détruisit les progrès de l'esprit humain, sans ôter les vices qui en était l'ouvrage.'⁷³ Europe was, Rousseau bemoans, overrun with 'barbarians' from the north – Visigoths, Huns and then Vandals – which plunged it into a long intellectual and cultural darkness. At once, Europe lost its sciences, its arts and, catastrophically, 'la langue harmonieuse perfectionnée.' Those languages that had been formed in the north, those 'triste filles de la nécessité'⁷⁴ brought forth as a response to the second species of need rather than desire or the passions, would drive a coach and horses through the delicate, accented, poetic tones of the southern languages. Neither language nor music would recover from the onslaught of harsh accents, consonances and articulations. 'Ces hommes grossiers,' as Rousseau labels them,

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp.238-239. 'Also, as soon as Greece was filled with sophists and philosophers, poets and celebrated musicians no longer lived there. In cultivating the art of convincing others, we lost that of moving others ... Soon, servitude added its influence to that of philosophy. Greece, in shackles, lost this fire that warms only free spirits, and could find no longer the tone in which it had sung of its heroes to praise its tyrants. The mixing of Romans further weakened what remained of the language's accent and harmony. Latin, a less musical and voiceless language, damaged music by adopting it. Song used in the capital gradually altered that of the provinces; Roman theatres damaged those of Athens. When Nero won prizes, Greece had ceased to merit them, and melody, shared between two languages, suited either less.' It is worth noting that this same 'history' will be represented and reframed in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* article 'opera' which we will look at in more detail in the next chapter.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.239. 'destroyed the progress of the human spirit, without removing the vices that it had produced.' Note, in passing, how Rousseau is careful to tie this assertion in with one of the principal arguments of the First *Discours*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.210. 'sad daughters of necessity.'

que le nord avait engendrés accoutumèrent insensiblement toutes les oreilles à la rudesse de leur organe; leur voix dure et dénuée d'accent était bruyante sans être sonore ... Toutes leurs articulations étant aussi âpres que leurs voix étaient nasardes et sourdes, ils ne pouvaient donner qu'une sorte d'éclat à leur chant, qui était de renforcer le son de voyelles pour couvrir l'abondance et la dureté des consonnes.⁷⁵

The impact of the northern peoples began to leech whatever remained of the interest and vivacity out of melody, for in order to make themselves understood they slowed down their speech, carefully articulating and enunciating every single word. But this temporal distortion would also indelibly change the face of melody and of song, stripping it of all sense of metre and rhythm. In order to compensate for the difficulties posed by pronunciation, the musician would instead dwell upon each sound, to pad such sounds out and to make as much of a noise as possible, rather than preserve or observe the natural rhythm and cadence of its cognate, speech:

Ce chant bruyant, joint à l'inflexibilité de l'organe, obligea ces nouveaux venus et les peuples subjugués qui les imitèrent de ralentir tous les sons pour les faire entendre. L'articulation pénible et les sons renforcés concoururent également à chasser de la mélodie tout sentiment de mesure et de rythme. Comme ce qu'il y avait de plus dur à prononcer était toujours le passage d'un son à l'autre, on avait rien mieux à faire que de s'arrêter sur chacun le plus qu'il était possible, de le renfler, de le faire éclater le plus qu'on pouvait.⁷⁶

3.8. The Discovery of Harmony and the further degeneration of Melody

I noted in Chapter 2, that in Chapter IX of the *Essai*, Rousseau had foretold that it would take but one further incremental and developmental step for men to be irreversibly bound to one another forever: 'augmentez d'un degré leur [les hommes] développement et leurs lumières, les voilà réunis pour toujours'.⁷⁷ This incremental step, once taken, succeeds in not only binding men together, but also, as a corollary, drives the wedge ever deeper between music and

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.239-240. 'These crude men that the north had engendered gradually conditioned everyone to the harshness of their voices; their harsh voices, stripped of accent, were loud without being sonorous ... All their articulations being as harsh as their voices were nasal and muffled, they could only add one sort of brilliance [éclat] to their song which was to reinforce the sound of the vowels in order to cover up the abundance and hardness of the consonances.'

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.240. 'This noisy song, along with the inflexibility of their voices, forced these new immigrants and the subjugated people that they imitated to slow down all the sounds to make themselves understood. Tedious articulation and emphasised sounds conspired to hound out all trace of tempo and rhythm from melody. As the hardest thing to deliver was the passage from one sound to another, the best solution was to spend as much time as possible on each sound, to fill it out and to make it sound as brilliant as one could.'

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.202. 'raise by one step their development and their knowledge, and they will be united forever.'

language. The more frequently men are drawn together, for whatever reason – whether through need or desire, invasion and subjugation – the more they will search for the means to commune and commune efficiently and effectively.

This binding of men together has an additional, but entirely logical figurative outcome: the discovery of harmony, when one, lone voice becomes two, three, many. The figural representation of this is an image of myriad individual voices, with all their resultant differences, subtleties and variety, all their accent and expressiveness, having free rein and being fed by man's heart's desire wherever and whenever the idyll of the well occurs. This image is as nature had intended. But then when men are forced together, and when they feel the urge to communicate, to be heard and understood, variety, accent and subtlety count for little and are more of a hindrance than strength. At this point a happy medium needs to be sought, a compromised middle path that will, over time, see much of the interest, warmth, expressivity, accent and diversity of these *langues* diminish and erode, until they all begin to sound the same, to share the same timbral characteristics. To be sure they are efficacious, but in the process of becoming so they lose their affective power. And wherever there is harmony, there is the trace of the second species of need; harmony is thus its index for men must come together in order to discover harmony and it is the second species of need that makes this discovery possible. In the *Essai*, Rousseau furnishes the reader with an historical explanation of the process of discovery:

Le chant ne fut bientôt plus qu'une suite ennuyeuse et lente de sons traînants et criés, sans douceur, sans mesure et sans grâce; et si quelques savants disaient qu'il fallait observer les longues et les brèves dans le chant latin, il est sûr au moins qu'on chanta les vers comme la prose, et qu'il ne fut plus question de pieds, de rythmes, ni d'aucune espèce de chant mesuré. Le chant ainsi dépouillé de toute mélodie, et consistant uniquement dans la force et la durée des sons, dut suggérer enfin les moyens de le rendre plus sonore encore à l'aide de consonances. Plusieurs voix, traînant sans cesse à l'unisson des sons d'une durée illimitée, *trouvèrent par hasard* quelques accords qui, renforçant le bruit, le leur firent paraître agréable, et ainsi commença la pratique du discant et du contrepoint.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.240-241. 'Soon melody was nothing more than a tiresome and drawn-out succession of drawling and crying sounds without softness, rhythm nor charm; and if a few learned men decreed that one had to observe the longa and the brevis of Latin chant, it is certain at least that verses were sung in the same manner as prose, and that it was no longer a question of registers, rhythms, nor any sort of regular melody. Song thus stripped of all melody, and now consisting solely of the strength and duration of sounds, is likely to have itself eventually inspired the means to render it more sonorous with the help of consonances. Several voices, drawling continuously at the unison for an indeterminate duration, discovered by accident some chords which, by reinforcing the sound, appeared pleasing to them and thus began the practice of descant and counterpoint.'

Rousseau's narrative crescendos toward a climax at which point harmony will usurp melody's position as the primary expressive force in the art of music. Rousseau sets up this usurpation as a series of historical watersheds; first there was melody, melody then develops, men come together and then there was harmony, over the centuries harmony begins to dominate melody, until in the eighteenth century – in his own time and consummated in the music and theoretical postulations of Rameau – melody is subjugated and subsumed entirely within the harmonic domain of musical production and organisation. It is this outcome that in terms of its aesthetic ramifications and its incompatibility with Rousseau's philosophical position that cannot be abided:

La mélodie étant oubliée et l'attention du musicien s'étant tournée entièrement vers l'harmonie, tout ce 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 la mélodie ... 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. Voilà comment le chant devint par degrés un art entièrement séparé de la parole ... comment les harmoniques des sons firent oublier les inflexions de la voix, et comment enfin, bornée à l'effet purement physique du concours des vibrations, la musique se trouva privée des effets moraux qu'elle avait produits quand elle était doublement la voix de la nature.⁷⁹

In the next Chapter, we will begin to explore these moral effects, the aesthetic ramifications of Rousseau's philosophy of music, and then follow the development of his critique and reform of opera that grows out of it.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.242. 'Melody being forgotten and the attention of the musician being turned entirely to towards harmony, little by little everything was steered towards this new object; genres, modes, the scale, everything had a new face; it was the harmonic progression which controlled their destiny. It is not surprising that, having usurped the name of melody and our musical system becoming by degrees purely harmonic, oral accent suffered and music lost for us almost all of its energy. That is how melody became little by little an entirely separate art from speech ... how the harmonics of sounds caused the inflexions of the voice to be forgotten, and how, finally, restricted to the purely physical effects of vibrations, music found itself deprived of the moral effects that it had produced when it was doubly the voice of nature.'

Chapter Four:

The Aesthetic, the Critique and the Blueprint: a single battle waged on three fronts

Ah! Ma Julie, qu'ai-je entendu? Quels sons touchants! Quelle musique! Quelle source délicieuse de sentiments et de plaisirs! Ne perds pas un moment; rassemble avec soin tes opéras, tes cantatas, ta musique Française, fais un grand feu bien ardent, jettes-y tout ce fatras ... afin que tant de glace puisse y brûler et donner de la chaleur au moins une fois. Fais ce sacrifice propitiatoire au dieu du goût, pour expirer ton crime et le mien d'avoir profané ta voix à cette lourde psalmodie, et d'avoir pris si longtemps pour le langage du Coeur un bruit qui ne fait qu'étourdir l'oreille.¹

We now move the discussion beyond the consideration of the philosophy of music and Rousseau's degenerative account of the history of mankind towards the subject of primary concern: opera. This chapter has three key objectives: the first is to explore the aesthetic ramifications of both the trinary model of nature and history and the Common Origin Hypothesis explored in chapters 2 and 3 respectively; second, to consider the nature and range of Rousseau's critique of opera which grows out of this aesthetic; and finally to see how this aesthetic and critique will drive a radically new vision of a unified dramatic form that will be embodied in the *Scène Lyrique Pygmalion* (1762). Our three objectives are neatly counterbalanced by three issues to which we shall be devoting the majority of our attention: the first is to continue our exploration of Rousseau's seemingly immutable and intransigent valorisation of melody over harmony, and to see how music itself becomes a privileged art-form in a hierarchy of semiotic systems operating within the operatic superstructure; the second is to consider the musico-aesthetic implications of the relationship between speech and melody; and the third is the critical account of operatic history and its impact upon Rousseau's reformatory project. Our consideration of these issues and concepts will be framed within appropriate contextual discussion and we will be revisiting issues already encountered in the thesis thus far.

Our present task is rendered especially complex, however, by the fact there is no single volume in which Rousseau expounds these ideas either fully or definitively. Instead, the

¹ Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in *Oeuvres*, t.3, pp.196-197, 'Oh! My Julie, what have I heard? What moving sounds! What music! What a delightful source of feeling and pleasure! Don't waste one moment; carefully gather up your operas, your cantatas, your French music, make a great blazing fire, throw into it all of this jumble, so that all this coldness burn and for once give off some heat. Make this worthy sacrifice to the god of taste, atone for our crime of debasing your voice with this dull psalmody, and for so long mistaking a noise that only deafens the ear for the language of the heart.'

aesthetic and the operatic critique take shape across a diverse range of works which span some sixteen years of the Genevan's life. Though there is much consonance between ideas and argumentation across the range of these works, and although it is possible to trace their evolution and development, in certain instances such argumentation becomes overshadowed and overtaken by the particular demands of the functional aesthetic role of the works themselves. We will need, therefore, to carefully tease out individual issues and concepts and our approach will not, as a result, be strictly chronological. Rather we will need to juxtapose arguments from a variety of works, chief amongst which are the *Dictionnaire de Musique*, the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* and associated urtexts, the *Lettre sur la Musique Française*, the *Lettre à M. Burney*, the *Fragments d'Observations* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.

Before we begin our exploration of the issues and concepts alluded to above, a brief discussion of the nature, position and significance of the *Dictionnaire de Musique* – in my view one of Rousseau's greatest single achievements and of primary value to the present enterprise – is in order.

4.1. The *Dictionnaire de Musique* as aesthetic manifesto

C'est une très mauvaise rhapsodie que j'ai compilée, il y a plusieurs années, sous le nom de *Dictionnaire de Musique*, et que je suis forcé de donner aujourd'hui pour avoir du pain.²

The *Dictionnaire de Musique*, published in 1768,³ occupies a unique position in Rousseau's *oeuvre*. Not only does it stand as the solitary didactic *ouvrage*, it is also the only large-scale work entirely devoted to the study and analysis of musical theory, aesthetics and praxis. The *Dictionnaire's* importance does not merely stem from its position in Rousseau's *oeuvre*, nor from its pedagogical pedigree, though the clarity of Rousseau's commentary is testament to both extensive musical knowledge and authorial facility. Rather, its significance is born out of its own peculiar construction: a synthesis of erudite observation, transparent demagogy and mordant criticism of contemporary practice and practitioners. Such diverse attributes elevate

² Rousseau, 'Lettre à M. Clairaut, Motiers-Travers, le 5 mars, 1765', in *Oeuvres*, t.12, p.3, 'It is a very poor rhapsody that I compiled several years ago by the name of the *Dictionary of Music* and one that I am forced to publish today in order to earn a crust.'

³ The *Dictionnaire* was finally completed late in 1764 according to a letter, dated 18 September 1764, from Rousseau to his publisher (Cf. Pierre-Paul Plan, *Table de la Correspondance Générale de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. B. Gagnebin (Genève: E. Droz, 1953), pp. XX-XXI). Indeed, Rousseau's preface is dated: 'Motiers-Travers, le 20 Décembre, 1764.'

a work that appears, at first glance, to be little more than an encyclopaedia of musical terms into a volume of great significance. Indeed, so significant a work is it deemed to be, that one commentator describes the *Dictionnaire de Musique* as arguably the 'single Rousseauian source which provides the most comprehensive picture of his musical thought.'⁴

This most comprehensive of pictures, about which Cynthia Verba enthuses, is perhaps more akin to a collage, a composite image bearing witness to the work's extreme diachronicity. In all, about sixteen years separate the penning of the first word from the blotting of the last; sixteen years in which Rousseau's interest in the work waxed and waned with extraordinary regularity; sixteen years during which his quill was frequently engaged in other, less laborious, pursuits. Robert Wokler remarks that, 'the *Dictionary of music* [...] did not excite him [Rousseau] to flights of fancy as did most of the other projects to which he turned at The Hermitage.'⁵ Indeed, that the work took the best part of two decades from conception to completion seems to render the *Dictionnaire* a somewhat anomalous work: 'generally', as Thomas Webb-Hunt suggests, 'Rousseau wrote in white heat, at great speed.'⁶ Of course, one cannot expect a dictionary to be compiled overnight, nor even at great speed; this is an exhaustive process involving the assemblage, synopsis, revision and cross-referencing of an inordinately large amount of material and observation. But the fact that one man would embark alone upon such an enterprise is astonishing enough, that he would complete the task in such an accomplished manner is nothing short of miraculous. Indeed, Rousseau's achievement is all the more remarkable when one considers that it was during these two turbulent decades that the *philosophe's* written output was at its most prolific, of a consistently high standard, and yet, broadly speaking, had little to do with specifically musical subject matter.⁷

⁴ Cynthia Verba, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: the Radical and Traditional in his *Dictionnaire de Musique*', *Journal of Musicology*, 7, (1989), p.310.

⁵ Robert Wokler, *Rousseau*, (New York: OUP, 1995), p.109

⁶ Thomas Webb-Hunt, *The Dictionnaire de Musique of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, Denton Texas, (Thesis, Microfilm, Bibliothèque d'études rousseauistes, Montmorency, 1967) p.52. This assertion does need to be treated with some caution and in some respects it is a moot point. If we are to believe Rousseau's own thoughts on the matter, then we might conclude that he did not write with so much facility: 'These four letters [to Malesherbes], written straight off, hurriedly, without a rough copy, and left unrevised, are perhaps the only things I have written with facility in the whole of my life.' (Rousseau. *Confessions*. pp.525-526). However, we also know that he was apt to spending intense periods – sometimes as long as three months – drafting and redrafting works.

⁷ Cf. *First Discours* (1749), *Second Discours* (1754), *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les Spectacles* (1758), *Emile* (1762), *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), *Du Contrat Social* (1762), *Profession de foi du vicaire savyard* (1762). This list, by no means exhaustive, indicates that Rousseau's output during this time was both prolific and largely non-musically orientated.

As far as Rousseau's own sentiments towards the *Dictionnaire de Musique* are concerned, his preface is revelatory and stands as a veritable apologia for the work's limitations.⁸ Early in the preface, for example, Rousseau tries to counter any possible future criticism of the work with this somewhat facile '*caveat lector*': 'J'avertis donc ceux qui ne veulent souffrir que des livres bien faits, de ne pas entreprendre la lecture de celui-ci: bientôt ils en seroient rebutés.'⁹ Rousseau's modesty seems, however, somewhat misplaced if not altogether false, for the flaws alluded to turn out to be essentially structural ones – and in my estimation are none too evident. Nevertheless, Rousseau goes on to describe his *Dictionnaire*, as an 'amas indigeste,'¹⁰ a work that is '[...] moins un dictionnaire en forme, qu'un recueil de matériaux pour un dictionnaire, qui n'attendent qu'une meilleure main pour être employés.'¹¹ I would suggest, then, that we treat these comments not as an explicit reference to his own failings as author, theoretician and editor, but rather to the folly and the impossibility of such an enterprise. Indeed, as Rousseau concludes, 'les connoissances nécessaires pour [un tel ouvrage] ne sont peut-être pas forte grandes; mais elles sont fortes variées, et se trouvent rarement dans la même tête.'¹² Given Rousseau's reservations about the value and proficiency of the work itself, the following questions present themselves: can a single work, particularly one which classifies itself as a dictionary, furnish the reader with a comprehensive and all-inclusive picture of the author's musical thought? Can the work in question, compiled sporadically over such a protracted period, present a coherent picture of itself? Or does such diachronicity necessarily, and inevitably, preclude the presence – indeed the possibility – of unity, coherence and transparency in the way Verba suggests?

It is a difficult task to characterise or sum up the work in this fashion, for if nothing else, the *Dictionnaire de Musique* has many faces and any such manoeuvre would relegate subsequent

⁸ We should also register that it reflects Rousseau's state of mind at the time. As we will see in Chapter 5, Rousseau had been forced to flee Paris after the publication and subsequent proscription of *Emile* in June 1762, and during the next eight years he was not able to settle safely anywhere without being harangued or pursued by his so-called enemies.

⁹ Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de Musique* in *Oeuvres*, t.12, p.8, 'I advise those who do not wish to endure badly written works not to embark upon a reading of this one; they will soon be sick of it.'

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8, 'indigestible mass'

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.5 'less a dictionary in form, than a collection of material *for* a dictionary, which waits only for a better hand to put them to use.' [my italics].

¹² *Ibid.*, p.8, 'The knowledge needed to write such a work is perhaps not all that great, but it extremely varied, and is rarely found in one person.'

judgements to the order of the simplistic and the facile. In one sense, I would certainly agree with Verba's suggestion and go further still to assert that it opens up a window through which the reader may glimpse and engage with aspects of the author's philosophy of music in action. In another sense, it is a frustratingly fragmented, sometimes incoherent and contradictory volume. And in another sense still, the *Dictionnaire* merely masquerades as an encyclopaedic dictionary of musical terms, for there are many ostensibly conventional and informative entries which are literally engorged with ideology and contain poisonous barbs and abrasive allusions to individual works or composers. 'Baroque' is a capital – and representative – example of this. Here, Rousseau was seemingly unable to resist temptation and, as a result, the 'definition' he presents to the reader is nothing more than a thinly veiled denunciation of Rameau's musical style:

Une musique baroque est celle dont l'harmonie est confuse, chargée de modulations et dissonances, le chant dur et peu naturel, l'intonation difficile et le mouvement contraint. Il y a bien de l'apparence que ce terme vient du baroco des logiciens.¹³

We see this very point mirrored in the article 'Expression,' where Rousseau's criticism is even more pungent, censorious and indeed overt:

N'allez donc pas prendre le baroque pour l'expressif, ni la durété pour l'énergie, ni donner un tableau hideux des passions que vous voulez rendre, ni faire en un mot, comme à l'opéra François où le ton passionné ressemble aux cris de la colique, bien plus qu'aux transports de l'amour.¹⁴

If I was really pressed to venture down off the fence, I would feel compelled to suggest that, for the most part, the *Dictionnaire* functions as its title suggests, but that its most significant entries – those that go beyond the mere provision of definitions – are critical and ideological, and postulate avenues and opportunities for future reform. And we might say that it is in this respect that the work should be seen as a veritable repository of ideas – in Verba's words, a

¹³ Rousseau, 'Baroque' in *Op. Cit.*, p.76, 'Baroque music is one in which the harmony is jumbled, overburdened with modulations and dissonances, the melody is harsh and contrived, the intonation is difficult and the movement constrained. It would seem that this term comes from the Baroco of the Logicians.' For further discussion of this particular point – and indeed the use of the term Baroque in music criticism during the eighteenth century see Claude V. Pallisca, "Baroque" as a music-critical term', in Cowart (ed.), *French Musical Thought 1600-1800*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp.7-21.

¹⁴ Rousseau, 'Expression' in *Op. Cit.*, pp.347-348, 'Do not take baroque for expression, nor harshness for energy, nor give a hideous picture of passions that you want to render, nor do in a word like in French opera where passionate sounds resemble colic pains much more than transports of love.'

volume used 'to advance his radical philosophy'¹⁵ – and, as such, it is of paramount significance to our present enterprise. The work is, then, a problematic one to grapple with, and to some extent defies and discourages classification; these difficulties should be ascribed as much to the work's genesis as they are to its content.

The origins of the *Dictionnaire de Musique* can be traced accurately back to 1749. As we saw in chapter one, 1749 was the year in which Rousseau was press-ganged into cobbling together the vast majority of the articles on music that were to appear in the first volumes of the *Encyclopédie* between 1751 and the mid 1750s. In his PhD thesis, Thomas Webb-Hunt traces the evolution of the *Dictionnaire* from conception to realisation, and chronicles Rousseau's mounting embarrassment with the inadequacies of the *Encyclopédie* articles as they begin to be published annually. The main thrust of Webb-Hunt's argument is that these are articles which, when compared to the writings which were winning Rousseau notoriety – the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* (1749), the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* (1753), and the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* (1754), – were clearly not of the same calibre. In short, the articles were undermining Rousseau's public image as credible music theorist, capable composer and worthy adversary of Rameau.¹⁶ This fact alone, Webb-Hunt concludes, convinced Rousseau of the merits of spending sixteen years compiling a far more proficient work, a dictionary of music.¹⁷ In large measure, this analysis is, of course, corroborated by Rousseau in his own short preface to the *Dictionnaire*. 'Blessé,' Rousseau admits,

de l'imperfection de mes articles, à mesure que les volumes de l'*Encyclopédie* paroissoient, je résolus de refondre le tout sur mon brouillon, et d'en faire à loisir un ouvrage à part traité avec plus de soin.¹⁸

¹⁵ Cynthia Verba, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: the Radical and Traditional in his *Dictionnaire de Musique*', *Journal of Musicology*, 7, (1989), p.310

¹⁶ In Jacques Roger's introduction to the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1992, p.5), the point is made that until this work, and in particular its successor the Second *Discours*, had been widely read, Rousseau was known merely for his musical endeavours, not as a philosopher. His public image was, in the long term, not especially tainted however. As we can see from this letter by Gluck to the *Mercure de France* (1773), he suggests that he had made a study of Rousseau's theoretical writings and had been particularly impressed by his analysis of Lully's *Armide*. 'L'étude que j'ai faite des ouvrages de ce grand homme [Rousseau] sur la Musique, la lettre [*Lettre sur la Musique Française*] entre autres [...] prouvent la sublimité des ses connoissances et la sûreté de son goût.' Cited in Samuel Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Musique*, textes recueillis et présentés par Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger. (Neuchâtel: à la Baconnière, 1988), p.81.

¹⁷ Thomas Webb-Hunt, *Rousseau's Dictionnaire de Music*, p.58

¹⁸ Rousseau, 'Préface' in *Op. Cit.*, p.6, 'wounded by my article's imperfections as each of the volumes of the *Encyclopédie* appeared, I resolved to recast everything in my draft, and at my leisure make it into a separate work treated more attentively.'

But more than this, I would suggest that Rousseau's escalating embarrassment was further intensified by several additional factors: first, and most important, was the emergence and establishment of his philosophical system – as we saw in chapter two, the First *Discours* was to set Rousseau on a course that would colour the rest of his career and all subsequent writings; second, his somewhat reluctant participation in the polemical exchanges of the final phase of the *Querelle de Bouffons* (1752-54) had sparked off a bitter dispute with Rameau and the operatic establishment as a whole, a dispute in which Rameau was using, and would continue to use, the shortcomings of these articles as a means of undermining Rousseau's stature as music critic, composer and theoretician; and finally, as the 1750s approached their conclusion, Rousseau's philosophical system was reaching full maturity and, as a consequence, was drifting ever further away from the epistemology which underpinned Rameau's work and thought, and from which Rousseau had initially borrowed much. Rousseau clearly desired to set the record straight definitively, for I would suggest it was not merely that he was embarrassed by the articles, but above all that they did not constitute a strong enough case against Rameau.¹⁹

Some commentators have elected to dismiss the *Dictionnaire* as nothing more than a recasting of the *Encyclopédie* articles, or as Norman Demuth erroneously puts it, 'the articles in book form.'²⁰ Naturally, such assertions tend to cast some doubt upon the *Dictionnaire's* pedigree as a new and radical work in which Rousseau expounds, and applies, elements of his philosophy to an aesthetic of music and opera. They also tend to deny the notion of evolution and development of musical ideology across the span of Rousseau's *oeuvre*, tacitly implying that between 1749 and 1764 his conception of music did not change or indeed evolve at all. Consequently, it would appear that we are expected to believe that the *Dictionnaire* miraculously rose like a phoenix, in a conveniently bound volume, out of the ashes of the *Encyclopédie*. As an audit of the articles themselves demonstrates, this is simply not the case on either front. Of the *Dictionnaire's* 904 articles, 524 are entirely new, and only 166 were brought, in their original form, from the *Encyclopédie*. The remainder of the articles – 214 – which

¹⁹ Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Musique*, p.78, cites a footnote from Rameau's *Réponse de M. Rameau à la lettre de M. D'Alembert* (1757, that is to say following the publication of the volumes of the *Encyclopédie* and the *Lettre sur la Musique Française*), that testifies to rumours circulating of a definitive response from Rousseau which would humiliate Rameau. The response in question was to be the *Dictionnaire de Musique*.

²⁰ Norman Demuth, *French Opera: Its Development to the Revolution*, (New York: The Artemis Press, 1963), p.178

Rousseau 'carried over', are extensively revised, both in form and content. Clearly then, the *Dictionnaire* cannot be regarded simply as a reworking of the earlier articles in book-form. On the contrary, the *Dictionnaire* must be considered as a new work, one whose role in the chronicle of Rousseau's musical thought is decisive.

4.1.1. Concept and Form: synchrony, diachrony and the syncretic

Although born to some degree within the shadow of controversy and polemic, the *Dictionnaire* was conceived with the best of intentions. Rousseau's principal objective was to forge a work of utility and reference, a work which 'les vrais artistes et les hommes de génie'²¹ would know how to make the best use of. It was designed to be a work which would explain, in relatively unadorned language, the rudiments of composition, the mechanics of acoustic theory and recount the history and evolution of music, as an art form, from its origins in the ancient world. And in line with the penchant of the day, Rousseau's tale of history and evolution would include musics outside and prior to the western tradition.²² Beyond such immediate desires, there prove to be more important motivations and indeed functions of the *Dictionnaire*. These were not, I suggest, initially exploited by Rousseau. Of course we cannot say with any certitude if Rousseau contrived the *Dictionnaire* in light of its extra-pedagogical potential, just that the work itself was used – in both senses of the word – to present an account of his views on music and music theory, views which were both musically and politically inflammatory.²³ The *Dictionnaire* reads – in several places – like an aesthetic manifesto in which Rousseau, as demagogue, promises musical reform by waging war upon the creaking neo-classical aesthetics of his age. That said, it may be somewhat surprising to discover that Rousseau continued to use Rameau's *système* as the backbone for much of the theoretically based entries in the *Dictionnaire*. Rousseau does, however, strive to justify such apparent alarming double standards in his preface to the work, explaining that although Rameau's *système* was used, he

²¹ Rousseau, *Op. Cit.*, p.8. 'true artists and men of genius.'

²² Bruno Nettl in *Theory and Method in Ethnomusicology*, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p.13 acknowledges Rousseau's contribution to the discipline of ethnomusicology: 'to the history of ethnomusicology belongs Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose famous encyclopaedia of music...contains samples of Folk, Chinese and American Indian music.'

²³ In Robert Wokler's view (*Rousseau*, p.28), this statement would be tautologous, since he comments that '... Rousseau is no where so politically inflammatory as when commenting on music.'

preferred that espoused by Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) in his *Trattato di Musica* of 1754:

J'ai traité la partie harmonique dans le système de la basse fondamentale, quoique ce système, imparfait et défectueux à tant d'égards, ne soit point, selon moi, celui de la nature et de la vérité, et qu'il en résulte un remplissage sourd et confus, plutôt qu'une bonne harmonie; mais c'est un système enfin; c'est le premier, et c'étoit le seul, jusqu'à celui de M. Tartini ... Le système de M. Tartini, quoique meilleur à mon avis, n'étant pas encore aussi généralement connu, et n'ayant pas, du moins en France, la même autorité que celui de M. Rameau, n'a pas dû lui être substitué dans un livre destiné principalement pour la nation Française.²⁴

Perusing these entries, it is immediately apparent that much of Rousseau's original circumspection, deference and neutrality, evident from the *Encyclopédie*, is conspicuously absent, and that many of the articles, particularly those that intersect directly with Rameau's theory, are in their new context severely censorious. There are, in my view, two primary reasons for the *Dictionnaire's* overtly critical posture. Firstly, for Rousseau it was the perfect vantage point from which to fire ripostes across the bows of his adversaries; on each occasion he was criticised, attacked or his integrity as a musician undermined, he could simply counter-attack (in much the same fashion as one might vent one's anger in a private diary) in the pages of his dictionary. Secondly, and of paramount significance, is the *Dictionnaire's* unprecedented diachronicity which lends the work its all-embracing feel; although there is evidence of some disunity, this can be tolerated, because the articles which actually lend the work its gravity and significance are immune from this problem, since there is evidence to suggest that they were conceived in rapid 'bursts of enthusiasm.'²⁵

During the 1750s Rousseau's written output was prolific enough to earn the Genevan the reputation of an obdurately independent thinker, and, in the wake of the *Querelle des Bouffons* and the Second *Discours*, controversial enough for him to be labelled a trouble-maker; he would, by 1762, be forced into exile. Throughout this turbulent decade, the *Dictionnaire* was

²⁴ Rousseau, *Op. Cit.*, pp.10-11, 'I used the system of the fundamental bass in dealing with the sections on harmony, although this system, imperfect and defective in many respects, is not, in my opinion, that of nature and the truth, and that it results in a muffled and confused filling out rather than a desirable harmony; but it is, after all, a system; it is the first, and it was the only one until that of M. Tartini ... Tartini's system, although superior in my opinion, was not being well known enough and not having, at least in France, the same authority as that of Rameau, could not be substituted for it in a book destined principally for the French nation.'

²⁵ Thomas Webb-Hunt, *Rousseau's Dictionnaire de Music*, p.54.

always there on the 'back-burner', simmering away ready to be supplemented with new and fresh ingredients. Whether or not Rousseau happened to be focusing on operatic composition, political philosophy, *rêverie* or on pamphleteering, is, in one sense, of no importance, for he would always return to attend to the needs of his great project. As Rousseau recalls in the *Confessions*:

All these various projects [*Emile, La Nouvelle Héloïse, La Morale Sensitive*²⁶] offered me subjects for reflection on my walks. For ... I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs. I had, however, taken the precaution of providing myself with an indoor task for rainy days. This was my *Dictionary of Music* ... material that I could put together in the house when the weather prevented me from going out and I was tired of copying. This method suited me so well that I adopted it both at the Hermitage and at Montmorency, and afterwards also at Motiers where I completed that book at the same time as I was writing others.²⁷

In another sense, however, his engrossment with other works is greatly significant because many of the most important entries, such as *Opéra, Musique, Expression* and *Récitatif Obligé*, were written very rapidly and intensely. These 'bursts of enthusiasm' were triggered by extrinsic factors, such as a political, historical or social event, personal success or failure or the formulation of a theory which could be slotted neatly into the project. We find that many of these entries correspond to, coincide with and, in certain cases, complete lines of argumentation first seen outside and before the publication of the *Dictionnaire*. The entry 'Unité de Mélodie', for example, can be traced from its humble, rather unrefined exposition in the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* (1753), through various incarnations – including a practical application in *Le Devin du Village* – during the late 1750s, only to be specially reformulated for presentation in the *Dictionnaire*. And in several other cases, we find passages lifted, verbatim, from the *Dictionnaire* into the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* and vice versa.²⁸ What these examples serve to demonstrate also is the way in which Rousseau envisioned all of these writings about music: as one intertwined and cohesive argument.

²⁶ Which remained, of course, unfinished.

²⁷ Rousseau, *Confessions*, Transl. J. M. Cohen. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1953), p.382.

²⁸ One of the passages in question is contained within the *Dictionnaire* article 'Imitation' and is transferred to Chapter XVI of the *Essai* under the heading: 'Fausse analogie entre les couleurs et les sons.'

4.2. Melody and Harmony: the constituent elements of music-as-art diverge

Thus far in the thesis, we have not entered into a discussion of musical aesthetics or how they might be applied to compositional practice in any sustained or systematic way; we have, for the majority of our time, been concerned with conceptual issues and the architectural framing of Rousseau's philosophy of music and its discussion in a variety of formats. The time has now come, however, for us to change tack and to explore how this framework gives shape and form to the Rousseauist aesthetic, the critique and the movement for operatic reform. The first area we shall explore is Rousseau's privileging of melody over harmony and it is a province in which Rousseau and Rameau share contrary views. In doing this we will need to revisit the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* and those sections that, in Chapter 3, were temporarily set to one side because they were not immediately germane to the context; now, however, they are pivotal to our concerns. In this first section, we will also begin to touch upon arguments expounded in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* and we will see how this all takes shape, and how melody must extricate itself from the clutches of harmony and 'tonality', and form a renewed and renegotiated alliance with language.

From our discussion in Chapter 3, we have seen how melody in a musical sense grows out of *langue*, how it degenerates across its historical sweep, and how it ends up in chains and fetters as a slave to harmony. Melody is, as a consequence, a degenerate form: it *has already been* subjugated and *is already* dysfunctional; it reflects all that is corrupt in contemporary society and it is used to propagate such corruption in the service of harmony and art. And yet, in spite of this, Rousseau is both willing and able to invest melody with far greater value and significance in his aesthetic than he does harmony. How is this possible and is it not merely a contradictory manoeuvre? Michael O'Dea suggests that, for Rousseau, 'melody has ... a priority which cannot be shaken by any acoustic or technical argument', and that it is linked instead, 'to the philosophical dualism that is implicit' in his work.²⁹ However, I will argue that, in fact, this prioritisation is comprehensively justified by Rousseau, using precisely such 'acoustic' and 'technical' arguments, in order to make melody homologous with *langue* and thus

²⁹ Michael O'Dea, *Rousseau: Music, Illusion, and Desire*, (London: Macmillan, 1994), p.61.

inscribe it with superior imitative properties. What Rousseau does is confront Rameau head-on with vocabulary that Rameau would understand, react to and engage with. Parenthetically, we cannot exclude the possibility that his means of presentation would also implicate d'Alembert. I will also argue that, in essence, the elaborate system of value – the relativism – that underpins his philosophy of music and philosophy of history actively enables Rousseau to achieve this prioritisation in conceptual terms. There will, however, be a dilution, a softening of his position: melody's inextricable connection to *langue* will mean that when they are combined in art it allows itself to be affected by the prosody of the language it is colluding with; melody will no longer be seen as the be-all and end-all of expression in music. But this as we will see is seen very much as a positive and indeed necessary compromise.

