Chapter 2: Pharmacology on the Threshold of Modernity: Rousseau

2.1 Illness as social pathology

The term pharmacology originally comes from the semantic field of disease. The metaphor of illness, however, is a controversial and ambiguous figure of speech in political theory. For this reason, it seems appropriate to deal more fundamentally with the imagery of illness in politics. The aforementioned Susan Sontag differentiates between two sickness metaphors, ancient and modern: the ancient notion holds that "[t]reatment is aimed at restoring the right balance — in political terms, the right hierarchy"[1]. This understanding, which according to Sontag was widespread from Plato to Hobbes, was eventually replaced in 18th century political discourse by a 'modern' metaphor of illness: "The modern idea of revolution, based on an estimate of the unremitting bleakness of the existing political situation, shattered the old, optimistic use of disease metaphors"[2]. The French Revolution undermined the confidence that political grievances can be cured by old and proven remedies. It is not that the revolutionaries did not try this — as Hannah Arendt argues, they themselves initially misunderstood the revolutionary overcoming of the old order as its restoration[3] — but the recipes failed and gradually a new image of health took

1 S. Sontag: Illness as Metaphor, p. 75.

2 S. Sontag: Illness as Metaphor, p. 80.

3 Arendt, Hannah: On Revolution (orig. 1963), London: Faber & Faber 2016, ch. 1.

hold that was linked to the idea of overcoming the disease through a new beginning, a process of *régénération* [4], as the revolutionary discourse would have it. The radicalism of this new way of thinking is reflected in the political use of the most prominent medical metaphor of the era. In the case of Abbé Sieyès, who wrote a kind of "script"[5] for the Revolution with his appeal to the third estate, the nobility is defamed as a 'parasitic caste', as a 'cancer' that can only be cured by 'amputation'.[6]

Sontag's description of a change in the use of disease metaphors in the political discourse of the 18th century is visionary and underpinned by many plausible observations; yet it has a normative dimension which is less convincing. She considers this new sickness metaphor, which expresses "a sense of dissatisfaction with society as such"[7], to be inherently dangerous, because it tends to unleash violence. This becomes clear when she draws a direct connection from the revolutionary thought to the totalitarianism of the 20th century:

> It is hardly the last time that revolutionary violence would be justified on the grounds that society has a radical, horrible illness. […] Modern totalitarian movements, whether of the right or of the left, have been peculiarly — and revealingly — inclined to use disease imagery[8].

Let us exclude, for a moment, the normative qualification and stick to Sontag's descriptive capture of a change from classical to modern disease metaphors in political discourse. Several aspects can be distinguished in this regard. First, the classical concept of political sickness relates to a momentary tendency to decline or an acute

4 Ozouf, Mona: "Régénération", in: François Furet/Mona Ozouf (Eds.), Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française, Paris: Flammarion 1988, pp. 821–831; see also Ozouf, Mona: L'homme régénéré. Essai sur la Révolution française, Paris: Gallimard 1989.

5 Sewell, William H.: A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution. The Abbé Sieyes and What is the Third Estate?, Durham: Duke University Press 1994, p. 53.

6 A. de Baecque: Le corps de l'histoire, p. 110.

7 S. Sontag: Illness as Metaphor, p. 73.

8 Ibid., p. 82.

state of disorder; health, as a well-ordered state, is assumed to be unproblematic and a generally agreed-upon condition. By contrast, modern disease metaphors signify more systemic processes, which seem to be fundamentally intertwined with the general evolution of society. "[W]hat is at issue is health itself"[9]. Second, whereas sickness in the classical conception is purely a metaphorical attribute of the 'body politic', in the modern account the disease makes itself felt in individual suffering, which manifests itself in a discomfort or unease on the part of the social actors, who feel, but do not really grasp what is going wrong.

> [T]he modern metaphors suggest a profound disequilibrium between individual and society, with society conceived as the individual's adversary. [Modern] [d]isease metaphors are used to judge society not as out of balance but as repressive[10].

Third, this systemic character of the disease consequently leads to a decrease in the previous trust in healing through statecraft. As a consequence, healing seems either utopian, or possible only through radical means like a permanent regeneration.

While Sonntag focuses on the third, curative, aspect from which she deduces the dangerousness of modern disease metaphors, it is worth taking a closer look at the first two, more diagnostic, aspects. Here a discourse shift becomes clear that could be described as a transition from the concept of political sickness to that of social pathology. Frederick Neuhouser has worked out this difference in some detail. He characterizes a social pathology by "the idea of a practice which systematically runs counter to the ends of those who participate in this practice"[11]. The notion of 'practice' is crucial here: a practice is a result of individual actions; it is contingent in the sense that it has social, not natural, causes (a fundamental difference to classical political thought's assumption of the teleology of human action). The concept of a practice presupposes that actors

9 Ibid., p. 72.

10 Ibid., p. 73.

11 Neuhouser, Frederick: "Rousseau und die Idee einer 'pathologischen' Gesellschaft", in: Politische Vierteljahrsschrift 53 (2012), pp. 628–645, p. 630.

take part in it who are responsible, at least in principle, for their actions. For this reason, the diagnosis of a social pathology, which indicates that the purposes of action are thwarted, always implies an element of criticism which holds people responsible for not living up to the standards of a good life. To call a society pathological is therefore different from calling it unjust.

