

Civilizing and Decivilizing Processes:
Figurational Approaches to American Culture

Edited by

Christa Buschendorf, Astrid Franke
and Johannes Voelz

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P U B L I S H I N G

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ASTRID FRANKE

Drinking and Democracy in the Early Republic

From a European perspective, the attitude toward alcohol in American culture, especially when compared to Mediterranean countries, seems somewhat obsessed with control to the point of periodically advocating total abstinence and prohibition. Along with the attitudes towards carrying weapons, the death penalty, and statistical data on the homicide rate, the prison population, or lynching, alcohol belongs to those topics that contribute to the vague idea that while the U.S. may not be exceptional they may yet display some differences in their social set-up and history when compared to Europe. With regard to alcohol, the “Puritans” are often blamed, suggesting that there is a connection between some of the earliest settlers and their largely Calvinist version of Protestantism on the one hand and the desire for social control, along with a somewhat cheerless view of life, on the other.¹

However, the data provided by social historians on alcohol consumption in New England during the seventeenth and eighteenth century suggests that drinking patterns in the Old and the New World resembled each other as people drank during mealtimes throughout the day, but drank especially during festive occasions, among which the burial of ministers and the ordinations of new ones stand out among the historical sources on alcohol consumption. More importantly, numerous historical sources, such as theological and medical tracts as well as police ordinances, show that in Protestant, and specifically Calvinist regions in Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, religious and secular authorities also already attempted to regulate alcohol consumption to different degrees.²

What I would like to show, first of all, is that in the early American republic, the concern with alcohol consumption is tied to the problem of

¹ See, for instance, David F. Musto, a historian of medicine, in his 1996 article “Alcohol in American History,” or the suggestion that “the Puritans frowned on drunkenness” (Reynolds and Rosenthal 1).

² See the articles by Wassenberg, revolving around the thesis that the sources of the concept of addiction lie in Calvinism.

state formation and that this conjunction has roots in a republican and enlightenment tradition. It arises from the concern of intellectuals about the body politic and the peoples' capacity for self-control as a basis of democratization. While the anxiety about a loss of control, both individually and socially, becomes an important issue in the eighteenth century in both Europe and the U.S., there is one aspect that renders the American discussion quite special, and that is the conjunction of the debate on alcohol consumption with one on westward expansion and the territorial formation of the state as well as its association with two groups of social outsiders: slaves and native Americans.

As a cultural theory that bridges the gap between a macro- and a microsociological approach in that it links the processes of state formation, or sociogenesis, to the development of the psyche, or psychogenesis, Elias's theory of civilization suggests itself as a framework to examine the attitude towards alcohol in the early American republic. Since self-control, or more precisely: the gradual internalization of external controls of impulses in conjunction with the growth of networks of interdependencies, is a key element in the civilization process, according to Elias, controversies on drugs present especially fruitful but also challenging material: undoubtedly, part of the attraction of drugs such as alcohol is that they may offer an opportunity of controlled decontrolling of the psyche; they make it possible to experience a different state of the psyche, often in the context of social rituals and traditions. The vilification of drugs, along with a stigmatization of people associated with them, on the other hand, is based on the claim of insufficient self-control and thus an uncivilized behavior in colloquial terms; in Elias's terms, the perceived dangers of alcohol, such as licentiousness, a proneness to violence, hyperactivity, or else a profound sleep are instances of decivilization. Drugs thus play an important role in established-outsider relations and therefore serve important cultural functions that can be illuminated with the help of Elias's concepts.³

Elias can also be used as a way of addressing the transatlantic simultaneity of debates on drunkenness and its dangers, but also of doing justice to the specificities that arise in the American context. My thesis here is that the latter are largely due to an anxious awareness of the decivilizing forces tied to slavery and westward expansion in the early republic, and the well-founded fear that these decivilizing tendencies do not only undermine the self-image of the young republic as a beacon of

³ The terminology for that particular figuration as one of established and outsiders comes from Norbert Elias, elaborated in Elias and John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders*.

civilization but may also cause its failure and collapse. While English reformers also worried about the licentiousness associated with drinking, they did not envision a complete breakdown of the process of state formation that was already further developed than in the U.S.; furthermore, a class system with firm class barriers and codes marking status gave them instruments of social control and “gate-keeping” that Americans were lacking. Americans thus displayed a high amount of status anxiety – a fear of social decline all the way down to the extremely stigmatized outsiders – and therefore they became obsessed with extreme forms of self-regulation and -control.⁴

To emphasize the cultural rather than just sociological significance of this phenomenon, I would like to begin and end my argument with a short discussion of literary texts. They can be integrated into a sociological approach in different ways: first, literature may itself display a sociological perspective. Thus Elias can draw extensively on Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* in order to show the dynamics of an established-outsider relation that is much more imbalanced than the one in the English town he called Winston Parva. In what almost amounts to an homage to Virginia Woolf, Pierre Bourdieu refers to the novel *To the Lighthouse* to reveal the subtle power struggles between men and women in *Masculine Domination*. Furthermore, literature may provide an insight into the experience and perspective of those involved in social change; it may show the changes in the psyche and perhaps the frustrations connected to them.

This does not mean that the civilization process is in any way a subject matter of literature. Rather, literature participates in the processes of socio- and psychogenesis even when and while it also displays a sociological awareness of them. It participates because writers are participating in these processes and their psyche – or, as both Elias and Bourdieu would say, their habitus – is formed through the socio-historical circumstances in which they find themselves.⁵ Their writings may thus reveal much more than they might want to communicate explicitly. The simultaneity of a view from within and a view from without allows for a curious experience – an aesthetic experience that sociology cannot provide but that may

⁴ See Wouters, *Informalization* 29, 58, 149-154. That there is a connection between a lack of trust in peoples’ self-control and a heterogeneous society is a thesis explored also by Wouters. See his *Sex and Manners* 140-148.

