

**SEXUAL PERFORMANCE AS POLITICAL
PERFORMANCE IN THE *LETTRE À
M. D'ALEMBERT SUR LES SPECTACLES***

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Since everything which enters into the human understanding comes there through the senses, man's first reason is a reason of the senses; this sensual reason serves as the basis of intellectual reason. Our first masters of philosophy are our feet, our hands, our eyes.

Emile, 125¹

"I have written on diverse subjects," Rousseau wrote, "but always according to the same principles."² In light of the many announced paradoxes in and apparent contradictions between his works, this statement reads almost like a dare to readers to find the continuous thread running through them. Many have found this common theme is some variation of what we might call, borrowing from Marshall Berman, the problem of authenticity.³ It is presented variously as the tension between the social man who must dissimulate and the natural man who is always only what he appears to be, between "transparent" or unmediated communication and the "obstacles" that inequality, vanity, and fear produce, or between the innocence of *amour de soi* and the instrumentality of *amour propre*. In each case the dichotomy seems to announce a loss: we were once somehow more genuine and might perhaps be so again if the sociopolitical conditions of the day did not prevent it. Whether or how human authenticity can be recouped in a political milieu is entirely unclear. While the genuinely *republican* citizen might appear well

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positioned, Judith Shklar and others have underscored the necessarily partial existence of such a man: he only ever achieves a "fractional unity" because his identity and value remain dependent upon the whole.⁴ In a different but related vein, Richard Sennett finds in Rousseau the political consequences of an unchecked desire to "authenticate oneself as a social actor through the public display of personal qualities": the search for individual authenticity leads only to public chaos and thus requires continuous political control.⁵

In this context, Rousseau's condemnation of the theater in *Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les Spectacles* (hereafter *Letter to D'Alembert*)⁶ seems to be a logical consequence of his concern for authenticity. Both the sociocultural practice of theatergoing and the structure of theatrical representation pose multiple problems for the citizen whose *amour propre* must be kept in check and for the natural man who must be kept "entirely for himself."⁷ In fact, Rousseau has much to say in this piece about the theatergoer's opportunity for self-distinction, for social aggrandizement, and for the free reign of *pitié* that threatens a loss of self; but Rousseau has more to say about sexual interaction. Indeed, the disorder that the establishment of a national theater would introduce to Geneva is at base a sexual disorder. He insists that neither feminine *pudeur*, or modesty, nor masculine audacity could long endure a theatrical milieu, where the reversal of proper sexual positions (i.e., women's rule over men) is often thematic. This reversal is in part a function of theater's dramatic content: according to Rousseau, "only romances" succeed on the contemporary stage and "love is the realm of women; it is they who necessarily give the law in it."⁸ But this reversal is also owing to the theater's social practices, which afford both actresses and female spectators a publicity inconsistent with *pudeur*.

The discussion of republican entertainments near the end of the *Letter to D'Alembert* supports the conclusion that the political corruption associated with theatergoing is rooted in corrupt sexualities: Rousseau's preferred festivals, sportive competitions, *cercles*, and balls are all ordered such that men and women only ever appear in their proper places. And yet these alternative accounts of cultural practice rely on the same models of identification and publicity that Rousseau denounces in his analysis of the theater: in each case, citizen unity is forged or destroyed by sexual identities which must be scripted and choreographed. Here individuality is undermined by the confusion of roles, not by role-playing itself, and an organized publicity is one of its essential moments. As I will argue, Rousseau's remedies suggest that to be sexually authentic one must embrace theatricality, by which I mean a mode of action in which the self-*cum*-actor represents itself to others through gestures, poses, and words, and the meaning of the representation is contained within the performance itself.⁹

At first blush the notion that a representation could somehow contain its own meaning might appear baffling. But this appears to be the assumption of a sexual politics in which physically distinct bodies are represented as the source of social and political expedients (i.e., of masculinity and femininity). Thomas Laqueur has retraced these representations to the philosophical and scientific discourses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whose “discovery” of two distinct sexes was both a response to and a consequence of the destabilized sexual politics of that era.¹⁰ In the new account, gender differences could be verified or disproved only with reference to anatomical and physiological facts, which are not readily agreed on, but are incontestably there, in differences one can see and physically document. But contra Laqueur, who places Rousseau squarely on the side of the new natural science, I take his position to be far more ambivalent. Both his limited successes in the interlocutory exchanges that address *pudeur*’s naturalness and his emphasis on cultural practice and what might be called cultural law¹¹ suggest that Rousseau considered nature an imperfect determinant of gender difference. In his sexual politics, bodies are originary signs only to the extent that they are political sites, where the enactment of meaning and the showing of difference depends more on theatrics than on science.

To present the issue somewhat differently and in the language of the *Discourse on Inequality*, one might say that performative sexual identities are a response to the troublesome distinction between “being” and “seeming to be”; they signal an attempt to erase that distinction in the ostensibly unmediated unity of “doing.” This minimizes the possibility of political corruption in that citizens are always only what they appear to be, and in Rousseau’s republican *spectacles*, they only appear to act like men and women: dancing, ritualized courtship, and self-display are their content and form. Indeed, in the Spartan originals, the naked body itself was on display.¹² The fact that these entertainments erase altogether the distinction between spectator and *spectacle* does not mean that they preclude theatricality. On the contrary, they effect what might be called a generalization of the theatrical experience, by gathering men and women together publicly to play the roles of themselves. In the end, Rousseau rejects the theater as a historical institution but he embraces the manner in which it structures interaction: both its “imagined” identifications and its sexual publicity are necessary to forge the gender-differentiated citizenry he claims merely to celebrate.¹³ And while to some degree politics is always concerned with controlling performance, the *Letter to D’Alembert* provides an account of how republican identity itself originates with the control of sexual performance.

What are the implications of this reading of the sexual politics in the *Letter to D’Alembert* for Rousseau’s political project as a whole? I will suggest two

related points, both of which challenge authenticity as a central axis of his thought, in any of its various forms. First, the realization that gender is an assumed identity undermines the coherence of natural man, even as a romantic or nostalgic conjuring. There is, of course, ample reason to be doubtful of this without ever turning to the *Letter to D'Alembert*. In *Emile*, for example, Rousseau describes the dawn of sexual awareness as a "second birth," prior to which men and women are "indistinguishable" in all matters that count: physiologically male and female, they only become men and women when they enter the "moral order," apparently around puberty.¹⁴ Generally, however, the idealism in Rousseau's natural man has been accepted without any felt need to delve into his sexual politics: it is taken to refer either to the presocial, prelinguistic, and certainly prepolitical savage whose subsequent degeneration is best understood as Rousseau's version of the original "fall" into reason, or to the individual, envisioned alternatively as the Montagnon rustic or the solitary walker, who is somehow saved from the demands and vanities of bourgeois society. But what these idealist versions omit is Rousseau's equally idealist formulation of natural masculinity. This is not to say that they accept uncritically his sexual prescriptions: indeed, his natural scientific claims about gender inequality are regularly dismissed as outdated and/or misogynist sociobiology. But the masculine character of the natural man usually passes by unquestioned. However, if becoming a man *means* correctly performing a role, then the ontological and psychic status of "maleness" becomes as problematic as that of the citizen. It would seem that both the man and the citizen need to be produced, and neither that most natural of men, Emile, nor the isolated user of *suppléments* escapes being typecast. Furthermore, political life can be viewed neither as man's inescapable burden nor as his emancipatory choice: as a realm of interdependence, social control, and assumed identities, it is the sine qua non of his masculinity.

This leads to my second point, that the roles of man and woman are doing important political work in Rousseau's republican project. "In a republic," he writes in the *Letter to D'Alembert*, "men are needed": this is a moral and political dictum that requires investigation.¹⁵ Why, one must ask, is the performance of these roles critical to realizing republican ideals? Here I can only suggest why this is so, by providing a preliminary sketch of the characteristics of the sexual roles in which Rousseau would cast his republican men and women. The numerous depictions of sexual interaction that appear in his writings consistently underscore the performative dimension of gender made explicit in the *Letter to D'Alembert*, perhaps even more insistently inasmuch as they highlight the two-fold, (seemingly) contradictory, moments of sexual identity. To be a man, according to Rousseau, is to assume, alternatively, the positions of father/husband and lover: while in the first

position he is dominant, in the second he must be submissive. This necessitates a two-fold identity for the woman in which she alternatively assumes dominant and submissive roles: as a wife and mother, she remains subordinated to her husband, while as mistress, she commands him.

Feminist critics of Rousseau have long noted his contradictory expectation that women be simultaneously demure and libidinally aggressive, finding in it an early formulation of the whore/virgin double shift; what has been less explored is its parallel formulation for men.¹⁶ In Rousseau's sexual ontology, the experience and the expression of desire move through a dialectic of control in which men and women alternatively occupy the position of authority.¹⁷ In the interpretation offered here, these two-fold moments of domination and submission are of singular political significance in that they mimic the two-fold relationship every citizen must assume vis-à-vis the community: as sovereign, the citizen is an absolute ruler, while as subject, he is ruled absolutely. This formulation is given in *On the Social Contract*, where its problematic if not paradoxical implications are acknowledged and resolved in the theoretical construct of the general will.¹⁸ But what is philosophical brilliance, or legerdemain, in the *Social Contract* is made "real" in the *Letter to D'Alembert*, *Emile*, and other works through the public and private performances of sexual roles. There we find, not the equality or the transparency of mind meeting mind in a union of public and private interest,¹⁹ but the physical (re)enactment of inequality and relations of power.

