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Sexuality Under the Influence:
The Queer Pleasure of Illicit Drugs in Transatlantic Gay and Lesbian Culture

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Recently, popular culture has been riveted by depictions of addiction, overdose, and recovery in multiple media formats. These representations obsess over a before-and-after concept aligning drug use strictly with death and destruction and recovery with health and happiness. This mimics traditional examples of drug users as anti-social found in stories rooted in moral panic ubiquitous in mainstream media. Most examples connect sexual exploration and drug use in many ways, arguing they are inherently dangerous and follow a trajectory ultimately ending in death. My work examines transgressive queer sexuality and drug use while questioning issues of culpability and castigation. Although there has been a surge of interest within academia around drug use, most critics focus on abuse and addiction, which is sometimes divorced from drugs altogether. This decision limits the narrative of drug use to the harm it creates in bodies, among people, and within communities. While this work is useful, it also

creates a rhetoric that obfuscates the ways in which drug use does not always fit within the narrative of addiction.

In the first chapter, I situate my project within the historical and cultural context of drugs, homosexual identity, illicit pleasures, and queer theory. Next, I trace how the medical discourse's reconfiguration of the drug user as contagious, and pathologizing the homosexual identity during the late Victorian period, are intricately connected. I argue the 1980s panic of AIDS as the "gay disease" is deeply rooted in these disease-like narrative precursors. Chapter three analyzes the crisis of representation in gay male circuit party culture while questioning the sensationalization of drug use and promiscuous sex. By turning to recent gay and lesbian fiction, I analyze representations of safe drug use and sexual exploration with guidance. In the final chapter, I argue that many prominent theorists have both ingested and digested illicit drugs out of curiosity and a quest for knowledge. Their work provides a strong cultural lens, based on Western ideology, through which to study accounts of drug use; however, their preoccupation with forcing the experience into empirical product-centric normative values of stable identity, time, and space ultimately fails.

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Chapter 1

Queerly Reading: Sex, Drugs, and Their Subjects

Western concepts of the twenty-first century are inundated with technology, more specifically, with the Internet, not only as a source for entertainment, but also for information. Typing the words "gay" and "drugs" into the most popular search engine, Google, brings up a 2003 online article from England's *The Guardian*, a major news source for the U.K., as the very first match. The title of the article is "Gay Lifestyle is Fueled by Drugs, Research Finds," while the second match is from the website About.com, which is devoted to answering users questions. A quick search through Google comes up with this blurb: "*About.com* is a valuable resource for content that helps people to solve the large and small needs of everyday life." A subsection of this site is devoted to answering questions about gay life. Among other articles devoted to addiction, the link takes the user to one of its responses to a question about what 420 means, and it unapologetically includes the following: "gay men don't just state their personality or relationship preferences on online profiles, many also indicate their stance on drug use." To put this naturalization of gay lifestyle inherently including, or even being entirely reliant on drug use, into perspective, when one substitutes "lesbian" for "gay," the top results are about addiction. In a surprising twist, combining the word "heterosexuals" with "drug," produces top results that are all about HIV and AIDS.

So why is it that transgressive sexuality is always/already paired with recreational drug use in history and culture? Why has this association persisted even today? Is this combination evident in all aspects of the queer community? And, most importantly, why does this matter? I argue that this does matter, not only for gay men or the queer community, but for society as a whole because policies and laws are informed by the way drugs are framed. Here, it is useful to turn to Paul Manning's introduction on drugs' role in popular culture:

> [I]t is important to retain the distinction between *representations* of drug use through media and cultural institutions, and the cultural practices of those actually consuming drugs. In other words, an examination of the place of drug consumption in popular culture involves a consideration of both mainstream media representations and the 'real' cultural practices of ordinary people. (4)

Thus, this project interrogates both fictional representations and those ostensibly about the actual "cultural practices." In addition, I explore mind-altering drugs' connection to queer theory and subjectivity. Previously, the coupling of queer sexuality with drug use has been mostly explored through the lens of drug addiction. Many scholars, notably Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Halberstam, and Susan Zieger, have approached this topic; however, the current cultural climate, being both homophobic and drug-phobic, has severely limited the work thus far. Those few who choose to study drug use while avoiding drug addiction have rarely, if ever, looked at its connection to queer theory and culture. One major exception is

sociologist Kane Race and his work on circuit parties, HIV, and drugs, both for illicit pleasure and implicit health. Although some works have looked at different groups' use of drugs—including but not limited to, women, children, multiple ethnicities, and the working class—analysis of the connection to queer theory and gay/lesbian sexuality is lacking.

Even with the current trend in queer studies to resist societal values that are invested in the "normalization" of the queer subject, few scholars explore the "queerness" of drugs and drug use that appears along with queer sexual subjects. Surprisingly, even as it interrogated homophobic cultural practices, the Gay and Lesbian community, in its quest for neoliberal access to tolerance, moves toward drug-phobic normalization, blindly accepting nineteenth and twentieth century inflated and morally driven rhetoric conflating drug use with addiction. The relative absence of investigative work about the depiction of queer sexuality and drug use in any media is alarming.

In my study, I explore Transatlantic examples of queer subjectivity, gay culture of pleasure, and drug use in film, literature, and purportedly nonfictional accounts in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. I begin by looking back at pivotal Victorian fin-de-siècle works, and end with a foray into queer theory and its application to the mind-altering experience of drugs. I am limiting the research to works that are easily accessible and widely read or viewed because of their greater engagement, and impact, with popular culture and legislation. Some examples I chose not to include are those on the periphery of culture. In addition, I chose not to

include works that are mainly about addiction, such as William S. Burroughs famous text, *Naked Lunch* (1959) and lesser known novel, *Junky* (1953). Within the twentieth century, I have avoided metaphorical depictions that could be read as either about queer sexuality or drug use because I believe that the concrete examples provide a rich and varied history of the topic and make clear the implied connections formed in the late nineteenth century.

One of the fictional accounts that I investigate in chapter two is Alan Hollinghurst's Man Booker award-winning novel *The Line of Beauty* (2004), which does anything but shy away from transgressive desires in the main characters, Wani and Nick. The novel is not concerned with justifying the couple's drug use. Instead, the experience is described along with their intense sexual encounters. Hollinghurst also takes into account the negative aspects of using drugs, including intimacy only accessed through cocaine use. Although loneliness frequently besets Nick, it is during their intimate drug use that Nick's character feels the intensity of these emotions. Other authors, such as Armistead Maupin, describe drug use as reaffirming intimacy and allowing freedom. Maupin's series *Tales of the City* (1978) rarely spends time relating the drug experience itself. Instead, his work takes for granted that the audience can imagine what his characters are feeling, whether it is happy, loving, confused, or excited. Conversely, Will Self's *Dorian* (2002) rewrites Oscar Wilde's infamous novel and frames drugs as an example of moral depravity. While the repetitiveness of the drug use in *Dorian* would seem to imply addiction, I

would argue this is only true for the character of Baz, not for Dorian himself who indulges in drugs and gratuitous sexuality only as a sign of his inhumanity.

Many of the examples come from mainstream media, which draws a large audience with diverse values and beliefs. For example, each country's respective version of the series *Queer as Folk*, British airing in 1999-2000 and in the United States in 2000-2005, would be familiar to a significant percentage of the population. The U.S. version of the television series relies on MTV-esque film shots, emphasizing nudity, sex, and drug use while constantly changing and moving the camera. The bright lights and attractiveness of the men, along with the upbeat music, imply something to be celebrated and perhaps even desired. Here, it is useful to compare the British version alongside the American. Without resorting to a compare-contrast method, I link the divergences in the different responses that these countries have towards the representation of drug users. Whereas the United Sates has historically embraced criminalization of drug use, Britain has traditionally focused on harm-reduction strategies. In addition, I examine the documentary *When Boys Fly* (2002), which drew a mostly gay viewership since it was screened at Gay and Lesbian film festivals in many major cities across the globe.

I am able to explore the diverse shaping of queer sexual identity and drug use that appears, and in doing so, reveal how the depictions speak to their audiences in differently nuanced ways. These portrayals inform national and local policies on drug use and addiction, including its effect on the homosexual community. It is clear that there are strikingly different approaches reflecting an underlying moral belief

when drug use is depicted as completely devoid of risk or, conversely, evidence of deadly addiction. Obviously, there is no claim to a unified response within the Queer community on either side. However, multiple media representations explore both possibilities, and in some cases they even suggest the idea that there is a middle ground found through risk reduction and moderation. Analyzing self-representations, from an insider's viewpoint, along with an outsider's, allows my dissertation to complicate traditional studies of queer cultures that rest on a "reactionary only" hypothesis. Furthermore, I show that different typologies of queer sexuality and drug use vary in acceptability according to the distance the audience perceives itself from the actual subject matter. The difference in receptiveness might be linked to the type of contact the audience has encountered with regard to drug use in actual life. My argument is that certain representations are sustainable and suitable for specific forms of media.

Sometimes drug use itself is conflated not only with addiction but also with HIV and AIDS. One billboard ad found in West Hollywood in 2007 simply states, "I tried Crystal Meth and got HIV." Of course, the implication here skips over the actual activity—unprotected sex with someone who is HIV positive—that is the real risk. Later, after pressure from within the GLBTQ community, this ad was changed to: "I lost my common sense to METH. Then I got HIV." Even though this is an improvement, the ad is still problematic in what it is willing to represent and the direction the connections take. The ads conflate gay life not only with addiction, but also with disease. This becomes even clearer when one program in Britain aired on

BBC is considered. Similarly in the United States, a commonly held cultural belief is that a large percentage of gay men use methamphetamine. The television program in question, disturbingly entitled, *The Trouble with Gay Men* (2006), is a documentary that uses flawed data from a limited sample of gay men at a London gym, which wrongly declares twenty percent of gay men were using methamphetamines. This begs the question, why were these statistics presented as fact when many scientists called the study biased and skewed? Even more troubling is that the documentarian, Simon Fanshawe, identifies as gay, and yet he still willingly presents a homophobic portrayal as proof of depravity within the male homosexual community (Fanshawe). This perpetuates society's belief that gay men are more likely to suffer methamphetamine addiction, even though later studies reported less than three percent used the drug once or twice within a year and less than one percent claimed to be regular users of methamphetamines (Hickson 36).

The LGBTQ community is currently grappling not only with the harms of methamphetamine (crystal meth), but also with the best way to help individuals who become addicted. There is a need for work tracing the connections between the long-standing belief of homosexuality as immoral that informs drug addiction programs and their attempts for recuperation through a specifically homonormative narrative. Usually, among other things, this includes the addict regaining ties to family, attempting to be in a stable and monogamous relationship, and engaging in limited sexual activity. These aspects enforce a strictly heterosexual notion of kinship, and they regulate sexual relationships into long-term monogamy, which

works best for the nation-state. In addition, as of yet, scholarship has not focused on the dual transgression of queer sexuality and drug use resisting society's value of productivity. It appears that a complex relationship exists between drug use and queer sexuality; hopefully, understanding this pairing may lead to resistance of homophobic representations.

In order to proceed with this project, we must first decide what we mean by the phrases queer subject, gay culture, and even what drug use itself translates to. Since its inception in the 1990s, queer theory has struggled to define itself, attempting to avoid harmful limitations and division that gay and lesbian studies were critiqued for enforcing through traditional taxonomy. A good place to begin defining queer is through recent theoretical work that is invested in resisting normativity. I would like to look at the spirit behind the term that Judith Halberstam delivers in her work *A Queer Time and Place* (2005). She argues:

> If we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity and come closer to understanding Foucault's comment in "Friendship as a Way of Life" that "homosexuality threatens people as a 'way of life' rather than as a way of having sex. (1)

To some degree, I agree with the notion that she suggests, that queer is a sensibility which is positioned against normativity. Halberstam defines queer time as "one [that] leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity,

risk/safety inheritance" and queer space as "place-making practices within postmodernism," which involves the counter-culture of queerness applying to drug use and also, as she points out, to addiction (*Queer* 6). She then asserts "queer" refers "to nonnormative logics and organization of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (*Queer* 6). Queer is at the nexus of these four descriptors. However, we must remember that she is arguing for divorcing this term from the realm of sexuality, and instead tie it to a sensibility that challenges the naturalness of normativity. Even so, for drugs and for homosexuality, it is the site of pleasure that requires the increased surveillance and policing.

Many have attempted to describe what is meant by the term "drug." The word is laden with moral, political, historical, and other baggage conjured up with the concept. Although much of the discourse around drug use would like to set itself apart from its machinations, one theorist more honestly suggests, "Ultimately, discourses which claim to know drugs and their effects, that set out to identify them and to say what is and what is not a drug, to classify them (according to various taxonomies—legal, pharmaceutical, medical and so forth) and to control them, collectively share in the responsibility for the modern trauma relating to drugs" (Boothroyd 19). Culpability around drug harm on every level cannot be divorced from the way we, as a society, choose to frame them. Jacques Derrida argues, "As with addiction, the concept of drugs supposes an instituted and an institutional definition: a history is required, and a culture, conventions, evaluations, norms an entire network of intertwined discourses, a rhetoric, whether explicit or elliptical"

(20). One way to consider this is by agreeing that our concept of a drug "depends as much upon its social meaning and the way in which people use it as on its pharmacological or physiological properties" (Gossop 2). In this way, drugs escape the previous modernist concept of drugs, one that transfers the meaning to an assumed experience that is repeated without considering the person or other objects of influence. Time and time again, studies have proven this concept to be wrong. Instead, recent studies of drugs and drug use insist on context. A leading authority of addiction and drug use in Britain, Michael Gossop, assuredly argues:

> The way we think about drugs reflects our understanding of the social world around us, and as a result the social context influences three central aspects of drug taking. It influences what is defined as a drug and what is not; it influences the way a person behaves after taking a drug; and it influences their subjective experience of the drug effects. We cannot hope to understand the complexities of drug taking by studying either the drugs or those who take them in isolation from the social context. (35)

This explanation aids in understanding *how* society comes to define what a drug is, however, it does not clarify *what* is meant by the term. As most critics have argued, many drugs, such as caffeine and alcohol, cause a "refusal to acknowledge that we are all drug takers" (Gossop 3). Conversely, some substances, such as kava, alter perception but are not widely used or even made illegal. So, then, what exactly is it about drug use that society interprets in such a way that it induces a moral panic?

Even though Eve Sedgwick's chapter on drugs in her book *Tendencies* is limited to ideas of addiction, it provides insightful thoughts on how we specifically conceive drug use. Sedgwick declares that addiction is anathema to United States culture because the addict is insufficiently free; the subject is under the influence and cannot express free will (*Tendencies* 132). When discussing fin-de-siècle works, Sedgwick claims addiction as "both a camouflage and an expression for the dynamics of male same-sex desire and its prohibitions"(*Tendencies* 135). While I certainly agree with this assertion, it is important to distinguish what in these pairings is about addiction and what is about drug use and the experience. These details allow us to better understand the difference in perception of "desires" as opposed to "needs." She moves forward, adding that these works:

> [B]egin by looking like stories of erotic tensions between men, and end up as cautionary tales of solitary substance abusers. The two new taxonomies of the addict and the homosexual condensed many of the same issues for late nineteenth-century culture: the old antisodomitic opposition between something called nature and that which is *contra naturam* blended with a treacherous apparent seamlessness into a new opposition between substances that are *natural* (e.g., "food") and those that are artificial (e.g., "drugs"); and hence into the characteristic twentieth-century way of distinguishing desires themselves between those considered natural, called "needs," and those considered artificial, called "addictions." (*Tendencies* 135-6)

Here, it is clear how culture leaps between the concept of drugs as artificial, and then, as this passage shows, moves straight to addiction. The difficulty with this slippage is made even more complicated by the fact that today, addiction is phrased and understood as a *need*; the need for the next dosage, the need to relieve the pain, the need for help. The concept of desire is better opposed to the concept of need. The desire for the drug more fully engages the idea of volition that Sedgwick is interested in dismantling. The point here is not to simply go through and replace the term "addiction" with "drug use;" instead, we can delineate what aspects are pleasure and what ones reflect a need.

Section 1: Historical and Theoretical Pairing of Drugs and Sexuality

Michel Foucault's exploration of 19th century shifting sexual taxonomies, which sounds remarkably similar to the medical formation of the addict during the same period, allows this project to examine ideas of identity formation and power that influence the process. What is evident is that the disease-like narratives currently in use are just one example of the cyclical repetitions of moral panic that inform homophobic rhetoric from the past and unto the present. The reappearance of the disease metaphor linked to drug use is a model that was also employed in the 1980s around gay men and the AIDS crisis in the United States and Britain. Similarly, associations of illegal drug use are perceived to be stronger around gay men than they are around gay women. In fact, my original concept for this body of work was to cover representations of lesbian drug use as equally as I did for gay

men. However, depictions of this in popular media are sorely lacking. This is not to imply that lesbians do not do drugs; instead, it is a critique of the mainstream media having trouble picturing it. My project interrogates the relationship between media depictions of drug use and queer sexual subjects that inform policies and laws. Fears of contagious pleasure-centered transgressions of the law, I would argue, are uniquely paired together in transatlantic culture. My research looks at how gay men and gay male characters are associated with drug use in experiences that resist the nation-state and its policing; both engage in pleasure that is itself transgressive in a way that, perhaps, intensifies the pleasure itself. The question driving this project is: what is the nature of these Transatlantic representations of illicit drugs as queer to the nation-state, and how do the politics of pleasure legitimize current laws and policies in the twenty-first century linked to fears of contagion?

The contagion metaphor connected to sexual and drug identities is highly dependent upon the medical and juridical discourses that Foucault analyzes in his discussion on shifting taxonomies in the nineteenth century. *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* contribute to understanding how and why society shifts from first labeling and judging of acts, to the surveillance and regulation of identities. According to Foucault, criminal behavior must be depicted as something very unlikely to be engaged in by normal, productive members of society, and as such, those who transgress break their pact to be law-abiding citizens with the rest of the nation; instead, the subject becomes a "criminal." After the fact, it is implied that something innate in the person predisposes him or her to this unlawful

behavior. I believe this is crucial to understanding society's opinion toward those who use drugs and those with queer sexual identities. Specifically, this helps to explain how representations of drug use as immoral are easily conflated with queer sexuality, and why both are discussed in terms of disease.

The type of drugs commonly linked to gay culture in media share three aspects: first, they chemically "alter perception, mood or other psychological states" in ways that are pleasurable (Gossop 2); second, likely for the above reason, they are feared as contagious and addictive; and third, they are illegal, and therefore, considered immoral. Of course, as with any definition, this listing can be problematic for several reasons. So, then why narrow the topic in this way? All three of these aspects are inherent to policing pleasure for the nation-state. However, even understanding these close ties, one aspect that cannot be emphasized enough is the act of transgression and the illicit pleasure in resisting power as enforced through medical, juridical, and social institutions. There are many ways to frame why drug use is important in relation to non-normative sexualities. First, it is important to separate how theories of drugs in culture, and the theorization of pleasure, are different from theories of addiction. Next, I have paired literature about drugs of pleasure with those that converge with illicit sexual experiences in cultural discourses. Finally, I want to look at the unique ways that these two topics overlap and what representations result from their shared conceptualization that, as of yet, has not been researched.

Section 2: Why Do Drugs Matter?

Transgression of current restrictions and prohibitions placed on pleasure become one part of the thrilling aspect to the experience of using illegal drugs. Although Foucault does not believe in the repression hypothesis, he does argue that society perceives power under these terms. Foucault rationalizes:

> We are informed that if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required. (*An Introduction* 5)

Foucault reasons that since power is understood in this way, subjects who wish to engage in resistance do so by breaking the law and changing the discourse, the latter part of which this body of work tries to do as well. In turn, this resistance is itself conceived in terms of pleasure (*An Introduction* 45). These transgressions are layered with multiple levels of pleasure: pleasure in use, pleasure in surveillance and enforcement of laws, and then pleasure in resistance. Does this mean that the legal status of drugs has changed the terms of pleasure to those more suited to "repressed" minority groups? Perhaps so—after all, the very act of disobedience to the law, even engaged in by large groups of people, repositions the subject in

relation to the nation-state; if caught, the person is assigned the identity of "criminal."

The location of illicit pleasure within medical discourse is also used in juridical discourse in order to reinforce certain sanctioned behaviors while preventing others. This has been maintained by current power structures even though homosexuality itself as an identity is no longer illegal. As others note, "Extreme pushes for medicalization and seemingly opposite pushes for criminalization both serve as powerful homeostatic devices that support social order" (White 47). These methods of social control have been deployed against those who engage in illicit pleasure, which is labeled thusly to preserve the status quo. Paul Manning agrees when he shows "distinction between licit and illicit drugs is maintained through cultural definitions that are socially and politically administered" (4).

It is useful to break down aspects found in the conception of a contagious disease when considering its application to drug use and sexual identity; firstly, they are positioned as a threat to a normal healthy body; secondly, they are said to have the ability to easily spread to others; thirdly, they are often believed to be a sign of moral decrepitude; and finally, each are seen as especially threatening to the child in society. Thus, while explaining homophobic connections made between sexual promiscuity and disease, Simon Watney cogently offers up the deeper underlying messages that are being tapped into in order to justify the moral panic that the media stirs. He surmises, "It is not the least surprising that those attempting to

manipulate conscious attitudes should play on themes which possess deeper, unconscious resonances" (*Policing* 42). In other words, it should not be a startling revelation to find this rhetoric resists being pushed aside. Instead, it is transferred into a new socially acceptable outlet while still retaining its moralistic roots that justify a phobia. This, in turn, allows for stricter policing measures as is seen in the current drug rhetoric as a moral panic. In labeling the reactionary nature against drug use, I am not arguing that addiction does not exist, nor am I arguing that drugs do not harm bodies. Instead, I want to examine the logic behind the excavation of the pleasure of drug use and the exaggeration of its abuse. As one critic writes:

> Calling something a 'moral panic' does not imply that this something does not exist or happened at all and that reaction is based on fantasy, hysteria, delusion and illusion or being duped by the powerful. Two related assumptions, though, require attention—that the attribution of the moral panic label means that the 'thing's' extent and significance has been exaggerated (a) in itself (compared with other, more reliable, valid and objective sources) and/or (b) compared with other, more serious problems. (Cohen viii)

Thus, drug use and homosexual identity both engage in pleasures that are frightening for their ability to spread, and the case around any harm they produce, both to the body and the nation-state, must be overstated.

These same anti-social descriptions are what society finds distasteful in drug use. The argument is that the pleasures experienced during drug use are solitary

and artificial. The experience, because it is chemically derived, is challenged and ignored. For Derrida, it is transparent as to why drugs are made illegal:

> Anyway, as I think we've made clear, drugs in general are not condemned for the pleasure they bring, but rather because this aphrodisiac is not the right one: it leads to suffering and to the disintegration of the self, in short, it desocializes. It belongs to the diabolical couple, pleasure and suffering, denounced in every indictment of drugs. (37)

The language is identical; what defines the term queer also dictates the way society views drug use. What is most useful in Derrida's list should not be overlooked; the pleasure is "not the right one." This, then, is labeled a "problem" in juridical and medical discourses and invokes surveillance and policing through institutions: "The social and political utilities that must be achieved in the linguistic construction of the 'alcohol problem' or 'drug problem' include defining and responding to deviance in a way that promotes social order and the interests of existing social institutions" (White 46-7). This is linked to the idea that the "problem" is contagious to the healthy population. By concentrating on the pleasure that drugs represent, it is easy to recall that in the disease model this pleasure is insidious because, even though it is anti-social in nature, it beckons for everyone to partake.

Section 3: Hooked on Addiction

Today, it is safe to say the discourses around drug use are always/already haunted by the rhetoric of addiction. In fact, I would argue this conflation, which began towards the end of the nineteenth century with the inception of this new identity, the addict, has continued into the twenty-first century largely uninterrupted. Timothy Hickman explains, "'Addiction' did not 'exist alongside' an older, voluntary notion of habitual drug use, because the term contained both the concepts within itself" (9). Although he is still discussing habitual use, Hickman astutely understands the slippage between volitional drug use and addiction. However, this is not the only reason for the dearth in drug-centric work that avoids the ever-haunting presence of addiction. Many critics have noted the state sponsored censorship that limits any discussion of drugs in the current cultural climate (Brodie and Redfield 14).

There are crucial and unique characteristics of drug use that are lost when it becomes addiction. First, without idolizing the concept of "free will," addiction is about loss of control, or will, as opposed to a volitional desire, even as we admit desire itself is constructed for us in many ways. Second, addiction is a repetitive behavior that is done in order to avoid, or relieve, either physical or mental pain, while use of drugs involves pleasure. Third, addiction is presented in terms of imprisonment, or as a predictable cycle, whereas drug users describe their pleasure based in an escape from normative experiences, sensations, and perceptions. With addiction, the subject loses authority over his or her experiences involving drug use,

which is different from the drug user who is allowed some control over representation. Because the subject cannot be trusted, Sedgwick argues, everyone else is an authority on the addict's behavior, above and beyond any self-diagnosis (*Tendencies* 131). It is unfortunate that a discussion on drugs must first spend so much time escaping the clutches of addiction, but perhaps a detailed discussion of the differences is the only way to exorcise its overbearing presence.

The language of addiction has many roots, and Susan Zieger's recent work of gender, addiction, race and sexuality focuses on the narratives that crop up around addiction, tracing the usage of the word to its nineteenth century origins within literature where it can also be read as a metaphor for queer sexuality; however, while some of the descriptions are unique to her subject matter, others reflect ideas of the drug experience itself. Again, this could be because the time period was struggling with how to frame this new concept, but it is clear that the drug experience was seen as "abnormal, unproductive, over-embodied solitude" (24). That the medical concept of homosexuality itself was a compulsion, and considered a perverted one at that, more than supports her argument of addiction (10), but if we disengage drug use from addiction, we can see an intriguing difference that tells us why the drug experience itself was feared.

This same theory is suggested for queer sexuality. Watney highlights the struggle of the "normal" person against their "disgust," and the seeming ease with which it is apparently over-ridden. If this were the case, and one accepted a contagion/seduction model of homosexuality, then everyone is at risk from

pleasures which remain too awful to name and too dangerously seductive for the text to dwell on (23). Here, then, is the threat to "normal" subjects and the fear of a contagious disease, drug use, and queer sexuality to which everyone is innately vulnerable. Again, the pleasure itself cannot be enunciated but instead it is poisonous even while being difficult to resist.

Section 4: Unproductively Queer

Leo Bersani, along with Watney, provides a trajectory on how the immorality of these issues transforms into the characteristics of a disease model, which keeps appearing, barely altered in form, within discourses about the queer community. Their work provides detailed descriptions of how the popular rhetoric during the AIDS crisis simply justified pre-existing homophobic ideas. Bersani argues that fear allows for regulation, which is evident in sexuality and drug use. Building on these concepts, I explore mainstream depictions of queer sexuality and drug use that are intended to induce fear or disgust. These examples usually end with the queer subject's recuperation and containment, either through reform or death, which re-stabilizes heteronormative authority. One last crucial point that the authors make is that this regulation is disguised as if it is for the marginalized subject's "own good." In this way, oppression is presented as a moral imperative, which, in turn, demands that the nation-state prohibits and regulates acts and identities.

Theories of drug use often deploy language reflecting a decidedly queer aspect. For example, I am interested in Jacques Derrida's definition of drugs that is

inclusive of the "cultural baggage" which, he says, must be considered when working on this topic. Derrida argues that drugs already come with a history, morals, rhetoric and discourses. Furthermore, he discusses the anti-social aspects of the drug experience explaining the repugnance that culture, as a whole, must express. He explains, "From the prohibitionist, then, we hear of a need to protect society from everything we associate with drug use: irresponsibility, nonwork, irrationality, unproductivity, delinquency, promiscuity, illness and the social costs it implies, and more generally, the destruction of the social bond" (32). As the examples show, each of these aspects clings to a queer subjectivity as understood in our society. Queer subjects approach pleasure in ways that have historically been labeled as "unnatural," or at best, unsanctioned. Although no longer illegal, queer subjects are often labeled immoral and the law has made many attempts to punish sexual acts and identities that are outside of the normative. Finally, as some critics have argued, queer subjects perceive a different relationship to society and its expectations. In this way, queer subjects are said to have an altered perception. This elucidation is crucial to my own work that interrogates the association of queer sexuality with drug use. Protection of the "natural," or normal, body fits within past and present discourses fearful of queer sexuality.

Queer theorists lay the groundwork of how drug use itself is queer to current ideas of subjectivity. Here, I believe, Judith Halberstam can shed some light through her book *In a Queer Time and Place*. She invokes drugs as a way for the subject to step outside of normative time and place. Additionally, Halberstam points to notions

of reproductive time as specifically heteronormative. This notion opens up the dialogue for new interpretations of drug use as actually engaging in queer experiences of time and space that so often appear in my examples on the subject. I have already asserted that illicit pleasure of drug experiences, in and of themselves, are policed and linked to queer sexuality, but how exactly do they resist being recuperated into normative functioning? Certain features of drug use under consideration clearly share aspects of what we define as queer, and these traits are the antithesis to a productive centered nation-state as it is framed today. They are both said to be nonsocial, nonproductive, and self-shattering in ways that actually appear as a threat to social order itself. Second, closely aligned with the first, is the idea that they resist reproductive futurism, which is glorified and magnified in the nation-state. Finally, queer subjectivity and drug use engage in new non-Western epistemologies through temporal, spatial, and perceptional distortion and reordering that is not beneficial, or even accessible, to nonusers.

Bersoni and Edelman suggest, as a consequence of society's reshaping of homosexuality under heteronormative values that now, more than ever, it is essential for queer subjects to challenge productive and social ideology. Current work in queer theory has embraced the homophobic terms assigned, insisting that "queer" represents traits that are essentially "anti-communitarian, self-shattering and anti-identitarian" and this "produces a counter-intuitive but crucial shift in thinking away from projects of redemption, reconstruction, restoration, and reclamation and towards what can only be called an anti-social, negative and anti-

relational theory of sexuality" (Halberstam "Anti-Social" 140). Although Leo Bersani argues all sex reflects these characteristics, "homo-sex and receptive sex" are most strongly thought of in these terms.