⁵ They would refer to different levels of the formation of the psyche: roughly speaking, for Elias, the habitus is formed at a particular stage of the pacification of society and thus refers to degrees of self-regulation and sensitivities to violence. For Bourdieu, the habitus is a much finer tool to describe social stratification in a synchronic manner.

nevertheless be helpful in understanding the sociological processes. The underlying aesthetic assumptions of this phenomenon cannot be explained here extensively since the focus of this essay lies elsewhere; suffice it to say that literature allows us to experience the tensions between desires, frustrations, fears, intentions and ideas without dissolving them. It re-creates the experience of a situation where we feel overwhelmed or confused by a variety of affects and our common knowledge and habits do not suffice to establish the detachment needed to master them; affect and cognition still form a unit. To make that experience available through art does not solve any of the contradictions and tensions but allows us to recognize them with a certain amount of detachment.⁶

I will begin by illuminating the connection of state formation and drunkenness in the cultural sphere through the discussion of a short poem by Philip Freneau, to be followed by an analysis of some texts by Benjamin Rush, a Founding Father not only of the U.S. but also of American psychiatry and the Temperance Movement. As his writings, like Freneau's, are partly shaped by anxieties and fears he does not make explicit, they warrant a literary analysis that pays close attention to the specific ways they are written.

Philip Freneau, the "Poet of the Revolution," embodied what one might call a Habermasian paradox: educated in Princeton in the principles of Scottish common-sense philosophy, Freneau followed an ethos of the public man. Dedicating his life to the public good he identified with impersonal principles of conversation and assessment and for that purpose tried to control his passions and prejudices. Moderation is the major objective of his self-control, but then moderation does not make for exciting poetry. It leads to measured verses like "Reason shall new laws devise, / And order from confusion rise" (Freneau 2: 281) or "let reason be your constant rule / And Nature, trust me, is no fool –" (Freneau 3: 36-38). Another downside of moderation is that it limits the means to deal with one's enemies, such as the enemies of democracy. Freneau, like Rush, held on to more radical implications of the American Revolution as aiming not just for independence but promising a new social order. In that sense the revolution was not finished and its ideals were constantly threatened by "poverty in the country," "luxury in the capitals," and "corruption and usurpation in the national councils" (Leary 203). Freneau was passionate about a democratic public, and in the psychology of the public man as mapped out by Habermas – the public man as reasonable and dispass-

⁶ For a concise formulation of this version of pragmatist aesthetics, based on Dewey's *Art as Experience*, see Honneth, "Verwicklungen von Freiheit: Bob Dylan und seine Zeit" 15-28.

sionate – this was a paradox he could not resolve. Freneau also wrote a number of poems on drugs, such as tea, rum, wine, or tobacco – there is nothing unusual in this, except that he does not seem to be able to decide whether he wants to endorse or condemn them. There is something ambiguous in his attitude and in one poem this ambiguity is linked to the topic he feels so passionate about: democracy and the fate of the republic: “Crispin’s Answer” (1792) suggests a two-fold relation between drink and democracy. In the first three stanzas the Irish immigrant dutifully displays his adherence to a democratic disposition, such as love for freedom and equal rights and abhorrence for monarchy and slavery. But not long after mentioning a whiskey bottle, the poem veers off into a reeling burlesque.

They taxed my sun, they taxed my shade,
They taxed the offal that I eat.

They taxed my hat, they taxed my shoes,
Fresh taxes still on taxes grew
They would have taxed my very nose,
Had I not fled, dear friend, to you. (Freneau 3: 75-76)

Freneau’s political sympathies lay with small farmers, new immigrants, and people moving westwards such as Crispin. But poetically, repetition, exaggeration, and the form of the list signal the danger of a self-expressive and rebellious stance that threatens to escape control – clearly, Crispin is not the man democracy can rely upon. The poem’s ambivalence raises an important question: What attitude can the new state demand from its subjects – ordinary citizens as well as poets? Will the state have to insist on an upright and transparent attitude and language? Can it allow its citizens to relax control over themselves occasionally and put up with some reeling and staggering of bodies and speech? How much deviance can the new republic tolerate?

In 1792, this carried immediate political significance: the year before, Congress had complied with Alexander Hamilton’s recommendation that a federal excise tax be levied on whiskey. Hamilton, it is safe to say, was not worried about public health but about the budget and federal power to extract revenues. As expected, the measure provoked dissatisfaction, particularly in frontier areas where cash was scarce and whiskey, besides being produced for the market and private consumption, served as currency. In 1794 there were open riots, which President Washington, who owned a distillery, quelled by military force – the so-called Whiskey Rebellion is now regarded a major instance of violent resistance to the state-building process. The two postures of the body implied in the poem

thus have a political dimension: the transformation of the upright democrat who refuses to bend before kings into the reeling hillbilly who defends his whiskey bottle betrays a certain worry that people's attitudes are not yet reliably stable. It is not so much the realm of ideas that is at stake here, but the realm of temperament, emotions, and the habit of keeping them under steady control. The poem points to a connection between state formation and modes of conduct, in particular the danger of losing (self-)control. At the same time it betrays the attractiveness that a rhetorical simulation of a loss of control has for the poet.

One of the promoters of the unpopular tax was Benjamin Rush who had by this time fully launched into what he considered a public health campaign against drinking spirits.⁷ But he was also implicated in the Whiskey Rebellion in quite another way as he testified to the insanity of one of the men arrested and sentenced to death for treason. By his testimony Rush achieved a pardon by Washington. This is quite characteristic of Rush who increasingly lobbied for external constraints with regard to conduct as crucial to the success of the republican social body, who widened the concept of insanity to include ever more forms of deviance, and who campaigned against forms of violence including the death penalty.