It is crucially important to observe from the outset that melody is not conceived of as an oppositional force to harmony, but instead represents a point further up towards *langue* on our degenerative helix; harmony is even more degenerate and thus is further down. It follows, as we have seen in the previous chapter, that in certain circumstances harmony will further debase melody by constraining it or dictating its trajectory. Harmony will strip melody of its affective power if, in particular, it is allowed to reign supreme in a given genre or national musical style. Where melody is given a greater degree of latitude to be itself, then the resultant music will have greater effect. We shall return to this point in the second part of this chapter.

Of more significance still, is the notion that melody points more directly to other privileged elements in his philosophical system: the well, the south, solitude, the absence of the second species of need, even the ideal state through the physiological properties of the voice. It is not that harmony does not point to these things also, merely that it is further removed from them, and its connection with them is all the more tenuous and remote, if traceable at all. Where there was a golden age of melody – in the ancient world before the rise of philosophy and the linguistic contamination ushered in with the invading Romans – there is no parallel moment in the history of harmony. Harmony, in musical terms, is not only considered an aberration of melody – growing out of it as it does to compensate and supplement melody's increasingly 'inaffective' condition as it degenerates, but it is also a reflection of the second species of need, a product of a particular moment in history, rather than an entity that was once part and

parcel of nature's mechanism. Melody, on the other hand, has an instinctive and 'natural' lineage. It is instinctive because it grows out of *langue*, and *langue* is present from the onset of the Fall-State; it is present at the moment when man first senses the instinctive urge to commune with his semblants; it is there, at that moment, because man, instinctively, has recourse to the voice for self-expression. But perhaps of most significance, is that melody is seen as an extension, a direct descendant, an inheritor of *voix* and of *langue*.³⁰ Speech too, or rather poetry, must be seen as the equivalent of melody. Given the degenerate condition of both melody and language, harmony has, historically, stepped into the breach in order to compensate for the lack of accent in melody and, by extension, for the lack of accent in the prosody of the language it is allied to; harmony, has been, and (much to Rousseau's dismay) continues to be vaunted by composers, as the only means of compensating for the loss of affective potential.

The distinction between melody and harmony is more nuanced and profound than these preliminary paragraphs might at first suggest. Dig a little deeper beneath the surface variances and one uncovers an intricate tissue of distinctions predicated upon a set of interrelated themes. These encompass the semiological and the moral, harmony's (relative) cognateness with human nature and the *voix*, and music-theoretical praxis – and they are all at the beating heart of Rousseau's aesthetic considerations and judgements. Moreover, they pull into sharp focus the underlying difference between two incompatible visions of the nature of music. As we saw in the first part of Chapter One, Rameau's vision of music is determinedly formalist and it is one that is difficult to reconcile with the Aristotelian conception of music as mimetic art. For Rousseau, however, music is an imitative art: form, consonance and dissonance, harmonic trajectories, resolution, cadence, hold in themselves little interest for the human species for they yield merely physical, sonic, sensory effects. Melody in Rameau's vision is merely a by-product of harmonic imperatives. But as Rousseau would have it, in the absence of the mimetic act, music can have no moral significance or any semiotic dimension whatever. Such music is relegated to the order of sound, and, as sound, it is indistinguishable from noise. But more than this, Rousseau doubts whether harmony can affect the senses – the human

³⁰ In the *Fragments d'Observations*, in *Oeuvres*, t.11, p.389, Rousseau suggests that, contrary to melody and accent, harmony and rhythm '... ne sont pas de meme inhérentes à la langue.'

spirit – beyond the merely sensory stratum at all. As Rousseau puts it in the *Dictionnaire* article ‘musique’, ‘tant qu’on cherchera des effets moraux dans le seul physique des sons, on ne les y trouvera point, et l’on raisonnera sans s’entendre.’³¹ Indeed, how can harmony have a moral, affective, dimension if its effect is purely physical and structural? In chapter XIV of the *Essai* Rousseau works through some of these themes in a comparative analysis, interrogating the very nature of harmony and melody:

Quand on calculerait mille ans les rapports des sons et les lois de l’harmonie, comment fera-t-on jamais de cet art un art d’imitation, où est le principe de cette imitation prétendue, de quoi l’harmonie est-elle signe, et qu’y a-t-il de commun entre des accords et nos passions?³²

There can be no interface for Rousseau between harmony and the nature of human experience, for harmony is not a reflection of human nature, or human expression, or human passions. Rousseau asks, quite legitimately, what is harmony’s object of imitation? Of what is harmony a signifier? Rameau would no doubt have retorted that harmony was the transcendental signifier *par excellence*; that harmony pointed to the divine order of the cosmos, that it was the prototype upon which all aspects of human knowledge – particularly science – had been fashioned; and that the beauty of harmony is to be found right there in its proportions, proportions that stand as a testament to the unifying principle. The contrast with Rousseau’s conception of melody could hardly be couched in starker terms in the *Essai*. Melody, through the imitation of the inflexions of the voice, expresses and exercises its affective power over the soul:

La mélodie, en imitant les inflexions de la voix, exprime les plaintes, les cris de douleur ou de joie, les menaces, les gémissements ; tous les signes vocaux des passions sont de son ressort. Elle imite les accents des langues, et les tours affectés dans chaque idiome à certains mouvements de l’âme.³³

³¹ As Rousseau puts it in the *Dictionnaire* article ‘musique’, t.12, p.501, ‘as long as we look for moral effects solely in the physical properties of sound we will not find them, and we will reason without hearing them.’

³² Rousseau, *Essai sur l’Origine des Langues*, in *Œuvres*, t.11, p.224. ‘Even though we may calculate the ratios of sounds and the laws of harmony for a thousand years, how are we ever going to make this art into an imitative one, where is the object of this putative imitation, of what is harmony the sign, and what do chords have in common with our passions?’

³³ *Ibid.*, p.224. ‘Melody, by imitating the inflexions of the voice, expresses wailing, cries of pain or of joy, threats, moans ; all the vocal signs of the passions are in its province. It imitates the accents of languages, and its form in each idiom influences particular passions.’

Moreover, melody *speaks*: it speaks an inarticulate, but accented passionate language that gives flight to musical imitation, which, in turn, gives song its influence over receptive hearts:

Elle n'imité pas seulement, elle *parle*, et son langage inarticulé, mais vif, ardent, passionné, a cent fois plus d'énergie que la parole même. Voilà d'où naît la force des imitations musicales ; voilà d'où naît l'empire du chant sur les cœurs sensibles.³⁴

Melody's object of imitation could not be more unambiguous: it is the voice; melody is thus identified as the signifier of the voice. It is through this signifier/signified relationship, this association, that melody draws its affective power. The combination of sounds that, sequentially, constitute a given melody do not merely affect us sensorily or sonically either, they can stand as veritable signs of our affections and sentiments. Moreover, as Rousseau concludes, 'c'est ainsi qu'ils excitent en nous les mouvements qu'ils expriment, et dont nous y reconnaissons l'image.'³⁵ Melody speaks the same language as the passions. As the direct descendant of *langue* and *voix*, melody shares an intimate bond with the human spirit; it can tap directly into the emotions, by kindling the same feelings in the perceiver as the emotions do themselves. Rousseau cannot conceive of melody in terms other than its relationship to the voice. And Rousseau cannot conceive of a music in terms other than one in which melody reclaims dominion over the territory that harmony had once usurped. But as we will see, Rousseau's prescription for melody is that for melody to *speak* it must first ally itself with language; it must (re)unite with it to become song, otherwise its effects will languish in the domain of the sonic and the sensory. We can see this articulated in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* article 'Composition':

Dans une composition l'auteur a pour sujet le son physiquement considéré, et pour objet le seul plaisir de l'oreille ; ou bien il s'élève à la musique imitative et cherche à émouvoir ses auditeurs par des effets moraux. Au premier égard, il suffit qu'il cherche de beaux sons et des accords agréables ; mais au second il doit considérer la musique par ses rapports aux accents de la voix humaine [...]³⁶

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.224, 'It does not merely imitate, it *speaks*, and its inarticulate but lively, ardent and passionate language has one hundred times more power than words. That is the reason for the power of musical imitation ; that is where the influence of song over sensible hearts springs from.' (my emphasis).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.226, 'It is in this way that they arouse in us the emotions that they convey, and for which we recognise the image'.

³⁶ Rousseau, 'Composition' in *Dictionnaire*, t.12, p.192. 'In a composition, for a subject the author has sounds considered in physical terms, and for an object the pleasure of the ear alone ; otherwise he aspires to imitative music and seeks to move his listeners with moral effects. In the first instance, it is enough to find pleasing sounds and chords ; but in the second instance, he must have regard for the relationship between music and the accents of the human voice ...'

The consequent argument against harmony (or the misuse of it) is not simply a rhetorical plea directed to the better judgement (or instincts) of the composer, rather it is couched in hard-headed 'acoustical' and 'technical' language. There is, Rousseau suggests, only one natural condition of harmony, and that is at the unison: it is natural, for, as Rousseau puts it, 'la nature ne l'analyse point et n'en sépare point les harmoniques; elle les cache au contraire sous l'apparence de l'unisson.'³⁷ His argumentation at this juncture in the *Essai* is intriguing, very subtle and certainly counters many a hypothesis that tries to position his vision of harmony and melody in the domain of the schematic and the crude binary opposition. Rousseau argues directly with Rameau on Rameau's own terms. He accepts, and indeed validates, the theory of the *Corps Sonore* as one would expect, but then he uses it skilfully for his own purposes to push home one of the most telling points of his argument. If, Rousseau reasons, one sound carries within it the harmonic series – the first five partials of which 'suggest' the major triad – then by adding another sound to this first sound at any interval other than the unison, is surely to duplicate it, to disrupt the proportions, to disturb the natural order of things, to attempt to 'supplement' nature:

Un son porte avec lui tous ses sons harmoniques concomitants ... Ajoutez-y la tierce ou la quinte, ou quelque autre consonance, vous ne l'ajoutez pas, vous la redoublez, vous laissez le rapport d'intervalle, mais vous altérez celui de force. En renforçant une consonance et non pas les autres, vous rompez la proportion : en voulant faire mieux que la nature, vous faites plus mal [...] Naturellement il n'y a point d'autre harmonie que l'unisson.³⁸

What is also implied by this is, of course, that within melody there is harmony (and the inverse is also true as we will see in a moment), for any note in a given melody will emit the partials of the harmonic series at the moment it is sounded. Now if one supplements this 'natural

³⁷ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.230, 'Nature does not analyse or separate out the harmonics; on the contrary she hides them behind the facade of the Unison.' In the article 'Unisson' in the *Dictionnaire*, t.13, p.339, Rousseau offers the reader a justification for his privileging of the unison above any other type of consonance. Once again we can detect a subtle, but nevertheless, telling jibe being launched against Rameau: 'Une question plus important est de savoir quel est le plus agréable à l'oreille de l'unisson ou d'un intervalle consonnant, tel, par exemple, que l'octave ou la quinte : tous ceux qui ont l'oreille exercée à l'harmonie préfèrent l'accord des consonances à l'identité de l'unisson ; mais tous ceux qui, sans l'habitude de l'harmonie, n'ont ... nul préjugé dans l'oreille, portent un jugement contraire ; l'unisson seul plait ... tout autre intervalle leur paroît discordant : d'où il s'ensuivrait, ce me semble, que l'harmonie le plus naturelle, et par conséquent la meilleure, est à l'unisson.'

³⁸ Rousseau, *Essai*, pp.223, 'A sound carries with it all of its concomitant harmonics ... By adding the third or the fifth, or any other consonance, you do not add anything to it, you merely duplicate it, you leave the ratio of the interval, but you alter that of its strength. By reinforcing one consonance over others, you disrupt the proportion: in wishing to improve on nature, you do worse than it [...] In nature there is no other harmony except the unison.' This is seemingly a characteristic human trait for Rousseau; we are reminded here of the opening gambit of *Emile*, Transl. Allan Bloom, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.37: 'Everything is good as it leaves the creator of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil to yield the produce of another, one tree to bear the fruit of another. [...] He turns everything upside-down, he disfigures everything [...]. He wants nothing as nature made it, not even man [...].'

harmony' with consonances of whatever hue, one merely disturbs the natural proportions by having two or more harmonic series, and, by extension and by supposition, two or more major triads being emitted simultaneously; this 'disturbance' is heightened by the impact of dissonance and the degree to which it manifests itself. But there is an additional layer of greater subtlety and intelligence to be found in this line of argumentation. Rousseau suggests, that given prevailing musical conventions and the demands of musical praxis, there is a further swerve away from nature and the natural. By tempering individual intervals in a diatonic schema, one is necessarily altering the natural proportions of sound as it exists in nature; by compressing or augmenting thirds, fourths or fifths to make them fit the demands of a particular system of tuning or to facilitate both harmony and modulation in a piece of music, one is merely distorting the natural condition of sound further still. And when one tampers with the natural proportions of sound, the suggestion is that even sensorial pleasure can no longer be found in it: 'Quand les proportions naturelles sont altérées, il n'est pas étonnant que le plaisir naturel n'existe plus.'³⁹ But Rousseau does not here deny the universality of harmony, and by 'harmony' he means that which is suggested by the harmonic series.⁴⁰ He embraces it, or rather he admits the natural condition of only one type of harmony: the unison. In any other 'formulation' – whether it be in Well Temperament, Equal Temperament, Mean-tone Temperament or Pythagorean Temperament – harmony is seen to deviate from nature, contradict nature and has a concomitant deleterious effect upon melody. Melody, by acquiescing to, or even conspiring with, harmonic manipulation further debases itself; it too must deviate away from its natural form in order to serve music, art and ultimately vice. In the *Dictionnaire de Musique* article 'Mélodie' Rousseau suggests that this type of 'subjugated' melody merely flatters the ear with attractive, but essentially superficial sounds:

Prise par les rapports des sons et par les règles du mode, elle [la mélodie] a son principe dans l'harmonie, puisque c'est une analyse harmonique qui donne les degrés de la gamme, les cordes du mode, et les lois de la modulation ... Selon ce principe, toute la force de la mélodie se borne à flatter l'oreille par des sons agréables.⁴¹

³⁹ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.223, 'When the natural proportions are altered, it is not surprising that natural pleasure no longer exists.'

⁴⁰ Indeed, Rousseau declares in the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* in *Œuvres*, t.11, p.257, 'l'Harmonie, ayant son principe dans la nature, est la même pour toutes les nations.'

⁴¹ Rousseau, 'Mélodie' from *Dictionnaire*, t.12, pp.447-448. 'gripped by the ratios of sounds and by the rules of mode, melody has its origin in harmony, since it is an harmonic analysis which produces the degrees of the scale, the chords of the mode and the laws of modulation ... According to this principle, all the power of melody confines itself to flattering the ear with pleasing sounds.'

When the trajectory and mode of melody is governed by harmonic and tonal imperatives, it tears itself away from its heritage; it disavows its ancestry and begins to assume a different form and thereby a different character. It will begin no longer to speak in the same manner, for as surely as its resemblance to the pure accent of the voice that gives rise to it begins to diminish, its imitative and affective capabilities diminish also. As Rousseau puts it in dramatic terms in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*,

... 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 ; elle assujettit à deux seules modes [major and minor] des chants qui devraient en avoir autant qu'il y a de tons oratoires ; elle efface et détruit des multitudes de sons ou d'intervalles qui n'entrent pas dans son système...⁴²

And it is, paradoxically, for this very reason that Rousseau is able to argue consistently in his writings that ancient Greek melody was almost indistinguishable from their spoken language. As the Greeks did not conceive of harmony beyond the order of perfect consonances, their melody had a greater degree of freedom to assume its 'natural' form rather than be constrained by the shackles of major and minor scales: 'quarter tones', just intervals and the enharmonic mode were all possible (and permissible) without any nefarious musical side-effects.⁴³ It must have been thus because, as Rousseau argues, only the voice could have been used to determine such intervals in close proximity to one another, and indeed the patterning of such scales that do not conform to any harmonic or diatonic organisation. In the *Essai* Rousseau pointedly notes that:

Tous les peuples qui ont des instruments à cordes sont forcés de les accorder par des consonances; mais ceux qui n'en ont pas ont dans leurs chants des inflexions que nous nommons fausses parce qu'elles n'entrent pas dans notre système et que nous ne pouvons les noter. C'est ce qu'on a remarqué sur les chants des sauvages de l'Amérique, et c'est ce qu'on aurait dû remarquer aussi sur divers intervalles de la musique des Grecs...⁴⁴

⁴² Rousseau, *Essai*, p.225, 'by also shackling melody, it [harmony] strips it of power and expression ; it effaces the passionate accent and replaces it with the harmonic interval ; it subjects melody to only two modes [major and minor] when it should have as many as there are oratory tones ; it effaces and destroys the multitude of sounds or intervals that are not part of its system.'

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.237-238. In the article 'Enharmonique' in the *Dictionnaire*, t.12 p.32, Rousseau makes the point that it is harmonic progression that has engendered the difference between what the Greeks understood by their enharmonic mode, and what is understood, today, in tonal music: 'nous avons aujourd'hui une sorte de genre enharmonique entièrement différent de celui des Grecs: il consiste ... dans une progression particulière de harmonie, qui engendre dans la marche des parties des intervalles enharmonique.'

⁴⁴ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.235, 'All peoples who have stringed instruments are forced to tune them by consonances ; but for those who do not, their melodies contain inflexions that we call false because they do not form part of our system and we cannot notate them. This is what we have observed in the melodies of the American savages, and that is what we would have remarked about the diverse intervals in Greek music ...'

We pick up this point once more in the *Essai* where Rousseau outlines the fundamental differences between the harmonic system of the Greeks and that practiced in eighteenth century France. Once again he is confronting Rameau on Rameau's own music-theoretical terms and this passage reads very much as though he is addressing Rameau *vis-à-vis*. Over and above the significance of the argumentation, notice also how, in passing, he cannot resist alluding to Rameau's Achilles heel – the minor triad, and how the last locutions seem to answer Rameau's *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique*.⁴⁵

Ils [les grecs] n'ont reconnu pour consonances que celles que nous appelons consonances parfaites; ils ont rejeté de ce nombre les tierces et les sixtes. Pourquoi cela? C'est que l'intervalle du ton mineur étant ignoré d'eux ... et leurs consonances n'étant point tempérées, toutes leurs tierces majeures étaient trop fortes d'un comma, leurs tierces mineures trop faible d'autant, et par conséquent leurs sixtes majeures et mineures réciproquement altérées de même. Qu'on s'imagine maintenant quelles notions d'harmonie on peut établir en bannissant les tierces et les sixtes du nombre de consonances! Si les consonances mêmes qu'ils admettaient leur eussent été connues par un vrai sentiment d'harmonie, ils leurs auraient au moins sous-entendues au-dessous de leurs chants, la consonance tacite des marches fondamentales eût prêté son nom aux marches diatoniques qu'elles leur suggéraient. Loin d'avoir moins de consonances de nous, ils en auraient eu davantage ... Mais dira-t-on, pourquoi donc des marches diatoniques? Par un instinct qui, dans une langue accentuée et chantante, nous porte à choisir les inflexions les plus commodes: car ... l'organe prit un milieu et tomba naturellement sur des intervalles plus petits que les consonances et plus simple que les comma; ce qui n'empêche pas que de moindres intervalles n'eussent aussi leur emploi dans des genres plus pathétiques.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The passage from Rameau's *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique* (transl. in Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Appendices) to which I am referring was discussed in Chapter 1. For convenience, I will cite the relevant passages here again: 'The smaller natural degrees, which are called diatonic degrees, ...are only suggested by the consonances to which they move, and that the successive intervals form. It is the consonances which always present themselves first to any person without experience.' [...] 'If we wish to follow the order of these smaller degrees, without any preconditions, we will always ascend by a whole step and descend by a half step...' [...] 'After the two whole steps, we will feel ourselves forced to sound a half step, which would bring us to the interval of a fourth. A third whole step in this case would give a dissonance. It is precisely for this reason that it has become a matter of common knowledge, because it is something that we feel, that three consecutive whole tones are not natural. After this last half-step, another one would never present itself again; a whole step would prevail in everyone's ears, in order to arrive at the consonance of a fifth.'

⁴⁶ Rousseau, *Essai*, pp.236-237, 'They [the Greeks] only recognised as consonances those which we call perfect; they rejected thirds and sixths. Why is that? It is because the interval of the minor second was unknown to them ... and because their consonances were not tempered, all their major thirds were too sharp by a comma, their minor thirds were flat by the same amount and as a result their major and minor sixths were distorted in the same manner. Let us now imagine what conceptions of harmony we could establish in banishing thirds and sixths from the order of consonances! If the consonances they recognised were known to them out of a true sense of harmony, they would have at least been implied beneath their melodies, the tacit consonance of the fundamental steps would have lent its name to the diatonic progression that they suggested. Far from having fewer consonances than us, they would have had more ... Why would we say diatonic degrees? Through an instinct which, in an accented and melodic language, we are led to choose the simplest inflexions: because the voice takes a middle path and falls naturally on the smaller intervals than consonances and simpler ones than commas; which would not prevent smaller intervals being employed in the most pathetic genres.'

However, the logical corollary of this position is that Rousseau has no choice except to deny the universality of melody: melody must speak to individuals in their own languages; they must be able to recognise the images suggested by the melodic signs employed by others within their social group, for, necessarily, the accent of the language itself would have exerted a decisive influence upon the patterning and organisation of the intervals and mode. The process by which this transmission of sign is effected is, as a result, an associative, acculturate one, and we can clearly see how Rousseau envisages this process in the *Dictionnaire* article 'Musique.' Rousseau here describes, in a manner that would not appear incongruent in Book Three of Plato's *Republic*, the extraordinary power of a celebrated Swiss air *Rans-des-Vaches* (see Appendix Item 2). According to Rousseau, this air was so captivating, so endearing to the Swiss,

... qu'il fut défendu, sous peine de mort, de le jouer dans leurs troupes, parce qu'il faisoit fondre en larmes, désertir ou mourir ceux qui l'entendoient, tant il excitoit en eux l'ardent désir de revoir leur pays. On chercheroit en vain dans cet air les accents énergiques capables de produire de si étonnants effets : ces effets qui n'ont aucun lieu sur les étrangers, ne viennent que de l'habitude, des souvenirs de mille circonstances qui ... leur rappelant leur pays, leurs anciens plaisirs, leur jeunesse et toutes leurs façons de vivre, excitent en eux une douleur amère d'avoir perdu tout cela.⁴⁷

Note how Rousseau suggests that *Rans-des-Vaches* provokes in the listener a 'douleur amère' for it taps directly into the emotions of the Swiss soldier by kindling in him the same feelings as that emotion does itself. In the vocabulary of the *Essai*, the listener is able to recognise the signs and images conveyed by (and in) the melody as it unfolds. Thus music, in this instance, signifies in an associative, culturally – and necessarily linguistically – contingent manner, or, as Rousseau puts it, 'la Musique ... n'agit point précisément comme Musique, mais comme signe mémoratif.'⁴⁸ But, music – and in particular melody – does not convey universal meaning, for make no mistake this is, uniquely and peculiarly, a Swiss melody; for the Swiss, by the Swiss and significant – *mémoratif* – only for the Swiss. Others quite simply, 'chercheroit en vain' for the reasons for its affective power.

⁴⁷ Rousseau, 'Musique' in *Dictionnaire*, t.12, pp.510-511. '... that it was prohibited, under penalty of death, from being played amongst troops because it made those who heard it burst into tears, desert or die, and sparked an ardent desire to return to their homeland. One would search this air in vain for those powerful accents capable of producing such surprising effects : these effects which do nothing for strangers, stem from custom, memories of innumerable circumstances which ... reminds them of their homeland, their former pleasures, their youth and their way of life, arousing in them the bitter pain of having lost all of that'

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.511, 'Music ... does not act precisely as music, but as a 'memorative' sign.'

In the article 'mélodie,' Rousseau makes this same point even more explicitly, but he also foregrounds an extremely important hypothesis – that the very nature of the language and its prosody determines the character of the resultant melody and its expressive and affective potential:

Quel est ce second principe? Il est dans la nature ainsi que le premier ; mais pour l'y découvrir il faut une observation plus fine, quoique plus simple, et plus de sensibilité dans l'observateur. Ce principe est le même qui fait varier le ton de la voix quand on parle, selon les choses qu'on dit et les mouvements qu'on éprouve en les disant. C'est l'accent des langues qui détermine la mélodie de chaque nation ; c'est l'accent qui fait qu'on parle en chantant, et qu'on parle avec plus ou moins d'énergie, selon que la langue a plus ou moins d'accent. Celle dont l'accent est plus marqué doit donner une mélodie plus vive et plus passionnée ; celle qui n'a que peu ou point d'accent ne peut avoir qu'une mélodie languissante et froide, sans caractère et sans expression.⁴⁹

This hypothesis will play a pivotal role when we come to consider the basis for Rousseau's analysis of contemporary languages and their respective suitability for musical setting in operatic genres later in this chapter.

From what we have discussed thus far in this section, we must avoid, at all cost, reaching the erroneous conclusion that Rousseau is merely *contra* harmony. What we must do is separate out, on the one hand, Rousseau's philosophical (and idealistic) standpoint from his pragmatic view of practical musical necessity on the other. The reality of music is that it comprises both melody and harmony; that is what music is, and the task of the composer is, therefore, to endeavour to make the best of it by following Rousseau's philosophical and aesthetic principles and procedures.⁵⁰ The position Rousseau adopts, in terms of the reality of compositional praxis, is both more pragmatic and sophisticated than many commentators might give him credit for. In the *Dictionnaire de Musique* article 'Expression,' Rousseau

⁴⁹ Rousseau, 'Mélodie', in *Op. Cit.*, p.448, 'what is this second principle? It is to be found in nature along with the first ; but to discover it, a more refined – albeit straightforward – observation and more sensitivity on the part of the observer is called for. This principle is that which varies the tone of the voice when we speak, according to what we say and the manner in which we say it. It is the accent of each language which determines the melody of each nation ; it is the accent which makes us speak when singing, and speak with more or less energy, according to whether the language has more or less accent. Those [celle] in which the accent is more marked must have a more lively and passionate melody ; those [celle] in which there is little or no accent produces a melody which is cold and listless, without character or expression.'

⁵⁰ One such crucially important principle is that of *Unité de mélodie*. As we will see later in this chapter, once more Rousseau discusses how melody and harmony can be best utilised by the composer to realise the objective of moving the spectator and sustaining his interest and attention across the span of a long and necessarily complex musical form.

discusses how harmony may be fruitfully combined with melody and indeed how it might reinforce what is eventually expressed by it,

... en donnant plus de justesse et de précision aux intervalles mélodieux; elle anime leur caractère, et, marquant exactement leur place dans l'ordre de la modulation, elle rappelle ce qui précède, annonce ce qui doit suivre, et lie ainsi les phrases dans le chant.⁵¹

As we can see, what Rousseau envisages is a framework in which harmony is judiciously employed in order to facilitate melody, to give priority to melody so that its full expressive potential may be unleashed. But there is also a measured and nuanced warning for the composer and further instructions for the correct employment of harmony:

L'harmonie, envisagée de cette manière, fournit au compositeur de grands moyens d'expression, qui lui échappent quand il ne cherche l'expression que dans la seule harmonie ; car alors, au lieu d'animer l'accent, il étouffe par ses accords ; et tous les intervalles, confondus dans un continuel remplissage, n'offrent à l'oreille qu'une suite de sons fondamentaux qui n'ont rien de touchant ni d'agréable, et dont l'effet s'arrête au cerveau. Que fera donc l'harmoniste pour concourir à l'expression de la mélodie et lui donner plus d'effet ? Il évitera soigneusement de couvrir le son principal [the melody] dans la combinaisons des accords ; il subordonnera tous ses accompagnements à la partie chantante ...⁵²

Of course the outcome of this – and it does not in any way contradict or undermine what we have been discussing – is that melody, by itself, is not considered intrinsically expressive. Instead, in the work of art, melody and harmony must work together: harmony must support melody, and melody as we will see in a moment must strive to observe the prosody and rhythmic patterns of the language in order to be fully expressive. Melody is thus considered the most important element in the expressive arsenal of the composer for it is the element that

⁵¹ Rousseau, 'Expression', in *Op. Cit.*, p.348, 'in giving more justness and precision to melodic intervals ; it [harmony] enlivens their character, and, by clearly marking their place in the modulatory scheme, it reminds us of what has gone before, announces what must follow, and as a result links the melodic phrases together'. This passage probably has its roots in the *Essai* where we see very similar sentiment being expressed: 'l'Harmonie y peut concourir en certains systèmes, en liant la succession des sons par quelques lois de modulation, en rendant les intonations plus justes, en portant à l'oreille un témoignage assuré de cette justesse, en rapprochant et fixant à des intervalles consonants et liés des inflexions inappréciables.'

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.348, 'Considered in this way, harmony furnishes the composer with great means of expression, which he would not have if he searched for it in harmony alone for, instead of enlivening the accent, he would smother it with his chords ; and all the intervals, tangled up in a continual filling out of parts, only offers the ear a succession of fundamental sounds which are neither touching nor pleasing and whose effects stop in the brain. What can the harmonist do to contribute to the expression of the melody and give it a greater effect ? He will carefully avoid covering the principal sound [melody] in the combinations of chords ; all his accompaniments will be subordinate to the melodic part ...' This we will remember is the opposite of what Rameau advocates: the filling out of every chord.

gives character, life and expression to all the others. As Rousseau puts it in the article 'Expression':

La mélodie, l'harmonie, le mouvement, le choix des instruments et des voix sont les éléments du langage musicale ; et la mélodie, par son rapport immédiat avec l'accent grammatical et oratoire, est celui qui donne le caractère à tous les autres. Ainsi c'est toujours du chant qu'il se doit tirer la principale expression...⁵³

Beyond the affective, the moral and the semiotic, there are still further differences between melody and harmony to be explored. Melody, like language, occupies the domain of the temporal, the diachronic, whereas harmony is of the synchronic, the vertical, imprisoned – as it were – within the all-at-once. This spatial and temporal distinction is extended beyond the boundaries of music to encompass the constituent elements of opera – poetry and décor; Rousseau establishes a hierarchy of semiotic systems predicated upon their relative mimetic capabilities. However, this hierarchy, once enunciated, sheds more light upon the melody/harmony prioritisation and in fact feeds back into that prioritisation itself. As we will see later in this chapter, Rousseau attributes greater imitative and expressive capabilities to those semiotic systems whose signifying domain/territory is the temporal rather than the spatial. We now move on to consider, in greater detail, the nature of the relationship Rousseau envisages between melody and speech. In the *Dictionnaire de Musique*, Rousseau takes this distinction further than he does in the *Essai* or in any previous work and upon it constructs an entire 'expressionist' aesthetic.

4.2.1. The dual potentiality of the voice: Melody as the accent of speech; speech as the accent of melody

Rousseau's summary definition of music in the *Dictionnaire* gives primacy to questions of taste rather than to the articulation of any prescriptive content or structural imperative; neither is there any expression of – or prescription for – the goal of music as an imitative art. Rather music is defined simply as: 'Art de combiner les sons d'une manière agréable à l'oreille.'⁵⁴

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.346, 'The melody, the harmony, the tempo, the orchestration and the voices are the elements of musical language; and the melody, by way of its immediate relationship with the grammatical and oratorical accent, is the one which gives character to all the others. Therefore it is always the melody which should carry the principal expression ...'

⁵⁴ Rousseau, 'Musique' in *Op. Cit.*, p.496, 'The Art of combining sounds in a manner agreeable to the ear.'

Evidently, Rousseau's objective must be to provide the reader with a succinct definition at the head of what is, even by the standards of the work, a long and discursive article. But surprisingly, given the prevailing view of the *Dictionnaire's* status as a work in which he expounds his radical views on music and indeed what we have discussed thus far in this chapter, nothing remotely 'ideological' or even significant is expounded until well over one hundred words in. It is only following a description of how music can be 'scientific' in character, a citation of Quintillion's definition of music (which is, incidentally, as imprecise as Rousseau's is non-committal), a declaration, ostensibly *en passant*, that due to the prevalence of such vague definitions and generalities it was not surprising that for the ancients the term 'music' seemingly covered a multitude of sins, and a brief etymological episode, that Rousseau finally articulates his ideological stance:

Quoi qu'il en soit de l'étymologie du nom, l'origine de l'art est certainement plus près de l'homme et si la parole n'a pas commencé par du chant, il est sur au moins qu'on chante partout où l'on parle.⁵⁵

The significance of these thirty-eight words are crystal clear: not only is Rousseau, once more, refusing to entertain any evolutionary account of music which does not implicate language, or point to a shared origin and parallel degeneration with it, but he is implying – as he had done throughout the *Essai* and in the *Second Discours* – that the origin of music is to be found in the ontology and the history of the voice. Music is considered, then, a peculiarly human construct, it is of man and for man; it is not, as a result, of nature or the natural universe in the way that Rameau would understand it. As Lionel Gossman writes, music for Rousseau, '[...] does not express the eternal order of the universe, but is a communication of men with men. It does not reflect [...] physical laws or mathematical proportions, but expresses human emotions, the life of the soul.'⁵⁶ More than this, Rousseau does not conceive of music without first relating it to the mechanics of the voice and vocal production, and second, by extension, to speech and language.⁵⁷ The justification for this position is persuasively made in the *Du Principe de la Mélodie* with both panache and gravity:

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.497, 'Whatever the etymology of the name, the origin of the art is certainly closer to man and if speech did not commence through by song, we can at least be sure that wherever there is speech there is song ...'

⁵⁶ Lionel Gossman, 'Time and History in Rousseau', *SVEC*, 30, (1964), p.322-3.

⁵⁷ This is, parenthetically, the reason why little or no court is given in Rousseau's thought to instrumental music; even in the *Dictionnaire*, little detail or thinking is expended regarding the nature, compositional practice or performance of instrumental music that exists outside the confines of opera.

En effet, on ne voit rien dans la formation de la glotte qui puisse donner l'idée de deux sortes de voix. Sitôt que celui qui parle s'arrête sur une syllabe soutient et prolonge le son de sa voix au même degré, à l'instant la voix parlante se change en voix chantante et le son devient appréciable; de plus, la voix parlante, fait comme le son musical résonner et frémir les corps sonores [...].⁵⁸

This position of what we might now call the 'dual-potentiality' of the voice is maintained assiduously throughout the *Dictionnaire*, though Rousseau is not primarily concerned with postulating the ontological, rather his primary objective with this idea is to inscribe an aesthetic vision of music, at the centre of which is the voice and to locate this historically. We can see its trace in the entry 'chant,' where Rousseau approaches the same question from a different angle, but nevertheless reaches an identical conclusion: 'Le chant ne semble pas naturel à l'homme. Quoique les sauvages de l'Amérique chantent parce qu'ils parlent.'⁵⁹ Here there is no contradiction, for what Rousseau is really suggesting is that the delineation of the categories 'speech' and 'song' are not natural conditions of communication; these entities are part of the same family, they are cognates of *langue* and it is *langue* which is natural to man in the fall state. It is enough, therefore, that the 'sauvage' speaks and he will sound as though he is singing. Again, in the article 'Chanson', Rousseau suggests that, 'L'usage des chansons semble être une suite naturelle de celui de la parole, et n'est en effet pas moins général; car partout où l'on parle, on chante.'⁶⁰

In order to justify and validate his hypothesis, Rousseau's strategy is to manoeuvre the argument from a position where philosophical precepts are expounded, into one where historical 'truths' are uncovered. For Rousseau to locate his justification, historically, in the ancient world and, in particular, in classical Greece would make it seem all the more plausible to a readership that had an appetite for things Hellenic. Moreover, there were, of course, many accounts of the exploits of the music and poetry from this period, and it was seen very much as the golden age of culture as far back as the Renaissance. In saying this, Rousseau

⁵⁸ Rousseau, *Du Principe de mélodie*, in Wokler, 'Rameau, Rousseau and the Essai sur l'Origine des Langues', *Studies On Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, (1974), 177-238, p.204, 'In effect, one can see nothing in the formation of the glottis to suggest that there are two types of voice. As soon as he who is speaking pauses on a syllable, supports and prolongs the sound of his voice at the same pitch, at this instant the speaking voice changes into the singing voice and the sound becomes noticeable; moreover, the speaking voice like the musical sound, resonates the sonorous bodies.[...]'

