

THE FESTIVAL AT THE WATER HOLE: ROUSSEAU, FREUD, AND DERRIDA ON INCEST

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The position of privilege that psychoanalytic theory continues to enjoy within literary critical discourse has been reinforced in recent years by deconstruction, which at one point in its history began to accept and incorporate psychoanalysis within its own practice.¹ Gayatri Spivak has written with good reason that “Derrida implicates himself in the Freudian procedure of attending to the detail of a text,” since Freud’s notion of reconstruction can be shown to be analogous in many respects to the Derridian project.² Deconstruction “reconstructs,” as it decodes from the traces of the text, that which cannot be said.³

In his reading of Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues*,⁴ Derrida indeed proceeds in the fashion of the analyst, utilizing a Freudian perspective on incest and prohibition to interpret, in part, Rousseau’s argument for a theory of culture (chapter IX of the *Essai*). Deciphering Rousseau’s “unnamable” desire for the Mother and its subsequent repression, Derrida reads Rousseau’s theory as one based on the Father’s law, the first law being the prohibition of incest:

La société, la langue, l’histoire, l’articulation, en un mot la supplémentarité naissent donc en même temps que la prohibition de l’inceste. Celle-ci est la brisure entre la nature et la culture. (G, 375)

A theoretical practice, the authority of which depends on something that is in principle “unknowable,” would appear to be hermetically sealed and thus immune from criticism. However, the fact that this practice ultimately “names” something for that “unknown”—that an authorial voice and a reading are established at one point, also means it has opened itself to criticism. Jacques Lacan found an amusing, if not also perplexing, manner to explain the break in the hermetic seal of psychoanalytic practice when he declared: “we have no way of

knowing if the Unconscious exists outside of psychoanalysis.’⁵ The same might be said of Derrida’s reading of Rousseau.

This paper will question the Freudian interpretation of Rousseau’s theory of culture as developed in *De la grammatologie*. By retracing Derrida’s deconstructive path, it becomes apparent that his reconstruction is a fiction in which we find a Rousseau of Derrida’s invention. As a post-Freudian reader of Rousseau, Derrida draws our attention to a problem (incest) that was of little and limited concern to Rousseau. He chooses to read incest not as Rousseau did, but rather the way Freud would later define it. His reading forces us to look at Rousseau’s notion of Self through an arbitrary grid: internal, unconscious, unknowable (however, “true and original”) subjectivity (*présence*), versus an external, conscious, articulated, and deferred subjectivity—in effect saying too much and too little about Rousseau’s Self. By comparing Rousseau’s text of the *Essai* with analogous texts from two other works (*Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* and the *Premier Dialogue de Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*), I hope to show that what Derrida has designated as the unnamable and “ungraspable limit” of society’s founding, is in fact *named* by Rousseau as being a certain form of violence originating in desire.⁶ This rereading of Rousseau relies on a different psychological model of human desire than the one proposed by Freud/Derrida, and thus, my analysis will necessarily turn to René Girard and his theory of triangular desire.⁷

1

One of the fascinating aspects about Rousseau remains that well before the advent of psychoanalysis, he has already developed a theory of “being and otherness.” Rousseau constructs a dialectical model of the Self divided into a personal, subjective and “natural” Self (Freud would later formulate the Unconscious for this division), and a socially formed, artificial Self. To this rather crude model, he was of course to add depth by developing it in three different directions: the political, the social, and the psychological.

As defined in the *Discours* and later in the *Contrat social*, the political dimension expresses otherness as alienation: the instigation of a system of ownership whereby man accepts his fate as that of the property of another. Within the social dimension,

the divided Self is measured in terms of its distance from a hypothetical, original state of being: the greater the distance, the greater man's needs, exchanges and relations grow—a sort of quantitative transfer of what is supposed to be part of the “natural” in Self, to a new space marked by the social or cultural body the Self has now incorporated. Rousseau's explanation of the psychological sphere leads him to develop a theory of human cognition: the psychic faculties—perception, memory, judgment and imagination—are themselves expressions of division since they seem to emerge from a learning experience that is fundamentally imitative. The social and psychological spheres are intrinsically bound in Rousseau's system and he indifferently describes their development and functions as simultaneous occurrences from one text to the next. This means that Rousseau will always speak of a theory of culture as a theory of Self, as well as a process of socialization.

Derrida's study of chapter IX of the *Essai* reads Rousseau's theory of culture at this juncture of the psychical and social selves—the point or crossover from man's natural state of being to his social state. The juncture or “passage” from a pre-reflexive, pre-social being to a divided, reflexive Self is expressed in the text as a fall from grace—or as Derrida puts it, a “rupture,” a “reversal,” a “revolution,” “catastrophe,” or “regression.”

This break marks a transition from man's wholeness of being in Nature to his degenerate state in Society. The catastrophic “rupture” serves as the catalyst setting in motion the human process Rousseau calls perfectibility. Derrida explains that Rousseau's catastrophic theory is an insoluble paradox: the accident (“flaw”) causing man to fall away from Nature, necessarily originates in Nature. The creation by Nature of such an “imperfection” unleashes the development (supplementarity) of man's virtual faculties, these being placed in motion only to repair the consequences of the accident. In other words, Derrida argues, a *perfectly* natural order created an imperfection in the form of an accident in order to allow for the development of man's (imperfect) faculties. Out of whole, continuous and pure being are born division, discontinuity, difference:

La catastrophe ouvre le jeu du supplément parce qu'elle inscrit la différence locale La société ne se crée que pour réparer les accidents de la nature La formation des sociétés a joué un rôle compensateur dans l'économie générale du monde. (G, 367,368)

Yet in order to explain this paradox, Derrida finds himself turning to metaphor, to a subjective reading: Rousseau's "accident" or the providential "touch of the finger"—already metaphors themselves—are further obscured by the critic's rewriting. The accident becomes a hidden, mysterious movement: an ever-so-devious and slight turning; nothingness; a negativity; evil; and eventually death. By the end of his analysis, the accident has become the abyss of the unnamable desire for the Mother. How does Derrida move from the accident to an incestuous desire?

Derrida selects a particular passage from the concluding pages of chapter IX of the *Essai*, which could be called "The Festival at the Water Hole" episode. In this text, Rousseau creates a bucolic drama, a paradise lost representing the last vestiges of man as a participant in the pure presence of the natural order. Around the water hole, shepherds and young maidens gather. Here, the domestic (instinctual) economy meets the public (social) economy for the first time. Eyes meet; the sight of new faces incites the need to meet more new faces. Rising out of these new urges, passion is born. More needs are developed, among which Rousseau assigns the need for expression—the origin of language.