This strategy, whereby power is sexualized and (thus) naturalized, minimizes the possibility that its inequities will be questioned because the critical distance such a questioning requires has been collapsed: when the man and the role are the same, the circumstances necessary for critique disappear along with those necessary for dissimulation.²⁰ Thus, to the degree Rousseau's prescribed sexual roles encode political roles, republican virtue and sacrifice become as heartfelt as erotic desire itself, and as immune to the challenges of reasoned reflection or calculation. By showing the coincidence of republican loyalty and gender identity in the performatory milieu of the *spectacle*, the *Letter to D'Alembert* shows that sexuality is both the medium for and the prototype of Rousseau's republican politics, where citizens learn how to "act well" simply by learning to act "naturally."²¹

In the *Letter to D'Alembert* Rousseau presents two portraits of the theatergoer. In the first, he minimizes the socially interactive aspects of the theater. Instead he highlights its isolating features: in a darkened hall amid a silent audience, the spectator approaches the *spectacle* in solitude. Rousseau's account of the sequestered and immovable spectators invokes Plato's prisoners in the cave, whose reality is limited to the shadows created by some other's manipulations:

[L]et us not adopt these exclusive entertainments which close up a small number of people in a gloomy cavern, which keep them fearful and immobile in silence and inaction, which give them only prisons, lances, soldiers, and afflicting images of servitude and inequality to see. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 125)

Like Plato's cave dwellers, they need "the sun to illuminate [their] innocent entertainments" (i.e., the bright and public spaces of the *cercles*). In his isolation, the spectator does not have recourse to his reason, which is "good for nothing" on the stage.²² He thus fails to distance and to distinguish himself from the characters. Here emotions are "pure and without mixture of anxiety for ourselves": there is no deliberation that would force one to weigh the consequences of the choices made on stage.²³ This identification between spectator and character is a continuation of the natural pity felt by the presocial savage who, wholly lacking in reason, is said to have "infinitely closer" identifications with "suffering animals."²⁴ While in the state of nature the capacity for pity "takes the place of laws, mores, and virtue," this same capacity is a source of potential disorder for social man. Spectators do not simply tremble at the sight of enacted pain; they feel the despair and the moral dilemmas as do the characters, but without the concern for consequence that reasoned reflection would provide. And in the end, "which of us is sure enough of himself to bear the performance [of comedy] without halfway taking part in the deeds which are played in it?"²⁵

This is the most dangerous aspect of the theater. Rousseau claims that the playwright's representation of deeds is more insidious than the actual witnessing of those deeds: "the massacres of the gladiators were not as barbarous as these frightful plays; At the circus one saw blood flowing, it is true, but one did not soil the imagination with crimes that make nature tremble."²⁶ Because playwrights work through the imagination and the passions, the audience becomes subject to their will without recognizing this subjugation. At the same time, theater only succeeds to the extent that its reality is recognized: it forces the spectators into a collaboration where, by willingly suspending their disbelief, they willingly suspend their wills. Of particular concern to Rousseau in this regard is the theater's representation of sexual interaction. Instead of "true beauties," "natural and simple sentiments," and "situations drawn from political concerns," theatrical subject matter is predominated by the "love interest."²⁷ By giving "new energy and new colouring to this dangerous passion," playwrights let loose the "hot blood"—more potent than mere gladiators'—that makes men "ungovernable before having borne the yoke of the laws."²⁸

Here we begin to see how the theater challenges Rousseau's own educational strategy, inasmuch as it places the spectator in exactly that position

occupied by Emile as he underwent his “second birth” into the sexual and moral order. At that dangerous and volatile moment the tutor introduces his pupil to society by way of an announced “expedient”:

“Your heart,” I say to the young man, “needs a companion. Let us go seek her who suits you. We shall not easily find her perhaps. True merit is always rare. But let us neither be in a hurry nor become disheartened. Doubtless there is such a woman, and in the end we shall find her, or at least the one who is most like her.” With a project that is so appealing to him, I introduce him to society. What need have I to say more? Do you not see that I have done everything? (*Emile*, 328)

In what follows the tutor elaborates on the qualities of this love object—named Sophie to give it “a greater air of truth”—whose utility rests precisely in being imaginary:

And what is true love itself if it is not chimera, lie, and illusion? We love the image we make for ourselves far more than we love the object to which we apply it . . . [b]y providing the imaginary object, I am the master of comparisons, and I easily prevent my young man from having illusions about real objects. (*Emile*, 329)

The tutor’s subsequent representations of Sophie—that she is obedient yet capable of willfulness, pretty but not remarkably so, demure and chaste yet sensual and flirtatious—constitute the feminine chimera necessary to republican love. The drama’s spectator is similarly presented with sexual illusions:

If a young man has seen the world only on the stage, the first way to approach virtue which presents itself to him is to look for a mistress who will lead him there, hoping of course to find a Constance or a Cénie, at the very least. It is thus, on the faith in an imaginary model, on a modest and moving manner, on a counterfeited sweetness . . . [t]hat the young fool goes to his destruction thinking he is becoming wise. (*Letter to D’Alembert*, 48)

As Emile is introduced to Sophie, so, too, the theatergoer is introduced to his beloved: both approach virtue through belief in an “imaginary model.” In the theater, however, the “young fool” lacks the careful guidance of a tutor and is subject instead to the whims and the visions of a Molière, whose actions, no less than an unfaithful woman, “shake the whole social order” by making “ridiculous” the “respectable rights of fathers over their children, husbands over their wives, masters over their servants!”²⁹

These imagined identifications threaten masculine authority by “extend[ing] the empire of the fair sex.” On one level this means simply that the prevalence of love stories allows the spectator to take too regular delight in his erotic desire. While, as we shall see, publicity is in certain respects its

crucial feature, the dialectic of control that love creates includes moments that must kept privatized and personalized. "Is there a sight [*spectacle*] in the world so touching," Rousseau writes, "as that of a mother surrounded by her children, directing the work of her domestics, procuring a happy life for her husband and prudently governing her home?"³⁰ As poignantly illustrated by St. Preux's moral maturation in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, men's attachment to civic duty depends on these domestic *spectacles*, and it is only there that women can display their natural talents: "a woman outside her home loses her greatest luster and [is] despoiled of her real [*vrais*] ornaments."³¹

On another level, the theater extends women's empire by challenging the roles of the sexual dynamic. Within the romantic dyad it is imperative that women's behavior be circumscribed by men's judgments. Again Rousseau draws his example from Sparta, where respect for *pudeur* was so profound that amorous women were depicted on its stages only in the roles of "slaves or prostitutes."³² Such was the strength of Spartan *moeurs* that even the depiction of a decent woman constituted an offense to modesty: any distance between the representation and the real thing was not discernible to them. Salon society, by contrast, violates this order by linking women's esteem to their renown and to their roles as arbiters of taste. But however disquieting is this deference to women's judgment, things are much worse in the theater because *pitié* unchecked by self-interest shapes the spectators' response, rather than the desire to please:

Actually, in society they do not know anything, although they judge everything; but in the theater, learned in the learning of men and philosophers, thanks to the authors, they crush our sex with its own talents, and the imbecile audiences go right ahead and learn from women what they took efforts to dictate to them. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 49)

Paternal authority is threatened when the roles of wives and mothers show strong, conflicted, and authoritative figures. Phaedra's crime is diluted when she appears before the audience as a tragic (anti)heroine: they identify with her lust and her wrath. The sacrilege of Medea's infanticide fades when the audience sees her angst: they are moved by her pain. And the example of political obligation offered by Titus is undermined by the strength of the heroine in Racine's *Bérénice*: whatever Titus has chosen to do, at play's end "all the spectators have married Bérénice."³³ Neither the most brutal displays of love's fury nor the most moving displays of duty's triumph over it can lessen its appeal because "however love is depicted for us, it seduces or it is not love."³⁴

In this sense the process of theatrical identification resembles, rather than intrudes upon, romantic interaction. This point is made explicitly in the case

of dramatic actresses, whose very presence “gives them the same power over the audience that they have over their lovers.”³⁵ But it is also evident in Rousseau’s assessment of the comedic *Le Misanthrope*, which appeals to an equally strong, perhaps identical desire (i.e., to be found clever and discerning). In painting the virtuous Alceste as an object of ridicule, Molière “seduces by the appearance of reason” and thus reassures his audience that a bit of dishonesty is far preferable to playing the dupe.³⁶ Because both comedies and dramas must appeal to *amour propre* through “chimera, lie, and illusion,” their audience is positioned precisely as is the lover who must be seduced.

In addition to overly sympathetic and impassioned female characters, the father’s and husband’s authority is threatened by the social milieu of the theater that itself constitutes a performatory space. The fictions on the stage make women’s predicaments and powers felt; the “real” drama unfolding in the theater’s foyer and dressing rooms shows the practical consequences of that exposure. Most important is the weakening of *pudeur*. As Patrick Coleman points out, Rousseau’s analysis appears to lose a degree of coherence when he turns to this topic.³⁷ The text becomes increasingly argumentative as Rousseau shifts back and forth between the natural and cultural grounds of *pudeur*. He accuses hypothetical interlocutors of practicing “this philosophy of a day which is born and dies in the corner of a big city” when they disagree that *pudeur* is natural.³⁸ When they ask Rousseau to explain his “prejudice” on this score, he retreats behind a veil of ignorance that hides the “author’s” intentions. Quoting Voltaire—that most notorious of “big city” philosophers—Rousseau intones, “your whys, says the God, would never end.” It is not Rousseau these “scrutinizers” would challenge, but God.