⁵⁹ Rousseau, 'Chant', in *Dictionnaire*, t.12, p.145. 'Song does not seem natural to man. Although the American savages sing because they speak.'

⁶⁰ Rousseau. 'Chanson' in *Op. Cit.*, p.137, 'The use of songs seems to be a natural outcome of speech, and it is just as widespread since wherever people speak, they also sing.'

himself was rather more pragmatic about the Greek achievement and says as much in the *Essai* where he makes that point that it was indeed probable that contemporaneous accounts had been exaggerated.⁶¹ Also as we saw in Chapter Two, his admiration was turned more towards Sparta than Athens. Nevertheless, it suited Rousseau's purposes to use Greece as the historical location of the golden age of music, in the *Dictionnaire* and indeed in other works, largely because of the contemporary status of Greek drama and poetry and its agnatic relationship with opera.

The trace of the dual-potentiality of the voice can be seen once more later in the article 'musique' where Rousseau suggests that music is one of the oldest of the art-forms, and, moreover, that vocal music is the original type of music. He goes on to cast some doubt upon the question whether the ancients had a truly instrumental music as we would recognise the term:

Il paroît que la Musique a été l'un des premiers arts: on le trouve mêlé parmi les plus anciens monuments du genre humain. Il est très vraisemblable aussi que la musique vocale a été trouvée avant l'instrumentale, si même il y a jamais eu parmi les anciens une musique vraiment instrumentale, c'est à dire faite uniquement pour les instruments.⁶²

A similar and closely related point is echoed, as we will see in a moment, in the *Lettre à M. Burney*. Here, particular reference is made to the question whether Greek music had been uniquely instrumental or whether, in fact, their melodies had been composed with, on or to words. The implication of this question is extremely important for our current enterprise and is indeed fundamental to Rousseau's conception of opera as we will see later on in this chapter. Rousseau questions whether there was, in practice, any distinction between what the Greeks identified as 'lyrical poetry' or 'spoken poetry'. His reasoning hinges upon the hypothesis that if Greek music had been vocal, or at least derived from poetry or set to it, there was no reason to assume that it was, melodically speaking, unlike the poetry itself, especially since, it is argued, that the Greek language retained much of its original melodic content or prosody. As Samuel

⁶¹ In the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, in *Œuvres*, t.11, pp.216-217, Rousseau suggests that, 'nous sommes toujours dans étonnement sur les effets prodigieux de l'éloquence, de la poésie et de la musique parmi les Grecs ...' In a footnote attached to this statement, he continues, 'sans doute il faut faire en toute chose déduction de l'exagération grecque.'

⁶² Rousseau, 'Musique' in *Dictionnaire*, p.502, 'it appears that music was one of the first arts: we find it amongst the most ancient remains of the human species. It is also probable that vocal music was discovered before instrumental music, if the ancients had ever had a truly instrumental music, that is to say one solely for instruments.'

Baud-Bovy confirms, Rousseau's analysis and understanding of ancient Greek language is not without foundation. 'Dans le grec du V^e siècle,' Baud-Bovy writes,

non seulement la longueur relative des syllabes était l'un des éléments constitutifs de la Langue, mais aussi la hauteur relative des diverses syllabes du mot était naturellement fixée, et comme les langues à tons de l'Orient, seule la musique sur laquelle ils étaient parlés distinguait des mots par ailleurs identiques phonétiquement.⁶³

In the *Essai* Rousseau cites a key passage from his friend Duclos' *Remarques sur la Grammaire générale et raisonnée* in which Duclos argues that within the Greek language itself, music and primary intervals were to be found:

Denys d'Halicarnasse dit que l'élévation du ton dans l'accent aigu et l'abaissement dans le grave étaient une quinte ; ainsi l'accent prosodique était aussi musical, surtout le circonflexe, où la voix, après avoir monté d'une quinte, descendait d'une autre quinte sur la même syllabe.⁶⁴

The significance of both citations is their implication that what is signified is determined not merely by the graphemes and phonemes of which the word comprises, but by the word's relative pitch. Or to represent this in another way: if a particular assemblage of graphemes or phonemes signify x , then in ancient Greek, the same assemblage may have signified both x and y simultaneously. The precise or determining signification was delivered by the relative pitch at which the phoneme itself was enunciated. For Rousseau, the acid test of this hypothesis is simply, given the inherent musicality of the language, whether the same words could be set to different melodies. It is worth quoting the passage from the *Lettre à M Burney* at length:

... j'oserois demander, 1, si la poésie grecque étoit susceptible d'être chantée de plusieurs manières, s'il étoit possible de faire plusieurs airs différents sur les mêmes paroles, et s'il y a quelque exemple de cela ait été pratiqué ? 2, Quelle étoit la distinction caractéristique de la poésie lyrique, ou accompagnée, d'avec poésie purement oratoire ? Cette distinction ne consistoit-elle que dans le

⁶³ Samuel Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Musique*, p.64, 'in 5th century Greek, not only the relative length of the syllables was one of the constituent elements of the language, but also the relative pitch of the word's syllables were naturally fixed, and, like the oriental tonal languages, only the music upon which they were spoken distinguished the words, words which in all other respects, were phonetically identical.'

⁶⁴ Rousseau, *Essai*, pp.182-183, 'Denis of Halicarnassus says that the acute and grave accents raised and lowered the tone by the interval of a fifth respectively ; in the same way the prosodic accent was also musical, particularly the circumflex, where the voice was raised by a fifth and then lowered by a fifth on the same syllable.'

mètre et dans le style ? ou consistoit-elle aussi dans le ton de la récitation ? N'y avoit-il rien de chanté dans la poésie qui n'étoit pas lyrique ? et y avoit-il quelque cas où l'on pratiquât ... le rythme cadencé sans aucune mélodie ? Qu'est-ce que c'étoit proprement que la Musique instrumentale des Grecs. Avoient ils des symphonies proprement dites, composées sans aucune paroles ? Ils jouoient des airs qu'on ne chantoit pas, je sais cela ; mais n'y avoit-il originairement des paroles sur tous ces airs ? ... il est vrai que leur note étoit différente pour les instruments et pour les voix ; mais cela n'empêche pas, selon moi, que l'air noté des deux façons ne fût le même.⁶⁵

This same question is posed again and again by Rousseau in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* and forms one of the central arguments of the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* and the contretemps with Rameau. However, it is in the *Essai* where Rousseau's views on the question are perhaps most clearly and economically articulated:

Toute langue où l'on peut mettre plusieurs airs de musique sur les mêmes paroles n'a point d'accent musical déterminé. Si l'accent étoit déterminé, l'air le serait aussi. Dès que le chant est arbitraire, l'accent est compté pour rien.⁶⁶

This line of reasoning, as well as the notion that the very nature of the language and its prosody determines the character of the resultant melody and its expressive and affective potential, will shape his vision of opera and, more particularly, his conception of recitative; we will begin to look at this in more detail in the next section. For the moment, we shall return to the *Dictionnaire de Musique* article 'Musique', to continue to chart the progress of this argument but it will soon become apparent that Rousseau is unable to disentangle music from speech and vice versa.

Rousseau next chooses to explore and articulate further differences between melody and harmony. He discusses a variety of historical categorisations of music – amongst which he

⁶⁵ Rousseau, *Lettre à M. Burney*, t.11, pp.380-381, '... If I may venture to ask, 1, if Greek poetry was capable of being sung in a variety of ways, if it was possible to put several different melodies to the same words, and if there are some examples of this practice ? 2 what was the difference in character between lyrical or accompanied poetry and purely oratory poetry ? Did this distinction only exist in the metre and in the style ? Or did it also exist in the pitch of the recitation ? Was there anything melodic about poetry that was not lyric poetry ? And were there cases where non-melodic cadenced rhythms were practiced ? What exactly was Greek instrumental music ? Did they have symphonies in the strict sense of the term composed without reference to words ? I know that they played melodies that were not sung, but didn't they originally have words to these melodies ? ... It is true that their notation was different for instruments and for voices ; but in my opinion that does not rule out that the same melody can be notated in two ways.'

⁶⁶ Rousseau, *Essai*, pp.78-79, 'All languages in which several melodies can be put to the same words do not have a fixed musical accent. If the accent was fixed, the melody would be also. As soon as the melody is arbitrary, the accent counts for nothing.'

lists ‘mélopée’ and ‘rythmopée’, and Porphyry’s ‘six’⁶⁷ – then concludes by suggesting that in music of today, there remain only two relevant categories: melody and harmony. Rousseau’s argument implies that one of the most significant elements identified by Porphyry – ‘métrique’ – has been lost, or at least it has little meaning in contemporary music where, he suggests, music governs the metre of the verse, rather than the optimal, ideal configuration which is the inverse:

La Musique se divise aujourd’hui plus simplement en mélodie et en harmonie ; car la rythmique n’est plus rien pour nous, et la métrique est très peu de chose, attendu que nos vers ... prennent presque uniquement leur mesure de la musique, et perdent le peu qu’ils en ont par eux-mêmes.⁶⁸

But more significant still is Rousseau’s own division of music into categories of ‘natural’ and ‘imitative’ and this argument squares very neatly with our exploration of the distinctions made between melody and harmony earlier in this chapter. Rousseau’s implication, by now familiar, is that if music is not imitative then its effect is purely sensory, but as the passage unfolds he begins to suggest that music must become like speech in order to be imitative and expressive. This represents an important modification of, and departure from what is in all probability, an earlier argument in the *Essai* in which he suggests that melody, *per se*, speaks:

On pourroit et l’on devroit peut-être encore diviser la musique en ‘naturelle’ et ‘imitative.’ La première, bornée au seul physique des son et n’agissant que sur le sens, ne porte point ses impressions jusqu’au cœur, et ne peut donner que des sensations plus ou moins agréables : telle est la musique des chansons, des hymnes, des cantiques, de tous les chants qui ne sont que des combinaisons de sons mélodieux, et en générale toute musique qui n’est qu’harmonique. La seconde, par des inflexions vives, accentué, et pour ainsi dire *parlantes*, exprime toutes les passions, peint tous les tableaux, rend tous les objets, soumet la nature entière à ses savantes imitations, et porte ainsi jusqu’au cœur de l’homme des sentiments propres à l’émouvoir.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Rousseau, ‘Musique’ in *Dictionnaire*, t.12, p.499, ‘Rythmique, pour les mouvements de la danse; la métrique pour la cadence et le nombre des vers; l’organique pour la pratique des instruments ; la poétique pour les tons et l’accent de la poésie ; l’hypocritique pour les attitudes des pantomimes ; et l’harmonique, pour le chant.’

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.499-500. ‘Today, music can be divided more simply into melody and harmony, for rhythm no longer means anything to us, and metre very little, given that our verses ... take their tempo almost entirely from the music, and lose the little they have of it all by themselves.’

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.500. ‘We could and should perhaps divide music into ‘natural’ and ‘imitative’. The first, restricted solely to the physics of sound and only acting upon the senses, do not carry its impressions to the heart and can only produce more pleasing or less pleasing sensations: such is the music of songs, hymns, canticles, and of all chants that comprise only of combinations of melodic sounds, and in general all music which is only harmonic. The second, having lively inflexions, accented, and *speaking* as it were, expresses all passions, paints all scenes, renders all objects, submits nature in its entirety to its erudite imitations, and carries to men’s hearts the sentiments necessary to move him.’ (My emphasis).

Rousseau continues by suggesting that this second type of music was the truly lyrical music of ancient poetry, and that it is what is striven for in modern day opera:

Cette musique vraiment lyrique et théâtrale étoit celle des anciens poèmes, et c'est de nos jours celle qu'on s'efforce d'appliquer aux drames qu'on exécute en chant sur nos théâtres. Ce n'est que dans cette musique, et non dans l'harmonique ou naturelle, qu'on doit chercher la raison des effets prodigieux qu'elle a produits autrefois.⁷⁰

The inference is there to be freely made: melody in itself, is not necessarily expressive of emotion; it must imitate the inflexions and accents of the voice in order to speak to the passions. Melody must allow itself to be shaped by the metre of the verse, to be 'métrique'. When it does this, it is all powerful, when it does not, its effects tend toward the purely sensory; it is nothing more than a succession of sonic entities that, in extreme circumstances, signify little beyond the frequency of their vibrations. This is the goal, the ultimate objective; one must journey back up the helix towards the point where melody and language were much closer together and imitated one another, reflected the accent of one another; Rousseau uses the Greek language as an example of such a moment on the helix. As a consequence of this we can now begin to see why opera holds especial significance for Rousseau and is held in higher esteem than any other art-form. In opera the potential exists for the reunification of melody and language, for melody to allow itself to be guided by the prosody of the language; in opera, the potential exists for this second type of music – *Musique Lyrique*.

4.2.2. *Primus inter pares* or 'un tous très bien lié' ?⁷¹

Thus far we have discussed Rousseau's conception of music, but we have not touched upon the role that is envisaged for music in musico-dramatic contexts. Rousseau's summary definition of opera is at first glance not dissimilar to that of music. Look more closely, however, and one can see that it is both prescriptive and aesthetically driven, where that of music was merely determined by considerations of taste; there is no need for one hundred words by way of an introduction or, indeed, prevarication. From the outset, Rousseau

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.500-501, 'This truly lyrical and dramatic music was that of the ancient's poems, and in our day it is that which we strive to set to dramas which we execute in song in our theatres. It is only in this music, and not in harmonic or natural music, that we must look for the reason behind the prodigious effects that it once produced.'

⁷¹ Rousseau, 'Opéra' in *Op. Cit.*, t.13, p.55, 'a single, tightly bound, whole.'

enunciates the objective of the art-form – it is to represent a passionate action, to excite interest and illusion:

Spectacle dramatique et Lyrique où l'on s'efforce de réunir tous les charmes des beaux-arts dans la représentation d'une action passionnée, pour exciter, à l'aide des sensations agréables, l'intérêt et l'illusion.⁷²

He has gone beyond the strictly taste-driven definition of music that we examined earlier, to one which, from the very outset, reveals his hand to the reader. Continuing, Rousseau makes explicit the means by which this representation of a passionate action is to be achieved:

Les parties constitutives d'un opéra sont le poème, la Musique et la décoration. Par la poésie on parle à l'esprit ; par la musique à l'oreille ; par la peinture, aux yeux : et le tout doit se réunir pour émouvoir le cœur et y porter à la fois la même impression par divers organes.⁷³

Not only has each semiotic system a clearly defined and indeed distinct role to fulfil, ultimately they must seek to merge, to unite and to form a single signifying system in order to 'émouvoir le cœur'. The delineation of these roles is by now familiar: poetry speaks to the mind, whilst music speaks to the ear. Yet, in fact, this is not merely consonant with, but represents an extension of, the argument we have just been exploring, by tracing this idea in this article we can see not only how Rousseau conceptualises the internal mechanism of opera, but also a further aspect of the aesthetic emerging. The implication here is that opera is successful when the three constituent elements – music, poetry and décor – conspire to present one image of themselves, but the nature of that 'image' is not as straightforward as Rousseau's definition would lead us to initially conclude. What Rousseau envisages is, in fact, a unified object in which music is first amongst equals, at once the most important and potentially the most significant semiotic element. The justification for this idea turns upon the relative mimetic capabilities of each semiotic system. When music assumes its position alongside poetry and décor as an essential part of opera, it becomes, as Rousseau puts it:

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.36, 'dramatic and lyrical spectacle which attempts, with the help of agreeable sensations, to unite all the charms of the fine arts in the representation of a passionate action in order to excite interest and illusion.'

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.37, 'the parts which constitute an opera are: the poem, the music and the décor... Through poetry we speak to the mind; through music to the ear; through painting to the eyes: these all must unite to move the heart and bring it to the same impression, through diverse organs, all at the same time.'

... un des beaux arts, capable de peindre tous les tableaux, d'exciter tous les sentiments, de lutter avec la poésie, de lui donner une force nouvelle, de l'embellir de nouveaux charmes, et d'en triompher en la couronnant.⁷⁴

However, we must consider this to be very much the ideal of the form and is not exactly what Rousseau sees performed in the French theatres around him. In practice, Rousseau suggests, the problems encountered when trying to fuse contemporary languages with melody render this type of effect difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. I will come back to this very point shortly, first however, we must briefly consider why music is accorded such significant status by Rousseau, and whether this contradicts his argumentation as represented in the article 'musique.'

I suggested earlier that melody, like language, occupies the domain of the temporal, the diachronic, whereas harmony is of the spatial, the synchronic, the 'all-at-once'. I also suggested that this spatial and temporal distinction is extended beyond the boundaries of music, to encompass the other elements of opera – poetry and décor – and that Rousseau establishes a hierarchy of semiotic systems in which greater imitative and expressive capabilities are accorded to those semiotic systems whose signifying domain is the temporal rather than the spatial. There is, allied to this, one further nuance which is indicative of the remarkable sophistication and innovatory nature of his aesthetic thought: the role of the imagination of the perceiver. In the article 'opéra,' both the hierarchical structure and the nature of the role of the perceiver are fully expounded and we shall briefly touch on these below.

Rousseau's vision of opera is one in which music is privileged over décor, and, ultimately, over poetry. This hierarchy is in many respects the inverse of both antecedent and contemporaneous models – such as that espoused by that most influential of eighteenth century thinkers the Abbé Du Bos – which accord primacy to painting over poetry, and thus the visual over the intellectual. They do this primarily because of the superior representational and mimetic efficacy – the sheer immediateness and exactitude – of the signs employed in

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.37, '...one of the beaux-arts that is capable of painting all pictures, evoking all emotions, of struggling with poetry, of giving her a renewed force, of embellishing her with renewed charms and of triumphing over her by crowning her.'

painting and the plastic arts.⁷⁵ As Remy Sasselin has shown, Du Bos believed that the power of painting to affect men was more direct and more powerful than the power of poetry.⁷⁶ It is more direct and more powerful since, Du Bos argues, 'la peinture n'emploie pas des signes artificiels, ainsi que le fait la poésie, mais des signes naturels.'⁷⁷ Painting imitates exterior reality by employing only recognisable visual references from that reality, from nature itself. The vocabulary of poetry, however, is one constructed upon artificial – and arbitrary – signs, locutions which by association and by convention may signify one experience, one interpretation of that reality. Music, though ultimately akin to poetry, is treated slightly differently by Du Bos; he suggests that it should imitate the inflexions and accents of the voice, and, in turn, that its signifiers should be taken directly from nature:

Wherefore as the painter imitates the strokes and colours of nature, in like manner the musician imitates the tones, accents, sighs and inflexions of the voice; and in short all those sounds, by which nature herself expresses her sentiments and passions.⁷⁸

It is not that Rousseau's position on music – or the necessary objective of the composer – differs dramatically from the view held by Du Bos, rather it is the value he ascribes to the temporal attributes of melody that triggers this divergence.⁷⁹ Rousseau's vision of melody, as we have seen with the example of *Rans des Vaches*, is that it does employ signs that are virtually the equivalent of natural signs: those of the accent of the voice. To be more precise, melody signifies by being *mémoratif*, and, by looking towards the prosody of the language for its trajectory, those signs become almost a second nature to those that enunciate them and to those that hear and understand them. Thus, for the citizen or the national, the melodic sign may accrue a similar status to that of the natural sign for they are almost as recognisable as the natural object is in the perceiver's field of vision. But the great strength – and advantage – of melody over painting is that it occupies the domain of the temporal – as Rousseau puts it in the *Essai*, 'le champ de la Musique est le temps, celui de la peinture est l'espace'.⁸⁰ It is, for

⁷⁵ In the *Essai*, p.160, Rousseau suggests that '... les signes visibles rendent l'imitation plus exacte.'

⁷⁶ Cf. R G Sasselin, 'Ut Pictura Poesis: Du Bos to Diderot', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (1961-62), p.149.

⁷⁷ Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la Poésie et la peinture*, (cited in *Ibid*) 'Painting does not employ artificial signs, like those of poetry, but natural signs.'

⁷⁸ Du Bos, *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*, transl. T. Nugent, (London: 1748), p.360-1.

⁷⁹ For further discussion of the similarities and differences between Du Bos and Rousseau's aesthetic see J F Jones, 'Du Bos and Rousseau: a Question of Influence', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 127, (1974), pp.231-241.

⁸⁰ Rousseau, *Essai*, p.115. 'the domain of music is time, that of painting is space'

Rousseau, a question of effect (and affect) by degree; a sustained attack by a melody upon the senses that gives it its power to affect. Painting and sculpture are considered less affective than either poetry or music, since, Rousseau explains,

L'imitation de la peinture est toujours froide, parce qu'elle manque de cette succession d'idées et d'impressions qui échauffe l'âme par degrés, et que tout est dit au premier coup d'œil ; la puissance imitative de cet art ... se borne en effet à de très foibles représentations. C'est un des grandes avantages du musicien de pouvoir peindre les choses qu'on ne sauroit entendre, tandis qu'il est impossible au peintre de peindre celles qu'on ne sauroit voir ... ⁸¹

Although music is, undeniably, less representationally proficient than either painting or sculpture, it is nevertheless considered more expressive, affective and dynamic because it signifies temporally rather than spatially – it 'échauffe l'âme par degrés'; music is not so much concerned with a single sensation, but with sensations. The implication of this view is, therefore, that in music everything which is not experienced or revealed with the first perceptual 'glance' so to speak, is furnished as the work unfolds: it is eventually revealed to the listener.

But into this mix is also thrown the imagination of the perceiver, and Rousseau suggests that any representational deficit that music cedes to painting is more than compensated for by the dynamic nature of perceiver's imagination and the images that he projects onto and may supplement the musical object with. The sophistication and innovation alluded to earlier is that this is not merely conceptualised as an interpretive process or a passive reaction to the work of art, for Rousseau also assigns a creative, active and productional role to the imagination of the perceiver during the listening act. The stimuli for the 'creation' of such inimitable objects are released, in a controlled manner, by the signifying elements of music, by the embedded clues, codes and structures. Rousseau implies that music has the capability to evoke chimerical images; that music stimulates the mind to create models beyond all imitation, painting those things which we cannot hear or indeed see. The duty of the composer of opera is, thus, succinctly prescribed in this passage from the article 'Opéra' which is taken, almost

⁸¹ Rousseau, 'Opéra' in *Dictionnaire*, p.54, 'The imitation of painting always remains cold, because it lacks that succession of ideas and impressions which fires the soul by degrees, since everything is revealed with the first glance of an eye. The imitative power of this art is ... limited to very weak representations. It is one of the great advantages of the musician that he is able to paint those things which we cannot hear, whereas the painter is unable to paint those things that we cannot see ...' In an analogous statement in the *Essai*, p.232, Rousseau again suggests that painting is often dead and inanimate: 'La peinture est souvent morte et inanimée.'

verbatim, from the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*:

L'art du musicien consiste à substituer à l'image insensible de l'objet celle des mouvements que sa présence excite dans l'esprit du spectateur ; il ne représente pas directement la chose, mais il réveille dans notre âme le même sentiment qu'on éprouve en la voyant. Ainsi bien que le peintre n'ait rien à tirer de la partition du musicien, l'habile musicien ne sortira point sans fruit de l'atelier du peintre : non seulement il agitera la mer à son gré, excitera les flammes d'un incendie, fera couler les ruisseaux, tomber la pluie, et grossir les torrents ; mais il augmentera l'horreur d'un désert affreux, rembrunira les murs d'un prison souterraine, calmera l'orage, rendra l'air tranquille, le ciel serein, et répandra de l'orchestre une fraîcheur nouvelle sur les bocages. Nous venons de voir comment l'union des trois arts qui constituent la scène lyrique forme entre eux un tous très bien lié.⁸²

When music is skilfully combined with décor, the resultant signification may stretch beyond what is merely visible or indeed immediately perceptible. What is represented on the 'flats' and by extension the entire *mise en scène*, can be enhanced – brought to life, rendered dramatic – by the music. In this next passage we pick up Rousseau's argumentation at a point in the article where he contrasts the 'pure' representation of the 'real' by the visual arts – by both the décor and the machinery (*le merveilleux*)⁸³ – with those images 'created' or projected in the imagination of the perceiver. It is an argument for a more simplistic and indeed naturalistic approach to scenography and *mise en scène*, with certainly more focus upon the action of the actors than on the marvellous exploits of machinery, but we can also extrapolate from this, given Rousseau's argument for the union of the tri-partite elements of opera, the implication that music assists the spectator in this imaginative enterprise also:

⁸² Rousseau, 'Opéra,' p.54-55, 'the musician's art consists of substituting for the imperceptible image of the object, that of the movements which its presence excites in the spectator's soul: he doesn't represent the object directly; but he awakes in our soul the same sentiment that we experience in seeing it. Thus, although the painter finds nothing in the musician's score, the skilful musician will never leave the painter's studio empty-handed: not only will he stir the ocean as he wishes, fan the flames of a fire, make the streams flow, the rain fall, and swell the torrents; but he will augment the horror of a frightful desert, darken the walls of a subterranean prison, calm the storm, restore stillness to the atmosphere, make the sky serene, and spread, with the help of the orchestra, a new freshness to woods. We have now seen how the union of the three arts that constitute the lyrical scene form amongst them a single, tightly bound, whole.'

⁸³ Of course, what *le Merveilleux* depicted were magical 'unreal' objects – gods, monsters, demons, witches, furies and their accoutrements and accessories (clouds, chariots, fire etc.). But the principle is the same: these were recognisable objects representing their 'real' or 'unreal' counterparts, though requiring some suspension of disbelief, did not require an engagement of the imagination to the same extent as the static image of décor. Rousseau's assertion can be seen as part of a growing movement to rid the opera – and in particular the *Tragédie Lyrique* – of its reliance on such machinery and such spectacle, and replace it with a more naturalistic theatrical practice which suited the emergent aesthetic; indeed we see similar statements from both Grimm and Diderot. As we will see in the next section, Rousseau's contention is that *Le Merveilleux* was the result of the unnatural nature of combining music and discourse in the imitation of human life; to make operatic imitation seem more plausible to the audience, the representation was abstracted from the natural world and thrust into the supernatural world inhabited by gods and monsters. As Aubrey Garlington, 'Le Merveilleux and Operatic Reform in eighteenth century French Opera,' *Musical Quarterly*, 49, (1963): 484-497, has shown, the problem was more acute in *Tragédie Lyrique* than in any other musico-dramatic genre, '... the operas of Lully, Destouches, Rameau et al. are filled with the most fantastic presentation of unreality. France became the home of the machine opera and composers accepted this tradition as an unavoidable, even desirable convention. Despite sporadic attempts to make *Le Merveilleux* a part of legitimate tradition, this genre found its true home only in the *Tragédie Lyrique*.' (p.485). There is not time in the present context to explore this aspect of Rousseau's critique

Un beau palais, les jardins délicieux, de savantes ruines, plaisent encore plus à l'œil que le fantastique image du Tartare, de l'Olympe, du char du soleil; [Rousseau is alluding to the mechanical spectacles – *le Merveilleux* – used to great effect but also to excess in productions of *Tragédie Lyrique*] image d'autant plus inférieure à celle que chacun se trace en lui-même, que, dans les objets chimériques, il n'en coûte rien à l'esprit d'aller au delà du possible et de se faire des modèles au dessus de toute imitation.⁸⁴

It is these properties which elevate music to its lofty position as the dominant, and most important and most flexible, semiotic system operating within the operatic structure.

We have now briefly considered why music is accorded a privileged status in opera by Rousseau and we now return to the point left in suspension a moment ago. From our study thus far, we have established that Rousseau's outline prescription for the composition of opera is founded upon the combination of these postulates: melody must seek some kind of reconciliation with its cognate poetry, it must allow itself to be guided by the inherent prosody of the language it is allied to; in doing so, it must cast off the shackles of harmony and the yoke of implied (and necessary) diatonic organisation, and instead employ harmony discreetly in order to facilitate its expressive potential. This is thus a kind of tug-of-war in which melody is stuck in the middle and is pulled from both sides by the competing demands of language and harmony. As Rousseau puts it in the article 'Expression':

Partout où l'on réunira fortement l'accent musicale à l'accent oratoire, partout où l'accompagnement et la voix sauront tellement accorder et unir leurs effets, qu'il n'en résulte qu'une *mélodie*, et que l'auditeur trompé attribue à la voix les passages dont l'orchestre l'embellit; enfin partout où les ornements, sobrement ménagés, porteront témoignage de la facilité du chanteur, sans couvrir et défigurer le chant, l'expression sera douce, agréable et forte, l'oreille sera charmée et le cœur ému; le physique et le moral concourront à la fois au plaisir des écoutants, et il régnera un tel accord entre la parole et le chant, que le tout semblera n'être qu'une *langue* délicieuse qui sait tout dire et plait toujours.⁸⁵

or aesthetic, but Garlington's excellent, if slightly dated, article is an interesting starting point for such an exploration; for more detail and analysis, especially of a related principle – that of *Ut Pictura Poesis* – see Philip Robinson, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Doctrine of the Arts*, (Frankfurt: Lang, 1984), especially chapter 7, pp.166-189.

⁸⁴ Rousseau, 'Opéra,' p.50, 'A beautiful palace, delightful gardens, mysterious ruins please the eye more than the fantastic image of Tartarus, Olympia, the Sun's chariot; imagery all the more inferior to those which each person sketches himself, since with chimerical objects, it costs the mind nothing to go beyond the domain of possibility, and to create models beyond all imitation.'

⁸⁵ Rousseau, 'Expression', in *Dictionnaire*, t.12, pp.353-354. (my emphasis). 'Wherever one strongly reunites musical accent to oratory accent, wherever the accompaniment and the voice is in such agreement and united in their effects, one melody will result from it, and the listener, deceived, will attribute those passages which the orchestra embellishes to the voice; finally, wherever the soberly treated grace-notes attest to the facility of the singer, without overshadowing or detracting from the melody, the expression will be smooth, pleasing and strong, the ear will be charmed and the heart affected; the physical and the moral contribute to the listener's pleasure, and there will prevail such unity between the words and melody, that the two will appear to be one charming language which can say everything and always pleases.'

There are three interrelated corollaries arising from this somewhat idealistic vision: the first is that the 'single *langue*' that Rousseau envisages will be a culturally contingent one, since melody is to be combined and intertwined with language, and it is language which defines and determines nationhood and culture; second, the single melody in question, by allying itself to speech, is consenting to being altered by it – it will allow the prosody of the particular language to shape its trajectory, rhythm and cadences; and third, the relative merits of this 'single *langue*' will, necessarily, be almost solely determined by the character of the prosody of the language itself. These three correlates, and their far reaching implications, are at the heart of Rousseau's thinking on opera. Not only will they drive his critique of the opera of his contemporaries, but they will also help to shape his radical programme of reform. As we will see in part three, the concept of the *unité de mélodie* is founded upon such ideas.

The twofold difficulty facing the composer of contemporary opera arises from a single cause: the problematic combination of language and music (speech and song) within a unified dramatic idiom. If the prosody of the language to be set is not accented – melodic – enough, it will be difficult for the composer to satisfactorily shape the melody with the prosody, and the resultant melody will be featureless, monotonous and inexpressive. Historically, the knee-jerk reaction to this predicament, as it were, is for the composer to resort to harmony; given the degenerate condition of both melody and language, as I suggested earlier, harmony has stepped into the breach in order to compensate for the lack of accent in melody and by extension for the lack of accent in the prosody of the language it is allied to. This lack of accent, as we have traced in Chapter Three, can be directly attributed to the degenerative history of language and music. Thus the decisive factor of any melody is the accent of the language to which it is set; accent is everything; accent is absolutely crucial since, as Rousseau argues, accent,

... est la vraie cause qui rend les langues plus ou moins musicales : car quel seroit le rapport de la musique au discours si les tons de la voix chantante n'imitoient les accents de la parole ? D'où il suit que moins une langue a de pareils accents, plus la mélodie y doit être monotone, languissante et fade...⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Rousseau, 'Accent' in *Dictionnaire*, t.12, p.17, '... is the true cause which renders languages more or less musical : for what would be the relation between music and discourse if the tones of the singing voice did not imitate the accents of speech ? From which it follows that the fewer such accents a language has, the more the melody will be monotonous, listless and flat ...'

As we saw in Chapter Three, Rousseau considers most contemporary languages to be, if not entirely devoid of accent, then severely lacking in it. This lack of accent is particularly prominent in those languages which have been most severely affected by the encroachment of grammar and consonants; in short those languages that have something of the 'north' about them – English, German and French. Those that have their roots in the south, have, broadly speaking, been less affected, less contaminated; amongst these languages we can count Italian. The classical Greek language and, by extension, Greek drama are both, once more, accorded a privileged status in this context; they are held aloft as objects of unsurpassed greatness, formal paradigms. It is however, crucially important to note that Rousseau's differentiation of these languages – classical Greek, Italian and French – is never absolute, but always relative. As Rousseau puts it in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*:

Les langues modernes de l'Europe sont toutes du plus ou moins dans le même cas. Je n'en excepte pas même l'italienne. La langue italienne, non plus que la françoise, n'est point par elle-même une langue musicale. La différence est seulement que l'une se prête à la musique, et que l'autre ne s'y prête pas.⁸⁷

Although ancient Greek is privileged above both French and Italian, we will remember that it too is debased and degenerate; it too has a system of grammar, abounds with consonances and is used principally to articulate need and desire. To be sure, it is considered somewhat closer to the original character of *langue* than either Italian or French; it is perhaps purer than both, but not, in itself, pure in the absolute Rousseauist sense.

We now move on to the third and final section of this chapter to consider Rousseau's views on the problematic of combining speech and song in opera, and his solutions to it. This is played out, and can be traced nowhere better, than in Rousseau's reading (and revisionist account) of the history of opera and the invention of the great late-Renaissance compromise: recitative.

⁸⁷ Rousseau, *Essai*, pp.184-185, 'The modern languages of Europe are all more or less in the same situation, even Italian. The Italian language, no more than French, is not by itself a musical language. The difference is simply that the one lends itself to music and the other does not.'

4.3. Towards reform: the problem of recitative and a thoroughly French solution

C'est un grand et beau problème à résoudre, de déterminer jusqu'à quel point on peut faire chanter la langue et parler la musique.⁸⁸

Where the structural organisation of operatic form is concerned, Rousseau's critical and reformatory energy is focused, almost exclusively, upon recitative; this is logical since recitative is the battlefield upon which music, text and drama confront one another head on; recitative is where the 'problem' of opera rears its ugly and seemingly indomitable head. This province of his operatic critique can be broken-down into two distinct, but in no way mutually exclusive, critical strategies: first, Rousseau attempts to demonstrate, through historical analysis, that recitative is an intrinsically compromised, artificial structure, invented to compensate for the difficulty of subsuming speech and song within a unified dramatic form – a difficulty stemming directly, as we have already discussed, from the paucity of accent in debased modern languages; second, Rousseau consistently argues that recitative, in its 'current' form is incompatible with the French language and, by extension, all French Operatic genres. The single reformatory solution he postulates and then applies (in two potencies) to two very different dramatic works – *Le Devin du Village* (1752) and *Pygmalion* (1762) – is designed specifically to overcome the French problem.