As a consequence of the opaque nature of a social pathology, the healthy and the unhealthy states of a society can no longer be kept strictly apart (as in the classical model): on the contrary, they are deeply intermingled, conceptual twins, as it were. The history of society is the history of its deprivation. This idea is the *leitmotif* of the social philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom Neuhouser calls the father of the idea of a pathological society, an idea that was influential among 19th century social philosophers like Hegel, Durkheim and Nietzsche[12]. Rousseau, however, is particularly interesting as the interface between the classical and the modern understanding of political illness. He is the first political thinker to base his social philosophy and political theory on the diagnosis of a social pathology, and one of the last to take up the tradition of conceptualizing politics as a potential 'cure' by analogy with medicine.

Rousseau has a special and conflict-ridden relationship with the medicine of his time; numerous references can be found in his autobiographical, educational, socio-philosophical and political writings. At first glance he appears to be a dedicated critic of medicine, harshly slamming the "rule of the art of medicine, an art which is in any case more dangerous to people than all the evils that it claims to be able to cure"[13]. His polemics are particularly true of the self-misunderstanding of medicine as a science that devotes great care and energy to description and classification. In contrast, Rousseau emphasizes: "The only really useful part of the science of medicine is the art of hygiene; moreover, it is less of a science than a virtue"[14].

12 Ibid., p. 628.

13 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques: Collection complète des œuvres de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 17 volumes, Genève 1780–1789, vol. IV, p. 37.

14 Ibid., p. 40.

The biographical background cannot be overlooked. Because of his unstable state of health, Rousseau consulted numerous doctors between 1732 and 1736[15], and found that the majority of them either did not have sufficient knowledge of his ailment, or at least could not make a clear, precise diagnosis of it. After an odyssey of various examinations and futile attempts to find appropriate treatment, Rousseau draws the personal conclusion that he should allow himself "to recover or to die without doctors and remedies"[16].

Rousseau's complaint about the dilettantism of doctors reflects an unease with the medicine of his time that was widespread during the Enlightenment: a case in point, for example, is Molière's mockery of medics as money-tailoring charlatans in his *zeitgeist*-invoking play "The Imaginary Invalid" (Le Malade Imaginaire). With Rousseau, however, this criticism takes a specific socio-critical turn. For him, the real causes of illness are of a social nature, so "that one could easily write the history of human illness by following that of our civilized society"[17].

How does Rousseau justify the view that the history of human disease is inextricably linked with the history of civilization? — For him the concept of illness is closely related to that of unnaturalness. Civilization, through which people leave their 'state of nature', means falling away from a 'natural way of life'. Rousseau cites as an example the change in eating habits, "the overly artificial dishes of the rich, which nourish them with hot juices and burden them with digestive disorders", and on the other hand "the meagre food of the poor, which they are mostly still lacking and the lack of which leads them to greedily overload their stomachs when the opportunity arises"[18]. It becomes clear that Rousseau explains denaturation not naturalistically, but culturally; for him it is about a change in the habits of eating (not primarily about the food itself).

This is underlined by other examples of the artificial way of life in civilization, "the waking nights, the debauchery of every kind,

15 J. J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. X, pp. 303ff.

16 J. J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. XVI, p. 167.

17 J. J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. I, p. 53.

18 Ibid.

[…] the worries and hardships without number […]: these are the ominous evidence that most of our sufferings are our own work"[19]. At the end of his detailed list, which reads like a sweeping attack on the decadence of contemporary urban society, Rousseau sums up his understanding of illness as unnatural: he writes "that the state of reflection is a state against nature and that the man who thinks is a degenerate animal"[20].

In the light of such lines, Voltaire scoffed at Rousseau in his reply that one felt like walking on all fours. But if we leave the cultural pessimism aside, it becomes clear that Rousseau understands illness structurally as a state of imbalance between desire and its potential satisfaction. As Rousseau explains in "Emile", nature gives man "first of all only the desires necessary for his preservation and the abilities sufficient to fulfill them. […] Only in the original state are forces and desires in balance."[21] The health of humans in the 'natural state' consists in the fact that their desires (e.g. hunger) come to a halt spontaneously in satisfaction (e.g. the consumption of a fruit) (Second Discourse, p. 67). They are not yet worried by the hunger of tomorrow[22], i.e. they are not yet providential beings. Illness, on the other hand, is the state of falling away from this state of momentary happiness. It is triggered by the awakening of the imagination, which produces a state of differential desire.

Jacques Derrida[23] has worked out this self-reinforcing dynamic of unattainability, which is characteristic of Rousseau's thinking and which is constituted by the imaginative representation of the absent. As soon as the fragile state of equilibrium has been disturbed by the awakening of the imagination, the "natural" balance between desire and restraint turns out to be an "impossible

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. IV, p. 89.

22 Hobbes, Thomas: De cive, ed. Howard Warrender, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1983, ch. 10.

23 Derrida, Jacques: De la Grammatologie. Paris: Editions de Minuit 1967, p. 262ff.

balance"[24]. In Rousseau's own words: "The imagination expands for us […] the measure of the possible and consequently arouses and nourishes the desires through the hope to satisfy them. But the goal that you seemed to be reaching flees faster than you can pursue it."[25] Through the development of the imagination, the needs grow exponentially, the desire becomes excessive, or, to stick with the medical imagery, "feverish"[26].

2.2 Rousseau and the genesis of modern self-medication

Does Rousseau's conception of the process of civilization allow anything other than the pessimistic conclusion that health is irretrievably lost, and that our pathological society is consequently a habitat that we cannot escape? If one looks only at the "Second Discourse" with its culturally pessimistic thrust, then this reading suggests an inevitable pathogenesis of human civilization. In contrast, Derrida and other interpreters have shown convincingly that in Rousseau the terms nature/culture or healthy/sick are not to be thought of independently of one another and cannot be assigned separately to any particular historical periods or stages in the development of humankind.