Now, Derrida will insist on the *unreadability* of the episode. The text only appears to interest him as it defines a *before* and *after* of the festival. He declares that since Rousseau "says nothing" about what has taken place during the festival

ni en quoi consiste l'in-différence du désir au plaisir, *on pourra, si du moins on le veut*, compléter cette description des "premières fêtes" et lever l'interdit qui pèse encore sur elle. (*G*, 372; my italics)

The "mystery" of the festival marking the birth of cultural order—of language, articulation, symbolic structure—is the first in a series of holes ("lacunae") Derrida uncovers and proceeds to repair. This is somewhat curious since, on the one hand, he accuses Rousseau at one point of writing philosophical myths full of gaps:

Et quand l'histoire est incapable de déterminer ce fait ou les faits de cet ordre, la philosophie doit, par une sorte d'invention libre et mythique, produire des hypothèses factuelles jouant le même rôle, expliquant le surgissement d'une nouvelle structure. (*G*, 365)

On the other hand, Derrida proceeds in the very same manner by plugging the Rousseauian "gap" with Freudian mythol-

ogy. The reader is familiar with the logics he uses: the symbolic order is that of the male signifier, the Father's prohibition. The festival must thus represent the human order before the Father's prohibition (an order which cannot be expressed because we do not know what it is): the pre-Oedipal, the desire for the Mother, the era of the unnamable incest taking place. Derrida "completes the description" in this fashion, supporting his argument by quoting a passage directly following the festival episode. This text, we are told, holds the key to unlocking the mystery, reveals the determining combination that one finds contained in the last sentence of the paragraph and its footnote on incest. The "in-difference" between desire and pleasure is found to reside in the continuous experience, the non-difference of incest.

Yet read in context, it is not at all certain that the paragraph and footnote in question have been written as the development of the preceding paragraph. On the contrary, they more readily appear as one thought in a chain of ideas—a parenthetical comment of a sort. (Of course, the "parenthetical" or "marginal" comment is precisely the kind of text a deconstructive reading is apt to dwell upon; hence, Derrida's treatment of it as if it were a piece of dreamwork). Rousseau's point in bringing up the issue of the propagation of the human species—the subject of the incest paragraph—is to distinguish desire as Love ("du pur cristal des fontaines sortirent les premiers feux de l'amour") from desire as instinct ("il y avait des mariages mais il n'y avait point d'amour"). Rather than surreptitiously inscribing incest during the moment of the festival, Rousseau tries to clarify and define the point of origin or the interval between animality and culture. Yet, Derrida insists on reading the paragraph backwards, substituting "fires of love" with incestuous love between brother and sister.

He also makes a great deal of the marginality of Rousseau's footnote on incest. But is it really out of place for an eighteenth-century thinker, having just explained to his reader (in a most matter-of-fact manner) the necessity and (probable) historical reality of incest, to clarify himself on the matter of its subsequent prohibition? For Derrida, however, the footnote reveals Rousseau's moral "embarrassment" among other things.⁵ This is merely the beginning of the reconstruction. The first lacuna having been filled (festival = incest), Derrida moves to another revealing "hole": the passage on incest is all the more sig-

nificant since it has *not* mentioned the Mother but has substituted her with the sister:

Cet énoncé ne nomme pas la mère dans le texte de Rousseau. Mais il n'en montre que mieux la place. . . . Si l'on considère maintenant que la femme naturelle (la nature, la mère *ou si l'on veut la soeur*) est un représenté ou un signifié remplacé, suppléé, dans le désir, c'est-à-dire dans la passion sociale, au-delà du besoin, nous avons là le seul représenté, l'unique signifié que Rousseau, exaltant la sainteté de l'interdit, prescrive de remplacer par son signifiant. . . . Il y a donc ici une impossibilité de montrer la chose, mais cette impossibilité n'est pas naturelle. Rousseau le dit lui-même; elle n'est pas davantage un élément de la culture parmi d'autres, puisqu'elle est un interdit sacré et universel. C'est l'élément de la culture elle-même, l'origine non déclarée de la passion, de la société, des langues: la première supplémentarité. . . . (*G*, 375-76, *my italics*)

This statement could not be closer to the Freudian project, the task of the critic *cum* analyst being "to make out what has been forgotten from the traces which it has left behind, or more correctly to construct it."⁹

It is interesting to note that Derrida obviously reads the voice of the text as that of a male subject (is this Rousseau's unconscious speaking to us?), ignoring the fact that Rousseau's text never adopts a subjective point of view, never even speaks of *a subject* but always of subjects: multitudes of desiring, passionate subjects. But this does not seem to concern Derrida, who must invent the voice of the son; after all, the analyst requires an analysand.

A third lacuna supposedly points to Rousseau's secret desire. The fact that incest has now been identified as the subject of the Festival episode, its glaring *absence* from the *Contrat social* makes its possibility all the more certain. An omission tells all:

On peut donc difficilement séparer la prohibition de l'inceste (loi sacrée, dit l'*Essai*) de l' "ordre social", "droit sacré qui sert de base à tous les autres". Si cette sainte loi appartient à l'ordre même du contrat social, pourquoi n'est-elle pas *nommé dans l'exposé* du *Contrat social*? Pourquoi n'apparaît-elle que dans une note en bas de page, dans l'*Essai* inédit? Tout permet en effet de respecter la cohérence du discours théorique de Rousseau en réinscrivant la prohibition de l'inceste à cette place. Si elle est dite sacrée quoique instituée, c'est qu'elle est, quoiqu'instituée, universelle. C'est l'ordre universel de la culture. (*G*, 374)

"The sacred and universal interdict," or the "element of culture itself," which has displaced the impossible relationship with the Mother and Nature, marks the necessary path Derrida's Rousseau must follow so that the emergence of culture may take

place. Yet, this path representing the origin is also one leading to corruption and death:

En commençant, (la société) commence à se dégrader . . . Transcendant le besoin, la passion engendre de nouveaux besoins qui la corrompent à leur tour. La dégradation post-originale est analogue à la répétition pré-originale. L'articulation, se substituant à la passion, restaure l'ordre du besoin. Le traité tient lieu d'amour. A peine essayée, la danse dégénère. La fête aussitôt devient la guerre. Et déjà au point d'eau:

“Les barbares surtout, qui vivent de leur troupeaux, ont besoin d'abreuvoirs communs, et l'histoire des plus anciens temps nous apprend qu'en effet c'est là que commencèrent et leurs traités et leurs querelles.” (G, 377)

Derrida's journey has taken his reader to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the unnamable trace translates Eros, and its corruption, Thanatos.

