

Before handing over to our three participants, by way of an introduction I would quickly like to raise three points for consideration.

Studies of the uses of psychotropics are numerous and can be divided into three, if not four, categories.

First come those that emphasise the substance in question and its ability to modify perception. The substance acts on the senses by intensifying sounds and colours and/or destructuring shapes. It enables a «perceptual disorientation», and perhaps a quasi-ethnographic discovery of other worlds normally beyond the reach of our senses and revealed to us by the heightening of our perception.

Studies of more or less altered states of consciousness<sup>1</sup> focus on the fact that they can lead to a different kind of relationship with oneself and one's surroundings. It seems to me that we could invoke here Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialisation: the psychotropic experience could be said to deterritorialise us, that is to say, to wrench us free of our habits and our habitual way of existing in a given environment. It could, thus, renew our relationship with the world, for as Deleuze and Guattari point out, deterritorialisation is always followed by a new territorialisation.

Other studies accord a decisive role to society. Most of these bear on holistic societies whose use of psychotropics is ritualised. As Claude Lévi-Strauss put it, «Hallucinogens do not harbour a natural message... They release and amplify a latent discourse which each culture holds in reserve.» With these studies we include those that lament the absence of ritualised practices in individualised societies.

There are other studies still which present the issue in a more complex fashion: no psychotropic substance produces the same effects in all users; the states of consciousness concerned must not be reified and consigned to some generic form of being; rituality can be sacred or profane, and linked to the two preceding postulates tends to produce novel situations each time.

## Introduction to Station 9

*Influences and subversion in the arts:  
Towards a broader awareness*

### Space Brain Laboratory

Institute of Contemporary Art,  
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

Accompanying the exhibition

*Sous influences, arts plastiques et psychotropes*

*Under the Influence: The Visual Arts and Psychotropic*

La Maison Rouge – fondation Antoine de Galbert, Paris

The ethnologist Julien Bonhomme stresses the importance of ritual: «With his incantatory whistlings and chantings the Peruvian ayahuasquero guides his patients' experiences, avoiding terror and nausea and controlling the rhythm of the visions with the rhythm of his music. The presence of such a guide is often vital to the success of the experience, for he serves as a guarantor of reality for the destabilised subject.» But Bonhomme stresses above all the absence of determinism – in the ritual, the chemical substance, the individual's psyche – and the need to take all three factors into consideration.

It seems to me that reading the exhibition catalogue and the texts of Thomas De Quincey, Baudelaire, Aldous Huxley and Henri Michaux enables us to envisage the use of psychotropics by artists as an exploration involving more than a mere urge to travel new territories.

What is immediately striking is the collective aspect of the approach: the use – according to the period – of a common vocabulary and, even, a common aesthetic; and the common urge to break with the prevailing ideals and test out a potential form of being favoured by the psychotropic experience. This agenda signals a will to subversion, to a break with the traditional and the assertion of a new relationship with the world.

Béatrice Laurent sees the influence of Johann Fichte in De Quincey's writings, drawing a parallel between the latter's roamings and inner journeying and the former's conception of the ego as an interminable process. As she puts it, «De Quincey the rover was ultimately able to find himself – not as a finished man, but as an endlessly renewed creation who, through the pliancy of his life, affirmed his liberty and his modernity.»

In the works of De Quincey, Huxley and Michaux reason yields to perception and sensation. In 1954 Huxley wrote, «The percept had swallowed up the concept», and continues, «But neither, if we are to remain sane, can we possibly do without direct perception, the more unsystematic the better, of the inner

and outer worlds into which we have been born.» Laudanum and mescaline interest them because they enable a break with established mental categories and the ideals of classical thinking. As Anne Brun has written, «When reading Michaux, it appears that this dreamed language corresponds to a language of the body, a short-circuiting of the distinction between the body and the code.»

