

9

Re-Reading Culture and Addiction:
Coleridge's Writings and Walter
Benjamin's Analysis of Modernity
and the Addict

Andrea Timar (Eötvös Loránd University,
Hungary)

Clifford Siskin, in *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*, claims that “[t]o understand the historicity of romantic discourse is to hear within it the discourse of addiction” (175). In his last chapter, “Romantic Addictions”, he proposes to offer an alternative to “the mystification of opium”, and examine its “historical transformation into an addictive drug” (187). Siskin makes several allusions to Coleridge’s opium-taking turning into a habit, like other critics who foreground Coleridge’s struggles with the drug (Abrams, Hayter, Lefebure), the semantic field of opium in 19th century Britain (Leask, Wallen), or the way in which addiction itself gradually emerged as a disease in the nineteenth century (Berridge and Griffith; Sedgwick).

The general, a-historical idea of addiction equally affects or indeed possesses our contemporary critical discourse. It has lately become an umbrella term to name

the “other” of the Logos, “haunting” the big narratives of modernity. Critics are captivated by the idea of the drug as something “non-natural”, “technological”, “foreign”, “infectious”, as something always already subversive of all Western concepts of intentionality and subjectivity (Redfield, “Introduction”). In “The Rhetoric of Drugs”, Derrida links the question of drugs and the “bad repetition” involved in drug-taking to the problem of writing and the *pharmakon*, while Avital Ronell places the emphasis on the challenge the idea of addiction poses to such concepts as autonomy, freedom and responsibility, which have “marked our epoch since Kant” (59). Analysing Heidegger’s addicted *Dassin* (as “being-on-drugs”), he equally makes the important claim that addiction, trapped in its own repetitive circle, only ever aims at itself, thereby threatening *Dassin*’s authenticity.¹ In these approaches, the addict appears as a non-subject, or, at least, as a liminal one.

Cultural theorists see addiction as a modern, not to say postmodern symptom: an effect, or even a replica of consumerism (Boothroyd, et al; Brodie and Redfield). Addiction, in this line of thought, is the “other” of “culture”, understood in Marthe Arnold’s triple sense of the term,² and “appears to belong to culture’s own proper disease” (Brodie and Redfield, 4). Yet, like other theorists, cultural critics still find it hard to dissociate addiction from drugs, or from the idea of the drug: opium, hashish, heroine and alcohol generally appear as the (sometimes posited) causes of addictions.

Actually, it is Walter Benjamin, who was the first to establish a relationship between intoxication and

¹ On Ronell’s analysis of Heidegger see also Boothroyd, 33-36.

² “Culture” names at once the general accomplishment of humanity, the specific accomplishment of European man, and the aesthetic accomplishment of art, which mediates contradictions by allowing universal truth to radiate from particular acts.” (Brodie and Redfield, 2.)

commodity culture.³ He links the emergence of the “addict” to that of modernity, and, drawing on Freud’s investigations of trauma, he argues that the addict is a “traumatophile type”, who is addicted, in fact, to the shock of modernity. At the same time, he calls the addict a “commodity soul”, who, as I will show, turns out to be the precise replica of mechanical reproducibility itself. Hence, Benjamin’s analyses seem to offer one of the most fruitful points of departure to dissociate addiction from drugs.

The present study, apart from making the general claim that this dissociation is possible, examines the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the light of Benjamin’s analysis of modernity, and his theorisations of the addict. It argues that despite the fact that Coleridge was addicted to opium, his discourse of addiction emerges entirely independently from his discourse on the drug. At the same time, it is precisely this specific discourse that performs the modern idea of addiction into existence: addiction as an effect of what Coleridge himself calls “civilisation” in excess. Although Coleridge does not actually use the term “addiction” (the term as it is understood today does not even exist in the Romantic period), the compulsively repetitive pleasure taken in the effects of civilisation turns out to be precisely the kind of “bad repetition”, which poses a threat to memory, and, therefore, to both subject- and nation-formation.