Born in 1746, Rush, like Freneau, was educated in Princeton along with the future political elite of the republic. He studied in Edinburgh, returned to the U.S. in 1769 and became engaged in the political activities that led to independence. Like Freneau, he subscribed to the idea of the public man who subordinates his private desires to the common weal and contributes to the formation of a democratic public by continuously reflecting about issues that should concern everyone. He was a compulsive writer and published numerous essays on a variety of topics: he advocated the abolition of slavery and of the death penalty, argued against corporal punishments in schools, promoted free education financed by taxes and called for a better education of women; he endorsed research into medical folk knowledge and the medical knowledge of Native Americans; in the same vein of increasing and spreading medical knowledge he argued that dissertations at the faculty of medicine should be written in English, rather than Latin. He also supported the use of the Bible as a school book and wrote an essay countering the idealization of "savages" with a list of their "vices," comprising common prejudices against Native Americans. Throughout his life he counseled his audience on alcoholic drinks: in 1771

⁷ According to Brian S. Katcher, Rush "was instrumental in launching a physicians' temperance movement which successfully lobbied Congress to pass a tax on whiskey that promised to finance the new governments while at the same time promoting the health of the people" (Katcher 277).

he recommended to moderate the consumption of wine, in 1784 he reached widespread notice with a tract denouncing the effects of spirituous liquors as dangerous to the body and to the young republic; finally he argued that in order to save the republic, the state should curtail the individual rights and liberties of drunkards.

From today's point of view this may seem an odd mixture of progressive and conservative causes. But from the perspective of the civilizing process, his positions reflect precisely the interrelated transformations of interpersonal relations, tastes, modes of behavior, and knowledge that accompany the formation of a unified state with, ideally, a monopoly of power. And when seen through the lens of someone anxious about decivilizing tendencies as the loss of personal and political control and an increase in interpersonal violence, Rush's different political goals appear as consistently supporting a pacified social order and a growing skepticism about people's capacity to discipline themselves.

One can already discern some of the developments in Rush's thoughts on alcohol from the titles of his texts:

“On the Use and Abuse of Wine and Strong Drink,” in *Sermons to Gentlemen Upon Temperance and Exercise* (Philadelphia, 1771) and *Sermons to the Rich and Studious Upon Temperance and Exercise* (London, 1772)

“An Inquiry Into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors” (1784)

“The Influence of Physical Causes Upon the Moral Faculty” (1786)

“An Inquiry Into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors on the Human Body. To Which is Added A Moral and Physical Thermometer” (1790)

“The Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon Man” (1805)

“An Enquiry Into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind With an Account of the Means of Preventing, and of the Remedies Curing Them” in *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, vol. 1 (1809)

“Of Derangement in the Will” in *Medical Inquiries and Observations on the Diseases of the Mind* (1812)

These texts range from religious sermon to philosophical and scientific inquiry to the more specific medical inquiry; from an address to an audience distinguished in terms of class and education to a populist pre-

sentation of an issue of common interest to titles indicating expert knowledge; from a general concern with moderation in a healthy lifestyle to a specific concern – one might say, obsession – with distilled drinks. What is not quite so obvious is that Rush moves from an appeal to one's responsibility for one's health toward describing how others might help until he recommends measures to the legislative, such as taxes on distilleries, a "mark of public infamy" inflicted upon men convicted of drunkenness and finally "the establishment of a hospital in every city and town in the U.S. for the exclusive reception of hard drinkers" (Rush, "Derangement" 267). Implied is an increasing skepticism about the effectiveness of appeals to self-control, and the growing fear that the central tool to incite it – shame – will not work. By the time he writes "Of Derangement in the Will" (1812), drunkenness is presented as a moral problem originating in a somatic one, to be addressed by the state: drunkards are people whose will is deranged through the habitual use of alcohol in such a way that they cannot help themselves and become a danger to the existence of the young republic itself. At this point, advice literature and essays as modes of public persuasion in a democratic manner do not suffice, and external control is called for.

The three *Sermons to Gentlemen Upon Temperance and Exercise*, on temperance in eating, on the use and abuse of wine and strong drink, and finally on exercise, are composites of a religious genre, the sermon, and a medical tract on moderation in the tradition of Galen's *The Power of Food*. They begin with a quote from the Bible, such as the proverb: "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." In the course of the sermon, the wisdom of this passage is confirmed by modern medicine. Whosoever follows this rule will be rewarded by a long and healthy life here on earth; who does not follow these rules is threatened by the gout, and Rush leaves no doubt that this disease causes hellish pains. Of the two vocabularies and styles in the teaching of moral values, it is the scientific one that comes to dominate; all following texts forgo biblical epigraphs and instead begin with a distinction between fermented drinks, such as beer and wine, and distilled spirits: Whiskey, Brandy, and Rum. The former are initially said to maintain a therapeutic value, the latter produce a number of undesirable side effects, now called diseases, of which there are seven in 1784, growing to eleven in 1805 (at which point they include madness).

The shifts in genre and vocabulary justify moral precepts as scientific truth based on observation and reason, not only as revelation based on belief. Likewise the moral precepts threaten disease, not hell (though

disease could be hellish), and they promise health and wealth as salvation. The biblical quotations with which the sermons begin are shown to be reasonable in the light of modern science. That this is not just a clever attempt to update the Bible but an aspect of a larger shift in the modes of knowledge can be seen in Rush's rewriting of Greek myths. One example is a medical interpretation of the "fable of Prometheus," as Rush calls it. The endeavor to reduce the phantasmal by explanations more congruent with reality here leads to the interpretation that "the fable of Prometheus on whose liver a vulture was said to prey constantly, as a punishment for his stealing fire from heaven, was intended to illustrate the painful effects of ardent spirits upon that organ of the body" (Rush, "Ardent Spirits" 9).

