

Altered States of Consciousness (ASC)

From a panorama of the different techniques to the interest to understand these phenomenon

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What is an ASC? It can be defined as a brain state differing from ordinary consciousness. A deep ASC can transport the mind to different space of consciousness or mystic state. These experiences can be both pleasant and unpleasant. Everybody lives an ASC during his life (dreaming, entering in a hypnosis state naturally, etc.). While an ASC can have a strong influence on the human psyche, it is useful to understand the processes of ASC on the human consciousness through a panorama of the known ASC.

Types of ASC	Examples
Psychopathology	<i>Psychosis, epilepsy, stress, Stendhal syndrome</i>
Dream	<i>Ordinary dream, lucid dream, sleep paralysis</i>
Corporal and psychocorporal techniques	<i>Fast, induced pain, massage, breath, body movements & positions, sexual intercourses</i>
Psychological techniques	<i>Meditation, relaxation, hypnosis</i>
Sophisticated techniques	<i>Sensory deprivation, magnetic brain stimulation, psychedelics substances, near death experiences</i>

The goal of this first book project is to describe and analyze these techniques and the phenomenon linked to them. In addition, ASCs provoke some bodymind processes which consent to understand in depth the visionary, ecstatic and energetic phenomenon adverted by people who live deep ASC. The human consciousness can get many benefits of these ASCs:

- **Therapeutic** : an increasing number of studies proves the benefits of therapies using ASCs
 - o Ex: Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), holotropic breathwork, psychedelic medicine, shamanism
- **Scientific** : some scientists explained their discoveries by using ASCs
 - o Ex: the philosopher Descartes had three dreams which gave him information about his philosophy before writing "Discourse on Method" ; the chemist Kekulé had the vision of a string in a form of Ouroboros serpent which gave him the chemical formula of benzene ; the originator of PCR, winner of the 1993 Nobel prize, Mullis, declared the role of his LSD trips in his discovery
- **Artistic** : many painters, writers and musicians, report a link between their inspiration and ASCs
 - o Ex: the painter Kandinsky was able to translate the sound he heard on a painting (synesthesia) ; the poet Michaux experienced mescaline in order to explore the artistic creation; the shamans report the spontaneous creation of melodies and songs during their trance
- **Spiritual** : Main spiritual streams report phenomenon linked to ASCs
 - o Visions reported in the Bible (Apocalypse of St John, Ezekiel's vision...); shaman's journeys in other worlds; ecstatic states described in Hinduism or Buddhism ; scientific link established between psilocybin ingestion and mystic states

As ASCs played an important role in ancient people and civilizations and have inspired human beings so much, it is probably because ASCs reveal and enable to understand many elements which have always make human beings wonder. Therefore, many people and civilizations would have developed a ritualized and a mystification of these conscious states and they enabled to build their culture. For instance, it is true for some psychedelic mushrooms and plants that we find at the center of myths and arts of human tribes and civilisations. This is a second book project which will encourage some similar research in order to understand better human consciousness.