For Derrida, nature in its double meaning as a biological foundation and as a normative ideal is a term that cannot be conceived without its "supplement", culture[27]. Like health, nature is a *liminal term*. "It is not a question of leaving nature, nor of returning to it, but rather of diminishing its 'being distant'."[28]

Given this supplementary structure, how is healing to be imagined? Rousseau hints at homeopathic therapy according to the prin-

24 J.Derrida: Grammatologie, p. 265.

25 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. IV, p. 89.

26 Cited after F. Neuhouser: Rousseau und die Idee einer 'pathologischen' Gesellschaft, p. 637ff.

27 J. Derrida: Grammatologie, p. 255.

28 Ibid. p. 264.

ciple *similia similibus curentur*: "Eternal providence, by placing salutary simples alongside noxious plants, and by endowing the substance of certain harmful animals with remedies for their wounds, has taught the sovereigns who are its ministers to imitate its wisdom"[29]. Jean Starobinski made this the main theme of an essay entitled "The Antidote in the Poison: The Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau". He brilliantly shows that for Rousseau the homeopathic formula, far from being a principle confined to medicine proper, serves as a universal key to understanding the apparently paradoxical in the structure of his (i.e. Rousseau's) own thought. The arts and sciences, which Rousseau accuses in his "First Discourse" of degrading or even perverting the human species, are both poison and cure: literary writing is corrupting *and* cultivating, the theater has both isolating *and* communalizing effects. The same structure also permeates Rousseau's political thought. The social contract demands complete alienation, but is, *as such*, a liberating act. What all these different examples have in common is the fact that the "intervention of a therapist [...] is required to extract the remedy from the poison"[30].

Starobinski's essay has received widespread reception. However, his metaphor of homeopathy has not established itself as a leading concept in the Rousseau interpretation.[31] This may be due to

29 Starobinski, Jean: "The Antidote in the Poison: The Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau", in: Jean Starobinski (Ed.), Blessings in Disguise; or, the Morality of Evil, Transl. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge: Harvard UP 1993, pp. 118–168, p. 119.

30 J. Starobinski: The Antidote in the Poison, p. 120.

31 Neuhouser takes up the medical metaphor when he reconstructs Rousseau's social philosophy under the terms 'diagnosis', 'prescription' and 'curing the malady' — but he does not explicitly use the terms 'homeopathic' or 'pharmacological'. See Neuhouser, Frederick: Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love. Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition, New York: Oxford UP 2008. — An exception is Bottici, who uses homeopathy and pharmacology interchangeably. Bottici, Chiara: "Democracy and the spectacle: On Rousseau's homeopathic strategy", in: Philosophy and Social Criticism 41 (2015), pp. 235–248.

the fact that this image is so pertinent in Rousseau's writings, that the term *metaphor* does not seem fitting enough to capture its centrality. Maria Gullstam assumes Starobinski's stance of Rousseau, but replaces the term "homeopathy" by Derrida's concept of '*pharmakon*', which seems better suited to characterize a "thought structure [which] is indeed present in Rousseau's philosophy on a level that reaches beyond the recurring remedy/poison metaphor"[32]. In his text "Plato's Pharmacy", Derrida reveals a characteristic structure of occidental thought, which is based on the superiority of the spoken word over written language. This basic idea is analyzed in a close reading of Plato's work *Phaedrus*. The point of Derrida's deconstruction is that Plato's argument that only spoken language is capable of reaching the sphere of ideas is not tenable on closer reading. Derrida reveals the view as a subtext in Plato that written and oral use of language always refer to one another and cannot be separated — just as the Greek term '*pharmakon*' encompasses the opposing meanings of poison and cure.

It does not seem problematic to transfer this structure back to Rousseau. The text "Plato's Pharmacy" serves as a further explanation of Derrida's basic idea in "Grammatology" that the meaning of texts is interwoven with a supplementary logic, which he had demonstrated using Rousseau's use of the term 'nature'. To this extent, Rousseau's metaphor of homeopathic healing is a pharmacological image *par excellence*.

With a view to Rousseau' anthropology, it does not seem exaggerated to call man a pharmacological animal. On the one hand, unlike in the harmonistic doctrines of the natural law tradition, no *telos* exists for Rousseau that would channel and control the development of society through a social instinct inherent in human beings. On the other hand, however, Rousseau also criticizes the 'realistic' anthropology of Hobbes, who traces human nature back to some supposedly universal laws of motion and understands human

32 Gullstam, Maria: Rousseau's Idea of Theatre. From Criticism to Practice, Doctoral Thesis in Theatre Studies at Stockholm University, Sweden 2020, http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1430104/FULLTEXT01.pdf.

behavior as a vector of appetitive and aversive strivings, an analysis which results in the famous formula of man being man's wolf. The first view is naive because it presupposes a pre-established harmony between self-love and the social whole; the second is unhistorical because it hyposthesizes a certain gestalt of human self-love which, as Rousseau strives to demonstrate, came into being only with bourgeois competitive society[33]. Both of these perspectives fail to recognize the essential pharmacological structure of human self-love.