To summarize, Derrida has reconstructed Rousseau's theory of the founding processes of society by reading it through the Oedipal complex. Using “The Festival at the Water Hole” episode, he accomplishes his analysis by (1) identifying certain gaps or “lacunae” and supplying them with content; (2) substituting one word for another (Mother for Nature and sister; son for brother); (3) subjectively interpreting Rousseau's footnote on incest as a moral “embarrassment”; (4) assigning the text a (male) voice;¹⁰ and (5) transposing the order of Rousseau's text of war, disputes and treatises (above citation), which gives the reader the impression that Rousseau inscribed violence in the socializing process *after* the festival takes place when, in fact, Rousseau made these remarks in a text *preceding* the festival passage. Should we accept Derrida's reconstruction of the festival episode since it seems to fit so well Freud's model of repressed desire? For that matter, should we accept Freud's model of incestuous desire?

It does not seem out of place to question certain suspicious phrases found in Derrida's text, such as “if we wish to,” “complete the description,” “all the better” or an entire sentence such as the following:

On sera d'autant moins surpris par l'omission de l'inceste dans l'évocation de la fête qu'on aura prêté attention à une autre lacune, si courant il est vrai: décrivant la non-prohibition . . . (G, 372)

I would suggest that Rousseau does tell what occurred during the festival. In fact, it is this interval that represents the core of his analysis. However, we must follow Rousseau's path directly

by reading his text rather than taking an oblique path that leads somewhere down under, to Freud's or Derrida's texts. Ironically, Derrida *names* what occurs at the water hole; however, he ironically chooses not to "read" himself. He names it when he repeats yet fails to explain the term, *social passion*. What does Rousseau mean by it? Desire among others? For others? With others? Derrida names it without assigning it significance as he concludes that the movement of supplementarity is expressed not as a replacement but as a *reversal* "by which the *poles substitute each other by turn.*" Finally, he names it when he takes the liberty to rearrange the order of Rousseau's texts (attaching Rousseau's comment on war at the end) which, in effect, writes a new conclusion to chapter IX of the *Essai*. Derrida's "the festival becomes war" dissimulates the text's own logic that precedes the festival with war: violence, disputes and treatises (Law) precede the prohibition of incest.

What Derrida calls and perhaps hides by repeating Rousseau's *social passion* is what Girard would identify as conflicting mimesis: passion developed from need caught in a social context of rivalry. It defines desire as subject-directed (desire for the other) rather than object-oriented: a "catastrophic" desire to be sure—a crisis of indifferentiation that necessarily begins and ends in violence.

I am not dealing with Derrida's notion of *différance* in an ontological sense since I have chosen to address that part of *De la grammatologie* in which Derrida purposely chooses to use Freudian theory as a tool to unravel Rousseau's longing or expression for an originary presence of the Mother: that is, as Derrida interprets it, Rousseau can only express this presence as a chain of deferred experiences in the form of the festival. The identity of this originary presence can only be expressed by its difference from or *radical alterity* to the moment before or after its presence, only "sous rature." Using psychoanalysis as a tool, this trace can be conceived (incompletely) as Freud's trace-structure of a purely unknowable, unconscious desire (incest): all we can ever know is the difference from that trace, itself unknowable. In other words, Derrida renders difference an absolute and sets it apart. Whereas Derrida *absolutizes* difference, Girard *systematizes* it: in effect identity or presence is that play between difference and identity.

It is necessary, therefore, to begin rereading Rousseau's text as it is written: Law or the prohibition of incest is the desire for

the sister, not the mother: the sister is the object of desire caught between brothers, or between father and son, or merely between rivals (as Rousseau seemed to intuit—it makes no difference here who the players are). This means we must begin our analysis at the origin of passion, for it is surely passion that begins all. Moreover, by reading Rousseau's pastoral romance in its three versions, the development of a theory of culture based on the problem of conflicting desire becomes clear. To attempt such an argument, I propose to use Rousseau to "complete" Rousseau: reinscribing the Festival episode in the *Discours* and the *Dialogues*.

2

As Ernst Cassirer emphasized in his short but powerful essay, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Rousseau was an obsessively methodical and repetitive thinker.¹¹ Each of his major works reformulates a common core of principles, or what Rousseau himself called his "Système." It thus comes as no surprise to find the festival theme resurfacing in several works, although somewhat modified as the author refines his theories. Here, along with Chapter IX of the *Essai*, I will study two of these recurrences: the "Festival at the Tree" episode in the *Discours*, and the "Tableau of Nature" in the *Premier Dialogue*. The two earlier texts situate the festival in primitive man's hypothetical past, whereas the *Dialogue* text places the idealized "paradise lost" in a hypothetical present or future. All three texts develop the same atmosphere of euphoria and celebration and depict subjects participating in the plenitude of Nature, in the "pure presence" of being which lies somewhere outside of space and time. By comparing the repetitions in the texts, a picture emerges of the phenomenon we have isolated as *social passion* that has little to do with the problem of incest, and yet everything to do with a conflictual desire. Comparing and collating these common notions and terms of the three episodes will enable us to bring Rousseau's theory of culture into better focus, that is, will help reveal what has taken place during the festival.

THE FIRES OF LOVE, OR THE BIRTH OF PASSION

The Setting. A water hole, an old tree, utopia—each of the three texts situates its players and action in an idealized state of

Nature. The manner in which Derrida described this state leads us to imagine Nature as a continuum, a pure and unbroken presence: “Avant la fête, il n’y a pas, dans l’état de pure nature, d’*expérience* du continu; après la fête commence l’*expérience* du *discontinu*” (*G*, 372). “Unfettered nature,” Rousseau’s “perpetual spring” is a non-moment, a perfect stasis. Imitating Nature because he is a part of it, man’s original state is also one of inertia and indolence. Only by chance does an accident suddenly violate this continuous moment, planting the germs of degeneracy that will necessitate Nature’s reordering of itself. But is this an accurate picture of Nature according to the text? Does Rousseau paint it as a perfectly continual and balanced moment suddenly succumbing to some “natural” rupturing? The *Dialogue* text offers a somewhat different image of Nature, clouding the pristine waters of the *Essai* text:

Figurez-vous donc un monde idéal semblable au nôtre, et néanmoins tout différent. La nature y est la même que sur notre terre, mais l’économie en est plus sensible, l’ordre en est plus marqué, le spectacle plus admirable; les formes sont plus élégantes, les couleurs plus vives, les odeurs plus suaves, tous les objets plus intéressants. Toute la nature y est si belle que sa contemplation enflammant les âmes d’amour pour un si touchant tableau leur inspire avec le désir de concourir à ce beau système la crainte d’en troubler l’harmonie, et de là naît une exquise sensibilité qui donne à ceux qui en sont doués des jouissances immédiates Les passions y sont comme ici le mobile de toute action, mais plus vives, plus ardentes, ou seulement plus simples et plus pures, elles prennent par cela seul un caractère tout différent. (*Dialogue*, 668)

