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Ravishing Transports

Abstract: Influence is an important notion in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thinking. However, the event of influence is related to contamination, corruption, and alteration in Rousseau's philosophical system. At the very beginning, the first Discourse (1750) presents the critique of culture and social taste. The author points out the damaging influence of 'public opinion', 'riches', and 'powerful actors' on the morals of a society. These entities corrupt the social morals and set a depraved example to follow. On the other hand, there is a clean and progressive way of influence between individuals without moral abuse. This is the case of the Genius, who comes to the world exclusively under influence of another Genius. There is no Genius - whatever this notion is supposed to mean - in itself. His birth is the result of a strong influence: it came to the world in a 'ravishing transport' as the entry "Genius" describes its genesis in A Complete Dictionary of Music. Purely positive influence is a 'stimulus' as Rousseau names it in Dialogues. My paper describes what the 'stimulus' means and how the uncorrupted 'inhabitants of the other sphere' are disposed by this stimulus. The example of the Genius demonstrates more eloquently the process of the positive influence, which is also a possibility to a sourceless beginning. To illustrate this idea and make it more concrete I will reference Julie's paradise in Rousseau's masterwork, Julie, or the New Heloise. In Julie's garden, called Elysée, we have the topology of a perfect wilderness, a landscape at first sight uncontaminated by human artefact. The structure of the vegetation testifies of a beginning without beginning. The décor looks like a setup with no human intervention. This idea of creation is close to the idea of insemination, and more precisely to the 'dissemination' key word of Derrida's work, Dissemination. My article is a lecture regarding the entry "Genius" in A Complete Dictionary of Music and a thought-experiment about how this entry can be interpreted in a deconstructive context.

Keywords: influence; stimulus; contamination; Genius; supplementarity; autobiography; J.-J. Rousseau; J. Derrida.

Stimulus

Rousseau, in disagreement with the hegemony of reason of his age, bases the criteria of authenticity on sensitivity. Yet this authenticity in the field of aesthetics is strictly subject to the idea of imitation, in the spirit of ancient doctrine. In the "Third Dialogue" of Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues [Rousseau, juge de

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Jean-Jacques. Dialogues, 1775], "Rousseau" defines "J. J." as a "rebel to the new oracles". In the same chapter, the "Frenchman", to overwhelm the accused definitively, presents to "Rousseau" the books of "J. J.", the 'rebel' author charged for what he thinks, says, and writes. The two characters discuss the bad reputation and works of an author named "Jean-Jacques". In the dialogues Rousseau aims to justify his entire career and undertook his most comprehensive reflection on himself as an author, his books, and his audience.

Rousseau had become rebellious even before the formulation of the first *Discourse* [*Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, 1750], at this luminous moment, both salutary and fatal, where he understood, by accident, the stakes of the question put to the contest by the *Académie de Dijon* in 1749: that is, if the restoration of the arts and sciences had a purifying effect upon morals. However, later on, in his letter to Christophe de Beaumont [1763] he points out that this "wretched question of Academy stirring my mind in spite of myself threw me into a profession for which I was not made; an unexpected success showed me attractions that seduced me." Indeed, his answer to the question on the correlation between a possible moral 'cleansing' of humanity and the indisputable 'restoration' of the sciences and the arts had transformed him into an author against his will and had, 'from dispute to dispute' driven him to rebellion by engaging him in the 'career' that he says he despises most, that of a writer.

This is in his late work, namely in the *Dialogues, Rousseau Judge of J. J.* where the author drew the portrait of his entire philosophical system – through the lectures of his protagonist called "Frenchman" – and paints a picture of the author, called "J. J." by "Rousseau". In the long dialogues of this apologetic book, "Rousseau" frequently visits "J. J." in order to get acquainted with this personage, spend some time in his company, and to map his entire and ordinary life. The portrait chiseled by "Rousseau" shows his attitude toward writing, thinking, and reveals plastically the way he chooses to be an author. The "First Dialogue" soon after the first pages describes the existence of a parallel universe where this choice is possible. The "inhabitants of the enchanted world" write few books in general and do not arrange to write them; it is never a profession to them. The pictured 'enchanted' world is surrounded by ideal human beings who have a very different praxis of writing and thinking than the habitants of the real world:

When they do write, they have to be forced to do so by a stimulus stronger than interest and even glory. The stimulus – difficult to contain,

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques. Dialogues* (Paris: Gallimard – Pléiade, 1959), 925; In the English version see page 205 "refusing the new oracles". Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, trans. Judith R. Bush, Christopher Kelly, and Roger D. Masters, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 1990). I follow next the English version of the book.

