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"Body Parking" a psychotechnological use of restricted environmental stimulation to trigger trancelike experiences

The man who comes back after crossing the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who had entered it.
(Aldous Huxley, 1954: 78) "The doors of perception".

A metaphor

By using the metaphor of Body Parking, the comparison with a body suggests that after having parked a vehicle in a suitable space or garage, one can leave it safely and come back to use it in due time. This metaphor also involves the phenomenon of dissociation of body and consciousness, typically felt during the experience of trance. The concept of using a vehicle is so embedded in our culture and our habits that simply to refer to it causes conscious and unconscious reactions of familiarity that facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon of trance and allow to illustrate easily the ideal conditions necessary for its triggering, its proper progress and the reintegration of the state of ordinary consciousness, at the end of the experiment.

Introduction

Throughout history, humans have sought to extract themselves from material contingencies to access a broader understanding of the univers. Transcend the limitations of the body and senses for allowing the consciousness to travel freely in the universe is a fundamental aspiration of human nature, which underlies all religious belief systems. According to the orientalist Grazia Marchiano Zolla : "In the Hindu tradition, the body is considered essential to the metaphysical experience insofar as it houses something irreducible to corporeality, which, however, without corporeality could not occur. The Sanskrit word "sarira", equivalent of the Latin "corpus", "body", literally means: "which incorporates". It is described as a shell, a kind of sheath that envelops the flesh entity "atman", from which comes the Latin "animus", "soul". Ecstasy (trance), in its varied mystical manifestations, poetical or shamanic, is born out of the compelling human need to break the barrier of the body and perform a loosening, an output of oneself, a suspension of time and an entire forgetfulness of life conditions. This is an experience that involves the person in the totality of his psycho-

logical being." (Marchiano Zolla, 1986: 265) The techniques of trance induction that act directly on the body seduce by their practical aspects, easily reproducible and relatively simple to describe and to share. This explains the tremendous success met by the use of natural or synthetic psychedelic substances that have enabled many individuals to cross the "doors of perception", dear to the British writer Aldous Huxley. To a lesser extent we find this interest in trance induction techniques traditionally associated with shamanism, not only for ritual consumption of psychoactive plants, but also for psychosensory and bodily stimulation techniques, such as dances or the practices of percussion instruments. Despite their undeniable effectiveness, the psychedelic substances present a major inconvenience in addition to the obvious health risks: it is impossible to control their effects in real time during the experiment. Regardless of the absorbed dose, it is impossible to stop the effects before the end of their time of action. This disadvantage does not occur with the use of psychosensory stimulation techniques that can be modulated during the experiment for adapting it to the sensitivity of the experiencer, not only directly by himself, but also by an external action. This possibility of control and adjustment then allows great precision in the use of low power psychosensory stimulations whose effectiveness will depend not only on their own qualities, but also mainly on the quality of the environment where they are applied. Environmental quality is achieved by restricted environmental stimulation that creates a protected and controlled area, whose internal ambiance can be modified by psychosensory stimulation in a measurable and replicable way.

Thought experiment

Let us return to the metaphor of "Body Parking" to describe the essential qualities of the "garage". These qualities must foster the "parking" of the "vehicle-body" so that the "driver-consciousness" could leave it and then reintegrate it quite safely. "In Europe, when talking about death, we say that a man "renders his soul ". In India, a man "leaves his body." The difference is important because in one case the man **is** a body and **owns** a soul, and in the second case the man **is** a soul and **owns** a body." (Labat, 1997: 144) Let us now perform a thought experiment for visualizing this "garage" as an area of sensory protection, specifically designed to welcome the "vehicle-body" in the best conditions of security and comfort. The purpose of this experiment is to determine the conditions of restricted envi-

ronmental stimulation, necessary for suggesting the "driver" that the space of the "garage" can replace the one of the "vehicle" to contain it as a Russian doll. The "vehicle-body" will then cease to be perceived as essential and the "driver-conscience" will admit the possibility of leaving it. This awareness is an essential facilitating factor to trigger the trance experience. This process of suggestion combines passive physical triggers that act directly through the five senses and through conscious and unconscious psychological triggers. These depend also on sensations, together with mental activities, such as imagination and awareness. Passive physical triggers are directly related to the space of "garage", which must provide an effective protection against the external disturbances. It must be arranged in a neutral way, to avoid creating inner disturbances and not amplify those generated unintentionally by the human body. An absolute sensory isolation is impossible, because even in the absence of any external stimulation, the body constantly emits noises, which are normally covered by the flow of external sensations. Paradoxically, it becomes its own disturber.

Restricted environmental stimulation

The "garage" will be in darkness or at least in the twilight, protected from any light source that could be seen even with eyes closed, through the eyelids. The walls of the "garage" should oppose a maximum blockage to outside noises. The high-frequency sounds will be reflected; the low frequency sounds and vibrations will be absorbed. The interior coverings also will absorb the sounds that could be emitted and reverberated by the "vehicle-body." The air quality will be maintained by a silent ventilation system and produce no air stream. Temperature and hygrometry will be regulated at a neutral level. No smell shall be perceptible. All surfaces must be free of static electricity. Electromagnetic isolation like a Faraday cage with electrical grounding would be an additional advantage. The "vehicle-body" rests on a support that maintains it in a position that minimizes the kinesthetic perceptions and apportions its support over a large area to reduce tactile stimulation. The covering of the support must allow air circulation to avoid the localized sweating on the surface of contact that would generate sensations of differences of heat and moisture. Ideally the body should wear no clothes, but for reasons of psychological comfort, it is best to wear loose underwear made of natural fibers. All these elements must complement for maintaining an ideal homeostasis of the "vehicle-body" parked in the "garage". The conscious psychological triggers depend mainly on the