In 2004, Lee Edelman released his controversial work *No Future* in which he asserts queer theory should embrace its position as antithesis to reproductive futurism to challenge the idolization of "the child," and in doing so, reject as well the values this imagined innocence uses to morally restrict the rights of real subjects. Edelman defines reproductive futurism as a term "that impose[s] an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heternormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations" (2). Queer, then, is outside of this configuration and constantly situated as against it. For Edelman, this is as it should be. Others, including Halberstam, urge for a rejection of these white middle-class heterosexual values. Drug use also situates itself against deferred pleasure. Instead of sacrificing the here and now for an ever-distant future return, drugs demand instant gratification where payment, whether physical or mental, is due later.

Futurism is not the only temporal or organizational difference between normative experiences and those of the queer subject and drug user. In fact, some claim that these laden epistemological encounters test the very fabric of existence. While this may seem overly dramatic, there are very real challenges that "queer time" brings to the status quo. Edelman claims the responsibility "must fall on the

fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself" (13). Queer sexuality and drug use lead to new ways of knowing and living that fall outside of normal perception.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari also fall victim to future productivity when they explain how an addict's experience cannot be useful to himself. Their concern is "whether drugs have sufficiently changed the general conditions of space and time perception so that nonusers can succeed in passing through the holes in the world and (follow) the lines of flight at the very place where means other than drugs become necessary" (286). Of course, these epistemologies are only necessary if the experience must mean something in the traditional Western notions of mastering knowledge. The difficulty, here, is in the "sense" they try to apply to an experience that is labeled "nonsense." The pair asserts:

> Drug addicts may be considered as precursors or experimenters who tirelessly blaze new paths of life, but their cautiousness lacks the foundation for caution. So they either join the legion of false heroes who follow the conformist path of a little death and a long fatigue. Or, what is worse, all they will have done is make an attempt only nonusers or former users can resume and benefit from, secondarily rectifying the always aborted plane of drugs, discovering through drugs what drugs lack for the construction of a plane of consistency. (286)

First, they repeat and, in doing so, reify culture's slippage from drug experience to addiction. The drug experience itself is what opens up "new paths of life," or epistemologies, not the addict who is locked into a rigid cyclical existence. However, the real fault in this argument is the demand that the drug user produce anything at all, but especially anything that can be used by the normative and obedient subject of the nation-state. As we have already seen, this is a fruitless endeavor; it would be just as if we demanded that queer reproduce itself. There is an inherent conflict in the way these theorists understand these terms and what, then, they expect the experience to provide. The following project theorizes a different framework of drugs, gay culture, and queer subjectivity.

Section 5: A Roadmap for the Trip to Follow

In chapter two, "'What Strange Heavens and What Dull Hells': The Question of Influence and New Epistemologies Within Intoxicating Homosexual Spaces," I explore the disease model thrust forward in literature and rhetoric around drug use and sexualities at the turn of the century. It is unsurprising that the two are often represented in the same way and linked to the same fear-based cultural narratives. Delving into the imperial need for an outsider, I will explore how both acts and identities become framed as immoral and degenerative. In order to do so, I look at Oscar Wilde's infamous novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Many academic works have suggested that addiction and secretive homosexuality are both implied in his tale. However, this propensity towards immorality exists before the repetitive

behavior replaces willful indulgence. In other words, my work explores what takes place around pleasure and influence instead of the need to relieve pain. In addition, I explore the pleasurable aspects associated with these episodes of transgression. Although much of this chapter will focus on fin-de-siècle works, I also connect these representations with other, more current works of fiction, some of which shamelessly embrace illicit pleasure exploration. Traditionally, the self-reporting of drug use has existed mostly in the autobiography. However, this format depends on the confession and contrition of past behavior, actions from which the subject now has distanced himself. What is unique about this category in my work is that it embraces drug use as part of the described experiences. The portrayal of drug use and sexuality exists but it is not emphasized. . These representations depend upon the audience for filling in some of the gaps and fissures. At other times, the encounters are depicted realistically, drawing the audience in through recognition and identification with the experience.

The third chapter, "'What Will They Think of Us?' Crisis of Representation in Circuit and Club Culture," delves into glamorized portrayals of sexual freedom and drug use. This category is also closely linked to the disease model, even though it appears to be its polar opposite, by insisting on reactionary escapism. These examples are sometimes made for a mainstream audience and are more invested in sensationalizing the two behaviors instead of castigating them. In this case, the media's targeted audience is those who may have a more positive outlook toward homosexuality itself but who might be outside of the depicted community's actions.

This category has similar historical roots with the previous chapter, but it also has connections to 1970s disco club culture that glorified celebrity drug use and gay culture. In these examples, the subject matter is not necessarily concerned with depicting reality even though it may make this claim. Instead, titillating enjoyment of the on screen behavior is emphasized through a voyeuristic distance. This type of drug use and sexuality is best displayed on film. The scenes lend themselves to a voyeurism allowing the audience to remain unscathed and seemingly innocent. In addition, visual aspects provide a glitzy makeover of reality. Because the audience, for the most part, is unfamiliar with drug use, these examples are less genuine and more based on stereotype and societal fears.

The final chapter entitled "'Who are You?' Identity Formation in the Men of Letters and Queer Subjects," exposes the failure of Men of Letters to make meaning of mind-altering experiences through traditional Western epistemology. This is clearly based on masculine notions of work, (re)productivity, and stability. Here, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) provides a counter-narrative that values the challenges to normative notions of identity, desire, time, and place. It embraces the "queerness" of the mind-altering experience itself and resists normative bio-politics that demand the subject participate in the productivity of the nation-state. This is not to imply the literature is "pro-drug use," rather, these examples try to show how drugs function in the queer community. Often, the drug use is paired with desire and erotic feelings seeking expression through touch and intimacy. Through these examples, I show how a work can appeal to the imagination of a mainstream

audience while speaking to a queer community invested in resisting the urge to conform to normative values.

Chapter Two

"What Strange Heavens and What Dull Hells": The Question of Influence and New Epistemologies Within Intoxicating Homosexual Spaces

In 2008, California voters were faced with twelve propositions, ranging from the better treatment of farm animals to encouraging renewable sources of energy. However, one proposition gained national attention, both before and after the results were announced. Proposition 8 was added to the ballot in order to eliminate the newly established right for same-sex couples to marry in the state of California. Both sides spent millions of dollars campaigning; in fact, it broke the record in amount spent on a state proposition. In the end, proposition 8 passed by 600,000 votes and the right for same-sex couples to get married in the state of California was taken away (Smart Voter). While some were shocked by this announcement, many others pointed to a long history of regulating sexual identity through legislation. At the same time, another proposition about a different, yet historically connected, type of transgressive pleasure failed by a much larger margin. Proposition 5 had a significant sixty percent of the vote against it and was defeated. The purpose of this proposition was to change the way the state handled non-violent drug offenses. Supporters of the change wanted to invest in treatment programs for those arrested for possession instead of sending the offenders to prison. This would, in fact, reconstitute these transgressions as a social or medical problem instead of a strictly criminal one. Both of these propositions dealt with marginalized citizens of the state

whose desires and pleasures are first monitored, and then limited, through normative institutions and laws, which, in turn, are based strongly on moralistic values instead of scientific fact. However, there was no national outcry after Proposition 5 failed to pass. This may be because homosexuality has already been decriminalized, but drugs and sexuality share a history of control through medical and juridical power; both are positioned as threatening to the nation. So, why is it that society refuses to relinquish control and surveillance of those who engage in what is deemed illicit pleasures?

A survey of popularly acclaimed gay and lesbian themed novels of sexual, along with drug, exploration reveals a shameless fascination with transgressing normative ideas regarding acceptable forms of pleasure along with a predilection for exploring new epistemologies. This is in direct refutation of traditional representation dating from the turn of the century depicting both illicit sexuality and drug use, or influence, as monstrous, contagious, and deadly. By rejecting these narratives of drug use, which end in addiction or death, the newer representations provide a space to honestly depict the pleasures, and the risks, of drugs without evidencing the ubiquitous shame and guilt usually encountered. Often, these characters are shown to exist on the margins of society, an outsider to hetero-centric drug-free culture. This placement is actually the displacement of the monstrous other in order to excise it from the innocent, or healthy, populace. More recently, however, through queer theory, this position can allow for a critique of normativity while providing alternative epistemologies filtered through a drug-

fueled lens and only accessible by embracing the position outside. One aspect of these more recent narratives that bears greater scrutiny is the use of space, both physical and geographical, and its role in exploring these illicit pleasures. While blurring the lines between ideas of public and private space in which sexual and drug pleasures are engaged, these characters often turn to urban space as more open to possibility for many in the gay and lesbian community. The private is sometimes seen as a closeted space in which to hide shameful secrets from public life, such as monstrous desire for illicit pleasures. Recently, many critics, such as Eve Sedgwick, Judith Halberstam, and Karen Tongson, have called both axioms into question. Nevertheless, this conceptualization remains fixed in the public's imagination of rural space versus urban space when it comes to non-normative desires and pleasures. While many reviews written about these novels address the sex-positive nature, few discuss the pleasurable aspect of the drug experiences in these geographical and physically delineated spaces. In fact, most ignore, or write a sentence or two, about the drugs' place within the plot. Even then, the sexual exploration appears first and is the aspect applauded as daring and honest. These explorations of drug use act as counter to the ubiquitous claim that they are contagious, and that being under the influence leads to moral decay and eventually death. Although some of these novels of transgression share many aspects in their portrayal of homosexuality and drugs as artificial and unnatural, others paint a different picture of sensual pleasure explored that is usually denied through moralistic attitudes of heteronormative society. These examples show cultural and

historical differences, which act to nuance the representation of both when British and American centric stories are compared.

This chapter begins by looking at the taxonomy and rhetoric of the two illicit identities of the addict and the homosexual as they are pathologized at the turn of the century. Using theorists Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, I explore how these illicit pleasures are framed as a threat to the notion of productivity in, and for, the nation. These identity markers are said to be dangerous because of their ability to hide among the regular citizens and spread their contagion. Next, looking at Oscar Wilde's novel about Dorian Gray, I show the ambiguity around influence and desire that society deems monstrous. Although the pleasure remains unnamed, it is clearly threatening to the morality of those who partake in it. Will Self's retelling of the story is useful in transitioning to a twentieth-century model that recycles some of these same ideas around homosexuality and drug use as infectious and deadly. So, it falls to more recent gay and lesbian fiction to provide a counter example, and the position of an outsider facilitates a critique of heteronormativity's hypocrisy about acceptable pleasures. This is seen in Alan Hollinghurst's *Line of Beauty* (1998), which shows how the similar pleasures of drug use and homosexual desire sometimes deploys the same language and occupies the same physical spaces. Here, I explore the secret nature of the transgression and the difference between desire and need as evidenced by pleasure and addiction. Finally, turning to recent gay and lesbian fiction, I will show how geographical space is important in drug and sexual exploration. These final examples shrug off society's ideas of immorality around

certain pleasures. Instead, new epistemologies are embraced in order to challenge normative ideas of identity, space, and pleasure.

Section 1: Taxonomy at the Turn of the Century

Many historians and theorists have commented on the late nineteenth-century's pathologization of addiction and homosexuality, and how the same rhetoric and narrative were used for each case; however, drug use, and with it, illicit pleasure, were pathologized *before* they became solidified into these two identities. Michel Foucault points to how this informs society's position when he reviews texts that influenced late Victorian-era medical thought around masturbation. He writes, "The gradual exhaustion of the organism, the death of the individual, the destruction of his offspring, and finally, harm to the entire human race, were regularly promised, through its endlessly garrulous literature, to those who would make illicit use of their sex" (*Use of Pleasure* 16). Here, there is a clear conceptualization of personal pleasure not only harming the individual, but also insidiously corrupting the entire community through contagion. This language also appears in rhetoric of drug abuse, and more importantly, in the pleasure of drug use the individual engages in before addiction can, assuming it does, take hold.

What type of pleasure is it, then, that society believes drug use induces? According to Jacques Derrida, it is believed to be a secluded one. "So it cannot be said that the pleasure of drug use is in itself forbidden," he explains, "Rather we forbid a pleasure that is at once solitary, desocializing, and yet contagious for the

socius" (37). Noticeably, the nation-state feels vulnerable when the wrong type of pleasure is sought out and, therefore, must police its use and prevent it from spreading among the populace. Derrida continues by revealing the framing of this imagined pleasure as only private when he discusses the commerce involved, and the later exchange of drug-influenced experience, either through language or writing. Thus, there is an opportunity for contagion and the justification for criminalization. One, in fact, that is disproportionate to the actual physical harm it might represent.

This rhetoric easily slips into new form, with the same content, as society is forced to reconfigure the sensationalization of one episode of moral panic after the other. This language of disease and contagion from the late nineteenth-century, then, is made readily available, and even appears naturalized, in the 1980s dialogue about the AIDS epidemic. In his work, Simon Watney contends:

> But in so far as these categories are primarily defensive, in so far as they work to protect the individual from a partially perceived threat of diversity and conflict, they are also themselves vulnerable. Hence the repetition of moral panics, their fundamentally *serial* nature, the infinite variety of tone and posture which they can assume. The successful policing of desire requires that we think of "the enemy" everywhere, and at all times. (*Policing* 43)

The medical discourse surrounding homosexuality and addiction focus on an identity; however, because of the ambiguity of who exactly falls under these guises,

society must police and punish anyone who might be tempted to engage in illicit behaviors leading to what it deems is the wrong pleasure.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault theorizes why society's fear of anything contagious leads to harsher punishment, and in doing so, imparts insight on how illicit pleasures are framed. He argues, "But the influence of a crime is not necessarily in direct proportion to its horror; a crime that horrifies the conscience is often of less effect than an offence that everyone tolerates and feels quite ready to imitate….One must calculate a penalty in terms not of the crime, but of its possible repetition" (93). After an illicit pleasure is deemed contagious, it must be made illegal, and those who continue to engage in the behavior must be swiftly and harshly punished in order to detour others away from it. Even more telling, according to society, there must be something always/already wrong with an individual who would engage in the illicit behavior:

> On the one hand, the criminal designated as the enemy of all, whom it is in the interest of all to track down, falls outside the pact, disqualifies himself as a citizen and emerges, bearing within him as it were, a wild fragment of nature; he appears a villain, a monster, a madman, perhaps, a sick and, before long 'abnormal' individual. It is as such that, one day, he will belong to a scientific objectification and to the 'treatment' that is correlative to it. On the other hand, the need to measure, from within, the effects of the punitive power prescribes tactics of intervention over all criminals, actual or potential: the

> organization of a field of prevention, the calculation of penalties to ever more subtle variables; all this also leads to an objectification of criminals and crimes. (101)

The homosexual and the addict fit into this description according to the juridical and medical texts of this time. In addition, this depicts an identity, then, instead of an act; the criminal, homosexual, and the addict have all evidenced behaviors that demand private surveillance and public policing in order to prevent them from spreading. Notice, though, how it is not only the identity that must be scrutinized, but also each and every act that is believed to be threatening. For this reason, even when individual drug use is divorced from the ubiquitous identity of the addict, it is still configured as dangerous due to ideas of contagion and disease, discipline and punish, and finally, because the wrong kind of pleasure is experienced.

In another text, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* Foucault turns to the nation's need for control, even if it is not always overtly exercised, over an individual's life decisions. In the process, he reveals why the state must claim authority over life and death itself, harnessing "bio-power," when it comes to its own citizens. Foucault's ideas provide insight into other critics who observe that illicit drug use is perceived as a threat to society's well being. As Foucault explicates, bio-power references a broad scope of activities, anything from the right to live to the right to sexually reproduce. Undoubtedly, drug usage can sometimes threaten a person's life, but more insidiously, drugs are assumed to remove individuals from productivity. Because of these two different aspects of

drugs, the threat to personal health and national power, engaging in its pleasure can be seen as a rejection of the asserted authority over life and body. Interestingly, this resistance applies not only to addicts who might clearly remove themselves from the work force in obvious ways, but also to any instance in which a person engages in illicit drug pleasure.

Foucault explains the nation-state's investment and how it developed in the industrialized nineteenth-century in terms that clarify why using drugs might be seen as disruptive to the nation-state itself. He writes:

> One of these poles—the first to be formed, it seems—centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into the systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines*: an *anatomo-politics of the human body*. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological process: propagation, births, mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the condition that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population*. (*An Introduction* 139)

Both anatomo- and bio-politics are essential when considering how drugs are anathema to industrial-centered nations. For society to operate at optimal production, its citizens must engage only in behaviors considered health-centric. Additionally, any risk to life or wellbeing must be avoided. Of course, this only applies to non-sanctioned behavior. After all, governments tolerate alcohol and tobacco, both of which benefit the nation with taxes but ironically rob it of productive bodies.

In the end, society must believe these pleasures are alluring and contagious, and it insists on first identifying, and then policing illicit pleasures in order to prevent them from spreading to other citizens who are productive. In order to pursue this policy at the turn of the century, identities around illicit pleasure were pathologized in Western scientific discourse. Their very nature to remain hidden allowed them to go unnoticed if not for increased scrutiny brought about by the fear of these behaviors spreading. In addition, because of the glorification of productivity during the industrial revolution, bodies not invested in these values are seen as a threat to the nation. Behaviors that would remove the individual from a narrow definition of health are seen as sick and, thus, demand intervening forces. Even so, ideas of being under the influence, along with what pleasures society deems acceptable, were challenged and problematized as they were explored in life and art. Oscar Wilde presented his ambiguous, and sometimes hyperbolic, ideas in his only short novel and stirred up controversy with his character who pursued pleasure at all cost.

Section 2: Dorian Gray and the Question of Influence

The first definition of the word "influence" in the Oxford Dictionary of English is "the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something…" (Oxford)**.** Here, the language reflects late Victorian fears of will and independence that crop up in narratives of addiction; however, what remains unclear is the lasting effect any influence might have. For example, there is nothing to distinguish a momentary effect as opposed to a more permanent change wrought by someone or something. This ambiguity makes it difficult to separate whether the definition more aptly applies to ideas of drug use itself or to the condition of being forever changed, such as an addict. This ambiguity is repeated in the more specific, but less formal, definition of being under the influence as "affected by alcoholic drink or drugs" (Oxford). Today, it is no surprise to say that when someone is under the influence, the first assumption is alcohol or drug use; this also implies a change of behavior originating in some foreign substance, usually assumed to result in antisocial behavior. However, when a person is the source of influence, it can also mean dominance or it can signal something quite different, such as when someone inspires a change in another's identity or action for the better.

The ambiguity of influence informs Oscar Wilde's sole novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), as it vacillates between critiquing a seeming loss of will and a more subtle narrative of celebrating pleasure. Traditional ideas at the time vilified dependence of will as evidence of weak masculinity in men. For example, in her

work on addiction, Susan Zieger explains, "Toward the end of the century, these signs of addicted compulsion merged with signs of femininity, queerness, and biological racialization, encroaching on the normative liberal subject and investing him with uncontrollable, deviant desire, disease, and racial defects (*Inventing* 10). Accordingly, all signs of subordination, or being under the influence, would need to be purged from the self-made man. It would, at first, appear the novel is mirroring late nineteenth-century normative beliefs of originality and independence when Dorian Gray's mentor Lord Harry contentiously explains how influence of any kind should be shunned:

> All influence is immoral….Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thought, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of some one else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly—that is what each of us is here for. (19)

Although it is clear even at this point that any of Henry's musings should be taken with a grain of salt, his logic represents the same fears voiced about addiction during the late nineteenth-century. The pleasures and "passions" are artificial because they are believed to be created by an outside source. Being under the influence is not only immoral, then, but it is also at odds with self-improvement and growth, two values that were seen as imperative during the turn of the century.

Surprisingly, there is even the release of culpability in this paradigm for those who act under the influence, which is evident when Lord Harry suggests that sins committed do not belong to the individual. Instead, the vehicle of influence is to blame for these acts. Even so, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* problematizes the question of influence and responsibility as it appears within the novel.

In recent years, Oscar Wilde's work has been widely disseminated and highly scrutinized, in part, because of the author's infamous trials, and many critics have been quick to use the factual to justify the fictional account based on the changes made to the 1891 version from the one released in 1890. Many agree that there is one aspect of Wilde's life that haunts the novel and its discourse of pleasure: his same-sex desire at the turn of the century. In her pivotal work *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points to Wilde's sexual activity with men, and the glass closet he lived in, as the largest influence of his only novel about illicit pleasures and addiction (*Epistemology* 160). Male relations do take center stage since the only central female character, Sibyl Vane, is drawn in one dimension and then promptly dismissed. However, while two of the male characters also appear to be one dimensional, Sheldon Liebman points out that through their influence, Dorian gains a moral complexity that informs the central ideas of the novel (445). Curtis Marez, on the other hand, ignores these moral influences for one less subtle: opium and the opium den. His point is that Dorian is fascinated by the Asian aspect of the drug consumption and must leave the safety of his domestic space because he desires to venture out into the den to engage in "queer intimacy," a term Marez uses

to describe the forced homosocial configuration of Chinese immigrant men (71). As these examples show, the novel has been interpreted in many different ways, including as a narrative of addiction and same-sex desire; however, these critics do not differentiate between moments of pleasure and when they transform into repetitive acts that spiral out of control.

The Picture of Dorian Gray explores ideas of influence versus domination, monstrous desire, and artificial, or unnatural pleasures, all of which coincide not only with the newly conceptualized identity of the homosexual and the addict at the turn of the century, but also with theories of illicit self-gratification. The story delves into the consequences of losing control of identity and actions through inordinate influence, which is often depicted in terms of domination and loss of will; however, it remains ambiguous as to where the responsibility should fall. Since the turn of the century, this language of being a slave to one's own desire is regularly found in narratives of addiction, as has been cogently argued by others. For example, Zieger points to this aspect when she explicitly connects language of addiction in the United States with that of chattel slavery during the nineteenth-century. However, theories of willfully engaging in illicit pleasure and being under the influence can also be seen as presenting new epistemologies and inspiration, as well as providing previously hidden knowledge for the characters. This, in turn, suggests there is a subversive counter-narrative around illicit pleasure in the novel when a close comparison is made. Perhaps this is because the language habitually slips from sought-out-pleasure to powerless need, just as conversations of recreational drug

use often slip into the rhetoric of addiction. One way to divide these two is to mark the moment when pleasure becomes need. "That is," writes one scholar, "[when] the sordid world of violence, drugs, and prostitution, which originally appealed to [Dorian] as a source of knowledge and pleasure, sooner or later becomes yet another means of escape" (Liebman 451). This conflation of illicit pleasures and addiction can still be found in the current cultural narrative of drugs and their role in society today. While *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shows instances of some characters facing the consequences of over-indulging in anti-social sensual experiences often leading to public repudiation by others, it also questions the difference of public and private knowledge and delves into the pleasure of hidden secrets—and their confessions.

Even though he is given numerous opportunities to change, Dorian Gray stubbornly clings to his illicit and sensual pleasures, ignoring the consequences his actions have on the innocent lives of others. His excessive pleasures taint many lives and leave a trail of corruption behind him wherever he goes. Nominally, Dorian Gray is said to be mostly influenced by two sides; on one hand, Lord Henry, and the "poisonous" book he gives Dorian, argue for a self-centered indulgence in sensual pleasures, while on the other, Dorian's artistic friend Basil Hallward and the amateur actress Sibyl Vane try to inspire Dorian to "do good." As on critic notes, "Sibyl Vane occupies the same moral ground as Basil not only in terms of her aesthetic and moral idealism, but also because she inspires in Dorian the same values that Basil tries to inculcate" (Liebman 444). Conversely, these characters are

seen to be influenced, or act under the influence, of Dorian Gray himself. Through character interaction, Oscar Wilde privileges words, whether read or heard, as the instrument for influencing others, often in the same way or method that alcohol and drugs do. In fact, it is the philosophy glorifying youth that Lord Henry, or Harry, first voices in the Eden-like setting of Basil's garden that influence's Dorian and ultimately leads to his fall. When Harry expounds upon the virtues of youth, he brings a myopic self-awareness to Dorian and prepares him for a lifetime of change that will be brought on by fulfilling illicit desires.

The central role of influence quickly becomes apparent in the beginning of the novel and it straddles the line between being for the good of others and society, or conversely, leading to narcissistic self-centered and secretive pleasures. Basil believes his exposure to Dorian has actually bettered him as a person and artist. When Basil first tells Harry about Dorian, he discusses the changes in his art and perception of the world. In a daze-like fervor, he says, "'I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before…. Some subtle influence passed from him to me, and for the first time in my life I saw in the plain woodland the wonder I had always looked for, and always missed'" (13). This statement argues that a revelation brought on by Dorian's presence and beauty is directly linked to the ability to reproduce this newfound insight through artwork. Here, it is important to note how it is the mundane that is now seen as beautiful, and once opened, Basil's perception and senses can now perceive this aspect. This, according to Basil, is what Dorian can be and do to others.

His influence can bring out the wondrous, found in the ordinary, as is evidenced by Basil's new art.

The other relationship that is the inspiration to be and do good is caused by the fleeting interactions between Dorian and the young actress Sibyl. Dorian falls for the naïve actress by the young man after seeing her perform some of the great love roles from Shakespeare's plays. Interestingly, this moment is elided and not shown in the tale, but rather relayed after the fact to Harry, and later, Basil; his love is talked about, but never shown. However, this simple understanding of his passion for the actress is complicated by the acknowledgement that it was Harry's words and influence that caused Dorian to desire Sibyl in the first place. Even so, Dorian instantly believes she is to be the counter to Lord Henry's hedonistic philosophies. He passionately espouses, "'When I am with her, I regret all that you have taught me. I become different from what you have known me to be. I am changed, and the mere touch of Sibyl Vane's hand makes me forget you and all your wrong, fascinating, poisonous, delightful theories" (67). Those familiar with the novel will know that Dorian regrets very little about his chosen path, so the fact that Sibyl can cause him to do so through a "mere touch" is quite telling of her supposed ability to reestablish heteronormative values. Even though at this point in the narrative he has not yet committed any of his most egregious acts, Dorian's outburst reflects an understanding of Harry's words as both "fascinating" and "poisonous." This pairing is often used in cautionary drug narratives describing drug use before the characters are lead to addiction. On one hand, the pleasure and enjoyment of drugs

must be invoked in order to justify their use in the first place. While on the other, the insidious and subversive harm must be highlighted even before the more obvious harms of addiction become evident. One moment in particular highlighting the change of influence from inspiration to domination is when Dorian's words lead to a change in Sibyl.

When Dorian takes his friends to see Sibyl's genius acting, he is shocked to see the transformation he has wrought in her and the effects it has on his own desire. Whereas he was enamored by her superficiality before, Dorian finds her newborn awareness of her own performativity to be repulsive. Much like Basil's experience, for Sibyl, Dorian's powerful influence opens her eyes and alters her perception. She sees what she missed before; namely, the artificiality in the roles she acts out as inferior to the real experience. "'[B]efore I knew you,'" she tells him, "'acting was the one reality of my life….you freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality really is'" (73). Here, Sibyl views Dorian's unconscious ability to enact great change in others as a good thing because it is liberating. The shackles are gone, and now, Sibyl believes she can appreciate love and life more fully. However, Dorian prefers the artificial so his reaction to her rejection of the superficial is to repudiate her affection, and in doing so, he influences her actions for the last time. Having loved and lost, Sibyl decides to remove herself from the land of the living and, to that end, ingests poison. This, of course, is the first horrible action caused by Dorian's influence that begins the corruption of his portrait and his soul.

Harry attempts to control Dorian's behavior by corrupting him with his theories and youth-centric ideals, which ultimately lead the young man to even more hedonistic and self-destructive behavior. As Dorian first listens to the older man, he becomes "dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him," and finds Lord Henry's voice "absolutely fascinating;" (20) and later when listening to Harry, Dorian is "like one under a spell, smiles chasing each other over his lips, and wonder growing grave in his darkening eyes" (39). Indeed, who Dorian Gray is, and what he will become, is awakened by Harry's words at this moment. The language invokes a sense of enchantment and pleasure in the discovery of newfound knowledge. At this point, Harry's influence appears beneficial as it opens Dorian's eyes to new epistemologies and ideas around pleasure. Basil, however, having knowledge of Dorian's weakness and the strength of Lord Henry's strange theories, strives to prevent the two from even meeting in the first place. In a moment of foreshadowing, Basil pleads, "'Don't try to influence him. Your influence would be bad'" (16). Even at this early point, it is clear that Harry's type of influence cannot inspire one to be better. Instead, his words start out as fascinating but eventually seek to control, or overcome, Dorian Gray, a fact that the older man notes when he muses, "He would seek to dominate him—had already, indeed, half done so" (35). This power, or control, is directly linked to the young man's sensual desire, as becomes evident when Dorian seeks out new knowledge of sensations and pleasures.

The twin, or rather the continuation, of Lord Harry's influence that comes to dominate Dorian's life is the slender book loaned to him by the older man. This construction of influence being ambiguous in nature is made even stronger as Dorian is described reading the pages in the book. The words "produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows" (104). To begin, this scene is quite different in nature than the previous one discussed; the other was dependant on the social realm while this new influence is strictly solitary in nature. The language is evocative of the origin of Dorian's change brought on by Lord Henry's voice in Basil's garden. One difference is that by this point, Dorian is aware of being "under the influence" but he no longer wants to be free of his newly found pleasures. Most telling of all, Dorian is no longer aware of the world around him; he has removed himself from reality and society all at the same time. "For years," Wilde writes, "Dorian Gray could not free himself from the influence of this book. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he never sought to free himself from it….fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control" (105). The description deceptively erases the boundary between desire and need, or pleasure and addiction, reinforcing that which is fascinating, and pairs it with loss of willpower. This is not the only time that the description slips from the power to inspire to that which dominates.

When Basil has his encounter with Dorian Gray and requests to see the picture, Dorian's hidden shame, he is instead tricked into finally revealing his secret

passions that he had earlier only confided in Harry. From the beginning, when it comes to Dorian Gray, Basil admits walking a tightrope, sometimes feeling inspired and sometimes dominated. He confesses to Harry, "'I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself. I did not want any external influence in my life….I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray'" (10). The language highlights Basil's struggle for autonomy against Dorian's overpowering ability to influence every aspect of the artist's life. Just as is the case of overdosing on anything that, in the correct amount, is actually beneficial, Basil's whole-hearted obsession causes him to give up his desire to be freed from the influence even when it turns from pleasure to need. Thus, reinforcing the idea that what at first is a pleasure, if not monitored and controlled, becomes menacing and consumes the individual.