This is a province of Rousseau's operatic criticism which manifests an extraordinary degree of coherence and unity – a unity that arguably transcends the vicissitudes of taste, politics, functionality and self-interest. Furthermore, once he had lighted upon this idea, his belief in it was unshakeable; though the mode of expression may have been tailored to fit the particular function of the individual works in which this view was expounded, the underlying notion remained remarkably stable across his *oeuvre*. An underlying unease and tension concerning the problem posed by recitative can be found as early as the article of the same name drafted for the *Encyclopédie* in 1749; it can be seen again in the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* of (1753) and it permeates the articles 'récitatif' and 'opéra' in the *Dictionnaire de Musique*. This 'problem' was seen an intrinsic one, at once the outcome of a flawed design process and the unavoidable

⁸⁸ Rousseau, *Fragments d'Observations sur l'Alceste Italien de M. Le Chevalier Gluck*, in *Oeuvres*, t.11, p.392, 'It is a great and troublesome problem to resolve, to determine to what extent we can make a language sing and make music speak.'

accident of birth; the source of it Rousseau traces back to late sixteenth century Florence where *Dramma per musica* had been conceived of on a wave of naïve and misguided idealism.

4.3.1. The Florentine compromise: the invention of recitative and the degenerative history of opera

In the *Dictionnaire de Musique* articles 'Opéra' and 'Récitatif', Rousseau offers a reappraisal and a re-reading of operatic history before he proposes any avenues for reform. This particular stratagem is employed for two specific purposes: first, by focusing the reader's attention upon the flaws of contemporary opera and upon their root causes, he can point the finger of blame in the direction of his antecedents; second, this enables him then to postulate his own solution to the 'problem' of opera, a solution that is intended to appear all the more logical and inevitable in the light of the mistakes and compromises he illuminates. This is a particularly well-sourced and percipient account of the history of opera and indeed one that is consonant with similar contemporaneous renderings by, for example, Charles Burney.⁸⁹ Yet it is also one which is very much a reading of opera's degeneration from an intrinsically compromised and imperfect genesis, rather than a chronicle of its evolution, progress and ultimate perfection; in this respect it closely shadows the degenerative account of music expounded in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*. In addition, we can see Rousseau actively drawing together many of the elements we have been tracing throughout the third and fourth chapters, and assembling them into the core of an argument directed against the institution of opera itself. Rousseau's mode of expression, in both articles, is somewhat oblique, for there is little mention of names or specifics; but, to be sure, the familiar implications of Rousseau's views are not lost on the loyal reader.

Rousseau's historical analysis of the genesis of opera turns on the contention that Giovanni Bardi's *Camerata*⁹⁰ committed their most fundamental and fatal errors at the very outset of their enterprise. Their first mistake was to have taken an idealised and misguided conception of what constituted Greek dramatic praxis and to have used it as a prototype or a blueprint for a new, composite musico-dramatic form – the *Dramma per musica*. Their second was to have believed

⁸⁹ Cf. Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, (London: 1804).

⁹⁰ The *Camerata* included such figures as Mei, Galilei, Bardi, Peri, Caccini, Parabosco and Rinuccini who, in various respects and capacities, pioneered the first 'operas'.

that their musical vocabulary could attain a similar degree of perfection to that of the ancients (or at least that reported in the newly available editions of, principally, the Platonic dialogues). Their third was to have resorted to an arbitrary and artificial compromise – recitative – upon the realisation that their music fell some way short of the effects (and affects) reported by the ancients. Their fourth, a direct result of the expressive and affective limitations of recitative, was to have supplemented it with a bevy of further artificial forms such as arias, choruses, the symphony and independent melodic strands. And their fifth mistake, due to the difficulty of realising their aspiration, was to situate their dramas in the realm of the supernatural rather than the natural, human, earthly world. Thus, far from representing a golden age of opera, according to Rousseau the early Florentine musico-dramatic experiments merely cast the good ship opera off on entirely the wrong course and this set an ill precedent for the subsequent history of the form itself – a history that culminates in the moribund concoctions of his French contemporaries. Let us look at this in a little more detail.

Although the members of the *Camerata* broadly agreed on the fundamental principle that speaking and singing had been an integrated part of the same expressive medium for the Greeks, they held two conflicting visions of how Greek drama had originally been staged and performed in the Periclean Age.⁹¹ One conception was that only the choruses had been sung, the rest of the text being spoken or declaimed by the actors. The other view, espoused principally by Girolamo Mei, was that the text, in its entirety, had been sung in a sustained manner throughout. It was, of course, the latter conception that eventually prevailed, due largely to Mei's exhaustive single-minded research, influence and powerful noble connections. Having established this basis upon which to elaborate the new form, the nub of the problem, as Rousseau identifies it, was that in modern languages the gulf between speech and song – and by extension poetry and music – was simply too great, rendering the usage of both in a convincing dramatic context extremely problematic – if not altogether impossible:

Les sons de la voix parlante, n'étant ni soutenus ni harmoniques, sont inappréciables, et ne peuvent par conséquent s'allier agréablement avec ceux de

⁹¹ cf. Vincenzo Galilei, *Il primo libro della pratica del contrapunto intorno all'usi delle consonanze*, (c.1590) cited in Tim Carter, 'Pastoral, Intermedio, Favola in Musica,' *Foundations: Drama per Musica*, Unit 1, (Sidcup: Rose Bruford College, 1996), p.30. 'Today touching many and diverse notes is in esteem; then [5th century BC] few and the same notes, and they did not use more notes in singing than in speaking, except enough to distinguish the two' and Jacopo Peri's 'Preface' to *Euridice* cited in Claude Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance musical thought*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp.428-9.

la voix chantante et des instruments, au moins dans nos langues, trop éloignées du caractère musical.⁹²

Beyond this there was, Rousseau asserts, a decisive difference between the form of Greek drama and the manner in which it had been performed, and the Florentine attempts to reconstruct or emulate it:

... Je remarquerai d'abord que les Grecs n'avoient pas au théâtre un genre lyrique ainsi que nous, et ce qu'ils appeloient de ce nom ne ressembloit point au notre: comme ils avoient beaucoup d'accent dans leur langues, et peu de fracas dans leurs concerts, toute leur poésie étoit musicale, et toute leur musique déclamatoire; de sorte que leur chant n'étoit *presque* qu'un discours soutenu, et qu'ils chantoient réellement leurs vers [...]; ce qui, par imitation, a donné aux Latins, puis à nous, le ridicule usage de dire Je Chante, quand on ne chante point ... Il est certain que les tragédies grecques se récitoient d'une manière très semblable au chant, qu'elles s'accompagnoient d'instruments, et qu'il y entroit des chœurs. Mais si l'on pour cela que ce fussent des opéras semblables aux nôtres, il faut donc imaginer des opéras sans airs; car il me paroît prouvé que la musique Grecque ... n'étoit qu'un véritable récitatif.⁹³

Jacopo Peri, following Mei's example, was forced, somewhat inevitably, into a compromise: the invention of recitative, the half-way house between speech and song, melody and poetry.⁹⁴ Rousseau's conclusion is that it had been necessary for Peri to concoct this idiom for two practical and aesthetic reasons: first, to compensate for the fact that the Italian language was insufficiently accented and inflected to be able to satisfactorily replicate the melodic declamation characteristic of Greek poetry – this elusive '*véritable récitatif*' – and moreover sustain this with interest across the span of a lengthy dramatic work; and second, as a consequence, to facilitate the smooth passage between what he had instituted in its stead – recitative (dialogue encompassing the development of characterisation and plot), and solo song (representing a single action or affect). The heart of the matter was that for the Greeks, song and poetry were

⁹² Rousseau, 'Opéra,' in *Dictionnaire*, p.37, 'The sounds of the speaking voice, being neither sustained nor harmonious, are imperceptible, and cannot as a consequence ally themselves agreeably with those of the singing voice and with instruments – at least not in our languages which are too far removed from the character of music.'

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.38-39, 'I shall begin by noting that the Greeks did not have in their theatre a lyrical genre similar to ours, and what they called by this name did not at all resemble ours. As their language was highly inflected and their music contained few fracas, all their poetry was musical and all their music declamatory. In this way, their melody was *almost* a sustained discourse and they truly sang their verses [...]; and which, through imitation, gave to the Latins and then to us the ridiculous practice of saying *I am singing*, when we in fact do not sing [...]. It is certain that Greek tragedies were recited in a manner very close to that of singing, that they were accompanied by instruments and there were choruses. But if we claim for all that that these were operas similar to our own, we would have to imagine operas without arias: for it seems to me to be proven that Greek music, including even instrumental music, was actually only a recitative.' (my emphasis).

⁹⁴ Tim Carter, *Op. cit.*, p.34, attributes the compromise to the fact that Peri was '... acutely concerned with immediate practical problems and ... how to make things work musically on the dramatic stage.'

almost the same language; but for the Florentines they had become entirely separate and competing semiotic systems. We can see, from Peri's 'preface' to *Euridice*, the logic and necessity behind the invention of recitative. It is worth quoting this familiar passage at length in order to contextualise (and validate) Rousseau's analysis:

Although Signor Emilio del Cavaliere, before any other of whom I know, enabled us with marvellous invention to hear our kind of music upon the stage, nonetheless as early as 1595, it pleased the Signors Jacopo Corsi and Ottavio Rinuccini that I should employ it in another guise and should set to music the fable of *Dafne* ... to make a simple trial of what the music of our age could do. Seeing that dramatic poetry was concerned and that it was therefore necessary to imitate speech in song ... I judged that the ancient Greek and Romans (who in the opinion of many sang their tragedies throughout in representing them upon the stage) had used a harmony surpassing that of ordinary speech but falling so far below the melody of song as to take an intermediate form. And this is why we find their poems admitting the iambic verse, a form less elevated than the hexameter, but said to be advanced beyond the confines of familiar conversation. For this reason, putting aside every other manner of singing heard up to now, I dedicated myself wholly to searching out the imitation that is necessary for these poems. And I reflected that the sort of voice assigned by the ancients to song, which they called diastematic (that is, sustained or suspended) could at times be hurried and take a moderate course between the slow sustained movements of song and the fluent and rapid ones of speech, and thus suit my purpose (just as the ancients, too, adapted the voice to reading poetry and heroic verses), approaching that other voice of conversation, which they called continuous and which our moderns [...] also used in their music.⁹⁵

Yet what Peri had devised did not reflect the nature of the original form – 'a harmony surpassing that of ordinary speech but falling so far below the melody of song as to take an intermediate form' – nor did it attain a similarly dramatic effect. Peri's recitative was not the equal of the diastematic voice, but neither could it even hope to emulate it since it was, Rousseau suggests, far beyond the capability of modern languages to reproduce the 'naturally' sustained melodic character of the Greek language:

Dans nos langues vivantes, qui se ressentent pour la plupart de la rudesse du climat dont elles sont originaires,⁹⁶ l'application de la musique à la parole est beaucoup moins naturelle; un prosodie incertaine s'accorde mal avec la régularité de la mesure; des syllabes muettes et sourdes, des articulations dures ... se prêtent difficilement à la mélodie; et une poésie cadencée uniquement par le nombre des syllabes prend une harmonie peu sensible dans le rythme, et s'oppose sans cesse à la diversité des valeurs et des mouvements. Voilà des difficultés qu'il fallut vaincre ou éluder dans l'invention du poème lyrique ... et cette langue qu'on appela lyrique, fut riche ou pauvre à proportion de la douceur

⁹⁵ Jacopo Peri, *La Musica sopra l'Euridice*, (Florence, 1600) cited in Claude Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance musical thought*; pp.428-9.

⁹⁶ Note the intertext with the argument from the *Essai* and the distinction between languages of the north and those of the south.

ou de la rudesse de celle dont elle étoit tirée.

Ayant en quelque sorte préparé la parole pour la musique, il fut ensuite question d'appliquer la musique à la parole ... *que le tout pût être pris pour un seul et même idiome* ; ce qui produisit la nécessité de chanter toujours pour paroître toujours parler, nécessité qui croît en raison de ce qu'une langue est peu musicale, car moins la langue a de douceur et d'accent, plus le passage alternatif de la parole au chant et du chant à la parole y devient dur et choquant pour l'oreille. De là le besoin de substituer au discours en récit un discours en chant ...⁹⁷

Indeed how could these two languages – poetry and music – be taken for one idiom – one hypothetical language – when they had become entirely separate semiotic systems? In the next two extracts, the first from the article 'Opéra' and the second from the article 'Récitatif', Rousseau explains why the Greeks had not encountered this seemingly insurmountable problem – 'la nécessité de chanter toujours pour paroître toujours parler' – at the birth of their drama:

Cette manière d'unir au théâtre la musique à la poésie, qui, chez les grecs, suffisoit pour l'intérêt et l'illusion, parce qu'elle étoit naturelle, par la raison contraire, ne pouvoit suffire chez nous pour la même fin.⁹⁸

Chez les Grecs, toute la poésie étoit en récitatif, parce que, la langue étant mélodieuse, il suffisoit d'y ajouter la cadence du mètre et la récitation soutenue, pour rendre cette récitation tout à fait musicale⁹⁹; d'où vient que ceux qui versifioient appeloient cela chanter. Cet usage, passé ridiculement dans les autres langues, fait dire encore aux poètes: Je chante, lorsqu'ils ne font aucune sorte de chante.¹⁰⁰ Les Grecs pouvoient chanter en parlent; mais chez nous il faut parler ou chanter; on ne sauroit faire à la fois l'un et l'autre. *C'est cette distinction même qui nous a rendu le récitatif nécessaire.*¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Rousseau, 'Opéra' in *Dictionnaire*, pp.39-40, (My emphasis). 'In our living languages, which for the most part reflect the harshness of the climate in which they originated, the application of music to speech is far less natural. An uncertain prosody is ill suited to meter. Silent syllables, harsh stresses, and sounds that are neither varied nor striking do not easily lend themselves to melody. And poetry uniquely scanned by the number of syllables yields a harmony that little agrees with musical rhythm and that will continually obstruct the diversity of values and movements. These are the difficulties to be surmounted or evaded in the invention of a lyrical drama ... and this language called lyrical, was rich or poor in proportion to sweetness or harshness from which it was taken. Having in some sense shaped speech for music, it was then a question of applying music to speech ... so that the whole could be taken for a single idiom; this produced the need to always sing in order to appear to be always speaking, a need that grows because the language itself is unmusical, for the less the language has a softness and accent, the more the passage from speech to song and from song to speech becomes harsh and shocking to the ear. Thus the need to substitute a recited discourse for a sung discourse ...'

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.41, 'This manner of combining music and poetry in the theatre, which in the case of the Greeks was sufficient for interest and illusion because it was natural, was insufficient in our case when applied to the same end because it was unnatural.'

⁹⁹ It would at this point become 'métrique.'

¹⁰⁰ Here I would suggest Rousseau is specifically referring to problem of the diegetic song in early opera.

¹⁰¹ Rousseau, 'Récitatif', in *Op. Cit.*, p.130, 'All Greek poetry was recitative, for as the language was melodic, it was only necessary to add the cadence of the metre and the sustained recitation, in order for the recitation to be truly musical; those who wrote verse called this *singing*. This practice, ridiculously passed into other languages, meant that one said to poets *I am singing* when in fact they do no such thing. The Greeks were able to sing when speaking, but here in France one must either speak or sing - we cannot do both at the same time. It is this very distinction that made recitative necessary.' (my emphasis). The sentiments of this passage are also mirrored in the *Du Principe de la Mélodie* in Wokler, 'Rameau, Rousseau and the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*', p.205: 'Si la voix parlante et la voix chantante sont absolument de même nature le passage entre l'une à l'autre devient la chose au monde le plus concevable et la communication sera d'autant plus facile que la Langue sera plus accentuée. De sorte que de toute les langues connues la Grecque étant sans difficulté celle qui a le plus de résonances et d'accent, il s'ensuit que c'est aussi celle de toutes où le discours doit être le plus semblable au chant.'

If the union of poetry and music in the theatre had been an entirely natural, and indeed simple, procedure for the Greeks to accomplish, then, for the moderns, it was an unnatural and extremely problematic one to realise. Rousseau deduces from this that the dramatic result must have shattered verisimilitude in the imitation of human life to such a degree that it had been necessary for the Florentines to transport the stage to heaven and hell and to make gods and devils sing:

A la naissance de l'opéra, ses inventeurs, voulant éluder ce qu'avoit de peu naturel l'union de la musique au discours dans l'imitation de la vie humaine, s'avisèrent de transporter la scène aux cieus et dans les enfers ; et faute de savoir faire parler les hommes, ils aimèrent mieux faire chanter les dieux et les diables que les héros et les bergers.¹⁰²

But the result was not merely problematic, it became so impoverished in terms of its expression, that in compensation, an array of artificial sonic appendages – in the form of arias, choruses, the symphony and independent melodic strands – were bolted on, as it were, to recitative so that the whole hybrid form might eventually sustain interest for the audience:

Ainsi, moins on sait toucher le cœur, plus il faut savoir flatter l'oreille, et nous sommes forcés de chercher dans les sensations le plaisir que le sentiment nous refuse. Voilà l'origine des airs, des chœurs, de la symphonie, et de cette mélodie enchanteresse dont la musique moderne s'embellit souvent aux dépens de la poésie, mais que l'homme de goût rebute au théâtre quand on le flatte sans l'émouvoir.¹⁰³

Soon the supernatural became the very cornerstone upon which these new operas were founded. New theatres were built to house such works and *le merveilleux* was devised in order to 'bewitch the eyes' whilst the panoply of musical forms and new instruments – recitative, aria, symphony, chorus and orchestra – 'stun the ears':

Bientôt la magie et le merveilleux devinrent les fondements du théâtre lyrique ... Pour soutenir une si forte illusion, il fallut épuiser tout ce que l'art humain pouvoit imaginer ... on vit s'élever par toute l'Italie des théâtres égaux en étendue aux palais des rois, et en élégance aux monuments de l'antiquité dont elle étoit remplie ; on inventa, pour les orner, l'art de la perspective et de la décoration ... les machines les plus ingénieuses, les vols les plus hardis, les

¹⁰² Rousseau, 'Opéra', in *Dictionnaire*, p.41, 'At the birth of opera, its inventors, wanting to avoid the unnatural [*avoir peu naturel l'union de*] quality of uniting music with discourse in the imitation of human life, dared to transport the stage to heaven and hell; and for the want of knowing how to make men speak, they preferred to make gods and devils sing rather than shepherds and heroes.'

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.41, 'Therefore, the less we know how to touch the heart the more we need to know how to flatter the ear, and we are forced to look towards sensations for the pleasure that sentiment does not provide. This is then the origin of arias, of choruses, of the symphony, and of that enchanting melody with which modern music is embellished often at the expense of the poetry, but which repulses a man of taste at the theatre when one tries to flatter him without moving him.'

tempêtes, la foudre, l'éclair, et tous les prestiges de la baguette furent employés à fasciner les yeux, tandis que des multitudes d'instruments et de voix étonnoient les oreilles.¹⁰⁴

As Rousseau's historical narrative continues, the emphasis begins to shift onto the further degeneration of opera and in particular the rise of the independent role of music within the structural fabric of opera itself. Rousseau charts what he sees as the self-inflicted separation and disunion of music from poetry, a process that runs counter to that which, as we saw at the end of the last section, should be the primary objective of the composer. In the extracts that follow, we shall see that we have, in a sense, come full circle and thus return to the issues that populated the first and second parts of this chapter. Yet we shall also see an important idea established, or rather a weakness turned to into a principle of reform: that of the rise of the orchestra as a distinctly competitive – and seemingly expressive – force in opera.

We will remember that Rousseau accords a privileged status to music within the operatic structure because of its temporal properties, its cognate relationship with poetry, and because it is able to enhance the *mise en scène* by aiding and abetting the imagination of the spectator. However, across the one and a half centuries of operatic development, Rousseau sees music beginning to assume a dominant position for altogether different reasons; it is out of a collective weakness of its counterparts, that music accedes to ultimate supremacy and absolute independence:

Quoique les auteurs de ces premiers opéras n'eussent guère d'autre but que d'éblouir les yeux et d'étourdir les oreilles, il étoit difficile que le musicien ne fût jamais tenté de chercher à tirer de son art l'expression des sentiments répandues dans les poèmes.¹⁰⁵

Rousseau's admittedly rather obscure implication here is that, instead of the composer attempting to unite poetry and music so that the melodic declamation might correctly imitate the

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.42, 'Soon magic and the marvellous became the foundations of the lyrical theatre ... to support so great an illusion, it was necessary to exhaust all that human art could imagine ... All across Italy we saw the building of theatres equal in size to that of royal palaces and equal in elegance to the ancient monuments that they were to replace; to adorn them the arts of perspective and decoration were invented ... the most ingenious machines, the most daring flights, storms, thunder, lightning, and all the tricks that the magic wand could muster to bewitch the eyes, while multitudes of instruments and voices stunned our ears.'

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.44, 'Although the authors of these first operas had no goal other than dazzling the eyes and deafening the ears, it would be surprising if the composer had never been tempted to apply his art of expression to the sentiments found in the poems.'

'accent' of the emotion being expressed by and in the words, the composer might attempt to imitate the sensation of the emotion in purely musical terms or imitate an object itself through purely musical vocabulary. This distinction is fortunately rendered increasingly less obscure as we follow Rousseau's narrative as it unfolds:

Les chansons des nymphes, les hymnes des prêtres, les cris des guerriers, les hurlements infernaux, ne remplissoient pas tellement ces drames grossiers qu'il ne s'y trouvât quelqu'un de ces instants d'intérêt et de situation où le spectateur ne demande qu'à s'attendrir. Bientôt on commença de sentir qu'indépendamment de la déclamation musicale, que souvent la langue comportoit mal, le choix du mouvement, de l'harmonie et de chants, n'étoit pas indifférent aux chose qu'on avoit à dire, et que par conséquent l'effet de la seule musique, borné jusque alors aux sens, pouvoit aller jusqu'au cœur. La mélodie, qui ne s'étoit d'abord séparée de la poésie que par nécessité, tira parti de cette indépendance pour se donner des beautés absolues et purement musicales; l'harmonie découverte ou perfectionnée lui ouvrit de nouvelles routes pour plaire et pour émouvoir; et la mesure affranchie de la gêne du rythme poétique, acquit aussi une sorte de cadence à part qu'elle ne tenoit que d'elle seule. La musique étant ainsi devenue un troisième art d'imitation, eut bientôt son langage, son expression, ses tableaux tout-à-fait indépendants de la poésie. La symphonie même apprit à parler sans le secours des paroles, et souvent il ne sortoit pas des sentiments moins vifs de l'orchestre que de la bouche des acteurs.¹⁰⁶

Not only does music become independent, and then assert, its independence from poetry, it begins to rival the other semiotic systems in the operatic structure; it learns to speak without the assistance of words and constitutes another competing voice clamouring for the attention of the spectator. Eventually, it will begin to dominate the other elements and the ultimate cost of this independence and supremacy proves prohibitive, unless the power of the orchestra is harnessed correctly that is:

Après avoir essayé et senti ses forces, la musique, en état de marcher seule, commence à dédaigner la poésie qu'elle doit accompagner, et croit en valoir mieux en tirant d'elle même les beautés qu'elle partageoit avec sa compagne. Elle se propose encore, il est vrai, de rendre les idées et les sentiments du poète; mais elle prend en quelque sorte un autre langage; et quoique l'objet soit le

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.44-45, 'The songs of nymphs, the hymns of priests, the cries of warriors, diabolical howling, did not fill these base dramas to such an extent that there were moments of interest or situations in which the spectator only required to be moved. Soon one began to sense that, independently from the musical declamation that often the language was ill-suited to, the choice of tempo, the harmony and the melody was not indifferent to the things being said, and, as a result, the effect of music alone which had hitherto been restricted to the senses, could go straight to the heart. Melody, which was at first only separated from poetry by necessity, took advantage of this independence to yield absolute and purely musical beauties; the discovery or perfection of harmony opened new ways of pleasing and moving; and the [musical] rhythm liberated from the constraints of poetic rhythm, acquired a sort of separate and unique cadence. Music having therefore become a third art of imitation soon had its own language, its own expression, and its own tableaux entirely independent from poetry. The symphony even learnt to speak without the assistant of words, and often sentiments no less ardent came from the orchestra as from the actor's mouth.'

même, le poète et le musicien, trop séparés dans leur travail, en offrent à la fois deux images ressemblantes, mais distinctes, qui se nuisent mutuellement. L'esprit, forcé de se partager, choisit et se fixe à une image plutôt qu'à l'autre ... Tels sont les défauts que la perfection absolue de la musique et son défaut d'application à la langue peuvent introduire dans les opéras à proportion du concours de ces deux causes. Sur quoi l'on doit remarquer que les langues les plus propres à fléchir sous les lois de la mesure et de la mélodie sont celles où la duplicité ... est la moins apparente, parce que la musique se prêtant seulement aux idées de la poésie, celle-ci se prête à son tour aux inflexions de la mélodie ... Mais lorsque la langue n'a ni douceur ni flexibilité, l'âpreté de la poésie l'empêche de s'asservir au chant, la douceur même de la mélodie l'empêche de se prêter à la bonne récitation des vers, et l'on sent dans l'union forcée de ces deux arts une contrainte perpétuelle qui choque l'oreille, et détruit à la fois l'attrait de la mélodie et l'effet de la déclamation.¹⁰⁷

The form the Florentines had invented, had ended up unravelling itself and destroying the very principle it set out to uphold – the union of poetry and music. This was particularly evident in those languages, such as French, that were not intrinsically suited to musical setting. As far as the destiny of French opera was concerned, there was no solution deemed possible whilst pursuing the current downward spiralling course, for the forced union of music and poetry merely made matters worse:

Ce défaut est sans remède, et vouloir à toute force appliquer la musique à une langue qui n'est pas musicale, c'est lui donner plus de rudesse qu'en auroit sans cela.¹⁰⁸

Paradoxically, however, this will be the very justification that Rousseau will give to the structure he invents for, in part, *Le Devin du Village* and in whole for *Pygmalion* in order to overcome the quintessentially French problem. We now turn, in the concluding section of this chapter, to an exploration of Rousseau's first – and rather tentative – reformatory manoeuvres; and we shall go on to examine in detail Rousseau's second – and extremely radical – step in Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.48-49, 'After trying and feeling its power, music, now able to subsist alone, began to scorn the poetry that it had to accompany and believed there was greater value in extracting from itself the beauties that it once shared with poetry [compagne]. It is true that it still intended to render the poet's ideas and sentiments; but in some way it took another language; and although the object was the same, the poet and the musician – too far removed from one another in their work and offering at once two similar but distinct images – inflicted harm upon one another. Forced to split itself in two, the mind chose and fixed itself on one image rather than the other ... Such are the defects that the absolute perfection of music and its misapplication to language can introduce into opera, in proportion to the competitiveness of the two causes. Thereupon one must observe that languages the best suited to being governed [fléchir] by the laws of rhythm and melody are those in which duplicity is ... least apparent, because music in submitting itself solely to the ideas of the poetry will have the poetry submitting itself in turn to the inflexions of the melody ... But when a language is neither soft nor flexible, the harshness of the poetry prevents it from serving the melody and the softness of the melody prevents it from being adapted to a pleasing recitation of the verse; and one feels in such a forced union of these two arts a perpetual constraint which shocks the ear and destroys, at once, the charm of the melody and the effect of the declamation.'

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.50, 'This defect is without remedy, and by wanting above all else to apply music to a language that is not musical, is to make it more harsh than it would have been without it.'

4.3.2. Reformatory steps: *Le Devin du Village* (1752) and the concepts of *Unité de Mélodie* and *Récitatif Obligé*

At the beginning of this the third part of the chapter, I suggested that Rousseau applies a single reformatory solution to two very different dramatic works: *Le Devin du Village* (1752) and *Pygmalion* (1762). I also intimated that the same solution had been applied in two potencies, two degrees of radicalness. In truth, however, when one ‘zooms-in’ on the detail, there are, in fact, two separately identified components to this single solution: *Unité de Mélodie* and *Récitatif Obligé*. My contention is, however, that both concepts are inextricably intertwined, conflated even, and that the latter should essentially be considered an evolutionary development of the former. In *Le Devin* Rousseau seems to pilot both principles albeit in a very minor and almost insignificant way, so much so that their implications and indeed their direct connection with one another and the structural innovations instituted in *Pygmalion* have been somewhat overlooked by scholars. Both principles are explained in some detail in their respective *Dictionnaire de Musique* articles: their application in the work itself is referred to in the *Lettre à M Burney*, the *Confessions*, the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* and several other places in the *Dictionnaire*. Let us turn our attention first to the concept of *unité de mélodie*.

The concept of *unité de mélodie* is essentially straightforward, and is entirely consistent (indeed ‘consonant’) with the compositional principles and objectives explored earlier in this chapter. Rousseau presents it in the *Dictionnaire* in the following terms:

La musique doit ... chanter pour toucher, pour plaire, pour soutenir l'intérêt et l'attention. Mais comment, dans nos systèmes d'accords et d'harmonie, la musique s'y prendra-t-elle pour chanter? Si chaque partie a son chant propre, tous ces chants, entendus à la fois, se détruiront mutuellement, et ne feront plus de chant ; si toutes les parties font le même chant, l'on n'aura plus d'harmonie, et le concert sera tout à l'unisson. Le manière dont un instinct musical, un certain sentiment sourd du génie a levé cette difficulté sans la voir, et en a même tiré avantage, est bien remarquable : l'harmonie, qui devrait étouffer la mélodie, l'anime, la renforce, la détermine : les diverses parties sans se confondre, concourent au même effet ; et quoique chacune d'elles paroisse avoir son chant propre, de toutes ces parties réunies on n'entend sortir qu'un seul et même chant. C'est là ce que j'appelle Unité de Mélodie.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Rousseau, ‘Unité de Mélodie’, in *Dictionnaire de Musique*, t.13, pp.343-344, ‘Music must ... sing in order to move, please, and sustain the interest and attention [of the listener]. But how, in our systems of chords and of harmony, will music be made to sing? If each part has its own melody, when all of these melodies are heard at the same time, they negate one another to the point where there is no melody; if each of these parts are given the same melody, there will no longer be harmony, instead the music will be at the unison. The manner in which a musical instinct, a certain feeling blind to genius has overcome this difficulty without realising it, and has even been advantaged by it, is quite remarkable : harmony, which may smother melody, animates it, reinforces it and determines it : when diverse parts are not confused, they strive for the same goal ; and although

In the passage above we can see two concepts that we have examined throughout this chapter re-emerge. First, the notion of a single '*langue*', except in this guise it is expressed as the objective of achieving a single melody distributed amongst manifold but discreet musical voices. Second, the notion that harmony's role should be to support, reinforce, enliven and so 'animate' melody that melody is able to realise its full expressive potential and thus sustain the interest and attention of the spectator across the span of a lengthy dramatic work. Rousseau continues by enumerating the means by which the composer can apply this principle of melodic unity. Note that it is the 'chant' – the melody – that should be the beneficiary of each compositional intervention:

... 1^o quand le mode n'est pas assez déterminé par le chant, de le déterminer mieux par l'harmonie ; 2^o de choisir et tourner ses accords de manière que le son le plus saillant soit toujours celui de qui chante ... ; 3^o d'ajouter à l'énergie de chaque passage par des accords durs si l'expression est dure, et doux, si l'expression est douce ; 4^o d'avoir égard, dans la tournure de l'accompagnement, au forte-piano¹¹⁰ de la mélodie ; 5^o enfin, de faire en sorte que le chant des autres parties, loin de contrarier celui de la partie principale, le soutienne, le seconde, et lui donne un plus vif accent.¹¹¹

Interestingly, Rousseau goes on to suggest that *Unité de Mélodie* is the reason behind one of the most salient differences between Italian and French music. However, it is not that the Italians' employment of the principle is seen as a conscious and deliberate act, rather Rousseau insists that '[les Italiens] l'ont senti et suivi sans le connoître ...',¹¹² whereas the French had done neither. Of course, the corollary of this statement, so far as the musical practice of his French contemporaries is concerned, is that in the case of each of the five 'rules' cited above, melody is disadvantaged: first, that harmony always determines the mode; second, that the most prominent melody is to be frequently found in the bass or scattered randomly amongst the inner parts; third, that the selection of harmonic progressions and the distribution of consonances and dissonances has little connection with the object of imitation; fourth, that little or no respect is

each one appears to have its own melody, when all the parts are united we only hear a single melody emerge. This is what I call the Unity of Melody.'

¹¹⁰ Not to be confused with the keyboard instrument of the same name. Rousseau defines 'forte-piano' in the *Dictionnaire*, t.12, p.364 as 'l'art d'adoucir et renforcer les sons dans la mélodie imitative, comme on fait dans la parole qu'elle doit imiter.'

¹¹¹ Rousseau, 'Unité de Mélodie', pp.344-345. '... 1. When the mode is not clearly determined by the melody, to define it more clearly with the harmony ; 2. To choose and shape his chords so that the most prominent sound is always that of the singer ... ; 3. To add force to each passage with chords that are hard if the expression is hard, and soft, if the expression is soft ; 4. In shaping the accompaniment, to respect the 'forte-piano' of the melody ; 5. Finally, to arrange it so that the inner parts, far from unbalancing the principal part, support it, are inferior to it, and imbue it with a more lively accent.'

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp.346. '[the Italians] felt and followed it without knowledge of it.'

accorded to the 'forte-piano' of the melody; and fifth, that the principal melody is frequently contradicted, overshadowed or entirely negated by secondary ones. It is as if Rousseau is suggesting that the principle of composition for the French composer – and by this we should implicate Rameau – is more of a '*Unité d'Harmonie*.'

As Rousseau confirms, once the concept had been envisioned, he was eager to apply it to his own compositional practice and thus *Le Devin* is the product of this first experiment.¹¹³ The trace of the principle of *Unité de Mélodie* can be identified throughout the work; the prevalence of homophonic orchestral textures, the carefully constructed duets, the restrained *basso continuo* accompaniments and the general sense of melodic dominance conspire to create an effect far removed from that of *Tragédie Lyrique* or an *Opéra Ballet*. On the basis of this alone, I would be arguing that *Le Devin du Village* constitutes a rail against the norms of French operatic praxis and should be considered a reform opera in its own right; but, of course, that Rousseau applies a second reformatory principle to the work merely strengthens the case further. We shall now move on to examine this second concept.

Although the deployment of *Recitatif Obligé* is restricted to a single scene in *Le Devin*, its impact and influence is certainly more far-reaching and presageful than its limited, even tentative, first outing might suggest. Before we examine the implications of the concept more fully, it is worthwhile taking a few moments to remind ourselves about Rousseau's precise definition of its cognate – recitative – in order that the differences gain a little more contrast. The definition I have elected to use here first, is taken from the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* for it is delivered with far greater clarity and concision than its counterparts in either the *Dictionnaire* or the *Encyclopédie*. In defining the term, Rousseau chooses to illustrate three primary functions of recitative:

Le récitatif est nécessaire dans les drames lyriques, 1^o pour lier l'action et rendre le spectacle un; 2^o pour faire valoir les airs, dont la continuité deviendront insupportable; 3^o pour exprimer une multitude de choses qui ne peuvent ou ne doivent point être exprimées par la musique chantante et cadencée.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.347.

¹¹⁴ Rousseau, *Lettre sur la Musique Française*, in *Oeuvres*, t.11, p.303, 'Recitative is necessary in lyric drama, first, to connect the action and preserve the unity; second, to set off the airs, of which a continuous succession would be insupportable; third, to express a number of things which cannot be expressed by lyric, cadenced music.'