He then changes course and suggests that unlimited sexual access would lead to a “boring freedom,” causing romantic interest to wane. Then why, the imaginary discussants ask, is *pudeur* not equally appropriate to both men and women? With great indignation Rousseau announces that paternity demands it of women: “As if all the austere duties of women were not derived from the single fact that a child ought to have a father!” His argument thus appears to reduce to sociopolitical expediency. But in the next line, he retreats back to the mystery of nature:

Even if these important considerations were lacking to me, we would nevertheless still have the same response, and it would still be without reply. Nature wanted it so, and it would be a crime to stifle its voice. (*Letter to D’Alembert*, 85)

The assertion of nature’s intention is interrupted by a footnote, which explains in detail how sexual reserve provides the basis for consent, without which

sex is only cause for “scandalous outrage”: “it bespeaks a soul without manners [*moeurs*], without refinement, incapable of either love or decency.” In other words, it bespeaks the savage, the natural, prepolitical man who knows neither morality nor authority. *Pudeur*, on the other hand, allows for refined violence, that which is used to obtain “silent consent” by “enslaving the sentiments before attacking the person”:

To read it in the eyes, to see it in the ways in spite of the mouth's denial, that is the art of he who knows how to love. If he then completes his happiness, he is not brutal, he is decent. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 85)

With this assertion Rousseau reveals the fundamental paradox of *pudeur* and the instability of the (sexual) consent it is designed to facilitate: the verbal articulation of desire or of its absence is insufficient because women's role *requires* them to say no. Because the grammar of interpreted consent must be read off the body, the enactment of struggle, of role-playing the dominant and the submissive, is an essential feature of gendered interaction.

The centrality of dominant/submissive role playing in Rousseau's own sexual imaginary is of course well known.³⁹ What is less noted is how it is written into the story of Emile and Sophie, and of Julie and St. Preux in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Whether these inscriptions are, on some level, projections is less interesting to me than is the correlation of an ethical and sexual awakening made in the *Confessions*, *Emile*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and other writings.⁴⁰ Each of these texts includes an account of how man's capacity for judgment emerges from and through his experience of erotic desire. In all cases, the terms and conditions of its satisfaction affect the subsequent formation of self-interest, and in all cases, the realization of autonomy is accompanied by the experience of sexual submission. In *Emile* the coincidence of ethical and erotic awareness is first signaled in Rousseau's discussion of the difficult “second birth,” which the two-fold social/sexual debut requires: “we are, so to speak, born twice: once to exist and once to live: once for our species and once for our sex.”⁴¹ Previously “alone in human society,” Emile's sixteenth year marks his entrance into the moral and erotic order, both of which entail the possibility of rendering him a tyrant or a slave. And while Emile's ethical development is said to avoid these dire possibilities by producing an authentic autonomy, we find them inscribed into the very structure of the marital relationship Rousseau sketches for Emile and Sophie.

At the end of *Emile*, when the lover and beloved are finally brought together to consummate their relationship, the tutor cautions them that love is difficult to maintain in marriage. The “only possible means” to preserving it, he insists, is to “go on being lovers [*continuer d'être amans*] when one is

married." The newlywed Emile eagerly agrees, assuming the issue is propensity. But the tutor takes pains to explain what he means:

"If it is true, dear Emile, that you want to be your wife's lover, let her always be your mistress and her own. . . . [O]btain everything from love without demanding anything from duty, and always regard Sophie's least favors not as your right but as acts of grace."
(*Emile*, 477)

Of course, as the tutor explains to Sophie, the roles of mistress and lover must be thoroughly circumscribed by paternal authority: "In becoming your husband Emile has become the head of the house; it is for you to obey, just as nature wanted it."⁴² But within that milieu, Sophie's role as arbiter finds "real" expression in the control of physical access. This is explicitly referred to as a "treaty," and Emile initially protests with great irritation. But after "consulting" his wife's eyes and seeing their "voluptuous agitation," he willingly submits. Falling prostrate at her feet he cries out, "dear wife, be the arbiter of my pleasures as you are of my life and my destiny." With this act of submission the tutor's responsibilities come to an end:

The treaty is signed with a kiss. I say to my pupil, "Dear Emile, a man needs advice and guidance throughout his life. Up to now I have done my best to fulfill this duty toward you. Here my task ends, and another's begins. Today I abdicate the authority you confided to me, and Sophie is your governor from now on." (*Emile*, 479)

But the roles of acquiescent wife and "masterful mistress"⁴³ are difficult to play simultaneously. Here, using the same language as that found in the *Letter to D'Alembert*, Rousseau announces that the husband/lover must learn to read when "her eyes accord what her mouth feigns to refuse."⁴⁴ The ambiguity inherent in this communication (i.e., in the corporeal signification of a moral property) is part of its appeal: "what is sweetest for man in his victory is the doubt whether it is weakness which yields to strength or the will that surrenders."⁴⁵ This overlapping of physical and moral experience, which succeeds in confounding awareness of right with a prereflective awareness of force⁴⁶ in that most "natural" of acts, is echoed in the *Letter to D'Alembert's* discussion of *pudeur*, where we read that nature designed women so they might "let themselves be vanquished," and theirs is the sex "destined to resist."⁴⁷ Indeed, according to Rousseau, even her fairer complexion, on which a "modest blush can be better perceived," is a natural sign of the inherent ambiguity of a woman's consent: feminine desire, indiscernible from feminine shame, is written all over her face.

But Rousseau seems to sense that the argument from nature remains unconvincing, if not simply confusing. After a final suggestion that the

mating practices of pigeons provide a model of “provocations and feeble resistance [w]hich the most skillful coquette could hardly obtain,” he ends the digression on *pudeur* in the *Letter to D’Alembert* with an admission that *pudeur*’s utility is its ultimate justification: “if the timidity, chasteness, and modesty which are proper to them are social conventions, it is in society’s interest that women acquire these qualities: they must be cultivated in women.” He can thus dismiss any counterexamples that might be drawn from an unadulterated nature:

The argument drawn from the example of beasts proves nothing and is not true. Man is not a dog or a wolf. It is only necessary in his species to establish the first relations of society to give to his sentiments a morality unknown to beasts. The animals have a heart and passions, but the holy image of the decent and the fair enters only the heart of man. (*Letter to D’Alembert*, 87)

But “holy images” are cultural products, and for this reason Rousseau does not and cannot reject artistic expression and experience completely. For the man and the citizen, the natural movement of the “heart and passions” is necessarily shaped by imagination, which in turn lays the foundations for understanding. This is the guiding theme throughout *Emile*’s education, which targets the young boy’s sense of self and interest in the critical years before reason develops:

Never reason in a dry manner with youth. Clothe reason in a body if you want to make youth able to grasp it. Make the language of the mind pass through the heart, so that it may make itself understood. I repeat, cold arguments can determine our opinions, but never our actions. They make us believe and not act. . . . [I]f this is true for all men it is *a fortiori* true for young people, who are still enveloped in their senses, and think only insofar as they imagine. (*Emile*, 323)

The introduction of Sophie, whose status as “holy image” Rousseau readily admits, is but the culminating moment of an educational process in which *Emile* learns how to judge by learning what to imagine. And as the passage above makes clear, this situation is only more acute with children: it does not disappear in adulthood when reason “awakens.” The ability to act morally—to recognize a difference between *ought* and *is*—originates in the same capacities of mind that take us “out of ourselves” into a realm of representations: “it is imagination which extends for us the measure of the possible, whether for good or bad, and which consequently excites and nourishes the desires by the hope of satisfying them.”⁴⁸ Although “reason alone teaches us to know bad from good,”⁴⁹ the very possibility of making that distinction exists only insofar as the desires are excited. Rousseau’s

strategy is to nourish desires whose satisfaction consists in the fulfillment of republican duty rather than leaving citizens to grapple with the distressing conclusion that morality and identity are always already a matter of appearances. Toward this end—controlling “the measure of the possible”—Rousseau, like Emile’s tutor, supplies “imaginary objects” so as to be the “master of comparisons.”⁵⁰

A similar claim about the role of imagination in Rousseau’s epistemology and politics is made by Patrick Coleman in his analysis of the *Letter to D’Alembert*, although the conclusions he draws are significantly different. He argues that Rousseau appeals to the *spectacle* in order to develop a new notion of practice, “neither purely instrumental nor defined simply in opposition to modern science and self-consciousness.”⁵¹ This possibility exists at the level of symbol interaction, for which the theater is both metaphor and institutional locale. Located somewhere between philosophical dialogue and instrumental calculation, (inter)action on the model of the *spectacle* induces a “thoughtful suspension of thought,” and thus provides “the only way out of the contradiction between identification and critique.”⁵² Rousseau’s goal is a “reconstituted” imagination, which will encourage the initiative action necessary to a “regenerated political will.”⁵³ And while Coleman acknowledges the dilemma Rousseau must face between the fundamentally nonreflective, experiential quality of participation in the symbolic order, and the moral and political demands for adjudicated norms, this is not sufficient grounds for him to dispute the authenticity of the citizen/spectator experience. Quoting Leo Strauss he suggests that this is but another example of the paradox of political philosophy: “the problem posed by political philosophy must be forgotten if the solution to which political philosophy leads is to work.”⁵⁴ Coleman concludes that Rousseau is preparing his citizens to cope with the “underlying scandal of politics”: that rights exist only in their application and there can never be recourse to a universal order of justice beyond particular, political instantiations.⁵⁵

Like Coleman, I find in Rousseau’s use of the theater a paradigm of identification and interaction between social beings. The fact that it does not proceed via instrumental reasoning is one of its most salient features. On the other hand, attention to the sexual politics, which thread through Rousseau’s account, makes it difficult to join in Coleman’s happy conclusion that the *spectacle* instantiates a form of self-consciousness ripe with emancipatory potential. This is not simply because the *Letter to D’Alembert* continues and elaborates his attack on women; although, it is certainly true that if his “new notion of practice” is compelling, it remains so only as long as one is comfortable with women’s permanent exclusion from political (self-)rule, which the *Letter to D’Alembert* clearly indicates is necessary.