degree of safety, comfort and well being felt by the "driver-consciousness" aboard his "vehicle-body." His confidence in the effectiveness of the protection granted by the "garage" must be total, in order to trigger an awareness of the shifting of the limits of "vehicle-body" to the limits of the "garage". This process also depends on the unconscious triggers, which are instinctive reactions to dimensions, proportions, architecture and aesthetics of the environment that the anthropologist Edward T. Hall has studied under the name of "proxemics." (*Hall, 1966: 12*) The virtual private space extending around each human being is like a hidden dimension. Its size varies depending on the quality of the environment. This space that delimits the vital territory essential for safety, is permanently monitored by the subconscious, day and night. A retroactive informational system enables the reaction or adaptation to disturbances and aggressions. This continuous unconscious activity is a component of self-image and contributes to the stabilization of the feeling of identity. The fact of simply taking place in a controlled and protected space as the "garage" immediately provokes a decreased level of vigilance and a readjustment of the subconscious surveillance activity. This results in a significant widening of feeling of security, which allows the change in the perception of the limits of the body. This reduction of the attention paid to the body results in the loss of bodily sensation. The "vehicle-body" ceased to be regarded as a reference framework by the "driver-consciousness", who suddenly perceives itself as a bubble of consciousness, floating without any physical support.

Controlled psychosensory stimulation

At this point of the experiment, it is necessary to provide an alternative frame of reference to the "driver-consciousness". The five senses being inhibited, the mental space is now free of any external perturbation, it became available for the acquisition of new information, defined and controlled. Sensory stimulations will replace the anarchic stimulations suppressed or filtered by the "garage". The visual mental space must remain clear as a blank screen. It will be an open vector, through which the visions will occur from the trance. The perceptual impression associated with the view allows a comprehensive and immediate apprehension of information, similar to the "flash" felt by the seers. The physicist Nikola Tesla described accurately the aspect of his mental screen before the appearance of visions: "When I close my eyes I invariably observe first, a background of very dark and uniform blue, not unlike the sky on a clear but starless night. In a

few seconds this field becomes animated with innumerable scintillating flakes of green, arranged in several layers and advancing towards me... the whole is sprinkled with dots of twinkling light. This picture moves slowly across the field of vision... leaving behind a ground of unpleasant and inert grey, which quickly gives way to a billowy sea of clouds, seemingly trying to mould themselves in living shapes. " (*Tesla*, 1919: 687) This information channel should not be cluttered with images derived from evoked memories, visualized concerns or other structures from the analytical mind. These disturbing mental elements leave no room for the appearance of external impressions. One must also avoid giving excessive attention to the visual mental space, while anxiously awaiting an outcome. That is why the auditory mental space will be subject to a rhythmic and controlled acoustic stimulation of low power, which will lead to a continuous and repetitive solicitation of the attention. This acoustic stimulation can be as simple as a drum beat or very sophisticated as a classical symphony. It must request the attention, while remaining unobtrusive and noninvasive. Colin Wilson, the English philosopher, recalls his feelings when listening to such a musical stimulation: "Bruckner, the composer, was a descendant of the great German mystics and the aim of his symphonies had been to make the supernatural real... his music was slow, deliberate ... it has the nature of a story... Bruckner wanted to suspend the mind's normal expectation of development, to say something that could only be expressed if the mind fell into a slower rhythm... I played the record when the house was quiet, and I calm my mind, as if I were lying on the seashore, listening to the sound of the sea... Bruckner's symphony was always an incantation to induce the same state of mind, the sense of detachment from our humanity, of entering into the eternal life of mountains and atoms." (*Wilson*, 1969: 31) This regular and monotonous stimulation will be relegated by the consciousness to the background of perceptions. It will remain enough present to act as a breaking factor for the disruptive activities of the analytical mind. "Music is truly an amazing instrument of disruption of the senses because it speaks directly to the nerves, the tendons, the physical mind of the one who listens with all his senses" (*Labat*, 1997: 74) The attention to the visual mental space will be distracted by acoustic stimulation in order to oscillate between visual and auditory impressions, until visual impressions are sufficiently structured by trance, and impose themselves as an external vision. From this moment the attention will remain focused with-

out effort on the development of this vision. Neuroscientist John Lilly, inventor of the isolation tank, experienced such a kind of vision: "In this unique environment, freed of the usual sources of stimulation, he discovered that his mind and his central nervous system functioned in ways to which he had not yet accustomed himself... He realized that there were apparent presences, which were either created in his imagination or programmed into his brain by unknown sources when he was isolated in the tank. He experienced the presence of persons who he knew were at a distance from the facility. He experienced strange and alien presences with which he had had no known previous experience. " (*Lilly*, 1978: 91)

Conclusion: a final transformation

The "driver-consciousness" has lost the notion of his physical environment; his "vehicle-body" and the "garage" have disappeared. The "driver" is no more driving; he is totally immersed in another dimension, which conditions his perception of time and space. He has opened the door to a flow of new information that he starts to explore, according to the progress of his trance experience. Having crossed the Door in the Wall, the Man is definitely transformed.

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