It would not be accurate, though, to speak of a replacement of moral issues by medical ones or to state a clear shift from a religious to medical framework and thus to regard these texts as furthering a secularization process. Though the texts betray that process, Rush is actually reacting against it and repeatedly wrote and lectured against a differentiation of knowledge and in favor of syntheses: "Truth is a unit. It is the same thing in war-philosophy-medicine-morals-religion and government, and in proportion as we arrive at it in one science, we shall discover it in others" ("Enquiry" 80).⁸ That his writings in physiology and psychology – the fields of inquiry into the effects of alcohol – imply normative assumptions carried over from earlier religious debates, to be used in political ones, is therefore not surprising. Donald J. D'Elia writes:

The union of physiology, metaphysics, and Christianity, which Hartley and Rush had discovered, provided the end as well as the means of social reform. The purpose of all reform, in fact, was the Christianization of society. ... Physiology afforded the scientific reformer exact knowledge of how the environment physically affected man by impression on the body which produced motions in the brain, and metaphysics, the third element in this formula for total reform, provided exact knowledge of how the resultant motions in the brain were associated to form thought itself. The new physiology and metaphysics (i.e., the science of the mind) afforded nothing less than the scientific mechanisms by which the Christian utopia could be realized in this world. (D'Elia, "Psychology" 114-115)

Like David Hartley, another physician with unconventional religious beliefs, Rush adheres to the idea of universal salvation, coupled with the

⁸ For a detailed discussion of one aspect of synthesis, see D'Elia, "Republican Theology" 187-203.

scientific idea of man as a kind of machine, powered by stimuli from outside and designed in such a way that we may all partake in divine nature. While the personal beliefs may, in the end, be quite unique, the mechanistic assumptions about man who does not carry a principle of life within but is, in “life” as in all other matters, totally dependent on God can be seen in the context of what Wassenberg calls “Calvinistic medicine” (“Suchtmedizin” 42) as it evolved in Western Europe in the course of the Reformation and after.

One could certainly say much more about the relation of religion and medicine in the discussion on drugs throughout history,⁹ but a wider context of these debates is the attention they draw to people’s ability or inability to control themselves. The complexities of the theological issues (eating, drinking, dancing or talking are not clearly sinful but may become so when running out of hand) and medical issues (one may eat, drink, or dance in moderation but once a certain threshold has been crossed, the habit cannot be stopped any more) ultimately lead to a stronger awareness of different levels of self-control. This awareness is undoubtedly a prerequisite of exercising new forms of self-control, so that the debates themselves help on the process of increasing self-regulation. As Elias argues, the civilizing process implies this increase in self-control by inner censorship rather than by external force; what the new argument prescribing good behavior implies is that this behavior is in one’s own interest: it is not vaguely “bad” or sinful to drink too much, but it is bad for one’s health and that of one’s offspring. And to care for one’s health is no longer a luxury of the few, as the sermons still suggest, but a new responsibility for everyone, certainly a duty of civic and religious leaders.

Here, too, the key term is “temperance” with its semantic field of moderation, self-control, temper, temperature, and measurement, leading to a major symbol Rush adds to the 1790 edition of his pamphlet, “A Moral and Physical Thermometer.” Temperance as symbolized by the thermometer is used as a technical term referring to abstinence from distilled spirits, and a moderate use of fermented spirits such as cider, beer, and wine. It is combined with a scale of virtues and vices as well as diseases that correspond to the intake of alcohol. Measured behavior is not one where abstinence alternates with bouts of drunkenness; rather, self-control is to be continuous, uniform, and consistent: “let me call upon statesmen, legislators, and all those who labour for the public good, to abstain from wine. Remember, you are the guardians of your country:

⁹ Apart from Wassenberg, a distinctive voice in this discussion is Thomas Szasz, *Ceremonial Chemistry: The Ritual Persecution of Drugs, Addicts, and Pushers*.

public business should, like time, have no pauses.” This last phrase is odd: as in the thermometer, Rush mixes moral prescription with physical properties, suggesting that conduct follows the presumed laws of time and temperature. Of course, the notion that time and temperature move evenly as on a scale of measured units is as much an expression of a certain culturally constituted disposition as moral values are. Science and moral conduct alike follow the same presumed laws and therefore do not compete but complement each other just as doctor and minister and politician may work hand in hand.

That “public business should, like time, have no pauses” also expresses the conviction that public life should be as evenly regulated and continuous as individual tempers. Consistent with this attitude is Rush’s and also Freneau’s decision to stay in Philadelphia during the Yellow Fever epidemic in 1793 while even government offices had closed: risking their lives, both public men stubbornly persisted to continue their work, one looking after patients, alerting the public to an epidemic, and arguing with other doctors about the correct treatment, the other ceaselessly writing and editing the *National Gazette*, a paper that nevertheless had to close in October 1793. Freneau’s poem “Pestilence: Written During the Prevalence of a Yellow Fever” humorously links body temperature, bad temper, and the interruption of public duties:

Priests retreating from their pulpits! –
Some in hot, and some in cold fits
In bad temper, Off they scamper,
Leaving us – unhappy culprits!

Doctors raving and disputing,
death’s pale army still recruiting –
What a pother One with t’other!
Some a-writing, some a-shooting.