For a time, Basil withstands being overtaken by Dorian's mysteriously strong influence; however, his repeated exposure leads to a new configuration of which he is helpless in resisting. This aspect of his growing dependency is developed moments later when he tells Lord Henry, "'Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. He is absolutely necessary to me'" (12). Already, then, their relationship is slowly being determined through the language of need instead of desire. Since Basil cannot even experience happiness without seeing Dorian daily, he has relinquished control over his own emotional state and becomes bound to the younger man. Later, when the full secret comes out, Basil acknowledges Dorian's

power to influence, but he also includes some of the darker aspects of this ability to dominate:

> "Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you….I was only happy when I was with you." (95)

Even Basil himself has difficulty distinguishing the moment that Dorian goes from inspiring to dominating; instead, he only remembers that it has always been this way from the very beginning, even though he describes it differently to Lord Harry. His shame in confessing this secret reinforces the immorality of this level of influence, one that takes control over mind, body, and soul. While Dorian's presence is still linked to the wondrous revelation of an unseen world, now it also slips into addiction-like rhetoric the moment Basil claims he can no longer be happy without Dorian. The language of Basil's initial pleasure in Dorian's company changes and it is now described as a slavish need that must be met.

Whether it is through influence or domination, Dorian finds himself tempted by monstrous desire, which, in turn, Harry naturalizes by providing the explanation as to why it is useless, and perhaps even harmful, to resist. Lord Henry explains and reveals the nature of Dorian's repressed desires, telling him, "'[Y]ou have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek with

shame—'" (21). Here, Harry is claiming that Dorian has always had these illicit desires, but is afraid since they transgress normative morality and knowledge. However, Harry tries to encourage him to change; since youth is fleeting, now is the time to act on his impulses without hesitation. Thus far, it seems, Dorian has contained his darker desires out of fear and shame. However, Harry argues against this repression, saying, "'The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for things it has forbidden itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful'" (19-20). This is his first attempt to place blame not on the desire itself, but on society and laws forcing the individual to reject illicit pleasures that are then made monstrous.

The question of responsibility is ever present throughout the novel, but since it is linked to ideas of influence, it, too, leaves the reader with ambiguous feelings as to who is responsible for the repercussions and to what degree. Is Harry really responsible for leading Dorian to decadent immersion in pleasure that leaves behind a path of destruction? One passage gives voice to the possibility that neither of the men should be held culpable for Dorian's behavior since he is only acting on his impulses:

> There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion for sin, or for what the world calls sin, so dominates a nature, that every fibre of the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their

> will. They move to their terrible end as automatons move. Choice is taken from them, and conscience is either killed, or, if it lives at all, lives but to give rebellion its fascination, and disobedience its charm. (158)

His description, couched under the heading of scientific authority, subtly mocks the definition of sins around desires even as it removes responsibility and displaces it unto man's bestial nature. Of course, within the context of the story itself, the reader is forced to wonder about this extreme positioning of an essential nature. Nevertheless, the machine-like imagery gestures to the futility in resisting what is described as one's very nature. The new Dorian proves eager to indulge in his desires and so he seeks out different knowledge and sensations regardless of the consequences.

Although Sybil feels Dorian's professed love frees her from artificiality, her loss of innocence also causes her to be hyper-aware of her performativity and Dorian is repulsed by his creation. Whereas before he called her a genius, Dorian comes to see her as nothing more than "commonplace" (72). Her knowledge and newfound freedom "made the passion unreal," but Dorian preferred when she truly believed in the artificial scenes she acted out each night (71). Now, instead of enjoying the deceit, Dorian is forced to see through the illusion with Sybil's every movement. Wilde writes, "But the staginess of her acting was unbearable, and grew worse as she went on. Her gestures became absurdly artificial. She over-emphasized everything that she had to say" (71). Her every action highlights her newfound

knowledge of life and the artificiality of acting, revealing that she is just repeating memorized lines to an imaginary lover as opposed to her actual feeling of love for Dorian Gray. When Dorian confronts her, he is anything but understanding as to why someone would reject art for reality. After his harsh repudiation causes the young actress to poison herself, Dorian wonders why he "cannot feel this tragedy" the way he should (84). He confesses, "'If I had read all this in a book, Harry, I think I would have wept over it. Somehow, now that it has happened actually, and to me, it seems far too wonderful for tears" (83). In other words, if it had been fictional, Dorian would have responded as he should. However, since life has now taken on the form of art, it is too astonishing because it is "extraordinarily dramatic" (83). Harry reinforces this configuration when he explains how one transitions from actor to spectator in the play that is life. This is the first moment in which Dorian learns to appreciate, or find pleasure, in the sensations caused by engaging in monstrous and transgressive behavior, especially when it has an effect on the life of another.

As much as the novel is about Dorian's hedonistic pleasures, the specific nature of his corruption is kept secret and hidden from the reader. Others have noted this vacuum and suggest that it appears to be sexual in nature, and it is believed that theses qualities of the pleasure in being hidden and secretive often appear in addiction narratives. Yes, Dorian, too, has his hidden pleasures that he chooses over those that are more acceptable to society; however, they remain pleasures throughout most of the novel, not needs, and he joyfully pursues them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Lord Harry foreshadows Dorian's path when he claims that

by trying to resist illicit desire, one becomes enslaved to them. In fact, he presents an inversion of addiction when he states that "the sin we had done once, and with loathing, we would do many times, and with joy" (52). Here, the pleasure comes after crossing over the boundary, and instead of feeling the need to do so again and again, there is an anticipated pleasure in future transgressions. However, as Dorian finds out, transgressions often have consequences.

When Dorian first notices the change in the portrait that Basil has painted of, and for, him, his reaction is horror, but it is narcissistically driven, causing him to hide it away. The moment is late at night and Dorian is allowed to blame the shadows as providing an explanation; however, once he sees it by the light of day he realizes it must remain in the darkness and out of sight of others. Much like the way drug use itself was beginning to be represented at the turn of the century, the evidence of Dorian's new pleasures and knowledge must remain hidden from others in a solitary space that only he has access. He wonders: "Was it to become a monstrous and loathsome thing, to be hidden away in a locked room, to be shut out from sunlight that had so often touched to brighter gold the waving wonder of its hair? The pity of it! the pity of it!" (89). His final claim appears strange since Dorian is the one responsible for the changes and for hiding it away. With the reference to his own beauty, it is clear that what is pitiable is the fact that the portrait will change and no longer look like its inspiration. However, the young man anticipates the pleasure in secretly watching and being privy to the changes wrought on his soul by his hedonistic actions, and he thinks, "For there would be a real pleasure in

watching it. He would be able to follow his mind into its secret places" (89). This pleasure is solitary and Dorian tries to keep others from finding out. In fact, he exhibits paranoia that his darker pleasures will be revealed when Basil wants to see the portrait (92-93). Nevertheless, when the moment finally comes, Dorian has changed enough that he actually anticipates, and relishes, the expected shock and horror that the artist will feel when he sees the now collaborative creation.

One aspect in many narratives of shameful hidden desires that is shared with drug use is society's need for either exposure or confession to reaffirm norms. There are multiple sources to the pleasure that comes from the confession. First, the confessor is able to relive the transgression through detailing it to another person. Next, that person can either feel emotions similar to the confessor, or, they may experience revulsion and disgust over the narrated deed. Finally, for some, such as Dorian, there is a voyeuristic pleasure in viewing the other's reaction to hearing about the sin. Dorian experiences all of these, thinking, "He felt a terrible joy at the thought that some one else was to share his secret, and that the man who had painted the portrait that was the origin of all his shame was to be burdened for the rest of his life with the hideous memory of what he had done" (128). His pleasure rests not only in the sharing of his secret but also in foreseeing the future pain the revelation will bring; instead of being cathartic, this confession of the monstrosity that he has created will infect Basil and "burden" him until death. Not only is this pleasure anti-social, it also signals the repercussions of Dorian's actions as contagious through contact and knowledge.

Basil's reaction does not disappoint Dorian as he is clearly horrified by what the painting has become since it reveals Dorian's secret disease and shows how he is able to masquerade within the community as an upstanding citizen. Considering that it is his masterpiece and represents his new art inspired by the admiration, and even love, he held for Dorian Gray, his surprise and disgust at the repugnant thing comes as no surprise:

> An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips as he saw in the dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing. Good heavens! it was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely spoiled that marvelous beauty. (130)

Dorian has even infected Basil's art and new artistic expression that the older man held dear to him. As it turns out, Basil is the only one to ever see the true contagion Dorian represents, an act that confirms that no matter how mysteriously it happened, Dorian's thoughtless wish really did come true and the painting now reflects his inner nature. Basil is forced to recognize Dorian's features in the revolting creation, and although the handsome man tries to foster some of the responsibility of influence unto the other man's shoulders, the artist resists. When he discusses his ideal that represents his art and his feelings for Dorian, Basil claims, "'There was nothing evil in it, nothing shameful'" (131). The portrait is monstrous, but only Dorian is the one culpable. Regardless, both men have loved too much, and

as Basil admits, they have been punished for it. However, Dorian's is the greater of the sins and he rejects this chance for reformation. Instead, he murders Basil and, again, tries to shirk the responsibility by pointing to influence as he relates that it was "as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips" (132). Curiously, this is the only time the portrait is suggested to have any power over Dorian, and yet, this is the most heinous of Dorian's actions that the reader is allowed to witness. However, this does not in any way relieve Dorian of the guilt since it is, in fact, just Dorian telling Dorian what to do; Dorian is contagious even unto himself.

The question of Dorian's ability to infect others haunts the novel as he destroys innocent lives by filling them with some unnamed horror, just as he has done with Basil. Before the moment of revelation, the artist himself is loath to believe that Dorian is not only capable of horrific acts but also intent on corrupting others by infecting them with his own twisted desires. Basil asks him, "Why is it that a man like the Duke of Berwick leaves the room of a club when you enter? Why is it that so many gentlemen in London will neither go to your house or invite you to theirs?" (126). These men shun Dorian in social spaces in a way that implies they must have reason to believe Dorian is contagious to others; they want to remain uninfected by Dorian's disease. However, not everyone is so lucky or wise as to avoid Dorian's friendship, which often proves as deadly as any disease. Basil continues his interrogation: "Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide. You were his great

friend" (127). It is interesting to see Basil's interpretation when he claims that Dorian's infection causes men to act differently than the women. Dorian's friendship is toxic for both, but the two genders react in different ways. For women: "It was remarked, however, that some of those who had been most intimate with him appeared, after a time, to shun him. Women who had wildly adored him, and for his sake had braved all social censure and set convention at defiance, were seen to grow pallid with shame and horror if Dorian Gray entered the room" (119). This destruction of innocence is clearly remarked upon in discourse around homosexuality, and while women feel "shame and horror," for men, Dorian's infection is fatal. Watney reveals both of these narratives of infection when he argues: "Firstly, the notion of homosexuality as a contagious condition, invisible and always threatening to reveal itself where least expected. And secondly, the spectacle of erotic seduction, in which 'innocent, vulnerable' youth is fantasized as an unwilling partner to acts, which, nonetheless, have the power to transform his (or her) entire being" (*Policing* 23). Thus, Dorian's contagion is not outwardly visible causing it to be all the more insidious and destructive. Even though "men would whisper to each other in corners, or pass him with a sneer, or look at him with cold searching eyes, as though they were determined to discover his secret," Dorian's infection is undetectable; it is conveniently hidden in the attic and only visible in the portrait (118).

Though Dorian considers the change in the painting horrific, he does not consider his actions infecting others as monstrous; instead, it is inanimate bodies he

finds disgusting and fascinating. Basil's body is described as "misshapen" and "grotesque" once he collapses dead to the floor. This is echoed in a later scene when Dorian describes the bodies in the opium den, some of which surely he was the first to introduce to the drug as is implied by Adrian Singleton's presence, and that of the woman who tauntingly calls him "Prince Charming." The occupants' drug-induced stupor makes their bodies both monstrous and—true to Dorian's form—therefore fascinating to him:

> Dorian winced, and looked round at the grotesque things that lay in such fantastic postures on the ragged mattresses. The twisted limbs, the gaping mouths, the staring lusterless eyes, fascinated him. He knew in what strange heavens they were suffering, and what dull hells were teaching them the secret of some new joy. (156)

The language literally fluctuates between heaven and hell, pleasure and pain, and, finally, public and private knowledge. Just as drug-induced bliss is haunted by a later pain of withdrawal and even addiction, Dorian's description chooses to overshadow the addict's pleasure with an understanding of the pain of suffering, both one imagined now and one to come later. He exhibits a desire for the secret pleasure attained by their state of oblivion, and he is jealous of their escape; nevertheless, as the others are experiencing some form of joy, their bodies are transformed into the grotesque through their need. However, Dorian Gray resists this configuration as demonstrated by distancing himself from those under its spell. Again, his description of the opium's residence mirrors the one provided for Basil's dead body

as “misshapen” and “grotesque.” In doing so, he pairs these addled bodies literally with the dead; dead in mind, dead in body, and most importantly, dead to pleasure. The denizens of the opiate den are victims to their need, instead of seekers of pleasure as Dorian himself is. In order to emphasize this difference, Dorian walks away from actually partaking in the drug once he sees he will find no pleasure there.

Due to his mysterious pact, Dorian’s body and face do not reflect the repercussions of his actions; instead, it is left to the community to discover his darker pleasures. Their inability to do so allows Dorian to continue infecting others, although some groups try to ostracize him before he infects anyone else with his illicit desires and actions. Dorian shares many characteristics thought to be possessed, at that time and even to this day, by the sexual deviant and drug user. Other critics have connected the language of addiction with that of homosexuality when looking at a secretive need that must be hidden from society and remain anathema to the nation because if left unchecked, it is highly contagious and leads to death. However, the question of influence remains ambiguous even as Dorian’s contagion, for the most part, remains nameless and hidden. Even so, Dorian’s illicit pleasures continue to inform the way society conceives of homosexuality and drug use. Will Self’s twentieth-century satirical rendition of the novel is a clear example of how these concepts are unambiguously connected.

Because of its investment in addiction and over-the-top sexual behavior, Self’s re-imagined version does not seem to fit within the theoretical framework of this chapter, however, it does explicitly deliver a homophobic picture connecting

excessive drug use and homosexual pleasure with an internalized death wish. In doing so, it links the narrative and rhetoric of the turn of the century to that around HIV and AIDS during the 1980s and provides a bridge between Wilde's story of influence and pleasure with current gay and lesbian fiction of shameless drug and sexual exploration. Self's novel entitled *Dorian: An Imitation* (2002) refers not only to his attempt to remake Wilde's work, but also to the fact that this new Dorian acts as an empty signifier reconfiguring others' aesthetics and mimicking it back. However, if the characters in this novel have been rewritten to reflect an obsessive engagement with sexual and drug pleasures, then Wilde's ambiguity of influence and sensual desire are lost; whereas the death of innocent characters in the original version are negligible but an unsought for consequence of Dorian's pleasure, in Self's retelling, Dorian is transformed into a character with murderous intent. This is problematic for many reasons because, as another critic points out, "Self's determination to appropriate Wilde's narrative for his own purposes by robbing it of its complexities, ambivalences and ambiguities," reifies "established ideological convictions and contributes to developing ones" (Alderson 313). The point that Self makes with his book, then, is that the pursuit of illicit pleasure is deadly in and of itself, while Wilde's story implies it is society's surveillance and judgment that make it so. This is a large and significant shift in Self's refashioning of the novel.

A quick synopsis of the book reveals the ideology that drug use and homosexuality are infectious and deadly and, therefore, justifies policing and even ostracizing individuals who engage in this type of behavior in order to protect the

innocent. While Self keeps all of the character's names the same—with the exception of changing the name, sex, race, and sexuality of Sybil into the newly configured love interest Herman, who is male, black, and a homosexual street prostitute—his version explicitly connects Dorian's pleasure to a monstrous and deadly disease connected to sexual desire. Dorian willfully and knowingly infects multiple characters with HIV through unprotected sex and shared intravenous drug use. This reflects the homophobic panic evident in the 1980s, as Simon Watney has argued:

> The HIV virus has manifested itself in three constituencies which are already feared and marginalized in the West—blacks, intravenous drug-users, and gay men. The presence of AIDS in these groups is generally perceived not as accidental but as a symbolic extension of some imagined inner essence of being, manifesting itself as disease. (*Policing* 8)

One aspect not mentioned here is the belief that those infected, like Self's Dorian, innately want to spread their disease to the rest of the population, especially to the innocent heterosexual. One scene in particular serves as an example of this representation that spurs the moral panic evident at the turn of the century that lingering on even today. The revision of Dorian's interaction with Helen, a woman who suffers from her connection with the young man in Wilde's version, is explicit in framing a sickening pleasure derived from destroying innocence. After re-encountering the young woman year's later, Self's Dorian plans out how to infect her

with HIV in order to amuse himself: "Performing in excess of a thousand thousand HIV impregnations had given Dorian the forensic attitude of a virologist injecting an attenuated virus into experimental cohorts" (231). Although Dorian never sticks around to see how his subjects fare, he imagines them suffering in pain before finally succumbing to the virus.

Self ignores Wilde's ambivalence and contradictions and instead reifies ideas of addiction connected to homosexuality by linking them both to an actual deadly disease. This naturalizes and justifies homophobic rhetoric of gay men innately possessing a drive that makes them pursue excessive pleasure while ignoring deadly risks. The question of influence is moot and the struggle to be good disappears. By giving a name to Dorian's so-called pleasures, Self robs the tale of its ambiguity around responsibility for the destruction that ensues. The question of culpability is answered; the infected homosexual is to blame for willfully spreading death and disease. Wilde's challenge to society over its role in creating the monstrous out of the individual's desire for illicit pleasure is erased, and while the original does portray Dorian as sliding into excess, Self's version reaffirms the pursuit as driven by immoral selfishness. Ultimately, Self's imitation is a poor substitute for the original but it does clearly articulate the connection of the moral panic at the turn of the century with homophobic fears around AIDS during the 1980s. In addition, its portrayal of intravenous drug use and its conflation with homosexual practice serves as an example of how the two pleasures are intertwined even today. However, other examples of drug use and sexuality act as a counterexample to this

naturalization, and Self's fellow contemporary author of British fiction, Alan Hollinghurst, usefully provides a novel separating shameless pleasure from painful addiction.

Section 3: Where the Line of Beauty Leads

In the late twentieth century, gay and lesbian fiction began to explore ideas of normativity and transgression in ways that challenged preconceived ideas of both as contagious. This statement, I admit, is quite broad in its scope, and other narrative genres certainly might be defined in this way. However, I am interested in the conjunction where transgressing pleasure laws is also linked to questioning normative limits placed on ideas of public and private space, ways of relating to others, and, of course, sexual exploration. Some of the examples I have found refuse society's ubiquitous negative judgment of illicit drugs and non-normative sexual activity by refuting traditional narratives demanding repudiation of these desires due to feelings of guilt and shame. The position of outsider allows the characters in these instances to, for the most part, defy attempts of recuperation. Time and time again, these protagonists are shown engaging in non-normative behavior without quite becoming queer subjects themselves. That is why I have separated this section from Chapter Four on queer subjectivity. This portion relies on the field of gay and lesbian studies, which argues sexuality is an important site to study difference in experience. Chapter Four uses queer theory, which is, admittedly, different in its focus on challenging of naturalized notions of normativity, and sometimes divorces

them from homosexuality altogether. Sociologist Fiona Buckland cogently argues this separation in order to use the labels people claim for themselves while acknowledging how they "describe many practices and lifeworlds as queer as they crossed the critical boundaries of the everyday and the utopian, the real and the imaginary, the private and the public, as well as the borders between insider and outsider that are crucial to both identity politics and to ethnography itself" (5). In this way, the two can be studied and evaluated differently while still acknowledging the intersections where they cross over.

Just as gay and lesbian politics sometimes converge with, or even slip into, that which is queer, so too do representations of queer subjectivity and drug use have an impact on gay culture. In fact, drug use is sometimes paired, in a positive manner, with the questioning of sexual mores and roles within culture. Gay culture, of course, is a term laden with ambiguity, and in no way do I mean to suggest that it is easily defined or even monolithic. However, I do think different medias, intentionally or not, attracting a large gay audience can be a starting point. Here, it is useful to think of gay and lesbian themed magazines, books, television series, and advertisements that do not quite read as queer to those who consume them. However, there is also another category that should be included: media dealing with topics of increased interest to a gay and lesbian audience while still appealing to a mainstream audience. Again, this latter category rarely, if ever, slips irrevocably into queer.

In literature there are numerous examples of authors who, in one way or another, resist sensationalizing drug use in gay culture while at the same time refusing today's moralistic trend that culminated in the movement more commonly known as "just say no" of the 1980s. One such author, Armistead Maupin, has sold millions of books, and his name is well known in the gay community. His work, *Tales of the City,* began as a newspaper series in 1974 and later was printed in book form. To date, there are seven books following the lives of both gay and straight characters, along with others who defy any stable sexual or gender identity, who live in San Francisco. What Maupin does that is of interest, at least to this study, is present casual drug use as part of the characters' lives in order to help them overcome limited ideas of relationships and sexualities. For example, the first book in the series follows Mary Ann Singleton and her decision to visit, and then stay, in San Francisco. At first, Mary Ann judges the people she encounters with her small town conservative values she brings with her. However, slowly, as she is proven wrong in her assessments, Mary Ann opens up to new experiences, new people, and new epistemologies. Part of her journey includes the decision to smoke marijuana. As she discovers how the world is less black and white than she had previously believed, she begins to tolerate differences and even questions her prudishness. Here, sex and drugs are things done; they do not define an identity.

This seemingly positive aspect of drug use and exploration also appears in other gay and lesbian novels. Some examples include John Rechy's novel *Rushes* (1979), which explores a group of gay men's night of sexual exploration while under

the influence of amyl nitrate; or British author Paul Burston's *Shameless* (2001), which is about one man's attempt to relive his youth by jumping into the promiscuity of the club scene; but perhaps the most widely read example is Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) where the protagonist is allowed to indulge, to a certain extent, in his sexual fantasy with his straight crush while the two are under the influence of marijuana. One surprising text to explore this connection as well is *The Cutting Room Floor* (2004) by Louise Welsh. It is interesting that Welsh, a self-identified lesbian, creates a gay male protagonist and describes in detail his approach to casual sex and drug use. However, it is a tricky question as to whether or not she is challenging stereotypes or buying into them when she irrevocably seems to link the two activities. These provide the groundwork for a gay and lesbian canon of novels that focus on some aspect of drug use while refusing ubiquitous negative ideas of disease and addiction. Even so, there are still some works within lesbian and gay fiction that re-inscribe these ideas even as they give the appearance of having moved beyond them.

In 2004, Alan Hollinghurst released his fourth novel entitled *The Line of Beauty*, which focused on several characters' secret personal gratifications and their consequences in the political circle of England's 1980s. It received critical acclaim and was short-listed for the prestigious Man Booker award, which it later won. Many pithy reviews admire the style of writing evident throughout the story, one that mimics, to a great extent, that of the protagonist's hero, Henry James. Longer reviews, ones that look at the substance of the novel, argue that it is a biting critique

of a time when people were greedily grasping for more material wealth and prestige even as many were falling short—short on money, short on jobs, and with the looming AIDS crisis, short on options in life. Often, the social and class critique overshadows the late buildingsroman-esque aspects of the novel; the protagonist Nick Guest is slowly exploring the pleasures of sex and drugs among both the lower and upper class characters while never quite fitting in with either. One reviewer hints at some of the problems with the pleasures found in the novel when he writes, "[C]ocaine, [is] a different line of beauty and emblematic of the perilous gratifications the 1980's have seemingly underwritten" (Quinn). Here, there is a clear implication of drug use as dangerous and it highlights the greed of those in power. However, the actual main characters who use the drug, Nick and his wealthy boyfriend Wani, do so in very different ways and for different reasons. For Wani, it is just another right and privilege that he indulges in, just as he does with his sexual conquests. As one critic puts it:

> Nick has become the clandestine lover of a former college classmate, Wani, the son of a very rich Lebanese business tycoon in London. Wani begins dabbling in producing films and a glossy arts-and-design magazine, and Nick becomes his official "aesthetic advisor." But their real business is scoring cocaine and picking up extra blokes for sexual three-ways, and Nick makes himself indispensable here, too. (Moon)

This is the only widely read review attempting to pair the men's sexual pleasures with drug-induced ones. However, the two men's experiences are conflated here in

ways that ignore differences of class and race. The review erases any distinction between the two men's position as it pairs the separate motivations for wanting cocaine with the need to navigate their secret shared sexual encounters. While I agree cocaine functions as a metonym of the excessive gratification in England during the 1980s, I am more interested in the aspects of pleasure that Nick and the narrator relate, which is more often than not elided in these popular reviews.

In *The Line of Beauty*, the gay protagonist transgresses acceptable modes of pleasure, through his drug use and casual sexual relations, during a time in which British culture hypocritically allowed members of the upper echelon to break the law with minimal punishment while others, usually positioned as outsiders, were set up as scapegoats. The action takes place within the span of four years in Thatcherite England, 1983 to 1987. Jeffrey Weeks cogently argues this was an unprecedented time in which sex became the focus for the nation. The 1980s were haunted by the newly emergent health crisis of AIDS and HIV (292). In addition, 1988 saw the enactment of section 28 of the Local Government Act "which sought to outlaw the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities" and "bann[ed] authorities from promoting the acceptability in a maintained school of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship'" (Weeks 294-5). This illegality of homosexuality itself is important when considering how drug use is paired with sex in Hollinghurst's novel, along with its displacement as outside of "real" family relationships.

Hollinghurst chooses a character, Nicholas Guest, and a narrator, who both occupy the position of outsider—as is implied by the protagonist's last name—a location that is often seen as intrinsic to the culturally constructed position of the homosexual in English culture. Nick's sexuality is central to the storyline, and yet at the same time, is taken for granted. The voice of the story is that of third-person limited narrator, a choice that clearly separates the mood (Nick) from the voice (narrator from outside who is privy to Nick's emotions but who is not Nick). It is a curious pairing since it distances the reader from the protagonist and makes it more difficult to sympathize with his troubles. Additionally, descriptions and emotions related by the narrator are often questioned since they are sometimes revealed to be skewed or incomplete. The reader, therefore, is placed in a position similar to Nick's own; immersed in the story but distinctly reminded of the distance maintained at the same time. Nick is constantly trying to "fit in," explaining his connection through his education where he met his school chum Toby, and to the Feddens' mentally unstable daughter Catherine, or Cat, whom he inattentively watches over. However, his place is tenuous at best; he is always grasping for some way to justify his position within the Feddens' household. Nick Guest finds out that others who are more firmly entrenched, through family or money, within this elite group constantly question his place. Issues of class and sexuality put him on the margins of society's narrative, as is shown in the microcosm that is the Feddens' household whenever his position is challenged. Seyla Benhabib, a political scientist, explains:

> The demarcation of cultures and the human groups that are their carriers are extremely contested, fragile as well as delicate. To possess the culture means to be an insider. Not to be acculturated in the appropriate way is to be an outsider. Hence, the boundaries of cultures are always securely guarded, their narratives purified, their rituals carefully monitored. (7)

Ironically, although Nick is an outsider to many of the characters within the novel, his experiences position him as an insider to privileged secretive knowledge around sexual pleasure and drug use. In the beginning of the novel, Nick is a virgin to both sex and drugs. His introduction to both worlds take on heightened pleasure through the risk they represent.

Nick's first sexual experience is both secretive and public as it happens in the gardens of Notting Hill with Leo, a black man he meets when he responds to a newspaper ad. After meeting briefly at a café first, the two strangers discover a sexual attraction that, for the moment, is frustrated by the lack of space to consummate it since both are guests in the houses they are living in; Nick, of course, staying with the Feddens while Leo, although working for the local government and being in his late twenties, still lives with his mother. Nick leads the more experienced man to a semi-private area close to the garden shed, noticing, "He was amazing with his habits, he was fabulous, but then Nick's skin prickled for a moment at the thought of himself out her in the dark with a stranger, the risk of it, silly little fool, anything could happen" (35). However, Nick accepts the danger

because in this space he realizes "anything can happen" sexually as well since they are sheltered from the casual observer. Once there, he begins to explore sexual pleasure with Leo, first kissing him, then rimming him, and finally fucking him in the dark, fulfilling what had only been fantasies before. As he does so, he is acutely aware of his transgressions, which is said to subsume the sexual pleasure experienced. Nick realizes, "He loved the scandalous idea of what he was doing more perhaps than the actual sensations…" (36). Perhaps most tellingly, his moment of ultimate pleasure, when he has an orgasm, is overshadowed by his knowledge of breaking the rules:

> Nick was more and more seriously absorbed, but then just before he came he had a brief vision of himself, as if the trees had rolled away and all the lights of London shone in on him: little Nick Guest from Barwick, Don and Dot Guest's boy, fucking a stranger in a Notting Hill garden at night. Leo was right, it was so bad, and it was so much the best thing he'd ever done. (36)

His vision conjures up his humble origins, as Don and Dot's son from rural Barwick, and pairs it with his new sexual knowledge and pleasure based in being "bad" in this more affluent location. Foucault explains this titillation: "The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it" (*An Introduction* 45). Later in the novel, the description of his first drug transaction is described in similar terms.