In Rousseau's description of man in the state of nature, self-love plays a prominent role; it is the seed of an arsenal of emotions and passions that can develop from it: "The source of our passions and the origin of all others is self-love that comes with the man's birth and which does not leave him as long as he lives. It is the original passion, innate and before everything else."[34]

In the state of nature, i.e. before the awakening of the imagination through the permanent representation of our needs, the hunger of tomorrow is not yet felt and the neighbor not yet a potential competitor. Thus, the radius of self-love is limited to the immediate needs; and if there is occasional competition with others, natural pity, *pitié naturelle*, the "innate reluctance to see one's own kind suffer", moderates the desire for self-preservation and, where possible, prevents a potential escalation of ego-related motives. It is pity which "moderates the effectiveness of self-love and therefore contributes to the mutual preservation of the entire species"[35]. Man has pity as a natural gift, although this does not lead to communalization, but only asserts itself as an impulse in the event of a chance encounter with others. Pity is not an 'active potency' (*entelecheia*) which drives the realization of a given target state by itself, if it is not prevented from doing so by adverse and unusual circumstances. According to Rousseau, a family structure is not natural either, and like all interactions, mating behavior is also random and

33 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. I, p. 73.

34 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. IV, p. 360.

35 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. I, p. 77.

does not lead to permanent ties[36]. Both faculties, self-love and natural compassion, stabilize a liminal state of peaceful coexistence, i.e. the state of nature, which is stationary and without history.

As part of a conjectural history of human civilization, at the beginning of the second part of the "Second Discourse", Rousseau outlines an ensemble of external causes that gradually disequilibrate this state of affairs: these include increased productivity, population growth, division of labor, private property and individualization. This external development is accompanied by the training and expansion of the faculty of the imagination, which broadens the temporal and social horizon and subsequently 'inflames' human passions. Self-love (*amour de soi*) changes to self-respect (*amour propre*), natural pity to a comparison-based form of intersubjectivity.

Amour propre has long been interpreted in Rousseau's reception as a cipher for decadence and moral decline, as a signature of advancing civilization. This interpretation is suggested not only through the predominant tone of the "Second Discourse", but also by the conceptual history of the term. The original context of the meaning of *amour propre* is theological; it is understood in Jansenism, a specific French version of Augustinism, as self-referential love and vain selfishness — in short: as a synonym for sin. In contrast to the spontaneity of love for God, the state of sin is characterized for the Jansenists by man's reflection on his own individuality[37].

Rousseau makes use of the conceptual duality of spontaneous and reflected love, elaborated in the theological context, but does not adopt its associated fixed, normative meaning. Rather, he understands *amour propre* pharmacologically as an essential principle of civilized man which has potential consequences in both directions, good as well as bad: "As soon as the dormant forces become active, the imagination, the most lively element of all, awakens and

36 Ibid., p. 87ff.

37 Spaemann, Robert: Reflexion und Spontanität. Studien über Fénelon, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1990, p. 188.

hurries ahead of them. The imagination expands for us, be it good or bad, the measure of the possible […]."[38]

This structural openness of *amour propre* — or its pharmacological texture — was first stressed by the seminal interpretation of Nicholas Dent[39], who interprets *amour propre* as a basic anthropological need for social recognition. In line with this view, Neuhouser has put forward the most comprehensive interpretation of Rousseau's social philosophy, which he characterizes as a "theodicy of self-love"[40]: "Despite its essentially secular und naturalistic presuppositions, the structure of Rousseau's account mirrors that of the traditional Christian conception of human history: an original harmony among humans, God, and the world is ruptured by a fall from grace — an effect of human freedom — that corrupts human nature and initiates an era of evil and misery, but also brings with it the possibility of redemption and transcendence"[41]. Self-love in the gestalt of *amour propre* is at the same time the source of evil and the possibility of its cure; the remedy, however, cannot be taken for granted as a function of a natural teleology and not even as a kind of 'cunning of reason'. Rousseau's outlook is more modest and more humble, as Neuhouser makes clear with recourse to a Kantian reading of Rousseau:

> Rousseau's theodicy offers practical orientation. […] [T]he goal of freedom and social harmony are not intrinsically contradictory nor in principle unachievable, Rousseau's account of evil shows that if we can have no guarantee of there being a way out of our present fallenness, we can also not know *a priori* that no such path exists[42].

38 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. IV, p. 89.

39 Dent, Nicholas J.H.: Rousseau. An Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1988; Dent, Nicholas J.H./O'Hagan, Timothy: "Rousseau on Amour propre", in: Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 72 (1998), pp. 57–75.

40 F. Neuhouser: Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love.

41 F. Neuhouser: Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love, p. 2f.

42 Ibid., p. 8.

The de-pathologization of social relationships and self-relationship depends on the development of 'reasonable' needs, which cannot be nourished unchecked by the excessive power of the imagination. The central means for this are, firstly, a responsive form of education that remedies the harmful influences of society on individual development as far as possible, and, secondly, the political shaping of social conditions that enable successful recognition relationships, including, for example, the prevention of overly serious economic dependencies or the institutionalization of socially acceptable measures of distinction through e.g. political honors, etc. From the numerous measures that Rousseau is considering as possible remedies, two examples are selected below: the practice of self-education through writing as a possibility of a pharmacological analysis of subjectivity, and the institution of the theater as the object of a pharmacological analysis of social intersubjectivity.

2.3 Homeopathic self-medication: self-education through writing?

The aim of education is to socialize the individual in a sensible way; but this only appears to be possible, given Rousseau's diagnosis of civilization, if the pupil is largely shielded from the harmful influence of society in his early development phase. This task falls to the educator, who has to dose the influence of society pharmacologically. As in his social philosophy, Rousseau also uses the concept of nature as a starting-point and normative guideline in his pedagogical considerations. His treatise "Emile" aims to reconstruct the development of 'natural' man[43]. Rousseau defines as natural, analogous to his argument in the "Second Discourse", all those human qualities that an individual would develop if he did not come into contact with society. All these properties can be either "true" or "imaginary"[44]. The latter refers to the influence of the imagination,

43 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. IV, p. 4.

