

PSYCHOTROPIES

Can an online philosophy magazine discuss drugs and, more generally, the ability of the human mind to experience or induce perceptive, emotional and behavioral alterations through the intake of narcotics? We are living in a time of new prohibition in many European and non-European countries, but also of unprecedented liberalisation in many others. And if we consider the role played by the web in both cases, the question does not appear rhetorical nor strange at all. Psychotropic potentials and techniques are at the same time a cultural phenomenon (aesthetic in the double meaning of sensitive and artistic) and a metabolic (chemical, physiological) reality, and they cannot be consigned by political correctness to the medical-legal field, to the psychotherapy practice or to sociology and anthropology, that have studied it for a long time. Psychotropic experience is the overcoming (*Erfahrung*) of a threshold that modifies the subject in an irreversible way, and has to do with the deep substance of thought, with its skill to transform actually, materially its reality (no coincidence that in German the word *Stoffwechsel*, which literally means changing of stuff, is used for 'metabolism'), also using natural or artificial 'external' substances. If thinking is experimenting and practicing on one self – all alone or in company of others – different forms of selfness, identity or disidentification, then the ways to expand or reduce the power of the mind through the intake of stuff (*Stoff*) into the living body (*Leib*) represent a first-rate philosophical object that should enrich the ethical and social debate about the addiction that the psychotropic substances induce in most of the people who use them.

The unusual and intentional plural in the title of this issue, Psychotropies, is primarily targeted to distinguish between psychotropy as inebriation, active dizziness of a substance (boldly experimental, as well, although sometimes dangerous or even lethal) and psychotropy as addiction or passive 'fall' into the whirlpool of a substance (basically conformist, because induced/produced in the context of late capitalism). In this second meaning of the word, psychotropy would coincide with the consumption of drugs in the contemporary world, in particular in western countries and in the USA, consumption that has been rising up since the 1960s but that today appears deeply changed and has experienced an ambiguous proletarianization, because of the boom of synthetic drugs and the fall in prices (cocaine is a good example).

Secondly, however, aware that the topic is very sensitive (just think about legal repercussions and existential implications, often tragic), we wish to shift the common perspective and to historicize the field of inquiry. We would point out how the psychotropic substances have a fundamental anthropological and palaeontological value, since they appear when the human race appeared. Since the dawn of time they were used to accompany and to make possible sacrifices, wars, rites of passage, work and even, in some cases, artistic practices. For example, just consider how important is coffee in the workplace, and coffee is a drug for all intents and purposes. Or, in the case of war, keep in mind that so many American soldiers used to take amphetamines in the Vietnam battlefields. This way we can blow up many (alleged) fences and partitions and, at the same time, expand the concept of experience or ritual psychotropic phenomenon beyond the borders of anthropology or of sociology of religion.

Third, and as a logical consequence of what has been said so far, it's incorrect to talk about psychotropic substances 'in general', because: a) every substance has a peculiar pharmaceutical effect, that furthermore varies from individual to individual; and b) the effect of every substance depends upon the cultural and ritual context. We know that between the late 60s and the early 70s, in the underground cultures and in the public imagination, there was a value-based and even political difference between opioids (heroin, first of all) and marijuana or hashish. At that time cocaine was not widespread, except for the Andean region, where its use was traditional and connected to work, while LSD had a particular and experimental connotation and was essentially connected to art (music, paintings, theatre, movies). But in some cases it had much to do also with philosophy as psychedelia (literally, "psychedelia" means: the thought that becomes transparent to itself).

Fourthly, rather than increasing the examples regarding the infinite psychotropic variations acting among the human cultures, we'd better think carefully, philosophically about how the concept of psychotropy (literally, nourishment for the soul) appears ambiguously connected to the concept of addiction and this latter to the concept of passivity, which after all is the dark side of metabolism. Let's use food as example, which is only apparently distant from psychotropy. Let's disregard the clear psycho-symbolic meanings of giving / receiving nourishment and focus on it just as a substance that transmits energy. From this point of view, we could think about hunger (that the western world hasn't known for a long time, but that has been a common condition in the past and still is today for a large part of humanity) as a state of abstinence, of total dependence that generates perceptive and behavioral alterations. The eradication of hunger in the world was a typical target of ethical, political and economic emancipation of the 20th century. Today this target has been reached (almost completely) *not* curing the hunger as abstinence syndrome but allowing everybody (not exactly everybody) to eat. In other words, the food abstinence has been cured with a regular and limited intake, namely with the diet. The social defense against other forms of addiction, however, has been almost exclusively the repression and the pharmaceutical compensation, which creates further 'normalized' conditions of addiction or of altered reality.

From this point of view, psychotropies must be analyzed not only using the therapeutic paradigm but mainly through the deconstruction of this paradigm and, at the same time, with the prospective and genealogical understanding of the effects that the management (the *dispositif*, in Foucault's lexicon) of addictions produce on individuals and on society. Thinking about the forms of addiction and about the alterations of human means thinking about our peculiar passivity and plasticity as psychotropic subjects, showing how these can be large and deep and why it can not be totally removed but just experimentally, sometimes dangerously, self-governed.