When Coleridge, in *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (1829), speaks about “civilisation”, he basically means “the progression of the state, in the arts and comforts of life, in the diffusion of the information and knowledge” (25). But, even though these advances are “useful and necessary for all”, he is eager to warn against their potential dangers:

civilisation is itself but a mixed good, if not far more a corrupting influence, the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health, and a nation so distinguished more fitly to be called a varnished than a polished people; where this civilisation is not grounded in *cultivation*, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our *humanity*. We must be men in order to be citizens (43).

Civilisation is like an inoculation: it is rightly administered to a nation, whose citizens are “healthy”, always already cultivated. However, in case, as is always the case, the individuals of the state are not yet fully-fledged subjects, with the full development of their active, Kantian faculties,⁴ civilisation proves to be a poison the injection of which generates disease, and the corruption of the individual and national body.

In “The Statesman’s Manual” (1816), he uses a similar trope of malady to argue against the advances of civilisation and the threats posed to the health of the body politic, but this time, his rhetoric inscribes itself into a more specific discourse, into what I call the discourse of addiction:

³ By cultivation, Coleridge means the full development of the active, Kantian qualities and faculties, and by “humanity” he similarly understands first and foremost the presence of these. See, for instance: *The Friend* where he argues that whereas man shares with animals the property of “Sense”, that is, “whatever is passive in our being”, the “sensations, and impressions”, what makes him specifically human is not any social, historical or geographical distinction, but the possession of the “universal”, active faculties: “the faculty of thinking and forming *judgments* on the notices furnished by the Sense”, and that of Reason, “the power by which we become possessed of Principles (the eternal verities of Plato and Descartes) and of Ideas, (N.B. not images) as the ideas of a point, a line, a circle in Mathematics; and of Justice, Holiness, Free-Will, &c. in Morals” (2: 104).

³ See also Boothroyd, 110.

If there may be any antidote to that restless craving for the wonders of the day, which in conjunction with the appetite for publicity is spreading like an efflorescence on the surface of our national character; [...] that antidote [...] must be sought for in the collation of the present with the past, in the habit of thoughtfully assimilating the events of our own age to those of the time before us (8-9).

The “national character” which, in accordance with Coleridge’s Romantic nationalism, is in a synecdochic relationship with the character of the subjects, risks corruption precisely by the effects of “the diffusion of the information and knowledge”, triggered by the unprecedented diffusion of printing and literacy. What this fast diffusion generates is a “restless craving” and an “appetite” to get more and more of the same. The logic of excess dictates that unimportant events and people turn into wonders and exceed the proportion they normally had in the big narrative of history.

As an antidote, Coleridge proposes the cultivation of a (national) habit that “collates” and “assimilates” the events of the present with those of the past, makes selections and establishes proper hierarchies between them. This habit is the possibility condition of the unfolding of temporality in tradition, and, therefore, of the posing of the nation itself. Civilisation, which induces the formation of counter-habits, such as “restless craving” and insatiable “appetite”, seems thus to both precede and potentially undermine the cultivation of this good habit: the working of memory or the imagi-nation, creating the fiction of the history of the nation.

In his notes to the opening lecture of his 1811-12 series on literature, Coleridge already expresses his fears concerning the direful effects of a civilisation in

excess, accompanied by the formation of big cities, the spread of new forms of communication and the increase of stimuli. In this sense, he anticipates by more than a century Walter Benjamin’s analyses of the age of mechanical reproducibility. In fact, Coleridge and Benjamin seek an answer for a very similar problem: while Benjamin investigates the conditions in which the “positive reception of lyric poetry have become less favourable” in the Paris of the Second Empire (“On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 153), Coleridge searches for the historical obstacles to “a sound judgement concerning the comparative Merit of Poems” in his own age. As for Coleridge, he enumerates these obstacles as follows:

1. The enormous stimulant power of Events making the desire to be strongly stimulated almost an appetite [...] 2. [...] the unexampled Influence of Opinions on the conduct of young men &c, have made us a World of Readers – 3. The passion for public Speaking -- / 4. Reviews, Magazines, Selections – these with Newspapers & Novels – (*here introduce the passage concerning Novels*) constituting 9/10^{ths} of the Reading of 9/10^{ths} of the reading Public from their habits as readers – 5. This combined with the increase of Cities & therewith the starvaton of ordinary gossip produced a substitute for the ever dema[nd]ing appetite – [...] a rage for a more dignified Gossip about *public* Characters [...] – 6. – the enormous multiplication of Authors & Books [...] 7 -- & lastly [...] all the causes from Luxury, Lotteries, &c. (*Lectures on Literature* 1: 186-7)