Coleman's conclusion does not convince because it entails a very partial reading of Rousseau's management of sexual interaction. He writes that Rousseau's anxiety about sex roles is really a concern about the "enduring power of initiative," and thus his delimitation of the realm of sexual interaction is really an effort to "preserve one area of human life in which 'persons who perform' participate in something more significant than the instrumental action of social existence; for Rousseau, it might be said that reproduction offers the only option for genuine, inaugural action, and therefore what [he] means by a public life."⁵⁶ But Coleman fleshes out this claim with an analysis of *pudeur* that highlights its instrumentality; not, to be sure, in the sense of a narrow calculation of interest, but in the sense of creating the very conditions in which Rousseau's citizens—"who are, of course, male"—can maintain their "free public realm."⁵⁷ What remains "genuine" is apparently the natural and enduring power to act, which men's erotic desire both initiates and represents. Rousseau's sexual *moeurs* are thus a necessary artifice in the preservation of this authentic mode of human engagement.

But when Coleman explains that Rousseau uses *pudeur* to "diffuse the violence of initiative action"⁵⁸ he forgets that one critical element of *pudeur* is its inculcation of vulnerability. Like girls' early training geared to make them "feel their dependence," this call for shame and modesty insures that the quasi-rapes of the successful marriage can be perpetrated.⁵⁹ Furthermore, a strategic denial of *pudeur* is paramount to the success of the "masterful mistress" whose exquisite tyranny is no less central to Rousseau's sexual repertoire than the coy acquiescence of the virtuous wife. One is compelled to ask, exactly *what* sort of sexual interaction is Coleman talking about? What the *Letter to D'Alembert* depicts, and what is repeated in all of Rousseau's depictions of the romantic dyad, is a thoroughly calculated exchange in which the difference between ravishing and savaging depends on the right reading of bodily signs, and the "sweetness" of the exchange depends on confounding the difference.

The performance Rousseau demands of the citizen does not begin, as Coleman would have it, with the experience of affective unity between republican militiamen whose reconstituted imaginations transcend the crippling truth that "there are no longer convincing arguments for defending political divisions."⁶⁰ Rather, the performance begins in the home and the bedroom, in those first moments of sexual and ethical awareness when men and women are ready to undergo a "second birth" and make political divisions between themselves. Rousseau's script works on their social and self-understanding long before the demands of politics proper are addressed. Limiting his notion of drama to a paradigm of *citizen* interaction is thus misleading, because it is first and foremost a model of how one becomes a

political, or in the case of women, a depoliticized agent. Sexual identity as well as political rights must be protected from a fundamental instability: like the law, its "truth" is confirmed only in its enactment.

But sexual identity's status as "necessary fiction" can never be disclosed. In this sense gender might be that "area of darkness, even of active forgetting, in the symbolic basis of culture," which Coleman suggests is necessary for Rousseau's citizens.⁶¹ There is textual support for this conclusion in Rousseau's most complete analysis of symbolic systems, the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, which retraces a first language to the first expressions of erotic desire. Prior to that moment was the "golden age of barbarism," in which males and females lived in families, but families of a most rudimentary sort: "natural inclinations sufficed to unite them, instinct served in lieu of passion, habit in lieu of predilection, [and] people became husband and wife without having ceased to be brother and sister."⁶² Rousseau explains that this situation was unproblematic given the "simplicity of the first morals," a simplicity that precluded the idea of "man":

Since they had never seen anything other than what was around them, they did not even know that; *they did not know themselves*. They had the idea of a Father, a son, a brother, but not of man. Their hut held all those who were like themselves; a stranger, an animal, a monster were all the same to them. (*Essay on Languages*, 260-61; emphasis added)

The transition to fully differentiated gender roles (i.e., to the identification of "man" and "woman," and the concomitant institution of incest taboos) is located precisely in the advent of language: the first social intercourse between families, the "first meetings between the sexes," and the first utterances were all coincident.⁶³ While this development is initially described in joyful terms ("the heart . . . [f]elt the pleasure of not being alone"), it also signals the advent of "new needs," which "force everyone to think of himself and to withdraw his heart within himself."⁶⁴ The trajectory is familiar from the *Discourse on Inequality*: that which signals new levels of awareness ushers in the inevitability of *amour propre*. It would seem that the very capacity for representational thinking, and with it, the loss of independence and innocence, is indelibly linked to the acquisition of a sexual identity, and one is only a "man" or a "woman" by virtue of one's powerlessness and partiality. This, then, is the darkness at the heart of the symbolic order, which must be forgotten if authenticity—of community, self, and authority—can be believed.

This is the conclusion reached in Jacques Derrida's masterful study of the *Essay on Languages*, which teases out Rousseau's contribution to a post-Enlightenment "metaphysics of presence." According to Derrida, Rousseau

offers a singular example of the “dream of a full and immediate presence,” which must suppress the very condition of language and consciousness: “contradiction and difference.”⁶⁵ While his terms and his interests are different from those used and pursued thus far, his conclusion goes directly to the point: there is violence, Derrida insists, in the construction of the categories on which autonomy depends and that violence originates at the level of the symbolic. On this reading, Rousseau responds to the scandalous and (literally) unthinkable conclusion that “immediacy is derived”—in our terms, that natural man is a political construct—by introducing a series of *suppléments*, or compensatory substitutions whose necessary function as intermediary can be denied, or perhaps forgotten.⁶⁶ In this series gender is the essential, so to say, *supplément*, and it obtains at the level of the symbolic: the (false) assertion of identity between representation and the thing represented corresponds to the masculine, while the inability to assert such identity corresponds to the feminine.⁶⁷

On one hand, this notion of arche-violence, which is Derrida’s term for the originary suppression of difference that naming requires, gives us a way to think about Rousseau’s preoccupation with sexual representations. That how women appear to be is more significant than what they might really be, while men’s virtue consists in the unity of the two; that the citizen can only be represented by himself, while his wife can unproblematically concede her representation to him: these well-rehearsed claims of Rousseau’s might be seen as a continuation of gender’s linguistic function on the social-aesthetic and political levels. On the other hand, this approach does not adequately address the material basis of Rousseau’s representative strategy. Because he attempts to realize the “dream of a full and immediate presence” on and through physical bodies, sexual identity is never simply the effect of Rousseau’s metaphysics: it is his political goal. To ignore this is to render timeless and inevitable what is in fact a question of power and historical contingency.⁶⁸ Furthermore, because Derrida’s notion of the arche-violence necessary to identity fixes femininity and masculinity in the metaphysics of mind, his account ironically desexualizes these terms, pretending that philosophy, and not bodies, is the critical site of their construction.⁶⁹

But Rousseau was “not obliged to make a man a philosopher before making him a man,” and the disjuncture between the symbolic and the physical that deconstructive analysis assumes is actively denied by his sexual politics.⁷⁰ The model of theatricality, which I have suggested is central to the *Letter to D’Alembert*, is the quintessential example of that denial. Another look at the *Essay on Languages*, one that does not privilege the question of writing, reveals a similar strategy of representation-as-embodiment. Thus confirming *Emile*’s insistence on the primacy of sensual over intellectual

objects in human development and understanding, it confirms the lessons of the *Letter to D'Alembert*, that men and women are made (and unmade) in a manner that defies reason.

As noted above, the *Essay on Languages* tells the story of a linguistic "fall," in which the innocence of a first language was corrupted by the emergence of new needs, the equivalent of *amour propre*. This process is depicted in a topographical sketch: southern lands, connoting a lush and hospitable nature, were the site of the first utterances. But these "daughters of pleasure" were soon perverted by the languages of northern lands, "sad daughters of necessity," which originated with the need to formulate self-interest.⁷¹ The insecurity and fear produced by a harsh nature, rather than "the pleasure of not being alone," initiated the language of the north: "its first words were not *love me* [*aimez-moi*] but *help me* [*aidez-moi*]."⁷² While the resulting *mélange* is a language in which self-interested calculation figures prominently, its erotic origins are never fully eclipsed: according to Rousseau, utterance always retains the potential to evoke its initiating desire.⁷³

The strategic differences, and possibilities, in linguistic origin are made evident in his description of the features of modern languages:

[F]rench, English, and German are the private languages of men who help one another, who argue with one another in a deliberate manner, or of excited men who get angry; but the ministers of God proclaiming the sacred mysteries, wise men giving laws to their people, leaders swaying the masses must speak Arabic or Persian. (*Essay on Languages*, 275)

While northern languages retain the features characteristic of disputation and negotiation, southern languages must "seduce the ear": their accents "penetrate to the very depths of the heart [and] in spite of ourselves convey to it the emotions that wring them [from us] and cause us to feel what we hear."⁷⁴ Rousseau notes that a man who reads a little Arabic might "smile as he peruses the Koran," but to hear these words delivered by "Mohammed himself" would cause that same man to "prostrat[e] himself and cr[y]: *Great Prophet, Messenger of God, Lead us to glory, to martyrdom; we want to conquer or to die for you.*"⁷⁵ This looks strikingly similar to the seductive power of the mistress celebrated in *Emile*, who can "send her lovers with a nod to the end of the earth, to combat, to glory, to death, to anything she pleases."⁷⁶ But she is not speaking Arabic: her gestures alone (re)invoke the same penetrating desire.