Nature’s poisons here collected,
Water, earth, and air infected –
O, what a pity, Such a City,
Was in such a place erected! (“Writing the Fever”)

Communication is constitutive of ceaseless public business, and both Rush and Freneau deplore the consequences of the breakdown of public business as intemperate and as decivilizing: a dissolution of mutual care and responsibilities, an increase in personal violence, a lack of self-control. There is a conspicuous position of conversation in Rush’s description of drunkenness: the most comprehensive version of “Inquiries

and Observations” (1809) lists eleven immediate effects of a fit of drunkenness, now called disease, which begin with “1. Unusual garrulity” followed by “2. Unusual silence” and continued over “7. A rude disposition to tell those persons in company, whom they know, their faults,” to “11. Certain extravagant acts, which indicate a temporary fit of madness. These are singing, hallooing, roaring, imitating the noises of brute animals, jumping, tearing off clothes, dancing naked, breaking glasses and china, and dashing other articles of household furniture upon the ground, or floor.” Seizing to be able to communicate politely, that is, evenly, is the first step towards a decivilized and dehumanized behavior. After this vignette of Dionysian ecstasy, Rush launches into an expansive two-page-portrait of a drunken man:

The face now becomes flushed; the eyes project ... the under lip is protruded; the head inclines a little to one shoulder; the jaw falls; belchings and hiccup take place; the limbs totter; the whole body staggers. ... falls into a profound sleep, frequently attended with snoring, and profuse sweats, and sometimes with such a relaxation of the muscles which confine the bladder and the lower bowels, as to produce a symptom which delicacy forbids me to mention. ... He opens his eyes, and closes them again; he gapes, and stretches his limbs, he then coughs and pukes; ... his eyes resemble balls of fire; his hands tremble ... In this state of languor and stupidity he remains for two or three days, before he is able to resume his former habits of business and conversation.” (“Ardent Spirits” 6)

The poetics of this passage are those of the grotesque, a merging of man with animal and monster that is both horrible and funny; the drunken body with its muscles relaxed, reeling and staggering, oozing out bodily fluids is the symbol of a complete loss of self-control, meant to shame those who have reason to believe they once resembled that portrait. As Elias points out, the transformation from social constraints to self-restraint goes along with elevated levels of shame; both are aspects of the lengthening and multiplication of networks of interaction and interdependence among individuals. Shame, of course, is what the drunk man sheds right at the beginning along with his clothes; the focus on garrulity, silence, and habits of conversation testify to Rush’s concern about a breakdown of communication and civilized interaction; they lead to a dehumanized and decivilized body.

What one can observe in this passage is another important effect of the medical discussion arising from and complementing the theological one: it shifts responsibility for temperate forms of conduct to the individual. One might object that concepts like sickness and addiction relieve the indi-

vidual from responsibility, but a closer look shows that this is not the case: eating and drinking are, like conversation, primarily social forms of entertainment. But in the course of the medical discussion, as in the passage above, the social contexts of these diversions – the customs and traditions, the occasions for celebration and the social control that goes with them – recede into the background; in the foreground, we see the individual body. It is this body that needs to be regulated and, if necessary, locked up. The medical discussion therefore circumvents the social by shifting the means of control to the individual and, should the individual prove incapable of exercising it, the means of sanctioning to the state.¹⁰

In a next step, Rush indeed moves from the individual to the nation as he worries that a habitus allowing for occasional breakdowns will affect civic leaders and thus endanger the achievements of the American Revolution:

A people corrupted with strong drink cannot long be a free people. The rulers of such a community will soon partake of the vices of that mass from which they are secreted, and all our laws and governments will sooner or later bear the same marks of the effects of spirituous liquors which were described formerly upon individuals. (“Enquiry” 249)

A habitus marked by irregular self-control will soon come to dominate public life because, without rigid class barriers, the governing elite will partake in the habits of the masses. This fear of contagion or corruption from below is a frequent theme in Rush’s essays;¹¹ according to Wouters, it is an indicator of an insufficiently integrated, heterogeneous society where the authorities accordingly do not quite trust peoples’ capacities for self-regulation (see *Sex and Manners* 140-148). As Rush sees it, the possibility that vices spread jeopardizes all the achievements of the revolution: freedom, independence, democracy, the republic itself, and, most importantly, the dream of a more perfect communal life and man. The corruption by strong drink threatens the merger of a republican and religious dream of perfectability. As he puts it in his essay on the mode of education proper in a republic, “I consider it is possible to convert men

¹⁰ This mechanism is described particularly in part 6 of Norbert Elias’s essay “The Society of Individuals” 46-60.

¹¹ See, for instance, “Of the Mode of Education Proper in A Republic” and “An Address to The Ministers of the Gospel of Every Denomination in the United States, Upon Subjects Interesting to Morals” in *Essays: Literary, Moral and Philosophical* 9, 71.

into republican machines” (Rush, *Essays* 9). Banning alcohol is part of a fight against an existential threat to the republic as an educational project requiring the contribution of politicians, ministers, doctors, philosophers, teachers, women and others involved in socializing young citizens. This even justifies curtailing civil liberties and here Rush’s text betrays argumentative difficulties precisely by denying flatly that they exist: “Let it not be said, that confining such persons in a hospital would be an infringement upon personal liberty, incompatible with the freedom of our governments,” writes Rush, and explains that the evils their immoral example and conduct introduces into society warrant confinement and also a placement of their property into the hands of trustees.

Central to this administrative and coercive approach is the concept of addiction as a loss of control over one’s actions, which has been prepared for by changes in theology and the debates in medicine, both involving philosophical questions such as the freedom of will. At this point, I cannot go into the details of the debate on free will. Suffice it to say that for Rush, the freedom of the will can be lost, or “deranged.” In his mechanistic view of the human being, as delineated, for instance, in “The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty” (1786), external stimuli such as climate, idleness, music, or the scent of flowers can act on the moral faculty – as can alcohol. It is therefore possible that people act unwillingly against their better judgment – they really cannot help themselves. Alcohol deranges the will in such a way that it is no longer free and this happens in a two-stage-process, dividing sin and sickness: “The use of strong drink is at first the effect of free agency. From habit it takes place from necessity” (Rush, “Derangement” 266). The first step still falls into the realm of ministers and administrators who can advocate restraint or implement it by making it difficult to obtain strong drink. But once the will has been deranged, chronic drunkenness and its associated behavior has somatic causes and becomes the concern of the doctor and officials. As Karl Wassenberg writes: “Modern authors are wrong to believe that this is the birth of the modern concept of addiction. The doctors did not free the sinfulness of drinking from its religious roots but only the consequences of abuse” (“Suchtmedizin” 51, my translation).