Coleridge’ list comprises all the stimuli of modernity that induce the need for being further

stimulated, while equally emphasising modern man's craving for stimuli. Stimulation, like the drug, triggers a need for itself. The increase of cities not only generates the formation of a gossiping city crowd, but gossip itself comes to constitute a virtual, but always unsatisfactory substitute for food: as opposed to natural hunger that can be satisfied, or ordinary curiosity that feeds on "ordinary" gossip, the appetite for "dignified" gossip is "ever-demanding".⁵ Authors and books, just like reviews, magazines, selections, newspapers and novels multiply excessively, and apart from contributing to the further growth of the industry of mechanical reproduction, they trigger the excessive "habit" of reading. The wide availability of information provokes an "anxiety" to receive even more, lotteries generate gambling -- apart from being associated to aristocratic luxuries, which, according to the middle-class Coleridge, lack any real, or inherent value.

In the meantime, the form of Coleridge's inventory is ironically the precise replica of its content: isolated items follow each other in a disrupted, self-repetitive series, itself approaching excess (eg. the repetition of "reading" three times in the same sentence). Hence, the list convincingly displays the threats the impact of an emerging modernity may pose to imagination, the unifying, assimilating and collating habit of the mind.

For Benjamin, the capacity to "assimilate" is the prerequisite of the formation of "experience" in which "certain contents of the individual past combine with the material of collective past" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire. 156). What he contends is that the overwhelming, new stimuli offered by the age of

mechanical reproducibility constitute traumatic shocks that cannot be assimilated into consciousness, and cannot become part of "experience". In fact, they change the whole "structure of experience", and this is the reason why the positive reception of lyric poetry has disappeared.⁶

Benjamin's description of the impact of the press (and, by implication, the multiple shocks of modernity) on the structure of experience can even be read as a commentary on both Coleridge's list of

⁵ And may therefore be added to Detrida's list: "oral consumption is not limited to any particular classified narcotic, but covers all sorts of nonclassified objects of compulsive eating or drinking, things like peanut butter, chocolate, coffee, liquor, and tobacco" (33).

⁶ Benjamin differentiates between two kinds of experiences: *Erfahrung*, or long-lived experience on the one hand, and *Erlebnis*, short-lived experience or "event" on the other. *Erfahrung* is linked to remembrance or memory, to the capacity to assimilate the past into consciousness, whereas events resist this integration. Approvingly quoting Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", he argues that "becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are processes incompatible with each other" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." 157). In this essay, Freud famously analyses the consequences of accident neuroses, or individual traumas, and argues that when the subject is suddenly assaulted on all sides by a powerful amount of outside stimuli, these stimuli do not enter consciousness. "The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions", explains Benjamin, "the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (*Erfahrung*), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life (*Erlebnis*). Perhaps the special achievement of shock defence may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents" (159). One may call these non-experiences "missed encounters": there is an encounter with the event, but it is not integrated by consciousness. In Freud's version, traumatic events cannot become integrated into the temporality of what Benjamin calls "experience": they cannot be willingly remembered, nor can they become symbolised, metaphorically displaced or metonymically transferred in dreams. Yet, according to Benjamin, they do bring about a change in the structure of experience, that is, in the structure of temporality. What is interesting for Benjamin, however, are not the individual traumas Freud investigates. Rather, the relationship between trauma and the emergence of modernity. See also: Benjamin, Andrew. 122-140.