44 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. IV, p. 265.

which in the individual represents the influence of society, its views and prejudices.

From this guideline to shield the 'harmful' influence of society, all other educational maxims result: Emile's development should proceed as slowly as possible, which above all means carefully guiding the expansion of the world through the imagination. For this purpose, all interpersonal contacts, with the exception of the one with the educator, must be postponed as long as possible. The purpose of shielding the pupil from other people is not just to delay the awakening of the sex drive: more fundamentally the aim is to protect the pupil from the influence of the will of others. This maxim is of such fundamental importance that it is even transferred to the pedagogical relationship between educator and pupil: Emile is to learn by gaining experience, not by obeying the master's will, be it by force or by insight through conviction: "true education is less prescriptive than practical". Nonetheless, the 'experiences' that Emile has are anything but coincidental. Rather, in order to enable 'natural development', these must be 'artificially' arranged by the educator.

Like the process of civilization, the development of the individual seems to be pharmacological through and through. A self-determined life, which is the aim of education, is only possible through strategic manipulation on the part of the educator, who has to mask his intervention as if it were unfolding naturally. This analysis seems to reveal that the development of autonomy is in principle only possible as a function of (benevolent-minded) heteronomy — a structure that finds its analogy in Rousseau's political philosophy in the figure of the *législateur*, who can bring freedom to a political community through a constitution only as an outsider.[45]

Is something like self-education even conceivable under these conditions? — The possibility of self-education seems to presuppose that we can enter into a relationship of hetero-autonomous control with ourselves. A prerequisite for such a relationship to oneself is a form of reflexivity that observes the original and mutually constitutive relationship between external and self-determination in one's own biography. In his lectures on the history of sexuality, Foucault

45 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. I, p. 232.

showed how the modern individual is shaped through a form of work on the self, and also suggested that modern biographical literature is a form of 'technique of the self': "The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement"[46].

Rousseau's "Confessions" can be read in this sense. Here the biographical constellation of external and self-determination is unfolded in a narrative way that enables the self to interpret its development reflexively[47]. The interrelationship of heteronomy and autonomy is thematized in the Confessions on different levels: the self can first be experienced as an authentic subject through demarcation from others and society; its 'authenticity', however, proves to be fragile and corrupted by social influence right down to the innermost impulses; as a result, the "dividing strategy"[48], through which the subject found himself in isolation from society, is applied in relation to himself, which leads to a series of differentiations between outside and inside, understanding and sensuality, feeling and passion, etc., which only ever brings to light the impossibility of finding a natural place beyond social influence. The fact that writing always addresses a (fictional) reader reveals at the same time that the self-analysis is a justifying presentation of the self in relation to the gaze of the stranger. In the process of writing this gaze is more or less internalized, and becomes a condition of the constitution of a subject.

In the more recent discourse in cultural history, the practice of reading and writing and their effect on the subjectivity of the bourgeois subject have received a lot of attention. In his genealogy of modern subject cultures, Andreas Reckwitz devotes a separate paragraph to the creation of "bourgeois inwardness in the medium

46 Foucault, Michel: The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, New York: Pantheon 1978, p. 61.

47 Gutman, Huck: "Rousseau's Confessions: A Technology of the Self", in: Michel Foucault/Luther H. Martin/Huck Gutman/Patrick H. Hutton (Eds.), Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1988, pp. 99–120.

48 H. Gutman: Rousseau's Confessions, p. 108.

of writing"[49]. For him, reading and writing are the cultural practices that create the self-controlled, autonomous subject capable of morality assumed by the Enlightenment: "The subject educated in reading carries out an unconscious self-government of physical movements, a permanent concentration of attention."[50]

While Reckwitz primarily traces the 'inward', self-disciplining and focusing effect of reading and writing, Lynn Hunt reconstructs their social 'external' effects. According to her interpretation, it was only a culture of letter and novel writing with a focus on the inner states of individuals which created the psycho-social basis for the mutual perception of human beings as equals with regard to their shared vulnerability and their common need for recognition. The emergence of the new genres of biographical literature and the epistolary novel, which had the development of inner life as its main theme, played a decisive role in the change in subjectivity that would ultimately also bring about human rights: "[R]eading novels created a sense of equality and empathy through passionate involvement in the narrative"[51].

Nevertheless, looking back at Rousseau, it is difficult to fully appreciate the positive aspects of the bourgeois culture of inwardness. For him, reading and writing are *pharmaka* that, as remedies, are also poisons. The reflection of the inner state can be authentic *and* vain, the participation in the suffering of others can result from sympathy *and* voyeuristic curiosity — there will always be a mixture, the proportions of which can never be adequately determined by either the outside onlooker or the self-observer. What can be determined with certainty, however, is that the observation of self and other is a structural trait of bourgeois society.

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49 Reckwitz, Andreas: Das hybride Subjekt. Eine Theorie der Subjektkulturen von der bürgerlichen Moderne zur Postmoderne, Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft 2006, pp. 155f.