Though terms approaching the sense of continuum and stability are to be found in the text, they do not dominate it. Contrary to an atmosphere of serenity, one senses exacerbation, as if Nature were stretching beyond itself. Its perfection spills over the limits of its own definition as a perfect space. Rousseau’s *tableau* describes Nature as an over-abundance, an over-perfection, a too-full plenitude, a more-present presence. Hardly the model of balance and harmony, Nature has become a *disturbance*; moreover, it has become an aggravation inciting desire in its onlookers to compete with it, *to be like it*, to imitate its perfection—in other words, its *difference*. Men’s more-than-passionate desires become mere reproductions of Nature: the repetitive use of the superlative difference (*superlatum* = ce qui est porté au-dessus, i.e. *l’excès*) acts as a contagion or inflammation (enflammant) resulting in its mimetic doubling by man.

In fact, this portrayal of a disturbed and disturbing Nature has been developed in an earlier passage of chapter IX of the *Essai*, allowing us to link the settings of the two texts:¹²

Le premier état de la terre différait beaucoup de celui où elle est aujourd'hui qu'on la voit parée ou défigurée par la main des hommes. Le chaos, que les poètes ont feint dans les éléments, régnait dans ses productions. Dans ces temps reculés, où les révolutions étaient fréquentes, où mille accidents changeaient la nature du sol et les aspects du terrain, tout croissait confusément, arbres, légumes, arbrissaux, herbages: nulle espèce n'avait le temps de s'emparer du terrain qui lui convenait le mieux et d'y étouffer les autres; elles se séparaient lentement peu à peu; et puis un bouleversement survenait qui confondait tout. (*Essai*, 218)

Nature as *chaos* is marked by an indifferenced, wild growth of vegetation. Chaos precedes the "brisure"; in other words, upheaval represents an inherent quality belonging to the natural order. Furthermore, the natural order is fraught with competition and conflict wherein species must appropriate territory at the expense or extermination of rival species. If one wishes to speak of a continuum here, it can only be in terms of the repetitive or continual state of discontinuity. The rupture is a catastrophe bringing confusion to an *already confused and chaotic* world.

In the *Essai* and *Discours*, episodes in which Nature has been metonymically reduced to a fountain or a tree, this presence of an inherent disordering is reproduced in the human order of need and desire. In the *Essai*, disordering is expressed as an imbalance, as both a lack and a surplus. Water becomes more necessary, the animals are thirstier, gestures are less adequate, feet jump instead of walk, new faces and objects produce more desires for newer faces and objects, and pleasure and desire are confused. In the *Discours*, feeling and ideas stack up one after the other, social relations "spread out" as family ties becomes "tighter," and lazy crowds of women seem suddenly animated with dance and song. Rousseau's idea of Nature and of man's natural state is thus variously expressed as chaos, excess, imbalance, contagion and competition. The relationship between Nature and man is symbiotic: chaos is to Nature what passion is to man. Rousseau intuited only too well that passion, like Nature, is fundamentally violent and conflictual.¹³

The Actors. Although Rousseau in a sense recreated a secular garden of Eden, he did not reinvent the original couple. The couple *per se* (mother/son; sister/brother; lovers) does not

interest him; nor does he concern himself with them in his comments on incest. As mentioned earlier, Rousseau's text does not adopt a *subjective* point of view—there are no Ids or Egos to speak of who would themselves speak. It seems risky, therefore, to develop a model of incestuous desire or to speak of a trace of a desire engraved on an "I" when there is no particular subject or couple to whom one may attach this desire or assign the trace.

Subjects. Subjects do exist, however, yet only in multitudes. Either Rousseau addresses categories (men, women, young people, boys and girls) or he uses the impersonal "one." His subjects are often metonymically reduced to eyes, passions, developments of the heart, the voice, or the feet, or metaphorically compared to projectiles in a game (in the *Dialogues*, passions are compared to something like the balls in a game of billiards). Rousseau's analysis of the birth of culture forcibly relies on the *intersubjective* context rather than on the individual psyche. Therefore, any "character" development or action will necessarily entail at least two subjects—if not a crowd—caught between a common desire.

More interestingly, however, Rousseau works with a particular number or configuration of characters which one might describe as threesomes (or multiples of three). The "first fires of love" are not born of the amorous couple, but rather, of the couple *plus* the jealous rival:

A force de se voir on ne peut plus se passer de se voir encore. Un sentiment tendre et doux s'insinue dans l'âme et par la moindre opposition devient une fureur impétueuse: la jalousie s'éveille avec l'amour; la Discorde triomphe, et la plus douce des passions reçoit des sacrifices de sang humain.
(*Essai*)

Opposition and jealousy can only point to an Other, a rival. (It seems obvious that "human blood" here does not refer to a despondent lover's suicide, but to the violent spilling of blood between enemy subjects over a common object of dispute). More importantly, violent identity develops with the emergence of desire and is not distinguishable from it. The conflictual nature of love is due to its necessary and natural situation between two subjects who desire the same object.

This conflictual "triangle" is more explicitly shown on four occasions in the *Dialogue* text. Our first example posits human desire as a force or energy:

... mais bientôt manquant de force pour suivre à travers tant de résistance leur première direction, ils se laissaient défléchir par mille obstacles qui les détournant du vrai but leur font prendre des routes obliques . . . cet effet vient principalement de la faiblesse de l'âme qui suivant mollement l'impulsion de la nature, se détourne au choc d'un obstacle comme une boule prend l'angle de réflexion; au lieu que celle qui suit plus vigoureusement sa course ne se détourne point mais comme un boulet de canon, force l'obstacle ou s'amortit et tombe à sa rencontre. (*Dialogue*, 669)

Again, we find the triangular configuration: subject-object (i.e., "goal")- obstacle. However, in the above text, the author has chosen to emphasize the conflict between subject and obstacle rather than to focus on the amorous couple. Furthermore, violence is no longer described as a jealous fury but as a disfigurement or death.

In a second example, the opposition between subject and obstacle moves even closer to center stage while the object recedes to the background:

... quand, détournées de leur objet par des obstacles, (les passions primitives) s'occupent plus de l'obstacle pour l'écarter que de l'objet pour l'atteindre, alors elles changent de nature et deviennent irascibles et haineuses. (*Dialogue*, 669)

The object has disappeared altogether while jealousy has now become the expression of hatred. Emphasis now clearly focuses on the conflict between the desire and its obstacle. Moreover, we sense that desire concentrates its primary energy on its obstacle and that the object is now entirely secondary.