There is a last and very important reason why Rush is calling for drastic measures and it becomes apparent in another passage where he sees his country on the border of madness, or even extinction:

It has been remarked that the Indians have diminished every where in America since their connections with the Europeans. This has been justly ascribed to the Europeans having introduced spirituous liquors among them. Let those men who are every day turning their

backs upon all the benefits of cultivated society, to seek habitations in the neighbourhood of Indians, consider how far this wandering mode of life is produced by the same cause which has scattered and annihilated so many Indian tribes. ... However exalted, my countrymen, your ideas of liberty may be, while you expose yourselves by the use of spirituous liquors to this consequence of them, you are nothing more than the pioneers, or in more slavish terms, the 'hewers of wood' of your more industrious neighbours. ("Inquiry Into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors" 11)

This curious passage warrants a close reading as it conceals and yet reveals so much. There are the many passive constructions paraphrasing a process of what we might call "ethnic cleansing:" the conquest and displacement of Native Americans and the destruction of their means of livelihood. This happens in a miraculously indirect fashion – somehow they "have diminished." If there is an agent, it is "the Europeans" who appear to have little to do with the writer and his kind – the text was published in 1790 and the revolution happened just 14 years ago. But then this passage is not primarily about the Native Americans, of course, but about those who settle "in the neighbourhood of Indians" – a euphemism for farmers, hunters, traders, but also surveyors and speculators who took possession of the land to sell it later. According to Francis Jennings, the process barely concealed by this passage is actually central to the American Revolution: between 1763 and 1775, a number of treaties between Indian tribes and the British government defined borders that constrained the hunger for land of the American settlers along the coast.¹² The new nation no longer felt bound by these treaties and readily started to expand westwards.

Rush, who certainly understands the economic forces involved in land speculation, gives a pharmacological explanation of westward expansion: these people are probably closeted alcoholics who may, through self-reflection, admit how much their "wandering way of life" is due to their consumption of spirits. They are threatened by the same fate that meets the Indian tribes: as victims of alcohol, they will lose their tight inter-connection, be scattered and finally annihilated – in short: they will undergo a decivilizing process. The last threat is that "you are nothing more than the pioneers" since "pioneer," for Rush, is still a derogatory term. The civilizing project is still too hazardous and the people as well as the state not yet stable enough to withstand the decivilizing of a large number of

¹² For an account of the revolution in its relation to the desire for land, see Francis Jennings, *The Creation of America: Through Revolution to Empire*.

people. But the following paraphrase as “hewers of wood,” a biblical quote from the book of Joshua, adds another layer of meaning to Rush’s vision of the decivilizing process at the frontier: Joshua, the successor of Moses, led the Israelites into the promised land or rather – since the biblical promised land had also been settled already – he conquered it and thus belongs to the typological inventory used by the early Americans to interpret and justify their endeavors to themselves. Joshua punishes a conquered tribe by enslaving them as “hewers of wood and drawers of water” (Joshua 9.21). That this second term for the allegedly alcoholic settlers is called “slavish” in the sense of common and unoriginal, but with clear connections to the semantic field of slave and slavery, intensifies the connotations evoked by life apart from “cultivated society:” whosoever drinks alcohol is not only threatened by economic failure or by diseases such as gout; the major threat is the proximity to the two social groups of extremely stigmatized outsiders who were excluded from the democratic project right from the start: Indians and slaves.

The scandal of the young republic at the core of Rush’s anxieties is what Abram de Swaan calls “compartmentalization” (“Dyscivilization” 268): the simultaneous existence of a state building process leading to the pacification of large parts of society with forms of (state) violence directed at particular stigmatized groups in specific, often separated locations. Thus, one code of conduct governs white people of European descent; the other governs the treatment of the groups of outsiders. The former is the basis of the self-image of the U.S. as a country realizing the ideals of the enlightenment. For Rush, it is a precarious project liable to fail if people are not constantly reminded of the danger of a relapse. This danger is so prominent because the nation is politically and economically founded on slavery and conquest and thus on endeavors that require a double-standard with regard to violence. The existence of extremely stigmatized groups creates “neighbourhoods” as described above: ambivalent spaces that create constant opportunities and temptations to exercise extreme forms of violence or sexual excess and where this regression cannot be effectively controlled.

There is a structural hypocrisy built right into the process of state formation: it adheres and propagates a new stage in the civilizing process and uses this rhetorically as a means to strengthen identification with the new nation while silently sanctioning what appears in the same rhetoric as forms of barbarism or regression. As if he knows but cannot admit the ineffectiveness of public shaming under these conditions, most of Rush’s suggestions are now of a modern administrative kind: “to limit the number of taverns, to impose heavy duties upon ardent spirits, ... a temporary

abridgment of some civil right, ... to secure the property of habitual drunkards, for the benefit of their families, by placing it in the hands of trustees, appointed for that purpose by a court of justice” culminating, in 1812, in the recommendation to lock up habitual drinkers in special hospitals – not to punish them but to help them as people afflicted with a disease (“Ardent Spirits” 28).