An ability to "speak to the eyes" is precisely what Rousseau identifies as the persuasive power of a first language: on his telling, not only is visual arousal man's most primary and immediate means of apprehension, but

“visible signs make for more accurate imitation.”⁷⁷ The examples that Rousseau uses to illustrate the power of “arguments addressed to the eyes” (e.g., the Levite of Ephraim dismembering his mistress’s corpse, Alexander “putting his ring in his favorite’s mouth,” Hyperides successfully defending Phrynê by exposing her breasts) all attest to the power of a “mute eloquence” that appeals to and through the body. Here communication succeeds because it bypasses the voice: “they did not say it, they showed it.”⁷⁸ Again, one is reminded of a passage in *Emile*, which discusses how the pupil’s lessons can be “engrave[d] in his memory.”⁷⁹ There Rousseau offers the same examples of “mute eloquence” found in the *Essay on Languages*, as well as repeating its preference for arguments addressed to the eyes:

In neglecting the language of signs that speak to the imagination, the most energetic of languages has been lost. The impression of the word is always weak, and one speaks to the heart far better through the eyes than through the ears. In wanting to turn everything over to reasoning, we have reduced our precepts to words; we have made no use of actions. Reason alone is not active. It sometimes restrains, it arouses rarely, and it has never done anything great. . . . [S]trong souls have quite another language. It is with this language that one persuades and makes others act. (*Emile*, 321)

He concludes his digression with a contrast between the sterility of modern orators, whose descriptions of Caesar’s “wounds, his blood, his corpse” would hardly move Roman citizens, and the eloquence of Antony, who simply has “the body brought in; what rhetoric!”⁸⁰

In the *Essay on Languages*, Rousseau’s first language mimics the “mute eloquence” of embodied representations because it also “shows” meaning. The first expressions, he insists, were tropes: “figurative language arose first, proper [or literal] meaning was found last.”⁸¹ The example he offers is the savage who, in his fear and ignorance, first sees and thus understands all other men as *giants*. Repeated exposure and subsequent comparison provide him with opportunities to see them differently; they thus “recognize” *giant* to be a false object. In this way the first transposition of meaning was actually the bifurcation of our first meanings into truth and illusion, and the first sense we made of the world was metaphoric:

That is how the figurative word arises before the proper [or literal] does, when *passion holds our eyes spellbound and the first idea which it presents to us is not that of truth*. . . . [S]ince the illusory image presented by passion showed itself first, the language answering to it was invented first; subsequently it became metaphorical, when the enlightened mind recognized its original error and came to use expressions of that first language only when moved by the same passions as had produced it. (*Essay on Languages*, 246-47; emphasis added)

“When passion holds the eyes spellbound”: this is the moment when illusion and truth are one, and the distinctions necessary for both deliberation and deception have yet to be made. This is precisely the moment of theatrical identification, and the moment of erotic desire. In Rousseau’s account of each, the ability to distinguish between appearance and being, and thus the ability to calculate, deliberate, and judge, is lacking. In this sense the language of the theater duplicates the structure of a “first language” (i.e., its meanings are taken in “completely at a glance”) and if sexuality, as the organization of erotic desire,⁸² can be affected in this way (i.e., through corporeal signification), then the first illusions of *man* and *woman*, as introduced by the tutor to Emile and by Rousseau to his readers,⁸³ can determine sexual identities. Gender, as the figurative *man* and *woman*, could only be seen as such when the “same passions as had produced it” are overcome. But in Rousseau’s scenario, they never are: perpetual sexual control and perpetually sexualized interaction guarantee that males and females are *always* acting like husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, or lovers and mistresses.⁸⁴

Returning to the *Letter to D’Alembert*, we find that perpetual sexual (re)enactment is precisely the organizing strategy of Rousseau’s republican *spectacles*. A republic, he insists, ought to have “many” entertainments, but they must be linked to properly republican institutions. Foremost among these are Geneva’s sexually segregated *cercles*, where men and women gathered separately for revelry and talk. These gatherings allow men to develop both the robust physical countenance and the quality of mind that social intimacy with women threatens. On the first score, Rousseau claims that sedentary and homebound activities inevitably weaken men’s bodies: just as, one might add, they weaken women’s.⁸⁵ On the second score, male companionship safeguards against the pernicious desire to amuse women, which reduces men’s writing and thinking to the level of the frivolous.

Rousseau’s discussion of this problem includes a footnote on the subject of women’s intellectual abilities, which is, even for him, extraordinarily sharp and dismissive: “Women, in general, do not like any art, know nothing about any, and have no genius . . . [t]heir works are all as cold and pretty as they are . . . [t]hey do not know how to describe nor to feel even love; only Sappho, as far as I know, and one other woman, deserve to be excepted.” Here Rousseau utterly denies women’s capacity for that which shapes their duties throughout his work (i.e., the requirements of maternal and connubial love). On one hand, this denial suggests the extent to which women must be made to perform: if incapable of feeling love, perhaps their passion is always only artifice. On the other hand, the passage must be read in the context of the argument he has just made. Imagine, he has suggested, what will be the “temper of a man’s soul” when he is “uniquely occupied with the important

business of amusing women and spends his entire life *doing for them what they ought to do for us.*" The possibility thus arises that a life-long task of amusing and pleasing others is itself the cause of frivolous thinking and stunted emotional capacities: this potentially problematic train of thought is derailed when Rousseau denies the very capability for literary excellence to any but Sappho and one unnamed woman.

What appear to be the *cercles'* disadvantages are brought about by their public and festive quality; their sexually segregated publicity, however, minimizes the consequences. The women's societies, Rousseau admits, spawn "scandalmongers and satirists."⁸⁶ On the other hand, such behavior is contained within a relatively harmless milieu: "for which is better, that a woman speak ill of her husband with her friends, or that she do it with a man in private conversation, that she criticize the disorder of her neighbor, or that she imitate it?" Here Rousseau emphasizes the *cercles'* disciplinary function. He writes that "severe observers" in the women's societies "almost perform the function of censors in our city."⁸⁷ Fondly recalling the great days of Rome, he notes that there the citizens engaged in mutual surveillance, on occasion "publicly accus[ing] one another out of zeal for justice." While he continues that a corrupt Rome saw "infamous informers succeeding zealous citizens," he anticipates a different effect in Geneva's *cercles*: women's condemnations and accusations constitute a socially expedient self-monitoring that reins in feminine excesses while it rules out masculine options.

As for the men's *cercles*, their drawback seems to be that they encourage drunkenness. But Rousseau insists that inebriation merely "alienates [man's] reason for a time": only in the long run is it "brutalized."⁸⁸ Furthermore, brutalized reason renders men stupid, not evil: "wine does not make wickedness, it only discloses [it]." In short, a people has never "perished from an excess of drinking; all perish from the disorder of women."⁸⁹ If, then, men left to their own devices will occasionally overindulge, this must be tolerated because the benefits of sexual segregation far outweigh the alternatives:

Everything is abused, a trivial axiom on the basis of which one ought neither to reject everything nor to accept everything. The rule for choosing is simple. When the good surpasses the evil, the thing ought to be accepted in spite of its disadvantages; when the evil surpasses the good, it must be rejected even with its advantages. When the thing is good in itself and bad only in its abuses . . . [this] can serve as a pretext, but not as a reason, for abolishing a useful practice; but what is bad in itself will always be bad, whatever may be done to make good use of it. *Such is the essential difference between the cercles and the theater.* (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 108; emphasis added)

Rousseau clearly considers the theater a direct threat to the institution of the *cercles*: "[the people] could not possibly divide themselves among so many

amusements; the hour of the theater, being that of the *cercles*, will cause them to dissolve."⁹⁰ As a consequence, the *cercles*' engendering lessons will be supplanted by the theater's. "The two sexes meeting daily in the same place; the groups which will be formed for going there; the ways of life that they will see depicted in the theater, which they will be eager to imitate; the exposition of the ladies and the maidens all tricked out in their very best and put on display in the boxes as though they were in the window of a shop waiting for buyers; the affluence of the handsome young who will come to show themselves off": these Genevans-*cum*-Parisians will not long maintain a "taste" for their republican government.⁹¹

In both their form and function, *cercles* preserve critical features of the theater: they provide amusement and distraction, they bring private individuals together in public spaces, and they reinforce gender roles. Similarly, the theatricality of these gatherings produce female "satirists," and men become vulnerable through a loss of reason, just as when they witness drama. But, unlike the theater, the *cercles*' organization dispels these potential threats:

Now, of all the kinds of relations which bring individuals together in a city like our own, the *cercles* form incontestably the most reasonable, the most decent, and the least dangerous ones, because they neither wish nor are able to be hidden, because they are public and permitted, because order and rule prevail in them. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 108)

But the *cercles* are only one aspect of Rousseau's plan for public *spectacles*. While they provide a crucial educative experience for the citizen-actors, it is in the festivals, sportive competitions, and balls that republican theatricality is fully realized. Rousseau's most detailed descriptions pertain to the balls, which bring the "marriageable young" into their first contact with one another under the steady gaze of the entire community. In addition to being "watched over" by vigilant mothers and fathers, these social and sexual debuts are "witnessed" by the old men and women, sitting apart in an "honorable section" where they can observe their grandchildren "prepare to become citizens."⁹² A company of judges further evaluates the dancing and other rituals of courtship, awarding the prize title Queen of the Ball to the "most modestly" behaved of the young women.⁹³ Here, in particularly acute form, we see the essential theatricality of sexual virtue: distinction is accorded to the best display of a reluctance to display oneself.