"obstacles" to the "sound judgement" of poems and the passage from "The Statesman's Manual" quoted above:

If it were the intention of the press to have the reader assimilate the information it supplies as part of his own experience, it would not achieve its purpose. But its intention is just the opposite, and it is achieved: to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader. The principles of journalistic information (freshness of the news, brevity, comprehensibility, and, above all, lack of connection between individual items) contribute as much to this as does the make-up of the pages and the paper's style. [...] Another reason for the isolation of information from experience is that the former does not enter 'tradition'. (On Some Motifs in Baudelaire?, 155)

Both Coleridge and Benjamin blame, among others, the fast diffusion of journalistic information for the decline of "experience" or "tradition". Yet, whereas Coleridge proposes an antidote, the imaginative reshaping of tradition to save the nation, Benjamin's analysis is merely descriptive, and its outcome is slightly different.

In fact, in Benjamin's view, the new forms of communication (including novels) are far from posing any threat to the formation of nationalist narratives. On the contrary: as Benedict Anderson famously argues, they effectively *contribute* to the rise of nationalisms.⁷

⁷ Anderson draws on Benjamin's discussions of modernity to investigate the possibility conditions of the rise of nationalisms that he links to the Romantic theme of the "creative imagination". His basic claim is that since all community is fundamentally something "imagined" because its members never perceive each other, the nation

Mark Redfield even claims, via Benjamin and Anderson that the "imagination of the nation responds to and to some extent cushions or wards off the shock of modernity", while the signs of the imagined nation (such as the flag or the emblems) are mechanically produced "substitutes for what Benjamin called *Erfahrung* [experience]" (*The Politics of Aesthetics*, 59). Thus, both Anderson and Redfield suggest that nationalist discourse wards off the traumatising shocks of modernity, and benefits thereby from the age of mechanical reproducibility.

Conspicuously, however, Benjamin's theorisation of the "addict" as a "traumatophile type" seems to have escaped critical attention. In fact, the emergence of the "addict" in tandem with modernity seems to be the exorcised spectre of both Anderson's and Redfield's account of the nationalist discourse. In order to illuminate the implications of Coleridge's "cravings" that he associates with the advances of civilisation and the decline of history, I turn first to Benjamin's writings, and investigate the relationship he establishes between the trauma of modernity and addiction to modernity, or, properly speaking, the subject's potential addiction to the trauma of modernity.

Explaining the reasons why the positive reception of lyric poetry has disappeared, Benjamin makes a brief digression on Poe's *Man of the Crowd*. It is here that he points to the emergence of the "traumatophile type", who is "in urgent need for stimuli", craves for the repetition of the potentially traumatising shock events, and enjoys being overwhelmed by them. Making a distinction between

is the most radical of Romantic fictions made up as a response to specific historical and political crises. The claim that the nation is always already "imagi-nation" is supported by an investigation into the underlying medial or technical conditions of these fictions. His main scope is the way in which the spread of novels and newspapers contributed to the idea of the nation in the 19th century.

Baudelaire, and Poe's "man of the crowd", he argues that Baudelaire is the kind of "traumatophile type", who "made it his business to parry the shocks" while seeking them. Thus, as a "special achievement of the shock defence", Baudelaire is able to assign the incident a precise point in time in consciousness "at the cost of the integrity of its content". Benjamin calls this a peak achievement of the intellect: Baudelaire turns the incident into a short lived event (*Erlebnis*), and then *portrays*, that is, turns into experience (*Erfahrung*) the condition of the modern man ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" 159-160).⁸

However, what is important for us here is not Baudelaire, but Benjamin's portrayal of the "addict". As opposed to both Baudelaire and the *flâneur*, the "man of the crowd" attests to the failure of the shock defence. Although he is also a "traumatophile type", and is "in urgent need of stimuli", he succumbs to the effects of the crowd. As Benjamin comments, "The man of the crowd is no *flâneur*. In him, composure has given way to manic behaviour" (ibid. 168). In other words, he equally seeks the repetition of the potentially traumatising shock events, but, unlike Baudelaire, he is unable to portray the events. Differently put, his consciousness does not register the shocks, does not ward them off, and, therefore, they are more likely to have a traumatic effect (ibid. 157).

