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ELASTICITY AND HEGEMONY: A BRIEF HISTORY OF ADDICTION NARRATIVE IN THE POSTWAR UNITED STATES

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Abstract

The 20th century has demonstrated a great diversity of thought when it comes to defining addiction: a phenomenon that has been supposed to be everything from a chronic brain disease to a moral failing. Given that incredible range, literary studies of addiction are often led to define addiction in narrow ways rather than examine the fluid, dynamic character of addiction over time. While previous works offer great insight into specific forms of addiction at specific times, there is currently no study in literary and cultural studies that addresses the ongoing history of addiction's meaning(s) in detail.

Building on the work of scholars from diverse fields—including cultural studies, literary theory, Marxism, psychoanalysis, history, the social sciences, medical science and public policy—the following dissertation proposes a novel methodology for examining addiction literature that is not limited to any single perspective. Its analysis proceeds by way of what I call addictive realism: a combination of social, historical, chemical, and aesthetic forces that work in tandem to produce plausible, compelling and engaging versions of addiction. Every narrative renders addiction according to certain conventions—plot, character, conflict, climax, conclusion, etc.—and in so doing creates a stylized, edited, selected version of something "real." Broadly, the work of this dissertation attempts to understand those styles historically, as they adapt and mutate given new ideological and aesthetic paradigms.

Put simply, this dissertation attempts to understand the *why* of *how* America has told the story of addiction. It examines cultural works dating from roughly 1950, focusing largely

on heroin memoirs and novels. Each chapter sets up a dynamic analysis between at least two literary texts, examining them in light of key political, social, and scientific paradigms relevant to their publication and reception. Ultimately, it elucidates several key dynamics that are common to literary productions of addiction in America, finding that literature has had a unique influence on the ongoing history of addictive thought. Due to narrative's ability to capture and transmit the first-hand experience of users in a meaningful way, it has been, and continues to be, a valuable compliment and counterpoint to political, philosophical, and empirical theories of addiction.

This work is dedicated to my family: Kate, Mom, Dad and Rachael.

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Introduction

There is not in the case of drugs any objective, scientific, physical (physicalistic), or 'naturalistic' definition (or rather there is: this definition could be 'naturalistic,' if by this we understand that it attempts to naturalize that which defies any natural definition of natural reality)…one must conclude that the concept of drugs is not a scientific concept, but is rather instituted on the basis of moral or political evaluations.
- Jacques Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs," (20)

And speaking *Personally*, and if a man speaks any other way we might as well start looking for his Protoplasm Daddy or Mother Cell….*I Don't Want To Hear Any More Tired Old Junk Talk And Junk Con*….The same things said a million times and more and there is no point in saying anything because NOTHING *Ever Happens* in the junk world.
- William S. Burroughs, "Deposition: A Testimony Concerning Sickness," *Naked Lunch*, (xvii)

Running through the history of addiction are two distinct trains of thought. Both appear to be reasonable descriptions of addiction, yet are, paradoxically, in more or less open contradiction with each other. The first, here characterized eloquently by the influential French theorist Jacques Derrida, is that drugs and addiction are more the product of culture than chemistry. In his view, there is very little that we can say is "natural" about drugs, precisely because drugs are always already found in a particular historical circumstance, a certain social configuration that conditions their consumption. For Derrida, any attempt to "naturalize" (or perhaps even define) a drug is an attempt at

rendering drugs according to certain political or moral beliefs: drugs may be "natural" in the sense that they grow from the earth, but their effects—intoxication, anxiety, euphoria—are entwined in the political and moral narratives that always precede our experience of drugs.

In her influential work *Tendencies*, celebrated theorist Eve Sedgwick takes a similarly discursive position in regards to addiction: as she has it,"[i]n the taxonomic reframing of a drug user as an addict, what changes are the most basic terms about her. From a situation of relative homeostatic stability and control, she is propelled into a narrative of inexorable decline and fatality" (131). Here, the boundaries by which the addict is characterized, and the metrics by which she is understood, are responsive to the narrative structures that enframe her. Whether that is done by means of legal controls or moral ones, the experience of drugs is inevitably tied to the social and cultural conditions in which the user uses: even if a "drug" may possess a common chemistry and typical effects, the addiction it may or may not produce is as much an effect of context as it is of chemistry. In this reading addiction—whether it is a disease, or the result of excessive pleasure seeking, or whatever else—must be understood as more than just the effect of a chemical entering the body; it is instead the whole process by which that consumption is viewed, controlled, "instituted" in the broadest sense.

The second take on addiction, characterized above by the influential drug writer William S. Burroughs, is that there is a "real" element in drugs.[1] Far from the

[1] I use "real" here somewhat loosely, though its use throughout this dissertation will roughly follow the thought of Jacques Lacan. Without getting too bogged down in theoretical details, real things are non-symbolic: the unexpected touch on your shoulder that causes a vague and immediate panic; the unfamiliar effect of a drug you have never experienced before. In short, anything "real" is not subject to historical change because it has not yet or cannot be enframed by intellectual, ideological, or emotional structures.

"protoplasmic" readings of psychoanalysts in which addiction is "subjective" or "symbolic" (or else a question of childhood trauma and the "Mommy Cell"), Burroughs recognizes a hard, very "real" core at the centre of drug—or more specifically, heroin—use.[2] For Burroughs, junk never changes.[3] Rather than being a site of cultural, historical an political meaning, the junkie is more or less a kind of machine: a predictable vessel that cyclically ingests drugs, gets high, comes down, then looks for more drugs.

To claim that these two readings of addiction are opposed is not, however, to claim that they have nothing in common. Indeed, Derrida, Burroughs, and Sedgwick all recognize something immutable and something flexible in drugs and addiction. My interest is not so much in discounting or in disproving one strategy over the other, but rather to suggest that the history of addiction itself has been more or less constantly engaged between variations in these two, ultimately irresolvable, positions. As I claim, the movement around and between these two poles has constituted a great deal of the confusion we now see in the concept of addiction. This opposition between the "real" and "cultural" qualities of addiction has ensured that there is always some counterpoint to any given theory, always some relevant point of contention.

Even putting aside its cultural dimensions, we still find a host of disagreements pertaining to empirical studies of addiction. If we take seriously the claims of social scientists, historians and medical doctors alike, then there is very little we can take for

[2] Burroughs' view was also supported in the medical sciences in his time. According to Dr. Nils Berjerot in 1972, "My theory of addiction, briefly, is that the condition is caused by dependence upon drugs, and an effect of the drug itself, completely independent of the factor causing the individual to commence his abuse. Often the initial abuse is completely incidental: curiosity, the desire to belong to an in-group or careless medical treatment" (xiii).

[3] Ann Marlowe, in her innovative heroin memoir *How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z*, feels similarly: that when you are using heroin, "there are not a lot of surprises, which is often the point; your rhythms are defined by the familiar and predictable arc of the drug's breakdown in your body, rather than the hazards of time. It is absence of pain that you are looking for, but absence of living what you get" ("aging," 10-11).

granted in terms of addiction even on the level of science. As Marie Nyswander (a medical doctor who worked at America's premier rehab facility in Lexington Kentucky for several years) said in 1956, "in this particular illness it is virtually impossible to generalize with any degree of safety," (83) an idea echoed in medical science scholar Nancy Campbell's claim in 2007, that "[a]ddiction is a complex social phenomenon that exceeds the grasp of every explanatory account" (10). Of a supposed "cure" for addiction, the esteemed drug historian David Courtwright is similarly skeptical, as he notices that, at least in the case of opiates, "the problem of opium addiction, though mutable, has thus far been intractable. None of the countless regimens of treatment, drug free or otherwise, has resulted in permanent abstinence for more than a minority of addicts" (*Dark Paradise*, 5).

Lacking a definitive definition of addiction, the 20th century has been marked by an ongoing struggle over its meaning. Beginning with 19th century medical practice in Britain (and later, the United States), the struggle over addiction involved medical associations, medical doctors, law associations, lawyers, government agencies, politicians, citizens, writers, artists and addicts. Accordingly, over the last century or so, addiction has been variously considered a psychological disease, a physical disease, a "disease of the will,"[4] a disease of exposure,[5] a relapsing brain disease, a vice, a moral failing, a choice,[6] a "virus,"[7] the manifestation of the Freudian "death drive,"[8] an adaptive behavior,[9] a response to trauma,[10] or any number of variations on the same.

[4] See Zieger's *Inventing the Addict* (5).
[5] See Burroughs' "White Junk" in *Burroughs Live*, or Goldstein's "Heroin Maintenance: A Medical View."
[6] See Heyman's *Addiction: A Disorder of Choice*.
[7] See Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, "Deposition."
[8] See Ronell's *Crack Wars*, and *Lacan and Addiction*.
[9] See Alexander's *Th Globalisation of Addiction*.
[10] See "Addiction is a Response to Childhood Suffering: In Depth with Gabor Maté."

This dissertation claims that the constant upheavals in addictive theory are not the result of insufficient tools and technologies, nor of inconsistencies or failures in medical practice or science. They are instead the result of variations in addiction itself relative to the theories, narratives, laws and practices that attempt to contain it. Indeed, the engine for such fluidity in addictive theory has not only been innovations in science and sociology, but also a dialectic process by which new theories of addiction are crafted from the political and empirical inequities of the old. As I will argue, what we call "addiction" at any given point is a complex interchange between politics, history, medicine, science and aesthetics that is more indicative of a temporary and tentative "realism" rather than "reality." Following the work of philosopher Graham Harman on tool analysis, we might say that addiction is more interesting in what it *does*, rather than what it *is*.[11]

Avoiding the pitfalls of so many previous attempts to define addiction (what sociologist Bruce Alexander has called the "conventional wisdom" of addiction[12]) requires abandoning the concept of *addiction*, in favour of *addictions*; it requires understanding the elasticity of addiction as a process that has reciprocal effects on the drug, the user, and the dominant views that define what is or is not addictive behaviour, or what constitutes an addictive substance. This is not to say that every single element (chemical, biological, political) of addiction is flexible, or that addiction is somehow purely discursive. Rather it is to stress that even the most concrete aspects of addiction

[11] See Harman's *Towards Speculative Realism*.

[12] As Alexander suggests, this involves thinking about addiction as a problem of the individual, rather than a social or political problem. As he puts it, "there is an odd dualism built into this individual-centered depiction: addiction is seen either as an illness or as a moral defect or—somehow—both at once…Another fundamental assumption of the conventional wisdom is that drug and alcohol abuse are the prototypical addictions" (*The Globalisation of* Addiction, 1-2).

are themselves subject to change and adaptation.[13] For example, as Courtwright has argued "what we think about addiction very much depends on who is addicted" (*Dark Paradise*, 3).

While there is a temptation to think about addiction as "constructed" in what is often referred to as a "vulgar" reading of post-structuralism, this falls somewhat short of the intention of my work. I will not suggest the dominance of "cultural" aspects of addiction over and above empirical interpretations, but instead try to see between the two a shared set of conventions by which the much more complex beast we call "reality" begins to take shape. To suggest that realism is a process rather than a fact is not to denigrate the sciences and romanticize the arts, but to see in each a shared set of signs and strategies that give rise to an always tentative, always flexible "reality" that can never quite be taken for granted.

In order to address this elasticity in the manifold meanings of addiction, this dissertation will conduct its analysis by means of what I call addictive realism. Found between a dominant political or scientific theory and a given aesthetic paradigm, addictive realism is the product of an always-temporary marriage of reality and representation. When we read an account of addiction that "rings true," or when we encounter a new theory of addiction that is compelling, we are recognizing more than a good theory or an interesting story; we recognize a certain compatibility between the contents of that representation and our own sensibilities. This is, of course, always a partial overlap: the difference between disease theory and neurochemistry isn't so great that we can't recognize a similar and compatible form of realism in each. Different forms

[13] As is obvious enough from the different effects that drugs have on different users.

of addictive realism are often competitive (and often particularly so between literary, empirical and political accounts), but seldom totally exclude one another. Indeed, the boundaries between one form of realism and another may be slight, and have as much to do with the perceiver as with the perceived.

Paradoxically, what I call addictive realism has very little to do with recognizing "reality" as such within a text or a theory of addiction. It is instead a recognition of the point at which realism breaks down: where realism is no longer about showing something as it is, but rather the point at which what is "really there" can no longer be shown—what Marxist theorist Ernesto Laclau has called the antagonistic, "objective limit" of representation. Laclau defines antagonism as "the experience of the limits of any possible objectivity, the way in which any objectivity reveals the partial and arbitrary character of its own objectification…And in this sense antagonism locates itself in the limits of language and can only exist as a disruption of language, that is, as metaphor" (256). In this reading, realism is not a clear, untarnished pane of glass through which we look at the world but rather a stained-glass window that has been carefully and purposely wrought. The task of interpretation then is to examine the multi-coloured palette of individual theories and narratives: to see the necessary distortions that are an integral part of "seeing" in the first place.

Accordingly, my own solution to the problem posed by addiction's incredible elasticity will be furnished by the findings of Marxist cultural theorists such as Raymond Williams, Ernesto Laclau, and Fredric Jameson, for whom "culture" operates in a dynamic relationship to official (state) and empirical (medicine, science) discourses.[14]

[14] While Marxist analysis is never far from any single reading in this dissertation, I stop short of employing it as a general theoretical framework. Because addiction is such a slippery and difficult phenomenon, I

More specifically, I am interested in the concept of hegemony, what Williams has called "a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming" (110). Cultural objects exist in a dynamic relationship with other modes of authority and knowledge: sometimes this relationship is antagonistic, sometimes complementary. Yet each narrative of addiction[15] tries to produce and circulate a model of addiction that syncs up, or is in tune with, other forms of authority and knowledge. Whether they approach the topic from the view of empiricism (the "real science" of addiction) or narrative (the "true story" of addiction), they construct their own theory with their own style and their own ideological assumptions. Addiction—whatever it is—is not authored by one group or body, nor is its meaning(s) ever uncontested. It is a variable process of contestation, revision and upheaval.

While literature has often been seen as a mirror that reflects cultural values, there is good reason to explore how culture has reciprocal effects as well. As I argue, far from being a passive reflection of findings in the hard sciences, addictive "culture"[16] has shown a great deal of influence in both science and society. In particular, this dissertation

would argue that even a theory as robust as Marxism is incapable of speaking to all of its applications. For instance, in many cases this dissertation will examine the class position of addicts and the economic function of drug use/sale relative to the state and its prohibitory laws. Yet explaining the complexity of addictive experience without reference to psychology, biology, and the social sciences, I would argue, leaves an untenable gap in our understanding. Thus, I will be supplementing Marxist perspectives with thinkers in the social sciences, psychoanalysis, and other theoretical disciplines.