² "Cette misérable question d'Académie m'agitant l'esprit malgré moi me jeta dans un métier pour lequel je n'étais point fait; un succès inattendu m'y montra des attraits qui me séduisirent." *The Letter to Beaumont* is a response to a Pastoral Letter by Christophe de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris, which attacks the religious teaching in *Emile*. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont*, (Paris: Gallimard – Pléiade, 1964), 927.

impossible to counterfeit – makes itself felt in everything it produces. [...] Since writing is not a profession for them, they will begin or end early or late, depending upon the stimulus that provokes them. [...] And one who may have been born with genius will never suspect it himself and will die without being known by anyone if no object activates his zeal to the point of forcing it to show itself.³

It is manifest that "J. J.", hero of *Dialogues*, makes part of this sphere: he is not only *forced* to express his "system", he is strictly pushed to do so. The fact to be *forced* assumes a vocation quasi non-voluntary, unintended in his case.

He is, as you said, an inhabitant of another sphere where nothing is like it is here. His system may be false, but in developing it, he portrayed himself truthfully in a manner so characteristic and so sure that it's impossible for me to mistake it.⁴

Author "J. J." is forced to write his system by a stronger 'stimulus' than egotism, glory, or vanity – those are the products of the evil, external influence linked to the society – also he didn't realize he was born with genius until an object had activated his zeal and forced him to show his genius. He became an author – even worse, a famous one – against himself. Writing had never been a simple act of eloquence to him:

From the lively effervescence that developed then in his soul came those sparks of genius that have glittered in his writings during ten years of delirium and fever, but of which no vestige had appeared before then and which presumably would not have sparkled subsequently if, once this paroxysm had passed, he had wanted to continue to write.⁵

Inimitable Eloquence

"Writing books to make a living would have made me dependent on the public." ⁶ In "J. J." s judgement writing can't be a profession, but the result of a 'stimulus', the presence of an influence, which produces 'lively effervescence', and a "course of writing fifteen volumes speaking the sweetest, purest, most vigorous language of virtue." ⁷ His books are 'dictated' by love of virtue and zeal for truth:

³ Rousseau, Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues, 12-13.

⁴ Ibid., 212.

⁵ Ibid., 131.

⁶ Ibid., 140.

⁷ Ibid., 53.

You have asserted that this very person was the same man who for forty years lived esteemed and well regarded by everyone, the Author of the only writings in this era that bring into the soul of their readers the persuasion that dictated them, and about which one feels in reading them that love of virtue and zeal for truth are what cause their inimitable eloquence."

How to reach the soul of the reader with the language of virtue (or the virtue of the language) if the written language is as corrupted as its institutions? Looking closely Rousseau's theory of writing, we can distinguish different writings in *The Essay on the Origin of Languages*. The 'innocent' writing is more the presence of accents connected to the original spontaneity of speaking, and the other one is the articulated one. The idea of this split is named by 'originarity' and 'supplementarity' in the *Grammatology* of Jacques Derrida. As Derrida notes: "Rousseau would like to separate originarity from supplementarity. All the rights constituted by our logos are on his side: it is unthinkable and intolerable that what has the name origin should be no more than a point situated within the system of supplementarity." Originarity is connected to the speech, to the sounds, and to the diversity of accents – to the logos, shortly. The sounds have the energy, the vivacity that the corrupted, altered (written) language doesn't have anymore – it has been lost in the process of conventional articulation.