In a third example, Rousseau's rather abstract description of desire as a projectile becomes more tangible as he returns to the human sphere:

Dans la société humaine, sitôt que la foule des passions et des préjugés qu'elle engendre a fait prendre le change à l'homme, et que les obstacles qu'elle entasse l'ont détourné du vrai but de notre vie, tout ce que peut faire le sage, battu du choc continuel des passions d'autrui et des siennes, et parmi tant de directions qui l'égarent ne pouvant plus démêler celle qui le conduisait bien, c'est de se tirer de la foule . . . il ne se tourmente point à leur rendre mal pour mal, outrage pour outrage. (*Dialogue*, 669-70)

Le sage/le vrai but/les passions d'autrui. The triangle of conflictual desire ever more poignantly points to the violence it creates: jealousy and hatred express themselves as folly, blindness, malice, and vengeance. Desire has moved toward a contagion as the jealousy of the rival spreads to family, friends, the crowd. The hostile obstacle finally grows into an angry mob and

its violence has also become reciprocal: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, *mal pour mal, outrage pour outrage*.

The Action. The three works we have been examining have already raised questions concerning desire, conflict and identification—questions that will become more pertinent as we move closer to what actually occurs at the festival. It is obvious that the action of each text involves sexual desire; however, non-sexual actions involving public esteem and prestige are just as important. Rousseau defines the benefits of desire in various terms as “passions,” “plaisir,” or “bonheur,” these being sometimes synonymous with, sometimes contrary to, desire. By pleasure, he usually means the gratification of an instinct or need, with “jouissance” or “bonheur” serving as synonyms. He sometimes uses “les passions” to mean the instincts, but most often he uses the term to describe desire. In the *Dialogue* text, he has clearly made a distinction between his first meaning of passion as an instinctual drive, and his more frequent use of it as desire. “Les passions primitives” are those which “lead (our actions) most directly to our conservation and happiness.” In contrast, “les passions secondaires” (also called “relative,” “deflected” or “side-tracked” desires) fix their energy on the obstacles (that is, on the passions of the Other) to that happiness. What could Rousseau mean by desire’s obsession with its obstacle, and how and why does desire turn into hate when it began as love?

René Girard has suggested that desire, like other activities of the psyche, is an acquired or learned activity. Since all learning involves imitative processes, the origin of desire is thus said to be *mimetic*.¹⁴ An important aspect of man’s behavior also depends on his “dimension acquisitive” or what Girard calls a *behavior of appropriation*.¹⁵ A subject desires a certain object or goal (desires to “appropriate” it) not because the object itself is desirable but because it is desired—and perhaps possessed—by another subject. Desire is not self-created nor does it originate in the object; it exists as the desire of the Other, imitated and repeated.¹⁶

It is interesting to note the importance Rousseau attaches throughout his work to learning as a fundamentally imitative and repetitive process. The difference between man’s primitive or prereflexive state and his “rational” state represents only so many mimetic movements of the mind. As he declares in the *Emile*, for example, that which differentiates man from animal

is the faculty to perceive, compare and imitate things around him; he incorporates those qualities of the external world that best serve his needs:

Les premiers mouvements naturels de l'homme étant de se mesurer avec tout ce qui l'environne et d'éprouver dans chaque objet qu'il aperçoit toutes les qualités sensibles qui peuvent se rapporter à lui, sa première étude est une sorte de physique expérimentale relative à sa propre conservation.¹⁷

By imitating the movements of Nature which first appear before him, man's cognitive faculties begin to develop:

A mesure que le genre humain s'étendit, les peines se multiplièrent avec les hommes. La différence des terrains, des climats, des saisons, put les forcer à en mettre dans leurs manières de vivre. Des années stériles, des hivers longs et rudes, des étés brûlants qui consomment tout, exigèrent d'eux une nouvelle industrie. Le long de la mer, et des rivières ils inventèrent la ligne, et le hameçon. . . . Le tonnerre, un volcan, ou quelque heureux hazard leur fit connaître le feu, nouvelle ressource contre la rigueur de l'hiver: ils apprirent à conserver cet élément, puis à le reproduire. (*Discours*, 165)

However, the “qualities” man appropriates and reproduces for his own use are precisely those which imitate the forces—one might say, the violence—of Nature. As one species among many, and part of Nature's chaotic order, man learns to imitate the violence of Nature that serves his needs in the competition for survival. Out of the repetition of imitated processes, man also develops more complex perceptions, his first or “primitive” ideas being perceptions of *relationship*. Perceptions of relationship translate man's ability to perceive *difference in sameness* (large and small, strong and weak, slow and fast, cowardly and courageous, and so forth):

Cette application réitérée des êtres divers à lui-même et les uns aux autres, dut naturellement engendrer dans l'esprit de l'homme les perceptions de certains rapports. Ces relations que nous exprimons par les mots de grand, de petit, de fort, de faible, de vite, de lent, de peureux, de hardi, et d'autres idées pareilles, comparées au besoin, et presque sans y songer, produisirent enfin chez lui quelque sorte de réflexion. (*Discours*, 165)

Yet, these new ideas of relationship are in themselves objects of imitation and appropriation. For, along with his ability to perceive relationships or what he later calls “rank,” he also comes to identify himself with that difference.¹⁸

In the final analysis, however, difference is nothing other than *the mark of violence*. Rousseau also adds that perceiving relationship and difference emerges as the “competition” for space, objects and survival becomes more intense. That is, as

the number of other subjects and objects multiply within the same area, the more conducive the environment becomes for the development of violent differentiation. As part of the conflictual movement of Nature, man develops his reflexive faculties by learning to imitate and incorporate (appropriate) the violence necessary for his survival. Perception, memory, imagination and judgment together perceive compare, juxtapose, incorporate, repeat, and copy the “qualities” or objects of his surroundings to ensure his well-being.