[15] Most simply, I define addiction narrative as a plot or story that takes addiction as its principle point of organization. Most importantly, a narrative of addiction, by my definition, connects addiction to major plot events, including beginning, climax, and conclusion. Most typically, a narrative starts in medias res, tells the backstory of "how it all began," and then concludes with sobriety. Works such as *Fear and Loathing* do not constitute addiction narratives in my view, despite the rampant drug use it contains: that story is about accumulation and excess, not *dependency*.

[16] A problematic term, to be sure, but one that is useful in designating various expressions of addiction: ads, novels, films, conversations, these are each bonded together, if only loosely, and culture is simply the best term to capture that bond.

will be interested in how the American discourse of addiction was shaped by the contributions of narrative culture. It will place special emphasis on the role of addictive literary culture in the United States, dating from the roughly post-war era, and will focus on works dealing with opium and its derivatives. While any strict periodization runs the risk of leaving valuable works behind, this period represents a time in which drug use and laws were undergoing profound changes that would shape the history of addiction forever. Dramatized most effectively in the early works of Burroughs, the 1950s represented an expansion of government controls in regard to drugs.[17] It was also a time in which being an "other" of any sort (whether an addict, or person of colour, or communist, etc.) was immediately suspect. Accordingly, this period is an interesting point at which to view addiction relative to the formation of more general American values: the ideological pillars that would decry drug use, prostitution, and a host of other "deviant" behaviors as un-American.

What we find in American literary representations of opiate addiction is a mix of conflicting motivations that have resulted in just as many confused and contradictory representations of the addict. In the United States, where the ideology of free-will, the American Dream, and (later) Neoliberalism have become so prominent, the study of addiction takes on a very particular historical character. For this reason, my dissertation will focus its energies on that particular context, starting roughly with the works of William S. Burroughs, following through to present American examples (David Simon's

[17] The overlap between the conservative treatment of drugs in this period and the Cold War merit more discussion, though it falls somewhat outside of the scope of this dissertation. In general terms, it is worth noting that larger ideological forces motivated new laws/agencies aimed at controlling drugs. In this way, early writers such as Burroughs were responding to a much broader historical context than the one posed directly by the problem of drugs.

The Wire being the most recent of these). In between, I examine an eclectic selection of texts including two of Hubert Selby Jr.'s novels, *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and *Requiem for a Dream*, several works of science fiction by Philip K. Dick (*Now Wait for Last Year*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, and *A Scanner Darkly*), Ann Marlowe's experimental memoir *How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z*, Donald Goines' pulp crime thriller *Dopefiend*, and James Frey's popular "memoir," *A Million Little Pieces*.

Generally speaking, this dissertation will examine the means, styles and rhetoric by which various kinds of addictive realism have been secured in the last 65 years, detailing the forms of opposition and camaraderie by which they attained and forfeited their legitimacy. Importantly, I am not suggesting that each addictive "construct" might be opposed to some sort of "real" addiction. Rather, following the advice of theorist Bruno Latour, I am suggesting that "construction" implies only that its development was contingent, historical, and may easily have been otherwise (*Reassembling the Social*, 88-91). It is to find, even in the science of addiction, a sense of "realism" rather than evidence of the "real."

In scoping this project as a work in American heroin narrative, there have been important avenues of analysis that were, of necessity, left underdeveloped. Not only are there other drugs and drug cultures worthy of examination, but also important connections to identity, perspective and history, especially for marginalized groups. While this dissertation does examine some African American writers and one female author, there are scores of valuable, underappreciated works by others that fall outside of the prototypical drug writer. *Grand Central Winter* by Lee Stringer and *Confessions of a Shopaholic* by Sophie Kinsella are two works that, despite not being about heroin, would

make substantial contributions to this project. Cupcake Brown's *A Piece of Cake* also comes to mind as a beneficial addition, especially in terms of its presentation of a female, African American voice.

There will nonetheless be many opportunities to address issues of race and gender in the following work of this dissertation, particularly around the presence and absence of these identities in drug narratives. Especially in a project that is immersed in realism, it will be important to note where narratives fail to match up to reality. Many male drug writers proceed as if women simply failed to exist in any meaningful way; most are incapable of imagining a drug-using woman who is not already (or on her way to becoming) a sex worker. Certainly many women use heroin, but there is something very particular about the ways in which masculine drug culture flocks to it in particular. Part of this discrepancy could be due to the fact that heroin (as Ann Marlowe notes) is often tied to the performance of masculinity. Part of it is undoubtedly a (blatant) oversight and bias, as male writers fail to see the operations of race and gender that were often right in front of them.

In terms of the racial dynamics of addiction narrative, I address this question more thoroughly in Chapter 2. There I examine the barriers to publishing for black writers in particular, and how the publishing industry is set up such that it favours authors who enjoy a certain amount of privilege: while it is not the case that every author of addiction is privileged and white (though the Hollywood drug memoir is indicative of the genre), class position has an enormous impact on both the quality of life and recovery rates for addicts. Just as history is told by the winners, so too is the story of addiction often told by those who have material advantages in recovery. Indeed, if there were more memoirs told

by those who died in streets and jail cells, I suspect the demographics of addiction authorship might look a fair bit different.

But before proceeding to a literary analysis, it will be necessary to provide a brief overview of American drug history, and understand the historical circumstances that shaped the various kinds of addictive realism now visible in American culture. Ultimately, my goal will be to map a contemporary "construction" of addiction by way of its historical precedents and revolutions. Following a brief survey of U.S. history, Part 2 will synthesize the historical and literary contexts of addiction, and propose some methodological strategies for addressing the aesthetics of addiction historically. This section will conclude with a brief survey of other literary approaches to addictive culture. As I suggest, there are many advantages to understanding addiction dialectically, and as a "hegemonic" norm that "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" (Williams, 113). One such advantage is to avoid being distracted by what addiction "is," and instead see, as Latour might say, how addiction was built.[18]

Part 1 - A Brief History of Addiction in the United States

Many of the most powerful effects of drugs are caused by the nervous system's attempts to compensate for the disturbances they make. Just as the war on drugs displays more excitement, confusion and paranoia than the drugs themselves, the brain's own search for equilibrium can become the most significant factor in drugs' ability to change states of mind.

[18] "[I]n all domains, to say that something is constructed has always been associated with an appreciation of its robustness, quality, style, durability, worth, etc. So much so that no one would bother to say that a skyscraper, a nuclear plant, a sculpture, or an automobile is 'constructed'…Is it well or badly constructed?" (*Reassembling*, 89)

- Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs*, (197)

Hegemonic relations depend upon the fact that the meaning of each element in a social system is not definitely fixed. If it were fixed, it would be impossible to rearticulate it in a different way, and thus rearticualtion could only be thought under such categories as false consciousness.

- Ernesto Laclau, "Metaphor and Social Antagonisms" (254)

We tend to think about hegemony as precisely that which, in culture, is most stable and predictable. When we encounter a dominant mode of thinking in medicine or science, it is easy to assume that it is both "true" (in the sense that it corresponds to a reality independent of discourse itself) and "natural" (in the sense that it follows directly from the problem, or problems under examination as the "only" or "best" response). The prescription of oxycodone for moderate pain relief, for instance, seemed obvious enough to doctors 20 years ago. So too did the prescription of cocaine to cure morphine addiction a hundred years before.

In *hindsight* it is easy enough to point out why such treatments failed, yet we fall into error if we attribute these failures to some sort of false consciousness, as if we possess some timeless truth about addiction that the doctors of the past did not. We fall into even greater error when we suppose that some great truth lies behind the veil of ideology, as if treating addiction were simply a question of getting at the "real" of it with ever-greater scientific precision. Today we are, in many ways, in the same situation as societies of the past as we try to "place" addictive drugs within a specific historical

context in which legal, economic, and social interests are all at stake. Indeed, as Sadie Plant articulates above, what we find in the revolutions of drug policy and drug science is an analog for the work of drugs themselves as they try to achieve a sense of "normalcy" within a complex economy of chemistry, compulsion and desire.

My goal in this section will be to demonstrate how the history of addiction shows a similar pattern of mania and equilibrium as different modes of authority struggled over its definition. In general, this brief history will focus on the laws and scientific advancements that parallel 20th century culture in America. Yet this study would be incomplete without some reference to what existed prior to the American system of regimented drug controls. Indeed, that American society should police and control drugs more than any other society in history should indicate the gravity that such a change can have on social relations, economics and the basic organization of human lives.

(Almost) Anything Goes: Addiction before the 20th Century

It is worth noting there were few points before the twentieth century where drugs were considered important enough to be the subject of political debate. In fact, the vast majority of societies before ours have been rather permissive in terms of drug use: from the chewing of coca leaves in early South American cultures to independent discoveries of alcohol all over the world, drugs seem to have been a part of human culture and society since its inception. As many historians have noted, drug use has been the rule, rather than the exception, in human civilization. Historian Antonio Escohotado, author of the insightful and far-reaching *A Brief History of Drugs*, locates the earliest uses of drugs in religious and spiritual ritual (as still seen today in the indigenous practices involving

ayahuasca). In his words, "[t]he first hosts or holy sacraments were psychoactive substances, such as peyote, wine, or certain fungi" (2). In reference to the ancient cultures of both Greece and India, Escohotado points to the widespread use of opium and hemp. Some neuro-chemists have pointed in particular to the cannabanoid receptors in the human brain that interact specifically with tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the presence of which indicates that humans have been smoking (or perhaps eating) marijuana for a very, very long time (Plant, 194-95).

Despite the seemingly natural affinity that humans (as well as animals[19]) have for drugs, laws controlling their use have existed, on and off, for centuries. Escohotado notes that the earliest sanctions against the consumption of alcohol and drugs came with the Christianization of the Roman Empire (26-27). The church was so opposed to drugs during the tenth century that "the use of drugs for therapeutic purposes could be a synonym for heresy" (27). Just as early Christians fought against the "pagan" impulses towards intoxication, so too would early Islamic sects outlaw the use of hashish and opium in order to gain political advantages (33-34).

It wasn't until the dawn of the 20th century, and the emergence of drug controls that sought to contain what it saw as a "menace" that it was possible to speak about addicts as a group worthy of discussion. As the oft-quoted *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) of Thomas De Quincy attests, the use of narcotics was far from uncommon.[20] This idea is supported in the work of Virginia Berridge, perhaps the

[19] David Nutt refers to goats eating coffee beans, and pigs and elephants eating alcoholized rotting fruit (51).

[20] There is, of course, a deep and rich history in terms of Britain's relationship to opium, especially in the context of its conflicts in China and India. This history does however fall outside of the scope of the present study, due largely to its historical and geographical distance from the primary area of study.

world's leading drug historian, who notes how "[o]pium was simply a part of life for many consumers, neither exclusively medical nor entirely social" (*Demons*, 28).

Indeed the difference between the 19th century and previous eras, according to Berridge, was not *knowledge* about the effects of drugs, but rather the existence of particular social forces that allowed a certain version of addiction to congeal: in her words, "[w]hat was new in the nineteenth century was not the discovery, but rather the particular combination of social forces which made such concepts assume hegemony" ("Special Issue," 999). These forces included "the increasing status and expertise of the medical profession," the influence of religious temperance movements, and the expanding role of psychiatry in medical treatment (999). Together, these discourses created a sufficiently complex environment in which one could speak, suddenly, of the "meaning" of addiction.[21]

Indeed, the first attempts to control and stabilize drugs were wrought by the same people who arguably caused the first drug "epidemic": the nascent medical profession of the 19th century. In Britain and the United States, doctors treated numerous ailments with the freshly discovered alkaloid of opium—morphine—and found its most effective application in the hypodermic syringe, which only served to increase the speed and power of the drug. Popularized in the 1860s in Britain (*Demons,* 112-115), the syringe posed a substantial risk in addiction owing to the speed and intensity at which the drug could achieve its effects. According to the prominent drug historian David Courtwright, addicts in this period were composed largely of two groups: on the one hand, the women who

[21] While Berridge fails to provide a specific date for this shift in mentality, she discusses this idea in her analysis of the Society for the Study and Cure of Inebriety in Britain between 1884-1889.

had been overprescribed morphine, and on the other the doctors who had written the prescriptions (*Dark Paradise*, 36, 41).

The medical profession's attempt to "treat" the population of people that it had addicted was at the same time an attempt to maintain control over what was quickly becoming an elastic concept. As literary scholar Susan Zieger notes in *Inventing the Addict*, this was at stake in doctors' insistence that addiction was a *medical* rather than *moral* malady:

> [T]he first cohort of medically recognized 'addicts'—those whose growing habituations required higher dosages, who then suffered when they could not obtain them—were often upper- and middle-class women whose doctors had inadvertently habituated them…In order to rebuild a tarnished reputation, they began to control the use of the syringe more tightly…By generating a medical consensus about the norms of habituation and the rules for preventing or ameliorating it, they began to reconfigure their patients' habits as diseases. (23)

By treating addiction as a disease rather than moral failure, doctors in fact created the view of addiction as pathology: a view that remains popular today. As such, the disease theory of addiction was not "constructed" per se, but rather built given a certain set of medical, social, legal and political circumstances.

Yet the first cohort of addicts would not be the only ones, despite the fact that rates of addiction would drop following the initial group of morphine addicts. Courtwright argues that following the 19th century, the changing attitudes of doctors led to a distinct drop in incidences of addiction. He notes how improvements in public health and sanitation began to control many of the disorders for which opiates were prescribed

in the first place (diarrhea, dysentery) (*Dark Paradise*, 52). Similarly, advances in medical science (in terms of vaccines) reduced the overall need for morphine and opiate painkillers (52). In short, medicine became less a question of treating symptomatically and more about properly diagnosing and curing illnesses.[22] These were each signs of an imminent struggle over authority that would continue throughout the 20th century.

In the United States, before the introduction of the Harrison act of 1914, U.S. drug laws were controlled through States. Some, like Pennsylvania (a state that manufactured morphine) opted for controls as early as 1860 (Musto, 91). In general, there was little consensus among different State governments. Lacking this, druggists or individuals who wanted opium or cocaine could simply acquire them through mail or by travel to other States where they were legal. One major problem in early drug laws involved insuring that such laws didn't infringe on the individual rights of States.[23]

As a whole the medical profession knew precious little about drugs until the 20th century, the point at which another powerful authority been began to step in. The American government in particular became interested in the political and global scale of drugs at the beginning of the 20th century: not only for moral reasons, but also because of their status as commodities. Ultimately this would involve, contrary to previous controls, finding fault in the substance itself rather than in the person who used it.