In "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire", Benjamin explains why the addict seeks out the crowd. Since this "type" "does not feel comfortable in his own company", the crowd allows him to "fill the hollow space created in him by [...] isolation with the borrowed – and fictitious isolation of strangers" (*SW*, 4: 33). In other words, the isolated and hollowed out

modern subject seeks a way out from his isolation by relentlessly repeating the very events [*Erlebnisse*] that isolate him in the hope of filling up his own emptiness. However, the attempt to obtain relief by entering other people's fictitious soul is forever bound to fail. Substitutes only entice further desire. It is in this sense that Benjamin can claim that "[e]mpathy is the nature of the intoxication to which [Poe's *flâneur*] abandons himself in the crowd" (ibid. 31).

Yet, with the use of the term "intoxication", Benjamin's own purpose is to echo Marx's metaphor of religion as the opium of the people. As he says, the crowd is "the latest *narcoïe* for people who have been abandoned." Later, eventually literalizing the metaphor, and re-emphasising its Marxist implications, he concludes that these "commodity-souls" equal "the *addicts* under the influence of drugs" (ibid. 55-56). But on what specific basis does Benjamin establish a relationship between addicts and commodities, or commodity-souls?

In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", he links the shock experience of the crowd both to the isolated experiences of the worker at the machine and to the isolated games the "addict" plays in gambling. He says that both the worker and the "compulsive gambler" live "like automatons" (173). Hence, they become the extensions or precise replica of either the mechanically reproduced objects or of the games they are addicted to. In an unconscious enjoyment of the identification with commodities, the addict thus metamorphoses into techné, and turns into a figure for "mechanical reproduction" itself.

As for the temporal structure of addiction, Benjamin opposes it to the progressive unfolding of temporality that constitutes experience. Whereas experience "accompanies one to the far reaches of time, that fills and divides time", the (non-)experience of both the worker and the addict is devoid of temporal dimension. He says, "[t]he jolt in the movement of the

⁸ See also Boothroyd: "Baudelaire was able to experience being at one with the crowd without being overwhelmed and succumbing to the experience" (108).

machine is like the so called *comp* in a game of chance. The manipulation of the worker at the machine has no connection with the preceding operation for the very reason that it is its *exact repetition*” (ibid. 175). In other words, both the compulsive repetition of the gambler and the trained repetition of the worker is the ceaseless and meaningless repetition of the same. Yet, these repetitions, while becoming inevitably bound up with the repetition or iterability necessary for any meaning, experience or tradition to be constituted, also undermine the repetition involved in recollection and necessary for the unfolding of the tradition. Living their lives as automatons and being unaware of their commodity nature, the worker and the gambler thus only “pass the time”, or “while away the time”, and come to “resemble Bergson’s fictitious characters who have completely liquidated their memories” (ibid 173-4).

Derrida, in “The Rhetoric of Drugs”, theorises the “drug” in a conspicuously similar vein. He argues that the drug like the

pharmakon ‘writing’ does not serve the good, authentic memory. It is rather the mnemotechnical auxiliary of bad memory. It has more to do with forgetting, the simulacrum, and *bad* repetition than it does with anamnesis and truth [...] The bad *pharmakon* can always parasitize the good *pharmakon*, bad repetition can always parasitize good repetition (24).

What a Benjaminian approach would bring to the fore in this characteristically Derridean argument is a focus on the concept of “addiction”, as an action (or rather, passion), instead of that of the “drug” (as a substance). It would underline that addiction, as an automated iteration, or the ceaseless repetition of the

same, effectively blurs the boundaries between humans and machines.

When Coleridge does eventually introduce a “*passage concerning Novels*” in *Biographia Literaria*, his argument against those habituated to the use of “circulating libraries” points to threats very similar to the ones evoked by Benjamin. At the same time, however, he criticises from a conservative point of view the political dangers of addiction:⁹ of both the mind’s potential transformation into *trance* and the trance, the intoxication generated by novel-reading. His argument, placed in a footnote, runs as follows:

For as to the devotees of circulating libraries, I dare not compliment their *past-time*, or rather *kill-time*, with the name of *reading*. Call it rather a sort of beggarly daydreaming, during which the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness and a little mawkish sensibility, while the whole

