REVIEW

Francesca Guarino
Alcohol and the youth trend.
A sociological interpretation
Franco Angeli, Milano, 2010,
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   Recent research on alcohol consumption, especially among the young
would lead to a debacle from the numbers alone when grasping the
phenomenon in question. For example, when tackling the broad survey of
recent publications (Prina, Tempesta, 2010) from the present series, the
crucial importance of particular factors stand out. These are the social-
ising patterns in which the first experiences with alcohol arise and the
alcohol trajectory is built. There is also the purpose and meaning behind
drinking, the type of drinking and its association with other activities (for
example the coupling of food and wine). Finally, there are diverse and
subjective tolerance levels – which are innate but also 'topped up' or a
result of lengthy use and misuse – perceptions of risk, the market and its
different target groups. The underlying premise suggested by Guarino
does not seem isolated: drinking is a rational act even when it leads to
irrationality. The quantitative information does not suffice, (the author
discusses «tolerant inclusion among methods and techniques in social
research» (67)) without the outcome of meaning from research «of the
phenomenological matrix», (*ibidem*) on the subjective meaning which
people give to their drinking. This is formed by the intrinsic chosen
rationale behind their habits, on the relationship they have with the
beverage and tribe they drink it in and with. Moving in the same direction
one can alternatively refer to the conclusions reached by Charrier e
Cavalli (2010): the impossibility of outlining a collective quantitative data
on its comparability among the divergent youth realities. The book
unfolds without lapsing into the temptation of considering the actual
epistemological reasons to the exclusion of all others, starting if anything

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from that epidemiologic quantitative. The text illustrates and explores the sources and statistics to the full taking the opportunity to then research the subjective and social meaning behind youth drinking. Guarino proposes an intersection between a practice and a cultural and market material product, drinking and alcohol, and its audience – the young. She signals many factors from this long period: opaque boundaries, age range from 12-34 years old, and disengagement with a focus on the present in the absence of forward-planning. She intersects these points with drinking alcohol in its multiple guises and possibilities, and different representations of the youth cross-section (associated styles and cultures).

From the outset Guarino illustrates in her volume the polysemic alcoholic drink defining the substance as a «'mimetic' drug"» (10). It is

mainly because alcohol is also food, culture, an economic phenomenon, an agent with potential pathogenic effects, among many others, which are difficult to keep analytically distinct. This is something which complicates research focused on its consumption in line with an unambiguous perspective, control choices for example should be applied in an effective and reasonable manner (*ibidem*).

The author deserves praise for having developed all the individual aspects, such as the characteristics of alcohol mimesis, in the chapters of her book. However, it should be noted that any reference beyond the very concept of mimesis should be developed considering the importance placed and intrinsic nature of human knowledge. «The most archaic arrows of human knowledge are structured around the concept 'of mimesis', a term which indicates the actual ability of the living to assimilate something else» (Maurizi, 2004: 104). Mimesis, the analogical key to ontological assimilation in the world, which establishes relationships and connections throughout it, ends up as indefinable (Habermas, 1986) and therefore in its mimetic turn is key in sacred and mythological literature. Guarino does in fact suggest some references and forays of alcohol in the field of the sacred and religion. However, above all else, she lucidly reveals and follows the structure of mimesis launched in her introduction throughout her detailed analysis. This is evident not only when she profiles the substance – its supply and diffusion – but also when profiling the mimesis of the consumer. Since the concept of mimesis relates to the fluidity of myth, with the inability to apply logical Aristotelian principles of identity and difference, the structure of mimesis[1] is adapted to fit in with the majority of the aspects in the volume. Many of these are amply covered in the preceding volume of the review dedicated to psychoactive substances (Cipolla, 2007; Cipolla, 2008):

1. Cfr. voce "mimicry" in Cipolla C. (1997), *Epistemologia della tolleranza. III volume I-N*. FrancoAngeli, Milan, pp. 1748-1749.

- The normative aspects pushed towards prohibition shake through their consequences the same aims of the law, increasing the consumption of the substance and the feared damage to public health and safety.
- Although over the last thirty years the consumption of alcoholic drinks in Italy has halved, the average consumption per capita has in fact gone from113.7 litres in 1970 to 50.5 in 2003, «the number of people who drink has markedly grown» (26). This is due to the new consumers (women, young adults and teenagers).
- Diversification of the product with the actual occurrence and real mimesis catering to every target case. There are varied names, different features of product marketing (the mimetic insertion through universal symbols suggested by the advertising and packaging of the product), selected colours, tested flavours and duly-considered alcoholic strength;
- New form of intake ranging from binge-drinking to poli-consumption.
- Normalization – a phenomenon whereby alcohol is the precursor – and the most mimetic?
- The unsurprising uncertainty of meaning in a post-carbon society whereby alcohol facilitates and amalgamates relationships and the youth responses to the state of fear and anxiety before they enter into the risk culture. Indeed in celebrating, ritualising, and taking on extreme activities, the risk and the unforeseen exorcise fear derived from the widespread uncertainty and the multiple, collective feared calamities. These include economical, terrorist and environmental ones– and the overexposed dangers in the media on a personal level – crime, disease and accidents.
- Drinking in diverse subcultures is customarily managed by regulating the alcoholic strength. This system functions by protecting groups and individuals. The repercussions of drinking on the individual should remain within the group, (the harm does not warrant external intervention) as outside of it the person would lose out to alcohol.
- The breakdown of geographic patterns of subdivisions between a drinking and sober culture, as with among other things discussed by Room (2010): «all of Europe is more "soaked" as it consumes more alcohol per capita than almost any other part of the world (…) The picture of Europe is one of a substantial standardization in drinking habits, occurring over some decades» (Prina, Tempeste, 2010 236).

The author finishes her analysis with traditional theoretical application and referenced authors in her investigation of alcohol-based interaction, the rituality of transition and the language of alcohol. She concludes with concrete proposals for responsible drinking.

Finally, the author should be applauded for having looked for touch points between the sociological macro and micro perspectives, between structure and action. She has also aligned herself with the most to-date paradigms in the Persona school of sociology (Cesareo, Vaccarini, 2009).

However, the following observation should be noted: the excessive simplification of the relevant stakeholder's situation in relation to their alcohol intake to that «converging in attributing a positive meaning in alcohol consumption» (82). Furthermore, there is a missed opportunity to identify them «a greater reflexivity starting from the same socio-health policies demands greater coherence and transparency from all the stakeholders» (213). In the current literature on the subject the stakeholder extends to all of them. And knowingly or unknowingly, with more or less interest and force, legally or illegally, the stakeholder can determine the consequences of an organization's actions, or be affected by them[2]. However, this is not meant to penalise the text, but rather serve as a remark on its state of completion, especially as the forthcoming observation is the opinion of the review's author. And it is plausible this view differs to the one shared by the students of the subject more in line with the author's work.

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2. Let us reconsider the first definition by Freeman: «A stakeholder in an organization is (by its definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objective» [Freeman 1984 25].