Through a combination of publicity and managed sexuality, Rousseau's republican festival minimizes the opportunity for role changing, which the theater as an institution makes thematic. Neither feminine *pudeur* nor masculine "audacity" are challenged here, because "the man and the role are the same." Dignified mothers, demure maidens, patriotic men, and honorable

elders all play the role of themselves: no Medeas or Tituses are needed to move this plot along:

Let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 126)

One aspect of their unity is the convergence of audience and actor: the spectators only ever see themselves. Another is their functional end: to "gathe[r] in order to form unions and [arrange] the establishment of marriages."⁹⁴ Here is a sanctioned *spectacle* whose very purpose is to bring men and women together to court. Earlier Rousseau sharply criticized precisely this aspect of the theater where, when members of the audience are not trying to seduce one another, the romances on stage produce "sweet emotions" that arouse their ardor: "[these emotions] do not choose the person who ought to be loved, but they force us to make this choice."⁹⁵ Even when the love depicted is legitimate, there is no reason to believe the spectator's satisfaction will be limited by it: "an example for corruption could be taken from a very decent action." The balls, by contrast, both arouse that "contagious passion" and guarantee its controlled satisfaction:

The young, having certain and decent meeting places, would be less tempted to seek for more dangerous ones. Each sex would devote itself more patiently in the intervals to occupations and pleasures which are fitting to it, and would be more easily consoled for being deprived of the continual company of the other. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 130)

Now public seduction is the content, as well as the form, of citizen interaction, and the union this produces is "the most natural" of societies:

These balls, thus directed, would bring the people together not so much for a public entertainment as for the gathering of a big family, and from the bosom of joy and pleasures would be born the preservation, the concord and the prosperity of the republic. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 131)

Of course, the gathering of citizens in this fashion does not *really* make a family: rather, they are acting *as if* they were a family, which is to say, they are assuming false identities. But this is only a continuation of the theme of performatory identities I have been tracing throughout. Rousseau writes that the "adornment of daughters"—so necessary and problematic in the development of coquettish women⁹⁶—is "entirely in its place" at these festivals, where the sexes can "get a taste for one another" before a public whose "eyes . . . [a]re constantly open and upon them, forcing them to be reserved,

modest, and to watch themselves most carefully."⁹⁷ Dancing is the means by which young men and women come to know one another, and Rousseau embraces it as a "decent recreation" and an "inspiration of nature."⁹⁸ But married women must not be allowed "to profane conjugal dignity by dancing themselves; for to what decent purpose could they thus show themselves off in public?" To what purpose, indeed, since they have already been "known": now they must appear only as mothers, fawning over their sons and adorning their daughters.

Republican *spectacles* rely upon, even as they attempt to mask, the performatory requirements of sexual identities. Rousseau's descriptions lend support to their inescapably carnivalesque quality: he writes that Genevans are "almost unrecognizable" at their public gatherings:

The people are lively, gay, and tender; their hearts are then in their eyes as they are always on their lips; they seek to communicate their joy and their pleasures. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 127)

Ordinarily a staid and sober people, their festivals allow Genevans to devote all activity to the sentiments and the passions, and pleasure is its explicit goal. Thus returned to their first language, they are returned to their earliest imaginings and to the apprehension of the world through tropes, for example, "family," "man," "woman."⁹⁹ In this way, the public performance of sexual roles constructs citizen identity: "the memory of their first exercises, their first entertainments, their first pleasures, must remain profoundly engraved upon their hearts."¹⁰⁰ If, then, Genevans leave their city, the memories of their festivals will always recall to them their first home. The point is demonstrated by way of reference to Rousseau's own early experience at a Genevan *spectacle*. In an extended note he lovingly describes the spontaneous gathering of the citizen-militia in the town square, the dancing and revelry which ensued, and the intervention of women, first as spectators and then as participants, whose appearance in the square suspends the dancing: "now there were only embraces, laughs, *santés* and caresses."¹⁰¹ Rousseau claims still to be marked by this display, the lessons of which are articulated by his father:

My father, embracing me, was seized with a trembling which I think I still feel and share: "Jean-Jacques," he said to me, "love your country. Do you see these good Genevans? They are all friends, they are all brothers." (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 135)

In the manner of the Spartans, who were bored by the fine arts of Athens, true republicans can never separate pleasure and entertainment from the goals and the good of the state: "the only pure joy is public joy, and the sentiments of

nature reign only over the people."¹⁰² Any remaining distance between the man and the citizen is now effectively eclipsed: the natural sentiments that are the seat of the former's virtue can only be sustained in the context of the latter, that is, the political milieu of "the people," and it is only by virtue of being a citizen that one has any potential to be a man.¹⁰³

As both a sexual and political creature, Rousseau's man, as well as his woman, must confirm his identity through performance. Because as a social being he "lives only in the opinion of others," how he is seen by others determines what he is: "it is, as it were, from their judgment alone that he draws the sentiment of his own existence."¹⁰⁴ From this proto-Hegelian formulation of consciousness, Rousseau develops a notion of performatory politics that can respond to its inescapably unsettling implications. What is particular, if not singular, in Rousseau's account is the extent to which he reveals the sex/gender subtext of these political inscriptions. I have suggested, albeit in a preliminary way, the deeper significance of that inscription: the parts that men and women must play allow them, or rather, men, to enact the paradoxically bifurcated identity of the citizen. To the extent that paternal authority is maintained, man's submission is performed only for the one over whom he has ultimate authority—just like the subject, who is also always sovereign. The consensual nonconsensuality that the social contract demands is encoded in the love relationships of men and women, and thus it is "engraved in the heart" of every citizen, which is where the *Social Contract* tells us we will always find "the true constitution of the state":

To these three sorts of laws [political, civil, criminal] is added a fourth, the most important of all. . . . [W]hen other laws grow old and die away, it revives and replaces them, preserves a people in the spirit of its institution and imperceptibly *substitutes the force of habit for that of authority*. I am speaking of mores, customs, and especially of opinion, a part of the law unknown to our political theorists but on which *depends the success of all the others*; a part with which the great legislator secretly occupies himself, though he seems to confine himself to the particular regulations that are merely the arching of the vault, whereas mores, slower to rise, form in the end its immovable keystone. (*Social Contract*, 172; emphasis added)

Mores, customs, and "especially": opinion signify action that circumvents reflection. Indeed, they signify action reduced to behavior: the rote repetition of habit replaces the moral category of authority. This is one of the more enduring and unsettling images we are given of Rousseau's citizen, and it appears as early as the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* in the depiction of the virtuous man as one uninterested in discourse: he "naturally" adheres to that "glorious distinction" between acting well and speaking well.¹⁰⁵

Interpreters have long noted, and abhorred, this feature of Rousseau's politics, this apparent conclusion that democratic politics requires the individual's "inner domination."¹⁰⁶ Alternatively conceived as the emasculating—or perhaps just immiserating—demands of reason or as the erasure of any critical space for reflection, the tendency is to conclude that the most profound consequences of Rousseau's politics are to one's head.¹⁰⁷ But attention to his sexual politics makes such a conclusion untenable. "Clothe reason in a body if you want to make youth able to grasp it; make the language of the mind pass through the heart so that it may make itself understood": in Rousseau's strategy, any "inner domination" that the language of the mind requires will first be played out on a body—and that body looks like Sophie's.

Even the more sympathetic, and brilliant, analysis of Rousseau's work by Jean Starobinski seems to make this same mistake. Making a *rapprochement* between Rousseau's festival and the *Social Contract's* moment of alienation that is the political founding, he notes a tension between the former's inability to dissolve social ranks and the latter's promise of equality. But he concludes that the accomplishment is nonetheless authentic and consists in an "equality manifest in the subjective enthusiasm with which an entire people *participates* in the spectacle."¹⁰⁸ On Starobinski's account, "equality is achieved as a collective state of mind" because the republican *spectacles* instantiate the conditions of transparency:

But what will be the objects of these entertainments? What will be shown in them? Nothing, if you please. (*Letter to D'Alembert*, 126)

If nothing is represented, Starobinski deduces, then "space is a free vacuum, the optic medium of transparency: mind is directly accessible to mind without intermediary."¹⁰⁹ Whatever other problems this formulation might have (Starobinski himself notes the questionable distinction between theater as mediated communication and the festival as unmediated expression), its fundamental premise is wrong, because something *is* being represented, namely, sexual identity. It is around and through sexual roles that the festival itself is organized. That which would take Rousseau's formulation of moral freedom out of the realm of theoretical abstraction and into the phenomenological realm of lived experience is incapable of making the people equal even in their "collective state of mind." Its central focus is to make them *unequal*, as it makes them men and women, as it makes them rulers and ruled.