Returning to our texts, we find that desire (sexual or for prestige) develops from the imitative and acquisitive properties of perception:

On s'accoutuma à considérer différents objets, et à faire des comparaisons; on acquiert insensiblement des idées de mérite et de beauté qui produisent des sentiments de préférence. A force de se voir, on ne peut plus se passer de se voir encore. Un sentiment tendre et doux s'insinue dans l'âme. . . . (*Discours*, 169)

Là, des yeux accoutumés aux mêmes objets dès l'enfance, commencèrent d'en voir de plus doux. Le coeur s'émeut à ces nouveaux objets. . . . (*Essai*, 222)

On s'accoutuma à s'assembler devant les cabanes ou autour d'un grand arbre. . . . Chacun commença à regarder les autres et à vouloir être regardé soi-même, et l'estime public eut un prix. . . . Sitôt que les hommes eurent commencé à s'apprécier mutuellement et que l'idée de la considération fut formée dans leur esprit, chacun y prétendait y avoir droit. (*Discours*, 169)

. . . voilà comment l'amour de soi, qui est un sentiment bon et absolu, devient amour-propre; c'est-à-dire, un sentiment relatif par lequel on se compare, qui demande des préférences dont la jouissance est purement négative. . . . (*Dialogue*, 669)

Imitation is like a contagion; perceptions, objects, subjects multiply, intensifying the competition for survival, happiness or gratification of desire, within a “space” that becomes more and more constrained. If only it could be controlled, checked, “held back,” then preference or the *difference* leading to violence would never develop: “lui (l'homme) dans son état primitif, lorsque placé par la nature à *des distances égales* de la stupidité des brutes et des lumières funestes de l'homme civil, et *borné également* par l'instinct et par la raison à se garantir du mal qui le menace, il est retenu par la pitié naturelle de faire lui-même du mal à personne” (*Discours*, my italics).

If desire is part of this mimetic process, it is thus conflictual in nature and perceived to be a source of disorder within the

community, since the appropriation of objects (or goals) necessarily entails the exercise of force or violence between subjects. Thus, to continue to focus on a specific form of desire (incest) or on the *object* or goal desired (the Mother) is to misapprehend the nature of desire and the social problems it poses in Rousseau's work. If desire is not the expression of a want but rather, the imitated desire of another, it must be understood as the desire *to be like the Other*. We thus move closer to desire's veritable object which is the *Other*—or more accurately, the very being of the Other. Again, it should be emphasized that desire cannot be understood outside its intersubjective, social dimension, nor is the mimetic process limited to merely two rivals; on the contrary, it invariably grows to include a multitude of subjects, violence begetting violence. Violence based on rivalry ensures vengeance, and like an illness, spreads through the community unchecked until it is deadened (temporarily) by a superior violence or arbitrarily interrupted by the authority of "sacred" institutions, such as prohibition and ritual.¹⁹

We can now trace the development of what comes very close to a triangular desire and the role it plays in Rousseau's theory of culture. It should by now be clear that in the *Dialogue*, a desire "naturally" tending toward a given object or goal is always already inscribed within a conflict of rivalry. Between the desire and its object, there is always already present an obstacle, an equally opposing desire:

Tous les premiers mouvements de la nature sont bons et droits . . . mais bientôt manquant de force pour suivre à travers tant de résistance leur première direction (toward the object), ils se laissent défléchir par mille obstacles qui les détournent du vrai but leur font prendre des routes obliques.

. . . celle (une boule, i.e. un désir) qui suit plus vigoureusement sa course ne se détourne point, mais comme un boulet de canon force l'obstacle ou s'amortit et tombe à sa rencontre.

. . . l'homme battu du choc continuel des passions d'autrui et des siennes . . . parmi tant de directions qui l'égarent.

Deux amants, l'un très épris, l'autre assez tiède, souffriront néanmoins un rival avec la même impatience.

In fact, the opposing desire reveals itself to be the true object preoccupying the two subjects, and the stronger the "resistance," that is, the stronger the mimetic play, the less important the initial object becomes, to the point at which it disappears

entirely, leaving the two rival parties alone: Deux amants . . . souffriront néanmoins un rival avec la même impatience . . . il peut très bien arriver que la haine du second devenue sa passion principale, survive à son amour et même s'accroisse après qu'il (= l'amour pour l'object) est éteint" (*Dialogue*, 670).

In the *Discours*, the crisis of mimetic desire touches not only sexual objects but also objects of *prestige*. We find another outbreak of it in the form of a desire for public esteem:

Chacun commença à regarder les autres et à vouloir être regardé soi-même, et l'estime publique eut un prix. Celui qui chantait ou dansait le mieux; le plus beau, le plus fort, le plus adroit, ou le plus éloquent devint le plus considéré, et ce fut le premier pas vers l'inégalité, et vers le vice en même temps: de ces premières préférences naquirent d'un côté la vanité et le mépris, de l'autre la honte et l'envie; et la fermentation causée par ces nouveaux levains produisit enfin des composés funestes au bonheur et à l'innocence. (169)

Not only does this passage clearly exhibit the crisis of mimetic desire as a crisis of violence, the reference to dance and song necessarily ties it to the Festival episode of the *Essai* text. It allows us to read "les pieds bondissaient," "la voix . . . d'accents passionnés," and "le geste empressé" as *the same text*. It is now possible to read the Festival episode and identify what Derrida isolated as "social passion."

3

At the outset of this study, I argued against Derrida's Freudian reading of incest and its prohibition, which sees this phenomenon at the center of the Festival episode, and the importance he places on it in Rousseau's development of a theory of culture. By emphasizing the *before* (incest) and *after* (prohibition) of the Festival, he reduced the episode itself to an unreadable "blank." By psychoanalytically "constructing" the festival as a present absence, he compared it to the Unconscious: the Unconscious always already inscribed with the presence or "trace" of a culpable desire—hence, the Festival or origin of society is always already inscribed with its degraded, corrupted origin. Even if we were to agree with Derrida that incest does occur during the Festival, this would not change the outcome of our analysis.

It is not Freud's culpable desire for the Mother that is present here. Nor does it matter that we may never be able to define this incest (although Rousseau did choose to define it as incest

among siblings). In each of the three texts, we have found it to be a question of the *birth of desire*, which is tied to intersubjectivity. In the final analysis, *desire is violence*—the violence of the Other mimetically reciprocated in a spiraling effect. As the crisis of violence builds, order and difference deteriorate to the point where violence becomes *indifferently* inflicted, touching not only rivals as enemies but also friends and family. If incest has suggested itself to Rousseau at the close of the Festival episode, it is because incest (like parricide and other extreme forms of social violence) epitomizes the purest, most acute form of the mimetic crisis to strike the community: violence becomes an issue between the very subjects least likely to become rivals (fathers, sons, brothers).