50 A. Reckwitz: Das hybride Subjekt, p. 160.

51 Hunt, Lynn: Inventing Human Rights. A History, New York (NY)/London: Norton 2007, p. 39.

2.4 Culture as a homeopathic remedy: civic education through the theater?

Just as the literary genres of biographical writing are discussed in 18th century Enlightenment discourse as a medium of possible self-education, as a playing field for an imagination that refines itself in the interior of the psyche, so a debate also arises in the field of playwriting and drama theory as to whether the institution of the theater is a possible place of civic education, a social playing field for the cultivation of the imagination. Rousseau is also directly involved in this discourse. In his "Letter to d'Alembert" he sharply criticizes the author of the article about his hometown Geneva for the *Encyclopédie*, in which d'Alembert recommended that the Swiss provincial city introduce a theater based on the Parisian model. D'Alembert argued that the establishment of a modern theater could contribute to the cultural refinement of the customs of Geneva and, consequently, could be a component of a program of civic education. According to d'Alembert the theater "would form the taste of the citizens and would give them a fineness of tact, a delicacy of sentiments"[52]. Not only the performances themselves were to contribute to this, but also the fact that with the settlement of actors and directors in Geneva a new social class would be established which would bring with it a certain cultural growth through its presence in city life. The theater would therefore be something like a nucleus of modernization in old-fashioned and provincial Geneva.

Rousseau responds to this suggestion with a criticism that at first sight is devastating, but on closer view turns out to be a pharmacological analysis of theatricality as a principle of modern bourgeois society. His numerous invectives and polemics can be grouped into two strands of criticism: Rousseau's first argument against the theater is that acting is based on the art of pretense, to a certain extent on a professional form of hypocrisy that removes people from truth and authenticity. This argument is reminiscent of Plato's criticism of poetry as a representation of appearances and not truth, but has a specifically contemporary thrust. In Enlightenment theater

52 Cited after M. Gullstam: Rousseau's Idea of Theatre, p. 91.

discourse, the question was discussed as to whether the feelings of the character to be represented by the actor should be empathized with or only externally displayed — whether the theater should be based on the image of 'emotional acting' or 'reflective acting'. Denis Diderot, a leading figure of the Paris Enlightenment, editor of the *Encyclopédie* (and thus the figure in the background of d'Alembert's article), and himself a playwright, rejected the maxim of sensitive empathy as a condition of acting in his reflections on the theater. Rather, the actor should be constantly aware of the split between his personality and the character he is portraying.

For Rousseau, this definition of acting as the art of disguise is nothing more than a legitimation of hypocrisy, reminiscent of a culture of pretense and appearances, which characterized court society. Through the principle of *bienséance*, according to which the figures in a play should abide strictly by the framework of good taste and moral norms, this code of conduct entered drama theory and shaped the plays of French *classicisme*. Diderot adheres to this principle, his transformation of the *tragédie classique* to the *drame sérieux* notwithstanding. In keeping with this tradition, d'Alembert also subscribes in his article to the principles of classical decorum which Genevan society should aspire to and maintain.

Rousseau, by contrast, fears that the actor will not be able to completely give up his role when he leaves the stage and, as an exposed personality, will bring into Geneva society the vanity and desire for pleasure that predisposes him to his profession. He sees the danger that the art of disguise will gain a foothold in Geneva society and nurture a pathological form of *amour propre*, the craving for admiration, which makes people completely dependent on the judgment of their fellow men. "[T]his art of counterfeiting, of appearing different than what we actually are, is particularly dangerous because it contains the very same dialectic between being and appearing that, according to Rousseau, is one of the greatest evils of modern society"[53].

Rousseau's first argument does not seem very convincing, however, because acting as the art of disguise is problematic and would

53 C. Bottici: Democracy and the spectacle, p. 239.

contaminate social interactions in 'real' life only if it were not debunked as art(-ificial). But isn't it characteristic of modern theater as a form of autonomous art that both sides of the theatrical relationship tend to become more professional: the actor as well as the audience?

In fact, Diderot ascribes an attitude of professionalized distance to the audience as well, which in a sense results from the redefinition of the role of the actor. He understands the audience as purely spectators, with whom the actors should not come into direct contact either through speech or looks. They should act, "as if the curtain did not go up"[54]. According to Diderot, this distancing has the paradoxical result that the spectator's emotional involvement in the play is increased, but in a refined way. Instead of sympathizing with the characters' emotions, they are confronted with the perception of their own aesthetic feelings — which can be better controlled, lack a tendency toward immediate action and are therefore open to moral reflection[55].

Rousseau does not find this line of argument convincing. His second argument against the theater draws on the claim attributed to Diderot that the feelings triggered in the audience by the play are purely aesthetic, which, in Rousseau's view, does not make them suitable for secondary moralization. On the contrary, they no longer constitute any social cohesion and do not create solidarity. The audience in the theater is a lonely crowd.

Regarding the theatrical emotion of compassion for the tragic hero — a leading theme in 18th century drama theory, particularly in Lessing — Rousseau argues:

> But what kind of pity is that? A fleeting and vain shock that lasts no longer than the appearance that creates it; a remnant of a natural sensation that is soon suffocated by the passions, sterile compas-

54 Diderot, Denis: "De la poésie dramatique", in: Denis Diderot (Ed.), Œuvres esthétiques, Paris: Garnier 1959, pp. 179–287, p. 231.

55 Kolesch, Doris: Theater der Emotionen. Ästhetik und Politik zur Zeit Ludwigs XIV, Frankfurt a.M./New York: Campus 2006, p. 237.

> sion that drowns itself in its own tears and has never produced the slightest act of humanity.[56]

Because theatrical identification only serves to increase one's own pleasure, it focuses on what separates the audience and the suffering actor. In theatrical pity there is "no concern for ourselves"[57]. "The more I think about it, the clearer it becomes to me that what is presented in the theater is not being brought closer to us, but taken away from us."[58].