An identity that is enjoined is perpetually unstable and Rousseau's politics reveal the degree to which "disordered" sexuality remains a continual threat. Furthermore, as *philosophe* discourse had made evident, the inequality and injustice that those identities represent can become the subject of disputation.

Rousseau counters with Antony's rhetorical strategy: he "enchains" the citizens' political imagination by "bringing in the body," thereby making any assessment of gender's justice inseparable from the experiential truths of engendered desire.¹¹⁰ In so doing he offers an apparent resolution to the legislator's paradoxical dilemma (i.e., how "man would be, prior to the advent of laws, what they ought to become by means of laws").¹¹¹ What is required is a way to make the threatening appear inviting and the paradoxical appear natural, and thus, without recourse to "force or reasoning . . . [c]ompel without violence and persuade without convincing."¹¹² This is not, finally, possible, by invoking the image of the wise lawgiver who manages a pacific political founding, or the image of the respected lawbreaker who proudly accepts punishment as the hallmark of his freedom. But it might be possible through images of love, whose "miracle," Rousseau has discovered, is that it can "make us find pleasure in suffering."¹¹³

NOTES

1. *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

2. "Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont," in *Oeuvres Complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-1969, Bibliothèques de la Pléiade), 4:928.

3. Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (New York: Atheneum, 1972). See also Alessandro Ferrara, *Modernity and Authenticity: A Study of the Social and Ethical Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). Ferrara argues that Rousseau's "fragmentary and antisystemic" work is unified in its focus on the authenticity of private virtue, which entails "empathy, self-knowledge, the capacity to accept the undesired aspects of the self, a sensitivity to the inner needs linked with the essential aspects of an identity, and a nonrepressive attitude towards one's inner nature" (pp. 25, 27).

4. Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

5. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 11, 116-22.

6. I give the title in the original French to emphasize the plural *spectacles* that are its announced subjects. Usually translated in the title as "theater," *spectacle* has far richer connotations in French. See translator's note in *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theater*, trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960), 150. Subsequent citations are to this edition unless otherwise noted.

7. *Emile*, 30.

8. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 47.

9. On the notion of sexual identity as performative, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), especially 134-41. While Butler's work has pushed my thinking about Rousseau's presentation of sexuality and sexual

difference, the initial provocation was and remains Louis Althusser's analyses of ideology. See his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 127-86.

10. Thomas Lacqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1990). This study offers, among other things, an elegant warning against ahistorical use of "the body" as an unambiguous—transparent, perhaps—term to be understood along the lines suggested by (modern) natural science. According to Lacqueur, "in [p]re-Enlightenment texts, and even some later ones, *sex*, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomenon, while *gender*, what we take to be a cultural category, was primary or 'real'" (p. 8). In assessing the impact of the "new biology," he writes, "sexual difference no more followed from anatomy after the scientific revolution than it did in the world of one sex. . . . [F]ar from being the foundations for gender, the male and female bodies in eighteenth and nineteenth century anatomy books are themselves artifacts whose production is part of the history of their epoch" (pp. 163-4).

11. Rousseau's classification of laws in *On the Social Contract* includes four categories: political, civil, criminal, and a fourth, "the most important of all," comprising "*moeurs*, customs, and especially [o]pinion," in *Basic Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Donald Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 172 (book 2, chap. 12).

12. Spartan republicanism (which Rousseau insists is "the example that we ought to follow" [*Letter to D'Alembert*, 133]) thrived on the appearance of naked citizens: the unmolested Lacedaemonian maidens gave witness to the purity and the innocence of Spartan *moeurs*, while the Olympic games suggest the sign of the "good man" proposed in the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*: he is "an athlete [w]ho enjoys competing in the nude," in *Basic Political Writings*, 4.

13. The claim that the cultural practices endorsed by Rousseau are importantly theatrical has been made by several commentators; see, for example, Patrick Coleman, *Rousseau's Political Imagination* (Geneva: Droz, 1984), 39: "Oddly enough, Rousseau needs the theater and the metaphors associated with it to develop his vision"; and Tracy Strong, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Politics of the Ordinary* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 63: "Rousseau does not so much want to keep theater out of life, but to experience life as theater." For alternative interpretations of the relationship between theatricality and public life in Rousseau's work, see Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 116-22; Melvin Lasky, *Utopia and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 532-6; and Charles Ellison, "Rousseau and the Modern City: The Politics of Speech and Dress," *Political Theory* 13, no. 4 (1985): 497-533. For more general discussions of Rousseau's treatment of imagination, see Marc Eigeldinger, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la réalité de l'imaginaire* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1962); and Benjamin Barber, "Rousseau and the Paradoxes of the Dramatic Imagination," *Daedalus* 107, no. 5 (1978): 79-92.

14. *Emile*, 211.

15. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 101.

16. See, for example, Susan Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 100-1.

17. Joel Schwartz also emphasizes alternating political dynamics between men and women in his account of Rousseau's sexual politics; see *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). In sharp contrast to the interpretation presented here, Schwartz takes gender-differentiated sexualities to be prepolitical phenomena and argues that the possibility of republican politics hinges on their successful sublimation (p. 80). Furthermore, he sees Rousseau's sexual politics as fundamentally Aristotelian because it entails "the interchange of rule among equals" (p. 154). Schwartz's often intriguing analysis is limited by an

explicit intention to defend Rousseau on charges of sexism. As a consequence, he is preoccupied with often ahistorical efforts to assess the validity of Rousseau's natural scientific arguments and assumptions; Schwartz retrieves from these a tortured logic in which women's enforced political submission is reconfigured as their proper sexual tool (see, e.g., pp. 84ff). If Rousseau's sexual politics are only as relevant as his natural science, then changes in technology and scientific theory would appear to render much of his thought irrelevant; this is apparently a conclusion Schwartz is willing to concede (see chap. 6, "What is Living and What is Dead in Rousseau's Sexual Politics").

18. *On the Social Contract* (hereafter *Social Contract*), 148-9, 201: book 1, chap. 6-7.

19. This is Jean Starobinski's influential formulation; see his *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

20. See *Letter to D'Alembert*, 81: "When the orator appears in public, it is to speak, not to show himself off, he represents only himself; he fills only his own role, speaks only in his own name; says, or ought to say, only what he thinks; the man and the role being the same, he is in the situation of the citizen who fulfills the function of his estate."

21. The reference is to the concluding plea of the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, that the virtuous republic should embrace "that glorious distinction observed long ago, between two great peoples, that the one knew how to speak well, the other to act well" (p. 21).

22. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 18.

23. *Ibid.*, 25.

24. *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, in *Basic Political Writings*, 54. In this same passage he writes: "Such is the force of natural pity, which the most depraved of *moeurs* still have difficulty destroying, since everyday one sees in our theaters someone affected and weeping at the ills of some unfortunate person."

25. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 46.

26. *Ibid.*, 33-4.

27. *Ibid.*, 47.

28. *Ibid.*, 109.

29. *Ibid.*, 35.

30. *Ibid.*, 87-8.

31. *Ibid.*, 88.

32. *Ibid.*, 48-9.

33. *Ibid.*, 23, 53.

34. *Ibid.*, 55.

35. *Ibid.*, 47.

36. *Ibid.*, 45.

37. Coleman, *Rousseau's Political Imagination*, 114. According to Coleman, the (relative) lack of cogency in this digression is only apparent, inasmuch as Rousseau's true aim is to "change the terms of the debate" by replacing the attention to origins (nature vs. culture) with an attention to the very possibility of "man's possessing an enduring power of initiative" (p. 115). My disagreement with Coleman on this score is substantial, and presented in detail below.

38. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 83.

39. Rousseau's most detailed account of his self-described "brutal sensuality" is found in the story of his early years at Bossey in the Lamercier household. See *Confessions*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1:14-21.

40. The coincidence of sexual and ethical experience also figures in *Emile et Sophie, ou Les Solitaires*, *Le Levite D'Ephraïm*, *Narcisse*, and *Discourse on Political Economy*.

41. *Emile*, 211.

42. *Ibid.*, 478.

43. The expression is Rousseau's; see *Confessions*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1:17: "To be on my knees before a masterful mistress [*maitresse impérieuse*], to obey her commands, to have cause to beg her forgiveness, were for me the sweetest pleasures, and the more my lively imagination inflamed my blood, the more I resembled a paralyzed lover [*amant transi*]."

44. *Emile*, 477.

45. *Ibid.*, 360.

46. On the awareness of force as natural (pre-moral) power, see *Social Contract*, 143 (book 1, chap. 3); and *Discourse on Inequality*, 143.

47. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 84, 86; emphasis added.

48. *Emile*, 81.

49. *Ibid.*, 67.

50. *Ibid.*, 219: "Sentiment must enchain imagination, and reason silence the opinion of men. The source of all the passions is sensibility; imagination determines their bent; every being who has a sense of his relations ought to be affected when these relations are altered, and he imagines, or believes he imagines, others more suitable to his nature. . . . [B]ut is man the master of ordering his affections according to this or that relation? Without a doubt, if he is master of directing his imagination toward this or that object or of giving it this or that habit. Besides, the issue here is less what a man can do for himself than what we can do for our pupil by the choice of circumstances in which we put him."

