

Addiction as Embodied Powerlessness

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Abstract

This paper tries to show that the naturalistic view of addiction is mired in contradictions that stem from reducing the addict to a weak-willed subject who loses control over his or her body. From a phenomenological perspective, addiction reveals itself to be a habit which eventually becomes harmful, but has its primary sources in the embodied needs of a worldly subject. The aim of this paper is to uncover the dimensions of the lived addiction that are neglected in the contemporary naturalistic discourse: the lived-body (*Leib*) and the worldly context of the addict. Firstly, we try to do justice to the variety of addictions by underlying that their new and surprising forms are determined by the intersubjective tissue wherein the subject operates. Secondly, the loss of control in addiction, how the subject deals with the tendency to satisfy a need, is experienced as powerlessness, as expressed in the accounts of ecstasy addicts regarding altered states of mind. The last section of this paper will argue that this sense of powerlessness cannot be equated with a weakness of the will because a strong, forceful will engenders the same vertigo of being prey to strange powers. The embodied aspect of addiction and the spontaneous, bodily need it saturates will clarify further this claim.

Keywords: addiction, embodiment, powerlessness, weakness of the will, need

In a recent post, well-known film director Lena Dunham spoke about her “apology addiction”:

I had men more than twice my age for whom I was the final word on the set of “Girls,” and I had to express my needs and desires clearly to a slew of lawyers, agents and writers. And while my commitment to my work overrode almost any performance anxiety I had, it didn't override my hardwired instinct to apologize. If I changed my mind, if someone disagreed with me, even if someone else misheard me or made a mistake... I was so, so sorry. ‘If you say sorry again, I'm going

to lovingly murder you,' Jenni texted during a meeting. 'I'm sorry,' I texted back. (Dunham 2016)

One may contend that such an addiction does not really exist. Nevertheless, this extensive use of the term is not entirely unjustified. The notion of “addiction” has been coined by the psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall in 1978 in order to “fill in a semantic void” (Leroy 2015) created by the sudden burst of “behavior addictions” (sex, eating, gambling, etc.). It seems however that the semantic void has not yet been filled, since almost every year we hear of a “new” addiction and this surge enjoys a constant thematic attention from numerous professionals in the field of addiction studies (see, among others, Trouessin 2015 or Karim & Chaudhri 2012). In fact, the heavy, and sometimes, outright creative use of the term¹ is symptomatic of a cultural change and might provide valuable clues about the underlying essential core of the phenomenon of addiction.

The successful career of the concept of “addiction”, cheered on in today’s discourse available both in everyday life and in the scientific and philosophic communities, represents in our view an indication of the fact that *it might actually describe a slightly different phenomenon than its conceptual predecessors and/or competitors* (dependence, substance abuse, altered states of consciousness or the obsolete French term of *toxicomanie*). Compared with the older ones, which have been restricted to the field of the medical science, “addiction” has the advantage of pointing to aspects which are far beyond the medical sphere. That is the reason why it is susceptible to be part of a process of overmedicalisation². However, its capacity to encompass a large variety of aspects might help us as uncover the fundamental phenomenon which generated the behaviours that need to be described, understood and eventually tackled.

We find some hints in the above mentioned post of Lena Dunham. Addiction is somehow related to others, to work environment, to anxiety, to changing minds and affects. Except for the reference to “hardwired instincts”, which is in fact a mechanical one, *there is little talk about the body*. It seems that, since no substance is involved and the behaviour in question is a purely verbal one, a discussion about the role of bodily operations or substrata would be out of the question. It is

astonishing that Lena Dunham, who in her films explored deeply the question of gendered body in contemporary society (Weitz 2015; Marghitu & Ng 2013; Woods 2015; Householder 2015), fails in this case to recognize the fundamental dimension of corporeality or embodiment³. The reason might be the fact that she endorses, as the vast majority of our contemporaries, a dualist vision of the human person, in which the self – an abstract, disembodied self – is supposed to exert a form of control over the body – a machine-like body.