Recitative is thus envisaged as the unifying glue that binds the tripartite elements of opera together; it sets off the arias, by being essentially less musical (melodic) than them; and it relays the dialogue, the very stuff of the drama – the development of characterisation and plot. But recitative is not simply envisaged as a mechanism for facilitating dialogue or character development, for Rousseau it should fulfil an additional function: it should be a means of substituting the awkward, ungainly and unnatural passage between song and speech, for one in which only the half the distance is bridged. It is simply beyond the capability of declamation – that heightened and in many respects exaggerated speech practiced by actors in the tragedies of Racine and Corneille – to satisfactorily connect aria to aria by itself:

Le passage du discours au chant, et réciproquement, est trop disparate; il choque à la fois l'oreille et la vraisemblance: deux interlocuteurs doivent parler ou chanter; ils ne sauroient faire alternativement l'un et l'autre. Or le récitatif est le moyen de l'union du chant et de la parole; c'est lui qui sépare et distingue les airs [...] c'est à l'aide du récitatif que ce qui n'est que dialogue, récit, narration dans le drame, peut se rendre sans sortir de la Langue donnée, et sans déplacer l'éloquence des airs.¹¹⁵

The ultimate objective is to create an illusion, a hypothetical language which ensures that verisimilitude is preserved intact; the nature of the illusion is to appear to be employing one, uniform, register of voice throughout the drama:

... il y a une sorte de vraisemblance qu'il faut conserver, même à l'Opéra, en rendant le discours tellement uniforme, que le tout puisse être pris au moins pour une langue hypothétique.¹¹⁶

In the *Dictionnaire* Rousseau regards the ideal form of recitative as one in which it would be necessary only to notate or transcribe the inflections and rhythms of real speech and in this way, the recitative – naturally inflected and inherently musical – would still be recognisable as speech:

¹¹⁵ Rousseau, 'Récitatif' in *Dictionnaire*, p.131: 'The passage from speech to song, and vice versa, is too disparate; it shocks both the ear and the verisimilitude: two interlocutors must speak or sing; they would not be able to alternate between one and the other. Now, recitative is the way to unite song and speech; it is recitative that separates and distinguishes the arias [...]. ...It is through recitative that all that is dialogue, recitation, narration in the drama may be presented without leaving the given language and without overshadowing the eloquence of the arias.' This passage is paralleled in the *Lettre sur la Musique Française*: 'La simple déclamation ne pouvoit convenir à tout cela dans un ouvrage lyrique, parce que la transition de la parole au chant, et surtout du chant à la parole, a une dureté à laquelle l'oreille se prête difficilement, et forme un contraste choquante qui détruit toute l'illusion, et par conséquent l'intérêt [...].'

¹¹⁶ Rousseau, *Lettre*, pp.303-304. 'there is a kind of realism [*vraisemblance*] that must be preserved even at the Opéra, by making the language so consistent [*uniforme*] that the whole may at least be taken for a hypothetical language.'

La perfection du récitatif dépend beaucoup du caractère de la Langue; plus la Langue est accentuée et mélodieuse, plus le récitatif est naturel, et approche du vrai discours: il n'est que l'accent noté dans une Langue vraiment musicale; mais, dans une Langue pesante, sourde et sans accent, le récitatif n'est que du chant, des cris, de la psalmodie; on n'y reconnoît plus la parole: ainsi le meilleur récitatif est celui où l'on chante le moins.¹¹⁷

And there, once again, we have another instance of the peculiarly French problem: in an 'unmusical' language one must either sing (in which case the recitative is not recognisable as speech and always remains song) or speak (in which case the recitative is unmusical and uninflected); but one cannot do both at the same time.

There are two important points to pick up on here. The first is that if deployed in the 'correct' manner, recitative has the capacity to create the illusion of a single, albeit hypothetical, language by smoothing the passage between the delivery of the dialogue and the plot and by framing the arias; and second that its application does not necessarily interfere with the principle of the *unité de mélodie*. In fact, it could, in certain circumstances, enhance it by bringing the dominant melodic strands to the fore. With these two points in mind, we shall now turn our attention to the structural device Rousseau dubs *récitatif obligé*.

We will remember in Rousseau's historical account of the birth and subsequent development of opera, he describes how music gradually extricates itself from the influence of poetry and becomes an independent semiotic system which competes for the attention of the spectator. We will remember too, that at the same time, he describes how the orchestra rises up to such a degree as to rival the other semiotic systems as it learns to speak without the assistance of words. When these two elements are fused to the two points illustrated above, one can begin to sense the logic and indeed the prevailing direction of Rousseau's next reformatory manoeuvre. Rousseau defines *récitatif obligé* in these terms:

C'est celui qui, entremêlé de ritournelles et de traits de symphonie, oblige pour ainsi dire 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 récitatifs et de

¹¹⁷ Rousseau, 'Récitatif' p.130, 'The perfection of recitative depends largely upon the character of the language. The more the language is accentuated and melodic, the more the recitative is natural and approaches true discourse - it represents nothing more than notated accent in a truly musical language. However, in a language that is heavy, voiceless and without accent, recitative is nothing but song, cries, psalmody - we no longer recognise it as speech. Therefore the best recitative is one in which we sing the least.'

mélodie revêtue de tout l'éclat de l'orchestre, sont ce qu'il y a de plus touchant, de plus ravissant, de plus énergique dans toute la musique moderne.¹¹⁸

Rousseau continues by describing how this might function during the cut and thrust of performance:

L'acteur agité, transporté d'une passion qui ne lui permet 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 ... l'on a tâché d'en donner quelque idée dans une scène du *Devin du Village*.¹¹⁹

The scene in question from *Le Devin du Village* is number six, in which the soon-to-lovers, Colin and Colette, are, for the first time, about to confront one another with their true sentiments. Through a series of extremely brief asides, they reveal to the audience the depth and extent of their feelings toward one another. In Figure 3 in the Appendix, we can clearly see what Rousseau intends with this structure. The texture of the first four bars before Colin's first interjection is homophonic: a simple melody is shared between the flutes and violins, with the bassoon and *continuo* providing a unison bass that shadows the melody for the most part at a tenth below; the viola barely fills out the harmony, and broadly shares the same rhythmic pattern of the other instruments. Colin's first entry ('Je l'aperçois ...' at bar 5), just under a half a bar's material, sees the whole orchestra, save the *continuo*, tacit. The *continuo*, which is not figured, merely provides a skeletal bass support. This pattern is repeated, as we can see, throughout the scene and provides an interesting contrast with the prevailing *accompagnato* style of recitative of the other scenes of the work. The orchestra, then, is 'speaking' for Colin and Collette in those moments when they are 'transported by a passion that does not permit them to say everything'. In these moments, music not only supplements their dialogue, it stands in as a sign of the inarticulacy of language. Also of note is the deliberate syllabic setting of the words which are stressed in time with the tempo, inflexion and accentuation patterns of real speech. As

¹¹⁸ Rousseau, 'Récitatif Obligé', in *Dictionnaire*, t.13, p.138, 'It is that which, coming in between the ritournelli and the symphonic phrases, obligates, as it were, the singer and the orchestra to one another, in such a way that they must be mutually attentive and understanding. These alternating passages of recitative and of melody invested with all the brilliance of the orchestra are the most touching, the most ravishing, the most dynamic in all of modern music.'

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.138, 'The actor, feverish, transported by a passion that does not permit him say everything, breaks off, pauses, reflects upon his situation, during which time the orchestra speaks for him; these silences filled in this way affect the listener infinitely more than if the actor had himself uttered all that which the orchestra had expressed ... I endeavoured to demonstrate this is a scene in *Le Devin du Village*.'

Rousseau describes in the *Confessions*, this was an innovation perceived by many as a step too far in the wrong direction and was not greeted with any enthusiasm by his contemporaries:

The part [of *le Devin*] to which I had paid the greatest attention, and in which I had made the greatest departure from the beaten track, was the recitative. Mine was stressed in an entirely new way and timed to the speaking of the words. But they would not let this horrible innovation stand; they were afraid it would shock the ears of the timid herd. I gave my permission for Francueil and Jélyotte to write a fresh recitative, but I didn't want any part of it.¹²⁰

With the evident benefit of hindsight, I would suggest that it was the aggregate effect of the three elements that we have discussed thus far – *unité de mélodie*, *récitatif obligé* and the syllabic setting of the text – that was seen as a little too novel and indeed radical.

If we return, for a moment, to the definition itself, we can see that Rousseau describes the alternating passages of recitative and melody in an extremely loaded but precise fashion, he suggests that the melody, when suitably invested with the 'full splendour of the orchestra,' can speak for the actor, can express what the actor is not quite able to say through words and that this mechanism can affect the spectator infinitely more than if recitative was employed on its own. It is, in one sense, a great irony to see Rousseau suggesting that music, without the assistance of words and as a separate and distinctive semiotic system, can affect the listener as much, if not more, than recitative can by itself. It is ironic, for the simple reason that music must assume this state of independence and articulacy in order to achieve these much-vaunted effects: it must divest itself of its linguistic apparel in order for it to be able to speak its own language, employing its own vocabulary and by extension, its own signifiers. But, on the other hand, the very employment of this structure is a tacit acknowledgement of the extreme difficulties and unsatisfactory nature of recitative in the French language. Thus it is not that this structure is ideal, but that it is the best compromise solution for the French, or at least it was in 1752.

It should have become clear that the aesthetic distinction between *Unité de Mélodie* and *Récitatif Obligé* is, in practice, extremely small and that the latter should really be seen as an extension of the former. If there is a discernible difference then it turns on the question of perception:

¹²⁰ Rousseau, *Confessions*, Transl. J M Cohen, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), pp.350-351.

whether one considers recitative to constitute melody or not. My view is ultimately swayed in the affirmative direction by the fact that in scene six of *Le Devin*, by employing *Récitatif Obligé*, we can see how Rousseau also preserves the *Unité de Mélodie* of the scene: the homophonic texture and the sparse harmonies do not overshadow or negate the melodic line; the alternation between the voice and the orchestra can be seen as merely the relaying of the melodic line between one 'voice' and another; and as Rousseau puts it in the article of the same name, '... le chant des autres parties ... lui donne un plus vif accent.'

In the next, and final, chapter we shall see how Rousseau pursues the *Récitatif Obligé* structure to its logical conclusion and how, from this position, the *Pygmalion* 'mechanism' is but one small step away.

Chapter Five:

Pygmalion: words without music, and music without words: the philosophy, the aesthetic and the reform converge

She was a grocer's daughter, Mlle Lard by name, the true model of a Greek statue and whom I should quote as the most beautiful girl I have ever seen if real beauty could exist without life and without soul. Her indolence, her coldness and her lack of feeling were quite incredible.¹

Sitôt que des signes vocaux frappent votre oreille, ils vous annoncent un être semblable à vous.²

In Chapter 4, we saw how Rousseau takes the first, and somewhat tentative, reformatory steps with his *Le Devin du Village* of 1752, and that his application of a governing aesthetic principle – *Unité de Mélodie* – and a structural mechanism – *Récitatif Obligé* – betokens a desire to compensate for the lacunae of French opera by tackling the problem directly at its source. I suggested that Rousseau's rethinking of opera's structural apparatus was a tacit acknowledgement of, on the one hand, the impossibility of 'true' recitative in the French language, and, on the other, the necessity of establishing a mechanism that would facilitate a more favourable union of text and music in a dramatic idiom. Concluding, I proposed that *Pygmalion* represented this innovative mechanism and that its realisation was but one small reformatory step away from *Le Devin*. At this moment, the immortalised words of a pioneering astronaut seem strangely apposite, for *Pygmalion* represents, at once, a small reformatory step and a giant leap: a small step because the form Rousseau devises is, in essence, merely an extension of the *Récitatif Obligé* mechanism; a giant leap, for *Pygmalion* turns its back upon one and a half centuries of operatic evolution and points towards a new, uncharted pathway, the ultimate destination of which was not even remotely visible or even divivable in 1762. *Pygmalion* is, we will remember, the first melodrama.

The aim, in the first part of this Chapter, is to examine *Pygmalion*'s structural and formal characteristics, attaching special import both to the theoretical innovations and their relationship to Rousseau's aesthetics of music and opera. Evidently, the significance and influence of these

¹ Rousseau, *Confessions*, Transl. J. M. Cohen, (London: Penguin Classics, 1953), p.184.

² Rousseau, *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, in *Œuvres*, t.11, p.232. 'As soon as vocal signs strike your ear, they announce the presence of another being similar to you.'

innovations cannot be restricted to the boundaries of Rousseau's *oeuvre*, nor indeed to the eighteenth century in general: *Pygmalion's* influence on composers such as Gluck, Mozart, Grétry, Weber, Beethoven and Wagner demonstrates, with great clarity, that Rousseau's fundamental rethinking of the operatic aesthetic and operatic form has left an indelible mark upon European opera.³ In the second part of this chapter, I will treat the libretto as both literary text and aesthetic doctrine, focusing in particular upon Rousseau's dichotomisation of art and nature, and the aesthetic of representation couched within *Pygmalion's* monologues. I will argue that Rousseau uses the Ovidian tale allegorically – that is to say he allegorises the original allegory in order to postulate an aesthetic precept in musically embodied form. This precept amounts to a categorical rejection of the notion of mimetic perfection in art. Rousseau regards artistic perfection as a kind of 'forbidden fruit' bearing forth both the negation of art and the silence of the artist. Hence *Pygmalion* can be seen as a direct challenge to the concept of 'artist creation.' Finally, I will show how Rousseau's Philosophy of Music achieves closure within the communicative enterprise of artistic creation itself, infiltrates the work and comes full circle in the words of the animated statue Galatea, as a 'Fall-State' manifestation of the *cri de la nature*.

³ Whilst a detailed exploration of Rousseau's music-theoretical influence on such figures is beyond the scope of the present work (though it would make for an extremely important study in its own right), it is interesting to note that this line of inquiry is either completely overlooked, or, perhaps more alarmingly, dismissed entirely out of hand by some scholars. Of those who have attempted to demonstrate Rousseau's influence on Wagner, two studies are notable: the first can be found in Albert Jansen, *Rousseau als Musiker*, (Berlin, 1884), p.405 – in which the author enumerates thirteen points of influence; and second in Alfred Oliver's, *The Encyclopaedists as Critics of music*, (New York: 1947), p.137 – who argues that at least eight of Jansen's thirteen points are still significant. Beyond the influence upon Wagner, David Charlton, *French Opera 1730-1830 : Meaning and Media*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), X, p.5-25 traces a 'melodrama model' that descends from Rousseau and Benda through to Weber's *Der Freischütz* (1817-21). Moreover, Charlton cites (p.6) a contemporaneous account by Laurent Garcin (*Traité sur le Mélodrame ou Reflexions sur la musique dramatique*, 1772) which points to the significant fact that *Pygmalion* was considered to be one of the reference points for future operatic reform at that time. Samuel Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Musique*, textes recueillis et présentés par Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, (Neuchâtel: à la Baconnière, 1988), p.65 points to Beethoven's *Egmont*, Schumann's *Manfred* and Honegger's *Roi David* as being examples of Rousseau's influence. Gerald Seaman, 'Moscow and St Petersburg' in Alexander Ringer (ed.), *The Early Romantic Era*, (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.238 traces Rousseau's probable influence stretching into Russia and the opera *Mel'nikkoldun, obmanschchik I svat* (1779) with a Libretto by Alexander Ablesimov and suggests that this 'almost certainly owed something to Rousseau's famous Opéra Comique, *Le Devin du Village* which was possibly given at the Theatre of the Moscow Orphanage in 1778.' Arnold Whittall, 'Rousseau and the Scope of Opera,' *Music and Letters*, p.371, however, gives the idea that Rousseau exerted an influence on Wagner and indeed composers of the nineteenth century short shrift and argues instead that it was Rameau who had been the greater influence of the two figures: 'Rousseau looked back, Rameau looked forward, the one to the Camerata, the other to the Gesamtkunstwerk. Needless to say such a conveniently tidy view is inadequate, but the tendency to exaggerate Rousseau's influence on the nineteenth century is equally inaccurate and more persistent.' For Norman Demuth, *Opera: Its Development to the Revolution*, (New York: The Artemis Press, 1963), p.178, Rousseau was '... a major prophet in a minor way, and although he did not finally alter the course of lyric drama, he at least postulated a genre ... at the most he may be said to have caused a stir in musical affairs, but nothing more. The later history of French Opera proves this.'

Pygmalion, Rousseau's final musico-dramatic *ouvrage*, was written in 1762⁴ during the most turbulent and problematic period of his life.⁵ It was a period in which his works enjoyed extraordinary popularity and, paradoxically, one during which Rousseau was persecuted and, almost like a pariah, ostracised from *Le Beau Monde* and its myriad *Côteries*. With *Du Contrat Social* (1762) in storage in Rouen⁶ and *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) enjoying unparalleled success, Rousseau had every reason to anticipate that his most recent work *Emile* (1762) – the 'best and most important' of all his writings⁷ – would be enthusiastically received. But to his astonishment and evident disgust, the *Sorbonne* reacted with extreme hostility to the work and the Censor's Office, at the behest of the *Parlement de Paris*, had seemingly no alternative but to outlaw *Emile's* printing and distribution. As far as Rousseau was concerned, however, the Parisian institutions – spurred on by his enemies – had conspired to sabotage his finest work.

Like many of his contemporaries, Rousseau was the object of considerable suspicion and he had a history of difficulties and entanglements with the Censor's Office. Most notably Rousseau had been forced to re-draft entire sections of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in order to purge the epistolary novel of anti-Church and anti-Royal content. 'The censor Piquet', as Robert Darnton has shown,

... made twenty-three alterations to the text of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* – twenty-one ... involved no more than slight modifications of language so that an idea would be purified of potentially disturbing overtones; the other two required outright suppression of passages that openly questioned the authority of the Church and the King.⁸

Now given his novel's rather rough passage through the Censor's Office less than a year earlier, quite why Rousseau assumed that *Emile* – a far more explosive and iconoclastic cocktail than *La*

⁴ The precise period of composition is unknown, but it is generally thought that the *Scène Lyrique* was written during the summer and autumn of 1762 whilst Rousseau was at Motiers-Travers. The first reference to the manuscript of *Pygmalion* is made by Julie Von Bondelli in a letter to Nicholas-Antoine Kirchberger on 21 January 1763. Cf. Rousseau, *Correspondance Complète*. R A Leigh (ed.), (Oxford: the Voltaire Foundation et Paris: diffusion J Touzot, 1959-), Vol. xv, n° 2445.

⁵ Cf. Rousseau, *Confessions*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1953), pp.544-551. Book twelve – recounting the events of 1762 – of the *Confessions* begins, 'Here begins the work of darkness in which I have been entombed for eight years past ... In the abyss of evil in which I am sunk I feel the weight of blows struck at me.'

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.527 recounts, 'the *Social Contract* appeared a month or two before *Emile*. I had made Rey [Marc-Michel Rey, Rousseau's publisher in Amsterdam] promise that he would never try to smuggle any of my books into France, and he applied to the Censor's office for permission to bring it in by way of Rouen ... [where it] remained for several months.'

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.529-530.

⁸ Robert Darnton & Daniel Roche, (eds.), *Revolution in Print: The press in France 1775-1800*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p.14.

Nouvelle Héloïse – would sail straight past the assiduous attention of Piquet unchallenged, is either an extraordinary demonstration of his naïveté or an indication that the Genevan had simply thrown all caution to the wind.⁹ The *Confessions*, chronicling in some detail the ‘actual’ sequence of events, presents a rather equivocal and indistinct picture of the possible source of such convictions. There are, for example, passages in which Rousseau exhibits a remarkable degree of self-confidence and a somewhat reckless defiance;¹⁰ and there are other passages in which Rousseau appears extremely suspicious, paranoid even.¹¹ One thing is certain, however: at the time, Rousseau was convinced that *Emile’s* content was, for the most part, innocuous, and that its commentary on educational institutions, religion, the Church and the practices of the ‘great and the good’ would not alarm the Court, the censor nor the clergy.¹² *Ex post facto*, Rousseau’s express intention in the *Confessions* was to pass off the affair to his loyal reader as a grand conspiracy: they – the censor, Tronchin, Voltaire, the old women, d’Alembert, Christophe de Beaumont and whosoever Rousseau suspected – had apparently allowed him just enough rope to hang himself. And in a letter to his ‘dear’ friend, Moulou, Rousseau depicts vividly the

⁹ At one point in the *Confessions*, p.531, Rousseau refers to his ‘confidence and stupidity’ at this time.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.530, ‘Far from in any way foreseeing the catastrophe impending, I was convinced of the beauty and merit of my work, and certain that my conduct was completely in order. So relying, as I believed I had a right to, on Mme de Luxembourg’s influence, and on some ministerial favour, I congratulated myself on the resolution I had made to retire in the midst of my triumphs ...’

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.526, ‘Once the printing had been resumed it was completed without incident; and I noticed one strange thing about it; that after all the strict alterations that had been required for the first volumes, the two last were passed without a word, nothing they contained being found unsuitable for publication. I still felt a certain uneasiness, however, that I cannot pass over in silence. Having formerly feared the Jesuits, I was now afraid of the Jansenists and the Philosophes [...] The ‘old women’ had some time ago left their former abode and moved in so close to me that from their room they could hear everything that was said in mine and on my terrace; and from their garden it was quite possible to climb the little wall separating it from my turret. I had made this turret my study, and so I had a table there piled with proofs and sheets of *Emile* and *The Social Contract*. These sheets I stitched together as I received them, and consequently had each volume there before it was published. My scatterbrained carelessness ... often made me forget to shut my turret at nights, and I would find it wide open in the mornings; which would not have worried me had I not seemed to notice some disturbance among my papers. After making this observation several times I became more careful to shut my door. [...] Watching rather more carefully I found that things had been more disturbed than when I had left the door open. Finally one of my volumes disappeared for a day and two nights, and I was unable to discover what had happened to it till the morning of the third day, when I found it once more on my table ... I began to be suspicious of the old women. I knew that although Jansenists, they had some connection with d’Alembert and lodged in his house.’ Of course, we know that d’Alembert was an atheist. Earlier Rousseau does speculate that the ‘inexplicable’ delays to the printing of the work were due to a Jesuit conspiracy, for as he puts it, ‘I supposed that the Jesuits had been enraged by the contemptuous way in which I had spoken of their colleges ...’ (p.523). Looking at the context of this last citation it seems probable that Rousseau, already ill and believing he was about to die, was not merely desperate but almost certainly paranoid.

¹² As we can plainly see in this quite remarkable extract from the official *Mandement de Monseigneur L’Archevêque de Paris* (20th August 1762), the clergy – and in particular Christophe de Beaumont – viewed the work as scandalous and downright evil: ‘... après avoir pris l’avis de plusieurs personnes distinguées par leur piété et par leur savoir, le saint nom de Dieu invoqué, nous condamnons ledit livre [Emile] comme contenant une doctrine abominable, propre à renverser la loi naturelle et à détruire les fondements de la religion chrétienne, établissant des maximes contraires à la morale évangélique; tendant à troubler la paix des états, à révolter les sujets contre l’autorité de leur souverain; comme contenant un très grand nombre de propositions respectivement fausses, scandaleuses, pleines de haine contre l’Eglise et ses ministres, dérogeantes au respect dû à l’Ecriture sainte et à la tradition de l’Eglise, erronées, impies, blasphématoires et hérétiques.’ (in *Oeuvres*, t.9, pp.173-174).

political ferment into which *Emile* had been 'born,' and we may infer from the closing allocution, that in spite of mounting adversity, Rousseau held the genuine belief that he had right on his side and that the cause justified the rather excessive and somewhat reckless means:

Je me garderois de vous inquiéter, cher Moultoù, si je croyois que vous fussiez tranquille sur mon compte; mais la fermentation est trop forte que le bruit n'en soit pas arrivé jusqu'à vous: et je juge par les lettres que je reçois des provinces que les gens qui m'aiment y sont encore plus alarmés pour moi qu'à Paris. Mon livre [*Emile*] a paru dans des circonstances malheureuses. Le Parlement de Paris, pour justifier son zèle contre les jésuites, veut, dit-on, persécuter aussi ceux qui ne pensent pas comme eux; et le seul homme en France qui croie en Dieu doit être la victime des défenseurs du Christianisme. [...] Ma carrière est finie, il ne me reste plus qu'à la couronner. J'ai rendu gloire à Dieu, j'ai parlé pour le bien des hommes. O ami! Pour une si grande cause, ni toi ni moi ne refuserons jamais de souffrir. C'est aujourd'hui que le Parlement rentre; j'attends en paix ce qu'il lui plaira d'ordonner de moi.¹³

Just four days later, the *Parlement's* verdict was delivered: *Emile* was banned and summarily burnt. Rousseau was forced to flee Paris on 11 June 1762 in order to avoid certain arrest.¹⁴

During the eight years that followed, Rousseau was persecuted, lapidated and driven out of wherever he tried to settle; he could find no refuge in Yverdun, Motiers-Travers or Monquin and he only enjoyed temporary sanctuary and solace on the Ile de St-Pierre.¹⁵ Despite his dislike of England and the English,¹⁶ he had even been forced to leave its shores following a 'quarrel' with his host, David Hume.¹⁷ Late in 1767, Rousseau adopted a pseudonym – Jean-Joseph Renou –

¹³ Letter to A M Moultoù, 7 June 1762, in *Oeuvres*, t.18, pp.493-495. 'I would try not alarm you, my dear Moultoù, if I thought you were not already concerned on my account, but the ferment is too strong for the rumours not to have reached you. And I judge from the letters I receive from the provinces that my friends there are even more alarmed than those in Paris. My book [*Emile*] appeared in unfortunate circumstances. The *Parlement de Paris*, in order to justify its zeal against the Jesuits, also wants to persecute those who do not think like them. And the only man in France who believes in God must be the victim of the defenders of Christianity. [...] My career is finished, nothing remains to complete it. I brought glory to God, I spoke for the good of men. Oh friend! For such a great cause neither you nor I will ever refuse to suffer. It is today that the *Parlement* sits; I wait patiently for their command.'

¹⁴ News of his impending arrest came from his 'ally' the Prince de Conti. This allowed Rousseau just enough time to gather his effects and decide where he would flee. (cf. Rousseau, *Confessions*, pp.535-536).

¹⁵ According to his correspondence, particularly with Moultoù, Rousseau seems to have held Tronchin and Voltaire largely responsible for sustaining the campaign of persecution during these years. Cf. Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, t.18, pp.517, 519, 535, 539, 567-570. An alleged remark Rousseau made about Tronchin, cited in a letter by Mme Bondelli, demonstrates all too clearly the intense hatred Rousseau felt towards Tronchin: 'De votre vie ne citez plus Tronchin! Sachez que c'est un home qui n'a point de chaleur dans l'âme, qui ne dit jamais que ce qu'il veut, enfin un home faux, un home noir, un jongleur.' Cf. Rousseau, *Correspondance Complète*, (ed.) Leigh, Vol. XIV, pp.207-8 no. 2394.

¹⁶ Cf. Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.537.

¹⁷ Michael O'Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Music, Illusion and Desire*, (London: MacMillan, 1995), p.1. attributes Rousseau's hasty flight from England to the fact that 1767 had been 'one of the most exhausting and terrifying years of his life' and one that was 'filled with demonic fantasies' and 'violent terrors.' O'Dea concludes by drawing the reader's attention to a remark Rousseau made in

under which he started work on his *Confessions*. And in what seems to have been a rather conspicuous act of retaliation on his part, Rousseau returned to central Paris in 1770 where he would frequently read sections of his *Confessions* in public to embarrass his 'enemies.'¹⁸

Set against this seemingly accursed and troubled backdrop is Rousseau's drafting of the *Scène Lyrique*, *Pygmalion* (summer-autumn 1762). Whether classified as a minor work by one commentator or having a lengthy chapter devoted to its autobiographical significance by another,¹⁹ *Pygmalion* is, to paraphrase Philip Robinson, certainly worth folios of theory. And yet, at first blush, Rousseau's rendering of the Ovidian tale is, broadly speaking, conventional: Pygmalion, a sculptor, carves a statue – the perfect imitation of his heart's idol – and falls in love with his 'creation.' Venus responds to Pygmalion's invocations by animating the statue and metamorphosing marble into living flesh. Rousseau does alter the Ovidian text in two significant respects: his Pygmalion veils the statue in order to escape its disturbing and nefarious influence; and the setting itself is transposed from Cyprus to Tyre.

In contrast to the somewhat orthodox rendering of the myth itself, Rousseau's libretto is rich in philosophical content: a veritable constellation of themes is explored both directly and obliquely. There are passages which consider the doctrine of 'Mimesis'; others that are patently autobiographical and critical; many which consider questions of perception and judgement; and still others in which ontological and epistemological questions are considered. Thematic treatment is accomplished dramatically: Rousseau skilfully manipulates the eponymous artist's soliloquies so that Pygmalion's relationship with the inanimate statue becomes the focal point for the articulation and exploration of these themes.

later life in which he acknowledges that he had 'temporarily lost his reason at that point'. Rousseau himself describes the events in quite some detail in the 'Second Dialogue' from *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*. For a very detailed account of Rousseau's movements and encounters in England see Sir Gavin de Beer, *Quelques Considerations sur le séjour de Rousseau en Angleterre*, (Geneva: Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, 1955).

¹⁸ Mme d'Épinay, one of his named enemies, was successful in having Rousseau prevented from reading such extracts in public in 1771.

¹⁹ Cf. Robert J Ellrich, 'Rousseau's Androgynous Dream: the minor works of 1752-62', *French Forum*, V.13, pt3, (1988): 319-338 and Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la Transparence et l'Obstacle*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp.84-101 respectively.

That the writing of this work commenced shortly after the burning of *Emile* and Rousseau's expulsion from Paris, casts a long, dark shadow over those passages which are overtly critical and autobiographical. Not only was the bitter taste of injustice and failure fresh in Rousseau's mind, it was starting to consume him; already exhibiting paranoid tendencies, Rousseau would, eventually, be driven insane. The autobiographical content of *Pygmalion* is, as a result, omnipresent, although frequently one has to look very carefully to uncover it. Passages that are critical in nature, however, tend not to be hidden or disguised. And if one of Rousseau's intentions was to be overtly critical then he could not have chosen a more suitable vehicle: 'Pygmalion', as J L Carr observes, '... becomes a reflection of the author's own personality and a mouthpiece for his ideas.'²⁰ Rousseau seized such an opportunity, and using the words of the eponymous artist, voices, on more than one occasion, his disgust with the *milieu* he is exiled from, denouncing all the accoutrements of celebrity which had originally attracted him to Paris. Diderot, once his greatest friend whom he visited – with such momentous consequences as we saw in Chapter 2 – in the dungeon of Vincennes, does not escape Rousseau's censure either. Fortunately, enough has been written about the autobiographical significance of *Pygmalion* to render a more detailed discussion in the present context unnecessary.²¹ Nevertheless, the reader should keep in mind that the libretto's critical passages are for the most part rather thinly veiled.

5.1. The final reformatory steps: The *Pygmalion* Mechanism or the *Unité d'Expression*

Pygmalion is, *in primis*, an experimental work, and its structure represents an intrinsically compromised middle-ground between an idealistic form that Rousseau dubs *Mélodrame*,²² and contemporaneous operatic genres, such as *buffa*, *seria*, *comique* and *Tragédie Lyrique*. But *Pygmalion* is not an opera in the strict sense of the term: words and music do not share the same vertical score-space; they are rendered successively, diachronically. The monologues are, in fact, declaimed not sung and are entirely unaccompanied (unlike even the unfigured skeletal bass

²⁰ J L Carr, 'Pygmalion and the Philosophes', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23, (1974), p.255.

²¹ See especially Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la Transparence et l'Obstacle*, pp.84-101 and John Hummel's excellent comparative study of *Pygmalion* and the *Confessions* in 'Rousseau's *Pygmalion* and the *Confessions*,' *Neophilologus*, 56, (1972), pp.273-284.

²² Based upon the putative form, and mode of performance, of Greek Drama.

support of the recitative in scene six of *Le Devin du Village*), and the function of the orchestral *ritornelli* that precede and interpose, is to prepare the speech of the actor by ‘painting’ the atmosphere and setting the emotional mood. One could, of course, draw from this the conclusion that *Pygmalion* is merely monodrama with incidental music, rather like a ‘Musique de Scène’, but this, as we will see in a moment, would be to miss the point altogether. We may, however, provisionally conclude that *Pygmalion* is somewhat Janus-like, looking, as it does, backwards along the evolutionary path of opera in the direction of its agnate Greek Drama and forwards, in an unexplored direction, towards a future, more prosperous union of music and text. In purely formal terms, *Pygmalion* is designed, on the one hand, to rectify the mistakes instituted at the birth of opera by the Florentines, and on the other, to put into practice certain key elements of his aesthetic of opera. We shall now look at the elaboration of the form in a little more detail.

Rousseau’s first step is to sweep aside operatic convention and established forms: the aria – recitative paradigm is thus dissolved and replaced by the alternating framework of instrumental *ritornello* and declaimed soliloquy or monologue. Rousseau dubs this structural framework *Scène Lyrique*.²³ In all there are about eleven-and-a-half minutes worth of music (some 635 bars), which together with the disproportionately long monologues make the one-scene drama last approximately thirty-five minutes.²⁴ *Pygmalion* is, thus, notably short in comparison with many contemporaneous *intermezzi* or one-act works. The music itself consists of a three-part overture (the middle *andantino* is Rousseau’s) and twenty-six *ritournelli*, (of which the second is also Rousseau’s). The *ritournelli* are subject to extreme variations in length from the shortest (no.25) which is but 2 bars long, to several in excess of 30 bars. As Waerber has shown, there are two other aspects of musical interest here: first the variance in length of the *ritournelli* inhibits any musical or thematic development beyond simple repetition; second, that a large number of Coignet’s *ritournelli* avoid tonal closure, cadencing instead to a dominant, and not necessarily that

²³ I would suggest that the ‘*Lyrique*’ part of the form’s name refers to the Aristotelian taxonomy of literary genres, that is to say a genre which is uttered throughout in the first person. Until the denouement, when Galatea walks down from the pedestal and utters her three short lines, the form of the *Pygmalion*’s monologues is generally apostrophic.

²⁴ A performance in 1997 at the Conservatoire de Musique in Geneva that I was fortunate enough to attend lasted for about 40 minutes. Cf. Jacqueline Waerber, “J’ai imaginé un genre de drame”: une réflexion sur la partition musicale du mélodrame de *Pygmalion*’, *Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft*, Neue Folge, xviii, (1998), p.178 for a table of durations for each of the three parts of the overture and the 26 *ritournelli*.

of the home key.²⁵ On the first point, I would say that given the concept and mechanics of the work in general, and the function of the *ritournelli* in particular, thematic development is entirely superfluous; if the music's function is to prepare the declamatory passages of the actor; and given that across the span of the work (as we will see later in this chapter) there is considerable character development and plot advancement, what possible function would conventional musical development or motivic argument serve? Where the second point is concerned, I would concur with Waeber's view that the function of such tonal open-endedness is to bind each *ritournello* to its adjacent monologue and thus provide the work as a whole with some semblance of global unity.²⁶

The only detailed account of this form (we will note again that no mention is made of *Pygmalion* or *Scène Lyrique* in the *Dictionnaire de Musique*) appears in an obscure, apocryphal and somewhat sketchy paragraph from the *Fragments d'Observations sur l'Alceste Italien de M. Le Chevalier Gluck* (unfinished, 1774):

Persuadé que la Langue François, destituée de tout son accent, n'est nullement propre à la musique et principalement au récitatif, j'ai imaginé un genre de drame dans lequel les paroles et la musique, au lieu de marcher ensemble, se font entendre successivement, et où la phrase parlée est en quelque sorte annoncée et préparée par la phrase musicale. La scène de *Pygmalion* est un exemple de ce genre de composition, qui n'a pas eu d'imitateurs. En perfectionnant cette méthode on réuniroit le double avantage de soulager l'acteur par les fréquent repos, et d'offrir au spectateur François l'espèce de mélodrame le plus convenable à sa Langue. Cette réunion de l'art déclamatoire avec l'art musical ne produira qu'imparfaitement tous les effets du vrai récitatif, et les oreilles délicates s'apercevront toujours désagréablement du contraste qui règne entre le langage de l'acteur et celui de l'orchestre qui l'accompagne; mais un acteur sensible et intelligent, en rapprochant le ton de sa voix et l'accent de sa déclamation de ce qu'exprime le trait musical, mêle ses couleurs étrangères avec tant d'art; que le spectateur n'en peut discerner les nuances. Ainsi cette espèce d'ouvrage pourroit constituer un genre moyen entre la simple déclamation et le véritable mélodrame, dont il n'atteindra jamais la beauté.²⁷

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.158-160.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.160.