[22] Berridge similarly notes how a number of British pharmacy acts professionalized the industry throughout in the 19th century. (*Demons*, 57).
[23] For a detailed account of State laws, see Musto (91-120).

The End of Morphomania: American Medicine, Law and Society, 1900-1960

In the Unites States, the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 ushered in a new era of drug control by requiring the labeling of narcotic content in patent medicines and tinctures. Prior to this law, there was little or no oversight on the contents of patent remedies, and many drugs contained opium where none was medicinally necessary. Courtwright notices one instance in which a patent medicine, made to cure morphine addiction, employed morphine as its principle agent (*Dark Paradise*, 58). As he points out, the 1906 act effectively eliminated "accidental" addiction, as casual use of drugs became infrequent. This was one major step towards the changing face of the addict, as the general populace was no longer commonly exposed to drugs, shrinking the scope of users in general.

Yet this was only the first step in the outright prohibition of opiates, soon to be followed by similar movements against marijuana and cocaine. Opium smoking was the first narcotic activity to fall under state and municipal laws, due largely to its association with Chinese immigrants (*Dark Paradise*, 78-79). The first move towards national prohibition was the Foster Bill of 1910 which would ultimately be rejected, and finalized, in a somewhat different form, as the Harrison act of 1914. Dr. Hamilton Wright, who campaigned for both domestic and international drug controls throughout the 1910s and 20s, was involved in the creation of both.

Wright was indispensable in the authoring of modern drug laws as he campaigned against what he saw as a distinct moral evil. As he put it in one interview in 1911, just prior to the International Opium Convention of 1912 (also known as the Hague

Convention), "here in the United States, [opium] has gained a terrifying foothold which it has been advancing with appalling speed until it threatens to become a drug-invasion great enough to hamper our triumphant march of progress" (Marshall, *The New York Times*). By associating drugs opposite the lofty goals of American progress, and by associating drugs with non-white populations, Wright began the construction of drug addiction as something that could be considered un-American.

Yet Wright's motives, much like the evidence he used to support his claims for the evils of drugs, ended up being far from clear. According to both Berridge and David Musto (*American Disease*, 39) Wright's interest in international opium controls had more to do with getting an economic foothold in China than in a moral crusade: in Berridge's words, the Hague convention "was not the outcome of national situations, but rather the outgrowth of pre-war colonial rivalries, overlain with US imperialist ambitions in the far East" (*Demons* 118). Wright also concocted favorable statistics, alongside his racist fear mongering, to exaggerate the dangers that drugs posed to further his own political ends (*Dark Paradise*, 28-29).

At the time, the American public was, unsurprisingly, more interested in the prohibition of alcohol than they were in drugs. The most effective promotion of drug laws involved connecting their use to feared minorities, something that would have proved difficult in the case of alcohol (though of course, alcohol too would have its racial and class dimensions). Wright began a new era in drug legislation that demonstrated the power of propaganda: his logic being that if drugs weren't so much a concern for the average citizen, then perhaps their association with minorities could mobilize and motivate legislation. As the leading historian of the Harrison Act, David Musto, suggests

of Wright, "[h]is statistics were usually interpreted to maximize the danger of addiction, dramatize a supposed crisis in opiate consumption, mobilize fear of minorities, and yet never waver from the exuberant patriotism which colored the crusade for the Shanghai Conference" (33). Wright found in opium a perfect confluence between a real and a fantastic threat.

The strategy of racial propaganda was also useful for the sponsor of the Harrison Act, Francis Harrison himself, who wanted bans on "Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola and all those things that are sold to Negroes in the South" (qtd. in Musto, 46). Wright had a similar view of cocaine in 1911:

> the habitual use of it temporarily raises the power of a criminal to a point where in resisting arrest there is no hesitation to murder…In the South the use of cocaine among the lower order of working negroes is quite common…There is no doubt that this drug, perhaps more than any other, is used by those concerned in the white slave traffic to corrupt young girls, and that when the habit is established, it is but a short time before such girls fall to the ranks of prostitution. (Marshall, *The New York Times*)

The anti-drug sentiment, which had been largely non-existent before its attachment to racial minorities, developed rapidly.[24] What had once been a common ingredient in a variety of over the counter remedies had now been all but eliminated from such tinctures as ant-drug sentiment grew through the 1920s (Musto, 94-95).

[24] There was, of course, the case of opium smoking that had been considered an unsuitable drug for some time. But even here, sentiments were more commonly against the largely Chinese population that smoked the drug, rather than against opium itself, which would have been considered fairly innocuous in any other form.

Yet the popular consensus that drugs were the problem of racial minorities matched up poorly to reality. Musto cites one clinic in Jacksonville in 1913 where the majority of habitual users were actually white women, despite a roughly even racial split in the local population (98). Similar evidence from records of a New York clinic in 1920 showed that less than 400 of some 2700 registered addicts were non-white (158). These records also indicate that a wide variety of working-class people, as well as professionals, suffered from addiction (159). As Courtwright notes, whites[25] made up the vast majority of drug addicts until the 1930s, when incidences of black addicts began to match, and in some cases exceed, their relative proportion in the US population (*Dark Paradise*, 121-22).

With the introduction of modern drug policies following the International Opium Convention of 1912, the history of addiction becomes more complex. Following American pressure, 12 countries (including Britain, China, France, Germany and Japan) signed a treaty that signaled willingness to control the international distribution of opium as a dangerous substance. This agreement saw its realization in the first punitive American drug laws, which had profound effects on addicts beginning with the Harrison act of 1914. Such laws intensified the already growing opposition between state and medical authorities, as they each saw in addiction a distinct cluster of causes, effects and consequences that they sought to maintain authority over.

But this change in the treatment of addicts (from medicine to law) assumed a complimentary change in the figure of the addict. As both David Courtwright and Susan

[25] Courtwright references a 1935 investigation of 946 addicts by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics that listed black, oriental, American Indian, and white as the principal demographics. Although Courtrwight fails to define exactly what "white" constitutes, we may assume from the breakdown that European immigrants were included as "white."

Zieger suggest, before 1900, the addict was statistically likely to be female and wealthy. By 1940, Courtwright notes that the average drug addict had changed into a young, working class man (*Dark Paradise*, 113). What was once the symptom of a somewhat misinformed medical practice become a form of self-medication for downtrodden members of the new industrialized world.[26] In this sense, we can see how the elasticity of the concept of addiction is also at play in its "real" experience. By enhancing the relative dangers that drugs posed, drug laws effectively increased the "value" of those same drugs they sought to police. As we shall see, by punishing the use of addictive drugs, states produced a self-propelling cycle of poverty as users found relief from the difficulties of life by using more drugs. Simultaneously, in banning drugs governments also politicized them, such that they became more desirable rather than less: as a new "taboo," drugs became not only symbol of rebellion, but also a site of cultural struggle as users fought to redefine the misinformed and totalitarian view that states had suddenly, and seemingly arbitrarily, taken on drugs.

This is only the first way in which class became a decisive factor in the use of drugs: a theme that would continue as the punishment for drugs became more and more severe. Indeed, drug laws would prove so decisive in transforming the demographics of the average addict—as well as the social and economic conditions under which the average addict used—it becomes difficult to distinguish between the symptoms of drugs themselves and those caused by the social and legal sanctions against them.[27] As Marie

[26] It is worth noting how drugs came to occupy a similar cultural place to alcohol in this regard. Indeed, there is a worthwhile study of this dynamic in regard to my own emphasis on addictive realism, though this study falls somewhat outside of the scope of the present project.

[27] As Marcus Boon has similarly said of most post-war literature (including that of William S. Burroughs), their depictions were the product of anti-narcotic laws as much as drugs themselves (*The Road of* Excess, 75).

Nyswander put it in 1956, "overnight a million victims of a horrifying illness were transformed into criminals" (5).

Unsurprisingly, the attachment of racism to drug use coincided with a distinct ideological shift in how America understood the *mechanism* of addiction. There had always been separate camps that alternated between thinking about addiction as either vice or disease, but in the 1920s and 30s policy began responding to the former idea far more than the latter. As Doctor I.A. Fossier of New Orleans said of the comparatively harmless drug marijuana (now legal in some States and all of Canada) in 1931: "The dominant race and most enlightened countries are alcoholic, whilst the races and nations addicted to hemp and opium, some of which once attained to heights of culture and civilization have deteriorated both mentally and physically" (n.p.).

In criminalizing the addict and relegating them to an underclass of "degenerate" citizens, the new addictive discourse altered their circumstances such that they became ever closer to the kind of degenerates that Harry Anslinger (the first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics) expected. Public perception of drug users accordingly changed radically from a short 35 years ago. As journalist Winifred Black declared in 1928, "[a] dope addict is a disease-carrier—and the disease he carries is worse than small pox, and more terrible than leprosy."[28] (qtd. in *Dark Paradise*, 143).

If the addict had once been the victim of an illness, they were now its harbingers, and threatened to spread the disease to others. Unsurprisingly, children were regularly invoked as the purported victims of "dope peddlers," making them as bad (or worse) than murderers, as one New York politician suggested in 1919: "we will go after these drug

[28] Black, Winifred. *Dope: The Story of the Living Dead*. New York: Star Co., 1928. P. 57.

sellers just as we would after murderers, for that is what they are doing to the youths between 17 and 21 years of age" ("TO SEEK CONTROL OF DRUG PRODUCTION")

In 1930, the enforcement of U.S. drug laws passed to the newly minted Federal Narcotics Bureau whose goal was to centralize drug seizures and investigations from the U.S. Tax Department that had became incapable of handling the volume of such offences (violation of the Harrison Act was technically tax evasion, a loophole that allowed the act to supersede State laws). Under the direction of Anslinger, the Bureau would conduct the first, though perhaps unofficial, war against drugs in America. As Anslinger's biographer notes,

> [p]rior to the Harrison Act, an opium addict could legally be administered a physician's dosage of narcotics to alleviate his misery…By the early 1920s…they were no longer perceived as helpless, downtrodden souls, but as despicable, evil deviants who were no good to themselves or to the society in which they lived (McWilliams, 16-17).

A New Hegemony

Legislation based on the moral dangers of drugs resulted in the first hegemonic formulation of addiction, one that would be decisive for both American and world history. By finding fault in the addict and the dealer, and by supposing that the solution to drugs involved restricting their sale, importation and consumption, policy makers created a political and legal system that created a place for addicts along the margins of society: punitive laws ensured a stark change in the figure of the addict by making poverty, theft, and health complications a near ubiquitous part of "junky" life.

By crystallizing the addict as a specific kind of identity, and one that could be found at the intersection of multiple "undesirable" traits, the U.S. state hegemonized addiction by making the addict a salient container into which they could pour a variety of significations that, while appearing "natural", were actually a very strategic fabrication that served to increase the scope of state and police powers (as Burroughs himself would note, as would later critics of American crack laws). The addict became, in the popular imagination, the most undesirable sort of person imaginable. As Courtwright notices, such a comparison presupposes certain characteristics of the addict that would have been impossible 30 years earlier: following the introduction of narcotic laws, public perceptions of addicts drifted gradually (and sometimes suddenly) from "inebriates" and "habitués" to what we now recognize as a "junky."

American drug law would become even more punitive with the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences, in the Boggs Act of 1952 and the Narcotics Control Act 1956; each were unambiguously aimed at drug users and sellers. The severity of such laws signaled an incredible distance between the physiological harms that drugs posed and the moral panic with which it was associated. As Musto puts it, "[p]ublic sympathy was up against a social fear of addiction that had almost no connection with physiology or pharmacology" (232). Yet the state's control over addiction was far from uncontested. Both medical and legal institutions questioned Anslinger's criminal measures. Part of this followed from the dissent from British doctors who treated addiction without criminalization. In 1937 Dr. Laughton Scott attested that addicts were not typically the "vicious weaklings" or degenerates that society at large believed them to be, but instead consisted largely of normal citizens for whom "the habit [was] acquired either during the

course of some painful illness, or still more frequently in an attempt to tide over a period of special stress or overwork" (2).

Owing to advances in research, the American medical profession was much more capable of dealing with addiction medically than was historically the case, though the stringency of American drug laws largely interfered with any possible benefits of new knowledge. This was certainly the case for Dr. Marie Nyswander, whose experience at Lexington proved to be an indispensible factor in her education about addiction (x). Nyswander, along with many of her colleagues, discovered that individualistic treatments of patients provided the best chances at recovery: a kind of proto-sociological perspective on addiction treatment. As she has it,

> [i]n sharing my experiences with my medical colleagues I discovered that they, too, had been treating their patients as individuals with human problems, utilizing varied family and community resources, instead of arbitrarily sending them to institutions…I learned that my experience at Lexington had to be supplemented; I came to realize that any form of compulsory treatment had considerable limitation. (x)

The medical discipline (at least by 1956) had had enough experience of addiction to speak authoritatively on the topic as they leveraged clinical experience in understanding how addiction worked. Unfortunately, by the time that the American medical discipline was sufficiently informed in the dangers, symptoms and treatments of addiction, they were nearly powerless to treat it (save when addicts were contained in hybrid penal facilities such as Lexington).[29]

[29] See Musto, 152-156 for details.

By the 1950s, the medical profession was beginning to push back directly against federal laws. In 1958 the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association attempted to intervene in drug laws with their joint report, *Drug Addiction: Crime Or Disease?* The association tried to usurp the authority of the Narcotics Bureau and challenge its punitive approach to addiction, endorsing legislative changes that would place the control over addiction back into the hands of doctors. As Alfred Lindesmith, a leading sociologist from Indiana University and author of many articles and books on addiction, claimed on behalf of the association, "drug addiction is primarily a problem for the physician rather than for the policeman, and it should not be necessary for anyone to violate a criminal law solely because he is addicted to drugs" (viii). This idea was echoed in a separate publication by Nyswander, who argued that "[i]gnorance of the true nature of the drug addicts' malady had further ramifications, for the Bureau's entire program carried the implication that relapse to drugs is a crime." (5)

People involved in the treatment of addicts had by this point begun to consider the ramifications of punitive drugs laws. They noticed that because drug laws took such a toll on the wellbeing of addicts, in addition to crippling their ability to obtain employment, that laws were a major contributor to the supposed "symptoms" of drug addiction itself. People such as Lindesmith and Nyswander argued that the most positive outcomes for recovering addicts came by way of medical treatment and social reintegration, rather than criminal punishment. So long as the state controlled what Michel Foucault may have called both the "power" and "truth" of addiction, medical professionals risked their own livelihoods while catering to the needs of addicts.