Leaving aside the dualist Cartesian presuppositions of Lena Dunham's reflections, the extension of the use of the term "addiction" that she proposes brings nevertheless to the light some neglected or taken for granted aspects of this phenomenon. We noticed that the behaviour that bothers her occurs only in certain situations or, more precisely, do not occur when she is focused on her work (which, most probably, will make her a workaholic). We cannot speak in this case of "lack of control" and even less of "weakness of will". It seems that she acts differently in different situations, which is considered a sign of good mental health and a precondition of success. That shows that our behaviours are highly context-dependent. If this is true, addictive conducts are answers to a particular (physical, cultural, social, and normative) context and that they cannot be assigned solely to the individual's self or mind.

Irrespective of the paths one would take in exploring the meaning of addiction, there is an almost palpable sense of powerlessness, of which many accounts on addiction, either personal or public, draw an anguished picture. Even scientific (naturalist) accounts cannot avoid to make reference to it. (Flanagan 2013, 66-67)

While the signs or the outcomes of powerlessness let themselves be described by a naturalistic approach of addiction, the source of powerlessness and the capacity to recover need a more comprehensive framework in order to be identified. This paper explores addiction as *embodied powerlessness*, i. e. as a way that the bodily subjects strive to accommodate to forms of injunctions that they perceive as being external, when in fact their overpowering grip is internally elaborated and motivated. Should we frame the experience of addiction as "loss of control"?

Is addiction a weakness of the will? This paper will advocate for a phenomenological approach, in which the aspects related to “control” and, implicitly, willing are dealt with in a manner that allows their articulation to the world to be revealed.

1. Loss of control in addiction?

“One wants to know what it is like to be alcoholic – if, that is, there is any commonality to the experiences of alcoholics [...]”. (Flanagan 2013, 66) The same can be said about any other addiction. But what exactly do we want to know and to what purpose? Owen Flanagan – a well-known naturalistic philosopher and a participant in AA meetings – summarizes the expectations concerning the accounts on addiction:

One wants to know about such things as whether and if so what kind of loss of control alcoholics experience in relation to alcohol (as well as any and all affective and cognitive deficits). One wants to know what the brain is doing and how it contributes to the production of the characteristic phenomenologies and control (and other cognitive and affective) problems. One wants to know what effect heavy drinking has on vulnerable organ systems (e.g., the brain, the heart, and the liver). And, of course, all along the way, one should want to know how the sociomoral-cultural-political ecology normalizes, romanticizes, pathologizes (and so forth) alcoholism and its relations, heavy drinking, recklessness under the influence, and so on. (Flanagan 2013, 66)

But is it that what we really intend to know when we read the account of the struggle to recover from addiction and to cope with life? While it is true that we are highly curious to know when and how one lost control over her life, we are even more interested to know and learn how the person regained control. What emerges in the first place from addiction narratives is a *sense of powerlessness*. There are plenty of such stories, but we are not always ready to see beyond the factual data or the underlying moral judgements. When the account is placed in an intersubjective framework, the empathy will lead us to discover that what we have in front of us is a vulnerable subject. (Bernet 2000; Staudigl 2007; Throop 2012)

While many addicts are describing their experience of addiction in terms of “loss of control” or “weakness of will”, it does not mean that they grasp accurately its content and

dynamic. It might happen, for example, that the terms of the discourse are borrowed from other exemplary reports or that the addict tries to present his situation in terms that are familiar to the interlocutor and/or generally accepted by the society.

For example, not everyone is interested in what the brain is doing and some are heavily trying not to think to the damages that a particular substance might do to certain organs of their body. And besides, not every addiction involves substance abuse. We might object, therefore, to the naturalist view, such as that expressed by Flanagan, that the “characteristic phenomenologies” of addiction are highly variable, depending on person, culture etc., and, in fact, they might prove to be less than “characteristic”. Not everyone in the contemporary societies, including the Western ones, shares a naturalistic view of the body and it is not certain that such a view will contribute to the solving of the addiction problem. In fact, we can see from Flanagan’s own discourse on Alcoholics Anonymous epistemological framework (Flanagan 2013, 68-69) that the success of the AA is not related to the objectivity of their account of addiction. He actually stated that AA functions as what Foucault called an *episteme*, placing its members under pressure to re-describe their experience of addiction to fit the AA mould (see also Levy 2013, 7-8). What AA actually does cannot be understood solely at the level of individual experience and inter-individual exchange of ideas. It re-replaces the addicted persons in another (physical, social-cultural-normative) environment, which means that addiction is a social, not an individual problem.