As in the first argument, the diagnosis is that the theater claims or encourages the imagination in a way that has socially pathological consequences. While the actor fakes foreign states of mind in order to achieve an effect in the audience, the spectator uses his imagination to understand other people's fates for the sake of his amusement — neither of the parties breaks the circle of egocentrism, either through the imaginative anticipation of other peoples's reactions to their own acts (actor), nor through the imaginative comprehension of the suffering of others (spectator).

Where is the pharmacological aspect of Rousseau's criticism of the theater, where can elements of a cure to the evil be found? Derrida's analysis of the supplementary logic of Rousseau's argument is again helpful. He elaborates on the "ambivalence of the imagination" using the example of the emotion of pity, which is central to both theater discourse and Rousseau's anthropology:

> Pity is innate, but in its natural purity it is not a peculiarity of man but is quite generally peculiar to living things. […] Only with the power of imagination does this compassion come to itself in mankind, rise to […] representation and produce identification with the other as a different ego[59].

And even more succinctly with a view to its pharmacological structure, Derrida states that the imagination "transcends animality and

56 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. VI, p. 452.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 453.

59 J. Derrida: Grammatologie, p. 262.

arouses human compassion only by opening up the scene and the space for theatrical representation. It inaugurates the perversion, the possibility of which is inherent in the very idea of perfection"[60].

Compassion appears here less as a feeling or a virtue, but as a cipher that reveals theatricality as a constitutive basic structure of human intersubjectivity. It is not the theater as an institution and not theatricality as a structural principle of human intersubjectivity that is pathological[61], but the fact that the theater, as Diderot conceives it theoretically and as d'Alembert recommends it to the people of Geneva, fixes one-sided and asymmetrical relationships: between the enlightened playwrights and an audience in need of education, between actors and spectators, between fiction and reality. Due to their passivity, the members of the audience remain dissociated from one another; they are only connected through their one-sided dependence on a common center, the stage and the performance.

With Rousseau, the possibility of a non-alienating theater and a non-pathological theatricality does not remain a merely theoretical possibility. Towards the end of his "Letter to d'Alembert" he hints at two alternatives to a theater *à la parisienne*. First, there is the tradition of popular festivals, anchored in Geneva, in which the asymmetries characteristic of institutionalized theater are eliminated, so that "the chasm between individual and society is temporarily breached"[62]. In Rousseau's words:

> Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to

60 Ibid.

61 In this respect, Rousseau's diagnosis bears resemblance to Guy Debord's "The society of the Spectacle". On this see Kohn, Margaret: "Homo spectator. Public space in the age of the spectacle", in: Philosophy & Social Criticism 34 (2008), pp. 467–486, p. 476f.

62 Ibid., p. 472.

> themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united[63].

The second alternative makes use of the form of drama but tries to make the limits of the institution of theater immanently visible in order to destabilize it. Bottici and Kohn refer to a technique elaborated by Guy Debord in the fight against the 'society of the spectacle', diversion or *détournement*: "Détournement means that we cannot get out of the spectacle, but we can use pre-existing elements of it in a new ensemble that subverts, destabilizes, *détourne*, the dominant spectacular logic"[64]. Since Rousseau himself wrote dramas, it would seem particularly appropriate to turn also to them for explication and practical demonstration. Maria Gullstam in her book about theater in Rousseau traces in a nuanced way, "how Rousseau in his plays problematizes the power structures within artistic representation"[65]. She shows that "Rousseau plays with the concepts of both traditional imitation and auto-representation in various ways in order to address the possible harm that theatrical imitation can do, and as a way of encouraging autonomous thinking in the audience"[66].

2.5 The limits of homeopathy in Rousseau

It is appropriate at this point to pull together and systematize our previous individual and example-oriented considerations. Rousseau's diagnosis of contemporary bourgeois society makes use of the disease metaphor, which has a long tradition in political theory. In applying the metaphor, however, he reinterprets the concept of disease. For Rousseau, illness no longer denotes the abandonment of an indisputably presupposed order, a state of temporary disharmony between part and whole (e.g. through the

63 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. VI, p. 585.

64 C. Bottici: Democracy and the spectacle, p. 242.

65 M. Gullstam: Rousseau's Idea of Theatre, p. 117.

66 Ibid., p. 198.

usurpation of a tyrant who puts himself and his followers above the common interests). Rather, for Rousseau, illness is a structural feature of modern society that systematically produces a series of social pathologies, which manifest themselves in individual suffering due to alienation. In contrast to the classical disease metaphor in politics, which, as an indicator of a disorder was at the same time a pointer to its cure, modern social pathologies cannot simply be addressed through political action. Their underlying mechanisms are complex and difficult to comprehend, as they result from unintended consequences of collective social practices.

Rousseau's original idea is to cure these systemic ills through homeopathic therapy. This form of therapy, the prerequisite of which is a pharmacological analysis of social pathologies, cannot be reduced to clear rules; it is not a form of technology, but of curative practice. This practice cannot be raised to an epistemic level of theory, but its guiding principles can be generalized:

(1) Contextualism: Apt diagnosis, appropriate dosage

According to Rousseau, the most general basis of the homeopathic therapeutic approach is Parcelsus' maxim that it depends solely on the dose whether a substance is a poison or a remedy. "The same causes that have corrupted peoples serve sometimes to prevent even greater corruption. Thus a person who has ruined his temperament by the unwarranted use of medicine must look once more to the physicians to save his life"[67]. The principle applies equally to individual (pedagogical) and collective (political) therapy. In Emile's educational program, everything depends on the student having the right experience at the right time. And in the political shaping of living conditions, the *législateur* must carefully consider the 'age' factor, i.e. the level of cultural development of a people: "For people and nations there is a period of maturation that they must pass through before they can be subjected to laws"[68]. The same applies not only to the establishment of the constitution as a basic political order, but also to the introduction of cultural practices, as Rousseau makes