This was precisely the situation in which William Burroughs found himself in the 1950s when he was arrested under the punitive drug laws of Louisiana, as we shall see in Chapter 1. His was one of the few voices that contradicted the official accounts of addiction at the time, and in so doing his work inspired substantial changes in how people thought about drug addiction. While the state's position on drugs would remain unchanged for many years, it would prove far from unalterable. Indeed, one major influence on changing ideas in the American system of drug control can be found in the system supposed by Britain. Rather than wage on all-out war on addiction, Britain employed a "hybrid medico-penal" system that "symbolized an alliance between medical profession and state" (*Demons*, 130-131).

Crime and Punishment, Science and Sociology: 1960-1990, The Modern History of Addiction

The latter half of the twentieth century brought with it a host of new complications for drug control. First and foremost among these was the emergence of new recreational drugs. Most popular among the new drugs were LSD, MDMA, crack cocaine and amphetamines, each of which would make a distinctive mark on the modern history of addiction. Amphetamines, for instance, were legal for many years before their prohibition by the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and were well known as fuel for writers on drugs.[30] We should likewise all be familiar with the symbolic resonance of LSD for youth in the 1960s, as well as the importance of MDMA (and its

[30] See Boon for details on the use of amphetamines by Phillip K. Dick and Jack Kerouac in particular (*The Road of* Excess, 197-211).

later packaging in the pill known as ecstasy) for rave cultures of the late 90s and early 2000s.

Because drugs continued to be institutionally demonized, they offered a very clear point of departure for countercultures. As a result, drugs in this period were politicized as they began to represent the discontent of generations that saw conspicuous holes in the state's version of the "truth" about drugs. The ultimate irony, of course, is that the symbols in question were ultimately nothing more than drugs: contrary to what both the state and many countercultures believed, drugs were ultimately just drugs, and were no more capable of spiritual emancipation than they were of being the root of all evil.

Accordingly, the legal, moral and social status of drugs in this period may best be described as a paradox, insofar as we see both an increase on controls and punishments and also substantial increases in consumption. This precipitated major changes in the discourse of drugs and the role of the addict in the popular imaginary. Gone were the "old-time" junkies that Burroughs imagined, rolling lushes on New York subways, replaced by the "crack head" and the hippy as the known drug aficionados (though they of course had their own, "new" drugs, no longer beholden to the same old junk).

Beginning in 1961 with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, modern drug laws began to replace older domestic legislation. Followed by the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), these international treaties aimed for the uniform control of drugs across nations and included schedules that accorded different punishments for different drugs. These treaty would serve as the basis for the Controlled Substances Act in the United States (1970), the Misuse of Drugs Act in the United Kingdom (1971), and the Narcotics Control Act of Canada (1961). Legally, these acts contained provisions

against possession and trafficking, and a new classification system that differentiated different kinds of drugs. Ideologically speaking, these laws instituted and formalized a punitive philosophy that would prove decisive in terms of popular opinions about drugs: that all drugs were "bad," but some drugs were "worse." In effect this new regime of drug laws created our own modern convention about "hard" and "soft" drugs (or the common user idiom of "synthetic" and "natural" drugs) because it evaluated drugs in terms of their *perceived* harms. These laws, much like American crack laws that would follow them, tended to punish users disproportionally in the sense that the most statistically dangerous drugs didn't always carry the greatest punishments.[31] Rather it was the drugs that were perceived to be the "hardest" and most intoxicating (like opiates, LSD, ecstasy and cocaine) that brought the most severe penalties.

While the United States Government continued to insist on the evils of drugs while expanding their legal consequences, researchers, on the other hand, began developing theories that contested anti-drug policies. One of the major motivators for renewed sociological research was the Vietnam War. America was forced to come to terms with more or less common drug use by soldiers who were supposedly protecting American interests overseas. Drugs were being used by many, and unless governments were willing to admit the fallibility of the supposed "heroes" who had been called to its defence, there needed to have some rational explanation of how and why soldiers were

[31] While I will be examining the policy work of David Nutt in detail to demonstrate this point, even a quick comparison between alcohol, cocaine, heroin and tobacco would show a wide range of different potential harms and legal consequences. Given the frequency of use per capita, and the potentially life threatening or life compromising conditions that might be associated with long-term use of each, it is clear that the punishments for a drug like crack cocaine are wildly out of sync with its potential dangers, at least relative to common, legal drugs like alcohol.

using addictive substances. In this way, definitions of addiction began to shift once again; this time in a way that might compliment the political needs of those in power.

In the 1970s, explaining addiction in Vietnam came in (at least) two forms. Norman Zinberg (an American psychologist and sociologist) offers one explanation that was largely sympathetic. His sociological research was interested in understanding the contexts of addiction: what he called "set" and "setting." Unlike the critics that decried addiction as immoral, he sought to understand how and why drug use might be motivated by rational means. In 1975, Zinberg suggested that rates of addiction post-Vietnam were not the product of moral weakness, nor even of exposure to drugs, but rather a result of the deplorable conditions soldiers suffered:

> final army data makes it possible to say assuredly (despite the army's early claims that only those who were heavy drug users before service became addicted) that these young men displayed a wide variety of personality types, that they came from diverse social, ethnic, geographic and religious backgrounds, and that few were drug users before they went to Vietnam…[32] The determining factor in their heroin use had been the intolerable setting of Vietnam, and once they returned to the United States neither the power of the drug nor a susceptible personality proved to be decisive in keeping them drug dependent. ("Addiction and Ego Function," 150-151).

Zinberg's analysis explains why many addicts were able to give up drugs upon returning to American soil. Because their drug use was motivated by a certain lifestyle—a web of behaviours, beliefs, psychological and emotional responses that were adaptive to

[32] Zinberg references Robins' 1974 study, "A Followup Study of Vietnam Veterans' Drug Use." *Drug Issues* (4), 1974.

circumstance—it was possible to go "cold turkey" easily enough for many veterans. By supposing drug use as a response to environment, Zinberg contradicted the State's idea that drugs were simply "bad."

A second explanation of drug use in the period comes by way of the polemical American sociologist Avram Goldstein, who used Vietnam data to demonstrate the *exact opposite* of Zinberg's point (indeed, even citing the same study by Robins). In his estimation, "there, where heroin was very pure, very cheap and very readily available many thousands of young men became addicted, who would never have even experimented with heroin at home" (342). Goldstein reasons that it is *the drug itself*, its availability and purity, that caused so many veterans to become addicted. Accordingly, when the vets returned home, addiction became less viable because domestic heroin wasn't nearly as strong. Like Zinberg, Goldstein's view opposed the simplistic, moralistic view supposed by the state's criminalization of addiction: if drugs are strong enough, Goldstein reasoned, anyone could become addicted to drugs despite the content of their character or their mental or physical health. It's worth noting how these two, competing interpretations make very different cases based on the same data set; their disagreement doesn't concern the facts of veterans' heroin use, but rather the explanation *behind* their use. Because such data was, in some sense, open to interpretation, these contestations would become common among researchers of addiction throughout the latter half of the 20th century, as they tried to determine the slippery and forgiving boundaries that addiction occupied.

By the late 1970s the popular discussion had shifted from opiates in Vietnam to the domestic use of crack cocaine. It brought with it a new form of state rhetoric that increasingly employed scientific accounts to justify ever-harsher forms of drug control. Indeed, what Berridge said of scientific approaches in the 19th century was even more true of the 1980s, as "[t]he apparently value free rationale of science provided a legitimation of contemporary social and economic relationships" ("Special Issue," 999). This was nowhere more obvious than in the myriad accounts that stressed the purely chemical addictiveness of crack cocaine, referred to by Ronald Reagan as an "uncontrolled fire" in 1986.[33] Effectively, by stressing and isolating the chemistry of cocaine, state authorities obscured the social and economic conditions that were a major part of the motivations behind crack use. Quite simply, they favoured a politically convenient "reality" at the expense of another, more nuanced account.

Many scientific studies in the period tested the "pure" addictiveness of cocaine by administering the drug to rats under highly controlled conditions.[34] Such studies set up rats in cages and fitted them with an injection device by which they could self-administer cocaine at will,[35] finding that rats would use the drug repeatedly, for about as long as they were physically able. The rhetoric that followed was deterministic: that crack was so powerful that we, like the rats, were powerless in the face of drugs. This scientific, "value

[33] On September 14th, 1986, in a televised public address.
[34] As one pair of authors note, these conditions artificially isolated the chemistry of cocaine and in so doing produced results of limited value: "Studies of drug self-administration by rodents, dogs, and even primates have garnered much attention but have not contributed much to understanding cocaine use in humans. This is true because the conditions used in most animal studies are so extreme, so *unlike* the conditions of ordinary human life. In fact, experimental conditions are *expressly designed* to maximize animals' self-injection of cocaine" (Morgan and Zimmer, 148).
[35] Johanson, C. E. Fischman, M. W. "The Pharmacology of Cocaine Related to its Abuse." *Pharmacological Reviews*. (41:3) 1989. 3-52. Also see James Woods' for a detailed list of experiments conducted on rats and addiction up until 1978, as well as an overview of the kinds of experiments that took place, and their findings.

free rationale" enabled the outrageous drug laws that attempted to control the "crack epidemic" of the 1980s.

Yet the claims of such science were dubious as best, as the scientific community soon discovered. Part of the problem of chemical approaches to addiction, as physician John Morgan and sociologist Lynn Zimmer contend, is that the ability "to explain how a drug *works in the brain* reveals no more about why and how people use it than explaining how a specific food is *processed by the body* reveals why and how people eat it" (135). Neurochemistry has established, for instance, that cravings and withdrawals are produced by saturation and subsequent deprivations of certain clusters of neurons and chemicals within the brain: such observations "describe" what happens in addiction, but has yet to provide a reliable way of treating it.[36] And if there is no "solution" that follows purely on the basis of chemistry, then there must be some other, perhaps social or learned element that is active and determinate in the experience of addiction.

Of course, this is precisely why sociological studies often complement, rather than contradict, the findings of neurochemistry, and why we might say that different "realisms" of addiction are often cooperative rather than exclusive. Because addiction's meaning (and indeed its experience) is such a difficult and fluid phenomenon, findings that employ diverse, rather than unified, analytic approaches are closest to approaching something representative. Just as brain science can't explain the economics of addiction, so too are purely sociological approaches unable to adequately address the chemical differences between fentanyl and heroin (whose respective chemistries might easily affect the social behaviours of their use, sale and consumption).

[36] For a straightforward, non-specialist description of the neurochemistry of addiction, refer to Nutt (135-43).

This was exactly what Canadian sociologist Bruce Alexander attempted in his "Rat Park" experiments of the 1970s at Simon Fraser University, where he sought to correct "purely" scientific, determinist interpretations of drug use. Alexander's important study contested cocaine's addictiveness by examining the role of *environment* in the consumption of drugs. Alexander wondered if rats' addiction was in part caused by the environment in which they were using, and wanted to isolate the impact of the small cages, isolation, and operant conditioning that "trained" them to consume. His experiment, called "Rat Park," emulated the rats' natural environment by populating it with members of both sexes to allow for typical social behaviour. They also allowed rats to self-administer by non-invasive means, lacing water with morphine and making it (as well as clean water) available to the rats at all times. What his studies found, in comparison to a control group, was that specimens were less likely to use morphine when put in a "Rat Park" then in cages. His studies suggest that addiction should never be considered purely a question of chemistry: it is inevitably and equally a question of society and of environment.

Despite the explanatory power of Alexander's research, the state disagreed. In 1980, fueled by populist rhetoric, and the highly visible problems in Los Angeles (where urban poverty, and social unrest combined to amplify the problems drugs posed), the United States declared its war on drugs and irrevocably polarized public opinion. Most simply, anti-crack legislation blamed drugs themselves for the social and economic problems that were, in reality, far more complicated than the ingestion of an intoxicating white powder. The excessive crack laws introduced in the Anti-Drug Abuse Act (1986), for instance, punished crack 100 times more than cocaine by weight (*The New Jim Crow*,

112-14), and functionally discriminated against the crack using population that was statistically dominated by disenfranchised African Americans (112).

Such laws distracted popular (and state) attention from the material and systemic problems that fueled the new "crack epidemic" by insisting on the dangers of the drug itself. This is one way in which state legislation, and the political discourse of addiction, can affect how drugs "really work." By increasing the consequences of drug use, and by targeting that punishment at a specific demographic, laws increased the relative values of drugs as relief or escape. In effect, the 1986 act made drugs more addictive. It also revealed the limitations of scientific approaches to addiction; the racist application of such laws were justified by a body of research that did little more than mimic popular assumptions. It is in this sense that I would argue for *narrative* as an influential and indispensable element of addiction's conceptual and political history.

It was also during this period that drugs laws were taken to their modern extremes with new provisions for the forfeiture of property in the United States. The Comprehensive Crime act of 1984 increased the powers of law enforcement to seize property involved in drug crimes (*The New Jim Crow*, 79). As legal and black history scholar Michelle Alexander convincingly argues, such laws seemed less concerned with preventing the transfer of liquid assets between dealers (in the form of cash and property), and more interested in filling the coffers of police departments.[37] This allowed departments to acquire extravagant weapons and vehicles to wage the war on drugs with new vigour. Whether intentionally or not, these laws ended up funding massive police

[37] Found in the comprehensive Drug Abuse and Prevention Act of 1970, which initiated forfeiture laws for police departments. By the time it was amended in 1984, the act included the ability to retain 80% of seized assets (cash, cars, homes). (*New Jim Crow*, 79)

budgets that led to more incentives to pursue drug crimes that could be lucrative for the arresting departments.

Conceptually, the severity and scope of such punishments are conspicuous given the political and ideological climate of the 1980s. With the advancements of neoliberal thought (which held individual choice and responsibility as core beliefs), the justifications for severe punishments became more salient; that is, if people were understood to be fundamentally and essentially in control of their actions, then punishing them to the highest degree of the law makes some sense. After all, they would seem to deserve it. On the other hand, as Alexander points out, there is an economic logic to these politics, insofar as repossession laws offered major incentives to increasing the scope and penalties of drug crimes (in her compelling view, itself an extension of racist laws and policies).