Rousseau understood that the fundamental issue before the question of the origin of society remained that of “les passions” or what today we call desire. He attempted to describe the nature of desire and the role it played in society’s development by returning to its hypothetical inception. What he stumbled upon—perhaps without fully comprehending—became a problematic form of desire, *always already* caught in a conflictual movement of opposing forces. Furthermore, he found that it is the very nature of desire to act both as humankind’s *demise* (since it represents an eventual cause for social violence to break out) and its *triumph* (since it also serves as the catalyst for the socializing processes to begin in the first place). Rousseau tried to explain the paradoxical intuition by returning to the origin of human faculties, in effect, building his own cognitive science based on identification and imitation. For Rousseau, human thought develops through processes of identification similar to those described as desire: primitive man learns by imitating the forces of Nature (its violence) that best serve his conservation and needs. This does not resolve the problem of *origin* for him, since his analysis has merely transferred the process of mimetic desire onto Nature, whereby Nature metaphorically plays the role of man’s rival. Yet what is new and central to the analysis is the recognition and place Rousseau awards to identification and conflict within the cognitive processes. Perception, memory, judgment, and imagination—because they are essentially imitative faculties—result in the framing of man’s world as a universe of comparison, preference, hierarchy—that is, difference.

If the origin of society (of language, inequality, and law) seems to escape Rousseau's investigation, it may be due to the fact that he constantly skirts the issue of religion, or more precisely, the sacred (as Derrida has brought to our attention with reason). But this is an attitude for which one can hardly blame Rousseau, hounded by the secular parochialism of the eighteenth century. If he seems to ignore the issue most of the time, the closer he moves toward the question of origin, the more religion nevertheless insinuates itself in his argument. He somehow cannot help but come back to it, though sacrality is transformed and transferred to the realm of secular law, becoming the first and only legitimate Contract. (This is what Derrida tried to show us in the prohibition of incest: the "first" sacred law founding society.) In fact, in the *Discours* (in a passage separate from the Festival episode) he clearly expresses the necessary inclusion of the sacred in the founding of society:

... les Gouvernements humains avaient besoin d'une base plus solide que la seule raison, et combien il était nécessaire au repos public que la volonté divine intervint pour donner à l'autorité souveraine un caractère sacré et inviolable qui ôtât aux sujets le funeste Droit d'en disposer. Quand la religion n'aurait fait que ce bien aux hommes, c'en serait assez pour qu'ils dussent tous la chérir et l'adopter, même avec ses abus, puisqu'elle épargne encore plus de sang que le fanatisme n'en fait couler. (*Disc.*,186)

If we accept the thesis that the appearance of incest and its prohibition in the *Essai* is not a mere coincidence, and consider the above passage from the *Discours*, it then seems evident that Rousseau speculated on the necessity of the sacred function in the development of society: its prohibitions as well as its "abuses." Prohibition marked *difference* by defining the limits of human violence; it denied men access to certain objects that seemed to stimulate outbursts of disorder. It defined difference by designating the prohibited objects as *sacred*, in other words, as the property of a transcendent (or more powerful) authority.

And the "abuses" Prohibition is not the only manifestation of the sacred. As we have briefly mentioned in passing (see note 19), Girard points to its second, more problematic manifestation: ritual sacrifice. Whereas prohibition attempts to prevent the violence of a mimetic crisis by assigning a sacred dimension to the mark of difference that it attempts to reestablish, ritual sacrifice *creates* the difference, creates violence in the form of sacrifice while the community is already in the midst of a crisis

of violence. As the reader knows, ritual sacrifice polarizes latent violence, focusing it on a scapegoat so that the community will be spared a greater outbreak of violence. By designating a unique victim or scapegoat, it polarizes the collective violence upon one, arbitrarily “culpable” victim whose death or expulsion from the group expels the violence infesting the community.

It may be argued that since Rousseau never clearly develops a notion of sacrifice in the texts we have been examining, his analysis of the origin of society does not really conform to or “hint at” Girard’s theories concerning desire, violence, and the sacred. After all, the sacrificial mechanism plays a key part, if not the key rôle, in Girard’s system, and its exclusion would undo his theory and perhaps our analysis.

If Rousseau blinds himself to the notion of sacrifice in the *Essai* or the *Discours*, it is because the point of view of his argument remains on the side of violence rather than on the side of innocence. Rousseau’s theory *is itself caught in the play of mimetic desire*. While he exposes the scandal of desire as the seat of the socializing process, he does so only to condemn culture and its theoretical allies. However, in some texts, his remarkable intuitions do take him to the verge of a “sacrificial” mechanism.²⁰ The *Dialogue* texts we examined represent one of those instances. In it, we discover that Rousseau’s “ideal world” populated by subjects whose “primitive” desires are pure, good, and right (i.e., non-violent), is none other than the world of sacrifice. It is the utopic universe of the victim where desire is refused and denounced. If the players of this new world are any happier or better, it is only due to their condition of *inactivity*: they “sacrifice” their desire for the express purpose of refusing to enter into the conflict of a mimetic identification. They confront their rival and “fall” (“tombe et s’amortit”). This is the world of the “wise” person who withdraws from the angry mob and refuses to answer his enemy’s threats. And intersubjective rivalry is created between the subjects of this ideal world (Rousseau’s very “natural” order) and the subjects of our world (the corrupt social order). Their common object, however, remains the reader’s moral and political esteem. And Rousseau awards that esteem to his fictitious universe by “sacralizing” the subjects of his ideal world. He achieves this by turning them into victims. In the real world of “unhappy humans” men are torn apart by reciprocal violence. In the ideal world, men are

“saved” through sacrifice by refusing violence, by turning the other cheek:

L'état céleste auquel ils aspirent et qui fait leur premier beson par la force avec laquelle il s'offre à leurs coeurs leur fait rassembler et tendre sans cesse toutes les puissances de leur âme pour y parvenir. Les obstacles qui les retiennent ne sauraient les occuper au point de le leur faire oublier un moment, et de là ce *mortel dégoût pour tout le reste, et cette inaction totale quand ils désespèrent d'atteindre au seul objet de tous leurs voeux.* (*Dialogue*, 670, my italics)

Finally, Rousseau coldly designates them as victims:

. . . dans ces contrées . . . l'expresse volonté de nuire, la haine envenimée, l'envie, la noirceur, la trahison, la fourberie y sont inconnues; trop souvent on y voit des *coupables, jamais on n'y vit un méchant.* (*Dialogue*, 671, my italics)

It should come to no surprise then that the author of *Rousseau: juge de Jean-Jacques* has by now incorporated the skeletal outline of the sacrificial mechanism in the founding of society, since this work, more than any other, shows Rousseau at the height of his own delusions of victimization. The importance Rousseau assigns to a violence based on “social passions,” that is, on mimetic desire, having been made apparent by studying the three texts in question, raises questions that Girard seems better able to address than Freud. Although Derrida’s objectives go well beyond a reading of Rousseau’s *Essai*—in fact, Part II of *De la grammatologie* is not so much a reading of Rousseau as Rousseau’s text becomes a reading of Derrida—the critic’s Freudian perspective of the Festival episode nevertheless leaves us with an interpretation that equates the scene with a nostalgic quest for an impossible, unobtainable originary presence. My reading has attempted to suggest or point to a location in Rousseau’s writings that allows the reader to “complete the description” of the festival, to complete Rousseau’s theory of culture. This locus has been found at the crossroads of identity and difference, of *identity as difference* caught in the throes of a crisis of indifferentiation. We are indeed still a great distance from a Girardian theory of culture. But Rousseau’s contribution to the study of society, violence, and human desire should no longer go unnoticed or be misconstrued as a precursor to Freudian mythology.

