

The Pharmakon Symposium
New York University
Casa Italiana
Friday, 3 May 2019

We invite paper proposals that attempt to seriously engage with the topic of drugs, broadly defined—their cultural, literary, aesthetic, and philosophical ramifications.

In Ancient Greek the word for ‘drug’ is *pharmakon*, a secular or magical potion that can heal or harm the body. Like the modern English drug, it is a word for both medicine and poison, a site of deep desire and divisive social and political discourse. Derrida’s analysis of ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ positions writing itself as *pharmakon*, as a digression that is both toxic to and productive of knowledge. This symposium calls scholars to ‘use’ writing and the discursive techniques of their discipline(s) to critically engage with drugs, to digress on drugs through history and contemporary culture as the product and source, companion and subject of literature. While maintaining the *pharmakon* of Derrida’s analysis as titular inspiration, we also aim to expand our conversation beyond the realm of high theory to the material, social, and political effects of drugs in literature. To that end, we welcome disciplinary perspectives within and without literature and the humanities.

A non-exhaustive list of possible topics includes:

- Drugs as treatment for physical, psychological, and social ailments
- Drugs as recreation
- Drugs and race
- Drugs and violence
- Addiction and overdose
- Drugs and affect control/management
- Drugs and sex; contraception, inhibition, and erectile dysfunction
- Food, sex, exercise, gambling, internet use, and other behaviors with addictive capability
- Entheogens and spiritual/religious uses of drugs
- Tripping and the psychoactive effects of drugs
- The aesthetic and perceptual limits traced by psychotropic experience
- Control and regulation of drugs, the “War on Drugs,” drugs and policing
- Drug cultures: “cannabis culture,” “coffee culture,” “tea culture,” “drinking culture,” stoners, burn-outs, psychedelia
- Drug “epidemics”: crack, coke, and opioids
- The pharmaceutical industry and “big pharma”

Please submit abstracts of 300 words to pharmakon2019@gmail.com by March 15.