The naturalistic accounts of addiction fail by disconnecting the individual’s experience from the experience of the others. Owen Flanagan, for example, argues openly that the second perspective – that of the addicted individual narrating her experience – should not be regarded as privileged. He dismisses the accounts provided from this perspective as being modified by the views imposed by the AA and, then, as misdescribing addiction (alcoholism, in this case). The epistemological certitude comes with a cost, which is the loss of exactly what should be the outcome of the inquiry: how to change a painful experience,

how to describe the change of particular problematic behaviours, and finally how to point to, preserve and strengthen the “operative centre”, supposing that we acknowledge that there is one.

Addiction entails difficulty in exercising self-control. It is possible, therefore, that all accounts of addiction might be false or, at least, not entirely accurate. The question of accurate descriptions of addiction might be itself misplaced; what counts in these cases is what it works, what helps the addicted individual to get more control over her life. The practitioners in this field ask themselves, naturally, why does it work. As Flanagan suggested in the case of AA, that is probably a repository of practical wisdom about self-control and recovery. It might belong to it also the rhetoric of “loss of control”, which encourages the addict to see her abstinence as a sign of regaining control. (Levy 2013, 8)

If addiction is not necessarily “loss of control”, how could we describe it better? What we are advocating in this is a phenomenological approach, in which the aspects related to “control” and, implicitly, willing are dealt with in a manner that allows their articulation to the whole embodied and worldly situation of the subject to be taken into account.

In the footsteps of Erwin Strasser (1969), Sean Leneghan adapted the phenomenological (Husserlian) perspective and its methodological framework to an ethnographical study of ecstasy (Leneghan 2011). It is in the dialog between the researcher and the participant (*recte*, the addicted person) that „the unique *Welt-Stimmung* (world-mood) and the overall dynamic trajectory [...] of ecstasy experience” were to be configured (Leneghan 2011, 39). Going back through layers of human interactions, this phenomenologically informed anthropological inquiry brings to the light the processual *morphology* of the varieties of ecstasy experience (as mode of being-in-the-world). It investigates the specific aspects of lived ecstasy. It begins with the activities that take place in the primary sites of consumption and goes further towards the cognitive and body expressions of users’ experiences and their attempts to *keep a control* of their (altered) mind states. In a first level codification of the primary ethnographic reports, there are frequently employed terms like:

“modifications”, “intensifications”, and “modulations”. They are pointing to a fluid typology of the subjective experience of the user, interpreted with the “devices” – types and concepts – forged for describing the ordinary states of consciousness. The peculiar states of mind which are following initial phases of consumption, as well as the modified intersubjective field resulting from ecstasy use and the phase of “scatting” (the post-plateau phase), are extensively documented on the basis of users’ accounts and researchers’ participative observations.

The experiencing and the corresponding description of what is lived in the “altered” states of mind are helping the researcher to gain access to the subjective world(s) of ecstasy users. It is the starting point for communication and understanding between the user and the possible listener or the observer, who is experiencing the same objects in the mode of as-if. The reporting user and the listener are building a common experience around the noematic kernel of their specific modes of experiencing. A shared experience, a sense of being together is possible even in the case of the strangest ways of feeling.

If we take into account also the pragmatic effects of experiencing, the most bizarre experiences are not pushing people away from one another, as they may appear in a naturalized perspective. On the contrary, they bring people together. Not only those directly involved, but also these ones and the others, who didn’t undergo this particular experience. For they are answering to the intentions of the others as the special ones, as the ones who did this or that, or needed this or that.