In the framework of Elias’s theory of the civilizing process, the different claims and increasing anxiety implied in Rush’s writings make sense as part of an overarching concern about a psyche that is not yet entirely stable, constant, and temperate in its self-regulation in a heterogeneous, not very well integrated society without sufficient means of the social control that homogeneous communities can exercise. Under these conditions, strong drink is problematic enough; in addition, the peculiarities of the American state-building process, such as immigration, slavery and westward expansion, create forms of social interaction which cause severe doubts about people’s willingness to engage in disciplined self-regulation. Thus Rush resorts to a call for external constraints, coupled with threats directed against white Euro-Americans: if they do not conform to the new standards of self-control, their ultimate fate will be that of the stigmatized groups – forms of spatial exclusion and imprisonment, expropriation, and even extinction.

This concern about a relapse also allows us to see the coherence in the different reform projects Rush and the later temperance movement pursued. Some authors see a contradiction between the “conservative climate of self-moderation through discipline, humility and self-restraint” with “progressive reform movements of suffrage or abolition” or even see a conflict between the American Temperance movement’s tenets and “a foundational American identity,” where the latter is seen as tied to individual liberty and freedom of choice (Reynolds 5). But for someone like Rush, liberty and freedom promised by the Declaration he signed is only possible in a well-ordered, pacified society. In the holistic project to perfect it, the environment needs to be tightly controlled as to the stimuli it provides. And all phenomena likely to incite the passions, such as public executions, corporal punishment in schools, the use of guns as an amusement for young men, the ownership and absolute power over slaves or the expulsion of a people are to be avoided and banned since they threaten to corrupt people.

In her book *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery*, Rachel Cleves traces the confluence of anti-war rhetoric in 1812 with the opposition to slavery and critique of the treatment of Indians to “a deep-rooted political-cultural tradition that

identified human depravity as an ever-threatening proclivity toward violence” (173). This tradition she traces back to anti-Jacobinism as supplying the vocabulary and the concepts describing America’s vulnerability to Old World corruptions. But the tie to concerns about public executions or flogging in schools suggests that the genuinely political concerns over the course of the French Revolution are only one manifestation of a wider change in the demands for temperate order and self-regulation. This also provides a differentiated view of the question of “humanitarianism or control,” that is, whether the reform movements of the late eighteenth, but specifically the nineteenth century are humanitarian efforts arising from enlightened views of man or whether they are elite efforts to control the lower classes and perhaps discipline them into a new economic order. As Cleves writes:

An optimistic view of human progress and perfectibility need not be the only source, short of class or status interests, for reform. Early national Federalists and Calvinists were motivated by a deeply negative view of human nature to create reform movements that would ameliorate human violence and control threats to the social order. They were neither optimists nor hypocrites; rather, from their fearful negativism sprang humane efforts to reform society. (56)¹³

Indeed, status anxiety, humanitarian interests, and the desire to control the lower classes need not be contradictory motives if someone assumes that society will be better when people control and are helped to control their violent impulses and when those conditions that presumably foster violent impulses are eliminated. The overlap in the leadership personnel of the temperance and the abolitionist movement on a local level testifies to this interconnection – and so does Rush, of course.¹⁴

Rush also exemplifies another seeming contradiction: he links the danger of relapse to a socially and geographically mobile populace with the presence of two groups of outsiders whose treatment allows for excesses of violence and lack of self-regulation. It is in the interest of a more pacified society to reduce or even eliminate the large power differential and the accompanying violence towards Native Americans and

¹³ See also Cleves 55-56, footnotes 117 and 118 for a long list of historians exemplifying the different positions.

¹⁴ On the social composition of temperance and antislavery societies, see Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City 1760-1900* 205.

African Americans. And it is part of Rush's democratic search for knowledge wherever it may be to inquire into the medical ideas and practices of native Americans as well as that of ordinary people.

At the same time, however, Rush contributes to the stigmatization of outsiders by an essay delineating the common accusations hurled at them by the established: the Indians, far from being "noble savages" as some European philosophers claim, are marked by the inability to govern themselves, as indicated by "Uncleanliness," "Nastiness," "Drunkeness," "Gluttony," "Treachery," "Cruelty," "Idleness," "Theft" and "the low rank to which they degrade their women" (*Essays* 151-152).¹⁵ As Abram de Swaan has argued with regard to slavery, the simultaneous identification and disidentification with people is not uncommon and it is part of a compartmentalized civilization process where the state uses its increased monopoly of power to pacify life but also to direct violence against stigmatized minorities (see de Swaan, "Widening Circles" and "Dyscivilization"). Rush seems to sense the inherent contradiction and hypocrisy while he also participates in it.

The disidentification with outsiders also serves another purpose, besides justifying their oppression and extermination: the Indians can be contrasted to all those who are prone to deviant behavior. In that sense it is a disciplining gesture, directed at all whites who, however poor they may be, have at least the satisfaction that as long as they are no drunkards, they will belong to the established group. That the outsiders are marked by drunkness, combined with the ever present threat of a downward slide on the social scale and the awareness that the capacity for temperance is regarded as such an important marker of social position leads to the expectation that people anxious about their station will not only practice abstinence, but will also be interested in making that known.

As Joyce Appleby discovered by reading the autobiographies of men and women born between 1776 and 1800, there is a surprising number who considered their decision to quit drinking a crucial event in their lives while alcohol consumption in general rose (Appleby 141-142). This generation lays the groundwork for the American Temperance Movement, popularized in the 1820s by Lyman Beecher and in the 1840s by the Washington Temperance Society, which gained a membership of half a million in three years. The Society's insistence on voluntary abstinence and thus self-

¹⁵ These quotes are taken from the essay "An Account of the Vices Peculiar to the Indians of North America." The charge that a despised group does not treat its women well seems to be a common form of stigmatization, at least in the West. That stigmatization of different groups shows certain similarities is one of the arguments made by Norbert Elias in *The Established and the Outsiders*.

restraint on the one hand, and campaigning for state legislation and thus external coercion on the other, follows and radicalizes the pattern set by Rush. Rush also lives on in the argument that drugs are at the root of “deviant” regressive behavior that is associated with certain social, often ethnic groups that are then stigmatized as deviant along with the drug.