⁹ The fact the reading of gothic romances became considered by the Romantic advocates of high culture as something addictive has been often commented upon. Still, to cite one telling example by Coleridge, he argues in his review of Lewis’s *The Monk* as follows: “the perusal of one romance leads, with much more frequency than is the case with works of other kinds, to the speedy perusal of another. Thus, a habit is formed, a habit at first, perhaps, of limited indulgence, but a habit that is continually found more formidable and more encroaching. The appetite becomes too keen to be denied; and, in proportion as it is more urgent, grows less nice and select in its fare.” (<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Texts/coleridge/reviews>) Here, Coleridge gives the clinical definition of addiction. A medical dictionary defines “addiction” precisely as a “compulsive physiological need for and use of a habit-forming substance (as heroin, nicotine, or alcohol) characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal.” (<http://medical.merriam-webster.com/medical/addiction>) One may, in fact, easily add “romance” to the list of habit-forming substances, with the important remark that romances are not real but virtual substances: stories that intoxicate.

material and imagery of the doze is supplied *ab extra* by a sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, so as to people the bareness of an hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose. We should therefore transfer this species of *amusement* (if indeed those can be said to retire *a musis* who were never in their company, or relaxation can be attributable to those, whose bows are never bent) from the genus, *reading*, to that comprehensive class characterised by the power of reconciling the two contrary yet co-existing propensities of human nature, namely, indulgence of sloth and hatred of vacancy. In addition to novels and tales of chivalry in prose or Rime [...], this genus comprises as its species, gaming; swinging; or swaying on a chair or gate, spitting over a bridge; smoking; snuff-taking; tete-a-tete quarrels after dinner between husband and wife; conning word by word all the advertisements of the daily advertiser in a public house on a rainy day, &c. &c. &c. (1: 48. Coleridge's own italics)

Coleridge's key terms comprise "pass-time" or "kill time", the "*camera obscura*" of both the "mind" and the "printing office", "dozel[s]" supplied "*ab extra*", "bareness of brain" and "hatred of vacancy", "novels" and "advertisements", as well as mechanical habits such as "gaming, swinging, or swaying on a chair or gate, spitting over a bridge; smoking; snuff-taking", and "conning" (as opposed to remembering). All in all, terms that would be associated by Benjamin to the figure of the

addict. Now what are the Coleridgean specificities of this description?

Forest Pyle helpfully links the institution of "magi-nation" through the autobiographical activity of *Biographia Literaria* to Coleridge's ambitious project of English subject-making. Meanwhile, overloaded with implicit quotations, allusions and plagiarisms, the book, this (non)narrative of literary influences, is spawned precisely through the technological shock of printing. Though Coleridge's attempts to integrate his wide ranging reading experiences into the linear narrative proper to any (literary) autobiography remains a mere promise, his efforts to "collate" and "assimilate", or, as he says here, to use narration "in order to give a continuity to the work" (1: 5) must be taken seriously: the "magi-nation", according to Coleridge, is an "esemplastic power", which, ideally, "shapes into one" (*ibid.* 168). Thus, it is in this specific framework that one has to consider Coleridge's footnote, his prosthesis to the linear narrative.

Firstly, calling the reading of romances is a "kill-time", Coleridge echoes in fact his own critique of Lewis's *The Monk*, in which he claims that "the praise which a romance can claim, is simply that of having given pleasure during its perusal" ("Reviews"). Romances, as opposed to Coleridge's high-brow readings, are not necessary to retain and are not worth being integrated into any narrative of personal development. Even more importantly, together with "the habit of perusing periodical works [that] may be properly added to Avertehoe's catalogue of ANTI-MNEMONICS", novels also "weaken [the] memory" (*BL* 1: 49). Hence, compromising the faculty of recollection upon which both the construction of the fiction of *Bildung* projected by the *Biographia* and the narrative of the collective memory of the nation is predicated, compulsive novel-reading undermines the very concept of temporality that is necessary for the

unfolding of the history of both the subject and the nation. Consequently, it literally kills "time", understood in the sense of temporality, memory and experience. However, these temporary *escapes* from time, rather than being instances of what Jerome McGann calls Romantic ideology, translate the desire to forget time, and to get a break from the temporality of human experience. Ultimately, "kill-times" can be considered as compulsively repetitive attempts at death-denial.