Although the purpose of this experience is a kind of hetero-transformation of the psycho-physical unity of the individual, the problem that she or he encounters is that of the dissolution of the world engendered in such states (Leneghan 2011, 42), a form of unavoidable internal degradability of that experience. Socially, it takes the form of “addiction”, which is defined here as “repeated consumption” (Leneghan 2011, 43), and of the strategies for moderating use. A genuine sense of the power of the self appears through the reports on “tolerances, addiction, reconstitution and fading away”. (Leneghan 2011,

193). A “subject” timidly reaffirms itself when the magic vanishes. Some are seeing a transcendent goal, like “*being able to dance generally*” (Leneghan 2011, 183) or are invoking a “Golden Mean”: “anything in moderation”. (Leneghan 2011, 183)

2. Weakness of the will and possibilities of action

It is often heard that addiction designates a weak-willed person. This direct and simple claim is oblivious to its own ambiguity: is it the addiction that produces the *akratic* subject? Or, on the contrary, the lessening of the will gives way to addiction? If forced to reflexivity, those who uphold this claim reduce its ambiguous meaning to an equally rushed (moral) diagnostic: the addict does not have the will to stop feeding his addiction, he lacks the will to say no. If he tries to end it, and therefore has the will to stop, it is a weak will that tumbles back into addiction. If the addict has the will to say no, he lacks the will to enact it. The proponents of this claim with regard to addiction seem to cling to a simple equation of getting in and out of self-harmful behaviours: the willing addict should be an equally willing de-addict; where the will creates the addiction, the will can make it go away. The will at work in the habit of addiction is the same and continuous with the will of getting-out-of-addiction. The unity of the will should be proof of its undiluted strength. The force of the will is a given and, according to this naïve view, the addict prefers to devise the ruse of its weakness as an alibi for its continual indulgence.

The problem with this claim that identifies a weak willed subject, engulfed by addiction, who can simply sort himself out by mobilising a stronger will, is that it completely eludes the defining role of the body, habit and need and their relationship with the will. At the same time, there should be a distinction between will and the subject’s bundle of powers, of what he can do – Husserl calls it the sphere of “*Ich kann*” (1989, 270) – of his capabilities or abilities. The will does not operate in a vacuum: even from a phenomenological perspective, it is not enough to describe the essence of the will as the execution by a decision-making subject of a project guided by an intended aim because it expresses a form of intentionality adequate for a disembodied consciousness and equally detached from the chain

of meaningful historicity. Paul Ricoeur (1949) proposes, therefore, the enlargement of the Husserlian *cogito* whereby the practical intentionality of the will gains its whole gamut of eidetic relationships with the consciousness, the body and the world. So much so, that the willing subject is a practical subject whose activity is founded by a synthesis of voluntary and involuntary acts⁴; the spontaneity of consciousness has a complicated bond with the bodily spontaneity. The relationship between the will and the involuntary is not, *a priori*, an oppositional one; it is a dynamic and reciprocal rapport wherein the involuntary prepares, triggers and sustains the activity of the will which, in turn, brings about the overall meaning of the practical act. But, at the same time, the input of involuntary activity (preformed skills or instinctive bodily conducts, emotion, passion, habit) might contribute, through all kinds of “organically”-lived disturbances, to the loss of the willing intentions in the density of the body and which, in that case, lead to form a stumbling block, a resistance to the exercise of the will in its immediate spontaneity. The involuntary acts, thus, impose a temporary or fatal limit to the willing subject. It must be clearly stated, though, that practical limitations come not only from the involuntary, bodily side of the subject’s activity, but also from its being precisely a human being who ages and whose capabilities become fixed and ossified or corroded by time.

A first confusion that arises from the discourse concerning the weak-willed addict has to do with what “weak” means; it seems to indicate an objectivistic and naturalistic view of willing: if only the addict would apply more force to his will! It is similar with the perspective that the natural sciences endorse with regard to the hungry and disturbed body: eat less (obese), eat more (anorexic). These quantitative understandings of the relationship between willing and body do not succeed in grasping the subjective meaning of the lived addiction or the lived anorexia nervosa. And this naturalistic approach leads to a paradox that I shall deal with below.