²⁷ Rousseau, *Fragments d'Observations sur l'Alceste Italien de M. Le Chevalier Gluck* in *Oeuvres*, t.11, pp.397-398. 'Persuaded that the French language, devoid of all accent, is not capable of being set to music and principally to recitative, I devised a type of drama in which words and music, instead of working together, are heard successively and one in which the spoken phrase is in some way announced and prepared by the musical phrase. *Pygmalion* is an example of this sort of composition that has not been followed. By improving this method, we would combine two advantages: give the actor frequent rests; provide French audiences with the most appropriate type of melodrama for their language. This reunion of the art of declamation and the art of music will produce imperfectly all the effects of true recitative and discerning audiences will always perceive the disagreeable contrast that reigns between the actor's language and that of the accompanying orchestra. But a sensitive and clever actor, by bringing the tone of his voice closer to the declamation that expresses the musical line, can mix his colours with such skill that an audience will not notice these nuances. Therefore, this type of work could constitute a sort of middle ground between simple declamation and true melodrama, but will never attain its beauty.' I have kept the italics of the original editor in order to show the reader that they are the words of Prévost who was

By now, most of what Rousseau describes in this fragment should be quite familiar: we can see the trace of *Récitatif Obligé*, the notion that the orchestra can supplement, and perhaps surpass, the speech of the actor; the *rapprochement* of melody and poetry in the quest for music *métrique*, and that this solution is designed specifically to overcome a peculiarly Francophone problem of diction, musical accent and prosody. In addition, Rousseau endeavours to stress the inevitability of his invention, as though he wanted the reader to grasp the fact that the form represented a logical step or a natural progression from earlier works and indeed from prior thinking. He makes explicit, therefore, the view that both song and recitative, as applied to the French language, are in the truest sense unrealisable, and that the *Scène Lyrique* mechanism represented the most appropriate type of *Mélodrame* for the French nation. Rousseau explains how, through the talent of the actor, the alternation and *rapprochement* of heightened speech and music might hint at, or perhaps faintly echo, the effects produced by the 'vrai récitatif' of the ancient Greeks. This point, in particular, intertexts neatly with the notion of a 'hypothetical language' or a single '*langue*' that we examined towards the end of the last chapter.

The general consanguinity of *Récitatif Obligé* and the *Pygmalion* mechanism is self-evident here: both operate on the sequential alternation of instrumental orchestral passage and text. There are, however, distinct evolutionary differences that distinguish them. In the former, the text is rendered as recitative, it aspires to and conforms to an outline melody and rhythmic pattern; the immediate melodic trajectory and metric delivery is predetermined by the composer and the recitative is accompanied, albeit minimally, by a skeletal continuo. In *Pygmalion*, the text is to be delivered in declamatory style without any visible or preordained reference to melody or rhythm, neither is it to be accompanied; on the most fundamental level the text is neither 'notated' nor is it indicated anywhere on the musical score. Rousseau thus relinquishes his grasp and control over the immediate melodic and rhythmic destiny of the text, and instead the onus is transferred to the actor who must exercise considerable, but unspecified, skill and sensitivity. The goal of both mechanisms is identical: to create and project to the spectator the illusion of a single, unified hypothetical *langue*, and, in a similar way, both mechanisms also seek to observe the

charged with transcribing Rousseau's notes. According to the editor, 'Prévost a supplié quelques passages ... dont le sens étoit resté suspendu, et qui sembloient point se lier avec le reste du discours.' Apparently, Rousseau's notes were transcribed by Prévost 'sous les yeux de M. Rousseau.'

doctrine of *Unité de Mélodie*. In *Le Devin* the mechanism allows the relaying of a single melodic line between the voice and the orchestra, and the skeletal accompaniment reinforces its delivery; in essence, the objective is to enhance and facilitate the expression of the emotional content of the text with and by way of the orchestra. In *Pygmalion* although song, recitative and musical accompaniment are entirely banished, the expression of the emotional content of the text is delivered through the alternating melodic line of the orchestra and the heightened declamation of the actor. To be sure, the gulf between the resultant (but unprescribed) trajectory of the voice and the fixed diatonic melodic trajectory of the orchestra is significant, but because the mechanism itself prevents the admixture of the two separate semiotic systems ultimately a single expressive 'line' is preserved, and highlighted, throughout without confusion, counterpoint or other expressive diversion. Perhaps it is more appropriate, where *Pygmalion* is concerned, to think that it not so much observes the *Unité de Mélodie*, but rather that the mechanism facilitates the observance of a '*Unité d'Expression*.' In essence, then, the singular importance of the *Pygmalion* mechanism is that it allows music and language to be – and operate as – discrete signifying entities.

Classifying the functional role and status of music within the *Pygmalion* mechanism is a problematic endeavour, since music seems to fulfil several functions at once, and occupies both primary and secondary echelons. In functional terms, music in *Pygmalion* is diegetic and non-diegetic, it is at once narratory and part and parcel of the expressing, signifying material. To be sure, it enhances and complements the staged action and, as we saw in Chapter 4, in combination with the décor allows the spectator to venture beyond what is immediately presented and concoct their own images and elaborate their own meanings, but it is also an integral part of that action; integral, for it is descriptive and narratory and its functional rôle resembles that of the chorus in Greek or Shakespearean tragedy. In addition, it facilitates supports and augments the potential expressivity – albeit in a dislocated manner – of the declamatory interventions of the actor. In terms of its relative status, music appears to be both prime mover and faithful servant to the overarching poetic and dramatic structure. It is subordinate to the poetic and decorative strands in the sense that it is there to announce each scene, set the atmosphere, prepare the declamation of the actor and depict the emotional and

psychological state of the sculptor. But it is a dominant force in the sense that the *ritournello*-monologue structure ascribes and enjoins a crucially important role for music: it is as if the voice of the actor cannot express quite enough and thus the orchestra must intervene, stand in as a sign of his emotion, and speak for him, supplementing his declamation with additional, more 'expressive' and articulate material. The orchestra thus becomes the rival of the actor, and ultimately may at various points assume control in the performance. *Pygmalion* unwittingly poses the question whether it is the words that set the agenda of the antecedent music, or the music that sets the tone of the words. Music in *Pygmalion* is, thus, a duplicitous double agent, like an Iago it acts as faithful servant to its counterparts, but all the while it may be calling the shots, determining the course and nature of the action from within and from without, and for its own selfish purposes.

Rousseau does not attempt to gloss over any of the form's evident shortcomings. He chooses instead to signal the unavoidable and undesirable fragmentation associated with alternating music and declamation:

Cette réunion de l'art déclamatoire avec l'art musical ne produira qu'imparfaitement tous les effets du vrai récitatif, et les oreilles délicates s'apercevront toujours désagréablement du contraste qui règne entre le langage de l'acteur et celui de l'orchestre qui l'accompagne.²⁸

It is this contrast, this endogenous fragmentation that renders the form somewhat refractory, and the testimony of Rousseau's collaborator – Horace Coignet – bears witness to the fact that this work is difficult to stage.²⁹ Having seen *Pygmalion* performed in its original form, I would certainly concur with both Coignet and Rousseau's sentiments. It is not that the work necessarily challenges the limits of the audience's credulity, rather, that during each *ritournello* the dramatic flow is interrupted to such a degree that the tension, suspense and power of the libretto is momentarily diminished or at best suspended or deferred. It is somewhat akin to watching a film on television that is broken on numerous occasions by intrusive advertisements; the

²⁸ 'This reunion of the art of declamation and the art of music will produce imperfectly all the effects of true recitative and discerning audiences will always perceive the disagreeable contrast that reigns between the actor's language and that of the accompanying orchestra.'

²⁹ Rousseau, *Correspondance Complètes*, pp.150-153. 'Je n'aurois pas besoin de les indiquer [les ritournelles] à quiconque verra ou entendra cet ouvrage; mais comme tout le monde ne sera pas à portée d'en juger, par la difficulté de représenter ce spectacle.'

atmosphere is, almost always, irretrievably shattered and what is outside begins to be subsumed within the global aesthetic experience. Add to this the expressive anaemia of Coignet's compositional efforts and one has a recipe for, at best, a second-rate *ouvrage*. In short, the concept is intriguing, but its realisation is somewhat unfulfilling.

5.2. The question of collaboration and authorship

Although, in terms of the overall length of the drama, the orchestra remains silent for almost two-thirds of the work, the authorship of the music has been surrounded by controversy since the first performance in Lyon 1770. Authorship was contested by Rousseau's collaborator Horace Coignet and has been vigorously debated by Rousseau scholars. Somewhat characteristically, Rousseau's commentary on this matter is conspicuous by its absence, leaving sufficient scope for hypothesis and speculation from many quarters to flourish. I do not, in the present context, wish to become embroiled in a discussion about the problems associated with establishing authorship, nor do I wish to examine folios of speculative opinion; it would not be pertinent, important nor beneficial to the present argument.³⁰ What I shall discuss, however, are the generally accepted facts concerning the composition and early performance history of *Pygmalion* that do have some bearing upon the formal innovations of the *Scène Lyrique* mechanism itself. What follows below is, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive and up-to-date conspectus to appear in English.

We know that the bulk of the libretto was written during the summer and autumn of 1762 following Rousseau's flight from Paris, and that it received its first private reading on November 17 of that year.³¹ It has been suggested that some sections could have been drafted even earlier, 'dating', as Hummel speculates, 'from ... a less tumultuous time,'³² but as Hummel eventually

³⁰ For a 'fly-on-the-wall' perspective of the various theories and counter-theories put forward see the debate in Edgar Istel, 'La partition originale du *Pygmalion* de Jean-Jacques Rousseau', *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, t, I (1905), p.141; Albert Jansen, 'La question du *Pygmalion* de Berlin: Objections de M. Albert Jansen', *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, t.III, (1907), p.119-129; Charles Malherbe, 'La question de *Pygmalion* de Berlin: Objections de M. Charles Malherbe', *Op. Cit.*, pp.129-145 And Istel, 'La question du *Pygmalion* de Berlin: Répliques de M. Istel', *Op. Cit.* pp. 146-155. The most complete, and up-to-date, investigations have been carried out by Jacqueline Waeber in '*Pygmalion* et J J Rousseau' and Emilio Sala in *Rousseau-Coignet: Pygmalion, Sografti-Cimador: Pimmatione*, Sala, E, ed. Drammaturgia musicale veneta, 22. (Milan: Ricordi, 1996).

³¹ Cf. Istel, 'La partition originale du *Pygmalion* de Jean-Jacques Rousseau', p.141.

³² John Hummel, 'Rousseau's *Pygmalion* and the *Confessions*,' p. 273.

concedes, this cannot be substantiated. What we can be certain of, however – and this is crucially important – is that Rousseau penned the libretto without composing a single bar of music. Certainty is provided by the dearth of information concerning *Pygmalion* in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* (a work which Rousseau finally completed in 1764)³³ and in the *Confessions*. In fact, the *Dictionnaire* makes no mention of *Pygmalion* at all, nor is there any reference or article concerning ‘Scène Lyrique’, or ‘Mélodrame’. Even when, in the entry ‘Recitatif Obligé’, Rousseau clearly describes the device of which *Pygmalion* would become in one respect the formal paradigm, he uses, as we saw in Chapter 4, an example taken from *Le Devin du Village* and not from *Pygmalion* itself:

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. [...] L’on a taché d’en donner quelque idée dans une scène du *Devin du Village* [...].³⁴

From this we may conclude that Rousseau had not composed any music for the work, at least until the *Dictionnaire* had been completed and published, nor had he thought about doing so. Now what this patently does not mean is that the text was conceived to be merely a text, a *pièce de théâtre* in isolation. We have, in fact, incontrovertible evidence to indicate that Rousseau had carefully planned precisely where he wanted each *ritournello* to interpose: on the autograph manuscript of the libretto (Ms N) there are twenty crosses in Rousseau’s hand indicating the position of each musical interjection and in two particular cases instrumentation and a dynamic marking are specified.³⁵ Additional corroboration is provided by a letter (dated 21 January 1763) sent to Dr. Johann Georg Zimmermann by Rousseau’s friend Julie von Bondelli, in which is recounted Rousseau’s *lecture* of *Pygmalion* to his friend Nicolas-Antoine Kirchberger:

³³ Cf. Letter dated 18 September 1764, in Pierre-Paul Plan *Table de la Correspondance Générale de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. B. Gagnebin (Genève: E. Droz, 1953), XX-XXI). Rousseau had, in fact, worked on and off on the *Dictionnaire* for about sixteen years.

³⁴ Rousseau, ‘Recitatif obligé’ in *Dictionnaire*, t.13, p.138 (my italics). ‘The actor, feverish, transported by a passion that does not permit him say everything, breaks off, pauses, reflects upon his situation, during which time the orchestra speaks for him; these silences filled in this way affect the listener infinitely more than if the actor had himself uttered all that which the orchestra had expressed ... I endeavoured to demonstrate this is a scene in *Le Devin du Village*.’ The scene in question is number 6, between Colin and Colinette and is entitled ‘Recitatif Obligé’. It lasts for just 41 bars and contains no accompaniment save a skeletal continuo that is unfigured. See Chapter 4 and also Appendix Item 3.

³⁵ At cross 17 is indicated ‘Accords Basson’ and at cross 18 is indicated ‘flutes calme.’ Cf. *Rousseau-Coignet: Pygmalion, Sogrofi-Cimador: Pimmalione*, Sala, E, (ed.) *Drammaturgia musicale veneta*, 22. (Milan: Ricordi, 1996). p.LXXXIII. See Appendix Item 4.

Je reviens de Berne, j'y ai passé deux jours, une entrevue de 2 heures avec M K[irchbergher] fait la raison de ma lettre, il m'a raconté des anecdotes de R[ousseau]. [...]. R. a lu K une petite pièce admirable, c'est un drame, un seul acte, une seule scène, un seul personnage qui est Pigmalion. Le théâtre représente un atelier, nombres de statues à différents degrés de travail, celle de Galathée couvert d'un voile. Pigmalion se met à l'ouvrage, chaque statue a un coup de ciseau, l'agitation graduelle l'empêche de s'attacher à aucune, celle de Galathée la redouble, il craint de gâter en voulant perfectionner, [le] trouble augmente, il est hors de lui, les Dieux en ont pitié et Galathée saute en bas de son piédestal et ne dit que trois mots qui finissent la pièce, ces trois mots sont forts, mais ils les falloient tels dit R. parce qu'ils finissent et qu'elle ne dit que cela, il vouloit envoyer cela en forme de Lettre à Métastase. Pendant la lecture K transporté dit tout haut, 'ici l'orchestre', ah Mons^r, n'écoutes pas l'orchestre!³⁶

It is clear, then, that the *Pygmalion* text was always destined to be a libretto, an integrated part of a musico-dramatic work, rather than merely a *pièce de théâtre*. As Alain Cernushui puts it,

Pygmalion n'est pas qu'une production littéraire ... Rousseau a conçu une action scénique précise sur laquelle s'articulent les paroles de Pygmalion ; les moments où la musique s'intercale sont également prévus.³⁷

Thus Rousseau had conceptualised music's role within the work; he had devised the mechanism, and the libretto had been drafted and designed accordingly.

Rousseau and Coignet's collaboration is extremely difficult to chronicle, not least because Rousseau never mentions nor addresses Coignet directly in any of his writings or correspondence. Horace Coignet liked to think of himself as a composer and a violinist, but was in fact a fabrics designer and later became a dealer in embroideries in Lyon. Coignet claims to have met Rousseau at a concert on 13 April 1770 in Lyon, where following an introduction, Rousseau proposed that he set music to his *Pygmalion*, 'dans le genre de la mélopée des Grecs'³⁸.

³⁶ Rousseau, *Correspondance Complètes*, xv, n° 2445; 'I have just returned from Bern where I spent two days, the reason for my writing is a meeting I had with M. K[irchberger] where I was told some anecdotes about R[ousseau]. R read K an admirable play, a drama, a single scene, a single character - Pigmalion. The theatre represents a studio, numerous statues at various stages of completion, that of Galatea is covered with a veil. Pigmalion starts to work... each statue receives a blow from his chisel... a heightening state of emotion prevents him from remaining with any one of them... he returns to Galatea, he fears that he may spoil her by trying to perfect her... his emotional torment increases, he is beyond himself... the gods take pity on him and Galatea leaps from the pedestal and utters but three words that conclude the play. Her three words are powerful, but they needed to be for they end the play and that is all she utters. He [Rousseau] wanted to send this in the form of a letter to Metastasio. While he was reading, K got carried away and said very loudly "here's the Orchestra", do not listen to the orchestral'

³⁷ Alain Cernushi, 'La Musique Projetée dans *Pygmalion*' *Equinoxe*, 9, (1993), p.40. 'Pygmalion is not only a literary production ... Rousseau conceived a precise dramatic scene in which the words of Pygmalion are articulated; the moments where the music interposes are similarly planned.'

³⁸ A. Mahul, *Annuaire Chronologique ... de 1821*, (Paris: 1882), p.123.

Je fis la connoissance [de Rousseau] au grand concert de cette ville [...], on y exécutait le Stabat de Pergolèse. Je montai avec empressement pour le voir. Il étoit assis sur une banquette placée en arrière. M. de Fleurieux me fit signe d'approcher; en même temps il disoit à Rousseau que j'étois un amateur, bon lecteur, et que j'exécuterois bien sa musique. Moi, je lui dis que je voulois lui montrer quelque chose de ma composition pour le soumettre à son jugement, sur quoi il me répartit qu'il n'étoit pas louangeur. Il me donna rendez-vous chez lui, pour le lendemain, à deux heures après-midi. [...] À mon arrivé, [...] la conversation roula sur l'harmonie; je lui dis que j'avois son *Dictionnaire*, et il parut s'intéresser à moi. Bientôt, me trouvant seule avec lui, je lui chantai l'Ouverture de mon Opéra [*Le médecin d'amour*]. Ma manière lui plut, il me dit avec feu: 'c'est cela, vous y êtes.' [Deux jours plus tard], il me proposa dîner avec lui. [...] Après le dîner il me communiqua son *Pygmalion*, et me proposa de le mettre en musique, dans le genre de la mélopée des Grecs.

[...] Chargé de sa scène lyrique, [...] je composai de suite l'ouverture qui je lui apportai le lendemain: il fut étonné de ma facilité. Enfin, je terminai l'ouvrage à sa satisfaction. Il me demanda de lui laisser faire l'andante, entre l'ouverture et le presto, de même que la ritournelle des coups de marteau, pour qu'il y eût quelque chose de lui dans cette musique.³⁹

Coignet's testimony must, however, be treated with some caution: not only was his account written some fifty years subsequent to the event, but the first private performance of *Pygmalion* (with Coignet's music) was given at the Hôtel de Ville on April 19. This means that in order for a reasonable performance of the completed work to have been given, Coignet would have been required to compose two numbers for the overture, twenty-four *ritornelli* of variable length, write out all the parts, gather together a suitable ensemble of musicians and organise a sufficient amount of rehearsal time. Moreover, given the fact that the nature of the work itself would have been unfamiliar and indeed problematic to both the actors and the musicians, Coignet would have needed to accomplish all such tasks in just six days. Should we assume, therefore, that Coignet was mistaken about the exact date of their meeting? The problem with that assumption is that the possible margin of error is not as significant as one might imagine, because the earliest

³⁹ *Ibid.* pp.123-124. 'I made Rousseau's acquaintance at the main concert hall in Lyon where Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* was being performed. I rushed up to meet him. He sat on a bench towards the back. M. de Fleurieux signalled to me that I should approach; at the same time he was telling Rousseau that I was an amateur, a good reader, and that I would execute his music well. For my part, I said to him that I wanted to show him a composition of mine so that he could judge for himself, to which he replied that he was not one to hand out praise. He gave me an appointment for the following day at two o'clock in the afternoon. [...] When I arrived, [...] the conversation revolved around harmony; I told him that I had his *Dictionnaire* and he seemed interested in me. Soon, finding myself alone with him, I sang the overture of my opera [*Le médecin d'amour*]. My style pleased him, and he said to me with ardour: 'That's it, you've got it.' [Two days later] he invited me to dine with him. [...] After dinner he told me about *Pygmalion* and asked me to set it to music in style of Greek recitative. [...] With his *Scène Lyrique* in hand, [...] I immediately composed the overture which I took to him the following day: he was surprised at my ability. Finally, I completed the work to his satisfaction. He asked me to let him do the andante, between the overture and the presto, as well as the ritournello of the hammer blows, so that there was something of his music in the work.'

Coignet could have met Rousseau was on 10 April – the date of Rousseau's arrival in Lyon. I would suggest that three additional days would not have made any significant difference to the enormity of Coignet's task.

There is, of course, another explanation: it is possible that Coignet could have composed at least some of the music at an earlier time – I am thinking here in particular about the overture.⁴⁰ Although his overture is far from being one of the finest examples of its genre, it is considerably more polished in its construction than the *ritornelli* and this would seem to suggest that more time and effort had been spent in its composition. The overture – excluding Rousseau's *andantino* – accounts for some 45% of the entire work, or as many as 250 bars; the *ritornelli*, by comparison, extend to just 320 bars. If Coignet had already composed the overture it certainly would have made his task more straightforward. It also renders his claim that the music was *satisfactorily* completed in just six days seem far more plausible. In the absence of certitude, it is in my view by far the most logical and credible explanation.

Pygmalion received its first 'public' performances in early May 1770 – the very first took place in Lyon at the home of his hostess, Mme. Boy de la Tour, with whom Rousseau spent approximately seven weeks (18 April - 8 June). Fortunately, there is no shortage of commentary regarding these early performances, and in order to build up a picture of both how the authorship came to be first contested and the early reception of the work, I shall examine several accounts below.

Two somewhat cursory reports of *Pygmalion* appear in Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*, the second of which is most illuminating because it describes the manner in which the drama had been staged. Although, as is evident from the incorrect appellation 'petit opéra,' Grimm was relying on second-hand information for his report, for he had not yet seen the work performed:

Depuis environ six mois que J J Rousseau a eu la permission de venir paisiblement à Paris, on a parlé quelquefois de son petit opéra de Pygmalion, joué sur le théâtre de Lyon à son passage par cette ville et essayé ici sur quelques théâtres de société. Je n'ai pas entendu parler de l'effet qu'il produit au théâtre.

⁴⁰ Jacqueline Waeber, *Pygmalion*, p.34 (and p.150 'J'ai imagine un genre de drame.') also alludes to this possibility.

Vous êtes déjà prévenu que Pygmalion ne chante point, mais il parle et récite, et que la musique n'est employée que pour couper par différents ritournelles le discours de l'acteur et pour exprimer son action ainsi que les divers mouvements dont il est agité.⁴¹

The problem was that the press – of which the *Mercure de France* proved the major culprit – assumed, largely upon the say-so of ‘un voyageur Anglais,’⁴² that Rousseau was author of the libretto and composer of the music. Not one shred of evidence materialised to suggest otherwise, nor would Rousseau himself declare the contrary. It is at this point that authorship was first contested publicly. Horace Coignet would claim that he had been informally engaged by Rousseau to compose the musical numbers for the *Scène Lyrique* in 1770, and, under Rousseau's direction, had completed the task satisfactorily.⁴³ The complete work – Rousseau's libretto and Coignet's music – was given, ‘privately’, in Paris in the autumn of 1770, at Mme de Brionne's residence, no doubt one of the *théâtres de société* that Grimm had written of. But still there was not any mention of Coignet's collaboration and yet again the *Mercure de France* attributed both the libretto and the music to Rousseau.

Two further accounts of *Pygmalion* appear in print before the end of 1770. The first, in Bachaumont's *Mémoires Secrets*, dated 7 July, does not mention Coignet by name, but instead refers simply and anonymously to a ‘musicien de Lyon.’⁴⁴ The second account, appearing in the *Mercure* during November, alludes to a certain artist, John Constable (our ‘voyageur Anglais’), who had apparently seen *Pygmalion* performed during a short sojourn in Lyon. The article's author evidently believed the words and music to be the sole work of Rousseau.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Coignet sought to rectify this apparent injustice in a vigorously argued letter to the *Mercure*'s editor. Incidentally, Coignet's testimony provides further clues to *Pygmalion*'s unusual structure and mode of performance:

⁴¹ Grimm, *Correspondance Littéraire*, t.IX, p.238, ‘During the six months that Rousseau has had permission to return to Paris without fear of reprisal, we have sometimes spoken of his little opera *Pygmalion* performed in Lyon during his stay there and tried out here in a few private theatres. I have not heard any mention of the effect that it produces in the theatre. As you already know, *Pygmalion* does not sing, but he speaks and recites and the music is only used to break, with different *ritournelli*, the actor's words and to express his gestures and his various emotions with which he is stirred.’

⁴² *Mercure de France*, Novembre 1770, p.124. ‘An English traveller’

⁴³ In the first of several letters to *Mercure de France*, dated January 1771, Coignet writes: ‘[Rousseau] paru content de mes efforts.’

⁴⁴ Bachaumont, *Mémoires Secrets*, (London: John Adamson, 1777), vol. V, pp.164-65

⁴⁵ ‘Selon lui les paroles et la musique, qui sont du même auteur, sont également sublimes.’

... ce n'est point un Opéra, il [Rousseau] l'a intitulé, Scène Lyrique. Les paroles ne chantent point, et la musique ne sert qu'à remplir les intervalles des repos nécessaires à la déclamation ... Je dois, cependant, à l'exacte vérité d'annoncer, que dans les vingt-six ritournelles qui composent la musique de ce drame, il y en a deux que M. Rousseau a faites lui-même. Je n'aurois pas besoin de les indiquer à quiconque verra ou entendra cet ouvrage; mais comme tout le monde ne sera pas à portée d'en juger, par la difficulté de représenter ce spectacle, je déclare que l'andante de l'Ouverture et que le premier morceau de l'interlocution qui caractérise le travail de Pygmalion appartiennent à M. Rousseau [...].⁴⁶

Rousseau did not trouble himself by replying to Coignet's letter, and remained silent on the matter. But the plot thickens. Curious as it may seem, and as Albert Jansen reminds the reader, there is not a single mention of Horace Coignet in any of Rousseau's writings, nor is there any authenticated evidence to suggest that their paths had ever crossed.⁴⁷ R A Leigh does, however, point to the possibility of some correspondence having taken place between the two men, though all that is extant is a remark, by Coignet, stating that Rousseau replied to a letter, '... en l'exhortant à cultiver les talents que la nature lui [Coignet] a donné.'⁴⁸ Indeed, as Leigh goes on to point out, 'les originaux de toutes les lettres adressées par JJ à Coignet ont été détruites pendant la Révolution, de même que les manuscrits de toutes les compositions musicales de Coignet.'⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Coignet had the work (Rousseau's libretto, his music) printed, in Lyon and Paris, on at least two separate occasions between 1770 and 1771. And it is one of these – an original 'Castaud' edition of the parts printed in Lyon at Coignet's expense which was believed lost or probably destroyed during the Revolution – that was recently found in the Bibliothèque Livrée Ceccano in Avignon.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Extract from Horace Coignet's letter to the *Mercur de France* dated 26th November 1770, cited in Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera*, (London: John Calder, 1978), pp.310-312. A full transcription of this letter (Horace Coignet à Jacques Lacombe) can be found in Rousseau, *Correspondance Complète*, (ed.) Leigh, no.6816, pp.150-153. '... it is not an opera, he [Rousseau] entitled it, a lyrical scene. The words are not sung and the music serves only to fill the rests necessary for the declamation ... I must, however, for the sake of the truth announce, that of the twenty-six ritournelli that make up the music of the drama, there are two which Rousseau composed himself. I would not need to point out which ones they are to whoever sees or hears this work. But as not everybody will be able to judge for themselves by the difficulty of staging this work, I declare that the andante of the overture and the first number that characterises Pygmalion's work belong to Rousseau [...].' As Jacqueline Waeber, "'J'ai imaginé un genre de drame'", p.150 has shown, Rousseau's 'andantino' of the overture was in fact the 'Air des Songes' – the 'acte Hésiode' that we encountered in Chapter 1 – from *Les Muses Galantes* (1744).

⁴⁷ Albert Jansen, 'La question du *Pygmalion* de Berlin: Objections de M Albert Jansen', pp.127-8 Endnote. Leigh (ed.), *Op Cit* p.163

⁴⁸ Leigh (ed.) *Op. Cit.*, p.163. '... urging him to cultivate the talent that nature had given him.'

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.163. 'The originals of all Rousseau's letters addressed to Coignet, as well the manuscript copies of Coignet's compositions were destroyed during the Revolution.' Of course, Leigh was not to know that an example of the latter would eventually be discovered.

⁵⁰ This Castaud edition along with the Ms N autograph forms the basis of a new edition of the score edited by Jacqueline Waeber as *Pygmalion, Scène Lyrique*, (Geneva: Université-Conservatoire de Musique, 1997).

In light of the problems concerning authorship, it is perhaps then a great irony that Rousseau's libretto spawned such a large number of unauthorised editions both in France and across Europe in translation, with music by a host of different composers. There is the rather curious situation that whilst the first truly public performance of *Pygmalion* in France was given at the *Comédie Française* as late as 30 October 1775, an incarnation of Rousseau's *Scène Lyrique*, with music written by a little known Austrian Composer Franz Aspelmeyer, had already received its Viennese première in German translation to great acclaim three years previously, on 19 and 22 February 1772. In February 1773, *Pygmalion* was performed for the first time in Italian translation in Naples. In 1780, yet another version of *Pygmalion* was given at the *Comédie Française* with new music composed by the then *Chef d'Orchestre* M. Baudron, and in 1822, Plantade recast the music for *Les Cercles des Arts*.

Given the proliferation of unauthorised eighteenth-century scores and accounts of the work's reception, it is somewhat surprising that, until recently, studies of *Pygmalion* have tended to avoid the issue of form and indeed the analysis of the work as a whole dramatic unit (music and text).⁵¹ For the most part, scholars have focused upon either autobiographical issues or the hermeneutic challenges posed by the libretto. This lack of attention can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the work was a collaborative enterprise, and thus of little value *per se* to Rousseau scholars – particularly those from non-musicological disciplines – beyond Rousseau's own creative input.⁵² Yet even some eminent musicologists have been unwilling to engage directly with the implications of the work. Arnold Whittall's view, for example, is that the work's intrinsic value and significance is diminished since it is the fruit of collaboration: 'As far as *Pygmalion* is concerned', Whittall suggests, 'the importance of such a peripheral, hybrid form has been much exaggerated, particularly as Rousseau himself wrote only two of the twenty-six *ritournelles* in the

⁵¹ For a reasonably detailed musical analysis of the *ritournelli*, see Waeber, "J'ai imagine un genre de drame", pp.147-178 and Emilio Sala (ed.) *Rousseau-Coignet: Pygmalion*. For a detailed discussion of form, see Alain Cernushi, 'La Musique Projetée dans *Pygmalion*' *Equinoxe*, 9, (1993), pp.37-55.

⁵² Jacqueline Waeber, "J'ai imagine un genre de drame." p.147, attributes the lack of scholarly interest to the poor quality of the music and its rarity. To an extent I agree with Waeber, although I would suggest that the extraordinary popularity of the form itself in the years following the first performances and indeed its influence in the longer term, renders such a conclusion somewhat beside the point.

work.⁵³ Although I would concede that the collaborative nature of the *Scène Lyrique* would undermine any analytical strategy that sought to illuminate aspects of Rousseau's musical vocabulary as exemplified by *Pygmalion*,⁵⁴ it does not hinder nor render invalid a discussion of the work's form and its communicative effect as a whole. Because, as we have already seen, the autograph manuscript of the *Pygmalion* libretto (Ms N) proves beyond question that Rousseau had already conceived the eventual role that music was to play in the *Scène Lyrique* at the time of its writing. Consequently, that not a single bar of music was composed at the time of its drafting, that substantial sections of music have their sources in earlier, and non-related works and are the work of two individuals; has no real impact upon the work's form and aesthetic status. Because the *Pygmalion* mechanism – this first melodrama – was Rousseau's invention.

Nevertheless, several puzzling questions do persist: why was it that Rousseau did not compose the musical sections of the work himself, entrusting instead the bulk of the composition to Horace Coignet, an amateur composer distinguished only by his anonymity; would not *Pygmalion* have represented the perfect opportunity for Rousseau to demonstrate his compositional prowess, put his theoretical postulations into practice, and demonstrate to his enemies that the *Scène Lyrique* was the only suitable musico-dramatic mechanism for Francophones; did he not have sufficient time in which to complete the composition; did he not feel capable of composing the music himself?

Given the fact that the best part of eight years separates the writing of the libretto and the first performance of the *Scène Lyrique*, I would suggest that timescale is unlikely to have played a role. As far as the question whether Rousseau did not believe he was capable of composing the music, the success and longevity of *Le Devin du Village* demonstrates that Rousseau must certainly have possessed the requisite ability as composer and dramaturge.⁵⁵ My gut feeling is this: as Rousseau notes, the work was an experiment born out of imperfection and would always remain an

⁵³ Arnold Whittall, 'Rousseau and the Scope of Opera', *Music And Letters*, 45, (1964), p.372. We should also note for the sake of accuracy that Rousseau in fact wrote the middle section of the 'Ouverture' and the second ritournello that accompanies Pygmalion's 'chisel work.' See Appendix Items 6 and 7.

⁵⁴ Indeed we know that the 'Andantino' of the overture was adapted from *Les Muses Galantes* (see note 47 above), so any such analysis would be founded upon the evidence provided by a single ritournello.

⁵⁵ *Le Devin du Village* remained on the Opéra's repertoire for some seventy years and enjoyed nearly 500 performances.

unsatisfactory compromise; furthermore, it suggests that Rousseau had little enthusiasm or appetite for the work, at least as far as its musico-dramatic realisation or eventual performance was concerned. In this sense, it was simply immaterial who composed the music, almost anything would suffice; indeed, Rousseau's decision to use the 'Air des Songes' from *Les Muses Galantes* as the basis for the middle section of the overture, merely adds weight to this conclusion. I suspect that Rousseau wanted, above all else, his *Scène Lyrique* to appear real – he wished the art, the artifice to be invisible, transparent. In an ideal world, the passage from *ritournello* to declamation and back again would have been seamless, undetectable and indeed unnecessary, but then again in an ideal world there would be no distinction between music and speech – there would only have been 'du vrai récitatif'. The French language, in Rousseau's words devoid of all accent and unsuited to musical setting, made such aspirations unattainable and thus striving to achieve them seemed somewhat pointless and absurd.

5.3. The recourse to Myth: the *Fiction ou Morceau Allégorique sur la Révélation*

That Rousseau selected a fashionable, even hackneyed, myth⁵⁶ as the subject for his 'Scène Lyrique', may seem, at first glance, surprising. In Chapter 4, we saw how Rousseau had condemned the Florentine inventors of opera for having abstracted theatrical representation to the realm of the supernatural and the mythical; how he had argued for a more naturalistic approach to scenography and *mise en scène*, how he had railed against the seemingly insatiable appetite for *le merveilleux* and spectacular *décors*; and, as this sagittal jibe illustrates, how he viewed the abuse of the ubiquitous *Deus ex Machina*.

... comme il n'y avoit point d'intrigue qu'on ne dénouât facilement à l'aide de quelque dieu, le spectateur, qui connoissoit tout le pouvoir du poète, se reposoit tranquillement sur lui du soin de tirer ses héros des plus grands dangers.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ J L Carr, 'Pygmalion and the *Philosophes*', pp.239-244, discusses about twenty eighteenth-century incarnations of the *Pygmalion* myth, ranging from La Motte's 1700 version, Desland's of 1740, Rousseau's of 1762, Voltaire's of 1770 and states that a comic tradition flourished during the century too.

⁵⁷ Rousseau, 'Opéra' in *Dictionnaire*, in *Œuvres*, t.13, p.42. 'As every plot could easily be resolved with the help of some god or other, the spectator, knowing the capabilities of the poet, put his faith in him to spare his heroes from situations of the gravest danger.'

Rousseau's apparent volte-face is, however, a mirage, and should not be regarded as an index of substantive change in his thinking. We know for example that mythology, and in particular Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, constituted some of his earliest reading⁵⁸ and that Rousseau was not merely an avid reader of mythology since a significant proportion of his dramatic works have myths or mythological characters for their subject matter.⁵⁹ We may, as a consequence, speculate that Rousseau had always been interested in the putative universality and the 'truth' of mythology just as much as he was enamoured with the quality of their intrigues and the dramatic potential of their plots.