When Antoine Ouradi—a closeted and wealthy friend from Oxford who Nick is in a secret sexual relationship—gives him the task of buying cocaine from a dealer, the narration slips into language of sexual desire and invokes sexuality in a way that keeps this pleasure in the forefront of the reader's mind as Nick contemplates the drug transaction. When he calls the dealer, Ronnie, Nick chooses to do so away from the Feddens household in order to not "implicate" them in his illicit activities. He is vulnerable in a way that Wani is not, since the richer man can use his own private portable phone. In the public phone box, Nick reaches Ronnie and explains how "[i]t was like calling someone you fancied at a party, but much more frightening" (204). Just as in the previous example, this fear is a source of pleasure just as much as it is multifaceted; Nick is afraid of being caught, being rejected, or being found lacking in the appropriate knowledge. Nick "panted encouragingly into the phone" while he waits for Ronnie to recognize who he is and what he wants. Nick successfully negotiates the transaction with only slight indications that this is his first time while Ronnie flawlessly slips him the cocaine in the car. Afterward, Nick fantasizes about conflating the pleasure the "cockneyfied Jamaican" is offering, an off-handed remark that invokes Leo's own dark-skinned body (205). Before he gets out of the car, the narrator explains, "He wanted to lean over and get out his probably long and beautiful penis and give him the consolation that a man so perfectly understands—right here, in the car, in the dappled shade across the windscreen" (207). Since Ronnie is having girl problems, he most likely would not be interested in receiving Nick's ministrations. However, Nick cannot

help but contemplate sexual pleasure in this moment since his experiences have often conflated the two. Although his first sexual experience is with Leo, it is the insider playboy Antoine who really guides him into these separate but overlapping worlds.

Wani is introduced in the second section of the novel as Nick's new lover, one who has an insatiable appetite for forbidden pleasures and gives the reader a different view of sexual desire and drug use. Going by the nickname Wani, he facilitates Nick's introduction to casual sex with multiple partners and the use of cocaine, both of which it is implied Nick would not have sought out on his own. On the surface, this decadence could be read as stereotypical behavior of the gay deviant lifestyle of the 1980s. However, Hollinghurst invigorates these scenes with a complexity, making it difficult to dismiss them so easily. One episode exemplifying the two conflated pleasures happens when Nick brings Wani to a "Men's Only" club, giving the closeted man a taste of what it is like to be around others who share their desire within a more open space where it is acceptable.

The novel combines intimacy, sexual contact, and drug use, and often conflates these moments within the same secretive spaces. This fact can hardly be labeled accidental; after all, as Wani remarks, the drug use itself is just like their secret love affair. The narrator describes the connection even further:

> For Wani the first hit of coke was always an erotic rush, and for Nick too. They had kissed the first time they did coke together, their first kiss. Wani's mouth sour with wine, his tongue darting, his eyes timidly

> closed. Each time after that was a re-enactment of a thrilling beginning. Anything seemed possible—the world was not only doable, conquerable, but lovable: it showed its weaknesses and you knew it would submit to you. (225)

This example intimately weaves the present and the past, showing how drug use and sexuality are similarly engaged, experienced, and described. Nick's usage reformats the world as not only available but yielding to his will, and this is directly linked to his tenuous position as outsider within the novel, a conclusion that becomes even clearer pages later when Wani is paralyzed with fear after hearing footsteps approach. Thinking that his sexual secret will be discovered along with his drug habit, Wani panics. The construction between the two different acts of taking drugs and engaging in queer sexual acts, and even the similarity in describing the two identities of drug user and gay man, here, is the point. Of course, the spatial aspects of the scene add to the overlapping pleasures of queer sex and drugs, hiding both behind closed and locked doors of the bathroom, as Wani cannot freely admit to engaging in either.

During the climax of the novel, because of his sexual status as outsider, Nick finds himself vulnerable, and perhaps even culpable, due to his desire to "fit in," which is how he fails to embrace a queer subjectivity. Gerald, the wealthy patriarch of the Feddens' household uses his station to displace blame onto Nick and, again, directly challenges his role. Nick begins to understand the implication and replies, "Well, I'm just me, Gerald! I'm not some alien invader. [Toby and I]'d been in the

same college for three years" (419). Already he senses that he is being positioned as an "alien invader" and scapegoat. Gerald asks him if he believes it was "queer" the way he fastened himself to the Feddens, implying not only something unusual, but something unnatural as well. Nick attempts to resist and reverse this interpretation and label, but his position as outsider prevents him from being successful. Gerald continues:

> "I've been giving it some thought. It's the sort of thing you read about, it's an old homo trick. You can't have a real family, so you attach yourself to someone else's. And I suppose after a while you just couldn't bear it, you must have been very envious I think of everything we have, and coming from your background too perhaps…and you've wrecked some pretty awful revenge on us as a result." (420)

Even though Gerald mentions class, he labels the trick as "homo." He equates Nick with a parasite, something invading and feeding off of that which is healthy. In addition, Gerald's pause leaves space for the unspoken, represented by the ellipses, allowing blame to fall on Nick without really being forced to explain the logic behind his words. Nick's own need to fit in constantly leaves him vulnerable to this critique. However, there is one person who has transgressed even more, and therefore, suffers a harsher punishment in the story. The character of Wani perfectly displays the aspects of cocaine use as reflected in 1980s British and American culture.

Cocaine figures prominently within the novel as a symbol of access, excess, and power ubiquitous to the upper class, both in the United States as well as

England, because it enhances self-confidence and energy. When discussing the drug in literature, Sadie Plant theorizes cocaine as a the perfect complement to the new industrial ages since it "woke everyone up to an era humming with new distributions of power and new means of mass communication" (61). Her description would neatly apply to the changes taking place in the early 1980s. However, it is David Lenson's explanation that connects cocaine to the excesses of Thatcherite England's upper class at a time when others were experience economic hardship. "Now the trouble with cocaine," he explains, "from the consumerist vantage point, is that it resembles money as closely as it does, the way a cancer cell mimics a normal ordinary one" (174). He continues by arguing that just as consumerism encourages the belief that one can never have enough money, for the user and seller, there can never be enough cocaine (174-5). This ties excessive consumerism to an insatiable desire that is forever looped.

It is Wani who truly embodies the excessiveness of the 1980s, however, instead of seeking pleasure, the rich young man's sense of entitlement allows him to eagerly break the rules in a way that indicates an insatiable desire for sex and cocaine, but not without consequences. After a four-year jump, the reader is re-introduced to Wani and it slowly becomes clear that the closeted young man is in a complicated relationship with the protagonist. They are in a Men's only compound with a small pond, which is homoerotically charged by the men's bodies on display under the sun. Nick believes there is something distinctly "English" about the setting, which perhaps explains why Wani, who is Lebanese, at first feels discomfort

and shows an inability to fit in. This is further emphasized through his class since Nick is unable to "imagine the worries of a millionaire" (159). Nick continues, noting, "There was a mild and interesting cruelty in bringing him here, so far out of his element" (161). Their upcoming erotic encounter is first foreshadowed by the danger of unprotected promiscuous sex when an unknown older man mistakes Wani for someone else and informs him of George's mysterious death. While the reader is able to read and decipher the implication that the sexually active thirty-one-year-old and his shockingly quick submission to an unspoken illness is related to AIDS, Wani and Nick brush it off as not having anything to do with them. As they make their way to the water, the space is described as possessing "the gleam of a new possibility" (162). However, even this new erotic space is unsuspectingly, and yet already, haunted by the disease to come, as becomes evident when Nick shockingly recognizes one of its inhabitants who is described as having "grown perceptively thinner, into an eerily beautiful, etched-out version of himself" (163).

Ironically, it is Wani who ignores the warning signs of imminent danger; instead, he only sees this as an opportunity to act on his attraction, and he quickly demands that Nick ask Ricky, a man of whom they both took note, to come home with them. However, the encounter unfolds very differently for each of them:

> If this was one of Wani's films—not the ones he wanted to make but the ones he liked to watch—Nick would have to join them in a moment. Sometimes there was an unaccountably boring scene where one man knelt and sucked the dicks of the other two in turn, or even

> tried to get them both in his mouth, and Nick could see Wani needing to do that. He chopped and drew out the fine white fuses of pleasure and watched Rick tug at the buckle of his lover's belt. (173)

By this point, it is obvious that Nick is still adjusting to his lover's appetites, both of a sexual and pharmaceutical nature; however, it is the interchangeability of these pleasures that is of interest here. Nick finds the need for sexual excess quite boring and instead turns to the "line of beauty" lain out before him, a term that has been applied not only to cocaine but also to the curve of Wani's backside and buttocks. While Nick admits that he "would have to join them," a verb phrase indicating an obligation, it is implied that Wani will demand even more, and perhaps Nick will have to stretch the limits of what is possible as he imagines Wani's need to reenact pornographic scenes. In fact, Wani is later shown to excessively indulge in both of these pleasures; however, in his case, these experiences are often shown as repetitive without climax or enjoyment, as is evident with his obsession with pornography.

When Catherine, the Feddens' daughter, discovers the men's secret affair, Nick, in a moment of weakness and desire for camaraderie, reveals Wani's insatiable sexual fixation; and, in the process, exposes the man's actions as transforming what started as a desire into an excessive need. "'He lay there all evening watching it," he tells her, "—straight stuff, of course, which he likes just as much, if not more. One night, I'm afraid, I had to go off to dinner by myself. He just wouldn't turn it off'" (308). This confession outs Wani's "sad" and "pathetic" actions in a couple of ways;

first, Wani's lack of discrimination—the fact that any old porn will do—points to an unquenchable hunger; and second, his lack of desire to step away, even to meet the most basic of needs, food, positions him as an addict. This aspect is emphasized even more with what Nick cannot bring himself to tell Cat. The image is "of Wani with his pants round his ankles, too crammed with coke to get an erection, in slavish subjection to the orgy on screen, whilst, Nick, in the sitting room of their stuffy little suite, made a bed for himself on the sofa. He could hear Wani, through the door, talking to the people in the film" (308). This would appear to gesture back to society's judgment of solitary pleasure as transgressive; however, there does not seem to be any pleasure here. In fact, Nick literally removes himself from the spectacle and becomes an unwilling audience to Wani's inability to achieve pleasure through his drug use or sexual fantasy. In the end, Wani is punished for his excessiveness by the haunting disease that weaves, almost entirely without name, throughout the story: AIDS.

Simon Watney's work has cogently argued that the silence around AIDS paved the way for it to become a spectacle in the 1980s media, which naturalizes the punishment of certain excessive sexual pleasures, and Wani's experience follows this trajectory. Although it is clear in the final section of the book that Wani is sick, the characters do not discuss this fact. To be sure, Nick imagines it in general terms of death; he even goes as far as to aesthetically construct the scene, remembering the "thrilling effect, once or twice, of saying, 'I'm afraid he's dying,' or 'He nearly died'" (382). However, the scene is never played out with another character for the

reader to observe until it is announced in the public media, and Wani's affliction is only named once he has been outed in the tabloids. After the Feddens' suffer political scandal, their daughter confesses the family's personal secrets, including Nick, and by extension, Wani. Much like the 1980s sensational stories that appeared in the tabloids about the disease, Wani is outed in the Standard with the titillating title, "'Peer's Playboy Son Has AIDS,'" followed with the subheading, "'Gay Sex Link to Minister's House'" (409). Wani's excessive use of drugs and sex has its consequences; as Watney argues, "[AIDS] provides a purgative ritual in which we see the evildoers punished, while the national family unit—understood as the locus of 'the social'—is cleansed and restored" (*Policing* 80). Here, we see how Wani and Nick are both punished, even though they engage in sex and drugs in very different ways, they are both purged; Nick is kicked out of the Feddens' house and their lives, while it is made clear that Wani's days are literally numbered and death will remove him from "the national family unit." While the Lebanese man is positioned as insatiable in his consumption, it is he who is finally consumed as his body wastes away due to the disease.

Just as medical discourse paired homosexual identity with addiction, Hollinghurst conflates the spaces in which drug's are used and sexual acts are experienced, but he suggests the possibility of real pleasure wrapped up in the transgressive aspect in illicit desire; however, he also cannot break away from the same narrative of excessive indulgence leading to punishment and expulsion from the privileged social class. Nick's experiences, for a time, allow him to exist on the

fringes in a world of sex, drugs, and power even though he is considered an outsider. Nevertheless, his position cannot be erased and it leaves him open to judgment even as he is critiquing those on the inside. In the end, though, it is Wani who must be punished for his insatiable hungers and his infection appears to naturalize and reform ideas of infection and disease connected to the engagement with these illicit desires. However, there are other novels that distance themselves completely from the turn of the century disease narrative of drugs and homosexuality. Instead, the following examples shamelessly engage in pleasurable behavior and exploration.

Section 4: Geographical and Sexual Exploration Using Drug Epistemologies

Although there has already been some indication of sexual exploration being connected to drug use, there are some recent examples in popular gay and lesbian fiction that shrug off the need to punish transgressive behavior in order to re-establish the status quo. One example is from a self-identified lesbian giving voice to a different experience. *Valencia* (2000) is the pseudo-autobiographical novel by Michelle Tea in which the narrator is a punk dyke in San Francisco during the 1990s who experiments with drugs, tries out different types of relationships, and all the while disrupts normative notions of both. Just as with the former examples, here, the drug use appears alongside sexual exploration, and each is delivered in a clear, matter-of-fact type of manner using similar language of willful transgression of limitations. Actually, these drug-fueled moments are so casually included that the author usually does little more than tell the reader she is under the influence of

some drug or other. For Michelle, drug use is both liberating and restricting. On the night of the Dyke pride march in Castro, Michelle shares crystal methamphetamine with her female friends, and even strangers, to augment her adventures. First, after taking the drug, she feels excitement, thinking, "I couldn't wait to do the drug. I had done it once before and wanted that feeling inside me again, like needing to hear your favorite song, an external experience made internal, made intensely personal. Blood zinging through your body like pinball and you own it, the king of your own glowing kingdom" (210). She resists ideas of addiction and instead relates terms of personal pleasure the drug use invokes. In fact, she asserts control over the drug by repeating how the moment is "owned." Later, the drug allows her to express her sexual desire for another girl, Stella, in ways that are unusual to her. At the gay club, the girl "yanked me into the sweating throng of dancing girls and started dancing at me in that way I hate, all grindy, with the strategically placed knees, but for some reason—the drugs, certainly—I was able to do it" (213). This moment is permissive and invigorating, and admittedly would not have happened without the drug. Although Michelle hates this dancing, her desire for Stella makes her want to do it, and she believes that it is the drug that gives her the ability. She gains a new skill, or ability, to interact with others while dancing on the drug. This closer contact is more sexually suggestive in nature. The drug, however, does not always instantly allow her to access new experiences.

When the group goes to a predominantly gay-white-male club, Michelle challenges the normativity found within the gay community itself, showing

differences in privilege based on class and gender. With Stella and the others in tow, she barters her way into the boy bar, giving voice to the hypocrisy of inclusive access within a marginalized group: "Listen, How Many Dykes Are Inside There? I demanded of the door cow. None, Right? Maybe Like Two Dykes Are In There, But That's It, Because Your Cover Is So Fucking Expensive We Can't Afford To Come In! It's Classist! There's A Bunch Of Gay Boys With Too Much Money, Two Dykes, And That's It!" (218). Here, Michelle touches on complications and experience differing from those of the "gay boys"; gender and economic access, even though it is limited, provide a right of entry for some and not others. Michelle's outburst implicates the gay male population frequenting these nightclubs and the ways in which they are also engaging in illicit pleasures. However, these places depend upon a certain status, or, what Michelle points to as class, and greater economic opportunities in order to afford access to these scenes. One point she remains silent on, however, is the privilege that they experience just by living in a sizable city, one large enough to provide an entire club full of gay people dancing on drugs in the first place. This disparity becomes clear when Michelle leaves her comfort zone and visits a more rural area.

When Michelle visits her girlfriend Iris' hometown, she finds it has just as much access to illicit drugs. However, her experience is quite different, confining instead of liberating, and inevitably boring instead of exciting. The small town in which Iris' family lives is, at least at first, fascinating in its newness. Soon, however, the heteronormative enforcement of gender roles quickly changes Michelle's

impression. Considering that they are returning for a wedding, perhaps she should not be so surprised and overwhelmed when first Iris, and then Michelle herself, is forced to wear a dress. Multiple episodes of gender conformity quickly denigrate from amusing to stifling, an aspect emphasized by Michelle's change in perception of Iris in the new geographical landscape. In the Castro when the couple engages in drug use, Michelle sees Iris as multiple identities and possibilities. She attempts to relate this knowledge, explaining, "I have to tell you that Iris looked like all these different people, a glamorous model, a fifteen-year-old boy, a fairy or elf or little kid" (106). This multiplicity of identity is liberating and attractive. However, when Iris gets stoned and then wants to role-play "as two slobs in a filthy apartment," Michelle is disgusted and turned-off. In fact, it is only after they are "deeply bored" that they search out drugs, not as a way to enhance their senses but to dull them instead (119). Teas highlights the disparity in drug use and desire, as Michelle sees them, in the big city as opposed to what is found in the country.

While I am not suggesting this is an accurate portrayal or the only way to conceptualize geography in relation to sexual exploration, I am acknowledging the ubiquity of the idea of urban space as more open to possibilities for many in the gay and lesbian community. In fact, many gay and lesbian academics have recently admitted there may be a mistake in this assumption of rural areas as more dangerous for homosexuals. For example, Karen Tongson reveals how "canonical and lesbian spatial histories help produce and perpetuate the classed, gendered, and racialized structures of metronormativity that collaborate, if sometimes unwittingly

with an ethos of urban gentrification" (356). Her critique brings into question the naturalization of urban settings as readily available and liberating for everyone within the gay and lesbian community. This conveniently erases differences of those who may not have, or need, access to these geographical locations. Nevertheless, within the gay community, the city is often depicted as safer and more desirable for a large percentage of the population, even if this does not necessarily turn out to be true. The point, then, is not to argue that one geographical space is better than another for sexual exploration, but instead, to acknowledge the cultural representation within most of the gay and lesbian community that ignores privilege in order to perpetuate this idea.

Some gay and lesbian novels involving drugs show them as augmenting a sexual awakening surprisingly, and unapologetically, devoid of guilt or shame. In Jim Grimsley's novel, *Boulevard* (2003), Newell is the handsome young protagonist from a small country town in Alabama now living in New Orleans. He starts off with little money and no real sexual knowledge. Even so, Newell shows little hesitation as he explores drug use, sexuality, and the city. This liberation is different from Maupin's *Tales of the City* (1974); though Mary Ann eventually frees herself from limitations imposed by her small town morals, it takes work on her part and that of others. Newell never experiences this struggle; instead, he is open to possibility, even when the results shock him. For example, when Henry, a much older gay man, introduces Newell to the warehouse district, the young man is excited by the newness of it all. Of course, his perception is filtered through a drug-fueled high from smoking

Henry's marijuana. Newell compares this to his one prior encounter with the drug, recalling how "it had thrilled him then as now because it was illegal, and yet here were these men on this balcony in the middle of a bar right out in the open, far more daring than Newell's taste of the smoke beside a moonlit grave" (104). Grimsley points out the difference between Newell's first joint, which was smoked in secrecy with his cousin in a cemetery, and this new high that is illicit, yet boldly done in the open. In doing so, he locates the pleasure and excitement in the men's rejection of shame around condemned behavior.

As Newell explores the city's sexual possibilities with Henry, he begins to question whether the drug is altering his perception or if "the world he was coming to know was itself a narcotic, acting on him in that way, [and] he was never quite sure whether the night seemed so strange and long because of the drug or simply because of itself" (104). This confusion blurs the separation between drug-induced excitement and the thrill of something new. However, the most important aspect of Newell's experience is that he is not interested in what that difference might be. Instead, Newell embraces the night, the drug, and the city, as contributing to, but not creating, his excitement. This realization is quite different from earlier works arguing how this pleasure is artificial, and therefore, somehow inferior. His pleasures are intertwined and described as very real indeed as they change his perceptions and behavior.

Newell's night of adventure culminates and crystallizes, at least for him, in the final moments he spends in the warehouse, a space both public and private.

Hearing “soft sounds” and “low groans,” the protagonist is inducted to a world of semi-public sex in a scene that is very similar to the earlier open drug use. Straddling the public and private lines society has dictated, the warehouse is approachable to anyone; it is private property that has been transformed during the evening hours to accommodate its temporary tenants. At the same time, the space is invisible to those who are not a part of this marginalized society. Even Newell would not have been able to find it without Henry’s guidance. However, once there, Newell is carried away into this world of sexual exploration, not only with his older friend’s help, but also under the influence of the drug. He is, quite simply, dazzled: “For an hour or more he walked, too excited by all he had seen to sleep, with his head swaddled in Rush and smoke and the smells of the warehouses. Snatches of what he had seen came back to him, in particular the last image, the one that had shocked him” (110). As it turns out, the fascinating image is an act Newell had never imagined, but now, he cannot forget; one man is bent over while the other is positioned “as if to plunge his whole arm inside the first man” (109). To be sure, this sight frightens him at first, but this sexual act, perceived through a slightly drugged haze, threatens to tear apart his previous boundaries, freeing him in ways that are exciting to the same degree they are alarming. Some critics point out “the values of exploration, novelty, longing, excitement, self-expression, hedonism, and imagination commonly transmitted,” in drug spaces and experience. This is exactly what Newell embraces during these moments, but it happens most often with someone else there to guide him.

In *Boulevard*, it takes at least two to tango, a metaphor for sex, but also for drug use as well. Newell is repeatedly described as open to pleasure and willing to challenge predetermined limits, and for some of this, Mark is his guide and role model. Mark, Newell's temporary boyfriend, takes him on the quintessential acid trip, complete with its revelations about the senses and the mind. Grimsley writes, "Satisfaction warmed Mark through. To watch this child of the country now, to look into his eyes and watch the change, the secret of the chemical and the secret that the chemical would reveal" (195). This moment is fraught with both men's expectations, however, the language emphasizes Mark's role as guide. The mysteries and knowledge, one can assume, are already within Mark's possession, and now, he is sharing them with Newell. It is clear this role is an important aspect of Newell's transition, in knowledge, sexuality, and geography. Again, just as previous examples suggest, Mark claims this trip is self-exploratory and transformative:

> Yes, Newell, yes, this is a worthy journey we are undertaking, yes, as I strive to rise to the challenge of the moment, and yes the flesh is weak and less than willing at the moment, pleasant to receive such ministrations, my dear Newell, but maybe a little frustrating for you, since nothing happens, really. But you are starting to feel something, too, aren't you? A change in your eyes, a cast of seeing inward. Of looking suddenly inward at an open door. (196-7)

The scene is multifaceted in its exploration of pleasure since Newell is, in fact, performing oral sex on Mark as the older boy discusses this awakening while Mark,

as it turns out, never utters these words out loud. This narrative technique allows the reader to interpret Mark's intended remarks, even as Newell, for the most part, is left in the dark. For example, Mark is unsure if Newell will be frustrated by the lack of an erection or climax, but quickly notices the boy's altered perceptions and realizes it does not matter. There is slippage in both language and pleasure. Not only is there a double meaning of Mark's need to "rise" to the occasion, but the passage also causes some confusion as to where the sexual encounter ends and the drug one begins. Nevertheless, the space allows for exploration of both and provides the safety of a more experienced guide.

Issues of identity, desire, and geographical space are complicated by the experiences of both Newell and Michelle; however, while both novels express positive aspects to exploring drug use and sexual pleasure, *Valencia* articulates masculine white privilege that goes unacknowledged by Jim Grimsley's tale of Newell's adventures. Even so, new possibilities are suggested and new epistimologies allow for a richer critique of traditional narratives that punish those who engage in illicit desires. These also provide a much needed counter narrative in the gay and lesbian community to the ubiquitous sensationalization of drug use as abuse or addiction. In fact, they unapologetically suggest a pleasure in the forbidden itself that escapes heteronormative ideas of what is acceptable pleasure.

Conclusion

Because using drugs for pleasure resists the nation-state's ideology of futurity and productivity, they were made illegal in both the United States and England at the turn of the century. At the same time, the medical field solidified the taxonomy of the homosexual and the addict, which were feared because of the their ability to pass and hide their pleasures. However, this aspect meant that the enemy could be anywhere at anytime and, therefore, these behaviors had to be scrutinized and punished above and beyond whatever harm was imagined. In addition, their very nature was deemed infectious, meaning that these identities needed to be isolated from the innocent population out of fear of contagion. These themes appear within the text of Dorian Gray, to a certain extent, however, Wilde complicates any straightforward narrative. Instead, his ambiguous ideas of whether desire is actually monstrous or if it is society that makes it so, allows for a counter-narrative. The story intentionally leaves the pleasures unnamed as it spreads to other characters. Even so, the structure is so embedded in rhetoric of addiction and homosexuality that when Will Self retells the cautionary tale he unapologetically makes the connections explicit. This re-inscribes the moral panic around homosexuality through a disease model of contagion. Self's use of AIDS naturalizes the sex panic of the 1980s and places the blame on hedonistic excess of drugs and casual sex. Hollinghurst also tackles the emerging AIDS crisis in England during that era, and while some characters are excessive about their pleasure, Nick's outsider status allows him to critique the hypocrisy he sees around him. Nick actually gets pleasure

from transgressing the normative desires as he engages in illicit behavior in both private and public spaces. However, his position is labeled parasitic and he is outcast from the family unit. In the end, more recent gay and lesbian fiction has pursued characters who shamelessly embrace their sexuality and drug exploration. Navigating between the city and the country, both Newell and Michelle provide examples of new epistemologies found through drugs. Their experience allows for a new configuration of illicit pleasure in the twentieth century and points to an alternative framework for drug use as liberating.

Chapter Three

"What Will They Think of Us?":

Crisis of Representation in Circuit and Club Culture

Mainstream-fueled representations of gay men involved in club culture purposefully embrace a sensationalized vision of drug use and sexual identity in order to either glamorize or demonize these subjects; some choose to do both. These figures are competing for dominance in the cultural discourse around gay men and drugs in order to influence opinions, regulations, and representations concerning drug use and acceptable forms of sexual pleasure, not only in the gay community, but, as the somewhat mixed audience suggests, within the realm of heterosexual imagining as well. This is not to say the examples are not nuanced, or that they do not speak differently to a gay community as opposed to others. However, it is important to consider the different ways drug use and sexual identity are conflated, positively or negatively, through the politics of pleasure. Closely connected to this process is the insidious way in which images of gay men overdosing on illicit drugs have come to replace pictures of gay men dying of AIDS in the 1980s, and how this self-inflicted harm is voyeuristically amplified in order to justify greater control through government-sanctioned institutions. This is ironic considering that circuit parties came into being in order to provide funding for AIDS research, and club culture was invested in reclaiming desire for the gay male body at a time when the mainstream media was framing it as deadly. As Kane Race shows,

"The massed bodies, decorations, lights, drugs, costumes, and music combined to produce a powerful and widely accessed perception of presence, belonging, shared circumstances, and vitality at a time when the image of the gay man, dying alone, ostracized from family, was the publicly proffered alternative" (22).

There are several different audiences that are drawn, for one reason or another, to these narratives exploring drug use and sexuality. Of course, there are large variations within each group, but three classifications remain clear: the outsider, the insider who has returned to the outside, and the insider. Because this chapter is invested in examining club culture, to be on the "inside" is to be a part of this subculture within the gay community. In some ways, this flips the script from the previous chapter in which gay and lesbian characters were placed on the outside. For the audience deemed as outsider, whether it is because of their sexuality or narcotic virginity, the narratives allow for a titillating glimpse into another world juxtaposed against traditional heteronormative values of productivity, family, and monogamy. The second audience, the insider who is now outside, adheres and relates most to the conversion narrative of the prodigal son—someone who returns from inside the world of drug use and club culture to the outside world of homonormativity—and, most often, their decision is reaffirmed because they chose voluntarily to repudiate these pleasures. Or, less frequently, it can invoke nostalgia if the viewer was forced out through circumstances beyond his control (i.e. addiction, conviction, or even aging). The final audience, the insider, is able to use their own drug experience and interactions in order to judge the

authenticity of the described culture, however, just as the first two groups gravitate toward titillation and demonization, this group tends to idealize circuit and club culture through glamorized images. Most critics tend to migrate to the polarized representations of gay drug use as either extremely risky or harmless indulgence in pleasure, all the while ignoring variations of the two that would complicate their position. Both positions end up misleading the public and, in fact, often can cause more danger to those who are drawn to the life inside by not providing honest risk-management information.

In the following sections, the audience member's position as either insider or outsider determines their perception of, and then reaction to, club and circuit culture. The first section looks at a self-proclaimed authentic look at gay men and the circuit party. The film *When Boys Fly* (2002) demonstrates how sensationalized accounts are used to justify a call to action for an outsider audience to intervene. There is also a fictional account that uses the same framework of the circuit party being narcissistic and escapist entitled *Circuit* (2001). This account justifies intervention because the characters are destroying themselves through drug abuse and unsafe sexual practices. The second section looks at theories about the politics of pleasure and which ones are controlled. The third part tackles Michael Signorile's book *Life Outside—The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles and the Passages of Life* (1998), and dissects the narrative of the insider who rejects circuit culture as narcissistic and empty in favor of homonormative values. The fourth section analyzes a fictional character's journey from outsider to insider and back

again in *The Spell* (1998) by Alan Hollinghurst. Finally, the last section looks at both the British and the United States' version of the popular television series, *Queer as Folk*, in order to explore nuances of risk management and pleasure in club culture.

Section 1: When Boys Fly, They Crash

Circuit Party: 1. A sequence of gay underground dance events.

2. A place where rules don't apply, boundaries are non-existent, and physical perfection is demanded.

The definition of an event, group, or culture such as the circuit party constantly grapples with problems of representation on a very basic level; what exactly is it? The lines above flash on the screen and provide the framework for *When Boys Fly,* a "groundbreaking true-life film" following three young men and their adventures at the 2000 Miami White Party, an annual gay dance event. In many forums, including the DVD cover, interview with the producer, and the film's website, the directors claim the film gives voice to the circuit party and the gay men who attend them. In actuality, editing decisions allow the directors and the producers to control what narrative they want to emphasize, and in this case, they choose to narrowly focus on the excesses of the circuit experience. Perhaps this bias is implied from the very beginning when the film makes up its own parenthetical phonetic characters of how to pronounce "Sur-kit Pahr-Tee," an act that is not only unnecessary but also indicates a simplicity or childishness. This is not too surprising

considering how circuit parties have evoked polarized emotions within the gay community itself. On the one hand, they are seen as a way to resist heteronormativity and to embrace the freedom of illicit pleasures, including sex and drugs, within a specialized community mostly composed of men of a similar identification. They came about during a time in which gay male desire was marked as deadly due to its perceived connection to AIDS, as was pointed out in the chapter's introduction.