The involuntary activity of the lived body, which is different from the objective body, is an important source of embodied capabilities for the subject. By doing and acting, the subject accumulates and develops forms of power or potency

(“being able to”) that appear to him/herself only in reflection. They are, at the same time, sedimentations of prior actions and possibilities of future actions. Certain capabilities seem to be innate: Ricoeur (1966) talks about preformed skills that translate instinctive powers of bodily movements and achievements. Not everybody possesses the ability to play the piano or to become a great boxer. Not everybody becomes addicted (to dance, to box, to alcohol, drugs, etc.). The foundation of acquiring these highly developed habits is provided by pre-reflexive, instinctual forms of bodily behaviour. They offer to the will a grip on the lived body, without being thematically grasped by consciousness. And the lived habits are usually so versatile and supple that the effort of bodily willing falls out of the sphere of subjective awareness: a pre-reflective, bodily spontaneity fulfils a triggering impulse to which the will only needs to give its agreement. Willing is easy exactly because it is sustained by the power of the subject inscribed in his acquired bodily habit. Why is it that this will, that accomplishes a project almost without effort, is not called weak instead of easy, seeing that the subject does not need to exert a strong will to engage in habitual conduct? If that were the case, the subject whose will follows the tendency and force of the habit should be weak-willing: the winning boxer or fighter who uses the “melody cells” (Ricoeur 1966, 284) and rhythms of his instinctive and acquired skills and habits should have, according to this view, the weakest will. The correct explanation is that the corporeal capability of the subject, shaped and amplified by the repetition of habit, along with practical possibilities successfully tested and sedimented, offers to the will an easy, pre-formed way of execution which is extremely efficacious. Easy means here efficacy: the effort of the body and the reflexive will do not have to intervene in order for the project to be carried through⁵. There is already a pre-given course of action in the form of the acting possibilities of the embodied subject. The driven dancer dances easily; the trained boxer boxes easily. The addict keeps being addicted easily. The lived body is docile and easy to master and delivers efficaciously the satisfaction of the completed action. When the subject possesses the power of doing and the necessary know-how,

everything is easy: the will becomes almost effortless and easy, the body docile.

It seems counter-intuitive to describe addiction under the guise of power. It is a practical power, a form of doing acquired through habit and sedimented as a latent possibility available to a willing subject. Viewed from the point of view of habit, addiction is a practical, subjective ability. And the converse seems true: in every skill acquired, there is a kind of obsession or addiction at work. But it is wrong to reduce addiction to habit. Even to bad habits. A first way out of this restricted perspective is furnished by the common parlance of “the force of habit” – again, a naturalistic vocabulary. And why speak of the force of habit when it is so easy to execute the habit itself? According to Husserl, for example, whose notions of habit and habituality (*Habitualität*) are more extended than Ricoeur’s, habit exhibits a compulsion of, or a tendency to, repetition, irrespective of the fact that the habit is governed by instinctive drives, or by value-motives⁶. On the contrary, for Ricoeur, the habit does not possess in itself this kind of driving force:

The need of a habitual action is actually secondary to the habit; it is an aspect which is sometimes present, at other times absent. These contradictory effects cannot be explained by habit but by its ingression into the deeper organic life of needs and sources of interest. I do not feel deprived of typing, of doing acrobatics, or of solving equations for the sole reason that I have mastered these activities and that I don't have an occasion to exercise them. They are inert tools which have no source of interest within themselves, though the need of earning a livelihood, a wish to surprise my acquaintances, etc., can suddenly animate these habits and attribute to them a demand of which they are devoid in themselves. (Ricoeur 1966, 114)

The tendency to repetition does not belong to habit itself because otherwise it can't be explained why a habit that once produced pleasure and satisfaction by its execution, now it engenders disgust and revulsion: for example, a professional habit such as correcting papers might become tedious. Or eating eggs for breakfast one more time turns out to be a disagreeable prospect. Therefore, habits in themselves are neutral because they provide the easiest way for the powers of

