2019  
XXIst Rousseau Association Colloquium  
XXIème Colloque de la *Rousseau Association*

**Rousseau and Aesthetic Experience: *Art – Nature – Politics***

Kristinehovs Malmgård/The Department of Culture and Aesthetics,

Stockholm University, Sweden, June 6–9, 2019

Organizers: Jennie Nell and Maria Gullstam,

The Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University, Sweden.

The Keynote Speaker will be Martin Rueff, Professor of Literature at the University of Geneva and President of the Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A performance of Rousseau’s Pygmalion and Le Devin du Village is being planned for the conference.

**Call for Papers / Appel à communications**

”Cet ennemi si déclaré des sciences et des arts, fit pourtant et publia des Pièces de Théâtre; et ce discours sera, je l’avoue, une satyre très-amére, non de moi, mais de mon siècle.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s relation to art has – already since his own time – often been described as complex and ambivalent. As the quote above from the preface of his comedy *Narcisse, ou* *L’amant de lui-même* shows, the complexity was not only something that he was fully aware of, but something he was proud of: for him a proof of the correctness of his thinking ahead of his own time as well as his auto-critique of the same. In his *Remède dans le mal* (1989) Jean Starobinski offered a way of thinking through the supposed contradictions of Rousseau’s ideas on art as on other questions, but the image of Rousseau and the arts still appears to be tainted by the reputation of ambivalence and inconsistency.

Without claiming that this topic is without challenges, we propose to approach the subject

from a new angle. Instead of centering on Rousseau’s relation to actual objects of art, we would like to focus on *aesthetic experience* throughout the philosopher’s oeuvre. In doing so, we wish to open the discussion to include not only the arts as such, but also Rousseau’s thinking concerning aesthetics in nature and everyday life.

There are numerous accounts of Rousseau’s vivid engagement when faced with an absorbing theater play, a beautiful landscape, or a touching piece of music. In various writings, both autobiographical and fictional, Rousseau describes aesthetic experiences of everything from operas and paintings to women, mountain villages and *la petite pervenche.* When attending the first performance of his opera *Le Devin du Village*, Rousseau is absolutely enchanted by the tears and emotional reactions of the audience. In contrast, the character Emile, in the midst of a theater audience in *Les Solitaires*, clutches his own chest in agony so violently that his fingers are covered in blood once he manages to escape the theater.

What possible effects and affects did aesthetic experience represent to Rousseau? How

did he define beauty, and what did it mean to experience it? Was beauty always a good thing? And, on the other end – aesthetic ugliness – what impact could it have according to Rousseau? Are there parallels to be made or dissimilarities to be explored between the aesthetic experience of a work of art and the appearances of nature in Rousseau’s eyes? Furthermore, what political predicaments are linked to aesthetic experience in Rousseau’s thinking, both on an individual and a collective level?

Viewing Rousseau’s body of work as a whole through the lens of *aesthetic experience*,

we believe, can allow for new ways of reading and understanding both his political and moral philosophy and his theories on music and theater. We encourage a transdisciplinary approach and parallel readings of Rousseau’s artistic, philosophical and political writings and encourage papers that deal with cross-readings of Rousseau’s œuvres.

The conference will be centered on the following topics:

**The artist facing his/her work** (for instance: the mystery of Galathée, Julie’s portrait,

the self in the world and in posterity, *amour propre* and the artist’s self image, the

responsibility of the artist…)

**The nature in art, and the art in nature** (for instance: the state of nature, the art of

acting, botanical euphoria, native music, human statues...)

**The political power of art** (for instance: artistic institutions vs. public festivals, *les*

*philosophes* and the Enlightenment project, the human right to a voice and expressive

language...)

Proposals for papers in English or in French should be sent as a pdf attachment to [jennie.nell@littvet.su.se](mailto:jennie.nell@littvet.su.se) and [maria.gullstam@teater.su.se](mailto:maria.gullstam@teater.su.se) by December 3, 2018. Proposals should include a title, an abstract of no more than 300 words and a short, academic bio of no more than 150 words, including affiliation, if applicable. Decisions will be announced by the end of January, 2019.

Rousseau Association / Association Rousseau

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