Rousseau's first 'artistic' foray into classical mythology was with *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même* (written 1730; first performed in 1752; published 1753). *Narcisse* is very much an immature work and one which Rousseau himself found particularly embarrassing, though he did manage to find the courage to have it published later. When the work was performed, Rousseau was so disgusted with the result that he left the theatre before the end of the performance and publicly apologised for its mediocrity.⁶⁰ It was, however, with the more mature *Fiction ou Morceau Allégorique sur la Révélation*⁶¹ that Rousseau would explore fully the dramatic possibilities myth or pseudo-myth provide. The *Morceau Allégorique*, though not a rendering or interpretation of a traditional myth, bears all the hallmarks of mythology: the characters are engineered to be archetypes; it is replete with religious symbolism and allusion, which, as Jean Starobinski rather unsympathetically contends, is '...assez traditionnel ... si naïve et si peu originale';⁶² and the main theme is the revelation of an absolute truth or, put in classical terms, of an imperceptible or abstract reality. My interest in the *Morceau Allégorique* is, in the present context, three-fold. First, as Starobinski has shown, there are distinct similarities between the *Morceau* and Rousseau's

⁵⁸ Cf. Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.20.

⁵⁹ Among the less well known works are: *Ipbis and Anaxaretes*, *Lucrece*, *Daphne et Chloé*. Also, as we saw in Chapter One, Ovid was subject of the second act of Rousseau's Opéra-Ballet *Les Muses Galantes* (1743).

⁶⁰ Cf. Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.68, 'I was so bored at the first performance that I could not stay to the end. On leaving the theatre, I went into the Café de Procope, where I found Boissy and a few others, who had probably been as bored as I. There I said my *peccavi* aloud, humbly or proudly confessing myself the author of the play and saying of it what everyone else was thinking.' See Paul de Man. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke & Proust*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) for a discussion of the symbolic and allegorical nature of this work.

⁶¹ Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, (Paris: Bibliothèque de Pléiade, 1959-), Vol. IV, pp.1044-1054.

⁶² Jean Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'Obstacle*, p. 84, '... traditional ... naive and of little originality.'

rendering of *Pygmalion*, on the most fundamental level they both employ a veil as both theatrical sign and dramatic action. Second, in both works, Rousseau explores strikingly similar questions of perception and judgement, and indeed he examines the role played by the perceiver's imagination, the perceiver's *reading* of the statues. And third, both works are resolved by the intervention of a divine presence: in the *Morceau* by Christ and in *Pygmalion*, by Venus. Beyond these reasons, I would suggest that a reading of the *Morceau Allégorique* is essential in order to develop an understanding of the aesthetic concepts and logic at work in *Pygmalion*. Since Starobinski's commentary is, to my knowledge, the only critical assessment of the *Morceau* to date, I have, in what follows, assimilated it to my own reading, whilst developing and expanding upon it.

The *Morceau Allégorique* ends with a philosophical reverie, 'un songe extraordinaire.'⁶³ The philosopher finds himself in the middle of an enormous dome-shaped temple, a structure that is supported by seven colossal statues – the seven deadly sins representing the corruption of mankind:

Seen from up close, these statues were deformed and horrible to look at, but through skilful artifice and the use of perspective looked different when viewed from the centre of the building, where they seemed to present a charming picture to the eye.⁶⁴

Each statue is different, in both posture and symbolism. One holds a mirror and represents vanity; another greedily drinks molten gold; yet another is shameless and depraved:

In the centre of the building is an altar, upon which stands an eighth statue, to which the whole edifice is consecrated. The statue is always concealed and wrapped in an impenetrable veil. She was perpetually served by the people but never seen. Her worshippers painted her in their own imaginations in accordance with their own characters and passions. The more imaginary the object of this worship, the more devoted the worshipper, who saw none other than his hearts idol behind the mysterious veil. The altar which stood in the middle of the temple, could barely be made out through thick clouds of incense that went straight to the head and clouded the mind. While the vulgar saw nothing but phantoms concocted by wild imagination, the more tranquil philosopher saw enough to judge what he could not make out. Around this

⁶³ Rousseau, 'Morceau', *Oeuvres Complètes*, p.1048.

⁶⁴ Rousseau, *Loc. Cit.*, translated in Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, English transl. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.65.

terrible altar were the instruments of a continuous carnage. He looked with horror upon the monstrous mixture of murder and prostitution.

They first blindfolded anyone who wished to enter the temple. After taking their victims off into a corner of the sanctuary, the priests permitted them to use their eyes again, but only after all the objects in the temple had conspired to create an effect of fascination. If someone attempted to remove his blindfold while in transit, the priests pronounced some words over him to make him seem monstrous to the others, until, abhorred by all and a stranger even to his own kin, he was torn apart by the whole assembly.⁶⁵

Rousseau introduces three characters, who, in turn, try to 'liberate' the congregation, and thus put an end to the lie:

This man, whose demeanour was grave and serious, did not go on to the altar himself but by subtly shifting the blindfolds of those who were being led there, and without causing any obvious disturbance, he restored their sight.⁶⁶

The first man is immediately seized by the ministers of the temple 'to the unanimous acclaim of the blinded herd.' The second man, (clearly Socrates, for he will be forced to drink hemlock and before dying will contemplate immortality of the soul) is more daring and actually unveils the statue:

Bounding nimbly onto the altar, he boldly uncovered the statue and exposed it to general view. Painted on its face were expressions of ecstasy mixed with rage. It trampled on a figure representing mankind, but its eyes turned tenderly toward heaven ... This vision made the philosopher tremble, but the spectators, far from being repelled, saw not a look of cruelty but only heavenly ardour, and felt even more zealous toward the uncovered statue than they had before its true face was revealed.⁶⁷

The statue is unveiled and its face exposed, but the evil has not yet been abolished. The third character, labelled the 'son of man' by Rousseau now enters:

'O, my children!' he says, with a tenderness that penetrates the soul, 'I come to expiate and heal your errors. Love Him who loves you and know Him who exists.' Then, seizing the statue, he effortlessly topples it, and, calmly climbing onto the pedestal, he seems to be assuming his rightful place there rather than usurping that of another [...] To hear him once was enough to admire him always. One sensed that the language of truth cost him nothing because he held its source within himself.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.66-67.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.70.

The evil has now been completely abolished and the 'son of man' figure restored to his 'rightful' position atop the pedestal.

The similarities between *Pygmalion* and the *Morceau Allégorique* suggest that the underlying theme connecting both – the act of unveiling – was an enduring and indeed dominant theme in Rousseau's imagination.⁶⁹ Without the *Morceau Allégorique* there is a danger that the embellishment Rousseau adds to the Ovidian myth may pass unnoticed or perhaps appear insignificant. In the light of this fragment, however, the addition of a veil appears to be the hermeneutic *passe-partout*. For Starobinski, the similarity is strong enough to merit the formulation of a theory of unveiling in Rousseau's thought:⁷⁰

Unveiling takes place in two stages [whose scope and value are very different].⁷¹ In each stage a truth (or a reality) is revealed, but the revelations are of unequal importance. The first unveiling is a critical act: deceptively seductive appearances are dispelled, a pernicious spell is ended. This unveiling is a work of disillusionment and disenchantment. It does not alter the reality beneath the mask, but eradicates errors rooted in that reality [...] The critical unveiling attacks the error that obscures the truth. Before attacking what is behind the veil, it denounces the veil's own presence. In the *Morceau Allégorique* this stage is represented by the [intervention of]⁷² the Philosopher who restores sight to the statue's victims and by the Socratic gesture of tearing away the veil.⁷³

The second stage is more significant: it is when what is hidden is revealed as it is in itself. In Starobinski's words, 'if the first stage is the denunciation of the "veil of illusion", the second will be the discovery and description of what remains hidden from our eyes.'⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Indeed the act of unveiling was a popular metaphor – and one with decidedly negative connotations – during the eighteenth century. Rousseau himself describes the act of veiling or of unveiling many times in his writings. Take, for example this passage from the *Confessions*, p. 364. 'Sweet and holy illusion of friendship! Gaffecourt was the first to lift your veil from my eyes. How many cruel hands have prevented it from falling again!' Or this extract from *Emile*, p.167: 'Darkness of human understanding, what reckless hand dared to touch your veil? What abysses I see opened up around this young unfortunate by our vain sciences!' Or this early one from the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p.33. 'Les soupçons, les ombrages, les craintes, la froideur, la réserve, la haine, la trahison se cacheront sans cesse sous ce voile uniforme et perfide de politesse.'

⁷⁰ Starobinski, *Op. Cit.*, p.73, 'On the basis of these two texts it is possible to formulate a theory of unveiling.'

⁷¹ In Goldhammer's translation this clause is omitted: 'dont la portée et la valeur sont très différentes.'

⁷² In Goldhammer's translation the substantive, 'intervention' is omitted.

⁷³ Starobinski, *Op. Cit.*, p.73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.74.

The limitations of Starobinski's theory of unveiling are perhaps not apparent at first glance. Adumbrated predominantly upon the similarities between the two texts – notably their treatment of the veil – it does not take into account the manifest functional differences which exist. The veil in the *Morceau Allégorique* patently generates illusion, its function being to obscure the source of supreme and absolute truth – the real image of God. The statue's nefarious power, in this instance, is both created and sustained by the veil. The veil also acts as an impenetrable mediative layer; like a silver screen, images concocted by the imagination are projected onto its surface and thus an additional barrier between the truth and the perceiver is involuntarily and somewhat inevitably erected. But in *Pygmalion*, the eponymous artist will veil the statue in order to escape its mysterious and destructive influence; if he cannot see it, he cannot be affected by it, he ceases to be its victim. Pygmalion does not project anything onto the veil, nor does the veil act as a mediative layer; the veil is always penetrable, transparent.

It is clear that whenever the theme of revelation appears in the *Morceau Allégorique* it is counterbalanced by an enunciation of the impenetrability of perception and judgement, and the true image is always appears distorted. Here are just a few examples of this:

When viewed closely, these statues seemed deformed and horrible, but through skilful artifice and perspective they looked different when seen from the centre of the building, where they appeared to present a charming picture to the eye [...]

She was perpetually served by the people but never seen. Her worshippers painted her in their own imaginations in accordance with their own characters and passions. The more imaginary the object of this worship, the more devoted the worshipper, who saw none other than his heart's idol behind the mysterious veil [...]

the vulgar saw nothing but phantoms concocted by wild imagination.

There are also the different stages of unveiling that Jean Starobinski has identified. At each of these stages a layer is torn away, a layer upon which 'phantoms concocted by wild imagination' are projected. The apotheosis of the allegory is provided, as we have seen, by the final stage – the revelation of absolute, unmediated truth. As Starobinski argues, this revelation puts an end to the lie and restores the Son of Man to his rightful position atop the altar. However, I would suggest that the act itself also abolishes mediated perception: the additional barrier is thus

dismantled or rendered transparent bringing the perceiver ever closer to the truth, or at least to the *source* of the truth. And I think this point is crucially important here. In both texts, the statue is an object or a symbol of tyranny, and in each, as Starobinski's theory makes explicit, the veil obscures the truth or reality. But what Starobinski does not make clear is that the truth is obscured for entirely different purposes.

Why did Rousseau not make dramatic use of the *Morceau Allégorique*?⁷⁵ One can only suggest that its scope was a little too limited for dramatic purposes, as it deals with one principal theme – the revelation of truth in a supernatural context. Moreover, its thinly veiled allusions to the manipulative practices of organised religion, or indeed the absolute state, were probably deemed too potent for a political regime intensely suspicious of art and indeed anything produced by a *Philosophe*. We should not forget that this was a time during which a veritable army of censors – some one thousand men – sought to suppress all works that threatened to undermine, through criticism or ridicule, the absolute authority of the King or indeed the Church. From the beginning of the eighteenth-century, censorship had been taken out of the hands of the Church and became instead a fully-fledged political institution, an instrument of the absolute state and representing, in essence, a fundamental constraint of liberty.⁷⁶ *Pygmalion*, on the other hand, would provide Rousseau with a traditional and extremely fashionable framework within which he could be censorious and indeed 'philosophical' but at the same time shelter under the aegis of mythology.⁷⁷ He may well have gambled too that the mythological setting would allow him to challenge prevailing aesthetic theories and articulate commentary of autobiographical significance in a relatively innocuous context; it was a setting which would have immediately thrown the army of censors off its scent. In the final analysis, however, we cannot rule out a far simpler explanation: that Rousseau believed *Pygmalion* would make for much better drama.

⁷⁵ Starobinski suggests, p.65, that 'the fragment was never finished, and Rousseau probably did not intend it to be published.'

⁷⁶ Robert Darnton, *Revolution in Print*, pp.6 & 22

⁷⁷ The *Index of Prohibited Books* tended not to include mythological works; it was overtly 'philosophical' ones which were the most likely to be burnt and cause the author or bookseller trouble. As Robert Darnton, *Revolution in Print*, pp.29-32. explains, the label 'philosophical' was in reality a euphemism for a gamut of prohibited literature ranging from pornography to philosophy.

5.4. Reading *Pygmalion*

In broad terms, Rousseau's version is faithful to the Ovidian text. The most salient differences are, of course, the addition of a veil and the unconventional setting of Tyre. Where the latter is concerned, J L Carr remarks that Rousseau's choice of setting may well have been accidental, and speculates that Rousseau probably confused two very different *Pygmalion* legends and traditions.⁷⁸ I would, however, concur with John Hummel's contention that the choice of Tyre, a city reputed for its decadence, immorality and harlotry, was wholly intentional, and indeed and part and parcel of Rousseau's sagacious game of vengeance.⁷⁹ Viewed in this light, Rousseau's unusual setting makes perfect sense: where Ovid's character is disgusted with all the wanton immorality of the women who encircle him, Rousseau makes his Pygmalion disillusioned with the so-called intelligentsia of Tyre. It is not difficult to see that Tyre is a cover for Paris, and its intelligentsia a cover for the Parisian *Salon* or the *Côterie*:

Tyr, elegant and opulent city, I'm no longer attracted to your artistic achievements, I have lost my inclination to admire them. The trade of artists and philosophers hold nothing for me, I find the conversations of painters and poets unappealing. My soul is no longer ennobled by praise and glory – those who build their posterity on such premises do not interest me. Even friendship has lost its charm.⁸⁰

We find echoes of these somewhat bitter sentiments in *Emile* (also 1762), where Rousseau again mocks the celebrated city of Paris:

♦ Adieu, then, Paris, celebrated city, city of noise, smoke and mud, where the women no longer believe in honour and the men no longer believe in virtue. Adieu, Paris. We are seeking love, happiness, innocence. We shall never be far enough away from you.⁸¹

There is one crucially important distinction between Ovid's text and Rousseau's libretto: in Rousseau's rendering, the relationship between the statue and the artist is more marked and

⁷⁸ Cf. J L Carr, 'Pygmalion and the *Philosophes*', p.240.

⁷⁹ Cf. John Hummel, 'Pygmalion and the *Confessions*', p.275

⁸⁰ Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, in *Œuvres*, t.10, p.366. All subsequent references to *Pygmalion* will direct the reader to my complete, and original, translation of the work that appears as Appendix One.

⁸¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, tr. A. Bloom, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.355. There are similar comments levelled at the Paris Opéra in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.

more important; in fact they engage in a kind of dramatic dialectic. The veritable emotional 'roller-coaster' that *Pygmalion* endures as the drama unfolds, facilitates an exploration of the psychological effect the finished work has upon the artist. Although in its pure form this is a secondary theme of the Ovidian text, Rousseau subtly shifts the emphasis from the statue back on to *Pygmalion*; it becomes a theme of struggle – a struggle to regain control over his work and consequently recover his sanity. In this guise, the significance of the struggle lies in its function as a focal point for the exposition and development of ideas.

5.4.1. Myth as Aesthetic Doctrine: the oxymoronic conception of 'artistic creation'

The *scène lyrique* begins with *Pygmalion*, as artist, having attained perfection; he has sculpted the perfect representation of woman (and thus achieved representational perfection) and, for him it is a terrifying prospect. He stares into the abyss, the bottomless void that threatens to consume him. Art has been abolished, the artist silenced. *Pygmalion* is to live for ever more without his prodigious talent:

There's neither soul nor life in it; it's nothing but stone. I shall never be able to do such a thing. Oh my genius, where are you? My talent, what has become of you? All my creative fire has gone, my imagination is frozen; the marble comes cold out of my hands. *Pygmalion*, no longer carve gods, you are nothing but a common artist! ... Worthless tools, no longer those of my glory, be gone and do not soil my hands. [*Pygmalion* I].

Shierry Weber proposes that *Pygmalion* can be 'fruitfully seen as a meditation on the nature of the relationship between the artist and his work.'⁸² Indeed, we have already provisionally seen that this relationship features prominently in both the Ovidian text and in Rousseau's libretto, although Rousseau attaches more significance and dynamism to it. The precise nature and focus of Rousseau's meditation seems, however, far removed from Weber's reading of it, for, in the same article, she asserts categorically that, '*Pygmalion's* aesthetics are a rejection of mimetic aesthetics.'⁸³ It is essential to note that although Weber devotes many pages of theory and hypothesis to her exegesis of *Pygmalion*, she nevertheless all but ignores the fact that the statue is

⁸² Shierry M Weber, 'The aesthetics of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, *Modern Language Notes*, 83, (1968), p.900

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.914.

brought to life by Venus, by a *Dea ex Machina*, not by the artist himself. Weber, in fact, mentions the intervention of Venus only once and *en passant*, as though it were somehow insignificant and inconsequential to the action. However, the *Dea ex Machina* is, evidently, a pivotal act in this drama, and is central to Rousseau's critique of the artistic enterprise. Moreover, Weber makes no mention of the function or the existence of the veil. These, as we will discover, are somewhat fatal omissions and all the more surprising since she considers that:

... both the Greek and Rousseauian versions of the story are concerned not with a movement to reunite art and nature but with the separation of art from nature. Both are premised on a distinction between the work and the natural object.⁸⁴

Shierry Weber then goes on to argue that

[...] the animation of the statue is in some sense equivalent to the making of the statue by Pygmalion, which occurs before the beginning of the scene. The animation is a recapitulation of the creation. In both senses Rousseau is saying that the artist gives life to the work.⁸⁵

I would suggest, rather, that the making of the statue is equivalent to the animation only in the sense that it represents or *imitates* the creative act itself. One could say that artistic production, in this case Pygmalion's carving of the statue, is symbolic of the creative act; in a ritualistic kind of way it is a re-enactment of the creative act.

Philip Robinson's reading of *Pygmalion* also highlights Rousseau's apparent desire to abandon the aesthetic of *Mimesis*, a desire to 'efface the frozen image of art ... abolishing the idea of representation itself.'⁸⁶ Robinson's conclusion is that 'the ideal of art [in *Pygmalion*] is that it should become life.'⁸⁷ Clearly, both Robinson and Weber consider the animation of the statue as being symbolic of Rousseau's desire to abandon once and for all the prevailing eighteenth-century aesthetic and doctrine of *Mimesis*. Furthermore, Robinson and Weber's readings also imply that *Pygmalion* is an oblique, autobiographical, commentary upon Rousseau's frustration with the entire artistic enterprise, especially with the inherent 'sterility' of the artist and is,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.906.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.907.

⁸⁶ Philip Robinson, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Doctrine of the Arts*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), p 407.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p407.

moreover, indicative of his desire to see the artist transcend, hubristically, his mortal role of imitator and become demi-urge. For this is precisely what the effacement of representation, within the context of the myth, implies.

It is my view, however, that with *Pygmalion* Rousseau tries to breathe a certain realism into what it means to be an artist by using the Ovidian text to demarcate the scope and boundaries of art and redefine the role and ultimate purpose of the artist. What I mean by this is that Rousseau uses the Ovidian myth as a kind of allegory – over and above the myth's conventional allegorical function – to drive home one, all-encompassing, idea: the contention that art *is* representation and cannot be other than representation, however melancholy a recognition this may turn out to be. What Rousseau actually wishes to reject, then, is the logical, final goal of *Mimesis* – representational perfection – rather than to abandon the aesthetic of representation altogether. The moral, as it were, of *Pygmalion* warns against the effacement of representation by giving the reader a foretaste of the inevitable consequence of such an enterprise: the silence of the artist and, in the final term, the negation of art itself. By not permitting his Pygmalion to transcend the role of imitator during the drama, (which of course he had been free to do), I would suggest that Rousseau is clearly setting out an aesthetic and doctrinal precept: the artist is imitator, not creator; his works must only represent and imitate. God alone creates *ex nihilo*, man produces and man invents;⁸⁸ man can only carve material which has already been created. Rousseau's *Pygmalion* should be seen, therefore, as a meditation upon the concept of representational perfection, and, more importantly, as a direct challenge to the egocentric notion of artistic creation itself and the vanity of the artist. In this sense, then, Rousseau's aesthetics are surprisingly conventional.

Rendering for a moment this meditation in formulaic terms, if the artistic object is such a perfect imitation or representation of the subject, it becomes, as a result, indistinguishable from the subject and indistinguishable from reality. Thus, the representation itself ceases to be either 'art' or the 'object', and becomes instead the very subject that it sought initially to imitate. Crucially in *Pygmalion*, though the statue achieves the status of the perfect representation of the subject, the

⁸⁸ I use the verb to invent in the sense of *to discover*, from the Latin *In venire*.

metamorphosis from marble into living and breathing flesh can only be realised by a divinity possessing the 'life-principle', not even by the skilled hand of the artist; there is, as a result, an unbridgeable boundary that demarcates the ambit of the artist and that of the creator. In *Pygmalion*, what the statue lacks is a soul – something which Pygmalion mistakenly believes he can give, transfer or 'create'. As we shall see, however, it is a frontier which Pygmalion is unable to cross and a frontier which Rousseau is unwilling to let him breach.

Ovid's text, too, explores the idea of representational perfection. This comes in the form of the remarkably economical locution: 'so cleverly did his art conceal its art.'⁸⁹ The emphasis in the Ovidian text is shifted to the perceptual difficulties of representational perfection. This finds its parallel in Rousseau whose Pygmalion cannot cope with the presence of representational perfection, and, in a desperate bid to continue his activity as artist and regain control over his work, he tries to alter the statue:

O Galatea receive my homage. Yes, I was wrong: I wanted you to be a nymph and instead I have made you a Goddess. Not even Venus is as beautiful as you are. Vanity, human weakness! I never tire of admiring my work. My pride [*amour-propre*] intoxicates me. I adore myself in what I have done. No, nothing as beautiful as this has ever appeared in nature; I have surpassed the work of the Gods.

What! Such beauties made by my hands? So my hands have touched them? Maybe my mouth could ... I can see a flaw. This garment covers too much, I must reveal more; the charms it conceals should be more visible.

(he takes his mallet and chisel, then, slowly and hesitantly climbs the steps up to the statue. It seems that he does not dare touch it, but finally, and with chisel raised, he stops)

What trembling, what turmoil. I wield the chisel with an unsure hand ... I cannot ... I dare not. I will spoil everything.

(he regains his composure. With his chisel he delivers a single blow, but terrified he drops it shouting loudly)

My God ... I feel the statue's throbbing flesh repel my chisel.

(he steps down, trembling and confused)

Vain terror, insane blindness. No I will not touch it. The Gods terrify me, she must already be one of them.

⁸⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, transl. Mary Innes, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1955) pp.231-232

(he looks at her again)

What do you want to change? Look; what new charms do you want to give her? ... Ah! Her perfection is her flaw ... Divine Galatea ... if you were less perfect you would not lack anything. [*Pygmalion*, III-IV]

In the passage which immediately supervenes, Pygmalion reproaches himself for believing that his heightened desire has begun to animate the statue. He believes that he is violating the natural order by assuming the work of the Gods; he sees himself as a Prometheus figure who has stolen the life-principle from Jupiter:

But you lack a soul: your features cannot do without it.

(more tenderly)

How beautiful must the soul be that is capable of animating such a body.

(he stops for some time; then, sits down again, saying in a slow and different voice)

What wishes do I dare to utter? What insane desires! What am I feeling? Oh heaven! The veil of illusion has fallen, and I dare not look into my heart: I will find too much to be ashamed of. [*Pygmalion* IV]

But Pygmalion momentarily regains his composure, and strives to comprehend, to rationalise this strange predicament in which he finds himself:

So here is the noble passion that leads me astray. It is because of this inanimate object that I dare not leave this place. Marble! Stone! Shapeless and hard, wrought by this instrument ... you are mad, withdraw into yourself, lament yourself; look at your mistake, see your insanity. But no ... no I have not lost my senses; no, my mind is not wandering; no, I do not reproach myself for anything. It is not with this dead marble I am enchanted, but with a living being that resembles it, and with this figure which presents itself before my very eyes. Wherever is this adorable statue, whoever carries it, whosoever created it, it will receive all my heart's sentiments. Yes, my only weakness is to perceive beauty, my only crime is my sensibility. There is nothing here to be ashamed of. [*Pygmalion* V]

The statue is too perfect to be 'merely' art: for Pygmalion she has become indistinguishable from the subject of imitation and indeed 'her perfection is her flaw.' It is as though the statue existed in a bizarre no-man's land between art and reality, drifting unpredictably and imperceptibly from one dimension to the other. But this state of flux is solely the consequence of Pygmalion's interpretation or 'reading' of the statue and is, as a result, entirely illusory. Pygmalion is merely

projecting the 'real' image of the ideal woman which the statue represents back onto the statue's artistically fashioned marble surface – hence it is his perception enlivened by his imagination that appears to quicken the statue. But in fact the statue is not going to be animated by the artist's desires. Pygmalion's reaction is one of utter confusion: his senses betray him to such an extent that he believes he is losing his sanity. Pygmalion has become the statue's victim – so cleverly did his art conceal its art.

5.4.2. The *Deus ex Machina*: a critique of the artist's vanity

The supreme significance of the Ovidian text comes back into play at this point. There is still the question of 'life', of 'soul' and of 'creation' itself; the statue may appear to be a woman, it may be a perfect representation of the subject of imitation – Pygmalion's heart's idol and desire – but it remains, nevertheless, a marble statue. It is still art, its corporeality is an illusion generated and sustained by Pygmalion's imagination and his desire. Art can only become 'life', and the 'frozen image,' in Robinson's terms, can only be effaced by the hand of a deity – in *Pygmalion* by the hand of Venus.

For the moment, however, Pygmalion's delirium persists unhampered and unchallenged. He still believes that he could, with his own essence, animate the statue and give Galatea precisely what she lacks: a soul. We are reminded, in fact, of the opening citation at the beginning of this chapter taken from the *Confessions*, where Rousseau ponders whether true beauty can exist without life or soul.⁹⁰ And there is of course also a curious, but in my view highly significant, parallel with Rousseau's description of the concept of *la Pitié* from the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* and *Emile*. In book iv of *Emile* (also 1762), and in a passage which occurs verbatim in Chapter IX of the *Essai*, Rousseau describes *la pitié* in the following terms:

To become sensitive and pitying, the child must know that there are beings like him who suffer what he has suffered, who feel the pains he has felt, and that

⁹⁰ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p.184. 'She was a grocer's daughter, Mlle Lard by name, the true model of a Greek statue and whom I should quote as the most beautiful girl I have ever seen if real beauty could exist without life and without soul. Her indolence, her coldness and her lack of feeling were quite incredible.'

there are others whom he ought to conceive of as being able to feel them too. In fact, how do we let ourselves be moved by pity if not by *transporting ourselves outside ourselves and identifying with the suffering animal, by leaving as it were our own being to take on its being?* We suffer only so much as we judge that it suffers. It is not in ourselves, it is in him that we suffer. Thus no one becomes sensitive until his imagination is animated and begins to transport him out of himself.⁹¹

This concept is rendered dramatically and apostrophically in *Pygmalion*:

How hot these flames which seem to radiate from this statue and kindle my senses, and then, with my soul, return to their source. Alas, it remains still and cold. My heart, kindled by its charms, would like to leave my body and kindle its. I think that in my delirium I could throw myself out of this body; I think I could give life to it, yes, bring it to life with my soul. May Pygmalion die and live in Galatea. What am I saying? If I were her I would not be able to see her, and I would not be the one who loves her. No, may Galatea live, and may I not be her. Oh may I always be another so that I can always want to be her, see her, love her and be loved by her. [*Pygmalion V*]

Pygmalion is initially perplexed by the appearance of Galatea: she is such a perfect representation of a woman and yet she remains cold marble; he offers himself, but realises that in order to love the statue, he must be other than the statue. This is a problem of necessary distance, of separation and of individuality. Pygmalion's only hope of deliverance is to invoke divine assistance, and to confess and repent his vain and profane desires. Pygmalion no longer pays homage to the statue, but instead to Venus; his express wish is to restore the natural order of the universe:

Torments, wishes, desires, rage, helplessness, terrible love...Oh, all hell has taken over my restless heart. Almighty Gods, benevolent Gods, Gods of the people who used to understand man's passions, you have worked so many wonders for less important causes. Look at this object, look at my heart, be just and be worthy of your altars.

(*with pathos*)

And you sublime essence who is hidden from the senses, but whose presence hearts can feel. Soul of the universe, principles of all existence. You, through love, give harmony to the elements, life to matter, feeling to bodies, shape to all creatures; sacred fire, celestial Venus through whom everything is preserved and reproduced endlessly, where is your omnipotence, where is the law of nature in what I feel, where is your invigorating warmth in my inane and vain desires? All your fires are centred in my heart and yet the cold of death rests within this

⁹¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, p.222-223. (my emphasis).

marble. I perish by the excess of life that it lacks. Alas, I'm not expecting a miracle, but it must disappear. The natural order has been disrupted, nature is gravely offended, give back its influence, re-establish a beneficial course and lend it your divine authority. Yes, all would be complete if the devouring ardour which consumes one without animating the other were shared equally between them. By my hand you have shaped these charms and features which only await feeling and life. Give the statue everything if necessary. It would be enough for me to live in her. You, who deign to smile upon homages paid by mere mortals, by those who cannot feel and cannot honour you; spread your glory with your work. Goddess of beauty, spare nature this offence, may such a perfect model be the reflection of what it is not. [*Pygmalion* V–VI]

The animation commences. Although Pygmalion's psychological state stabilises, this momentary stability will be tempered by doubt and confusion; his culpability is all too evident:

I have regained my feelings. What unexpected quietude! What unexpected courage inspires me. A mortal fever kindled by my blood; a feeling of confidence and hope is coursing through my veins – I feel as if I were reborn. So the feeling of our dependence can sometimes be our consolation. However unhappy mortals may be whenever they call upon the Gods, they are always becalmed. But this unjust confidence deceives those who express insane wishes. Alas, the state I find myself in you can summon anyone, but no one ever listens to you. The hope which deceives us is more insane than desire. As I am guilty of so many aberrations, I dare not contemplate the cause of them. Whenever I wish to look upon this fatal object, a secret and forbidden fear stops me. Look poor wretch, be brave; dare to stare at the statue.

(he sees the statue moving, and turns away frightened. His heart sinks with pain)

What have I seen, ye Gods? What do I think I saw? Reddening flesh, fire in its eyes, even gestures. As if it were not enough for a miracle to happen, I have it all at last!

(excessively depressed)

Wretched thing, that is it – your delirium is now complete. Your reason and your genius fail you. Oh Pygmalion do not miss it – the loss of it will bury you in opprobrium.

(great indignation)

It's too much for a stone's lover to have such pleasurable hallucinations.

(he turns and sees the statue walk down the very steps he himself had climbed. He falls to his knees and with hands raised, looks to the sky.)

Immortal Gods! Venus! Galatea! Oh prestigious and frenzied love! [*Pygmalion* VI–VII]

The animation now is complete, but Pygmalion still believes that his senses betray him; for the artist, the ambulant statue is merely an illusion, even a hallucination.

5.4.3. Separation or reunion: Narcissism or Androgyny?

The next passage, indeed the key passage of the libretto, contains without question the most enigmatic and problematic lines of Rousseau's *Scène Lyrique*. And we should not be surprised to discover that these lines have spawned a multitude of divergent, polarising interpretations:

(Galatea touches herself and says)

Me

(Pygmalion, carried away, says)

Me

(Galatea again touching herself)

It is me

(Pygmalion)

Ravishing illusion which I can even now hear. Never depart from my senses.

(Galatea steps forward and touches a block of marble and says)

It is no longer me

(Pygmalion, agitated, can hardly contain himself, and follows every gesture, listens, observes her so avidly that he can barely breathe. Galatea walks towards him and stares. He quickly gets to his feet, opens his arms and stares at her ecstatically. She puts her hand upon him, he winces, then she takes her other hand, puts it against his heart, and he kisses it ardently. Galatea, sighing, says)

Ah, me again. [*ah, encore moi*]

(Pygmalion replies)

Yes, dear and charming object, yes worthy masterpiece of my hands, of my heart, of the Gods. There's you, only you. I have given you all my being: I shall live only through you. [*Pygmalion VII–VIII*]

Pygmalion mistakenly believes he has quickened the statue; that his essence has somehow been transferred, either entirely or partially, to the statue; and that he will live from this moment onwards through his putative 'creation'. It is, however, Galatea's words which are far more revelatory; and they completely betray Pygmalion's conviction. Her first word carries no philosophical import as it does, for example, in many other contemporaneous renderings of the

myth, where, Galatea often represents the sensationalist *tabula rasa* and, beginning to employ her five 'senses', engages with her surroundings; quite the opposite is true in fact. In Rousseau's setting, Galatea's first utterance is a recognition of her own existence, her self, her individual consciousness; grammatically speaking, the 'moi' leaves no scope for doubt on this point. Upon touching the block of marble, she then marks a distinction between what she was, and what she has become. And then, finally, by touching Pygmalion and sensing a beating heart, she identifies herself with another of her kind, another living, sentient being. Or does she?

Jean Starobinski's reading of *Pygmalion* focuses, not surprisingly, upon this key moment in the drama too. But whereas Shierry Weber asserts that the work, and this particular moment, is premised on the distinction between art and the natural object and thus the statue and the artist, Starobinski contends that Galatea's words 'ah, me again' signify the abolition of such a separation:

les deux parts d'un même moi sont enfin réunies. La séparation est abolie, qui divisait l'artiste de ce qu'il avait produit. Le travail créateur n'a lieu que pour être repris dans l'unité d'un Moi aimant.⁹²

Starobinski's exegesis turns upon a narcissistic interpretation of artistic production, and indeed a narcissistic reading of *Pygmalion* itself.⁹³ In other words, Starobinski views the artistic enterprise as one in which something of the artist is projected onto or into his work, and, as a result, the artist and his work as being bound together, inextricably, by a common self or consciousness. The artist is thus reflected in his work; like Narcissus, Pygmalion is obsessed by his own reflection. When Galatea touches Pygmalion, the (re)-union is accomplished; Pygmalion, for his part, acknowledges this, saying: 'Yes, dear and charming object, yes worthy masterpiece of my hands, of my heart, of the Gods. There's you, only you. I have given you all my being: I shall live only through you.' [*Pygmalion* VII–VIII]

⁹² Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'Obstacle*, p.92. 'The two parts of the same 'moi' are finally reunited. Separation, that divided the artist from what he had produced, is abolished. The creative act took place only to be reclaimed in the unity of a loving 'moi.'

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.90, 'Amoureux de son visage comme il était Narcisse, il veut éteindre le reflet de lui-même qu'il adore dans son œuvre.'

