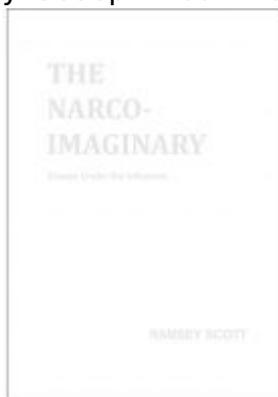
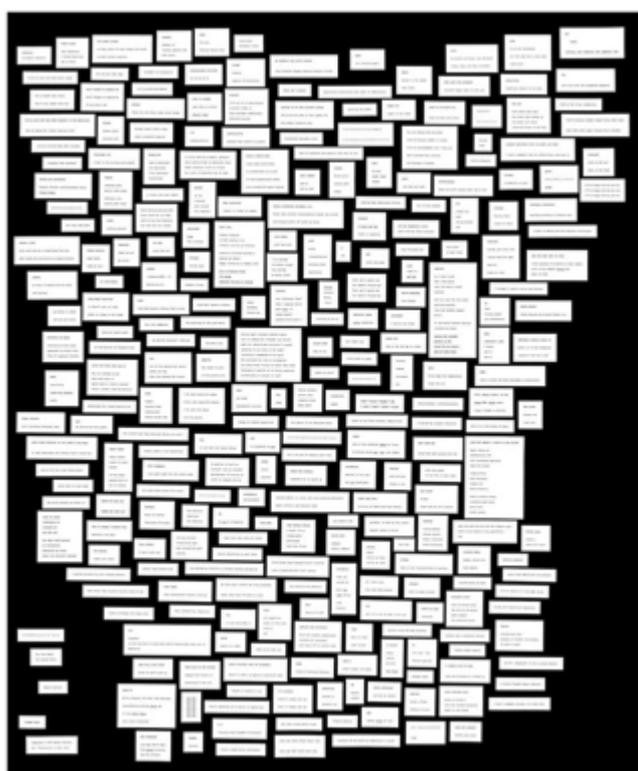


The Narco-Imaginary by Ramsey Scott

written by Joseph Houlihan | September 29, 2016



The Narco-Imaginary: Essays Under the Influence by Ramsey Scott
Ugly Duckling Presse, 2016
208 pages – [Ugly Duckling](#) / [Amazon](#)



Robert Grenier, Cambridge Mass

Avital Ronell notes that Walter Benjamin begins his essay, "Hashish in Marseilles," with a quotation from Baudelaire's *Les Paradis artificiels*.

Les Paradis artificiels includes Baudelaire's translation of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*.

"To locate 'his ownmost subjectivity,'" Ronell writes, "Thomas De Quincey cited Wordsworth."

No writing abstains; every text is written under the influence.

Language is the universal inebriant.

–Ramsey Scott, *The Narco-Imaginary*

The Narco-Imaginary offers a series of lyric essays on our shared obscurity. Scott outlines a clear lineage of travelers across the narco-imaginary (a term Scott defines repeatedly as the ambivalent influence of narcotics and trance-state experiments on modernism), but resists the temptation of general survey. The investigation is personal. And Scott draws mixed voices into conversation. He sends letters to Franklin W. Dixon, creator of *The Hardy Boys*. He sends letters to Sergeant Pepper. He follows the scrawls of Robert Grenier. He returns to Samuel R. Delany's NYC anecdotes of rapture. He muses on the tattered boomer allegiances in the gentrified West (Berkeley). He recalls Walter Benjamin, "To get closer to the riddle of bliss in rausch one must reconsider Ariadne's thread. What delight in the mere act of unwinding a skein...we go forward: but in doing so not only do we discover the bends of the cavern in which we venture forth, but rather we savor this happiness of discovery by virtue of that other rhythmical bliss which comes from unraveling a skein." Caverns, underground wells, dark places, places between dreaming and waking, unraveling skeins; these persist across the history of modernism. Movement into darkness and light demonstrates the erotic charge of avant-gardism, and the resulting constitutive effect of formal experimentation. But short of exhaustive, the collection breathes. It's a vital work that should necessarily be in conversation with past writing on dreams, memory, and hallucinations. From here, I went to De Quincey's correspondence with Wordsworth (a kind of long poem in its own right), María Sabina's *Selected Works* (courage against state violence) *The Great Fire of London* by Jacques Roubaud and *Dream I Tell You* by Hélène Cixous. *The Narco-Imaginary* thrives as part of an ongoing conversation; as such it's lyrical, productive, and lasting.