Since natural sounds are inarticulate, words would have few articulations. Interposing some consonants to fill the gaps between vowels would suffice to make them fluid and easy to pronounce. On the other hand, the sounds would be very varied, and the diversity of accents for each sound would further multiply them. Quantity and rhythm would account for still further combinations. Since sounds, accents, and number, which are natural, would leave little to articulation, which is conventional, it would be sung rather than spoken. Most of the root words would be imitative sounds or accents of passion, or effects of sense objects. It would contain many onomatopoeic expressions. This language would have many synonyms for expressing the same thing according to various relationships.¹⁰

According to Rousseau, says Derrida, the history of writing is indeed that of articulation. The becoming-language of the cry is the movement by which spoken plenitude begins to become what it is through losing itself, hollowing itself out, breaking itself, articulating itself. The cry vocalizes itself by beginning to efface vocalic speech.¹¹

⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, [1967] 1997), 243.

¹⁰ Derrida made a reference to "The Essay on the Origin of Languages", in Grammatology, 243.

¹¹ Ibid., 270.

The authentic language which demonstrates 'truth' and 'inimitable eloquence' is dictated by a strictly interior stimulus, meaning that there is no room for mediation, or transmission of 'conventional'. Another example of the abusive exterior violence, the 'conventional' in Rousseau's system is the *violence of politeness*. The rejection of 'vile and misleading uniformity' is the principal idea of the first *Discourse*. The "uniform and perfidious veil of politeness" [*voile uniforme et perfide de politesse*]¹² hides and, even worse, rids all spontaneity in social connections. The rejection of uniformity is one of the principal features of the critique of taste in Rousseau's system according to the first *Discourse*. The idea of moral corruption is strongly connected to the conception of the depraved (exterior) influence of vanity, *amour-propre*.

The question of influence has a central spot here. Those who guide us in the field of social taste have considerable power over our morals, yet "they are the artists, the great, the rich; and what guides them is their vanity." What about our life through all this knowledge that is given for "cultural progress": nothing but an all-powerful social taste that nurtures the luxury empire that loves "the hard and expensive". 14 Politeness is a synonym here to the permanent violence, an appearance that stifles original spontaneity, that limits and tramples on dignity when it does not transform life into a rigid spectacle, paved with meaningless ceremonies. But the worst effect of these magnificences remains to be described: our pleasures take root 'in the opinion of others'. It is an incurable deficit produced by this very culture: living without joy, in an artificial way always under the gaze of others. To oppose the omnipotence of prejudice, it is important to rebel against the jargon or the violence of politeness; one must refrain from 'flattering the senses'; one must hasten to enjoy oneself and discover the child who, in defiance of reason, still resists the power of opinion. However, there is a positive way to get influenced, stimulated, and involved in social connection and more precisely in the idea's transfer. There is room for an immediate emotional and intellectual penetration, but this act supposes "ravishing transports" 15.

Ravishing Transports

As the "Second Dialogue" declares "one who may have been born with genius will never suspect it himself and will die without being known by anyone if no object activates his zeal to the point of forcing it to show itself." The genius of an author (creator) must be violently awakened in order to transmit or communicate ideas. The interior stimulus is not powerful enough to dictate that 'love of virtue and zeal for truth' which is needed to reach the spirit of the innocent eloquence. There is a very interesting episode about the process of transmission pointed out in "Genius" section

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discours sur les sciences et les arts (OC, t. III, Paris: Gallimard – Pléiade, 1964), 8.

¹³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sur le goût (OC, t. V, Paris: Gallimard – Pléiade, 1995), 483.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris: Gallimard – Pléiade, 1995), 837–838; See the English version of the text: *A Complete Dictionary of Music*, trans. William Haring (London: J. Murray, 1779), 182.

¹⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques, 12-13.

of the *A Complete Dictionary of Music*:

He expresses with fire even the coldest subjects; even in painting the horrors of death, he conveys to the soul that sentiment of life which never abandons it, and which he communicates to hearts formed to feel it. But alas! his words avail nothing to those wherein his seeds are not implanted; and his prodigies are hardly sensible to those who are incapable of imitating them. Would you then wish to know if any spark of this devouring flame inspires you? Be quick, haste to Naples, listen to the master-pieces of Leo, Durante, Jommilli, Pergolesis. If your eyes are filled with tears, if you feel your heart palpitate, if gaiety agitates you, if sorrow involves you in transports, take Metastasio and labour: His genius will enflame yours; you will form a creation after his example: 'Tis this which forms the genius, and the eyes of others will very soon restore you those tears which your masters have caused you to shed. But if the charms of this grand art leave you contented, if you feel no ravishing transports, if you discover nothing beautiful, but what barely pleases, dare you demand what genius is?17

What exactly does *ravishing transport* mean? An intense inspiration? A powerful influence? An emotional or intellectual contamination? Pure, emotional discovery of a self-disposition? 'If you are inspired with it, you must feel it in yourself.'