51. Coleman, *Rousseau's Political Imagination*, 11.

52. *Ibid.*, 36-7.

53. *Ibid.*, 15.

54. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), 288, quoted in Coleman, *Rousseau's Political Imagination*, 35.

55. Coleman, *Rousseau's Political Imagination*, 138.

56. *Ibid.*, 115.

57. *Ibid.*, 116.

58. *Ibid.*, 117.

59. *Emile*, 370: "Let girls always be subjected, but let mothers not always be inexorable. To make a young person docile, one must not make her unhappy; to make her modest, one must not brutalize her. On the contrary, I would not be upset if she were allowed to use a little cleverness, not to elude punishment for disobedience, but to get herself exempted from obeying. It is not a question of making her dependence painful for her; it suffices to make her feel it."

60. Coleman, *Rousseau's Political Imagination*, 138.

61. *Ibid.*, 36.

62. *Essay on the Origins of Languages*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 272 (hereafter *Essay on Languages*). I have slightly altered Gourevitch's translation, which renders the original "mari et femme" as "man and wife."

63. *Ibid.*, 271.

64. *Ibid.*, 272.

65. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 115, 162.

66. *Ibid.*, 156-7.

67. *Ibid.*, 175ff. For a general discussion and critique of Derrida's notion of "the violence of the letter" as it pertains to gender, see Teresa de Lauretis, "The Violence of Rhetoric: Considerations of Representation and Gender," in *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 31-50.

68. For Derrida, political violence is always derivative: "Out of this arche-violence, forbidden and therefore confirmed by a second violence that is reparatory, protective, instituting the 'moral,' prescribing the concealment of writing . . . [a] third violence can *possibly* emerge or not (an empirical possibility) within what is commonly called evil, war, indiscretion, rape. . . [I]t is on this tertiary level, that of the empirical consciousness, that the common concept of violence (the system of the moral law and the transgression) whose possibility remains yet unthought, should no doubt be situated" (*Of Grammatology*, 112; emphasis in original).

69. See discussion in de Lauretis, "The Violence of Rhetoric," 45ff.

70. *Discourse on Inequality*, 35. See also *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, 3: "The mind has its needs, as does the body. The needs of the latter are the foundation of society; the needs of the former make it pleasant."

71. *Essay on Languages*, 272-3.

72. *Ibid.*, 274; emphasis in original.

73. Angèle Kremer-Marietti remarks in his introduction to Rousseau's essay, "Le référent constant est en effet la passion: on peut dire que le langage pur de l'origine est tout entier le signifiant de la passion," *Essai sur l'Origine des Langages* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1974), 30-1.

74. Compare with the task of the statesman, whose authority must "penetrate to the inner part of a man and be exerted on his will no less than on his actions," *Discourse on Political Economy*, in *Basic Political Writings*, 119.

75. *Essay on Languages*, 275.

76. *Emile*, 393.

77. *Essay on Languages*, 242-3.

78. *Ibid.*, 241. In this context Rousseau approvingly references Rodriguez Pereire, who had recently developed a signed language for communication with the deaf (p. 243).

79. *Emile*, 321.

80. *Ibid.*, 322-3.

81. *Essay on Languages*, 246.

82. I am borrowing from Catharine Mackinnon: "Sexuality is that social process which creates, organizes, expresses, and directs desire, creating the social beings we know as women and men, as their relations create society." See "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," in *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, ed. Nannerl Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara Gelpi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2.

83. I am thinking here of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, which replaces the didactically drawn examples of Emile and Sophie with the romantically expressed ideals of Julie and St. Preux. That the novel had a generation of European women (and men) swooning with the power of its erotic prose indicates no small measure of success on Rousseau's part. See Daniel Mornet, "L'Influence de J. J. Rousseau au XVIIIe Siècle," in *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 8 (1912): 33-67.

84. This assumes, of course, that there is nothing wrong with the "sign." I am thinking of Rousseau's reaction to Zulieta, the Venetian courtesan whose malformed nipple caused him such extraordinary anxiety, and his feelings toward Mme. d'Epinau, whose flat chest was a "defect" that "alone would have been enough to freeze me" (*Confessions*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1:321, 412). His conviction that a woman's breasts could identify her as "some kind of monster, rejected by nature, men and love" is perhaps more than an indication of his sexual puerility; or rather, his puerility is a consequence of the powerful symbolic function of female bodies.

85. That Rousseau recognized that women are similarly conditioned by their activities is clear: "If the barbarians of whom I have just spoken lived with women, they did not, for all that, live like them. It was they who had the courage to live like the men, just as the Spartan women

did. The woman made herself robust, and the man was not enervated," *Letter to D'Alembert*, 103.

86. *Ibid.*, 105.

87. *Ibid.*, 106.

88. *Ibid.*, 108.

89. *Ibid.*, 109.

90. *Ibid.*, 111.

91. *Ibid.*, 111.

92. *Ibid.*, 129.

93. *Ibid.*, 130.

94. *Ibid.*, 131.

95. *Ibid.*, 51.

96. Rousseau addresses this problem in his discussion of girls' education in book 5 of *Emile*, 315-8. The girl's early training in self-adornment is particularly important because it sets the stage for adult practices: "It is not attractive to see a woman cut in half like a wasp; that is shocking to the sight and makes the imagination suffer" (p. 317). We are also told that "Sophie loves adornment and is an expert at it" (p. 393).

97. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 128. Charles Ellison draws very different conclusions on the issue of adornment and feminine self-display. He finds in Rousseau a "dialectic of clothed and naked" that rejects the conventional meanings of fashion—for example, social status—as well as its distortions of the natural form (see "Rousseau and the Modern City: The Politics of Speech and Dress," 518ff). While Ellison insists on Rousseau's awareness of how "dress mediates relations between self and others," he goes on to conclude that Rousseau's emphasis on simple dress constitutes a rejection of dress codes. This is in keeping with his broader claim, that "a naturally expressive self visible to all in an intimate community is a central principle of [Rousseau's] politics."

98. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 128. This is also a courtship ritual for the lovers in *Emile*, where we read that Emile is allowed to take the lead in this matter: "He is permitted to be his mistress's master" (p. 425).

99. The gaiety, the pleasure, the veritable giddiness Rousseau conjures up is compared to intoxication, and thus to a loss of reason: republican *spectacles* causes heads to spin "with a drunkenness sweeter than wine," *Letter to D'Alembert*, 135-6.

100. *Ibid.*, 133. In the *Essay on Languages*, the emergence of a "first language" is similarly likened to the first *spectacles*: "Here the first festivals took place, feet skipped with joy, an eager gesture no longer proved adequate, the voice accompanied it with passionate accents, pleasure and desire merged into one and made themselves felt together; here, finally was the true cradle of the peoples" (p. 271).

101. *Letter to D'Alembert*, 135.

102. *Ibid.*, 136.

103. On "the people" as a necessarily political entity, see *Social Contract*, 147, 149: book 1, chap. 5, 7). In the first version Rousseau wrote: "We conceive of the general society [*la société générale*] in light of our particular societies, the establishment of little republics makes us think of the large one, and we only really begin to become men after having been citizens," "Du Contrat Social, Première Version," in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 3:287.

104. *Discourse on Inequality*, 81.

105. *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, 21.

106. M. E. Brint's recent interpretation of *Narcisse* is a good example of the move away from this problematic as articulated and resolved by Ernst Cassirer in his reading of Rousseau as a proto-Kantian (see *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. and trans. Peter Gay [Bloom-

ington: Indiana University Press, 1963]). Brint emphasizes Rousseau's preoccupation with *self*-estrangement, and the "inner domination" he concludes is a necessary response to stabilize identity. See "Echoes of *Narcisse*," *Political Theory* 16, no. 4 (1988): 617-35. While my analysis intersects with Brint's in several respects, I am persuaded that *outer* domination is definitive of Rousseau's solution to the problems of identity and agency.

107. William Connolly is particularly pithy on this point: "Rousseau withdraws politics from the general will and relocates it quietly inside the selves which make these general laws," in *Political Theory and Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 58.

108. Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*, 100; emphasis in original.

109. *Ibid.*, 96.

110. A telling indicator of his success is the limited degree to which even those highly critical of Rousseau's assertions about women recognize the political agenda that grounds them. Typical in this regard is Tracy Strong's recent study, which both insists on the sexism in Rousseau's political theory and concludes that his idea of "the common" is inescapably in tension with the reality of sexual difference: "If the capacity for human society and citizenship rests on there not being any defining substantive characteristics, what are we to make of the fact that sex seems unavoidable?" (*The Politics of the Ordinary*, 150). This is not, Strong writes, a problem of gender, by which he seems to mean social roles; rather, it is a problem of desire: "both males and females are, so to speak, out of the realm of the common when sex is on their minds" (p. 150). Not only is this insistence on human powerlessness over the erotic denied by crucial dimensions of Rousseau's politics, but keeping "sex on their minds" is precisely the linchpin of both Emile's and St. Preux's ethical development. Strong's conviction that whatever reduces to sex remains outside the scope of human agency is less a dilemma to which Rousseau offered, regrettably sexist, solutions (p. 136) than it is the achievement of Rousseau's sexual politics.

111. *Social Contract*, 164.

112. *Ibid.*, 164.

113. *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 2:245.

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