On the other hand, circuit parties are also seen as hedonistic and narcissistic affairs that oftentimes put gay men at risk, whether it is from drug use or unsafe sex, and, through economy or implicit desire, bar entry to all but the elite. Fiona Buckland, a sociologist, notes, "Disposable income, whiteness, and ideal notions of physical attractiveness produced a sense of belonging and a sense of alienation in different individuals" (89). In fact, these events have been called racist, classist, and even sexist, because circuit parties appear to privilege a white male muscular body as desirable. Buckland reveals how her informants recognized this when they considered "these factors in their evaluation of the utopian promise of queer clubs, recognizing that its failure rested in the failure of the clubs and their patrons to negotiate race, ethnicity, class, and/or patriarchy as an inclusive model of queer world-making" (88). While this statement might be complicated by the fact that different clubs actually make it a point to cater to different sexual identities, and that even the privileged white male muscular body may not be desirable in certain settings; nevertheless, this assumption, or ideal, is most often represented in gay

club culture and circuit parties as is obvious through their advertisements and fliers for the events. However, outside of the gay community, the response to circuit parties is quite different. Many people are completely unaware of just what a circuit party is, who would go there, and what is done at these events. Those in the public who might have some knowledge often access this information through mainstream media, which most often highlights only the risky behavior these parties are believed to promote. Some groups outside of the gay community are more informed; they consist of professional institutions, such as the police, lawmakers, and those in medical fields. As should be evident, these groups carry significant power within Western society and have often positioned themselves in opposition to the gay community's struggle for liberation. Even so, when it comes to a definition, all parties involved would agree that circuit parties are dancing events held in large cities across the world, featuring top DJs and performers, and mostly attended by middle and upper-class white gay males with muscular physiques.

Representations in popular culture of circuit parties, and those who attend them, have been marginal at best and sensationalized at worst. Circuit parties suffer from what Simon Watney describes as a "crisis of representation," where there is a "crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure" (*Policing* 9). How this knowledge is produced is based on the imbalance between those who experience the pleasure, on one hand, and those who are allowed to talk about it on the other. Ironically, the experience itself appears to rob subjects of the authority to construct knowledge; therefore,

others must step in to fill the gap. Here, it is useful to quote at length Richard Dyer's work on representation in order to understand what the stakes are:

> How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society….Equally re-presentation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation. (1)

Those who are in control of the image reproduced in culture are allowed to dominate the discussion not only around that subject's position within society, but the roles they should occupy. This process also dictates the rights, or lack thereof, a group or subject is allowed, and determines how they are treated. The fewer examples and variations there are to complicate this image, the more powerful those in existence become.

The feature, *When Boys Fly*, is a good blueprint of how easily control over an image can be exerted; by claiming to be an honest portrayal of circuit parties from

the inside, the director's take the authority to frame the narrative as they see fit. The film was originally shown in 2002 at gay and lesbian film festivals in large cities across the country, along with a few screenings in other countries, and was directed by Stewart Halpern and Lenid Rolov. Both men have directed documentaries before, however, they are quick to instead reference this attempt as a "feature" or "true-life film," and advertise it as a "Gay Real World," exposing or revealing the secrets of the circuit party and its participants. The director admits the title is a reference to *Peter Pan* and the allure of Neverland's promise not only to never grow up, but to never grow old as well. This positions the circuit party as a male space where play is more important than productivity. However, neither world is believed to be sustainable—the boys have to return to domesticity and responsibility eventually—and to stay in Neverland too long is to invite its darker side. *When Boys Fly* focuses on these shared aspects of childishness and escapism. All that is missing is for Wendy to show up and bring the boys back down to earth. Perhaps that role is purposefully left empty in order for the audience to fulfill it.

The feature homes in on excess, whether sexual or pharmaceutical, in order to sensationalize the men's behaviors as transgressive and the circuit party as a spectacle of lawlessness. Surprisingly, one of the gay men, Bryan, even directly challenges the camera at one point and jokes how it is "the exploitative kind of stuff you guys really like." To state, "A place where rules don't apply," is self-serving and sensationalizes the narrative that follows as outside of normal boundaries; however, through the experiences of the three men, and their friends, rules are overtly and

implicitly discussed, even as they are sometimes broken. Nevertheless, the idea that these spaces are chaotic and heedlessly flaunt normative morality is appealing to certain audiences, as is the idea that there is always a heavy price to pay for these transgressions. This narrative actually recycles the accusations hurled at gay dance clubs in the late 70s and early 80s as Buckland observes in her work:

> In the mainstream media, dance clubs were represented as dangerous, undisciplined spaces, the indices of the excesses of drugs, sex, and HIV infection. Because of these representations, queer dance floors were always contested and marginalized sites under scrutiny and constantly threatened by dominant social agencies, including some mainstream gay sources. (8-9)

The mainstream media has a history of sensationalizing queer spaces, which leads to greater monitoring by the state in the form of law-sanctioned crackdowns. In this case, the more sensationalized the story is, the more likely it will be disseminated in the media because it supports the already imagined world of gay men as full of excess and risk.

While some may argue that the White Party itself aims for an over-the-top feel to it, there is no doubt that the film follows through, just not in the way the promoters of circuit parties might imagine. The film opens by showing scenes of shirtless men dancing from the White Party's main event while opposing viewpoints about circuit parties are presented in voice-overs. Although there are a couple of opinions defending the event, many more criticize circuit parties in general for

being escapist, immoral, and dangerous. Even though the first narrator does not voice a position, per se, it can be inferred when he opens, claiming, "I've seen people die at circuit parties. I've seen people having sex in the middle of the dance floor." To put this statement into perspective, the question must be asked: are these instances rare or the norm for a circuit party? The audience is never told, but the shots on screen would seem to suggest the latter. This implication is important, as Buckland insists, "These representations relied upon the sensationalization and generalization of incidents of drug overdoses, violence, and what orthodox heteronormative morality views as deviant sexual behavior" (9). Perhaps this is why the audience is more willing to accept the next voice-over, which asserts, "They've built nothing else in their lives to live for." In addition, words such as "false," and "fake" come up again and again to emphasize this view of circuit parties indulging in excessive hedonism and escapism. To be sure, there are a few testimonials from guys who say gay men are just enjoying an event with their friends, but for each of these there are four or five who say the attendants are "pathetic" and downplay the pleasurable aspects as empty and fake. Of course, the first person introduced, twenty-one year-old Toné, proceeds to justify many of these fears and complaints.

Toné embodies the negative stereotypical image often found in club and circuit culture of self-inflicted harm because he repeatedly places himself in danger, even after his past actions indicate he has a substance abuse problem. He is portrayed as lacking in direction, control, and responsibility. In one scene, he is shown with his roommate before leaving town for the party. He confesses to the

camera that he is in his final year of college but really has no idea what he wants to do for a career. Later, he asks his friend Matt, "What are we doing with our lives?" His question validates one of the earlier critics who claimed all the attendees are only going to circuit parties because they lack direction. In addition, he maintains that he has no plans to do any drugs while at the party because of his multiple overdoses. This restraint does not last long and throughout the film Toné's words and actions often appear to contradict each other. It is not long before Toné is taking GHB, the drug responsible for stopping his heart when he overdosed before. His actions suggest a willful and blatant disregard for his wellbeing.

The other gay man from Los Angeles represents the opposite end of the spectrum; Brandon is twenty-three, attending UCLA, and has never been to a circuit party nor done any drugs before. He is introduced in his living room while having his mom present, bolstering his wholesome normative appearance. As the commentary on the DVD later reveals, the co-director aligns the audience with Brandon, insisting, "You know the audience relates to you (Brandon) more than anybody because they feel you're the 'everyman.'" Although he is gay, Brandon is worried about being judged since he is an outsider to Club Culture. His fear is unfounded as he is quickly accepted and befriended by other gay men when they meet him. Once comfortably taken in, however, he takes on the role and authority to denounce the men around him, saying they are "running away" and "lonely." By calling the men lonely, he negates the assertion of community the circuit party claims. This rhetoric is dangerous because it allows the outsider to minimize drug

use as reactionary only. In fact, many studies in anthropology reveal the "ways in which drug consumption can 'function' to preserve structures of kinship or communal authority because the customs or cultural practices associated with drug consumption help to promote communal integration" (Manning 13). However, Brandon's position is the one that is most familiar to an outside audience.

The narrative of escapism and drug use as an indication of moral disease is more palatable to those who, like Brandon, are slightly concerned about the temptation that drug pleasure represent. This causes a reaction that William White calls a "personal preventive device," which is "embrac[ing] a language that demonizes these substances and those who use them" in order to "suppress any latent curiosity or attraction to these substances via an exaggerated animosity toward the substances and those who use them" (44). While it is true that Brandon rejects the men and frames their actions as "pitiful," it is clear he wants to create a distance that puts him in a morally superior position in relation to the other circuit party attendees. Kane Race makes this position in society clear in his work when he discusses how "drug use by marginalized people is read as a reaction to social oppression—whether that of class, race, gender, poverty, or heterosexism. In the case of sexual minorities, it is sometimes viewed as an attempt to quell the pain of social stigma, or produce a zone of escape from the normative social order" (Race 167). This, in turn, creates a dynamic in which it is morally imperative that the outsider save the drug user from turning to drugs out of pain and misery. At one point, Brandon even calls his mom while on the dance floor at the White Party,

distancing himself from the other men when he tells her, “They are so stupid!” However, this positioning, “us against them,” is complicated by the fact that even though he has never used drugs before, for some unvoiced reason, he is afraid he might end up doing so now. The perceived difference between him and these Circuit Boys is fraught with ambiguity, and Brandon imagines he might easily slip and become one of “them.” From his interviews, it can be inferred this weakness stems from a fear of not fitting in or being accepted. When he really is offered drugs, Brandon is able to turn them down, and in doing so, maintains his position as an outsider. This is his choice since the men make it clear he does not have to be on any substance in order to be accepted by their community.

The final three main men of the documentary hold a complex, but close, relationship to each other. Jon is only nineteen and is dating Todd who is “reliving [his] adolescence” now when he is in his thirties. Jason is the last member of this entourage; he is Jon’s friend who used to date Todd. These three men play out many stereotypes and narratives, not only about being gay, but also of drug users; there is promiscuity, casual sexual exploration with strangers, transgression of rules, overstepping of limits, and finally, a drug overdose. This last aspect is even more damning due to the fact that Jason is the one who overdoses on GHB after previously discussing his frightening experience where Jon and Todd had stopped breathing after overdosing at a party. At the time, the two men were admitted to the hospital for a couple of days and Jon says the experience was “not fun” but the doctor was “hot.” The problem with this confession is that even though this might just be a

defensive technique in order to minimize the seriousness of the situation, the statement reinforces the idea gay men care more about sex and pleasure than they do about their health. Of course, when Jason overdoses, Jon and Todd are there to take care of him. In fact, they even joke that he will be ok because he is snoring, and therefore, breathing, which appears to mock the severity of the situation.

The documentary exposes many instances of men overdosing on one drug or another, but the audience is never told which drugs are dangerous, with the implication being, of course, that they all are. Interestingly, black and white images of men passed out on the floor are interspersed with images of men from the group alluding to the fact that it could happen to them, however, nobody from the film actually overdoses during the main dance event. These scenes are accompanied by a voice-over discussing the possibility of someone overdosing to the point that he stops breathing. Although this appears to be a hypothetical situation without a specific person being discussed, when paired with actual images of people who cannot even walk unaided, along with stories of prior situations of overdosing, the probability seems quite real and the men's behavior even more fraught with risk.

Jason's overdose happens the day after the main event, while everyone is at the pool party, and so the film's focus quickly turns to Toné and his use of GHB since it is known he has a substance abuse problem. The resulting interactions are startling, however, this begs the question: how can the interviewer expect to contextualize an interview where the interviewee is on a mind-altering substance? The moment is tense as Toné tries to answer the questions and stay as coherent as

possible, but all the while his friend Matt cannot seem to hold still. Although he is the more comprehensible of the two, Matt bounces slightly up and down the whole time with excessive energy. It seems even more out of place in the light of day, especially as both men have a wide-eyed stare that is more visible now that they are outdoors. The setting and the forum of the interview clash with the two men's state of intoxication. The result is that the audience judges, from the safety of their own home, whether or not this behavior is acceptable. However, this displacement of the context aids in the narrative that demands monitoring and controlling. Race explores this function in his own work, showing how certain pleasures:

> [Are] sensationalized on the basis of the deviation they represent from corporeal norms and materialize as thrilling instances of transgression. This is the danger of what I have described as "exemplary power." Exemplary power works by taking certain practices out of their concrete and relational contexts and blasting them into the abstract space of public address. In this zone, any deviation from normative prescriptions around corporeal practice appears as a case of pathology ("addiction") or else reckless intentionality and moral transgression ("abuse"). (162)

Clearly, Matt and Brandon are victims of exemplary power since they are separated from everyone else and removed from the setting for which they took the GHB in the first place. Instead of being on the dance floor, or even by the pool, they are standing alone, away from all the other men in the bright sunlight. Then, in turn, they are

broadcast onto the viewer's television screen. This displacement quickly becomes dizzying when one attempts to discover how many times removed their actual experiences are from the ones the audience perceives. Is it any wonder, then, if Brandon's behavior must be read both as signs of addiction and abuse?

These examples polarize the experience of the circuit party within the community, but what about the more moderate stories hinted at, but never developed, in the film? For example, one couple interviewed exhibits intelligence and restraint when discussing the White Party. While it can be assumed that perhaps they did drugs later on, they were never shown on screen under the influence. Even though this couple is vulnerable to judgment from an outside audience, the fact they are able to manage their image lends credence to their claims of control and use of drugs for pleasure. Greg, the older man, is even working on his Ph.D. in Psychology at a prestigious university. He wants to go into academia and has a clear plan for his life. His focus and drive contradicts the aimless image that Toné reinforces. There is never any suggestion Greg is running away or lonely. He also goes out of his way to make Brandon feels welcome and to give him support in his choice not to do any drugs. This absence of those who use moderation can only be explained by the need for sensationalization in the film, as the ending itself stresses.

Just as the beginning of the feature creates a direction for what follows, so too does the conclusion of the documentary make it clear which behaviors by gay men are acceptable and which are out of control and self-destructive. The screen

flashes to “Months Later,” followed by the statement “Toné continues to party heavily.” This is in contrast to Brandon who is shown with Mark, a boyfriend about to meet the young man’s mother; whereas Toné is filmed outside of another circuit event, again, in broad daylight. Although he does not appear to exhibit signs of obvious intoxication, because he is shown with others who are clearly under the influence of some mind-altering substance, the mental state is implied. There are guys standing around, again they are taken out of context of dance floor or club, and one even appears to be twitching on the ground. Whereas Brandon and Mark are able to talk to the camera and discuss their investment in taking their relationship to the next step, Toné is never allowed a voice to comment on what it is he values. Distance is intentionally invoked when the camera zooms in on him from across the street. Additionally, his status update is written impersonally across the black screen in white letters. The director’s portrayal of Toné being at risk is vindicated when the audience learns he has now been forced to sober up after suffering from a minor stroke. His silence is repeated during the follow-up interview two years later. While the questions are directed at Toné, it is actually his roommate Scott who answers most. In the end, Toné remains unrepentant even after suffering these drastic consequences, stating, “The drugs were fun,” and “I have no regrets,” which might be why he must have others speak for him.

The film *When Boys Fly* presents a common narrative of repudiation for the most part, but, almost despite itself, a more complex message is revealed. Despite being portrayed as false and fake, the men are shown caring for each other and they

easily accept Brandon even though he is an outsider. Although excess is highlighted throughout the feature, counterexamples slip through even if they are not developed fully. It is these gaps and fissures that are most revealing of the film's bias, along with its determination to show Brandon's experience of successfully resisting the lure of drugs and circuit culture. Both the ending and follow-up act to endorse this decision and establish the need for outside intervention, as Toné's lack of voice regarding his multiple overdoses and stroke suggest. His unrepentant attitude could be read as reaffirming the pleasures the circuit party offers, but because it comes after the harm he has done to himself, it instead becomes a cry for intervention. Unfortunately, while the film claims its intent is to give the White Party's attendees a voice, it actually speaks for them to an outsider audience and justifies the need for an outside authority to step in for the participants' own good. The supposedly artificial creation of their pleasure, and the excessive harm done to their bodies, demands that society monitor them even more closely than before.

Section 2: The Politics of Unearned Pleasure

Many minority populations habitually find themselves under the magnifying glass of media, among other forums, whose scrutiny is authorized through the latter's claim to specialized knowledge, power, or skills. Oftentimes, the findings of such intense examination paradoxically justify each other through tautology: the group is breaking morals, norms, or laws, and therefore, should be carefully watched; and, the observations show the group is breaking morals, norms, or laws,

and therefore, this close monitoring is deemed necessary to discover this behavior. Of course, the end result of this careful supervision is linked to the power, and of course the need, for others to step in and assert control over the subject's behaviors in order to re-establish adherence to society's rules; or, even more likely, punishment for breaking them in the first place. Race reveals this very concept when he problematizes the recreation versus rebellion binary of drug use haunting the circuit party:

> [This] reserves pleasure for the privileged, in a move that can retract any recognition of the capacity for pleasure and agency among subordinated bodies. The attribution of passive victimhood is often mustered to legitimize the authoritarian treatment of the socially disadvantaged. It has been used to justify increased scrutiny and authoritarian policing of already severely scrutinized and marginalized populations….Drug use becomes symptomatic of crude and reified social distinctions at the expense of a consideration of their specific cultural dynamics. (168)

In this case, the privileged are those outside professionals who speak about the reason, meaning, and consequences of gay men's drug use. By situating drug use as a response to victimization, authorities can pretend any punishment is for the subject's "own good." However, the value system used to interpret these motives and behaviors is heteronormative in its perceived danger these subjects are willingly putting themselves in the way of. Snapshots are picked out, highlighted,

and scrutinized in order to sensationalize certain behaviors while ignoring any complications resulting from willful disruption of normative behavior. Race continues by focusing on how lack of productivity and future-centric acts are interpreted, explaining, "Normative constructions of responsibility work here to undercut the practical or embodied ethics that are being elaborated in these contexts, with the effect of spectacularizing them only as risk" (162). The element of desire is subsumed when gay male drug use at circuit parties is understood only as a coping mechanism for their victimization; pleasure is rejected and risk is exaggerated in order to demand outside policing.

A look at the framing of these types of pleasure as artificial, the value of pleasure unearned, and the ability for institutions to monitor and control pleasure, reveals how the process is deeply cyclical in nature. In his work, Michel Foucault explains this development and argues how it is deeply rooted in cultural expectations that focus on:

> [T]he establishment of a set of rules and norms—in part traditional, in part new—which found support in religious, judicial, pedagogical, and medical institutions; and changes in the way individuals were led to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations, their dreams. (*Uses of Pleasure* 3-4)

Institutions are able to create value systems, disseminate them, and then observe and control anyone who does not follow their ideology. This support not only helps

to reify established morals, it also allocates the power for institutions to perpetuate their own views and values concerning these shifting realms, which then allows for cultures to re-categorize feelings and actions as illicit or licit as they please. Of course, it depends on the importance placed upon these values as to whether or not they are enforced, and indeed, how enforcement or punishment might take place.

It becomes obvious certain pleasures, illicit or not, are more readily tolerated by society than others due to their perceived risks, which are often exaggerated and obfuscated in order to justify greater surveillance. The sexual war of the 1990s around HIV and AIDS prevention provides a striking example of this configuration. As one critic explains, "Regulatory laws collapse public sex with unsafe sex, promiscuity with the spread of HIV, and legality with public health" (Duggan 17). Sociologists have studied the disparity between punishment and transgression and suggest the enforcement is in proportion to the perceived threat, or risk, the behavior entails, observing, "Boundaries, classifications, and taboos are set up to protect cultures from what threatens to destabilize them. All that falls outside these boundaries is generally regarded as threatening or 'risky'" (Martinic and Leigh 31). The risk, then, is to the health of the individual, his productivity within society, and his threat to other members through unsanctioned behavior and unearned pleasure. This personal behavior is re-categorized as a societal problem, and therefore, intervention is not just desired, it is demanded. Additionally, the hierarchy of permissiveness is not built in direct correlation to the level of risk these pleasures represent. Instead, critics maintain, "The degree to which a substance is regarded as

a potential risk to health and well-being bears a close relationship to the extent it is integrated into the fabric of society" (Martinic and Leigh 34). This explains why smoking is still tolerated, although to a lesser degree, even though it has been proven to cause many serious problems to an individual's health. Nevertheless, some personal choices are considered to be matters of national concern while others remain in the private realm of the individual.

This idea of culture, and humanity, at risk by a subject indulging in illicit pleasure on a personal level is certainly not new. In his discussion of the early Christian text, *The Pedagogue*, Foucault concludes, "The gradual exhaustion of the organism, the death of the individual, the destruction of his offspring, and finally, harm to the entire human race, were regularly promised, through its endlessly garrulous literature, to those who would make illicit use of their sex" (*Uses of Pleasure* 16). It is clear this idea about sexuality and unsanctioned sexual behavior is present even today. Certain personal decisions and actions, usually those around pleasure, are presented as threats to the nation and humanity as a whole. Through this positioning, those in power can defend not only the intense scrutiny of pleasures, but also the punishment of subjects who engage in illicit pleasures. However, what is most interesting is how these activities are usually located within a hierarchy of acceptable risk, and this, in turn, is based on changing subjective values. Again, it is not the actual threat an activity may present to the nation; instead, it is based on society's stigmatization of the pleasure (Martinic and Leigh 34).

Another explanation used to justify the monitoring and controlling of these pleasures is that the subject is only harming himself in an attempt to escape the pressures and oppression society forces on a minority population through every day encounters. This logic is problematic for two reasons; first, it prevents analysts from discovering the true complexities of illicit pleasures, and second, it removes control from the subject and reconfigures these actions as *reactions*. Critics stress how "deviant behaviour has only recently been conceptualized by sociologists as pleasure-motivated—usually, it has been viewed as rebellion against the establishment, rejection of society's norms and values, and a mode of escape" (Lewis and Ross 7). Even so, popular culture, including many news outlets, is slow to catch on. The police, through laws and imprisonment, are allowed to place individuals under contained scrutiny, and because of the classification of addiction, doctors are allowed to do the same. While these examples claim authority through institutions, another path to power is available to those who have experienced firsthand the inside world of sexual liberty and drug use but now repudiate it in exchange for acceptance through homonormative values. One gay advocate, Michael Signorile, depends on this aspect with his pseudo-investigation of gay men and the circuit party.

Section 3: Signorile's Homonormative Report

While the outsider clings to impartiality through knowledge and authority over drugs and sexuality, a different position contends to be even more adamant

about the responsibility and power to observe and report: the insider who is now outside. Just as it is in addiction narratives, this position is occupied by someone who has fallen victim to the lures of the life inside. Then, in one way or another, he discovers the strength to reject this world and, upon return, finds it is his duty to reveal just how corrupt and poisonous this lifestyle really is. Much like the prodigal son returned home, the newly reformed outsider repents his time as morally bankrupt and devoid of any real pleasure; however, this return must be based on a willing and logical rejection of the previous life, not a forced repudiation due to hitting "rock bottom." This does create curious bedfellows as outspoken gay men can find themselves mouthing the same rhetoric of the Christian Right when they denounce homosexual men as promiscuous, narcissistic, and avoiding real life through the use of drugs. As Signorile points out, one gay man calls the urban gay scene the "homo rocket to hell," a phrase that would seem to fit more with anti-gay activist Fred Phelps and his Westboro Baptist church (xxi).

Michael Signorile stresses his newfound position in his book entitled *Life Outside—The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles and the Passages of Life*. As the title suggests, this is his authoritative report about these subjects based on his own experience of this lifestyle. He declares, "It is my hope, and it is the ambition of this book that many gay men within the culture of narcissism and hedonism that envelops much of the gay world will follow in the footsteps of a great many others, gay men have discovered more rewarding, fuller, and richer life, outside" (xxxiii). His rhetoric sets up a polarization that might as well be labeled as

good versus evil. Of course, the life outside is intrinsically of value while the life inside is shallow and ultimately destructive. Signorile interviews circuit partygoers and presents his subjects in a condescending way, robbing them of their voice even as they try to explain their lifestyle. His point is that gay men and women have earned grudging acceptance, as long as they behave under society's guidelines, and thus, it is irresponsible to not take up this mantle of citizenship. While some hail Signorile as brave and honest when he discusses his past, he also has his critics within the gay community who think otherwise.

Paul Robinson attacks Signorile and accuses him of naively espousing not only homonormativity, but blind presentism logic as well. What he finds most problematic about *Life Outside* is not how Signorile has moved to a different way of perceiving this lifestyle and his participation within it, but how he embraces presentism by devaluing his admittedly pleasurable experiences from when he was on the "inside." Signorile bases homosexuality's acceptance on neoliberal ideas of consumption and a lifestyle hierarchy that values family, home, and health as opposed to narcissistic club culture of the big city. While circuit culture does support consumption and capitalism, for Signorile, it is the wrong kind because it is unproductive and unsustainable. He calls out for gay men to settle down in monogamous relationships and dismiss the clarion call of the big city. Thus, he must whole-heartedly reject his former pleasures as empty, meaningless, and even worse, dangerous. In *Queer Wars: The New Gay Right and Its Critics*, Robinson investigates Signorile's report:

> *Life Outside* is a binary book. It is constructed as an invidious comparison between two antithetical gay worlds: the world of the circuit culture, which is promiscuous, body obsessed, and drugged, and the world of "life outside," the folks beyond the city who are leading normal middle-class lives, mostly monogamous, and growing old gracefully. (110)

Admittedly, occupying either of these polarized positions is little more than fantasy, however, it is the rhetoric of occlusion giving Signorile the authority to judge the circuit world. Accordingly, it is for their own good, and the good of gay men in the future, for which he exposes this world and its ills. By this logic, complete repudiation of this lifestyle is the only healthy thing to do.

Signorile's fame and history within the gay community complicates how this topic, and his position, might be viewed. Signorile has extensively written for both *The Advocate* and *Out*, two popular gay magazines. Even today, Signorile has a national platform through his daily blog, and each day he has a four-hour spot on the Sirius radio station *OutQ*. However, perhaps most surprisingly, he was involved with the gay activist group ACT UP, and cofounder of Queer Nation, two groups that embraced in-your-face protest against established institutions at odds with the gay community's needs. Admittedly, this appears to give him authority and knowledge over the politics of the gay community, however, other prominent critics, such as Michael Warner, point out the resentment evident in Signorile's report castigating the gay ghettos, and circuit parties, as dangerous to gay young men emerging into

these urban spaces. This residual anger taints his report and clearly shows an agenda and bias. Signorile's experiences, of which only one is ever related in the book, cause him to become an advocate for the life outside.

One aspect of the danger of club culture Signorile espouses has deeper roots in homophobia and the prevalent 1980s narratives around gay men and HIV as seen in the previous chapter. Robinson reveals, "Signorile's most immediate objection to the circuit is that it promotes unsafe sex" (111). Literally, then, Signorile feels he is saving lives by preventing others from participating in the circuit lifestyle. In his work analyzing the media's representation of AIDS, Simon Watney highlights an "implicit ideological slippage from 'homosexuality' to 'promiscuity' to Aids…commonplace of far too much Aids commentary" (*Policing* 54). This construction is so ubiquitous and insidious that Signorile, an outspoken gay advocate, accepts its logic when he unquestioningly blames the circuit for promoting risky behavior. But what is the risky behavior? Is it drug use? Promiscuity? Unsafe sex? Signorile seems unwilling to take the time to differentiate. His solution is to bundle them all together and castigate those who enjoy any of these pleasures. Again, he points to his own experience for authority when he reveals his own engagement in unsafe sex while under the influence. As it turns out, the influence was alcohol, however, he says circuit culture somehow shaped his choice and that of other gay men.

For the past thirty years, there have been multiple aspects of gay culture that have been blamed for the spread of HIV and AIDS. Bathhouses, circuit parties, drug

use, and anonymous sex have all come under fire at one time or another. In reality, unsafe sex is the real risk being glossed over in these arguments. One critic brings a refreshing take on the relationship between risk and these behaviors:

> Drugs such as ecstasy, methamphetamine and poppers are also commonly used in many gay social settings. Where drug use in such social scenes has been associated with unsafe sexual behaviour, this has led to overhasty conclusions that it was the drugs that led to the unsafe sex. Actually, the two things are more often consequences of the prior, and often explicit, intentions of the clubbers who have gone in deliberate search of an uninhibited and wild night out. (Boothroyd 44)

When looking at this proposition, caution must be taken. It would be easy to slip from one falsehood—drug use causes the spread of HIV—to another—drug users are searching for, and embracing, danger itself. As has been already shown, what seems lawless and "where rules don't apply" to an outsider is actually, on closer inspection, contradicted by implicit risk-management. Even so, this explanation shows how even a critique of slippage between homosexuality/drug use to HIV is itself riddled with unintentional moral judgment minimizing the behavior as nothing more than a "wild night out." This dismissal is powerful, and harmful, in how it obfuscates any political intent, as Buckland explains, "Furthermore, in the case of going to queer dance clubs, a homophobic-inflected capitalist reading asserts that music, drugs, and alcohol are uncritically consumed and an apolitical clone

intent on irresponsible hedonism is produced" (91). Instead of being an indication of drug use as it exists in club culture, these readings recast the behavior in a different light; certain pleasures are condoned and actions monitored. Race clarifies this relationship of rhetoric around drugs today and that of the 1980s media representation of AIDS: "As HIV enters a new, more manageable phase," he posits, "illicit drugs appear to have taken up the slack in the public narrative of just desserts that has come to haunt gay life" (140). Again, the perceived self-destructive nature of club culture allows—no, demands—the outside intervention Signorile is pushing.

The Life Outside is written by someone who has already rejected his previous membership, and so it never shows the allure of the circuit party. Although Signorile is an advocate for gay rights, his past experiences have brought him to a point where he repudiates his previous pleasure as empty and shallow. Others suggest a personal nature to Signorile's position, and even though it merits attention, criticism shows the unbalanced nature to his supposed report. Also of concern is the rhetoric Signorile uses to make his point; it is deeply rooted in homophobia misdiagnosing the risk of HIV and AIDS, both in the past and the present. His push for outside intervention is troubling coming from a gay advocate because it relies on the very institutions for which the gay community has tried to liberate itself from. This liberation, according to Signorile, has gone too far and placed gay men's lives in danger. He argues that the only way forward is to embrace homonormativity and settle into family life in the suburbs. However, this narrowly defines what it is to be

gay: androcentric, monogamous, and middle-class, which is why this geographical movement seems easy to do for those to whom he is speaking, especially considering that Signorile's report positions single men's city-life in the gay ghetto as lonely and harmful to a healthy body image. However, while Signorile simplistically paints big cities in this way, other authors have shown why life inside can be so alluring to gay men in the first place.