One's genius enflames yours; there is no genius in itself, in a general, abstract way. The talent is a rootless, drifting quality. Being influenced, pushed or stimulated in this way is innocent and productive at the same time compared to the bad, exterior influence which is the terror of social taste. If we go a little further, can we say that this drifted episode includes a sort of infection? Why does this effect not become contamination? Because it is related to a strictly, positively pure interiority – another name of sensitivity? This article discusses an accidental recovery of the implanted (mental, emotional) seeds, a capacity of imitation.

The Graft

I would like to present next the *par excellence* picture of the perfect imitation in Rousseau's aesthetics. In the fourth book of *Julie*, *la Nouvelle Héloïse* we have a beautiful painting of the paradise of Julie's landscape, called Elysée. Julie has succeeded in giving the illusion of a completely undomesticated spot where she has planned and constructed it all. The undomesticated, uncontaminated, purely original nature is sublimely imitated in the heroine's masterwork, the secret garden called Elysée. Letter eleven in book IV of *Nouvelle Héloïse* presents this Eden in the description of Saint-Preux, ex-lover of the married heroine, Julie. Entering to this land Saint-Preux insists

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Complete Dictionary of Music*, 182, https://archive.org/details/0043COMP/page/n183/mode/2up, acc. July 17, 2023.

on his surprise:

On entering this so-called orchard, I was struck by a pleasant sensation of freshness that obscure shades, a greenery lively and lively, flowers scattered on all sides, a chirping of running water. The song of a thousand birds, carried to my imagination at least as much as to my senses; but at the same time I thought I saw the wildest and most solitary place in nature, and it seemed to me to be the first mortal who had ever penetrated into this desert. 18

The surprise he notes is not that a condemnatory shock that cultivated nature has been perversely grafted onto wild nature, but that an approving surprise that cultivated nature could slip so peacefully into wild nature, without disturbing it. On a first glance, it still gives the impression that a human hand has never worked to alter it. All the scenario suggest that we are in the sphere of an uncontaminated, untouched, uncorrupted natural environment. In this idyllic, rustic setting, the secret garden represents a private refuge and appears as an optical illusion. The sensation of being in an entirely natural space, untouched by human artfulness is perfect. All the vegetation is arranged 'without order and without symmetry': garlands are 'negligently thrown from tree to tree as in forests': grass is carefully sown to hide all appearance of the work of gardening: moss covers the alleys: thick shrubs cover the walls that enclose the garden. "Are you still at the end of the world?" asks Julie. "No" Saint-Preux replies, "here I am, completely outside it: you have indeed transported me to Elysium."

There were a thousand flowers shining from the fields, among which the eye was surprised to see some of the garden, which seemed to grow naturally with others. I met from time to time dark tufts, impenetrable to the rays of the sun, as in the thickest forest; these tufts were formed of the most flexible wood trees, whose branches had been bent, hanging in the ground, and taking root, by an art similar to what mangles do naturally in America.²²

^{18 &}quot;En entrant dans ce prétendu verger, je fus frappé d'une agréable sensation de fraîcheur que d'obscurs ombrages, une verdure animée et vive, des fleurs éparses de tous côtés, un gazouillement d'eau courante, et le chant de mille oiseaux, portèrent à mon imagination du moins autant qu'à mes sens; mais en même temps je crus voir le lieu le plus sauvage, le plus solitaire de la nature, et il me semblait d'être le premier mortel qui jamais eût pénétré dans ce désert." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Nouvelle Héloïse (OC, t. II, Paris: Gallimard – Pléiade, 1964), 471.
19 William T. Hendel, "The Theatrical Representation of Landscape in Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse," Paroles

¹⁹ William T. Hendel, "The Theatrical Representation of Landscape in Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse," Paroles Gelées UCLA French Studies 21, 1 (2004): 47–53.

²⁰ Rousseau, Nouvelle Héloïse, 473.