Addiction Today

Ultimately, it was the Harrison act that set the stage for the American drug laws that would follow it, as Burroughs recognized.[38] The illegalization of drugs, as taken up in the United States, was decisive in terms of our own state of affairs because it posed itself as a solution to the drug "problem" that it ostensibly created. Drug laws, in criminalizing the addict and the user, gave birth to manifold problems, most obviously in the national and international criminal organizations that profited from dealing in valuable, compact, illegal substances. As Escohotado has it, "[t]o attempt to cure a vice by calling it a disease and a criminal act is to certainly assure that it becomes a disease

[38] See "White Junk" in *Burroughs Live*.

and a crime" (85). Drugs themselves certainly posed problems worthy of legislation, but the laws that were introduced added to these a host of new problems. It introduced variance into a controlled system of dispensation, so that addicts couldn't receive drugs of a reliable strength, which in turn increased the possibility of overdose. So too did it increase the costs of drugs, which would limit the ability of addicts to maintain productive lives and stay out of poverty, just as it increased their profitability on the black market. It also served to encourage the exercise of racial prejudices of white society through discrimination in both searches and arrests.

Far from solving the "drug epidemic," the War on Drugs merely renegotiated its boundaries. In the process it managed to miss the addictive threats lurking on the fair side of its own legislation: in the prescription opiates whose dangers and addictiveness were obscured by the pharmaceutical companies invested in their wide prescription. Drugs such as oxycodone, which was prescribed quite liberally in the 90s, would become a root of the "new drug epidemic" striking everywhere today. Indeed over the last 20 years, there has been a resurgence in the disease theory as it attempts to explain the "use" of so many middle-class white folks.

An interesting example comes by way of Anthony Bourdain's popular show, *Parts Unknown*. One episode involves his own semi-autobiographical, semi-documentary take on heroin use in small town Massachusetts. As one doctor explains, the over-prescription of OxyContin, fueled by the interests of pharmaceutical companies, was a major cause of people turning to heroin (and fentanyl) as cheaper alternatives. In her words, "we took data that was bullshit, right? And then we went forth with it and said, 'Oh, prescribe it to everyone, they won't get addicted, we know what we're doing.'

Guess what? We didn't know what we were doing" (*Parts Unknown*). The great tragedy of the situation (as Bourdain notes) is that this "epidemic" is so pressing only because it has finally started affecting middle-class white America. So long as the victims of drug addiction were those "other" people (typically African Americans or people of colour), the drug problem could be thought of as a moral weakness on the part of users, or as an effect of bad parenting and bad neighborhoods. Contrary to the treatment of the drug problem over the last 20 years, the "drug epidemic" now employs the language of crisis and immediacy that has been conspicuously absent until now.

Changing the plight of addicts, sadly enough, has required more than the realization of drugs' harms, or recognition of the cruelty and impotency of drug laws in general. It has instead required one more change in the face of the addict. In the 19th century, when drugs were legal, this face was white and female. As prohibition took hold it changed into the younger, poorer, racialized face of the "junky" and the "crack-head." Is it really any surprise that today, as nations around the world are considering changes in drug laws—with injection facilities, maintenance programs and the like becoming more and more acceptable—that the face of the drug addict has once again changed,[39] now looking a lot more like those of the legislative authorities that created the "drug problem" in the first place?

[39] This is quite literally the case in the rhetoric of Eric Rankin's article for the CBC, "The New face of Fentanyl: Kati's Story." As a young white woman, Kati represents "us" rather than them, and so the horrifying symptoms of her addiction (opens sores and scabs from scratching her on face during withdrawal, track marks etc.) become horrific rather than simply unfortunate.

Part 2 - Narrative, Experience and Authority: (Re)Articulating Addiction

For substances, both regulation and culture and their interaction need to be built in. This is an historical process which is often open ended and changing as we write and speak. Science itself with its proponents is a player in all this…These concepts are often seen as timeless and value free, as 'pure science.' The rise of interest in addiction to nicotine, for example, now so prominent in current debates, is not a belated recognition of an immutable scientific fact, but rather a concept that has suited changing scientific and policy interests to espouse, given the changing cultural and legal positioning of tobacco in society.

-Virginia Berridge, *Demons* (6)

Ideology and style are the same thing.

-Amiri Baraka, *In our Terribleness* (n.p.)

While the political and legal histories of drugs are indispensable to apprehending our current situation, unofficial discourses such as those contained in the literary record are equally valuable. For this reason, I'll now turn briefly to an examination of literature relative to the broad historical outline just discussed, examining the ways in which "authority" and "experience" are indispensable categories in understanding the history of addiction: especially in terms of their relationship to dominant or hegemonic discourses. As we shall see, the validity of many literary accounts of addiction were predicated on their ability to contradict both state and medical authorities.

Tracing the interactions between official and unofficial accounts of addiction requires a nuanced approach insofar as the relationship is not one of simple cause and effect. As something that we might call "hegemonic," a dominant understanding of addiction is at all points implicated in resistance and contradictions that are integral to hegemony as "process." As Williams has suggested of hegemony in general,

> [i]t is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. (110)

The literature of addiction, relative to the official discourse of the state and medical practice is precisely this kind of "lived system of meanings" that is both "constitutive and constituting": a cultural force that is simultaneously produced by, and productive of, the various meanings and realities proper to our own sense of what addiction is. In this sense, literature is never an *articulation* of addiction (in the sense that it "invents" a new understanding) but always a (re)articulation: it is a reorganization of a system of signs, experiences, beliefs, realities and fictions that, when aligned just so, manage to "represent" something we might recognize as "addiction."

This is the sense in which Williams argues that hegemony "constitutes a sense of reality for most people in society" (110). Hegemony provides the codes by which "realism" becomes sensible. What we find in addiction is not only a struggle over

ideology, but equally a struggle over style: a struggle over the authority to code addiction as such. Just as medical science dropped the word “addiction” in favour of “substance abuse,” so too is the history of addictive literature an attempt to modify, rearrange and authorize ever more “real” accounts. Accordingly, there can be no assertion of authority without some concomitant revolution of style; the process of capturing addiction has proven to be an endless one insofar as each narrative must make concessions in their both their style and substance.

Indeed, as I will suggest, literature would come to play an important role in the struggle over addiction through its obvious connection to “experience,” a category that was largely ignored by the American state throughout its 100 years of prohibition. Yet paradoxically enough, by the end of the 20th century, lived experience was so important that getting “real” information on the effects of a drug involved speaking to someone who had done it themselves: an older sibling or a loose lipped uncle were much better sources of the “real deal” on drugs than a government pamphlet or PSA. This was similarly the case with drug narratives, an easily available source of first-hand information, which flourished in popular publications after the 1960s.

Prohibition would prove decisive for our own contemporary state of affairs because it criminalized the experience of drugs’ effects: the very means by which one might understand what drugs were “really like.” In so doing, state authorities compromised their own ability to “contain” the meaning of drugs, a mistake that would be a component of many failures in drug policy over the 20th century. As Raymond Williams suggests, “the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own

forms of counter-culture" (114). This was certainly the case for American drug legislators.

At the same time, the illegalization of drugs granted a newfound authority to users (especially writers and artists) that might claim the authority of experience that institutional models lacked. Consequently, the outlaw of drugs not only stimulated a new, subversive desire for the use of drugs (*The Road of Excess*, 39), but also fostered a new form of literary discourse that could undercut official doctrine. In effect, the laws against drugs provided the very avenue by which a different form of authority might supersede and overrule it, as noticed by Borst:

> [A]ddict-subject confessions have been given extraordinary power over their highly sensitive subject matter… [T]his rhetorical and political power relies not on the narrative's ability to get to the bottom of intemperance, the drug problem, or addiction itself, but rather on its ability to maintain, substantiate, or critique the prevailing theories of and responses to addiction and addict-subjects. (*Toward National Identity*, 69)

By de-centering the authority of addiction, prohibition also inadvertently created a kind of "truth vacuum" in which legitimacy could belong to all sorts of differing accounts of drugs simultaneously. If experience wasn't important to "knowing" drugs (according to medical and legal standards at the very least), then *any* experience carried with it some sort of authority. Most simply, first-hand accounts were capable of offering diverse, subjective truths and insights that anyone could appreciate as either student or voyeur.

Accordingly, addictive culture would regularly change and adapt according to its contemporary status quo. In the 1950s, when drugs were criminalized to the utmost,

authors like Burroughs explained drugs in terms of "total need": the unavoidable, all too human urge for addiction and intoxication. The same idea (basically that addiction is a disease) would later be contradicted by James Frey, who insisted on addiction as a personal and moral responsibility (interesting given the re-merging view of addiction as disease, popular through the 1980s and 1990s). Addictive literature, it seems, is always playing a discursive game of cat and mouse, employing the rhetoric of truth and experience to undercut and contradict official accounts, whatever their content may be.

Yet this newfound emphasis on experience wasn't produced *ex nihilo*. While literature undoubtedly influenced the relative value of experience in understanding addiction, it was aided by another discipline in which the value of experience was on the rise. Psychoanalysis (ironically much maligned by Burroughs himself[40]) was also instrumental in making "repetition" symbolic and meaningful. Freud's invention of the talking cure is just one example of how medical practices began to focus more and more on the patient throughout the 20th century, as a source for both meaning and authority. While early psychoanalytic approaches to addiction would stray towards schematic or analogical readings,[41] there was a growing sense in which the individual desires and psychology of addicts were important to understanding the motivations for use.

Indeed, such an idea would become so popular that subjective experience would be widely considered a *sufficient* criteria to diagnose addiction; by the later 20th century all one had to do was "feel" a loss of control in order to potentially fall into the company of addicts. Subjective experience would become so important by the 1970s that

[40] See Chapter 1.
[41] Freud would understand addiction as an analog for masturbation. Later psychoanalysts, such as Abraham Wikler and Sandor Radó, would suggest that *personality* was the main locus for addictive tendencies.

psychologist Stanton Peele could claim, in *Love and Addiction* (1975), that "subjective experience is the key to the true meaning of addiction" (29). Accordingly, as self-help culture exploded throughout the 1980s, we saw an exponential rise in different forms; gambling is the prototypical example of an addiction that has no substance per se. Other addictions, like sex, exercise, food and even "co-dependency" would all figure as addictions that had less to do with the substance and more to do with the subject. The assumption behind such diagnoses was that addiction was, fundamentally, a *method* of desiring rather than a desire for a specific object, one that could only be located inside of subjective experience.

A Note on Methodology and the Field of Literary Addiction

As we've seen already, addictive theories are always caught between two competing poles. On the one hand, the brute facticity of drugs as chemicals and users as clusters of receptors and neurons that react with them. On the other hand, we have arguments similar to those of Derrida that are more interested in the social and historical conditions that mediate and motivate drug addiction. Typically, any dominant theory of addiction combines elements of these two arguments. Disease theory, for instance, holds chemistry as the primary mode of explanation, but isn't so scientific that it is incapable of accounting for cultural and historical factors. The patient's own history, and their feelings about their use, can also be imperative in addressing the level and type of their distress. The *DSM* criteria, for example, takes into account subjective dimensions such as craving and negative emotional responses to use.

So too are literary studies of addiction always navigating these two poles in an attempt to define, or at least contain, the manifold meanings that addiction represents. One of the more common approaches to our own culture of addiction involves recourse to philosophy, and specifically the question of "being" as it relates to addiction. Exemplary works include those of David Clark and Avital Ronell, who rely heavily on the thought of Martin Heidegger. Here, the question is to what extent can addiction be said to a fundamental, or timeless element of the human constitution: one that is visible in so-called addictive culture. As Clark has it, "insofar as addiction names a structure that precedes and exceeds the knowing subject (and is thus 'older' than it), that subject is *always* 'speaking' of it, as if answering and answerable to an imperious law, the law of addiction that amounts to an addiction to the law" (Clark, 9). Clark muses on the interaction between subjectivity, philosophy, desire and craving, concluding that "[i]f addiction *is* originary, if it is constitutive of the subject…then there is no metalanguage *on* addiction that is not itself already fundamentally 'addicted'" (9). Through this post-structuralist lens, addiction becomes interesting as a concept more so than a practice. Such works find in addictive culture elucidation of the concept of desire in general, and the ways in which "addiction" is a fundamental structure of human being. In some cases, such approaches also borrow from the findings of psychoanalysis, and in particular the concept of drive: indeed, it is very tempting to find in addiction something like the self-destructive death drive, by which humans pursue "jouissance" as a final or ultimate pleasure.

Such studies are mirrored in the theoretically minded study of the addict-subject. Literary critic Allan Borst and cultural critic Mark Seltzer, for instance, argue that under

the current state of consumer capitalism, addiction is synonymous with subjectivity: that we are all already addicts. In Seltzer's words, "[t]he logic of addiction in machine culture seems 'hard-wired' to the logic of the subject and its determination" (91). His question, accordingly, is "[h]ow then are forms of self-production in machine culture perhaps inseparable from compulsive repetition and compulsive sexual violence both?" (91-92). In the case of Borst, pursuing the addict-subject involves investigating the ideological gap left between the "addict" and ourselves, such that we can gauge or measure our own excessive desires as a "limit-case." For both Seltzer and Borst, addiction is to be found precisely where we find the subject: the practices, technologies and ideologies that we are subject to. And if that machinery will only recognize us through our desires, then we too must take on the characteristics of the addict in order to function in the world.

Historical approaches are also widely represented among researchers in addictive culture (Boon, Berridge, Zieger, Plant). As we have already seen, such studies excel in examining how addiction changes over time: the ways in which addiction developed—by happenstance or by design—into the forms, concepts, narratives and ideas that now circulate freely. This is typically not only a question of literary inheritance, but also chemical intoxication. Indeed, for Plant and Boon, the history of drug literature is equally a history of something "real" in drugs themselves, and their infiltrations, both chemical and stylistically, into the history of "high" culture.

We should not consider these approaches necessarily exclusive. Indeed many of these strategies will use a variety of approaches in apprehending the complex object that is the addict. My goal here will not be to downplay any single approach, but instead to try to detail some of the advantages of understanding addiction historically and dialectically:

that is, to stress the importance of understanding it as a phenomenon that is caught between, on the one hand, certain realities particular to chemistry and biology and, on the other, political realities that are no less determining. It is also to stress that in understanding addiction, we must, must pay attention to the practice and experience of addiction in addition to its concepts and theories: the idea that addiction "speaks us" makes very little difference to the user in the street, and if we satisfy ourselves with studying addiction on the level of concept, we miss critical elements of it.