Section Four: Captivated by *The Spell*

The Spell (1998) by Alan Hollinghurst is a late coming-of-age story that is ubiquitous in gay culture, but this one is about entering the fast-paced, drug-fuelled London gay scene as opposed to the normative world of heterosexuality. The idea is, since closeted gay men and women often cannot be themselves when younger—the usual timeframe for a coming-of-age story—then they feel the need to relive their adolescences later in life. This should not be confused with a middle-age crisis, which is about trying to regain lost youth. This is Hollinghurst's third novel, written before he won the Man Booker Prize in 2004 for *The Line of Beauty* (2004). His first novel, *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988) also won an award upon its release and was followed by *The Folding Star* (1994). However, if critics treat Hollinghurst's other novels as his trueborn heirs, then it is clear that *The Spell* is seen as his bastard child. Set in the mid-nineties, the story fluctuates between the fast life of the city, specifically the gay Soho district, and the quieter country cottage in Dorset. The book has been called a failed "attempt at a picaresque sexual and social comedy of

manners" (Mendelsohn). The novel revolves around Alex Nichols who, at the age of thirty-six, begins a stormy affair with twenty-two-year-old Danny Woodfield. Danny's world is about beauty, pleasure, and desire, including, of course, drugs done in and out of the club scene. To complicate matters, Danny's father is now the lover of Alex's ex-boyfriend, Justin. The cover of the book proclaims it is a story of how "[t]he lives of four men intersect and intertwine during a long summer of discovery and heartbreak in London and the countryside" (Hollinghurst). However, many critics have been quick to dismiss the novel as a cheap and tawdry tale about a group of narcissistic and shallow gay men who have no self-control, often to the detriment of others. For example, the New York Times review claims the "flat, simplistic action" is only superseded by the "shallow and self-deluded gay characters" (Mendelsohn). Nevertheless, the novel captures one aspect of gay men's culture that is pleasure-centric even if it is an example, perhaps, blown all out of proportion.

The story is about Alex's induction to a life inside of the gay party scene, a place where his self-discovery leads him into a new daring world to which he never felt he belonged before, and for the journey, Danny holds the key. The combination of Danny's youth, beauty, and desirability give him easy access to a world Alex has often felt excluded from; however, soon after their meeting, Alex is introduced to the heady nightlife of London's premier gay clubs, a scene he first greets with disdain and then embraces as a community. Walking to the club, Alex feels isolated while Danny effortlessly claims his rightful place as an official member. Danny has

knowledge and is a part of this world, which Alex realizes when he notes, "Danny knew every beautiful or interesting-looking person who came towards them, and those he didn't know were registered, with a raised eyebrow or turn of the head, for future investigation" (74). This attitude exposes a certain level of entitlement on Danny's part since this is obviously his space. His status is emphasized further when the men arrive at the club. Here, it is useful to show the exchange and how quickly and effortlessly that Alex, with Danny's help, enters the world inside:

> At the crowd barrier Danny leant over and kissed the bomber-jacketed security guy on the lips, a few jeering fondnesses were exchanged, and that was all it took—the barrier was pushed back and they walked through, a ripple of nods and calls going over their heads from echelon to echelon of bouncers and greeters to signal their exemption and desirability. (81)

Hollinghurst highlights Alex's surprise at the simplicity of overcoming what, to him, must have appeared as an insurmountable obstacle. Danny's membership, as evidenced by his desirability, removes the literal barrier set before him. Alex's outsider status is also underscored when he realizes the exclusivity he is now experiencing at Danny's side, however, how much of this is his own perception? After all, the bouncer does not refuse Alex entry to the club, nor does anyone question his place once he is inside. It appears he is aware of what it takes to get in, but until now, he never understood the process. Even so, he maintains his distance from the club's participants as he takes in his surroundings once inside.

The outsider who becomes insider later in life must both critique the scene for its perceived negative aspects—explaining just why he was outside in the first place—and then backtrack and show how he had just misunderstood its inhabitants all along. This is a precarious position since there must be some reason as to why the outsider was excluded in the first place, but since he is soon a member, there must also be a reason for his desire to be included. For Alex, this is centered on beauty and the body as he admits, "The boys glistened and pawed at the ground. They looked like members of some dodgy brainwashing cult. Alex pursed his lips at so much willing slavery, and imagined it all going wrong for him, and the incomprehension of his family and colleagues as to why he had done it" (82). His fear is grounded in judgment from his normative community on the outside, but first he is worried about his experience not matching that of the other men in the club. From his description, it can be inferred how some positive aspects of drugs and desire that are closely linked can easily be interpreted in negative ways; the communal can become a mindless mob, easy and open sexual desire can become empty and narcissistic, and finally, pleasure of drug use can become shameful and animalistic. However, this view is made from the safety of being outside and, perhaps, the distance distorts his perception. This is certainly alluded to after Alex begins to feel his pill of ecstasy take effect. As an example of what one critic calls "narcopoeia," Hollinghurst's prose tries to take on some of the same aspects of drugs themselves as it glamorizes the entrancing effects of ecstasy (Mullan). This is seen when Alex realizes: "Each of the men around him seemed somehow distinct and

interesting, in a way he hadn't understood when he wandered in past the long line of cropped heads and top-heavy torsos" (83). His altered perception allows him to see distinct differences whereas before he only saw similarities. In addition, he re-evaluates the mindlessness he first perceived. Hollinghurst writes, "Alex still felt shocked at this wholesale surrender to the drug, but the abandon was beautiful too, he could see that" (83). What was brainless slavery to him before is now understood as intentional abandonment to pleasure. This sense of belonging expands from the community and the club. For the first time, Alex believes he is "on the inside of life rather than the outside" (107). This conclusion is curious because it implies that once membership in this small space is acquired it can be extracted and expanded to encompass life outside as well. However, this implication is not explored or fulfilled; Alex cannot translate his experience in the club onto the one he experiences on the streets of London. This, then, is exactly what Alex believes he has been missing; a community to which he belongs. Under the spell of ecstasy, Alex feels an "almost unconscious oneness" and believes he is among "all-knowing, all-forgiving friends" (86). For him, this feeling of belonging turns out to be unsustainable in the real world once the effects of the drug wear off. While the pleasure is accessible for these few hours, Alex cannot or will not tap into the confidence and abandonment he exhibits once he is outside of the club's spell.

The Spell quickly changes its tune about club culture, and what was at first bright lights and pleasure, quickly becomes darkness and pain. For this part, the author follows Danny's perspective and delves deeper into his self-centered

existence. Danny provides the stereotypical sinister side to the utopian world Alex is experiencing. The younger man is not only promiscuous and dishonest, he is also narcissistic and shallow. He embodies every critique brought against gay men in general, and club culture more specifically. Danny's life is composed of casual sex, empty desire, and rampant drug use, which are fueled by boredom. Once Danny is through with Alex, after their two-month whirlwind relationship, he easily tosses him aside and moves on, exhibiting the short-lived nature of his interest. The act confirms the shallowness of Danny and his world. The emotions expressed were superficial at best, but definitely not real; Danny never loved Alex. Their relationship becomes as fleeting as a trip on ecstasy. As he is being cruel to the older man, Danny looks in a mirror and notices "how terribly beautiful he was: the image itself was reflected again off some hard vain surface deep in his eye, and he thought, with easy pity, how little Alex would want to lose him" (234). Danny objectifies himself as a prize, one that is highly valuable because of its beauty. While Alex is a visitor to this world of desire, beauty, and drugs, Danny is a resident. During a conversation about drugs, the author again stresses the narcissism of the man's position, writing, "(Yes, thought Danny, in a spasm of frustration and worry, and I can get in free to any club in London, and get off my face for days on end, and have anyone there I want)" (232). The frustration comes from Danny's boredom outside of the club scene. He has disdain for the countryside and its inhabitants along with those who are ignorant of the drugs in which he indulges. For Danny, being an insider is about elitism, not of community.

After Alex is dumped, he once again revises his ideas about accessibility to the insider's world of drugs that Danny had revealed to him. He desperately wants back in and is hungry for the "new kinds of fun he had learnt from Danny," but he does not have the experience, or the connections, to make it possible (248). Clearly, Alex is afraid to go to the club without the drug experience to bolster his ideas of belonging as it had done the first time. A chance encounter with Lars, a man Alex met through Danny, allows him access to drugs, and dancing, again. Hollinghurst glosses over the moment and only references it as important because it is the night Alex meets Nick, an older more permanent suitor. After this one last fling with drugs, Alex finally wakes up from the "troubled trance of the past" (241). Whereas Danny is wild and passionate, Nick is described as more stable and reliable. The narrator notes, "Nick was the first person Alex had slept with who was older than himself, and though at their age it hardly made a difference, there was something, well, restful about it, and solidly grounded, after the jolting berths and squealing point-changes of nights with Danny" (240). Even though Alex enjoyed his time with Danny, it was unsustainable, and a relationship with Nick is more desirable. It is also important to note that for this final scene, Nick and Alex are back in the country and away from London's club culture. The novel ends with the men driving up to the scenic view over the cliff. They quickly speed towards the edge but stop just in time, just as Alex's own journey took him to a precipice and then back again to solid ground. Hollinghurst's novel dabbles in the world of club culture, and while Alex's

dalliance reveals the draw of the flashy disco lights, his return reaffirms that the stability of life outside is preferred.

In the end, Alex's journey from outside to inside, and from the sedentary country to the world of club culture for gay men in London, reads as a tourist narrative; he is titillated by the experience and feels like a native while there, but quickly reverts to the safety of the life outside. What is different in this example is the seductive description when Alex's views are changed and related through the veil of ecstasy. Alex shares the pleasure and freedom he feels, along with a sense of belonging that he seems to want as opposed to his prior pitiful feeling of loneliness. However, this aspect is counterbalanced by the more traditional narrative of club culture as superficial and self-centered, which Danny's lifestyle reaffirms for the reader. Finally, the audience is brought back to safety by the stability indicated by Alex's new love interest, Nick. The sex is predictable and "restful" with the older man and Alex can return to his normal life, growing-up after the short dalliance in adolescent behavior. While at times the novel succeeds at showing the siren's call of club culture, a more visual forum is necessary to truly understand why it appears so tempting.

Section Five: The Bi-Nature of *Queer as Folk*

In 1999, the British television station channel 4 aired *Queer as Folk*, the first show of its kind to focus on the lives of gay and lesbian characters. It only consisted of eight episodes, followed by a truncated season two, and was welcomed with

mixed reviews, both from the gay community and others. Although it did go on air late at night, it is crucial for any analysis to acknowledge channel 4 is a public channel. For this reason, some of the subject matter, including the portrayal of sexuality and drug use, is unexpected. The focus is on the evolving relationship between the three main characters, Stuart Alan Jones, Vince Tyler, and Nathan Maloney. What was surprising is how the show centered on gay male life in multiple forms that are often elided in mainstream media. Critic Giovani Porfido says it is an "introduction to the world of bars, discos, saunas, backrooms, threesomes, cyber sex, and intergenerational relationships that define the lives and loves of these proud-to-be-gay men" (58). Unsurprisingly, it had more than its share of detractors. It first aired to 2.2 million viewers and unabashedly placed gay life in the living rooms of its British audience. This is interesting since, as Porfido notes, the British decriminalization of homosexuality was based on the idea the government should not "interfere with the private life of citizens although it had to guard public order and decency" (58). This makes the British public broadcast of *Queer as Folk* on a noncable network even more startling. However, the station on which it aired, Channel 4, came about as an alternative to the public channel BBC, and its programs needed to take on more risks in order to gain a wider audience. Nevertheless, it was the first show of its kind to explicitly deal with homosexuality, and found itself at the center of criticism and support. For example, Stan Beeler concludes, "Attending clubs, using drugs and participation in a culture that insists upon occasional suspension of a mainstream work-ethic based lifestyle is integral to the plot to both

the U.S. and the UK versions of *Queer as Folk"* (98). However, while there is some truth to this, many of the issues tackled in both series have nothing to do with going out to the club. There are some storylines focusing on club culture, but many of the characters lead a homonormative lifestyle. The argument around authenticity of representation was repeated when the show was reconfigured for a North American audience.

Even before its official airdate in 2001, buzz around Showtime's latest series created interest, to say the least. The American version of Britain's *Queer As Folk* had its supporters and critics well before its first episode. Many were curious to see how far this remake would push the boundaries, both of its willing audience and of its detractors. Who the audience is becomes important when considering the show's impact. Beeler observes, "The audience demographic for the U.S. version of *Queer as Folk* surprised many media analysts because of the number of straight young women who watched the show" (104). One of the shows largest demographics, then, was made up of young women ages eighteen to thirty, whereas the British version drew a more diverse crowd. This would indicate a large segment of the audience falls within an outsider status. In fact, Beeler notes the advertisements that aired with the Canadian broadcast changed from club-centric male focused commercials to ones more female-centric (104). However, another critic claims the show beckons to a self-identified gay and lesbian audience with its accurate portrayal of gay life, arguing, "But the program's large audience and staying power suggest that it presents a picture of gay life with which many identify….even with its conventional

exaggerations, it captures many important elements of contemporary gay reality" (Robinson 152). So, then, the common belief was that the audience of the show was mostly gay, or at least could identify with a gay-centric lifestyle. However, the writers and producers knew straight women were watching, along with the gay and lesbian audience, and the show still appealed to them even though they were outside of the expected minority.

The opening credits of the U.S. version quickly hint at, in terms both sexual and pharmaceutical, the spectacle about to follow with its choice of bright colors and music. Many of the songs played throughout *Queer As Folk*'s five seasons are club hits, and sometimes fall under the label of "Circuit Music," a fact connecting Babylon, the main club in many of the episodes, and circuit culture. For example, the song playing as the first episode begins is a cover of the Jackson 5's hit "Can You Feel It?" by the Tamperer. The title of the song is a question suggesting an emotion, to be sure, but it is also a sly reference as to whether or not a person can feel his drugs beginning to take effect in a club. The physicality of the literal interpretation also works in club space, transforming the question to one sexual in nature, as evidenced by gay men seen rubbing against one another's bodies. However, even before this confirmation of the show's club-centric opening, the audience is bombarded with other visual signs of sex and drugs.

As the theme song plays in the background of the episodes' opening, psychedelic colors swirl around, evoking a connection to drug culture, specifically LSD usage, that existed in the United States during the 1960s. Of course, the rainbow

nature of the background colors is also a symbol of gay pride. More interestingly, however, the foreground is taken up with images of obviously male-bodied silhouettes dancing together, a visual technique emptying them of specific identity and features while making them faceless shadows; all that remains is their outline. Even so, fetishized symbols, such as the cowboy hat along with their clearly muscular and masculine physic, are ubiquitous symbols of desire in the gay community. Foucault reveals this aspect of power and bodies when he observes, "The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contracting bodies, caressing them with eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments" (*An Introduction* 44). At one point, the sexuality becomes even more overt as one man is shown thrusting a suggestive bulge into the other man's shadowy backside. What is unique about this representation is the lack of shame. As one critic claims, "One of the most remarkable aspects of club culture is the way that it has completely rejected the element of shame that was the earmark of (many) earlier drug cultures" (Beeler 117). I would add how this also applies to the rampant promiscuity the show depicts. However, this seemingly blatant disregard for mores is a vulnerability as well. Race explains, "For the point is the public spectacle of detection and humiliation, the making suspect of populations, the performance of moral sovereignty and the opportunistic exposure of those who are deemed to have failed it" (14). Those on the outside hold the position of authority, whether they are heterosexual or nondrug user, and these images, then, form the spectacle for their titillation. Other visual signs invoking the Circuit and Club culture

during the episodes include the use of glow sticks, ubiquitous water bottles, Go-Go dancers in costumes, sunglasses worn indoors, flag spinning, and finally, the almost total absence of female dancers.

The British version, on the other hand, while sometimes shocking, did not indulge in these techniques, which suggests they wanted a different reception. For example, the opening audio and visuals are quite tame when compared to its flashier American counterpart. The music in the background is too slow to be mistaken for club music. Since there were two CDs worth of club music released from the British show, they easily could have framed the series in that way. The U.K. *Queer as Folk* theme song is upbeat, but it is missing the high repetitions per minute that club music embraces even though it does have a repetitive "celebratory whoop of anticipated pleasure" (Billingham 111). In addition, instead of being flamboyant, or even sexual, the background is merely blurred golden-lights, suggesting city life, while the credits play in the forefront. The difference is startling; although the two share many plotlines, the American *Queer as Folk* is significantly more ostentatious with amplified drug use and references to club culture. Finally, the audience is introduced to Babylon and the characters who are leaving it for the night. This version of Babylon itself is devoid of any signifiers of club, or drug, culture. There are no beefy or buffed bodies dancing on the podium, nor are their any hands thrown in the air with their water bottles tightly clutched. There is one scene in the third episode, the first in which Babylon is featured, showing some people wearing glowing necklaces and a guy with his shirt off, but he is holding a beer and just

nodding to the music. Whenever the main characters go to Babylon, which is quite infrequently by comparison, they are also shown drinking or drunk. There are only two instances of drug use in Babylon, but neither is discussed, and although many of the researched articles about the British version analyze sexual excess, few mention the drug use at all. In one scene, Stuart and Vince snort lines of an undisclosed powder, while in the other instance, the men are shown dancing and each taking a pill. The dialogue does not reference either act, nor do the men appear to be under any influence. This silence is puzzling as it leaves the audience to interpret the drugs through other sources. Whereas the British version includes drug use in clubs, the American version magnifies, and even glamorizes, the culture. One final glaring absence in the British Babylon is the infamous sex-filled backroom that distorts private and public sexual space. Instead, there is an upper "chill-out" room where people are talking on couches. This difference suggests each series was expecting a certain audience; the British writers wrote for a wider audience, and although they never shied away from obvert sexuality, in comparison to the American *Queer as Folk*, they stayed away from glamorizing drug use and club culture.

Vince's character is called Michael Novotney in the U.S. version and he is one of the main characters in the show who reels the audience into the story, and even makes them partially belong with his insider-only information about the scene of Babylon and the other men in the group. Stereotypes are invoked in order to quickly sketch out the characters and the club, describing Michael as the nerd, Ted Schmidt as the older and awkward member, Emmett Honeycutt as the effeminate one, and

finally, Brian Kinney, who is said to be confident to the point of cockiness with the looks to back it up. As for Babylon, Michael sets the stage with his inner monologue, explaining, "The thing you need to know is; it's all about sex," then he claims it can happen anywhere at any time, however, the fact that all four are at the club at one in the morning argues that the club is where it happens more often than not; the club is the best and easiest place to find sex, which is why they are all there. In addition, he suggests everyone is on the lookout for "the most beautiful man who ever lived—that is, until tomorrow." His narration signals promiscuity and an element of interchangeability in who is most desired. In fact, he appears to indicate the very novelty of the sexual encounter with a stranger is what is preferred, even though he himself never lives up to this credo in the series. Just as in the British version, the narration in the introduction does two things. First, because it exists at all, it implies the audience is an outsider to the scene and so there is a "need to know" contextualization before the show can continue. However, the next move is to include the audience in on the hunt for the next man with the more general use of the pronoun "you." Others have argued that this usage draws the audience, as outsider, into participation, regardless of sexuality (Peeren 61). However, a safe distance is still maintained.

The true character aligned with the "outsider" aspect of the audience is Justin Taylor who, with his youth and innocence, is very similar to Nathan Maloney and exhibits the same naïve lack of knowledge. One big difference is their age; Nathan is only fifteen years old, while Justin is said to be seventeen. Whereas in England the

age of legal consent is sixteen, in the United States it is eighteen, which explains the change in age. Although he appears ready to act on his desires, Justin is shown to lack the knowledge and experience to negotiate Philadelphia's gay scene. The camera movement is at first slow, and then speeds up with jerky movements mimicking Justin's own jostled body on the crowded sidewalk. Justin's body itself shows signs of not yet belonging in this scene. His eyes are wide with mouth agape while he nervously avoids eye contact by looking down. This body language communicates his unease and lack of belonging among the group of older men. When he asks someone who is more experienced about where to go, the man looks him up and down and throws out his own obviously biased view of each bar and separates them through the difference in what "type" of gay man is desirable in each. This aligns the outsider audience with Justin since he is not cued into the meaning of categories like "twink," a youthful-looking boy, or "S & M," sadomasochism. His ignorance of the specific language around gay male desirability and social grouping makes him later innocently claim to be into leather fetish when he meets Brian.

If Justin is the innocent lamb then Brian is the veracious lion who intimately understands the ins and outs of club space and culture, but most importantly, he understands the unspoken rules of sex and drugs, including those of which it is relatively safe to break. When they first meet, Brian takes the initiative and steps into Justin's personal space, signaling his confidence and knowledge of desire. Even though he notices Justin's mistaken reference to the "Meathook," implying the young

man is into the leather scene, Brian neither corrects him nor cares. Brian, as an insider, is the one in control and remains that way as he quickly takes Justin to his place. When Brian strips down, leaving Justin fully clothed and hesitant, the camera is positioned behind his nude body, allowing him to retain power when he should be the vulnerable one. This sense of power is aided by Justin's reaction of obvious desire in the face of Brian's nudity. Brian is in command throughout the encounter while Justin is confused and misinterprets almost every question. At this point, even the audience is more aware of the appropriate, and expected, responses. For example, when Brian asks, "What do you like to do?" Justin responds with, "Watch TV, play Tomb Raider." There is a disconnect between the language and meaning within their conversation due to Justin's lack of knowledge around pleasure. In addition, because they are the "wrong" pleasures according to society, Justin lacks the resources needed to be prepared. While Brian is trying to narrow down sexual pleasure from a multitude of possibilities, Justin sees the question as a polite request about personal interests or hobbies. This lack of knowledge is repeated when Justin thinks "Special K" is only a cereal instead of slang for the drug Ketamine. However, Brian is experienced enough to guide Justin into his world of pleasure. These interactions emphasize how membership to the loosely concocted world of drug use and club culture is based on knowledge and experience gained through exposure.

Out of the main group in both shows, the Brian/Stuart character is positioned as the one most outside of heteronormativity, and as an insider to the world of

drugs and sexual promiscuity. Throughout the American show's five seasons, Brian's life is often framed to be incompatible with both hetero- and homonormative values, which leaves the audience fluctuating between approval and repudiation. As Robinson points out:

> On one hand, we are invited to see him as damaged goods, a man whose narcissism and brittleness are defense mechanisms against the hurt of an uncaring father and a homophobic mother. On the other, he is presented as someone who has completely liberated himself from the repressive conventions of heterosexuality and whose utter contempt for straight society makes him the ultimate gay hero. (154)

Both Stuart and Brian embody aspects of the gay community that homophobic rhetoric eagerly uses to challenge homosexuality as being without moral, whereas the queer community argues these pleasures are valid and desirable. In this, the two characters are similar indeed, however, because the American version highlights Brian's drug use as symbolic of his liberation, his actions flesh out the ideology Stuart hints at in the British series. In both versions, for example, while his lesbian friends are at the hospital, one of them giving birth to his son, the Brian/Stuart character is busy cruising for sex at Babylon. To emphasize his rejection of normative ideas of time, the shows' writers place him there, doing drugs, on a weeknight, something that only becomes known the next day as Brian is forced to drop Justin off at a private school. In addition, while he is in the hospital, he deploys talk about sex and drugs to disrupt the women's emotionally charged atmosphere of

domesticity. Even Justin's intimacy is brought up short when Brian calls love nothing but a "straight lie." While Brian/Stuart's life embodies a queer challenge to normative values, his is the only one out of the group to do so.

Brian's experience, both with drugs and sex, allow him to negotiate through his encounters with little harm while others do not fare so well. As one critic notes, "For the most part the show refuses to be alarmist about drugs: they are presented as an integral feature of gay life, a source of fun and unobjectionable erotic stimulation" (Robinson 160). After leaving the hospital, Brian pops a small pill in his mouth as he sings his ABCs, he revealingly stops on the letter "E," signaling it is ecstasy, but only to those who are familiar with the shortened street name for the drug MDMA. He acts aggressively sexual and later disassembles his apartment, both of which are strange behaviors for someone supposedly high on ecstasy. However, the only people who would notice this incongruity would be those who have interacted with, or studied, the drug and its effects. In the morning, Brian himself declares the drug had to be something other than MDMA, but he neither speculates as to what this unidentified substance was, nor does he appear concerned by the lack of knowledge that could have placed him in harm's way. An outside audience, because of their ignorance about drug use, would unquestioningly accept the interchangeable nature of drugs suggested in this instance. However, the series also makes a point of addressing the incongruity of Brian's behavior by his admission that his actions were not influenced by ecstasy. Nevertheless, Brian remains unharmed by his experience. This unspecified quality about the drug and its effects

is different from the experience Ted, an outsider to club culture, has when he first tries drugs.

Ted's lack of knowledge about sexual desire and drug use leave him more vulnerable to their risks and his experience appears to highlight the need for information about the dangers of drugs and sex. The third episode from the first season has a subplot involving Ted and his encounter with Blake, an attractive younger man who turns out to be a "tweaker," not necessarily an addict, but someone who does drugs often. The chapter title even calls out Ted's behavior with the label, "Young and the Reckless," with Blake being the young and Ted being the reckless. From the very beginning, Ted is located on the outside. In the club, Ted constantly tries to gain attention from the multitude of men walking by; however, he fails to get noticed as desirable. He is slow to believe it when Blake first shows interest in him, and his love of pornography keeps him from understanding this real life example of sexual desire, the very opposite of Brian's cockiness. For him, Babylon can be "too intense," whereas the others sometimes describe it as boring. Because of his nervousness, Ted readily agrees to consume GHB when Blake suggests it back at his place. It is here where he fails to negotiate the interaction with the drug due to his inexperience.

Although it is acceptable to have sex with a stranger, as Brian's character shows in almost each episode, doing drugs with one can be much more risky. Of course, this difference has not always been the case, but as safe-sex education has become ubiquitous, pleasure itself is no longer always seen as deadly as it once was.

However, Ted does not have the knowledge necessary to safely negotiate his drug encounter. First, he is shown drinking a beer right before taking the drug. The interaction of alcohol with GHB is known to exponentially increase its effect, even to the point of death. Blake appears to be aware of this when he asks only for water and says, "I don't drink." Second, Ted declares he has used GHB "once in a while," and then belies the statement as he proceeds to quickly gulp down the drug-laced water up until the point when Blake stops him in a panic. Blake's behavior shows his surprise that Ted is unaware that he should take the drug more slowly to monitor its effects. Finally, Ted blurts out, "I don't feel anything," before the drug has a chance to be absorbed into his system. Of course, his hasty consumption causes him to overdose, and as he collapses, his hand grasps out to a picture of his friends, literally pointing out the biggest mistake of all: doing drugs without his friends being present to form a safety net.

A thematic comparison between the two versions reveals differences in the cultural constructions of gay life, club culture, and the dangers of drug use. In the British version, Ted's character goes by Phil and his experience is darker and less forgiving. When Phil brings home Harvey Blake, their encounter is less tender. Harvey has a short buzz cut and he is older with a working-class wardrobe. He actually encourages Phil to do more drugs instead of cautioning him on the dangers; the multiple risk-management techniques from the prior example are absent here. The exchange is shorter, and they actually use heroin, which is not a club drug or heavily used in the gay community. When Phil dies right before Harvey's eyes, the

other man just steals the money from his wallet and runs out. His actions are clearly immoral and indicate both a predatory and selfish nature. Whereas Blake calls emergency services anonymously in order to save Ted's life, Harvey leaves Phil alone lying on the floor, and the police do not find the body until four days later. This selfishness and risk of drug use tied to sexuality is emphasized when Phil's mother unequivocally blames her son's death on being gay. As Beeler observes, "In the UK version the mother of the overdose victim is quite bitter and pointedly asks Vince if he thought her son would have died in such a fashion if he were straight. She asks if a thirty-five-year-old man would go home with a strange woman and die from taking heroin with her (*Queer as Folk*: UK, 1:4)" (101). Surprisingly, this assumption goes unchallenged by the other gay characters, as if to say this kind of thing happens all of the time in the gay community. The implication, then, is being gay causes a man to put himself in harm's way, and without anyone saying differently, homosexual desire and lifestyle are intrinsically blamed for causing Phil's drug overdose.

Although critics decry the drug users habits as purposefully placing the body in danger, in reality there are many unspoken practices in place within the gay community that actually drastically reduce any risks. An insider knows this, and, in fact, Brian tells this to the others at the hospital in the American version with Ted's overdose. When Michael says, "It could be us," Brian responds with, "We know better." He then proceeds to vocalize the ways, including only doing drugs with friends, in which they all use safety measures to lessen the risk. In fact, within the

same episode, Michael and Brian share some "Trail Mix," a powder usually made up of some combination of MDMA, Ketamine, and/or Viagra. Brian adroitly handles the small plastic bullet used to deliver the substance, and when it is Michael's turn to snort the drug, Brian cautions, "Careful, it's strong," in order to allow an informed decision as to how much he should use. Brian's friendship and experience combine, and his monitoring of the drug's power prevents Michael from overdosing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this chapter is entitled "Membership Required," and while this appears to reference the fact Babylon is for members only, it can also be read as an obvert gesture to the men's status as insiders. In fact, after Ted's experience, it could be read as a warning as well. Membership *is* required to minimize risk and maximize the pleasure the drug user experiences. Because there is such a lack of outside knowledge to this world, one must be an insider, or know an insider, to successfully negotiate the many risks involved.