These substances are also interesting, however, because they contribute to a dissolving – a «vaporisation» Baudelaire called it – of the ego. The ego is no longer the individual's fixed anchor; rather it is something shifting that takes shape only in time with his inner roamings: «I myself was torrent,» Michaux writes, «I was drowned man, I was navigation.» The individual is reunified as reason and emotion intermingle and the conscious, unconscious and subconscious work together at a re-bonding with the surroundings. Or as Jean-Jacques Lebel put it in the exhibition catalogue, «I AM ENTIRELY here in the Great Mixture, taking part in the perpetual movement of waves and cells.»

It seems to me that it is in allowing their organism to be completely body that these artists initiate a new way, a new potential, for being human. Can this not be seen as an attempt to put an end to the Man/World distinction? In a reference to Nietzsche Miguel Egaña has written, «This loss is not a bereavement: it signifies the return of the lost immanence, the fusion with the earth.»

In his book on the psychic process Joël Bernat analyses Freud's remarks about the writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams*: «My work was entirely dictated to me by my unconscious, following the famous principle of Itzig, the Sunday horseman: 'Itzig, where are you riding to?' – 'Don't ask me. Ask the horse!'» Taking his point further, Bernat cites Heinrich von Kleist's essay *On the Gradual Readying of Ideas While Speaking*: «The idea comes while speaking ... It is not we who know, it is above all a certain disposition of our being that knows.» A formulation Anne Brun, writing on the effects of hallucinogens on creativity, re-words as «It is as if the body was the thought and the thought a body.»

Is it not this quest, which artists have been publicly engaged in since the early 19th century, that is now attracting the attention of scientists and, more broadly, of today's changing societies?

And here I have to stop and leave us enough time to listen and exchange ideas.

### Denis Cerlet

Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques  
Université Lumière-Lyon 2

Translator: **John Tittensor**

1. The expression «altered states of consciousness» designates mental states differing from ordinary wakefulness. The list is a long one: hypnotic, sophronic, hypnagogic and even erotic states; together with trance, dreams, meditation, certain mystical states, alcohol intoxication and some artistic experiences.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology Vol. 2*, trans. Monique Layton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 232.

Julien Bonhomme, «À propos des usages rituels de psychotropes hallucinogènes (substances, dispositifs, mondes)», *Ethnopsy*, no. 2, pp. 171–190.

Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (London: Penguin, 2003).

Béatrice Laurent, B. (2007) «Ailleurs intérieurs: l'errance chez Thomas De Quincey», in Dominique Berthet (ed.) *Errance(s), Actes du colloque du CEREP* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 117–131.

<http://www.victorianweb.org/previctorian/dequincey/laurent.html>  
Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 53.

Ibid., p. 77.

Anne Brun, «Hallucinoaire et processus créateur: de l'œuvre d'H. Michaux aux enfants psychotiques», *L'Esprit du temps/Champ psy*, Illusion, vision, hallucination, 2, no. 46, 2007, 127–146.

Charles Baudelaire, *My Heart Laid Bare*, trans. Norman Cameron (Chester Springs, PA: Dufour Editions, 1986).

Henri Michaux, *Miserable Miracle*, trans. Louise Varèse (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002), p. 37.

Miguel Egaña, «Notes pour une narco-esthétique», in *Sous influences. Artistes et psychotropes*, La Maison Rouge – Fondation Antoine de Galbert, Paris (Lyon: Fage, 2013), p. 15.

Joël Bernat, *Le processus psychique et la théorie freudienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996)

HYPERLINK «<http://www.psychanalyse.lu/articles/BernatProcessusPsychique.htm#fnB28>» <http://www.psychanalyse.lu/articles/BernatProcessusPsychique.htm#fnB28>

See also Joël Bernat, «Entre être et disparaître, s'inventer...ou discourir!», *Dédale*, no. 20, March 1988.

HYPERLINK «<http://www.psychanalyse.lu/articles/BernatEtreDisparaitre.htm>» <http://www.psychanalyse.lu/articles/BernatEtreDisparaitre.htm>

Anne Brun, op. cit.