Secondly, Coleridge characterises the experience of novel reading as a kind of trance, a delirium induced by the images rising out of the printed page.¹⁰ The "material and imagery of the doze is supplied *ab extra*" and, just like opium, or the anodyne evoked by the Preface to "Kubla Khan" in the description of a similarly hallucinatory reading experience, it yields the suspension of all common sense. However, the "camera obscura" that transmits these phantasms stands not only as a metaphor for the Lockean, passive mind,¹¹ but also thematises the mise-en-abyme effect of the sentence itself: what Coleridge in fact says is that the printing office manufactures Lockean minds, that is, it manufactures precisely those mechanical minds, the existence of which is challenged all through *Biographia*.¹²

¹⁰ On this, see particularly Foucault, who argues that the 19th century was generally characterised by those hallucinatory reading habits that Coleridge attributed to the public of the circulating libraries. As he claims, "the visionary experience arises from the black page and white surface of the printed signs [...] The imagination now resides between the book and the lamp" (Foucault, 90).

¹¹ For a lengthy discussion of this Coleridgean passage with a special focus on the Lockean metaphor of the "camera obscura", see Christensen, 15-16.

¹² Coleridge criticises Locke precisely because the mind cannot function without the inborn presence of will and judgement. In fact, Coleridge's hint at Locke's "false ideology" that turns everything upside down could also be complicated by Marx's metaphor of religion, and, consequently, of ideology itself, as the opium of the people.

Despite this, Coleridge does warn against the possibility of the mind's turning into a machine (into a machine that replicates the working of the machine that produces it) and presents this possibility as a *historical* threat -- associated not only to the rise of popular culture, but also to the spread of printing and literacy, or else, to the emergence of the age of mechanical reproducibility upon which both the rise of popular culture and the spread of circulating libraries are predicated.

Thirdly, while the effect of Coleridge's anti-mnemonics prefigures the addict's liquidation of his memory in Benjamin's description, and the blurring of the boundary between mind and machine anticipates Benjamin's parallel between workers, addicts and automatons, the experience of novel-reading appears precisely as the mediated version of the experience of the crowd. The readers' empathic over-identification with the characters is triggered by a horror vacui, an anxiety resulting from the "boreness" of, or the "vacancy" in their "brain", which they need to repeatedly forget through virtually stepping into the characters' fictitious souls. This ex-stasis, this complete identification with the characters of a novel, against which 18th century moralists often warned the youth,¹³ in the meantime, has its practical political implications.

Coleridge condemns political fanatics in very similar terms: they are characterised by "the absence of all foundations within their own minds", and a resulting "reliance on the immediate impressions of the senses".

¹³ Anticipating thereby Mme Bovary's case, Elissa Marder, for instance, while Mapping out Mme Bovary's different addictions, draws on Riffaterre's influential claim that "*Madame Bovary* is a fiction about the dangers of fiction." Riffaterre himself connects Mme Bovary's promiscuity to her addiction to novels, and to the fact that the "errant wife is stepping out of bounds when she secretly indulges in the reading of novels and in a daydreaming identification with the women who sink about the never-neverland of wish-fulfilment" (quid by Marder, 51.)

Further, their need for strong external stimuli can equally explain, according to Coleridge, why they seek "in the crowd ... for a warmth in common" (*BL* 1: 30-31). Thus, the mesmerising power of revolutionary orators seems to be closely linked, in Coleridge's thinking, to the excitation offered by the crowd itself. Further, the power of the spoken and that of the written word (i.e. that of romances) equally intersect in that they both generate trance, delirium. Acting as a medium in the technical as well as in the mystical sense of the term, they make the receiver forget about themselves, that is, about the emphatically mediated character of the words themselves, which are thus conceived as immediate presences.¹⁴

Consequently, the mind's metamorphosis into techné (into a sort of camera obscura) equally implies the forgetting or erasure of the medium, or the techné (printing), which induced this transformation and transformed it into a compulsion in the first place. In other words, this forgetting of the medium that renders intoxication possible, rather than being predicated upon an inner disposition, upon some a-historical lack in the subject itself, is, according to Coleridge, a historical condition, concomitant with the age of mechanical reproducibility. As *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, "The Statesman's Manual" and *Biographia Literaria* equally testify, the restless craving to be repeatedly overwhelmed by strong external stimuli is triggered by the effects of a rising modernity as it is understood by Benjamin.