These examples of drug use illustrate the fluidity between sexual moments and drug-fueled ones, linking knowledge of the two together. As Michael and Brian walk through the bathroom of Babylon they attempt to enter a stall, but they are all being used. Finally, they gain access to one with a sign reading, "No sex in the Bathrooms/ That is What the Couches are For." However, the camera has shown a different story, hovering above the stalls as it reveals men making out in the other two. Brian's confidence and lack of caution demonstrate he is aware this space is safe from prying eyes and can be used for sexual encounters along with illicit drug use. While they prepare to take the drug, sounds of grunting and moaning can

clearly be heard in the background. Perhaps this overlap between the two pleasures is why Michael confuses the experience for a sexual one. Although it is clear Michael has had a crush on Brian throughout the years of their friendship, Brian does not see his friend as an object of sexual desire. As both men begin to feel the power of the drug, they intimately lean their sweaty foreheads together for support. Michael begins to tell a story, his mouth inches away from Brian's own as the sounds of sexual pleasure increase in volume. Out of drug-induced pleasure, they are massaging each other's sides and shoulders as they hug. After Michael starts kissing Brian's lips, his transgression becomes clear as he grabs Brian's crotch, who then asks, "What are you doing?" The drug lowers his inhibitions, which causes him to act on his impulse in the first place, but then it also allows for his innocent defense when he says, "Nothing. It must be the trail mix." As members of the club, both men are aware of this fluidity in pleasures and slippage between drug use and sexual desire. Additionally, both men know that while the drug may have emboldened Michael, it did not create the desire in the first place. Instead, it just enhanced his willingness to try for it. Their encounter is full of multiple examples of their insider knowledge, which allows them to maximize the pleasurable aspects while minimizing the risk.

In the end, although the two versions share many plotlines and character traits, the American counterpart, in comparison, is more sensationalized in regards to drug use and club culture. This could be why their audience group turned out to not only be members of the gay community, but in fact, consisted in a large part of

straight young women, who, it can be assumed, would be unfamiliar with the world unfolding on screen. The club space also changes in the transition, and Babylon takes on a more erotic charge. Pleasures of drug use and sex conflate and take place in the same spaces—the bathroom and backroom. The audience first gains entrance to this world through the experiences of two characters, Michael and Justin, but it is from the safety of their own home. Justin's innocence acts as a necessary foil to Brian's knowledge and confidence about sexual desire and drug use. The older man's unabashed indulgence in illicit pleasures put him at odds, both with the other characters' homonormative values and with society's heteronormative expectations. He successfully negotiates and manages the risks his behavior puts him in, unlike Ted and Phil, who lack the tools necessary. *Queer as Folk* is able to speak specifically to an insider audience and yet remain able to indulge in small fabrications and exaggerations about gay life and drug use in order to titillate. Although the show is not responsible for informing an outsider audience about any misconceptions concerning drugs and gay men, their glamorization of Brian's lifestyle emphasizes the pleasure while only hinting at life saving risk-management, and these clues are only decipherable by an insider audience.

Conclusion

Due to the lack in variety of these representations in mainstream media, circuit parties and club culture end up being sensationalized as hedonistic and dangerous. The crisis of representation allows others to speak about illicit pleasures

and negate them as reactionary and misguided. The state uses this process in order to justify increased scrutiny, and policing, of these spaces and communities. There are many genres tackling club culture, but for the most part, each claims authenticity and honesty in the portrayal of a world few know anything about. Excess is showcased as the norm, an act robbing inside members of any authority to speak about the topic of their pleasurable experiences. The image of the gay man overdosing on drugs has replaced the figure of gay men dying of AIDS while reinforcing the theory that illicit pleasures are deadly. Even so, gaps and fissures abound when these representations are scrutinized. The polarizing effect of lawless risk is mitigated by examples of risk-management, including experienced knowledge of the drugs used and their effect on the body. Even when there are mistakes made, the safety net of friends diminishes the amount of danger these men are actually in. The position of the audience and author, whether it is as an outsider or insider, dramatically affects what representations are highlighted and how these illicit pleasures are regarded. While some choose to sensationalize the life inside, others glamorize it; both can endanger a first-time user by their lack of information about the honest risks. The truth is, the life inside does appear to hold an appeal, even if there is a darker side to it.

Chapter Four

"Who *are* You?"

Identity Formation in the Men of Letters and Queer Subjects

"We have at stake here no less than the self, consciousness, reason, liberty, the responsible subject, alienation, one's own body or the foreign body, sexual difference, the unconscious, repression or suppression, the different "parts" of the body, injection, introjection, incorporation (oral or not), the relationship to death (mourning and interiorization), idealization, sublimation, the real and the law, and I could go on." (Derrida 31)

From Derrida's nearly apocalyptic account of civilization's vulnerability, one might imagine the very fabric of society itself is at risk when it comes to drug use. Of course, some people believe this hyperbolic positioning is true even today; however, this begs the question: why are current notions of civilization and the nation continually positioned as always/already threatened by the illicit drug user's experience, and why has this idea taken hold of the cultural imagination and refused to let go? Can drugs ever be incorporated into culture without altering our understanding of how the definition of one, or the other, is constructed? Jacques Derrida's comments on drug use illustrates why illicit drugs are forbidden even though some intoxicants are seen as more acceptable, to a varying degree, when they are just as harmful if not more. He assertion rests on the type of pleasure,

solitary and considered "false" or constructed, which society cannot accept. At one point he asks, "What do we hold against the drug addict? Something we never, at least never to the same degree, hold against the alcoholic or the smoker: he cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and community; that he escapes into a world of simulacrum and fiction" (25). His argument reveals how society, through laws and cultural representations, maintains this special separation between legal and illegal drug use. While behavior and perception may be altered by tobacco and alcohol, illicit drugs are believed to have the immediate effect of removing the individual from the system, and even from reality.

Drugs and literature have a rich history together made up of intellectuals who fail whenever they try to make their drug experience "meaningful" for the nation. Often, the experience is framed in such a way as to be seen as an attempt to bring productive knowledge about consciousness and perception back for society as a whole. For example, although Walter Benjamin thought of drugs as poison, he wrote to his friend, saying his experience "may well turn out to be a very worthwhile supplement to my philosophical observations, with which they are most intimately related, as are to a certain extent even my experiences under the influence of the drug" (Boon *Introduction* vii-viii). Men of Letters, in particular, have attempted to use their authority based on distinctly Westernized notions of knowledge to force the drug experience, which is often depicted as inexorably linked to the Orient, to be productive and useful for normative society. The Men of

Letters are intellectuals who desire to add to the body of knowledge in some way, and they closely tie this to heteronormative concepts of masculinity. Their authority and quest for productivity allow them to shamelessly engage in drug use even if the trip is illicit. Since drug use alters consciousness and provides a different perception, the experience can be threatening to established epistemologies. So, it is the Men of Letters who test drugs in order to write about them while trying to assert mastery over the experience. Thomas De Quincey and Charles Baudelaire, along with Walter Benjamin and Aldous Huxley, are all literary men who have written about their experiences with drugs in an attempt to provide knowledge for the rest of the populace. De Quincey is famously linked with opium by his tale of habitual use, one that Baudelaire later translates, while the Frenchman along with Benjamin use hashish for their experiments. They come up with similar experiences of unproductive gnosis, even though the experiments were done more than sixty years apart. Huxley, during his time in the 1950s, was more interested in the effects of mescaline and its ability to alter consciousness to provide a doorway into the mind. Even though these men used different drugs to do so, all of them were interested in going on a drug-fueled trip and bringing their altered perceptions back from the great unknown, as it was framed, fully mastered, for Western literature and society. However, this attempt at mastery is flawed, and it ultimately fails; instead, fictional representations of queer time and space allow for a better understanding of drugs and their influence on individuals' concepts of stable identity.

The failure of the Men of Letters to understand the great unknown gnosis the drug experience offers and bring it back in any meaningful way for the rest of society reveals how drugs are innately incompatible with traditional Western epistemology. Instead, the drug experience is best understood as both a queer time and place. This, in turn, causes these new experiences and perceptions to ultimately be rejected by Western philosophy built by the Men of Letters due to the perceived threat to nation, futurity—as represented by the Child—and stable identity. This argument, of course, relies on recent works in queer theory, such as those voiced by Judith Halberstam and more specifically by Lee Edelman, arguing not that the Child is unimportant, but that society and culture overemphasize the imaginary figure at the expense of real citizens. Edelman's recent work, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), is a useful tool when unpacking why queer subjects should challenge current glorification of a futurity at any cost. Edelman's argument is that "the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (11). Thus, the heteronormative glorification of futurity is embraced in order to keep the nation-state safe for the imagined Child. Other critics, such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on one hand, and Halberstam and Kane Race on the other, argue how drugs disrupt identities, time, and space, which is why they are seen as threatening. However, while the first two critique this aspect as unproductive for society, the latter two embrace this as a challenge to normativity. Actually, there are quite a number of people, both Men of Letters and queer theorists, who link drug use to the

Other and the Orient. However, few works outside of Queer Theory explore the possibility of the drug experience itself as able to challenge naturalized ideas of normativity. Lewis Carroll's timeless tale of a child's visit to Wonderland embodies all of these aspects of drug use that align with queer theory. Alice appears to be a parody of the traditional role of the child for the nation-state, and Carroll's fictional and nonsensical account exhibits non(re)productivity that the drug user is accused of embracing. Perhaps it should come as no surprise to see how the drug user, and his experience, is understood as always/already queer in today's society because of these attributes.

More recently, Kane Race exposes "how quickly and deceptively drugs and their metonyms can turn into fetishized symbols of all that is experienced as artificial, inauthentic, alienating, and untrue—always capable of implying a purer, unmediated, natural space that claims to exist before consumption, politics, and contest" (30). Many people familiar with queer theory will see the similarities between Race's argument about drugs and earlier challenges of the heteronormative matrix of oppression decried by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990). This serves to show how normativity operates to make outside identities unthinkable or unattractive through historical rhetoric of artificiality and how some identification practices are preferred as long as they align with the nation-state.

Besides space and time, notions of identity as unstable also appear in drug literature that is queer. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari expand upon the idea of drug use disrupting identity,

questioning whether drug experience can actually create new ways of being. The two authors argue that knowledge in the West is traditionally understood in linear ways, whereas humans actually think and perceive the world through rhizomatic ways. The idea is that connections between things are infinite lines of flight; any point in a rhizome can be connected to any other point to create new assemblages (4-5). For drug use in particular, these concepts are discussed as new ways of being and living that are at odds with civilization. Deleuze and Guattari argue that drug experiences disrupt normative ideas of time and identity. However, they then question whether or not the knowledge gained through these experiences can be used and transmitted after the person is no longer under the influence of drugs. The very terms in which they look for value in drug use are flawed from the start; how do you write or relive an experience that is, by definition, outside of normative perceptions and epistemologies? I would suggest that the person capable of bringing this experience back would, in turn, then be labeled as mad because they would be operating outside of normative epistemologies. Deleuze and Guattari go on to explain how this escape from normativity actually fails because a new rigidity is experienced as the addict redefines time around his next hit. However, this unquestionably slips from concepts around drug use and the drug experience into drug addiction; a casual user would have no reason to reorder their world in such a way. So then, the question remains: can a drug user frequently escape into a different perception and then slip back without falling into a new trap of time? Well, yes, but can that experience be told or shared in these classical ways? Here, the

answer is no. But why is there the assumption that these moments should be translatable or accessible in everyday life?

Deleuze and Guattari appear to insist on a value system of productivity in order to legitimize any drug use, an epistemology that occludes these experiences by its very definition. Even as Halberstam argues that drug use challenges normative notions of time and place, Deleuze and Guattari question its efficacy and base their answer, once again, on whether the perceptions are useful for society itself, asking "whether drugs have sufficiently changed the general conditions of space and time perception so that nonusers can succeed in passing through the holes in the world and following the lines of flight at the very place where means other than drugs become necessary" (286). In this statement, they reveal the very narrow terms of value and restrict drugs to ideas of productivity for society as a whole. I would agree with their assessment; drug use is not translatable to a non-user's perception of time and place. How can the user of drugs explain dreamlike sequences in any meaningful way to another person? Even so, many authors have attempted to bring their drug perceptions into society using traditionally linear narratives. Ultimately, these experiments fail to make meaning.

While De Quincey and Baudelaire's experiences act as more of a cautionary tale about the consequences of drug use on the creative mind, both Benjamin and Huxley, to a differing degree, offer a more utopian vision of what drugs can provide for culture. In his posthumously published notes *On Hashish*, Benjamin basis his argument on a more personal and individual approach, while Huxley advises a more

elitist vision in which certain individuals should experiment with drug use and then bring back their newfound knowledge for everyone. However, this paradigm is not new, neither the positioning of the Man of Letters as authority of knowledge production nor the attempt to make the drug experience productive and useful in some way for culture as a whole. On the connection between drug use and authorial position, Susan Zieger argues, "By contrast, drug autobiography self-consciously flaunts its more elite, literary origins, deriving authority from the drugged self's experiences that is not primarily didactic or regulatory but scholarly and aestheticized" (*Inventing* 37). This explains how the Men of Letters are able to narrate their experiences and retain their heteronormative masculinity even as they engage in illicit behavior.

Section 1: De Quincey's Quest

Thomas De Quincey marked his authorial place in the literary canon with his autobiographical account entitled *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) and, in order to do so, he invokes the two polarizing aspects of drug use as understood then and now: drugs can cause pleasure when used recreationally and drugs can cause pain when abused. Building upon these themes, many critics discuss how his narrative spearheaded a drastically altered British perception of opium, and solidified drugs as both medical cures and a cause for concern. In *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* (2002), Marcus Boon argues that De Quincey is the first to write about recreational use of drugs in the nineteenth-century, and the

experience centers on how opium can act as a conduit between a dream-world and the real one; De Quincey's perceptions in one inform his later experience of the other in a never-ending cycle. Boon explains, "Everywhere, opium opens doorways from nineteenth-century England into strange mythical territories…" (*Road* 38). However, as it turns out, this is anything but pleasant as De Quincey finds himself constantly confronted by images that have taken on a sinister form, but this is only after his pleasure has turned into pain. Before his eight years of abuse, De Quincey experiences years of casual use, which, in many ways, reflects Boon's assertion of drugs as transcendental. "By 'transcendental,'" he writes, "I mean that which goes beyond materiality, and materialist explanations—that which has traditionally, but by no means exclusively, been the concern of religions and spirituality" (*Road* 11). De Quincey expresses this aspect when he first uses the drug, but in order to pick apart both the pain and pleasures of opium use, other critics have cogently argued that the author must fist establish his authority. For example, Zieger analyzes the connection between the drug autobiography and scholarly elitism, pointing to De Quincey's need to assert "masculine scholastic and empirical authority," a description that neatly sums up the author's position within Western knowledge against the unknown of the Orient (*Inventing* 128).

While many critics have addressed De Quincey's obsession with the Orient, as expressed through his literary works, two stand out as succinctly describing the historical and personal context of his fear. Both Barry Milligan and Cannon Schmitt discuss the Orient and De Quincey's overwhelming fear of reverse colonization in

the form of the East penetrating the West, which has been feminized through continued opium use. Schmitt argues that De Quincey's confession mimics the Gothic genre as it positions the author and his country as helpless victim and, therefore, vulnerable to machinations of the East (66). He goes on to say that De Quincey shows a fear of losing his self-proclaimed identity, a reoccurring theme in *Suspiria De Profundis* (1845). Schmitt asserts, "What horrifies De Quincey is the swirling multiplicity of selves he experiences….Such horror is tied to opium: dependence on the drug promotes a destabilization of identity in the autobiographical subject" (70). However, this is less evident in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* because De Quincey is not dependant on the drug for most of the tale. Even though De Quincey faces challenges to his identity, it is not until he begins to abuse opium that he experiences this identity disruption. The more benign aspect to this openness to the Orient is the ability to access culture and creativity through the door that opium use can open. Sadie Plant addresses this when she discusses De Quincey being under the influence of the three Sublime Goddesses. "Their messages were scrambled," she writes, "but opium allowed him to receive them" (16). However, she also points out De Quincey's own assertion that the reader, or those who have never been under the use of opium, could never truly understand his drug experiences. Nevertheless, De Quincey states it is his duty to try.

From the beginning, De Quincey asserts his authority through his identity, both as an Englishman and opium-eater, in order to justify his story and the need for

others to read it. There are three distinctly masculine aspects that he invokes; his knowledge and education, his opium use first to relieve pain instead of for pleasure, and finally, his refusal to submit under epic struggles. In addition, De Quincey stakes his claim in the need to provide a product, his narrative, in order to warn society; however, this fails. Even though De Quincey is able to relate his personal experience with opium, he can neither articulate the pleasure of being on opium nor the pain of being without it. Nevertheless, De Quincey does clearly, and loquaciously, relate a fear of the Orient as a threat to Western knowledge and heteronormative masculinity based on disruptions of stable identity and time.

De Quincey sets in motion his tale by hailing and invoking his audience before he turns to his justification, based on the reader's need, for his cautionary tale of opium use:

> To the Reader.—I here present you, courteous reader, with the record of a remarkable period in my life: according to my application of it, I trust that it will prove, not merely an interesting record, but, in a considerable degree, useful and instructive. In *that* hope it is, that I have drawn it up; and *that* must be my apology for breaking through that delicate and honourable reserve, which, for the most part restrains us from the public exposure of our own errors and infirmities. Nothing, indeed, is more revolting to English feelings, than the spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral

> ulcers or scars, and tearing away that 'decent draper', which time, or indulgence to human frailty, may have drawn over them…. (1)

Thus begins Thomas De Quincey's infamous novel about drug addiction even before the concept existed; however, the framework is carefully structured to invoke authority while distancing himself from the experiences that follow. While his life story is "noteworthy" and "interesting," it is intended to be "useful and instructive" above all else; his is a higher purpose for the betterment of his countrymen who are distinctly English with their sensibilities. While he admits that the account is full of "errors and infirmities," through a rhetorical turn, De Quincey places himself with the audience who is about to bear witness to the "spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral ulcers or scars" (1). This displaces the author and removes him from blame. Perhaps this should not be surprising considering the displacement opium creates in regard to the body and senses. Boon marks this configuration as specific to the sublime and reveals, "Opium, in its ability to transform a sensation of pain into a sensation of pleasure, by creating a distance, a numbness that removes the user from unpleasant sensation, echoes the formula of the sublime itself" (*Road* 38-9). This, clearly, De Quincey does even as he relates his story of hardship, experiencing both the pleasures and the pains of opium, and then turning around and invoking his authorial presence in an attempt to make his life's history productive for all of society.

The first claim to authority De Quincey makes is through his intellect, and he goes to great lengths in order to situate himself firmly within the masculine realm of

a Man of Letters. When he relates his story, he bases it on a traditional Western education, along with an inherent intelligence, in order to claim his right to become an author. Early on, he reveals, "For my own part, without breach of truth or modesty, I may affirm, that my life has been, on the whole, the life of a philosopher: from my birth I was made an intellectual creature: and intellectual in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasures have been, even from my school-boy days" (2). Instead of claiming the pursuit of amusement when he is a child, De Quincey asserts his pleasure in being an intellectual from the start. He must construct this identity foremost in order to do two things; first, distance himself from a mindless pleasure-seeker; and second, to position himself as the English antithesis to the ever haunting presence of the Orient invoked by his identification as an opium-eater. This becomes even clearer later in his story when he begins to describe himself and his surroundings. De Quincey intrudes on the reader's imagination when he asserts, "Into this you may put a quart of ruby-coloured laudanum: that, and a book of German metaphysics place by its side, will sufficiently attest to my being in the neighbourhood…" (61). These two things, placed together, signal De Quincey's presence. However, just as De Quincey must summon great quantities of opium to show his extraordinary tolerance, so, too, does he need to claim presence of mind above even the most learned of men. For example, early on, De Quincey explains how he knew more than the men set to teach him. Later, even after suffering from addiction, De Quincey declares he can improve upon a brilliant book of politics written by Mr. Ricardo. He calmly maintains, "All other writers had been crushed

and overlaid by the enormous weight of facts and documents; Mr Ricardo had deduced, *a priori*, from the understanding itself….It seemed to me, that some important truths had escaped even the 'inevitable eye' of Mr. Ricardo…" (66). Not only does De Quincey comprehend the finer nuances that have escaped all other men, he can improve upon them.

The second feature that De Quincey emphasizes in order to gain authority is his firm assertion that his first use of opium originated from a medicinal need instead of recreational abuse. In her work, Virginia Berridge confirms that self-medication through opium use was quite common during the nineteenth century (51). Samuel Taylor Coleridge accused De Quincey of indulging in opium and seeking out pleasure, a charge he vehemently denied. However, society's delineation between the two has changed, and it is important to point out that the line between recreation and medicinal use was not always so clear. Berridge acknowledges this when she contends that many conversations "ignore the point that self-medication could easily shade into recreational use" (53). Nevertheless, De Quincey unequivocally states, "It was not for the purpose of creating pleasure, but of mitigating pain in the severest degrees, that I first began to use opium as an article of daily diet" (6). With this assertion, De Quincey reveals the need not only to have suffered, but to also have suffered greatly, before he turned to opium use the first time. Even so, he is careful to point out how "no quantity of opium ever did, or could intoxicate" (40).

De Quincey's final construction of his masculine identity is framed through his ability to face extraordinary struggles while refusing to submit. In order to confirm his authority, De Quincey must explain to the reader his ability to surmount overwhelming obstacles through sheer force of will in order to counteract his confession of drug abuse. This is structured through the narrative of slavery and imprisonment that later came to frame the temperance movement of the nineteenth-century (Zieger *Inventing* 61-2). De Quincey writes, "I have struggled against this fascinating enthralment with a religious zeal, and have, at length, accomplished what I never yet heard attributed to any other man—have untwisted, almost to its final links, the accursed chain which fettered me" (2). There are two aspects of his experience that De Quincey is interested in emphasizing here. First, the compulsory nature of his abuse closely linked to the second, which is his superhuman ability to break free of its influence. De Quincey's ability to resist even when faced with insurmountable odds is evident from the very beginning of his life's story. Once his guardian places him in a less than ideal situation where De Quincey is made to submit to authority, the author chooses to run away and be penniless instead, for "unconditional submission was what he demanded" (8). He becomes homeless and unable to search out those who might be able to help him because "what I dreaded about all other evils was the chance of being reclaimed by my guardians" since he assumes they will resort "to the extremity of forcibly restoring to me the school which I had quitted," and for De Quincey, this is clearly "a humiliation worse to me than death" (24). Just as with his later opium abuse,

submitting is inevitably tied with loss of agency and assertion of control; De Quincey claims he would rather die of starvation than suffer this loss of masculinity.

Opium, as the real source of his struggle, figures more prominently as asserting control, but only through astonishingly high levels of exposure. Throughout his narrative, De Quincey raises, and then lowers, the amount of opium he takes. However, he is quick to point out his ability to tolerate an unusually high amount of laudanum. This, too, is a source of his authority; he is no mere dabbler, as is evident when he disagrees with other's assertions about opium's effect. He proclaims, "[B]ut still I must plead my experience, which was greater than his greatest by 7000 drops a day" (43). Sadie Plant notes this when she explains, "Although his book did reveal the depths of his despair, the weakness of his will and his loss of self-control, he also took a certain sense of pride in his ability to resist the drug" (30). However, to truly explain the epic nature of his struggle with opium use, De Quincey must relate the incredibly debilitating nature of his forced submission:

> I shall not afterwards allude to this part of the case: it is one, however, which the opium-eater will find, in the end, as oppressive and tormenting as any other, from the sense of incapacity and feebleness, from the direct embarrassments incident to the neglect or procrastination of each day's appropriate duties, and from the remorse which must often exasperate the stings of these evils to a reflective and conscientious mind. (67)

The oppression De Quincey is elucidating is based on an inability to be a functioning member of society, something that any intellectual man will find unpleasant to say the least. However, this is a mild introduction to the actual horrors and terrors that are suffered by true opium-eaters, who, he assumes, are English Men of Letters:

> He lies under the weight of incubus and night-mare: he lies in sight of all that he would fain perform, just as a man forcibly confined to his bed by the mortal languor of a relaxing disease, who is compelled to witness injury or outrage offered to some object of his tenderest love:--he curses the spells which chain him down from motion:--he would lay down his life if he might get up and walk; but he is powerless as an infant, and cannot even attempt to rise. (67)

Again, this confession of De Quincey's is narrated in such a way as to be applicable in general terms, not personal; he displaces these experiences onto an opium-eater, and, thereby, avoids culpability. Even so, the inability to be productive is invoked along with the helplessness expressed in the loss of control through forced imprisonment within the body that is, itself, metaphorically strapped to the bed. This physical restraint is also paired with a loss of vitality and horrors of the mind when De Quincey conjures up both the incubus and nightmare. Incubus is the Latin word for nightmare, so for De Quincey to use both indicates the desire to tie the word to a traditional Western intellect and show its vulnerability. However, De Quincey must keep up the façade that he is strong enough, through these aspects of masculinity, to overcome these horrors and throw off the shackles of opium.

De Quincey insists that he remains the master of his own identity as a Man of Letters and, even if he has suffered greatly, he ends the tale by actively reclaiming agency. This, especially, must be seen as a feat of inner strength that few are capable of doing. In the final pages of his confession, De Quincey leaves the reader with the impression that, through great effort on his part, he is free from opium's clutches once more. He writes, "But he may say, that the issue of my case is at least a proof that opium, after a seventeen years' use, and an eight years' abuse of its powers, may still be renounced: and that *he* may chance to bring to the task greater energy than I did, or that with a stronger constitution than mine he may obtain the same results with less" (79). The implication, of course, is that it is very unlikely that anyone could bring a greater effort or have a stronger constitution to suffer what De Quincey has suffered only to break free at last; and, as part of his declared recovery, he unfolds his life's story in order to serve the public.

In his narrative, De Quincey must repeatedly emphasize the usefulness of his cautionary tale as he informs the reader that it is, in fact, for his benefit that the author is reliving both the pain and pleasure he experienced through opium's use and abuse. He states, "But, on the one hand, as my self-accusation does not amount to a confession of guilt, so, on the other, it is possible that, if it *did*, the benefit resulting to others, from the record of experience purchased at so heavy a price, might compensate, by a vast overbalance, for any violence done to the feelings I have noticed, and justify a breach of the general rule" (2). Unlike earlier rhetorical movements, here, De Quincey places himself and his tale as an interpersonal

encounter with the reader; however, he still refuses to admit guilt as more than an abstract entity that is justified through the already imagined benefit he is able to give to others.

Ultimately, De Quincey fails because as a Man of Letters, ironically, he cannot reconstruct his experience through language and, therefore, cannot fulfill his assertion to remake his story as productive for the nation. The author makes an attempt to fulfill his claim to be useful, but his experience with opium has left him unable to articulate the full account. "For several reasons," he explains, "I have not been able to compose the notes for this part of my narrative into any regular and connected shape. I give the notes disjoined as I find them, or have now drawn them up form memory" (62). His disarray is supposedly indicative of opium's influence; however, it is the sublime characteristic of opium itself that cannot truly be conquered and made useful for English society. De Quincey cannot give voice to the horrors he has experienced, but he implies that he could only do so, of course, through great effort: "I could not, without effort, constrain myself to the task of either recalling, or constructing into a regular narrative, the whole burthen of horrors which lies upon my brain" (62). While De Quincey might be leaving it up to the reader's imagination, hinting that if given time he could fully explain "feelings such as I shall not attempt to describe without more space at my command," his explanations cannot negate his failure (63).

While many critics have thoroughly examined De Quincey's fascination with the Orient and connect it to national identity, they fail to see that, as a Man of

Letters, it is linked to his distinct fear of unknown knowledge. To be sure, Schmitt discusses De Quincey's victimization as rooted in an inability to communicate, however, he basis this in a fear of Orient penetration of England, not as a threat to Western knowledge itself. De Quincey constantly compares himself and England with the imagined Malay and the East. For example, when he wants to assert his authority and expertise of opium's pleasures, he invokes Western knowledge:

> I question if any Turk, of all that ever entered the Paradise of opium-eaters, can have had half the pleasure I had. But, indeed, I honour the Barbarians too much by supposing them capable of any pleasures approaching to the intellectual ones of an Englishman. For music is an intellectual or a sensual pleasure, according to the temperament of him who hears it. (45)

Here, De Quincey asserts that the pleasures experienced by those opium-eaters in the East were purely bodily based and inherently inferior to those an Englishman is capable of feeling. It is not music itself that is the source of gratification; instead, it is the mind that processes it in the right way that produces pleasure. This, of course, is said to be outside of the intellectual capacity of those from an Eastern tradition. This position is made even clearer when De Quincey has his infamous encounter with the ephemeral Malaysian character.

Even though he is nestled away in a secluded cabin in the English mountains and far away from civilization, a Malay knocks on the author's door, presenting another opportunity for De Quincey to conjure up opium use and Western

knowledge's superiority. The first comparison is made between the Asiatic dress and skin color and his serving girl's preferred lightness. He observes, "And a more striking picture there could not be imagined, than the beautiful English face of the girl, and its exquisite fairness, together with her erect and independent attitude, contrasted with the sallow and bilious skin of the Malay, enamelled or veneered with mahogany…" (56). Many assumptions are made of the man, one of them being that he is quite familiar with opium use but unschooled in Western knowledge. Of course, this scene exhibits the feared vulnerability of English women to violation by a sinister other; however, more important is how De Quincey frames his own identity and ability to rescue the situation. He stresses, "I addressed him in some lines from the Illiad; considering that, of such languages as I possessed, Greek, in point of longitude, came geographically nearest to an Oriental one. He worshipped me in a most devout manner, and replied in what I suppose was Malay" (57). This exchange reveals much about De Quincey and his fears and fantasies, but two characteristics of this exchange jump out. Firstly, De Quincey deploys a Western classic rooted deeply in language as the most appropriate way to confront the East. Secondly, the Malay is incapable of comprehending what is being said; nevertheless, he bows down to its obvious superiority and his attempt to reply fails because it is believed to be in Malay, and therefore, not significant or noteworthy. De Quincey's performance, of course, leaves both witnesses in awe of his intellectual abilities; however, when the Malay returns, the encounter does not go as well as this first one.