The problem with this reading is that Galatea is no longer *exclusively* Pygmalion's work and no longer *his* object; she is, has and was given an independent consciousness, not by the artist but by Venus. Shierry Weber also latches onto Starobinski's assertion '... that Pygmalion wishes to obliterate this distinction [between the self and the other].'⁹⁴ She argues that 'what Rousseau shows ... is that the self encompasses the polarities 'subject' and 'object', 'self' and 'other'.⁹⁵ She concludes that:

Pygmalion's final recognition that he and Galatea share the same self is not the successful exclusion of otherness but the recognition that his desire for her is ideal rather than real.⁹⁶

The difficulty I have with both readings is simply this: until the statue is animated, that is to say when she becomes Galatea the woman, her otherness remains illusory; for until that moment she has no consciousness, her existence is but the product of Pygmalion's fertile imagination. Indeed, until the act of animation, Pygmalion's desire is for an object, not a consciousness; following the act of animation, Pygmalion's desires are turned toward Galatea the woman, and at this point they are real, *not* ideal. I believe that Rousseau wanted his Pygmalion to be, and remain, convinced that he had, in some sense, participated in the act of animation in order for him to continue his work as artist. Or to put it another way, I think Rousseau is trying to suggest that although the artist, in producing the work of art, deludes himself into thinking he has created something *ex nihilo*, this delusion is absolutely necessary for without it the artist would find no reason to continue his productive enterprises.

Building somewhat precariously upon the foundations of Starobinski's reading, Robert Ellrich contends that Rousseau is plagued by 'success/attack phases' and that, as a result, the 'minor' works (of which he identifies *Pygmalion* as one) are 'created as reaction to, and defences against, psychic stress occasioned by a felt attack following a visible and successful display of power.'⁹⁷ Rousseau's exile from Paris is identified as one such 'display of power' and to this we may add

⁹⁴ Weber, *Pygmalion*, p.907

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.907

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.907

⁹⁷ Robert J Ellrich, 'Rousseau's Androgynous Dream,' p.320.

the *Les Muses Galantes* episode and the debacle surrounding Rousseau's revisions to *Les Fêtes de Ramire*. It is Ellrich's belief that the abolition of separation and the subsequent reunification of 'two halves – feminine and masculine – of one whole' symbolise Rousseau's unconscious desire to achieve a state of androgyny. His argumentation appears to operate in this manner: if Pygmalion carved the statue in the likeness of the feminine half of his being, and if this half was projected onto or into the statue, Pygmalion would consequently love part of himself, and part of another. Evidently the physical presence, and sheer physicality, of the statue represents otherness in this formulation. The reunification, once accomplished, would signify the dissolution of the two halves into a single and androgynous whole, or indeed in Jungian parlance, the totality of the self.

As Ellrich is ultimately forced to concede, there is no mention of androgyny or any reference to androgynous beings in any of Rousseau's works.⁹⁸ In spite of this, Ellrich does not temper his enthusiasm for such a reading: he attempts to validate his argumentation by claiming that the lack of references to androgyny within Rousseau's *oeuvre*, 'betokens a shying away from a fantasy that ... lies too close for comfort to his emotional and psychic core'.⁹⁹ I would suggest, that Ellrich's reading is perhaps a little too contingent upon there being an unconscious connection, on Rousseau's part, between *Pygmalion* and *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui même*. What I mean by this is that I think Ellrich has been swayed by Rousseau's subtle variation upon the Narcissus myth: Rousseau's *Narcisse* falls in love with a portrait of himself rather than his own reflection. The portrait is not, however, a straightforward imitation: it is a representation of Narcissus with feminine features and wearing women's clothes – and has an obvious equivalence to the Jungian conception of the Anima, a cornerstone of the very methodological foundation upon which Ellrich's interpretation appears to be elaborated. The tacit implication here is, of course, that Pygmalion carved the statue in the image of himself but with, or accentuating, feminine features and that this represents another indication, another revelatory example, of Rousseau's unconscious desire to achieve a state of androgyny with the feminine half of his self.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.321.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.321. Ellrich (p.322) also suggests that 'Plato's *Symposium* would have been the standard source of Rousseau's notion of the androgyne [...] If Rousseau nowhere alludes specifically to Plato's androgyne, Pierre Bayle does in a number of instances in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, of which the young Rousseau was an avid reader.'

5.4.4. A Contemporaneous view

One contemporaneous reading of the work, which appears in Grimm's *Correspondance Littéraire*, is of particular interest here, not least because it seems light years away from the interpretations discussed above. Moreover, the author's evident bewilderment at Galatea's concluding lines demonstrates the extent to which Rousseau's aesthetic had torn itself away from that of his contemporaries:

Le rôle de la statue est très-court: elle ne dit que trois mots. Lorsqu'elle se sent animée, elle se touche le coeur et dit: 'C'est moi.' Elle s'approche d'une statue voisine, et, la sentant inanimée, elle dit: 'Ce n'est plus moi.' Portant ensuite la main sur le coeur de Pygmalion, et le sentant palpiter, elle dit: 'C'est encore moi.' Cela est peut-être un peu entortillé, un peu métaphysique: le moi est un terme bien abstrait pour une première pensée ou un premier sentiment. [...] Comment une statue métamorphosée trouverait-elle, dans le premier instant, un résultat si compliqué, et qui suppose tant de combinaisons et de rapports aperçus? Le premier mot d'un être subitement animé serait sans doute quelque expression passionnée, impétueuse, douloureuse; l'aspect de l'univers le troublerait; il s'en croirait menacé, sa propre énergie lui ferait peur.¹⁰⁰

The author, whether it was Diderot, Grimm or Meister, considers the '*moi*' 'a little twisted, a little metaphysical ... a very abstract term for a first thought or sentiment.' The author endeavours to imagine how the statue would feel having been freshly metamorphosed from marble into flesh, how she would engage with her new, unfamiliar environment and indeed what words she might utter as a reaction to it. The author anticipates expressions of passion, impetuosity or pain, feelings of vulnerability, fear and insecurity; instead Rousseau has his Galatea simply say: 'c'est moi.'

¹⁰⁰ Grimm, Meister, Diderot, *Correspondance Littéraire*, ed. Tourneux, (Paris: 1879), ix, pp.22-24. 'The statue's role is very short: she utters but three words. When she comes to life, she puts her hand on her heart and says, 'it is me'. She approaches another statue and perceiving it to be inanimate, says, 'it is no longer me'. Then placing her hand on Pygmalion's heart, and feeling it beat, she says, 'ah, me again'. This is perhaps a little twisted, a little metaphysical: *Moi* is surely a very abstract term for a first thought or sentiment. [...] How is it possible that a statue would have, in the first instants following metamorphosis, such a complex reaction based on so much insight? The first word uttered by a being suddenly brought to life would be without doubt a passionate expression, impetuous, painful; the appearance of the universe would trouble him; he would feel threatened, his own energy would make him afraid.'

5.4.5. The 'moi' as expression of independence, self-existence and individuality

The 'moi' is unquestionably intensely problematic and appears frustratingly impenetrable. And yet, there are some surprising and highly significant connections to be made between Galatea's reaction to her new environment and her new 'companion,' and ideas expressed in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*. In what follows, I offer a two-stage reading: the first stage engages with the general thrust of text itself; the second stage, builds upon this and then looks beyond the boundaries of the work to the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* to explore how Rousseau's conception of the *cri de la nature* might come full circle and achieve closure in Galatea's words. My view is that Galatea's words signify 'me again', in the sense that she means the same as me, another living being as opposed to a statue or cold marble. Pygmalion may have carved the statue, but Venus alone gave the statue life; she alone *created* the woman, the independent consciousness that is Galatea, but that is not Pygmalion. In order to be loved, Galatea must be other than the artist, and Pygmalion has already realised, and articulated the fact that he must be other than the statue:

If I were her I would not be able to see her, and I would not be the one who loves her. No, may Galathée live, and may I not be her. Oh may I always be another so that I can always want to be her, see her, love her and be loved by her.

The utterance 'C'est moi' is an assertion of both Galatea's corporeality and her spiritual independence from the artist. The artist and his work must remain separate; this is, so to speak, the condition *sine qua non* imposed by Venus. The 'Moi' in *Pygmalion* is, then, the expression *par excellence* of independence, of individuality and of the absolute recognition of self-existence. In *Pygmalion* the perfect representation is abolished, and with it, the bizarre state of flux between art and reality that threatens to disrupt the natural order of the universe. The work of art is thus lost forever as it becomes an independent consciousness but, as a final compensation, its ruinous influence is no longer apparent. In becoming a living entity, Galatea tears herself away from Pygmalion's ideal image and will be, for ever more, *other* than the artist. The natural order is restored; Pygmalion's folly, unlike that of Prometheus, is forgiven. The artist is thus liberated and he is free to continue his artist activity.

5.4.6. The 'moi' as the dramatic equivalent of the 'idyll of the well'

In our discussion of the origin of expression in Chapter 3, we will remember that in the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues* Rousseau argues that:

[...] sitôt qu'un homme fut reconnu par un autre pour un être sentant, pensant et semblable à lui, le désir ou le besoin de lui communiquer ses sentiments [...] lui en fit chercher les moyens.¹⁰¹

If we now imagine Galatea to be such a figure, the desire and the need to communicate her sentiments make her search for the means to do so. Upon touching herself she recognises – and instinctively acknowledges and expresses in the 'moi' – her corporeality, but at the same time sees (and hears) her own humanity reflected in the artist. She recognises Pygmalion, not as an artist or her putative creator, but rather as a living, breathing, sentient – and articulate – being like she has now become. Galatea thus desires to communicate with her semblant, and Pygmalion, without reflection, desires to respond. The sounds of their voices kindle this desire to commune, for both the artist and Galatea recognise that they are no longer alone in the world.

As Rousseau again puts it in the *Essai*:

[...] sitôt que des signes vocaux frappent votre oreille, ils vous annoncent un être semblable à vous. Ils sont, pour ainsi dire, les organes de l'âme ... Les oiseaux sifflent, l'homme seul chante, et l'on peut entendre ni chant, ni symphonie, sans se dire à l'instant : un autre être sensible est ici.¹⁰²

This moment of pure presence is, in one sense, a reiteration of the first moment of the Fall-State when humans were first drawn together; it is then, I suggest, the dramatic equivalent of the 'idyll of the well', where man and woman first cast their gaze upon one another and searched for the means to communicate their sentiments. Both Pygmalion and Galatea require nothing more and thus it is fitting that Pygmalion's final words are the equivalent of 'aimez-moi' rather than 'aidez-moi'.

¹⁰¹ Rousseau, *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, in *Œuvres*, t.11, p.155-156. 'As soon as a man was recognised by another as a sentient, thinking being similar to himself, the desire or need to communicate his feelings made him search for the means to do so.'

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.232-233. '[...] as soon as vocal signs strike your ear, they announce the presence of another being similar to you; they are, so to speak, the organs of the soul ... Birds whistle, man alone sings, and one can hear neither song nor symphony without saying to oneself at that moment: another sentient being is here.'

Conclusion

I suggested at the very beginning of this thesis that Rousseau's thought is characterised by a pluralism and a diversity that transcend the ambit of the theoretical and everywhere infiltrate his praxis: Rousseau moves freely and lithely between these two often polarised and mutually exclusive domains. Such uninhibited mobility is one of the great strengths of his writings for he is able to consider, for example, a musical problematic – such as combining music and text within a unified dramatic idiom – from an array of divergent perspectives: as music theorist, as composer, as aesthete, as anthropologist, and as social and political philosopher. Indeed, tracing the development of his eventual practical solution to this problem – in the *Pygmalion* mechanism – reveals almost as much about the manner in which the individual elements or fragments of his philosophical system interlock and interface with one another, as it does about the evolutionary progress of the mechanism itself. That the elaboration of this mechanism interfaces with and implicates such works as the *First Discours* (1749), *Le Devin du Village* (1752), the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* (1753), the *Second Discours* (1754), the *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, and the *Dictionnaire de Musique* (1764), demonstrates how such a concept evolves diachronically, through a variety of different intellectual frames and forms, and yet still preserves the motivation and logic of its initial reformatory impulse more or less intact.

For Rousseau such a protracted and seemingly convoluted evolutionary process did not appear unusual or epistemologically untenable; this evolutionary process merely follows the network of interconnected pathways and intersections that give overall coherence to his philosophy. As he was to succinctly put it in the *Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont*:

J'ai écrit sur de divers sujets, mais toujours dans les mêmes principes; toujours la même morale, la même croyance, les mêmes maximes, et, si l'on veut, les mêmes opinions.¹

Rousseau's conviction was, then, that disparate and seemingly unrelated provinces of his writing and thought were bound together by a common ideological principle: a philosophy of

¹ Rousseau, *Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont*, *Œuvres*, t.9, p.5. 'I have written on diverse subjects, but always according to the same principles; always the same ethics, the same beliefs, the same maxims and, if you like, the same opinions.'

nature and history which is predicated upon the belief that in every domain of human existence, the process of history has not been one of progress, betterment and increasing civilisation, but an unstoppable slide – a downward-spiralling degenerative movement towards fragmentation, dispersal, immorality, corruption and, ultimately, damnation.

In Chapter Two, I proposed that in order to facilitate the articulation of this historical model, Rousseau establishes a trinary structure, consisting of an Ideal-State, Fall-State and Actual-State. The process of history begins with the institution of the Fall-State and the second and third sectors of this trinary structure are characterised by a relativism and a temporality that enables Rousseau to assign a system of value to the process of history that unfolds between them. This historical process governs all domains of his thought – history itself, art, music, anthropology, sociology, politics, fiction, autobiography, education – and also the ‘objects’ which these domains encompass. And it is upon this trinary structure that Rousseau overlays, interleaves and theorises about the nature and evolution of these ‘objects’ as they change and, little by little, degenerate across their respective historical horizons. The opening gambit of *Emile* (1762) articulates this degenerative model of history with remarkable clarity:

Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil to nourish the products of another, one tree to bear the fruit of another. He mixes and confuses the climates, the elements, the seasons ... he turns everything upside down; he disfigures everything ... he wants nothing as nature made it, not even man.²

The ‘objects’ which are referred to in this passage could be substituted with many other ‘objects’ in his system of thought. If, for example, we superimpose his conception of the origin and subsequent degeneration of music, we can see that this passage would recount the slide from the spontaneous, unmediated vocalisation of the passions at the moment of our ‘idyll of the well’ to the contrived, codified, rhetorical artifice of contemporary music making. The implication would be that music has degenerated in the hands of man; that music has been disfigured by a variety of tuning systems and modes to which it has been subjected to; that harmony has usurped the place of melody as the principal and authentic source of

² Rousseau. *Emile*. Transl. Allan Bloom, (Harmondsworth : Penguin Classics, 1991), p.37.

expression; that man has thus rejected music as nature had made it, even the voice – the *cri de la nature* – which is part of his very being and consciousness.

In the introduction, I suggested that one of the primary objectives of this thesis would be to interrogate and contest Roger Scruton's claim that Rousseau's writings on music do not constitute a philosophy of the subject. I speculated at that point that the motivating factor behind Scruton's assertion was the absence, in Rousseau's *oeuvre*, of a single, monolithic volume that overtly and expressly sets out a philosophy or aesthetic of music; one cannot simply pluck from the shelves of a library a volume that unveils the entire scale, form and nature of this object to the reader. Perhaps the closest equivalent we have to such a volume is the *Dictionnaire de Musique*, but even then, as I discussed in Chapter 4, the work frustrates attempts to categorise it, consisting as it does of music theory, aesthetics, commentary on compositional and performance practice, and hundreds of definitions of musical terms, many of which are devoid of 'ideological' content. Not only then is there an absence of a unified and comprehensive text that sets out a philosophy of music, but this very absence begs the question that if there is a philosophy of music, how (and where) does this object manifest itself?

The answer to this question is that we are not dealing with an independent, self-contained, autarkic object, but one that is fragmented, scattered across and embedded within political and philosophical discourse, fictional drama, autobiographical narrative, encyclopaedic entries, operatic compositions and diverse texts exploring music theory and aesthetics. These fragments, considered *in toto*, constitute an object – though this object is never consciously reassembled, rendered discrete or articulated as such by Rousseau himself, for he would probably never have viewed these fragments in this way. Nevertheless, they constitute an object in the sense that they are bound together by virtue of their relationship and intimate connection with the overarching philosophical vision of nature and history which we have just discussed above. The philosophy of music is perhaps best expressed, therefore, as a subset of this overarching philosophical vision: it subscribes and conforms to its laws, it assumes its characteristics and general shape, and is, then, an integral part of it.

Indeed, if a defining or prerequisite characteristic of a philosophy of music is that it should have its own systematic coherence, be self-sufficient, self-governing and self-contained, then on such a basis one might declare that Rousseau's does not qualify. However, I would strongly argue that Rousseau's thinking on music is philosophical precisely because of the extra-musical connections it makes beyond its own music-theoretical and musico-aesthetic horizons and frame of reference; and it assumes the scope of a complete philosophy in the sense that it is, itself, an integral part of an overarching philosophical system, and is inseparable from it. If we consider, for example, Rousseau's conception of harmonic generation, it is informed by a wider philosophical and scientific view that encompasses epistemology, ontology and acoustic theory. His hypostatisation of the voice, to take another example, is at its root informed by an anthropological view of the evolution of mankind. And the theory of the subsequent development of human communication in all its diversity is informed by a vision of the socio-political history of the individual as he assumes his role as citizen through the negotiation of contracts and compacts with the social collective. In all of these cases, we find that Rousseau is establishing these extra-musical connections because they necessarily interface with music. Music is not a law unto itself and, as I asserted in the Introduction, Rousseau never contemplates music other than with regard to its connection with society, and thus with the quotidian interaction and relationships of human beings. To state that there is no philosophy of music is, in many respects, to also say that there is no philosophy, for the philosophy of music is implicated in, and an integral part of, the philosophy of nature and history and cannot be separated from it.

The implications of such an expansive, outward-looking and interconnected view of the position of music in society, and indeed in the process of history, gave rise to an aesthetic and associated reformatory programme that wholly embodied this view. If there is one false assumption that I have attempted to overturn in the course of this thesis it is the notion that Rousseau is merely *contra* harmony. To be sure, melody assumes a privileged position in his aesthetic, for it points directly to an idealised moment in his history of mankind – the 'Idyll of the Well' – a moment in which harmony had not yet been discovered. The reformatory impulse in his work is, then, almost to drive music back up the degenerative helix that we explored in Chapter Two towards a purer, more immediately expressive, more directly

affective condition. But with a healthy dose of pragmatism that was culled from his experiences as composer, Rousseau set about realigning and re-evaluating the roles of harmony and melody, rather than jettisoning the former altogether. In *Le Devin du Village*, Rousseau thus proposed a vision of musical form in which melody and harmony would march together, striving for the same goal: ever more affective expression. But Rousseau would pursue this idea with more zeal and perhaps greater conviction and in doing so he sought allow melody greater latitude to be itself, to renegotiate an alliance with language, a language that in his view was ill-suited to musical setting. In its final term, in the scène lyrique *Pygmalion*, the reform is radical and brutal: music and language are not permitted to share the same signifying representational space.

If, as I argued in the concluding lines of Chapter 5, Rousseau's philosophy of music achieves a sense of closure in *Pygmalion*, then it does so in two particular respects. First, through the words of Galatea, as a reiteration of the very first vocalisation at the institution of the Fall-State; and second, the work itself can be seen as an embodiment – a musico-dramatic reflection – of this particular subset of the philosophy of nature and history: the philosophy of music.

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Appendix Item 1: Example of Rousseau's numeric system of notation: 'volez, plaisirs volez' from Rameau's *Dardanus*.¹

MENUE ET DE DARDANUS.

Re **V**OLEZ, plaisirs, volez; Amour, prête-leur tes char-
 3 || d 3, 4 3, 2 3 | 4, 3—2, 3 2, 1 2—3, 1,
 mes, répare les alarmes qui nous ont trou-blés.
 d 2 | 1, 2 1, 7 6 | 5, 4, 3 | 6, 5, 1 | 7 c^x
 Que ton empire est doux! Viens, viens, nous voulons
 c 5c, 4 3, 4 5 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 1, 3 2,
 tous sentir tes coups: enchaîne-nous; mais ne te sers
 d 1 | 1, 3 2, 1 | 1, 3 2, 1 | 6 | 4 5, 6
 que de ces chaînes dont les peines sont des bienfaits.
 c 7, 1 2 | 3 4, 5 6 7 1 | 4, 5, 7 | 1 d
 x

¹ Rousseau, *Dissertation sur la Musique Moderne*, in *Oeuvres*, t.11,p.144

Appendix Item 2 : 'Air Suisse Appellé le Rans des Vaches'¹



¹ Transcribed in Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de Musique*, in *Œuvres*, t.13, planche N.

Appendix Item 3: Scène 6: 'Récitatif Obligé' from Rousseau: *Le Devin du Village*.¹

Lent à demi-jeu, les sons soutenus et liés

Flute 1, 2
mf

Bassoon
mf

Violin 1
mf

Violin 2
mf

Viola
mf

COLIN. *à part*
Je l'ap-per-çois . . .

Bass
mf

6

mp

mf

mp

mf

mp

mf

mp

mf

mf

mp

mf

Je tremble en m'of-frant à sa vu- e.

mf

mp

mf

¹ Extract taken from: *Le Devin du Village*. Edited by C Kaufmann. Recent Researches in the Music of the Classic Era, 50. (Madison: A & R Editions Inc, 1998), pp.46-49.

Appendix Item 3 (Continued).

The musical score is arranged in systems. The first system (measures 11-16) features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a bass line and a grand staff (treble and alto clefs). The lyrics "demi jeu" are written below the vocal line in measures 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16. The second system (measures 17-22) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics "...Sau-vons nous! ..." and "Je la perds si je fuis. ..." are written below the vocal line in measures 17 and 18 respectively. The piano part includes a bass line and a grand staff. The dynamic marking "mf" is present in measures 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22. The third system (measures 23-28) features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics "COLETTE" and "Il me voit ..." are written below the vocal line in measures 23 and 24 respectively. The piano part includes a bass line and a grand staff. The dynamic marking "mf" is present in measures 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28.

Appendix Item 3 (Continued)

23

mf *mp* *mf* *mp*

mf *mp* *p* *mf* *mp*

mf *mp*

COLETTE

Que je suis é-mu-e! Le coeur me bat...

mf *mp*

28

mf *p* *mf*

mf *mf* *mf*

mf

COLIN

Je ne sais où j'en suis.

COLETTE

Trop près sans y son-ger, je me suis ap-pro-

mf

Appendix Item 3 (continued)

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 33-36) features piano accompaniment with dynamics *p* and *pp* in the right hand, and *pp* in the left hand. The vocal line for COLIN begins with the lyrics "ché. e. Je ne puis m'endé- di- re, il a faut a-bor-". The second system (measures 37-40) continues the piano accompaniment with dynamics *p*, *pp*, and *f* in the right hand, and *pp* and *f* in the left hand. The vocal line concludes with the lyric "-der."

Huit
calme

Il revient à lui par degrés avec un
mouvement d'assuétude de joie.
Je reprends mes sens. Quel calme,
inattendu! quel courage inespéré,
me rassime! Une fièvre mortelle
embrasait mon sang: un baume de
confiance et d'espoir couvrait dans mes
veines; je crois me sentir renaitre.
Ainsi le sentiment de notre
dépendance sert quelquefois à notre
consolation. Quelque malheureux
que soient les mortels, quand ils ont
invoué les Dieux, ils sont plus
tranquilles....
Mais cette injuste confiance
trompe ceux qui font des vœux
insensés... Hélas! en l'état où je
suis on invoque tout et rien ne
nous étonne; l'espoir qui nous
abuse est plus insensé que le desir.
Kontoux de tant d'égarment je
n'ose plus même en contempler la
cause. Quand je veux lever les
yeux sur cet objet fatal, je sens un

des hommes, ah! vous avez tant fait
de prodiges pour de moindres causes.
voyez ce objet, voyez mon cœur,
soyez justes et mérités vos autels.
accus
bapt. Avec un enthousiasme plus pathétique.

Et toi, sublime essence qui te
caches aux sens et te fais sentir
aux cœurs, ame de l'univers, —
principe de toutes existences; toi
qui par l'amour donnes l'harmonie
aux éléments, la vie à la matière,
le sentiment aux corps, et la forme
à tous les êtres; feu sacré, alecta
Venus par qui tout se conserve
et se reproduit sans cesse; ah! où
est ton équilibre? où est ta force
expansive, où est la loi de la
nature dans le sentiment que
j'éprouve, où est ta chaleur
vivifiante dans l'humanité de mes
vains desirs? Tous tes feux sont
concentrés dans mon cœur et le
froid de la mort reste sur ce membre. §

¹ Reproduced in *Rousseau-Coignet: Pygmalion, Sografi-Cimador: Pimmalione*. Edited by Emilio Sala. *Drammaturgia musicale veneta*, 22. (Milan: Ricordi, 1996), p.X.

Appendix Item 5: A Complete Translation of Rousseau's Scène Lyrique, *Pygmalion*¹

The setting is a sculptor's studio. On each side one can see blocks of marble and roughed-out statues. In the background is another statue hidden by a delicate, glistening veil decorated with fringes and garlands.

Pygmalion, sitting, leaning on his elbow, is pensive like someone who is anxious and melancholy; then, suddenly getting to his feet, he takes his artist's tools from the table, goes and gives an occasional blow of the chisel to some of his unfinished pieces. He steps back and looks on discontented and discouraged.

Pygmalion:

There's neither soul nor life in it; it's nothing but stone. I shall never be able to do such a thing. Oh my genius, where are you? My talent, what has become of you? All my creative fire has gone, my imagination is frozen; the marble comes cold out of my hands. Pygmalion, no longer carve gods, you are nothing but a common artist! Worthless tools, no longer those of my glory, be gone and do not soil my hands.

(He throws down his tools with disdain, and paces for some time, arms crossed, pensively)

What has become of me? What strange revolt has overcome me? Tyr, elegant and opulent city, I am no longer attracted to your artistic achievements. I have lost my inclination to admire them: the trade of artists and philosophers hold nothing for me, I find the conversations of painters and poets unappealing; my soul is no longer ennobled by praise and glory. Those who build their posterity on such premises do not interest me; even friendship has lost its charm.

And you, young objects, nature's masterpieces which my art has dared to imitate and whose pleasures kept attracting me, you, my charming models, which used to make me burn with the fire of both love and genius, since I have surpassed you, I am indifferent to you all.

(he sits down and contemplates all around him.)

Confined [*retenue*] to this studio by a mysterious charm I cannot do anything and I cannot get away from it. I wander from statue to statue, figurine to figurine; my

¹ Rousseau, *Pygmalion* in *Œuvres*, t.10, (Paris: Tenre et Ledoux, 1819), pp.365-374.

chisel is weak and unsure. I have lost control over it. Those rough works, remaining mere outlines, no longer respond to the hand that would have once animated them.

(he gets to his feet impetuously)

That's it. That's it. I have lost my genius – I am still so young and yet must outlive my talent. What is this consuming ardour within me? What is it that sets my soul ablaze? What! In the languor of extinguished genius can we feel such emotions, feel the spirit of impetuous passions, the unconquerable restlessness, the secret agitation which torments me and for which I cannot find a cause?

I feared that by admiring just one of my works, I have neglected everything else; I have hidden it beneath this veil. My profane hands have dared to cover this monument to their glory. Since I no longer see it, I am even more discontent and even less conscientious.

How valuable and precious this immortal work will be to me! When my ailing spirit no longer produces anything great, beautiful, worthy of me, I will show my Galatea and I will say: 'that is my work'. Oh my Galatea! When I have lost everything I will still have you, and I will be comforted.

(he makes for the lodge, but stops, then paces up and down, and sighing looks at the statue)

But why should I hide it? What have I got to gain by it? As I am reduced to idleness, why should I deprive myself of the pleasure of contemplating the most beautiful of my works? There may still be some unnoticed flaw; perhaps I could add further embellishments to her dress [*parure*]; such a charming object should not lack any conceivable adornment.... Perhaps this object may yet rekindle my listless imagination. I have to see it again, I must examine it once more. What am I saying? I have not examined it yet, thus far I have only admired it.

(he begins to unveil it, but stops as if he is frightened)

I do not know which emotion I feel upon touching this veil. I am paralysed with fear; it is as if I were touching the sanctuary [*sanctuaire*] of a divinity. Pygmalion! It is stone; it is your work; what does it matter? In our temples we serve gods who are made of the same material and who were sculpted by the same hands.

(he lifts the veil, and trembling he falls to his knees bowing down before the statue. We see the statue of Galatea on a very small pedestal, raised by a marble platform consisting of a few semi-circular steps)

O Galatea receive my homage. Yes, I was wrong: I wanted you to be a nymph and instead I have made you a Goddess. Not even Venus is as beautiful as you are. Vanity, human weakness! I never tire of admiring my work. My pride [*amour-propre*] intoxicates me. I adore myself in what I have done. No, nothing as beautiful as this has ever appeared in nature; I have surpassed the work of the Gods.

What! Such beauties made by my hands? So my hands have touched them? Maybe my mouth could.... I can see a flaw. This garment covers too much, I must reveal more; the charms it conceals should be more visible.

(he takes his mallet and chisel, then, slowly and hesitantly climbs the steps up to the statue. It seems that he doesn't dare touch it, but finally, with chisel raised, he stops)

What trembling, what turmoil. I wield the chisel with an unsure hand...I cannot...I dare not... I will spoil everything.

(he regains his composure. With his chisel he delivers a single blow, but terrified he drops it shouting loudly)

My God...I feel the statue's throbbing flesh repel my chisel.

(he steps down, trembling and confused)

... Vain terror, insane blindness ... No ... I will not touch it. The Gods terrify me. Without doubt, she must already be one of them [*déjà consacrée à leur rang*].

(he looks at her again)

What do you want to change? Look; what new charms do you want to give her?... Ah! Her perfection is her flaw... Divine Galatea...if you were less perfect you would not lack anything.

(tenderly)

But you lack a soul: your features [*figure*] cannot do without it.

(more tenderly)

How beautiful must the soul be that is capable of animating such a body.

(he stops for some time; then, sits down again, saying in a slow and different voice)

What wishes do I dare to utter? What insane desires! What am I feeling? Oh heaven! The veil of illusion has fallen, and I dare not look into my heart: I will find too much to be ashamed of.

(long pause, Pygmalion is in deep contemplation)

So here is the noble passion that leads me astray. It is because of this inanimate object that I dare not leave this place. Marble! Stone! Shapeless and hard, wrought by this instrument... you are mad, withdraw into yourself, lament yourself; look at your mistake, see your insanity. But no...

(impetuously)

No I have not lost my senses; no, my mind is not wandering; no, I do not reproach myself for anything. It's not with this dead marble I am enchanted, but with a living being which resembles it, and with this figure which presents itself before my very eyes. In whatever place this adorable statue is, whoever carries it, whosoever created it, it will receive all my heart's sentiments. Yes, my only weakness is to perceive beauty, my only crime is my sensibility. There is nothing here to be ashamed of.

(still with passion)

How hot these flames which seem to radiate from this statue and kindle my senses, and then, with my soul, return to their source. Alas, it remains still and cold. My heart, kindled by its charms, would like to leave my body and kindle its. I think that in my delirium I could throw myself out of this body; I think I could give life to it, yes, bring it to life with my soul. May Pygmalion die and live in Galatea. What am I saying? If I were her I would not be able to see her, and I would not be the one who loves her. No, may Galatea live, and may I not be her. Oh may I always be another so that I can always want to be her, see her, love her and be loved by her.

(movingly)

Torments, wishes, desires, rage, helplessness, terrible love...Oh, all hell has taken over my restless heart. Almighty Gods, benevolent Gods, Gods of the people who used to understand man's passions, you have worked so many wonders for less

important causes. Look at this object, look at my heart, be just and be worthy of your altars.

(with pathos)

And you sublime essence who is *hidden* from the senses, but whose presence hearts can feel. Soul of the universe, principles of all existence. You, through *love*, give harmony to the elements, life to matter, feeling to bodies, shape to all creatures; sacred fire, celestial Venus through whom everything is preserved and reproduced endlessly, where is your equilibrium, where is your omnipotence, where is the law of nature in what I feel, where is your invigorating warmth in my inane and vain desires? All your fires are centred in my heart and yet the cold of death rests within this marble. I perish by the excess of life that it lacks. Alas, I'm not expecting a miracle, but it must disappear. The natural order has been disrupted, nature is gravely offended, give back its influence, re-establish a beneficial course and lend it your divine authority. Yes, all would be complete if the devouring ardour which consumes one without animating the other were shared equally between them. By my hand you have shaped these charms and features which only await feeling and life. Give the statue everything if necessary. It would be enough for me to live in her. You, who deign to smile upon homages paid by mere mortals, by those who cannot feel and cannot honour you; spread your glory with your work. Goddess of beauty, spare nature this offence, may such a perfect model be the reflection of what it is not.

(slowly, he pulls himself together, and assumes an air of assuredness and contentment)

I have regained my feelings. What unexpected quietude! What unexpected courage inspires me. A mortal fever kindled by my blood; a feeling of confidence and hope is coursing through my veins - I feel as if I were reborn. So the feeling of our dependence can sometimes be our consolation. However unhappy mortals are when they invoke the Gods, they are always becalmed. But this unjust confidence deceives those who express insane wishes... Alas, the state I find myself in, you can call upon anyone, but no one ever listens to you. The hope which deceives us is more insane than desire.

Ashamed of so many aberrations, I dare not contemplate their cause. Whenever I wish to look upon this fatal object, I feel confused, a secret and forbidden fear stops me.

(bitter irony)

Look poor wretch, be brave; dare to stare at the statue.

(he sees the statue moving, and turns away frightened. His heart sinks with pain)

What have I seen? God! What do I think I saw? Reddening flesh, fire in its eyes, even gestures. As if it were not enough for a miracle to happen, I have it all at last!

(excessively depressed)

Wretched thing, that's it - your delirium is now complete. Your reason and your genius fail you. Oh Pygmalion do not miss it - the loss of it will bury you in opprobrium.

(great indignation)

It's too much for the lover of stone to become a man of visions.

(he turns and sees the statue walk down the very steps he himself had climbed. He falls to his knees and with hands raised, looks to the sky.)

Immortal Gods! Venus! Galatea! Oh prestigious and frenzied love!

(Galatea touches herself and says)

Me

(Pygmalion, carried away, says)

Me

(Galatea again touching herself)

It is me

(Pygmalion)

Ravishing illusion which I can even now hear. Never depart from my senses.

(Galatea steps forward and touches a block of marble and says)

It is no longer me

(Pygmalion, agitated, can hardly contain himself, and follows every gesture, listens, observes her so avidly that he can barely breathe. Galatea walks towards him and stares. He quickly gets to his feet, opens his arms and stares at her ecstatically. She puts her hand upon him, he winces, then she takes her other hand, puts it against his heart, and he kisses it ardently. Galatea, sighing, says)

Ah, me again. [*ah, encore moi*]

(Pygmalion replies)

Yes, dear and charming object, yes worthy masterpiece of my hands, of my heart, of the Gods. There's you, only you. I have given you all my being: I shall live only through you.

Fin

322 *Andantino de Mr. Rousseau.*

The musical score is arranged in 14 staves. The first two staves are for Violino I and Violino II. The third staff is for Alto Viola. The fourth staff is for Bassa. The bottom six staves are for the string section, including Violoncello and Contrabbasso. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'sotto voce', 'for.', 'pizzicato', 'poco for.', 'pmo', 'pp', 'mf', and 'p'. The tempo is marked 'Andantino'.

¹ Reproduced in *Rousseau-Coignet: Pygmalion, Sografi-Cimador: Pimmalione*. Edited by Emilio Sala. *Drammaturgia musicale veneta*, 22. (Milan: Ricordi, 1996), p. 7

Appendix Item 6 (continued).

32:

Sotto voce

f. sotto voce.

Sotto voce.

Sotto voce.

andante de Mr. Rousseau. 92

The musical score is written for four instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Cello/Bass. The tempo is marked 'andante de Mr. Rousseau.' The score consists of 16 staves. The first two staves are for the violins, the third for the viola, and the last three for the cello and bass. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, dynamics (p, f), and articulation marks. The piece is identified as the '2nd Ritournello'.

¹ Reproduced in *Rousseau-Coignet : Pygmalion, Sografi-Cimador : Pimmalione*. Edited by Emilio Sala. Drammaturgia musicale veneta, 22. (Milan: Ricordi, 1996), p.11.