67 Cited after J. Starobinski: The Antidote in the Poison, p. 121.

68 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. I, p. 238f.

clear with respect to the above-discussed proposal by d'Alembert to introduce a theater in Geneva. The theater is harmful to peoples in their 'early state', yet "when the people are corrupt, spectacles are good for them."[69]

(2) Therapeutical wisdom as expert knowledge

Given the immense importance of an appropriate diagnosis aimed at the patient, the question arises as to who is able to make such a diagnosis. It appears to be an extremely demanding business; that much is certain. Consequently, Rousseau is skeptical about the possibilities of self-medication. In the case of pedagogical therapy, this seems to be less of a problem, since the pedagogical relationship is structured asymmetrically, but only for the purpose of bringing the student into a symmetrical position in the long term. Nonetheless, Rousseau seems to be skeptical as to whether a capacity for insight on the part of the student is available at an early stage, otherwise the master's lessons could increasingly proceed in the way of argumentative justification instead of strategic control. The success of education, however, seems to be determined primarily by the pharmacological dosage of the right stimuli.

The same pattern can also be seen in the field of political guidance through constitution-making. The profile of qualification that the *législateur* would have to meet is high: it would require a "higher reason that sees all passions of people and has none, that bears no resemblance to our nature, which it knows from top to bottom" — a hardly realistic requirement as Rousseau himself admits: "It would take the gods to give people laws"[70]. Another example of Rousseau's trust in elites is the regulation of cultural innovation. The influence of the arts and sciences on society is so risky that the dosage can only be entrusted to experts — the *Académie* has to act as *gatekeeper* here[71]. Only in his considerations on the writing self does Rousseau come close to admitting the possibility of self-medication.

69 Cited after J. Starobinski: The Antidote in the Poison, p. 125.

70 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. I, p. 232

71 J. Starobinski: The Antidote in the Poison, p. 121f.

(3) The aim of therapy: Relief vs. Healing

In Rousseau's writings that are critical of culture, especially in the two Discourses, the trend towards decadence does not seem entirely reversible. The therapeutic interventions serve to alleviate the suffering rather than healing in the real sense. In a biographical analysis, Rousseau emphasizes: "As for myself, if I had […] neither read nor written, I would no doubt have been happier. If letters were now abolished, however, I would be deprived of the only pleasure I have left"[72]. The same figure is found with regard to the effects of the arts and sciences that, "having given birth to many vices, are needed to prevent them from turning into crimes"[73].

In the programmatic writings on educational and political therapy, *Emile* and the *Contrat Social*, the perspective appears more optimistic, and a possible cure comes into focus. Neuhouser consequently gives the chapter in which he analyzes the countermeasures considered by Rousseau the title "Prescriptions"[74]. The point here is to provide individuals with a social infrastructure in both the micro and the macro range that makes successful relationships of recognition possible. In his reconstruction of measures to protect the individual against inflamed *amour propre*, Neuhouser differentiates between approaches in the 'domestic' and in the 'social' sphere. "The remedy of domestic education"[75] encompasses the promotion of self-modesty and a feeling of equality, which is achieved through the responsive handling of children's needs and protection against an early encounter through the comparative 'external gaze'. "Social and political remedies"[76], on the other hand, are intended to guarantee social circumstances that prevent citizens from becoming too dependent on one another, for example by reducing socio-economic inequality and creating "institutional sources of respect and self- esteem"[77], such as political honors.

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72 Cited after J. Starobinski: The Antidote in the Poison, p. 124.

73 Cited after J. Starobinski: The Antidote in the Poison, p. 121.

74 F. Neuhouser: Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love, p. 153ff.

75 Ibid., p. 171ff.

76 Ibid., p. 161ff.

77 Ibid., p. 166.

(4) The limits of homeopathy

The figure of homeopathic healing is used excessively by Rousseau and stretched to the limit of its metaphorical space — at the same time, however, Rousseau leaves no doubt that it is not always possible to make the seeds of good grow. In such cases only the path of a radical new beginning remains open, i.e. revolution:

> Just as some diseases confuse people's minds and rob them of the memory of the past, so there are occasional epochs of violence in the existence of states in which revolutions produce the same effect on peoples as certain crises produce on individuals […] and the state, set on fire by civil wars, rises, so to speak, from its ashes, escaping the arms of death and regaining the vigor of youth[78].

As Starobinski maintains, in this reflection the remedy is no longer "conceived on the homeopathic model as being *inherent* in the cause of the disease itself", but rather on the "allopathic model as coming from *outside* to combat the disease through administration of a contrary agent"[79].

> In either case the disease will have been useful, but in the former it will have demonstrated its aptitude for transformation from evil into good, whereas in the latter its very severity will have called down the forces of destruction and led to its replacement by an antagonistic power.[80]

Sometimes there is a point of no return that requires a clear cut and a radical new beginning. Nevertheless, this remedy as a last resort is to be used with extreme caution, because here too the basic pharmacological insight implies that the new beginning also contains illness and health from the same source. The revolution, even if it seems inevitable, is, for Rousseau, "almost as much to be feared as the disease it is meant to cure, and which it is blameworthy to desire and impossible to foresee."[81]

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78 J.-J. Rousseau: Collection complète des œuvres, vol. I, p. 238.

79 J. Starobinski: The Antidote in the Poison, p. 122, our italics.

80 Ibid., p. 122f.

81 Ibid.