The analysis and interpretation of Rush’s writings as cultural documents (rather, than, say, documents in the history of science or religion or political theory) reveals how the state building process in the early republic has particular reverberations in the psyche of a man who is strongly involved in that historical process. In a way it seems that the “compartmentalization” of civilized and decivilized spaces continues in his mind even as he struggles continuously for coherence and unity. The sociological phenomena connected to a loss of self-control, the larger social figuration of established and outsiders in which they happen, and the psychological consequences on the members of the two groups might be illuminated through further analyses of fictional writings – and not just of temperance literature. One might think of Frederick Douglass’s observations of the use of alcohol by slaveholders in chapter 10 of his *Narrative* or again, of Harper Lee’s book *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Here the character Dolphus Raymond, who lives with a black woman and has children with her, pretends to be a drunkard addicted to whiskey in order to help people accept his life: “It helps folks if they can latch onto a reason. When I come to town, which is seldom, if I weave a little and drink out of the sack, folks can say Dolphus Raymond’s in the clutches of whiskey – that’s why he won’t change his ways. He can’t help himself, that’s why he lives the way he does” (Lee 228). In 1961, when the book was published, the idea of alcoholism as a disease could be plausibly used as an excuse for miscegenation, especially in the common gender constellation; this excuse strengthens the assumption that alcohol, lack of self-control, and stigmatized outsiders are all connected in that the use of the drug will bring one closer and into the “neighbourhood,” as Rush would say, of outsiders – African Americans.

For a more detailed analysis, I would like to return to the eighteenth century and Freneau’s poems on drugs such as “Lines, Written on a Puncheon of Jamaica Spirits,” “The Parting Glass,” “The Dish of Tea,” or “A Bacchanalian Dialogue,” on whiskey, wine, beer, rum, Madeira, opium, tea, and tobacco. As we have seen, the enjoyment that comes from a temporary, often socially controlled decontrolling of the psyche presents a complex and difficult issue at a time when the ability to control oneself seemed so crucial. If literature is a place where we can experience unresolved tensions and contradictions, then what can these poems tell us

about the psyche of someone witnessing and participating in the compartmentalization of the civilization process? My example is an excerpt from the “Stanzas Occasioned by a Melancholy Survey of an Old English Tobacco Box Inscribed 1708, Written in a Dearth of Tobacco, by Hezekiah Salem” (1809). According to the poem, tobacco offers the joys of wine without headaches, and Salem has just reminisced about his dead wife who, during long winter nights, often sat and shared a pipe with him. But his new girlfriend, who put carpets on her floors, allows for neither the smoking nor the chewing, let alone spitting, of tobacco – three stanzas are dedicated to this new regime. The last one is:

I saw her anger waxing hot,
I heard her threaten, Do it not,
Or, instant, quit these doors of mine,
And be converted into swine. –

A melancholy humor is typical of these poems on drugs: the times have changed, as can be seen from the relation between men and women, from manners, and the strictures on drugs. In the realm of fantasy, the change may once again be observed in a kind of domesticated myth, namely that of Circe. “The fable of Circe,” as Rush would put it, where men were turned into swine, was intended to remind us of well-mannered behavior in the presence of women. As is to be expected in an artistic tradition of melancholia, the poet also reflects upon his poetics. This happens precisely at the transition from the old to the new regime, that is, from Jane to Nancy, in the only stanza with an alternate rhyme: “Such, vested with imperial sway / O’er bodies reign, dull, stupid, blind; / But us the nobler powers obey, / We reign, despotic, o’er the mind!” Aristocrats only reign over bodies, but “we” – a conflation of poets and/or democratic rulers and perhaps primarily, democratic poets, reign over the mind. This sounds like self-advertisement were it not for the word “despotic.”

As “Crispin’s Answer” showed, a merely discursive appeal to the mind is not entirely satisfactory to Freneau as a poet, even though it seems politically appropriate and wise. His melancholy drug poems seek for a conciliation between reason and the imagination, a state of mind both calm and composed, yet open to thoughts of death, imagined meetings with mythical figures, or memories of former lovers. Again, as in the earlier poem, the posture is important: it is neither that of the upright democrat who does not want to bend his knee nor that of the tottering or even lying drunkard. The posture of the melancholy man meditating over his empty tobacco box is, like that of Melancholia herself, sitting.

The physical and poetic attitude of melancholy relates the drug poems to another group of poems marked by their subject matter, namely the poems about Indians – mainly: dead Indians. The best-known of these, “Lines Occasioned by a Visit to an Old Indian Burial Ground” (1788) is precisely about posture: “the posture that we give the dead.” The speaker holds that the Christian tradition to lay down the dead seems to betray the idea of eternal sleep, whereas the Indian custom to bury them sitting suggests more clearly the belief in the eternal life of the soul – whoever sits rests momentarily but may get up any time. This is the background for his admonition to the pioneers migrating westwards to respect the burial grounds of the Indians and to realize that “They do not lie, but here they sit” – their posture is also related to a kind of truth.

These poems also urge moderation, but of a different kind than the control Rush is so obsessed with: these are poems less concerned with truth discursively explained but with truth as being experienced in a particular state of mind and body that lies easily beyond the confines of socially sanctioned behavior and is associated with those who live beyond the confines of civilized – and pacified – society. The desire, projected backwards as nostalgia and onto a stigmatized group, is for a kind of trust that can allow for wild fantasies and occasional relaxation with drugs. The association betrays the mental costs of a compartmentalized society where self-control is never entirely trusted and always accompanied with anxieties, and where the danger of straying from sanctioned behavior, however harmless it may be, is to be associated with stigmatized and ostracized outsiders.

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