the subject to exercise themselves. But the subjective abilities and potentialities do not trigger the habit; they only prepare its actualization. To use Husserlian terms, the powers of the subject are like a parenthesized or neutralised habit (and preformed skills), practical possibilities kept in suspension until the triggering impulse engages them in actual action. The force of the habit, its tendency to set off the chain of action is sparked off ultimately by need. The intentionality of need presupposes a lived or experienced lack and an impulse oriented towards something not given in presence. This needy intentionality is thus an active affect, a pre-action, an urge that strives to satisfy an indigence felt organically, before any representation and will come into the scene. The basic level of need is constituted by the corporeally inscribed drives or tendencies towards vaguely determined vital “objects”: hunger tends toward food, thirst toward liquids, etc. If the will could, in principle, master the tendency of need, it cannot however control its impetus: I can refrain from eating, but I cannot help feeling hunger. Another important difference between Husserl and Ricoeur should be noted quickly: whereas Husserl makes habit collapse into the drive category in order to diminish the dualism of nature and spirit, or nature and freedom, in the make-up of the subject (both instinctual behaviour and value-motives gain the force of a drive when taken up by the habit), Ricoeur keeps habit and drive separated and adopts the tactic of undermining this dualistic view of the subject by showing that the first rank of value-motives are actually fostered by need itself: before any act of positing by the willing subject, there are values that emerge and attract the will in virtue of the bodily flesh, of the subject being embodied. This primary spontaneity of the lived body generates vital values toward which the will turns as receptivity: bread is good, water is good. When the need enters the form of habit, the easiness of execution, that we talked about earlier, becomes a value-motive, a good for the bodily subject. The vague intentionality of need, that searches for intentional objects to satisfy and saturate it, is revealed to the subject through habitual behaviour, through regular ways of action. And need usually takes the path of the easiest practical option: habit offers an easy outlet for latent needs. Efficacy, the

least expenditure of effort, seem to define the relationship between need and the available repetitive action of habit.

Whence comes the appearance of the force of the habit though? Why is it that the habit seems to create new needs? Ricoeur states that: "In extending need by an easy conduct, in showing to it *that* it can and *how* it can satisfy itself, the schema of available action in some way infects the need itself." (Ricoeur 1966, 114). And also: "Si donc l'habitude affecte le besoin au point de sembler l'inventer, c'est par choc en retour de la forme usuelle acquise sur des besoins latents"⁷ (Ricoeur 1966, 109). If the need triggers the habit, the latter offers to the need the available, customary paths for its saturation. The shock produced when a habit extends a need does not have the meaning of pressure or constraint, like when two opposing forces meet. On the contrary, the shock is the result of the easiness with which the need is satisfied by habit. And because of this easiness of execution, the habit infects the need itself to have recourse to the same pre-given form of action every time the urge is pressing. That's why Ricoeur speaks of habit as a "quasi-need" (Ricoeur 1966, 114): habits are inert tools until the need gives them the impetus of actualizing a subjective power; but, in the aftermath of habit and need working together, the habit takes the appearance of a "quasi-need", obfuscating its real source. Habit is ultimately a means to satisfy needs. Its force consists in giving to the need easy access to pre-established ways of action and to pre-formed powers of the subject.

What about addiction which, sometimes, deals with "fabricated" needs? There are forms of addiction that enhance, at overwhelming levels, the vital needs: food addiction, sex addiction, etc. and they can be easily integrated within Ricoeur's theory of need and habit. Nevertheless, one of the most spread conception about addiction is that it creates new needs for the subject: drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc. Does not the habit create these needs after all? Ricoeur claimsthat:

It is never true that habit creates a need – even the most artificial needs, such as needs of tranquilizers and stimulants, always refer to the genuine tissue of need in which exercise had worked a kind of derivative bloodletting. Usage never does more than reveal the

primitive sources of motivation which then function along lines of least resistance. (Ricoeur 1966, 115)

The point that Ricoeur makes here is that artificial needs are not external or imposed needs, created by the object of habit, but, that they are in fact, the needs of the embodied subject who uses the habit in order to find alleviation. The object of the habit is coveted by the subject because it appears to him/her with the appealing traits that the need bestows upon it. Someone who's not into ballet, does not get the appeal of ballet shoes or ballet music. Someone who is not into drugs, stays immune to their pleasurable allure. The artificial need is not created by habit, but it corresponds or expresses a *bona fide* need that profits, in a motivated way, of the easy route toward satisfaction provided by the available habit. Having to deal with artificial needs means that there is an unsatisfied genuine need that strives for saturation.