²¹ Rousseau, Nouvelle Héloïse, 478.

²² "On y voyait briller mille fleurs des champs, parmi lesquelles l'œil en démêlait avec surprise quelques-unes de jardin, qui semblaient croître naturellement avec les autres. Je rencontrais de temps en temps des touffes obscures, impénétrables aux rayons du soleil, comme dans la plus épaisse forêt; ces touffes étaient formées des arbres du bois le plus flexible, dont on avait fait recourber les branches, pendre en terre, et prendre racine, par un art semblable à ce que font naturellement les mangles en Amérique." Rousseau, *Nouvelle Héloïse*, 473.

The illusion of wildness in Julie's refuge is planned and fully organized. The layout of the messy, 'thickest' forest is constructed through a delicate operation. In order to juggle away the traces of human intervention, the trees are not planted but hanging in the ground and taking root – this is a perfect example of an original transmission. Signs of human care aren't visible; the insemination is operated without external (artificial) influence. The interior structure of this illusional landscape bring into play the idea of dissemination designed by Derrida. Those branch-rooted trees give an example of the graft as it is described in the Dissemination concerning the transmission of the meaning. This deeply theatrical presentation give us an example about the perfect imitation of originarity. If we focus on the most important detail of the visual set up in this representation – the wildness of the impenetrable forest – we can easily associate this arrangement with the notion of 'graft' in Derrida's work. The graft, the shifting roots denies the idea of linearity in the origination and demonstrates that thinking and creation are rootless procedures: there is no clean (original or source) text, all writing is contaminated by other texts. Derrida considers about how texts interfere with each other, how textual grafts function, why each signification is a supplement of another one.

Within the problematic space that brings together, by opposing them, writing and agriculture, it could easily be shown that the paradoxes of the supplement as pharmakon and as writing, as engraving and as bastardy, etc., are the same as those of the graft (*greffe*) of the operation of grafting (*greffer*) which means 'engraving', of the grafter (*graffeur*) of the greffier (*a clerk of the court; a registrar*) ... It could also be shown that all the most modern dimensions (biological, psychical, ethical) of the problem of graft, even when they concern parts believed to be hegemonic and perfectly 'proper' to what one thinks belongs to the individual (the intellect or head, the affect or heart, the desires or loins) are caught up and constrained within the graphics of the supplement.²³

In Julie's artificial paradise, the example of branch-rooted trees authorizes the next interpretation:

There is no first insemination. The semen is already swarming. The 'primal' insemination is dissemination. Whether in the case what is called 'language' (discourse, text, etc.) or in the case of some 'real' seed-sowing, each term is indeed a germ, and each germ a term. The term, the atomic element, engenders by division, grafting, proliferation.²⁴

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 151.

²⁴ Ibid., 304.

Let us turn back to our principal text, the paragraph of the "Genius" in *A Complete Dictionary of Music*. Here we have the description of the mental birth which is identified as an emotional inception – contamination. We are getting moved by the 'fever' from another 'fever', which means the *chain of influence* is a never-ending line. This is all about the power of influence, which is transformed into contamination, transplantation, transformation – the notion, Derrida called 'the graft'. Dissemination generalizes the theory and practice of the graft without a body proper.

To summarize the main line of this essay I would underline that the concept of influence is a radical word in Rousseau's approach. In one hand in a negative, privative way, on the other in the positive one. The negative influence is identified as a corruption transmitted by the social taste, by the public opinion in the first *Discourse*, or the conventionalization of the language in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. The positive influence has its role in Rousseau's thinking, when he names what is Genius in *A Complete Dictionary of Music* or when in his latest apology the *Dialogues*, he describes the genesis of the author he himself becomes by a mysterious stimulus in ravishing transports. One cannot split originarity from supplementarity of the creation in Rousseau's conception about "Genius". The specific example of the stimulus or exterior influence is strongly connected to a chain of power in which the different elements can be replaced or varied.

Within the play of suplementarity, one will always be able to relate the substitutes to their signified, this last will be yet another signifier. The fundamental signified, the meaning of the being represented, even less the thing itself, will never be given us in person, outside the sign or outside play.²⁵

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²⁵ Derrida, Of Grammatology, 266.

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