Towards the end of his tale, De Quincey attempts to relate his opium-fueled visions of Asiatic landscape and its ever-present threat to England and civilization. The author blames the haunting presence of the Malay for transporting him to the East. He reveals, "I have often thought that if I were compelled to forego England, and to live in China, and among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep; and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations" (73). The implication, then, is that if a Man of Letters were to be forced to live a lifestyle of Eastern culture and knowledge, that it would drive him mad. De Quincey assumes that his audience shares his disgust and disdain of horrors that go unnamed. This madness is clearly embedded in his perception of Eastern culture as unfathomable. He insists, "Over every form, and threat, and punishment, and dim sightless incarceration, brooded a sense of eternity and infinity that drove me into an oppression as of madness" (74). The perception of an eternal East that is boundless threatens De Quincey's idea of Western notions of time, space, and identity as stable and predictable. This is evident throughout his tale of opium use but is even clearer when it turns into abuse.

It is evident from the title that De Quincey is invested in constructing a stable national identity in the face of opium consumption; however, his visions show an ever-shifting array of possibilities that leave the author terrified. "The sense of space, and in the end, the sense of time, were both powerfully affected," and, even after experiencing many horrors, he says none had the power to "disturb me as

much as the vast expansion of time; I sometimes seemed to have lived for 70 or 100 years in one night…" (68). Although he does discuss the overwhelming nature of this disorder of normative time, it is clear that the more personal disruption of identity is also disturbing. After he is transported to the East, he faces a dizzying collection of characters and animals—including a particularly menacing crocodile—but he also becomes a part of his vision. In the midst of relating his dream, he claims, "I ran into pagodas: and was fixed, for centuries, at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed" (74). Perhaps because of his experience with time on opium, De Quincey implies that he is all of these, and even none of these, at one time. This nightmare continues, seemingly without end, until it is interrupted by his vision of hope, namely, his young children: "And so often did this hideous reptile haunt my dreams, that many times the very same dream was broken up in the very same way: I heard gentle voices speaking to me (I hear every thing when I am sleeping); and instantly I awoke: it was broad noon; and my children were standing, hand in hand, at my bed-side…" (74). Here, his children, the future citizens of England, have the power to banish his frightening visions of the East with all of its impenetrable, and eternal, culture. Although De Quincey ends his tale with the knowledge that he is still suffering, he assures the reader that he has experienced a rebirth and is no longer under the influence of opium. While De Quincey clearly bases his authority on repeated exposure and experience, others clarify their use of drugs as an experiment to better society's understanding of whether or not they can be made productive for the nation.

Section 2: Other Men of Letters and the Failure of Masculinity

One of the classic examples haunted by failure and framed in the form of an "experiment" is Charles Baudelaire and his experience on hashish, which he writes about in *Artificial Paradises* (1860). Of course, the title alone gives an indication of where the work is headed; with its implied emphasis on the difference between what is real and what is constructed, it is clear Baudelaire would agree with Derrida's comment about how society judges "false" pleasures. This is problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is how this rhetoric has also been deployed to position "natural" lives of privileged citizens as opposed to "unnatural," or "artificial," lives and desires of marginalized others that recent queer theorists have questioned. Baudelaire sticks with this binary, using productivity and creativity as indicators of value when he compares wine and hashish and pointing out the benefits and perceived problems with each.

Even though stylistically Baudelaire attempts to distance himself from his discussion on wine and hashish, he must imply that he has experienced them in order to have the authority he needs to write about the two. Arguably, *Artificial Paradises* is not an autobiographical work; however, Baudelaire is driven to speak about his personal experience, and in this sense, he must first create his authorial persona. In this example, it is interesting to note the way in which Baudelaire resists the usual confession and the shame that might lead to dismissal of other firsthand accounts of drug use. Then again, it is clear that his use is not valid as an identity marker. Grammatically, in his work, Baudelaire invokes the reader as the one

responsible for the experiences he writes about. In fact, he insists upon it. After describing the green paste that is hashish, he pleads, "Take it, have no fear, you will not die of it..." (15). In this way, everything that follows is actually positioned as the reader's experience, as is evident by his use of the second person pronoun throughout. He also resists responsibility about writing on opium. In the second section on drugs he uses a translation of Thomas De Quincey's work. This allows Baudelaire to hide behind another's words and experience. Both stylistic choices provide a way for the temporal and spatial distance drug confessions like De Quincey's are sometimes forced to supply.

Baudelaire frames his incident through the mantle of the artist and philosopher, viewing these identities and oeuvre as the result of necessary hard work, a characteristic, he argues, that the drug-inspired artist is trying to avoid. In *Artificial Paradises*, he proceeds to argue how alcohol aids civilization and hashish destroys it. One way he does this is by dismissing the mind-altering experience and perception as artificial and false. Boon insists, "Baudelaire presents picturesque images and unusual experiences only to deny their value" (*Road* 140). In addition, Baudelaire contends the artist must not rely on inspiration, from drugs or other altered states of consciousness; instead, arduous effort is involved in the production of art. Zieger notes this when she observes, "In Baudelaire's critique, the hashish eater narcissistically appropriates and thereby debases the accumulated achievements of Western civilization…" (*Inventing* 47). In addition, he demands the artist and philosopher vigorously guard against the "sapping of will" that would

make them useless and unproductive. This is one way, at least for Baudelaire, in which wine and hashish differ; wine allows temporary relief from toil, allowing the subject to continue being productive while hashish "renders man incapable of action" (16). Baudelaire persists in this vein when he asserts, "Wine exalts the will, hashish destroys it" (24). Of course, his method of evaluation is questionable at best; still, his assumptions are no different from the average citizen disgusted because drug use is thought to be nonsocial and nonproductive.

This, then, is the final aspect of hashish Baudelaire posits as contrary to any productive society: its ability to separate the user, through its artificial paradise, away from everyone else, an ability that threatens the nation. This, he reveals, is why countries such as Egypt have outlawed the substance, something that all civilized Western countries should do; usage of hashish robs a nation of the minds of its citizens (24). Furthermore, for a citizen, hashish is able to "disrupt the equilibrium between his faculties and the condition in which they were *intended* to operate; in a word, to tamper with his destiny, substituting for it a new kind of destiny" (emphasis added 72). This statement slips from the fear of robbing the nation of its human resources and potential to arguing hashish use as intentionally and immorally going against God's destiny for the individual. Baudelaire appears to be particularly offended by the way hashish seems to deprive the nation of futurity through ideas and concepts. He is most concerned with the mind, and as the mind escapes to these artificial paradises, it is diverted from its divinely determined

destiny. Walter Benjamin, too, discusses these alterations of the mind and perception.

Brought on by his own scientific drug experiment, and written about in his chaotic collection titled *On Hashish*, Benjamin includes material produced while on his trip and thereby resists invoking a temporal and spatial distance deployed by Baudelaire and others. Just as the title implies, Benjamin sets out to try hashish and then translate his findings based on Western ideas of the scientific method. Of course, he also includes notes and drawings as an organic part of the process in order to show the reader his drug induced state as opposed to the previous examples, which narrate a more cohesive interpreted tale after the effects of the drugs have passed. Fritz Frankel and Ernst Joel noted Benjamin's behavior and collected both what he wrote and drew while under the influence. It is only later that the trio search for deeper truths in an attempt to produce meaning. When discussing Benjamin, Boon states, "Mescaline's visual pyrotechnics are gifts that pour out of the Gnostic modernist darkness, to save the psychonaut from the heaviness of the world. But this is a temporary phenomenon, just as childhood is, a regression that cannot hold back forever the storms of history" (*Road* 238). In this quote, Boon realigns drug-fueled visions with the experience of childhood that is played out in Lewis Carroll's fictional work. Even so, the framework Benjamin uses resembles the prior example in that he confers authority upon himself, not by distancing himself from the experience, but by claiming its benefit through scientific discourse. However, Boon's point about the limited temporal experience explains

why Benjamin's experiment fails for normative notions of time. Boon writes, "It is hard not to link this apprehension of a profound unity or work—and the jumble of unfinished fragments that is left in its wake—with intoxication itself, and with the failure of drug-induced insights and experiences to sustain themselves in coherent form when the intoxication is over" (*Introduction* 7). Nevertheless, Benjamin insists on a philosophical quest, centered on transformation of the self and an expansion of the senses, deeply rooted in historical and cultural settings, in order to claim credibility and add to the heteronormative masculine body of knowledge.

Ultimately, Benjamin's experiment fails because it cannot be coerced into normative meaning-making of scientific discourse. In his introduction to Benjamin's work, Boon touches on the collapse in scientific discourse surrounding the actual recordings of these drug-fueled experiences: "It is hard not to link this apprehension of a profound unity or work," he admits, "—and the jumble of unfinished fragments that is left in its wake—with intoxication itself, and with the failure of drug-induced insights and experiences to sustain themselves in coherent form when the intoxication is over" (*Introduction* 7). This is yet another example of the constant attempt by Men of Letters to make drugs productive in some way to society. The result, in some shape or another, is failure. Western knowledge is disrupted here; among other things, classical questioning, meaning, words/language, subjectivity, objects, time, space, body, and perception are all drastically reframed. Since this is true, then, it is a Sisyphean task to believe that the experience can be forced back into normative notions of these categories, and the source of this maddening aspect

is rooted in a hubristic belief that Western knowledge is able to force meaning and productivity from drugs. Both Boon and Benjamin notice the inherent incomprehensible nature of this task that makes these notes and the experience itself illegible.

One final example of a drug-induced experiment that is seen as incompatible to normativity also hints at the fact that new queer theories might be necessary in order to interpret these newly discovered perceptions. In 1953, Aldous Huxley takes mescaline and then writes about the occurrence in his nonfiction work *The Doors of Perception*. Immediately, he acknowledges the normal pitfalls that other scholars have attempted to overcome in their work; namely, how it is the incommunicability of the drug experience—because it is solitary by nature and takes place "in the mind"—that it naturally resists Western language and explanation. Nevertheless, Huxley's experience leads him to argue for a select few individuals to make this journey and then pool the information retrieved through their experiences in order to subjugate the knowledge and use it for culture and society. Just like the previous example, Huxley's work is quickly situated as a scientific experiment to better all of mankind, which is why he is a willing guinea pig. Huxley not only discusses a change in his subjective world of perception, but also in what he refers to as his objective, or outside, world. Things take on new meaning as they are simultaneously perceived, and re-perceived, in every moment of existence in every place of existence (22). What is unique in this understanding is the type of meaning that Huxley is researching. He argues that normative notions of beauty, utility, time, and space no

longer have any influence on the world. Instead, they are superfluous, and Huxley, the subject already now conceived in the paradoxical terms of I and Not-I, is indifferent to them. This is not to imply that there is nothing experienced or learned, however, the method of learning is altered in order to conceptualize a different way of being and perceiving. Perhaps most disturbing to a general audience, Huxley's new drug-induced epistemologies make him no longer interested in the things that would occupy the normal human mind or be considered valuable. This, in turn, leads him to admit that these new epistemologies and perceptions are incompatible to society's assumed need to function in a productive manner.

Each of these examples outline the multiple attempts to make meaning out of drug-fueled perceptions made by Men of Letters filtered through heteronormative masculinity based on Western epistemologies of time, space, and identity. Using their authorial persona, they distance, in one way or another, themselves from traditional critique brought against the drug user. Instead, because they claim allegiance with the nation-state, productivity, and futurity, they try to master this body of gnosis that is aligned with the Other and the Orient. Their failure to do so questions the ability to understand the drug experience through traditional concepts of reason and logic. Instead, queer theory's resistance provides a tool to appreciate how altering consciousness can lead to new ways of comprehending identity, space, and time. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* successfully provides examples of characters whose very fluidity between these traditionally limned zones allows for a different understanding of each.

Section 3: The Queer Subjects of *Wonderland*

Many examples of queer subjectivity include non-normative notions of time, place, and identity, while also being decidedly non(re)productive and self-shattering, in the much the same way as many drug narratives reveal. What is notable is how the two concepts, queer subjectivity and drug use, or experience, are both aligned as a threat to the social itself. In his latest work in queer theory, Lee Edelman issues a challenge for queer subjects to embrace their position as the antithesis to normative society and, in doing so, he perfectly aligns them on the opposite side of anti-drug rhetoric. *No Future* demands exactly what the title says. Of course, Edelman does not argue that everybody should work toward the death drive. Instead, he concludes that in today's society, queer subjects find themselves placed on the margins, which is, in itself, hardly a new revelation. However, by embracing their role, he argues, they can actually bring balance to a moral structure myopically focused on the future at the expense of the present, something to which queer subjects are uniquely suited for because "the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form" (4). Edelman is not referring to an adjective but to a subjectivity, a specific queer subjectivity. He does not stop there, instead, he explicates that without a future **"**then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself"(13). This powerful argument reveals the way both queer sexuality and

drugs are placed together in polar opposition to civilization and society, and somehow are not compatible with life. This is quite a shift in focus; just because both are invested in the moment as opposed to the future, they are represented as fatalistic and valueless. However, queer theory suggests how drug use and queer subjectivity offer some of the same challenges to identity and normativity.

One reason the drug user is considered an outsider is because his experiences do not fit with normative values and epistemologies of time, place, perception, and identity. Judith Halberstam addresses this in her own work:

> Within the life cycle of the Western human subject, long periods of stability are considered to be desirable, and people who live in rapid burst (drug addicts, for example) are characterized as immature and even dangerous. But the ludic temporality created by drugs (captured by Salvador Dali as a melting clock and by William Burroughs as "junk time") reveals the artificiality of our privileged constructions of time and activity. (*Queer* 4-5)

The threat, then, is located in the drug users' challenge to normative understanding of time and place; however, to this list I would add perception and identity as well. One interesting study exploring queer time and space making within club culture is Fiona Buckland's *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*. In it, she points out that club goers measure time internally, or through the body, since clubs usually operate during the late hours and do not have any obvious indicators of time's passage, such as clocks or uncovered windows.

To say that Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) reads like a drug-induced hallucinatory experience is hardly a novel argument. These strange and exotic adventures are often marked in ways that have led people to suggest this as a mescaline-inspired trip. For example, Marcus Boon discusses Carroll's access to, and use of, Mordecai Cook's work on intoxicants: "With astounding prescience, Carroll took these descriptions of the effects of the amanita mushroom and turned them into a set of mathematical operations, which could be executed on a young girl and the world she perceives" (*Road* 227). More recently, Susan Zieger's work emphasizes drugs' connection to sexuality and has examined the site of the young girl's body as the "transformative ground upon which the possibilities for resistance or obeisance to individual sexual maturation might be enacted" ("Queering" 106). This is important since it was written during the later half of the Victorian era when sexuality was being explored through scientific discourse, and Carroll's decision to produce a decidedly anti-didactic and anti-productive narrative for a children's book challenges society's de-sexualization and glorification of the Child. While the tale can, and has been, read as an effort to tell the story from a child's imaginative perspective, its complexities obviously speak to an adult mind and its ability to appreciate a richer meaning. If we can accept this possibility, then what do Alice's adventures represent for an adult reader? What experience is being shared and why has it taken hold of our imaginations in such a way that the tale has been repeatedly remade and retold? What is it about Alice's adventures that, more often than not, resonate with society as queer even today? Finally, then, we must ask, how does

Alice undergo a journey that reflects a decidedly queering of normative values, both when it was first received and even unto the present?

One obvious aspect of Alice's escapades that is unsettling is the change in normative perceptions of place. Alice's understanding of time and place is challenged by her adventures, and although both are intertwined within the story, here it will be more useful to treat them separately. Zieger contends, "The Victorian Alice's transgressions of time and space…struck counterculturists one hundred years later as metaphors for hallucinogenic experiences" ("Queering" 94). Alice's trip begins with her sleepily sitting beside her sister who is reading. Even as the story insists that Alice is stationary, in that she falls asleep by the riverbank, it also claims that Alice travels to a new place, Wonderland, through the rabbit hole. This doubling, or literally being in two places at once, is achieved by having the narrator leave Alice ignorant of her own state of consciousness until the very end. Of course, this mimics the drug users experience of "tripping," whether through LSD, Psilocybin, or some other mind-altering drug that induces mental displacement. Alice finds herself quickly moving from one place to the next without knowing how this change in scenery takes place. Since she is such a curious child, it is surprising that she is relatively unconcerned with this queer spatiality; within this world called Wonderland, places lack continuity and easily merge into one another.

Alice encounters many queer subjects who introduce her to new ways of perceiving Wonderland, both geographically and physically. After numerous changes in size caused by consuming unknown foreign substances, Alice finds

herself swimming in her own tears and conversing with others caught in the deluge. Then, after a silly race to dry off, she unwittingly scares everyone away. Suddenly, the rabbit returns and Alice notices "everything seemed to have changed since her swim in the pool; the great hall, with the glass table and the little door, had vanished completely" (74). Unlike normative concepts of spatiality, Wonderland is interconnected in ways that, thanks to the Internet, citizens of the twenty-first century might find easier to imagine. Alice moves from place to place, but somehow, she ends up right back where she started. Luckily for her, all roads lead to the one place she most wants to visit: the Queen's Garden. This nonlinear movement is somehow cyclical while still reaching a goal that resists an intentionality, and has been labeled, rightfully so, as queer.

Alice's notions of time are constantly and consistently questioned and her normative understanding does not seem useful during her adventures, even though the passage of time, and time as a being, is often central to Alice and the other characters in Wonderland. To begin with, Alice only embarks on her chase of the elusive White Rabbit after she sees the time-obsessed creature run by her. That the rabbit could speak did not shock her; instead, it is the animal's intense concern over being late that leaves her nonplussed. As most people already know, whether through one interpretation or another, the White Rabbit is known for his fixation on time, hurrying from one place to the next while worrying that he is literally running behind. He is the first character from Wonderland that Alice encounters. The White Rabbit's first words, of course, are: "'Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!'" (51). It is

the rabbit who leads her down the rabbit-hole to begin her journey as she chases after him. Her curiosity is aroused when the rabbit "*took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*" (52). This example appears to mock culture's concern for futurity and it reveals the unnaturalness of a future obsessed creature. By saying he is late, the White Rabbit is saying his body is in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is this aspect, a rabbit that is preoccupied with time, that Alice finds strange and introduces her to Wonderland. The counter-characters to this future fixated creature are the Mad Hatter and the March Hare who are frozen in time.

These characters understand time in a very different manner than Alice, and they grudgingly attempt to indoctrinate the young girl so she can join them for tea. This curious expression and understanding of time mimics drug and queer time in that perception and goals do not fit with linear time. When Alice first approaches the strange group, she is surprised to see a table set for six o'clock tea. She quickly discovers that time, or Time, as a proper noun, since the Hatter explains it is actually a he, is neither linear nor predictable. Time can change himself to suit the purpose of those whom he likes. However, it appears that the Hatter and Hare are not currently in Time's favor. After being accused of "killing" time, the Hatter has been forced into a limbo in which "it's always tea-time" a state that allows "no time to wash things between whiles" (108). This explains why the two are forever trapped in a time that, ironically, leaves no time. Just as the White Rabbit exists in futurity, concerned with being in a future place in a future time, these two always exist in the moment, a

present that leaves no other time. There can be no future and no past; instead, the only evidence of change is when the party members randomly rotate to a new seat.

One way to explain away how the child's curiosity is strangely frustrated whenever traditional meaning-making practices take place would be to argue that normative meaning is counterproductive to understanding Alice's strange adventures. After all, as many critics have noted, one oddity of the tale is that in the end, Alice returns unchanged, having learned nothing useful or productive from her journey. Richard Kelly argues that this is, in fact, terrifying for the reader when he discovers this "vision of the void that underlies the comfortable structures of the rational world" (24). However, I would suggest this is a liberating realization to make; an experience without intent is unlimited and rich with possibility. This could be because the moral tales that Alice attempts to share with Wonderland's creatures instead come out as tales of self-centered pleasure about consumption. For example, when Alice tries to recite the short poem "Against Idleness and Mischief," she instead finds herself telling a different tale altogether. A quick look at Isaac Watts' original poem shows how it focuses on the extreme productivity of a busy bee that collects honey and builds a cell in which to live (287). This bee's work quickly turns into a cautionary tale explaining that idle hands are the devil's playthings. Here is Alice's altered version:

> How doth the little crocodile
>
> Improve his shining tail,
>
> And pour the waters of the Nile

On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,
With gently smiling jaws! (61)

To begin with, whereas the bee is working for the betterment of a collective society, the crocodile is interested only in his own immediate needs and pleasure. His actions of labor are narcissistically motivated; he wants to improve the beauty of his tail, which is in direct conflict to notions of productivity. Next, he derives pleasure, as is shown by his happy "grin" and the seemingly contradictory description of "gentle," which is applied to the impending violence of his jaws resulting in consumption. This poem glorifies narcissism, self-survival, and a fatalism that is attractive even if it is in conflict with futurity. Alice is learning, and unintentionally teaching, a very different set of values than those traditionally fostered onto children. Again, this suggests traditional values are of no interest in Wonderland.

Another example of failure, which can be understood when scrutinized through the lens of queer theory, is Alice's version of father William. Although it may be confusing to see both Father William and father William, this is the way they are presented in the text. Alice changes the character from an identity marker to a proper noun, which holds overtones of religiosity and morality for readers. Robert Southey's poem, "The Old Man's Comforts, and How He Gained Them," reads as a

tale about preparing for tomorrow while Alice transforms it into a seemingly silly story focused on discounting future worries in order to enjoy each day. Southey's poem has a youth that questions how father William, in his past, managed to plan for the future, or the present of the poem in which he is aged. The first stanza, in which father William explains how he has remained "hearty", focuses on sacrificing and moderation in youth so as to save for the future.

> "In the days of my youth," father William replied,
> "I remember'd that youth would fly fast,
>
> And abus'd not my health and my vigour at first,
> That I never might need them at last" (287)

This expressed fear exhibits the need to delay gratification based on the belief that there is only a finite amount of energy available. Therefore, father William has focused on a futurity at the expense of pleasure in youth. The next question also places emphasis on his sacrifice; the youth asks how father William could live to an old age and not yearn for the obvious pleasures available in early life. William replies, "'I thought of the future, whatever I did, /That I never might grieve for the past" (288). This value falls in line with heteronormative interest in futurity even at expense of the present. Just as the White Rabbit shows a monomaniacal interest in a future moment, William keeps his thoughts on a tomorrow that, by definition, can never arrive.

Alice takes this tale and, quite literally, stands both it and its subject on their head. Alice's version of father William is not interested in the future, nor is he interested in teaching a youth how to prepare for it. For Alice's Father William, the future holds no consequences for past actions; Father William acts as a child by always standing on his head, unafraid of damaging his brain; in the past, he eats until he is now fat, yet he remains spry enough to do somersaults due to his use of an ointment; finally, linking back to improper consumption, his jaw has remained so strong through his incessant arguing with his wife that he can now eat bones and beaks (85-87). Again, the transformation of this moralistic tale rejects the glorification of the future when it requires sacrifices in youth. In fact, this tale suggests that only by living in the moment can someone truly thrive.

One other aspect of Alice's adventures that appears shocking is its references, hidden or not so hidden, to sexuality. Some dedicated admirers of this tale might first be surprised by the claim that Carroll's story deals with queer sexuality, but many scholars have cogently argued just that. Although there is the suggestion of this within the figure of the Duchess, a fact that I explore in greater detail later on, it has also been noted that Carroll's odd attachment to the real Alice leaks into Alice's Adventures in multiple ways. As one critic notes, even though new theorists have moved away from the "transgressive" desire represented by Alice, there is enough evidence to "suggest that the male author is (sexually) preoccupied with his child heroine; there is something the girl intrinsically offers that a woman cannot" (Garland 24). In his introduction to the tale, Richard Kelly speaks freely about the

oftentimes confusing way that the Alice's body shifts and changes (25). In addition to these uncontrollable changes in body shape, Alice also experiences a crisis of identity. She has trouble answering the simple question, "Who are *you*?" (83). This problem and destabilization is an essential part of society's conceptualization of drug use. Derrida declares, "Anyway, as I think we've made clear, drugs in general are not condemned for the pleasure they bring, but rather because this aphrodisiac is not the right one: it leads to suffering and to the disintegration of the self, in short, it desocializes" (37). Of course, queer politics, if nothing else, is about allowing fluidity in identity and challenging normative ideas of stability in the social order, which have been traditionally asserted, something Alice experiences in Wonderland but is unable to comprehend.

The other appearance, or threat, of a distinctly queer sexuality can be found in Alice's encounters with the Duchess. The reader is already aware of the Duchess and her failed femininity as is evidenced by her care of the baby. In fact, the Duchess might even be responsible for the queer transformation of the infant. After all, she utters a strange exclamation that Alice notices is directed at the baby, "Pig!," which is exactly what he turns into. Of course, this takes place in the kitchen, which instead of being a place of domesticity, is full of chaos and destruction. Finally, the Duchess abandons the child and carelessly flings him at Alice, who then catches him and figures "out the proper way of nursing" (97). Edelman addresses this aspect of queerness:

> Hence, whatever refuses this mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the child must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such, insofar as it threatens the logic of futurism on which meaning always depends. (11)

This explanation is appropriate to Alice's tale; Alice's adventures are not intended to make normative sense or embody heteronormative values. Through their actions, the Duchess and the other characters are seen as a threat to the social order. Later on, this failed femininity becomes an even more obvious queering of gender as the Duchess is described in more masculine terms.

The Duchess presses her "experiment" with Alice in the Queen's garden, and although it has been read vaguely as perhaps being a sexual innuendo, I want to focus on the threat of a queer gender expression as well. At first, the Duchess almost harmlessly intertwines her arm with Alice's in an "affectionate" manner, a move that could easily pass as friendship. However, this quickly progresses into a more intense expression of sexuality. As the Duchess "squeezed up closer," Alice begins to feel uncomfortable. The narrator explains, "Alice did not much like her keeping so close to her: first, because the Duchess was very ugly, and secondly, because she was exactly the right height to rest her chin on Alice's shoulder, and it was an uncomfortably sharp chin" (122-23). In this way, the Duchess keeps poking and prodding at Alice in a very phallic manner. Alice's discomfort at this unasked for

attention grows, even as terms of attraction are utilized to explain her uneasiness. The Duchess attempts to displace this queer desire onto Alice herself. She asks, "'I dare say you're wondering why I don't put my arm round your waist,' the Duchess said, after a pause: 'the reason is, that I'm doubtful about the temper of your flamingo. Shall I try the experiment?'" (124). Although Alice quickly shoots her down, and later the Queen banishes the Duchess, the threat and desire are both made explicit within what has been labeled the Eden-like setting of the Queen's garden.

In the end, Alice returns from Wonderland when she denies this altered perception and asserts a normative one. When she's had enough and her body has returned to normal size, she rejects the reality of these characters, crying out, "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (154). At this moment, she wakes on the bank beside her sister and attempts to quarantine her experience by labeling it all a dream. Curiously, even though she cannot remember everything, Alice's explanation leads her sister to a lesser adventure in Wonderland as she sits and listens. Her sister then tries to re-contain Wonderland and transform it into the ordinary and "dull" world around her:

> —the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheepbells, and the Queen's shrill cries to the voice of the shepherdboy—and the sneeze of the baby, the shriek of the Gryphon, and all the other queer noises, would change (she knew) to the confused clamour of the busy farm-

> yard—while the cattle in the distance would take the place of the Mock Turtle's heavy sobs. (155-6)

While Alice runs away, thinking what an amazing place Wonderland is, her sister insists on a different perception. Her normative epistemology, as parenthetically claimed and emphasized, explains away Wonderland and tries to dismiss it. Finally, she re-inscribes the value of futurity and the Child when she imagines Alice grown into a woman with children of her own. Zieger remarks upon this fact and suggests it successfully enfolds the narrative: "As Wonderland becomes reproducible as a tale, its radical anti-biological reproduction implications are safely neutralized, converted into tropes of sexual reproduction" ("Queering" 109). And yet, it is already too late; the reader and Alice have experienced Wonderland, its queer creatures, and alternative ways of making meaning. Alice's sister's final refashioning of Wonderland, in its brevity, fails to change all that has come before. In fact, she attempts to refashion Alice in the way Zieger suggests: by imagining Alice retelling the tale to her children. However, this is just a vision, and since her previous vision has been revealed to be nothing more than a fantasy, why should the audience believe this one to be anything more?

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland serves as a wonderful way to imagine a nonsensical world that devalues normative ideas of (re)productivity, time/place, and futurity as represented by the imagined Child. Here, the child parodies traditional roles and even espouses moralistic tales that are queer counterparts to the originals. Reality and social organization do not exist in the way Alice was taught

to understand them. Instead, time and place operate in queer ways and Wonderland's characters show that traditional values are useless. Alice's own concept of identity is challenged and her sense of self collapses. As Zieger argues:

> Carroll's text thus appears to parody temperance fiction because it defamiliarizes the ordered world of physical development, and celebrates its potential for disorder, rather than trying to preserve it. To invert Derrida's formulation, it valorizes all the things that define themselves against drugs—nonwork, irrationality, a "natural" body, and so on. (95)

This conclusion lays bare the connection between queer theory and its alignment, both with Alice's tale and the imagined drug user's mind-altering experience. Alice's journey denaturalizes normative values, and even though the ending tries to suppress Wonderland, the damage has been done. The method of containment is heteronormative in nature since Alice's sister tries to imagine the young girl's future enjoyment inexorably linked to reproduction; however, it fails since it is not a part of Alice's adventures. Instead, it is an outside attempt to reinforce traditional values. In the end, the reader is left curiously interested in Wonderland and its queer creatures.

Conclusion.

While many attempts have been made in order to force drugs back into place, our current culture and understanding of productivity run counter to drugs' inherent ability to change our perceptions. Experiments led by literary figures fail to

bring their experiences back in meaningful ways to the rest of society. However, the terms of value are skewed through a decidedly Western epistemology in such a way as to make it impossible for the drug experience to be useful in normative ways. The Men of Letters base their quest to conquer gnosis through their claim to masculinity and the social. Instead, we must turn to a little girl and her trip to Wonderland as seen through the lens of queer theory in order to reveal how drugs might provide new epistemologies that challenge stable identity and normative notions of time and space. Although Alice's sister tries to recuperate Wonderland through an imagined futurity, she ultimately fails to contain the rupture in naturalized ideas of normativity. These examples are rich and varied, but they all share a certain framework of drug use that examines possibilities, instead of limitations, around concepts of self and body, language and meaning, and finally, time and pleasure. While not everyone would experience drugs in this way, many narratives linked to queer theory express this knowledge and suggest a different rhetoric altogether, one that breaks free from the narrative of addiction and moves forward in thinking, but not toward futurity.

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