One more thing should be said at this point. What will can do, when confronted by need, is not to take a directly oppositional stand against it. The common sense which claims that addiction entails a weak-willed subject seems to imply that if the addict could oppose more strongly his/her addiction, things would improve. Or, Ricoeur stresses relentlessly that the involuntary and the will are not opposing categories: even when the necessities of the unconscious, character and life come into play as fatally limiting the practical powers of the subject, there should be a consenting will that experiences them not as limiting, but as a source of (limited) freedom. This oppositional and domineering stance demanded from the will in order to parade its force and strength proves to be ruinous when seen from the perspective of addiction, too. Binswanger, for example, in his study of Ellen West (Binswanger, 1958), a patient who suffered from food addiction and opposed it with a mighty will and who ended up in suicide, reveals that West's behaviour since she was a baby was characterised by "wilfulness", by a will to oppose her own organic tendencies (to gain weight while simply growing up), her family and her social world whose values did not appeal to her⁸. This excess of the will, directed straightforwardly and confrontationally towards herself, the others and the world corresponds to the pure self-positing

power of the consciousness seen as the only generator of values and motives for action and satisfaction. Wilfulness means, ultimately, a strong claim by the conscious self to be the sole breeder of values and the sole container of impetus for action, opposing thus strongly the needs of the body and the ways of action supported by the pre-given world. All West's incursions in the sphere of playful activity (riding, hiking) and that of working and action (university, social work) were short-lived because they did not offer satisfaction to what were her genuine needs. She could form technical and professional habits, but they did ultimately disappoint her. In the long analysis of her illness, Binswanger unveils step by step how need comes to take over her life completely: the intentionality of need is characterised by a powerful drive to eat (the tendency) and by an "animalic hunger" (the lack) (Binswanger 1958, 291). Ellen West expresses in her diary the same idea as Ricoeur: "I can summon up such a will power that I actually eat nothing. But I cannot suppress the desire for it." (Binswanger 1958: 254). Her ideal of slimness equalled with the ideal of being bodiless. Her confrontational and wilful attitude expressed itself within the spasmodic relationship with her addiction: periods of almost complete refusal to eat, followed by overwhelming outbursts of animalic hunger and total capitulation. Her will strongly opposes the tendency to eat so much so that she does not eat almost at all. She cuts off her body completely by exercising her imperious will. But the bodily need cannot be totally suppressed by a head-on, wilful opposition that ultimately does not satisfy the body and does not clarify and explain the need.

The analysis of Ellen West conducted by Binswanger (1958) shows what are the perils of complying with a highly polemic and combative will, which in everyday vocabulary might be admirably described as strong will. Addiction, because it's a problem of need and not of will, should be addressed not in a spirit of antagonism between the involuntary and the voluntary, but in the more integral and synthetic view of the embodied subject. The most important task for the will is to understand the source of the habit of addiction which is need. The will is not a kind of blind strength that can bar a habit from occurring and a need from being satisfied just because it

wills it so. The will is a reflexive will, it is an intentional activity of the embodied consciousness and, therefore, a source of meaning for the habit and action in general. The willing subject should approach addiction with a willingness to comprehend the need that feeds the addiction. The difficulty comes from the fact that need is ultimately the basic layer of embodied affectivity and is steeped in obscurity. But at the same time, will cannot become excessively reflexive in the sense of pure intellectual rumination. Again Ellen West talked about the vertigo she felt when doing solely the work of the mind (“The only work I do is mental” – Binswanger 1958, 255), again breaking off any relation with the frightening body: “It drives me to despair that with all my big words I cannot get myself further. I am fighting against uncanny powers which are stronger than I. I cannot seize and grasp them” (Binswanger 1958, 259). And Ricoeur talks of an *analogon* of this over-reflexive will that the non-addict encounters in hesitation: “in the chaos of my intentions lurks the conviction of my powerlessness. I experience not my possibility, but my impossibility: “I am not up to it”, “I am out of my depth”, “I am lost, swamped” – “I feel powerless” (Ricoeur 1966, 138).