NOTES

1. See Jacques Derrida, “La Scène de l’écriture,” *L’Écriture et la différence* (Paris, 1967).

2. In Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), “Translator’s Preface,” lxxvi, lxxvii supra.

3. The relationship between psychoanalysis and deconstruction has indeed become problematic since Derrida’s analysis of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *La Carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris, 1980). Is this work a definitive rejection of psychoanalytic practice? Or is it a final reconciliation with psychoanalysis, bringing Freud’s pleasure principle under the wing of deconstruction?

4. Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris, 1967). See Derrida’s analysis in Part II, chapter 3 (“L’Articulation”), 327-378. Further references to this work will be given in parentheses as *G*, page number.

5. Jacques Lacan cited by Stephen Melville in his article, “Psychoanalysis and the Place of *Jouissance*,” *Critical Inquiry* 13:2 (Winter 1987): 365.

6. The three texts examined have been taken from the following works: (1) *Essai sur l’origine des langues* in *Oeuvres de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris, 1822), 2: 217, 222-24 (Chapter ix of the *Essai*); (2) *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* in *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris, 1964) 3: 168-71 (Second Part); (3) *Premier Dialogue of Rousseau: Juge de Jean-Jacques* in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1959) 1: 668-70.

7. See René Girard, *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris, 1978).

8. Derrida declares: “Rousseau explique avec quelque embarras que la prohibition de l’inceste a dû suivre la fête, naître de l’acte de la société humaine, . . .” and later speaks of Rousseau’s “morale qui condamne l’inceste est constituée à partir de l’interdit, elle a en lui son origine” (*G*, 373-75). What does Derrida mean by this? Guilt on the part of the author? I would suggest that Derrida’s comments here are purely speculative, projecting a “guilt” which this reader fails to find in the original text.

9. Sigmund Freud, “Construction in Analysis,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London, 1959) 23: 258-59.

10. This “male” desiring subject, who might be confused with Rousseau’s unconscious, becomes in the final analysis, Derrida’s (or our voice as readers of Derrida): “C’est toujours *comme si j’avais commis un inceste*” (*G*, 377).

11. Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Peter Gay (Bloomington, Ind., 1963).

12. Derrida also refers to this passage, however, for different reasons (see *G*, 367-68).

13. Since his work on the origin of language is “anthropologically” rather than “philosophically” oriented, Rousseau is often forced to embrace “mythological” reasoning; hence, in each of the works discussed he develops at length the importance Nature plays in man’s attempt to understand his condition and world: mythological thought is a reflection based on analogy. Girard has this to add on the role of “natural disasters” in myth: “les menaces les plus extérieures, les plus accidentelles, comme les sécheresses, les inondations, les épidémies, sont confondues souvent par le biais des ressemblances entre les modes de propagation, avec la dégradation interne des rapports humains au sein de la communauté, le glissement vers la violence réciproque” (*Des choses cachées*, 22).

14. “Au sujet de ce qu’on peut nommer mimétisme, imitation, mimésis, il règne aujourd’hui, dans les sciences de l’homme et de la culture, une vue unilatérale. Il n’y a rien ou presque rien, dans les comportements humains, qui ne soit appris, et tout apprentissage se ramène à l’imitation. Si les hommes, tout à coup, cessaient d’imiter, toutes les formes culturelles s’évanouirait” (*Des choses cachées*, 15).

15. Lest the reader accuse Girard of inventing certain concepts of human behavior that seem to be without foundation—such as his notion of “comportement d’appropriation”—it should be recalled that Freud also hypothesized a similar

phenomenon: *Bemächtigungstrieb* (in English, the instinct to master or for mastery; in French, *la pulsion d'emprise*). Laplanche and Pontalis define it as either a "pulsion de maîtrise" or as an "instinct de possession": "maîtrise évoque une domination contrôlée, possession, l'idée d'un avoir à conserver, alors que *sich bemächtigen* signifie s'emparer ou dominer par la force" *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris, 1967), 364. Freud mentions this notion for the first time in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and notably in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—works in which the question of *origin* is of primary importance. See also Derrida's comments on this notion ("le code du pouvoir") in "Spéculer-sur 'Freud'" in *La Carte postale* (430-32). An interesting study would be a comparison between Girard, Freud and Derrida on the ideas of mastery and appropriation.

16. *Des choses cachées*, 16-18; 312-19.

17. Cited in a footnote to the *Discours* in *Oeuvres complètes*, 3: 1341, note 2.

18. "Les nouvelles lumières qui résultèrent de ce développement, augmentèrent sa supériorité sur les autres animaux, en la lui faisant connaître. . . . C'est ainsi que le premier regard qu'il porta sur lui-même, y produisit le premier mouvement d'orgueil; c'est ainsi que sachant encore à peine distinguer les rangs, et se contemplant, au premier par son espèce, il se préparait de loin à y prétendre par son individu" (*Discours*, 165-66).

19. Desire does not so much *create* violence as it *is* violence. This explains primitive societies' fear of desire and other imitative processess. As Girard has concluded from his exhaustive study of myth and ritual, prohibitions of certain forms of mimetic desire (such as incest) and ritual sacrifice are ways by which a community attempts to control reciprocal violence brought on by the mimetic crisis. Prohibition tries to "distance" the objects that seem to be connected to mimetic desire (see *Des choses cachées*, 24-25, and Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* [Baltimore, 1979], 220-22), whereas ritual sacrifice attempts to channel the community's violence upon a unique and unanimously agreed upon point—the sacrificial victim—whose death or expulsion from the group drives away the mimetic or "contagious" violence that has infested it. By the "sacralization" of violence—through prohibition or ritual sacrifice—the humanizing processes are activated (see *Des choses cachées*, 40-41, and also *Violence and the Sacred*, chapters i-iv).

20. See Rousseau's development of the concept of victimary sacrifice in the *Contrat social* in my study, "Rousseau's Civil Religion Reconsidered," *The French Review* 60:4 (March 1987): 485-96.