Indeed, as I would like to discuss next, there are many advantages to seeing theories of addiction as influencers, rather than as mere reflections, of some "real" phenomenon. Disease theory, for example, is both an attempt to explain a specific phenomenon while also proposing courses of treatment for addicts. The very tools with which we work on addiction, I argue, change the nature of the object with which we are attempting to work. It is in this sense that I would liken culture, after the work of Marxist cultural theorist Fredric Jameson, to a palimpsest: a surface that has been overwritten again and again, making the task of the interpreter to tease out the various forms and meanings that persist from previous addictive paradigms and different ideological climates, rather than try decipher the "meaning" of a text writ large (*Political Unconscious*, 98).

In terms of addiction, this requires examining the formal processes that are active in any given cultural artifact, including the generic constraints within which a given narrative is published, the political and legal status of addiction at the time of printing, the perspective of a narrator or narrators, and the discursive relationship between author and audience (didactic, confessional, phenomenological). Each of these may modify,

conflict or complement the avowed, manifest "meaning" of addiction in any given work. They each contribute to the *why* of *how* we tell the story of addiction.

Many critical approaches define what addiction "is," then apply their particular reading practice to the text in question. Borst, for instance, understands the addict as subject, then turns to works of fiction that present the addict as such. He gathers evidence, makes arguments, and examines how desires have begun to characterize our culture, even our very interaction with the world. Zieger, alternatively, understands addiction as a disease, and traces representations of that disease across the 19th and early 20th centuries. My goal is slightly different. Following the suggestions of theorist Bruno Latour, this dissertation examines the ways in which any given version of addiction (whether scientific, medical, or literary in origin) is "constructed," though in a very particular way:

> to say that something is constructed means that it's not a mystery that has popped out of nowhere, or that it has a more humble but also more visible and more interesting origin…[W]hen you are guided to any construction site you are experiencing the troubling and exhilarating feeling that things *could be different*, or at least *they could still fail*. (*Reassembling*, 88-89).

Contrary to naïve understandings of social constructivism in which "*either* something was real and not constructed, *or* it was constructed and artificial, contrived and invented, made up and false," (90) I am interested in the dialectic process by which addiction was built: a concept that was born, reified, torn down and rebuilt over again.

No theory of addiction, no matter how well researched, maintained and studied is the perfect representation of some natural law, or some hard "reality" of what addiction

is. Or at least, no one has yet developed such a convincing account. Theories of addiction may be based on compelling, and ultimately useful assumptions about what addiction "really is," but they are still only part of the story. No single discipline has been able to explain what addiction is without contradiction or exception.

So inevitably, constructing a theory of addiction involves much more than letting, as Latour might say, the facts "speak for themselves" (*We Have Never Been Modern*, 29). For Latour, the "discourse" of a given field is not simply an inert or passive description; literature doesn't merely "represent" addiction any more than science merely "describes" a phenomenon. In his words, "rhetoric, textual strategies, writing, staging, semiotics—all these are really at stake, but in a new form that has a simultaneous impact on the nature of things and on the social context, while it is not reducible to the one or the other" (*We Have Never Been Modern*, 5). In other words, there is no science, narrative or study of addiction that might constitute a passive observer: one that is "disinterested" or uninvolved in the case at hand. Science, much like literature, is active and involved in the "truths" that it describes.

In the context of addictive culture, I suggest that the most practical way of apprehending its construction is by means of studying its *realism*: how it produces, simulates or distinguishes itself against contemporary versions of what addiction "is." As we have already seen, in the absence of any universal theory of addiction (one that can explain the mechanism and operation of addiction across cultures, individuals and environments), there is some sense in which a given version of addiction approximates, rather than denotes, something "real."

Addictive Realism

Like so many physiological phenomena that are only partially understood, addiction has gone through incredible historical variation, being supposed as everything from a moral weakness to a relapsing brain disease. However, the instability that has now become central to addiction is indicative of something more than a simple lack of knowledge on the part of science, sociology, or even of literature. While new tools and theories often emerge from the sciences, there is also a sense in which ideology plays a decisive role in how the addict is viewed. On the one hand, what we believe about addiction is informed by empirical knowledge,[42] yet on the other hand, ideological beliefs are not merely responses to advances in the science. Ideology—at the very least in the case of addiction—serves to fill in or fill out the gaps left by the empirical record, and it at this is the point at which "realism" becomes a useful tool for understanding addiction.

Disease theory is an incredibly useful description of what addiction really "is," and adherence to disease theory has led to improved treatment options and outcomes for many addicts. Yet it too, despite a long history and mounds of empirical research, fails to "totalize" addictive experience, leaving a number of questions in its wake. Whatever addiction is, it is not a disease in the same way as malaria, nor is it analogous to other "brain diseases" like schizophrenia. If the notion of a "disease" is already metaphorical (as Susan Sontag has convincingly argued in *Illness as Metaphor*), addiction may considered doubly so. Not only has it been formulated, more or less explicitly as a

[42] For instance, the more we understand the genetic basis of addictions, the more inclined we are to consider it a disease, and consequently be more sympathetic towards addicts. To put it simply, there is always some pertinent connection between what we "know" and what we "believe" to be true of addiction.

disease of character: it lacks even the purely physical etiology of other socially stigmatized diseases (such as H.I.V.).

To call disease theory one form of addictive realism—rather than addiction's "true" reality—is not to disparage it, but rather to recognize the necessary fictions that are built into any totalizing theory. There is always something more in a given addictive realism than pure, unadulterated reality: there is inevitably some element of the imagination, some element of the world as we would *like* it to be, or how we *imagine* it to be. Just as a personal account of addiction can be "true" without being "exemplary," so too is any given theory a piece of the addiction puzzle rather than the whole.

Addiction is inevitably part psychological, part social and part biological, and yet reducible to no single domain. In this way, addiction is not unique from other diseases, illnesses, and conditions; there are many complicated disorders which science only has a relative grasp of. Yet there is also a profound sense in which addiction differs from nearly every other condition that might be considered a disease. This is in part due to the social and legal policing of the addict (which has determinate effects on its experience), and partly due to what might be called addictive culture: the cultural mythology that both reflects and affects the practice of addiction.

In this way, we can think of any given theory of addiction as less of an isolated idea, and more of a paradigm of thought with multiple points of agreement and contestation. This is what I would call addictive realism: a tentative and tenuous overlap between a certain way of thinking about addiction (science, empiricism, knowledge), a particular set of beliefs (moral, political), and a set of compatible aesthetic conventions. The story of an addict who struggles, fails, and finally succeeds to overcome their

addiction is more than just a recounting of events: it is the product of a complicated cluster of historical and aesthetic forces which allow a story to appear "realistic," believable, or compelling. Claiming to be addicted to cheese 70 years ago would have been laughable, where today it's more or less common knowledge. Neither the substance nor the subject has changed: rather, we have adopted a new set of addictive conventions by which a story of addiction "rings true." It's worth noting that this is always a partial overlap, insofar as different versions of addiction aren't typically antithetical: thinking about addiction as the product of trauma (as Gabor Maté suggests), or as an adaptive behavior to negative circumstances (as Bruce Alexander might argue) are similar enough. Even disease theory isn't incompatible with choice models, depending on how far we're willing to stretch (perhaps one doesn't choose to be an addict, but one does choose to stay an addict).

It is in this sense that we might think of realism as an "effect," rather than a quality, of literary works and of addictive theory. This is precisely the point of Birmingham scholar David Morley, in his work *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*: "What we may call the 'reality effect' is not the product of the required reduplication of the empiricist subject in the discourse of realism but the effect of an achieved alignment between subjects and texts which the discourse itself accomplishes" (Morley, 60). Realism may lay claim to showing something as it "really is," but a text can do so only insofar as we recognize the tools in its repertoire: only insofar as an aesthetic has been naturalized are we capable of seeing a contingent set of signs as "real".

This is more or less Jameson's point in *Postmodernism* as he undertakes the question of overlap between modernism and postmodernism. He argues that what they

cannot share in common, and what is arguably more important than their respective styles, are the historical contexts that informed and produced those styles as *realism*:

> [w]hat has not been taken into account…is the social position of the older modernism, or better still, its passionate repudiation by an older Victorian and post-Victorian bourgeoisie for whom its forms and ethos are received as being variously ugly, dissonant, obscure, scandalous, immoral, subversive, and generally 'antisocial.' It will be argued here, however, that a mutation in the sphere of culture has rendered such attitudes archaic. Not only are Picasso and Joyce no longer ugly; they now strike us, on the whole, as rather 'realistic.' (*Postmodernism*, 4)

At one point the aesthetics of modernism, and their attachment to a loosely correlated ideological position,[43] were considered unconventional and non-realist. As we know, Modernism was grounded in "defamiliarization," as Modernist work served to alienate its audience from an assumed sense of reality. Yet Modernism became "realist" as its conventions became married to a dominant, rather than disruptive, set of ideological assumptions (that the subject is "fractured," that "truth" is always partial, that history is not a straight progressive line, etc.).

It is in this sense that I will pursue the question of addictive realism historically and dialectally. Each new form of addictive realism is, first and foremost, predicated in its departure from some "other form" that preceded it. Just as modernism responded to the gaps and inconsistencies of a "Victorian Realism," so too did postmodernism repudiate the dominant aesthetics of the modern. The antagonism that we have already

[43] In regard to the subject, or to the author as "authority," or the repudiation of "grand narratives."

noted between different medical and governmental bodies is similarly engaged in the ongoing process of addictive realism. Just as new literature builds upon previous works, so too do empirical accounts "fix" the inconsistencies of previous models. As Boris Thomashevsky of the formalist school suggests, realism is never invented but always derived from some previous form:

> [n]aïve literary histories use 'Realist' as the highest praise of the writer; 'Pushkin' is a 'Realist' is a typical historical literary cliché that does not take into account how the word was used in Pushkin's time. This explains the ever present antagonism of the new school for the old – that is, the exchange of old and obvious conventions for new, less obvious ones within the literary pattern. On the other hand, this also shows that realistic material in itself does not have artistic structure and that the formation of an artistic structure requires that reality be reconstructed according to aesthetic laws. Such laws are always, considered in relation to reality, conventional. (Tomashevsky, 83)

This dialectic process of realism, outlined by Tomashevsky, aptly describes the various revolutions of "addiction" throughout the twentieth century as different groups, bodies, individuals and organizations vied for the authority to create, revise and institute their own version of addictive realism.

It is in this sense that I argue for the importance of style in the apprehension of addiction narrative. What the "realist" account of addiction attempts (nearly all accounts of addiction involve "truth-telling," though this feature is even more dominant in popular works and memoir) is the construction of a style that is commensurate with a certain political and theoretical paradigm: it doesn't so much tell addiction "as it really is," but

rather *articulates* a certain discourse of addiction according to its own historic, medical, chemical and moral sensibilities. If realism expresses the objective limit of representation as I (and Laclau) argue, then what we will find in any given style of addiction is a kind of ideological suture: a metaphor, a system of signs, that attempts to account for the impossible limit of representing addiction empirically, as it "really is."[44]

The sheer volume of scare quotes so far employed will be an ongoing feature of this dissertation, most notably in its varying uses of "real," "reality," and "realism," which carry slightly different connotations throughout. For my purposes, "real" will typically denote non-linguistic, non-conceptual entities: needles in arms, feet on pavement, the brute chemical reaction of a substance in a brain. Realism presents a much more difficult set of definitions. At times it will involve the genre of literary realism and its ability to construct an accurate representation of something in the world; it will also examine journalistic realism, and its tendency to "cherry-pick" an interesting event in an attempt to transform anecdote into actuality. At others times, realism will denote a form of simulation, or one interpretation of something "real." It will also be used in concert with Morley's "reality effect" to describe a feeling or response to something supposedly "real." It will alternatively be used in a more philosophical sense, notably in the context of Nietzschean perspectivalism and speculative realism.

Inevitably, realism is a question of simulation and of selection: of picking which aspects of addiction are worthy of emphasis and which might be ignored. While this plurality of uses precludes any singular definition, it may be possible to clarify my use of

[44] Yet as Laclau suggests, this is ultimately metaphor: not in the sense that addiction "represents" some other social operation or conflict, but in the sense that the style that attempts to contain addiction can only do so symbolically.

the term using some examples. For the purposes of this dissertation "realism" is reducible neither to a specific object, nor to a certain perspective that recognizes an object, but is rather to be found in a combination of the two. A cubist painting, for instance, isn't realistic in any typical sense. Yet such an image shows a kind of perspectival reality that would be impossible in a photographic sense; at times, showing something as it "really" is requires rendering it in unreal terms. Of course, my own interpretation of cubism has its own conventions and history, its own reality effect. That is, I am only able to judge such a work as "realist" based on my own aesthetic assumptions, which are far from universally shared. So for my purposes, in order for something to be realistic, it requires both a connection to something in the world, and also a sensible set of conventions by which we might recognize it as such.

Accordingly, for the present study, a pulp novel has its moments of realism just as a Victorian novel might: they simply operate by different styles. And while there are moments of intense psychological realism in a novel like *Dopefiend*, there is also quite a bit of high drama and spectacle which in no way correlates to things in the world. There is also the tension in memoir between an event being "real" and being "exemplary," in the sense that sometimes truth is stranger than fiction: "realism" is not just about *what* you depict, but also the way in which that depiction matches up against human experience. In this way, many of the "true" stories of recovery are fairy tales nonetheless, as they present an extraordinary set of circumstances that somehow led to an unlikely sobriety.

Ultimately, my interest is in thinking about realism as strategy: the means by which a writer or thinker welds a series of events to an aesthetic style that makes them

more believable or compelling. And if realism is strategic, it follows that there is no single strategy of realism that is primary. This is why it will be necessary to examine realism in multiple and competing forms (as genre, as effect, as an interpretation of something ”real”). And if there are multiple ways of getting at the real, there is, to my mind, no reason to limit ourselves to any one tactic.

In each of my chapters I will avoid focusing strictly on particular genres of addictive narrative or a specific period. Instead, I try to understand in each a style of addictive realism as it is translated across periods and genres. In Chapter 1, I examine William S. Burroughs' *Junky* (1953) and *Naked Lunch* (1959) alongside Ann Marlowe's *How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z* (1999). Historically the two share very little, owing to their relatively distant historical situations. Yet each employs a similar style to achieve a similar effect in their respective times and places. My approach in each case remains historical, in the sense that I pay close attention to the legal and social conditions under which each author used (wrote), while remaining attentive to their respective "realisms" of addiction. In the case of *Naked Lunch*, I read Burroughs' style as a near rabid indictment of a very real stage in addictive history; his narrative is not so much a hallucinogenic nightmare, but rather a dysfunctional realism that mirrors a dysfunctional reality. Similarly, Marlowe's narrative tells the "truth" of her experience but tells it slant: in order to achieve a sufficiently "real" account of addiction, she turns to the fragmented form of the encyclopedia, which simultaneously tells nothing and all.