¹⁴ The trance generated by these printed words must therefore be clearly distinguished from the "willing suspension of disbelief" that, according to Coleridge, should characterise "poetic faith" (*BL*, 2: 6). Whereas "reading" or the willing suspension of disbelief implies the temporary suspension of the awareness of the medium, the impact of the vision arising from these books can be put down to the subject's complete neglect of the vision's mediated character.

Hence, the idea of addiction emerges from those of Coleridge's writings that are entirely independent from opium, and stage instead the threatening effects of what he calls a "civilisation" in excess. This suggests that the claim that addiction is "culture's own proper disease" (Brodie and Redfield, 4) can be well supported by these texts. On the one hand, however, Coleridge's writings equally make it possible to speak of addictions without drugs in the first half of the 19th century. On the other hand, they precede at least by half a decade the ones, such as Baudelaire's or Nietzsche's, that generated, and served as examples for, the theoretical establishment of the relationship between culture and addiction in the first place.

Bibliography

- Abrams, Meyer H. *The Milk of Paradise: The Effect of Opium Visions on the Works of De Quincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson, and Coleridge*. London: Perennial Library, 1970.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Benjamin, Andrew, "Tradition and Experience" in *The Problems of Modernity, Adorno and Benjamin*. Ed. Benjamin, Andrew, London: Routledge, 1992. 122-140.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire". *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zorn. London: Pimlico, 1999. 152-196.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings, Vol 4*. transl. E. Jephcott, ed. Howard Eilan, Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Berridge, Virginia, Edward Giffith. *Opium and the People: Opium Use in 19th century England*. Yale University Press, 1982.

- Boothroyd, Dave. *Culture on Drugs: Narrow-Cultural Studies of High Modernity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006. 33-36.
- Boothroyd, Alexander, Anna Alexander, Mark S. Roberts (eds). *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Brodie, Janet Farrell and Marc Redfield (eds). *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*. University of California Press, 2002.
- Christensen, Jerome. *Romanticism at the End of History*. Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. Ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. Vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- . *Lay Sermons*. Ed. R. J. White. Vol. 6. of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- . *On the Constitution of the Church and State*. Ed. John Colmer. Vol. 10 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- . *The Friend*. Ed. Barbara E. Rooke. 2 vols. Vol. 4 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969.
- . *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*. Ed. R. A. Foakes. 2 vols. Vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- . <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Texts/coleridge.reviews>
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Rhetoric of Drugs." *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity*. ed. Anna Alexander and Mark Roberts, SUNY, 2003. 19-43.
- Foucault, Michel. "Fantasia of the Library." transl. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. ed. Donald F. Bouchard, NY: Cornell U.P., 1977. 87-109.
- Hayter, Alethea. *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*. London: Faber and Faber, 1968.
- <http://medical.merriam-webster.com/medical/addiction>
- Leask, Nigel. *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Lefebure, Molly. *Coleridge and the Bondage of Opium*. Golan, 1974.
- Marder, Elissa. *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity* (Baudelaire and Flaubert). Stanford University Press, 2001.
- McGann, Jerome J. *The Romantic Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Pyle, Forest. *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Redfield, Marc. "Introduction", *diacritics* (Additions). 27/3, Fall 1997. 3-7.
- . *The Politics of Aesthetics, Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Ronell, Avital. *Crack Wars: Literature-Addiction-Mania*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.
- Sedgwick, Eve. "Epidemics of the Will." *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. 130-142.
- Siskin, Clifford. *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Wallen, Martin. *City of Health, Fields of Disease: Revolutions in the Poetry, Medicine and Philosophy of Romanticism*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.