Consequently, to develop an oppositional, strong will is not the way to go in finding a durable remedy against addiction. The reflexive will should, on the contrary, be receptive to the troubles and disturbances of meaning and organic functionality expressed by the need saturated in addiction. The body in need tries to communicate vaguely and obscurely through this addiction what it lacks and what the addiction saturates. Need is incoercible because the subject is embodied and the will cannot just banish its presence by applying force. One cannot just forcefully will addiction away; what one could hope to achieve is not to bend the need to an almighty will, but to find other ways of satisfying it than addiction. The will is affected by the activity of the subject because, especially in habits, the will meets the pre-reflexive, obscure involuntary: need. The will before the addiction is not the same with the will after the addiction.

3. Conclusions

In confronting the naturalistic approaches of addiction with a phenomenological perspective of the worldly embodied subject, the investigation of addiction uncovers deeper aspects related to both intersubjective and embodied practices that ultimately facilitate the addiction to take place. Addiction is not a problem of the will or of loss of control, but of embodied needs that socially sanctioned discourses keep out of view so that they don't undermine the success story of the recovering addict. The difficulty comes not from the fact that there is a weak will that cannot cope with the force of habit; the seriousness of addiction stems from the fact that there are unsatisfied needs, i.e. a powerful experience of lack and drive that, not having been given a chance to fulfilment, extends itself, according to the easiest practical option, in habits by using the capabilities of the subject and the available stock of possibilities of action. And because all these processes take place at the involuntary, pre-reflexive level of the embodied subjects, the reflexive will has to deal not with addiction as habit, but with addiction as need, as involuntary spontaneity of the embodied subject.

The sense of powerlessness that the subject of addiction experiences is, consequently, related to the work of the need and its lack: the impetus that triggers a bodily action cannot be suppressed. If the tendency can be controlled, its origin – the lack – cannot. One cannot ignore the body he/she lives in. The will can take over the tendency of need, but cannot make the lack disappear. The reflexive will should accept it and provide alternative ways of fulfilling it. And, on the other hand, the powers of the subject, his/her capabilities are acquired through the fact that the subject has a body and through repeated, successful actions. As any other iterative activity, as any other habit, addiction is a form of power: not every subject is able to consume alcohol on a daily basis, for example. But these abilities are not in themselves triggers for action: the need, guided by the will, is in charge. The feeling of powerlessness comes from the “uncanny powers” of the needy lack, to use Ellen West's expression, for which the powers of the subject cannot find other alleviation than addiction. To recover a sense of power means that the urge of the need starts to lessen its grip on the embodied subject. At the same time, it must be

stressed that this powerlessness is most acutely felt when the will stands in a stark opposition with the tendency of need: engaging in this polemical, almost static attitude, produces a split between an almighty, self-positing subject and a bodily existence deemed to be transformable at will, at the drop of a hat. And this, as we have suggested, is the worst solution for addiction.

NOTES

¹ There is a perfume called “Addict”, which is a proof that the term is receiving also positive connotations. See *Dior Addict by Christian Dior – perfume review*, where the author notes that “they were hoping the name – and the tag line, “Admit it” – would get attention, and they got their wish”. (Robin 2008)

² For the aspects related to recent developments in the study of medicalization, see Conrad (2013).

³ She mentions, nevertheless, the topic of domination in contemporary society.

⁴ A comparison between Ricoeur’s (1949) concepts of voluntary and involuntary and Husserl’s notions of activity and passivity should be interesting to be drawn.

⁵ This idea of easiness of execution, of short-circuit of satisfaction is also delineated by psychoanalysis. See, for example, Rik Loose (2002).

⁶ Cf. E. Husserl (1989): “Habits are necessarily formed, just as much with regard to originally instinctive behavior (in such a way that the power of the force of habit is connected with the instinctive drives) as with regard to free behaviour. To yield to a drive establishes the drive to yield: habitually. Likewise, to let oneself be determined by a value-motive and to resist a drive establishes a tendency (a “drive”) to let oneself be determined once again by such a value-motive (and perhaps by value-motives in general) and to resist these drives. Here *habit and free motivation intertwine*.” (Husserl 1989, 267).

⁷ We give here the original French formulation of Ricoeur text because the English translation omits the word “shock”: “If, then, habit affects need to the point of seeming to invent it, it does so in turn by the encounter of the acquired customary form and latent needs.” (Ricoeur 1966, 115).

⁸ For a broader view of L. Binswanger’s main concepts and methodology, one may consult Binswanger (1963).

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