Chapter 2 examines the legacy of Burroughs' writing in popular genres. While the straight goods of Burroughs' accounts were enough to titillate readers of the 1950s, later audiences would require more out of their addictive realism. This chapter traces the

development of what I call “spectacular” realism in the writing of Donald Goines, Iceberg Slim, and James Frey. Separated by more than twenty years, these authors engage in the intersection of class and publication, as their works, and the “authenticity” of their experience became signs of economic viability. Each articulates, at their own historical moment, the conditions of reality and fabrication that might constitute “realism.” Each bear the fault lines between appearance and reality when exhibited for the eyes of a popular audience.

My final chapter examines perspective in the works of later writers of addiction. As I suggest, the works of Hubert Selby Jr. and Philip K. Dick broke, and then reconstructed, the conventions of addiction literature in order to examine more critically the point of view from which addiction was being surveyed. Unlike previous authors, who could take for granted the authority of their own experience, these writers would undo the unified perspective of the confession in favour of multiple, competing, and fragmented views. In so doing, they undid the classic assumption of will and agency that typically accompanied single, confessional narrators; where Burroughs or Goines could comfortably express addiction on the level of an individual character, the problem posed by addiction would prove more complex for Selby and Dick. For these authors, the very correlation between an addict, a desire, and a behavior would become problematic: “postmodern” addiction meant resisting the kinds of definition, and the political certainty, which had dominated the genre until the 1970s.

Taken together, these chapters attempt to trace an overlapping, troubled history that is at no point as simple as it appears. While certain genres would become dominant at varying times, there is no sense in which any style of addiction exists independently of

others. *Junky* believes in the authority of its perspective but also exhibits the perspectival characteristics I locate in the work of Selby. James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* employs a great deal of exaggeration and melodrama in its attempt to simulate the experience of addiction, yet it too speaks to something realistic (after all, many addicts claimed to be helped through their recovery after reading Frey's story). So, while this dissertation divides these works into different categories, they are not reducible to the areas in which I examine them: each of these works are implicated in spectacularism, in authorship, and in multiple and completing perspectives. This is not a weakness in my analysis: it is simply an acknowledgement that the work of realism is complex and ongoing.

Addiction as Symbolic Act: or, the Ideology of Cheese

I would like to conclude by offering a contemporary example of how addiction functions within and as "realism." An intriguing one comes from the L.A. Times in an article called "Cheese Really is Crack: Study Reveals Cheese is as Addictive as Drugs" (Oct 22, 2015) by Jenn Harris. The article appeals to common sense wisdom: that eating tasty foods, especially ones that are "bad" for us, often seem difficult to resist. It speaks more generally to the phenomenon that we all feel when trying to maintain a better diet and resist our cravings for foods. In this way the "truth value" of the article is already based more on an overlap of experience between reader and author than it is on the science of addiction; instead, it uses the science of addiction as a trope, the "proof" of an ideology that we already believe.

The article glosses over details of the study which is ostensibly its subject, which has more to do with processed foods than with cheese (particularly suspect considering Harris's article features a picture of fine old blue cheese). The original study is actually aimed at discovering the addictiveness of processed foods, only incidentally finding that cheese occurs in common "addictive" foods (like pizza, a favourite of the study's undergraduate test group). Of course, none of this is mentioned in Harris's article, which instead focuses its energies on showing how "cheese crack is a real thing. And so is your addiction."

Yet the cultural function of this article is a bit more profound than its shoddy citations, in that it serves a very important role in the maintenance of the signs and styles of addiction. It participates and circulates the symbolic means by which our culture may equate the consumption of a dairy product with what is considered, in other scenarios, a debilitating disease. Even if we recognize that "cheese is crack" is parody (which it both is and isn't) we are still left with the more general sense that addiction, even on this level, is practically applicable to the way in which we desire food: that "addiction" is a general, human condition rather than one based in social, economic, and historical conditions. After all, "craving" is something that everyone experiences, either for food, drugs or sexual pleasure. This is one way in which addiction has been, and continues to be, "constructed" in our own culture: not in the sense that it is purely false, but that its status as hegemony, as "norm," requires maintenance, production and reaffirmation, a task at which "clickbait" media is particularly apt.

This article's bottom ideological line is that we can recognize addiction in the most common and everyday pleasures: that addiction is a common, everyday form of

human desire, rather than an exceptional or pathological one. It is primarily biological here: determined by the ways in which bodies interact with substances. In so doing, it naturalizes certain “truths” about addiction that are far from innocuous. Most importantly, by employing a scientific “real” of addiction it deflects the ideological and economic aspects of addiction towards a question of biology. Rather than understand “cheese addiction” as the result of a particular stage of consumer capitalism, where a product is cheap, delicious and available, the article defers to the drug itself: cheese is irresistible, should not be resisted, should be eaten at all times because that is what our bodies “really” want. This reductive line of thought is the same when employed across mass cultural sites that attempt to show how our bodies are “hardwired” to addictive tendencies.

This is likely why the article is forced to gloss over the specific science of addiction in order to make its claims: glossing over the “signs” of addiction that are inconvenient or inconsistent (withdrawal, tolerance and overdose, all important “signs” of addiction in other scenarios) allows the article to address cheese as a symbol of addictive tendencies, even though stilton bears little actual resemblance to heroin. Nor is there much resemblance in their typical users. Again, this is not to say that such a construction is “false” (cheese is very good and bears frequent repetition nicely), but that its construction *as realism* reveals very purposive, very particular styles and rationalities that have much broader, ideological effects than being simply or transparently “true.”

Chapter 1 – Authorizing Addiction and the Dialectics of Disease

Introduction

The specialists seem to be unaware of the world which separates the opium addict from the victims of poisons, 'the drug,' and drugs.

I am not trying to defend the drug: I am trying to see clearly in the dark, to make blunders and to come face to face with the problems which are always approached from the side.

I imagine the young doctors are beginning to shake off the yoke, to revolt against the ridiculous prejudices and follow new developments.

- Jean Cocteau, *Opium: The Diary of His Cure* (78)

I do not intend to correct popular misconceptions about junk by presenting the facts that are already known to anyone informed on the subject. I am using the known facts as a starting point in an attempt to reach facts that are not known"

-William S. Burroughs, "Original Introduction to *Junkie*," *Junky* (143) [45]

Jean Cocteau—a well-known French playwright who became addicted to opium in the early 1920s—propagated an idea that would become central to discussions of addiction: though not for several decades after the publication of his *Opium Journal d'une désintoxication* in 1930.[46] As we see above, one of Cocteau's major complaints about his treatment—carried out at a clinic in Saint Cloud Paris from December of 1928

[45] Burroughs' 1953 novel is referred to by two different spellings. The original publication being *Junkie*, which Burroughs thought inferior to the alternate spelling, *Junky*. I will therefore use *Junky* in all instances that are not related directly to the original printing.

[46] Interestingly, the work would not be translated into English until 1957 (Margaret Crosland, "Introduction," *The Diary of His Cure*, 11).

to April of 1929—involved the relative inexperience of its doctors. Cocteau, like many addicts, found himself in the strange position of being more knowledgeable about the drugs he was taking than the doctors who were treating him. Cocteau notes how doctors dismiss what Cocteau sees as the beauty of opium: “Doctors would have us believe that opium dulls us and takes away our sense of values. But if opium takes away the old scale of values from under our feet, it sets up another for us, superior and more delicate” (75). For Cocteau, opium addiction is a kind of art; one that replaces the normal functioning of desire with higher, more “delicate” needs. Indeed, there is a certain elegance to addiction because its satisfaction is so simple, tied up in only a single, discrete, unparalleled object of desire. While this sounds like the sort of thing an opium addict might be inclined to believe (especially during the course of their recovery), there is nonetheless a conspicuous gap here between doctor and patient; whatever the pains addiction to opium might cause, only Cocteau is versed in the other side: the beautiful and euphoric experience that leads one to addiction in the first place.

Cocteau described addiction (or at least recovery from it) as a “wound in slow motion” (18)—a phenomenon that tugged at the edges of what we knew about human being and psychology. The records of his time in recovery show not only the profile of a person suffering profoundly from the chemical effects of withdrawal, but also serves to document an imperative shift in terms of drug experience. More specifically, it marked a separation between the official discourse of the state and of medicine, and the more practical knowledge of the addict themselves. Just as Cocteau’s doctors would ignore the value of his opium experience in administering its cure, so too would doctors and politicians of the United States discount the value of drug experience in determining

policies and treatments.[47] As we see above, this is precisely the context in which Burroughs injects his initial foray into drug culture with *Junkie* in 1953.

Much like Cocteau, Burroughs sees misconception and misinformation as a core difficulty in the public understanding of drugs. Burroughs, given his thorough primary research, imagines himself as an authority on the subject: someone capable of getting closer to the "unknown" of drugs by virtue of the authority of his experience. In fact, Burroughs' insights would be valuable enough make their way into medical circles by way of *The British Journal of Addiction* in 1956.[48] While Burroughs was educated at Harvard, his degree was not in medicine but in anthropology, making him a somewhat suspect authority, at least on paper, when it came to the medical sciences. Yet, his extraordinary experience (along with his proficiency in writing) made him a more than suitable contributor to the body of medical knowledge. And it is here that we begin to see the incredible amount of influence Burroughs was able to bear on the modern history of drugs as he leveraged his drug *experience* as drug *authority*.

Accordingly, while the U.S. expanded drugs laws through the 1950s and beyond, there was a class of writers that were given a unique opportunity to contradict the state-sponsored myths about drugs and addiction. Enacted throughout the 20th century, this struggle featured authors such as Burroughs, Alexander Trocchi, and Ann Marlowe who sought to challenge the prejudiced and populist view of drugs by the authorial right of

[47] Although as we have already seen in the introduction, physicians such as Marie Nyswander of Lexington were beginning to think about patient-focused treatments that accounted for experience, at least in some ways, by the 1950s.

[48] After being encouraged to submit by his physician Yerbury Dent (the same doctor that treated Burroughs using apomorphine, as will be discussed in detail shortly) Burroughs published "Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs" (Miles). Burroughs calls the letter an "article on the effects of various drugs I have used," ("Appendix," *Naked Lunch*, 239), and much like *Junky* itself, it chronicles his knowledge and beliefs according to his considerable first-hand knowledge of drugs.

their own, unadulterated experiences. These writers found themselves in a historically novel period in which use was not a question of morality and politics, but also an implicitly political and philosophical one. At stake in the use of drugs was not just questions of health and sanity but questions of state control, authority and the rights of an ambiguous set of criminals known as "junkys."

As I have already suggested, addiction theory may be productively understood as hegemonic insofar as it seeks to stabilize/naturalize a complex set of forces, institutions and practices. Such a hegemony, as Laclau argues, can never be wholly fixed because "[i]f it were fixed, it would be impossible to rearticulate it in a different way" (254). Accordingly, *revolutions* are the rule rather than exception when it comes to the history of addiction, as different theorists, writers, and users struggle to establish their own version of the "truth." And because the meaning of addiction has been a moving target historically (at times a disease, at times a moral weakness, etc.), both the proponents and detractors of addictive theories find themselves caught in fluid positions relative to hegemonic norms. As Cocteau had already noticed in 1930, the very process of addiction might itself be considered one of constant revolution: "The purity of a revolution can last a fortnight. That is why a poet, the revolutionary of the soul, limits himself to the about-turns of the mind. Every fortnight I change my program. For me opium is a revolt. Addiction a revolt. The cure a revolt" (78). Accordingly, while it may seem like the constant revolutions in addiction's history are indicative of instability, it might be seen more precisely as a stability in motion: a stability that must constantly adapt and react against the revolutions of science, literature and, as we will see next, *experience*.

The following Chapter will explore the revolutions of addiction according to its status as disease in the works of several authors. In the literary world, disease theory would find ample representation in the works of William Burroughs, who insisted on the physiological dimensions of addiction over and above it psychological and moral ones. Given popular opinion and the political climate at the time, Burroughs' argument for addiction as "total need" posed a departure from established thinking—at least on the part of the state, the public, and segments of the medical community (in particular psychology and psychiatry). Perhaps the greatest irony of Burroughs' thought would be its success, as the latter half of the 20th century embraced the pathology of addiction with open arms, especially as it began to include "other" addictions such as sex, eating, gambling, and a host of other behaviors that were increasingly visible and common in mass culture.

By the 1990s, the U.S. was ready for another revolution: one that would repudiate the logic of subjectivity as pathology, as if all one had to do to be an addict was be born in America. While many authors would come to question the broad cultural diagnosis of addiction and its basis as disease, the works of Ann Marlowe (a New York writer and journalist of the 1990s) will be the focus of the second half of this chapter. Rather than argue for addiction as a disease, Marlowe found in addiction a profound form of nostalgia: in her words, "addiction is essentially nostalgic, which ought to tarnish the luster of nostalgia as much as that of addiction" (*How to Stop Time*, "addiction," 9).[49] But just as addiction is nostalgic for Marlowe, so too is nostalgia addictive, especially from a historical vantage point where the past seems to offer much more than the future: "never has belief in the redemptive possibilities of the future seemed so laughable…Once

[49] As *How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z* is written encyclopaedically, I will be including the entries under which each quote appears.

upon a time, the future was supposed to be brighter, shinier and more fun…Now the past is supposed to hold the hopes we once confided to the future" ("nostalgia," 234-35). For Marlowe, what the addict is looking for with drugs is something they have lost: either the first "high" that they can never recover, or else a retreating future that offers much less promise than a romanticized past. Ultimately, where Burroughs saw in disease theory an opportunity to criticize the faulty logic of the state, Marlowe would see a failure of imagination. For Marlowe, ours is a society that has become hopelessly obsessed with its own excessive desires.

Both Burroughs and Marlowe—at their respective points along the history addictive theory—experimented with addiction literally and literarily, and in so doing advanced new concepts, metaphors, and realisms[50] by which to grasp it. They did so by positioning their experience within and against dominant paradigms: rather than produce believable accounts of addiction by operating within given theories and forms, they sought to alter the machinery, codes and symbols by which we apprehend veracity itself. For Marlowe this involved redistributing the memoir: no longer a chronological and teleological line from sickness to cure, but a staggered and fragmented encyclopedia that would resist any such narrativization. Burroughs, alternatively, would employ a stark, brutal confession style of *Junkie* alongside the hallucinogenic *Naked Lunch*. If, in a given period, a dominant addictive theory might constitute the "known facts" of addictive phenomenon, these writers pushed the limits of that realism by attacking their most fundamental assumptions. Ultimately, both writers are as interested in a metaphysics of addiction as much as they are in professing their own experience. Beyond the drug itself,

[50] And here, I mean specifically a "realism" of form and genre: a vehicle which might make a narrative's content more realistic.

and its consumption by human beings, lies the broader questions of drives, desires and dependencies that are implicated, at all points, in human existence. For Burroughs and Marlowe, taking heroin was a way of "seeing" as much as an experience itself, and their respective takes are deeply affected by the idiosyncrasies of their own use.

Wising up the Marks

We realized that here was a document which could forearm the public more effectively than anything yet printed about the drug menace. The picture it paints of a sordid netherworld was all the more horrifying for being so authentic in language and point of view.

For the protection of the reader, we have inserted occasional parenthetical notes to indicate where the author clearly departs from accepted medical fact or makes unsubstantiated statements in an effort to justify his actions.

- Carl Solomon, "Publisher's note in *Junkie* (1953)" (*Junky*, 153)

As a colleague of many beat writers (and a writer himself), Carl Solomon was in an interesting place relative to his work on Ace Press's publishing team. His note above attempts to balance two competing points of view: one, the value and veracity of Burroughs' account, and two, the danger it potentially presented to the public. If we take his suggestion at face value (which we probably shouldn't[51]) we can assume a certain

[51] Such warnings were popular in pulp novels at the time, at least for works that contained controversial or "dangerous" material. On the one hand, there were certainly people that believed reading about drugs might incline someone to begin using themselves, and such "warnings" protected the publisher to an extent. Yet it also served, as we will see, to legitimize the following account as the "real deal," precisely because it was so dangerous. In this way, such warnings were a kind of advertising ploy as much as anything else.

connection between "danger" and "truth-telling": that one of the dangers of *Junky* was its authenticity. While it is doubtful the Solomon was interested in much more then hyping the supposed dangers of getting too close to the "truth" of heroin's dark powers, it does point to an interesting paradox in terms of authority in drug literature. On the one hand, Burroughs' addiction narrative is dangerous because it is true. On the other hand, its "truth" relies on drug experience that, paradoxically, distorts the author's ability to tell the truth (as Solomon notes, either in terms of self-justification, or else perceptual distortions caused by the chemistry of drugs). Nonetheless, *Junky* represented one of the few authentic, first-hand accounts of addiction available at the time, especially considering the Federal Bureau of Narcotics' suppression of empirical accounts of drug use.[52] In fact, Solomon's rhetoric actually enabled and authorized Burroughs' account by enhancing its position as an anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment work: far from casting Burroughs' account as "inauthentic" or misinformed, this warning serves to legitimize his account.

In *Junky*, Burroughs was not simply showing the addict "as he/she really was," but also offering a view into the life of someone who had been pushed to the margins of society by the prohibition of drugs. In a 1970 interview with *Playboy* that featured Harry Anslinger, Burroughs proclaimed that "[a]ll of these laws result from misinformation, mismanagement, and what can only be called deliberate bad intentions" (*Burroughs Live*, "The Drug Revolution," 148). So it would seem that the "protection" of the reader was precisely what Burroughs was after, though perhaps in a different way than Solomon

[52] This struggle over authority is remarked by the authors of *Narcotics and Narcotic Addiction* (1954), who in a later edition (1973) note how their attempts at publication were stifled by government officials, and how "the bureau of narcotics was determined to keep all technical knowledge of drug abuse in a sort of classified category" (Maurer, Vogel, vii).

imagines; Burroughs was not out to protect people from drugs, but rather to protect them from a malicious state narrative. It is in this sense that Burroughs was "wising up the marks" who had breathed a little too deeply of the anti-narcotic fumes. With *Junky*, Burroughs responded to a dominant discourse of addiction to show that addiction was not, and never could be, simply a question of morals or of degenerate "thrill-seeking" as so many believed. Nor was it simply a disease as many medical professionals suggested.[53] For Burroughs, drug addiction was a human capacity, in the broadest sense, but might be better understood as one *manifestation* of a human capacity. For him, addiction is a basic human desire, contorted under conditions of control, prohibition and punishment. Addiction required more than a subject and a substance: it required an environment, a legal and social apparatus that governed consumption, production and distribution, just as it required a context that makes drugs desirable or useful in the first place.

In light of Burroughs' observations, addiction can here be usefully described in terms of what Giorgio Agamben has called an apparatus (borrowing from the Foucauldian lexicon): what he calls "a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control and orient—in a way that purports to be useful—the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings" (12). Agamben's insights go a great way in explaining not only the complex interconnections that Burroughs perceived between the ingestion, criminalization, treatment and distribution of drugs, but also the written form that his observations take. In describing the addictive

[53] Many 1940s and 50s physicians believed that addiction was a medical illness that should be treated by medical professionals rather than by the criminal justice system. The figures here are too numerous to list but would include people such as Victor Vogel and Marie Nyswander of Lexington, as well as advocates like Alfred Lindesmith, who will be discussed later in this chapter.

"apparatus" of the 1940s, 50s and 60s, Burroughs developed new styles that were capable of speaking to the reality and enormity of the political situation that confronted him. Ultimately this required not only the "straight goods" of *Junky*[54] but also the nightmarish spectacle of *Naked Lunch*.

As I argue, Burroughs' approach follows from the position that was afforded to him by then-dominant versions of addiction. Burroughs sought to lift the ideological veil that had been placed between people and drugs: his goal, in *Junkie* in particular, was "to make people aware of the true criminality of our times, to wise up the marks. All of my work is directed against those who are bent, through stupidity or design, on blowing up the planet or rendering it uninhabitable" (*Burroughs Live*, "White Junk," 81). *Junky* was an attempt to show people how addiction looked from the inside: not to scare them out of using drugs, but to show them the powerful fabrications that had been placed between them and the junk world. Similarly, and despite the fragmentation and disconnection inherent in its form, it is possible to read *Naked Lunch* as its own form of realism.[55] As critic Frank MacConnell has suggested in his incredibly insightful 1967 essay on Burroughs, "William Burroughs and the Literature of Addiction": "The 'hallucinations' which make up the bulk of the book are not the futuristic and numinous visions reported by users of LSD, but are rather clarified visions of present reality made more terrible by what we have already described as the addict's absolute dependence on real *things* in their aspect of maximum power." (MacConnell, n.p.). If *Junky* is the question of addiction that

[54] As Burroughs said to Allen Ginsberg in their correspondence, "what in the name of god do you mean by saying the book is a 'justification' for junk or myself taking junk? I don't justify nothing to nobody. As a matter of fact the book is the only accurate account I ever read of the real horror of junk. But I don't mean it as justification or deterrent or anything but an accurate account of what I experienced during the time I was on junk" (*Letters*, 83).

[55] And here my definition of realism begins to look more fluid. Obviously *Naked Lunch* is not a realistic text, but as we shall see, its style simulates aspects of the real that would otherwise be impossible.

starts with the "known facts" about drugs, then perhaps *Naked Lunch* can be read as its answer, as Burroughs mobilizes the "addiction apparatus" in a savage indictment of state authority and control in order to show us how it "really is."

Indeed our own contemporary moment, in which every recognizable form of desire seems pathological may be traced to a reinterpretation of Burroughs' innovative and radical presentation of addiction. Burroughs created a new *style* and a new definition of addiction that accounted for the inconsistencies that he observed in official accounts relative to his own, unparalleled experiences. Ultimately where Burroughs meant to show America the "nakedness" of its own grotesque consumption, mass culture now plays the straight man of Burroughs' nightmare, as they answer the capitalist hail in the unflinching affirmative: Yes, I *really am* an addict.[56]

The Psychology of Junk

The idea that addiction is somehow a psychological illness is, I think, totally ridiculous. It's as psychological as malaria. It's a matter of exposure.
- William Burroughs, "White Junk," *Burroughs Live* (63-64)

Burroughs was born the only child of a wealthy family in 1914. He grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, before attending Harvard as a young man, taking courses on literature and later anthropology. This explains Burroughs' interest in the human condition—at least as it relates to one of his primary topic of interests, heroin addiction—as his writing on junk typically tends towards the documentary, especially in *Junky*. In addition to his

[56] A play on Althusser's "hail" from "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

anthropological bent, Burroughs was also very interested in psychology and psychoanalysis. Burroughs would continue to be fascinated by the human psyche—its limits, capabilities, and powers—throughout his life, with interests ranging from Scientology to the theories of Wilhelm Reich (a somewhat controversial Austrian psychoanalyst). Each of these would inspire Burroughs, yet no one approach would come to dominate his thinking on the human psyche.

Accordingly, a contextualization of the addictive theories of William S. Burroughs would be incomplete without some reference to his fraught relationship with psychoanalysis. Burroughs was both familiar with and unimpressed by analysis, likely following from his psychoanalytic treatment in the 1940s. Following the death of his friend David Kammerer (who was stabbed to death by another friend and beat member, Lucien Carr, in 1944), Burroughs started undergoing psychoanalysis on his return to New York from St. Louis in the same year (Miles, 114). As he remarked to Allen Ginsberg in a 1947 letter, "[a]s regards to your psychiatric difficulties[57] I am not at all surprised. These jerks feel that anyone who is with it at all belongs in a nut house" (*Letters*, 11).

It was during this period that Burroughs first used morphine, and the situation is recounted more or less accurately in the opening pages of *Junky* (2-7). It all started with Burroughs' interest in the margins of life in New York. Hustlers, addicts, and petty criminals started to appear in Burroughs circle of acquaintances (Miles, 121). He managed to get a hold of a number of syrettes of morphine (stolen from aboard merchant marine vessels) and used some of them (Miles, 122). By the end of 1945, Burroughs was

[57] These difficulties being Ginsberg's homosexuality (*The Letters of William S. Burroughs*, 11, note 2).

using regularly, and was starting to experience some of the pitfalls of the addict lifestyle; he was short on cash, looking for hookups, and falling deeper into the junk world.

It was also at this time that Burroughs' interest in psychoanalysis was at its peak. According to biographer Barry Miles, Burroughs even attempted to analyze his fellow beat writer Allen Ginsberg (135). He also experimented with hypnosis, telepathy, and acting out his "alter egos," which consisted of distinct personalities from his own (136). Shortly after, Burroughs made his first trip to Lexington (a penal treatment center for addicts) after being caught using fake prescriptions to obtain drugs (143). Some years later, he would receive psychoanalytic treatment for his addiction, as detailed in *Junky*.

At the time, psychology was still coming to terms with how it wanted to treat addiction. Freud, for example, saw narcotic addiction as an entirely psychological illness. While Freud admitted it had a physiological aspect, correcting it was a question of altering behaviors, not physiology. Other psychoanalysts tried to explain addiction by way of personality: that different people had different dispositions and motivations towards using drugs before they ever touched a syringe. The goal in psychological approaches to addiction was to explain why two users, in similar sets of circumstances, might differ in their responses to drug taking. While one person might use heroin a few times and never touch it again, others could go through endless cycles of abstinence and excess after a similar introduction. Psychology was one way to explain this, while also answering why so many users had trouble staying abstinent after treatment. If the primary motivation behind addiction was in fact psychological, then repeat users were actually cases of failed psychological, rather than physiological, treatment.

One of the earliest, and most influential psychoanalysts of addiction was the Hungarian analyst Sándor Radó. Radó moved to the United States in the 1930s, where he wrote extensively, building on the earlier work of Sigmund Freud. One of his prime areas of interest was addiction, and more specifically, the drives that predisposed some people towards it. As Radó argued in 1933,

> the drugs in question attack [the addict] only if he purposely introduces them into his body…The psychoanalytic study of the problem of addiction begins at this point. It begins with the recognition of the fact that not the toxic agent, but the impulse to use it, makes an addict of a given individual. ("The Psychoanalysis of Pharmocothymia," 53)

For Radó, the primary moment in addiction was not the point at which withdrawal and physical dependence sets in, but rather the moment in which the (potential) addict first knowingly introduces drugs into their body. In limiting his study to psychology, Radó circumscribed his analysis to address motivation in a vacuum, making his solution necessarily one that overlooked chemical addictions.

Radó's work followed in the spirit of Freud who viewed drug addiction as an extension of auto-libidinism, a kind of sensory masturbation. As Freud has it, "masturbation is the one major habit, the 'primary addiction,' and it is only as a substitute or replacement for it that the other addictions—to alcohol, morphine and tobacco, and the like—come into existence"[58] (qtd. in Svolos, 75). Similarly, Radó figured addiction to be symbolic of sexual drives, with opium figuring as just another form that archetypal, sexual addiction took. As he has it, drug use "initiates an artificial sexual organization

[58] *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fleiss*, 1887-1904. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985. p 287.

which is autoerotic and modeled on infantile masturbation" ("The Psychoanalysis of Pharmocothymia," 59). In both Freud and Radó's model addiction can never be primarily chemical because drugs are all the same from a psychological point of view. Addiction emerges in the way a person consumes an object, not from the object itself. The chemical difference between heroin and tobacco are therefore meaningless, because addiction is "symbolic": any of its manifestations merely stands in for libidinal drive. The motivation for addiction, then, can never be anything but psychological, and no drug can be addictive without an addicted psychology.

Radó would become important to a later, influential analyst named Abraham Wikler, who would have a more direct influence on the treatment of Burroughs. Wikler was born in New York in 1910 and became a doctor in 1935 before beginning his work at Lexington Narcotic Hospital in 1940, the same hospital where Burroughs would eventually be treated. Wikler began his career at Lexington working in the narcotic withdrawal ward, before becoming the chief of experimental neuropsychiatry in 1943.[59] Wikler, following the work of Radó, believed that addiction was primarily motivated by non-chemical elements. In Wikler's 1953 version,

> [t]he predisposition to use drugs is considered to exist prior to the experience with drugs. The repetitive use of such agents is ascribed to the predisposition itself and the contrast between the elated state produced by drugs and the disillusionment which ensues when such effects wear off. Likewise, the notorious tendency of drug addicts to relapse is related to the basic personality defects of the individual. (567)

[59] For details on Wikler's career, see Campbell's *Discovering Addiction*, 75-82.

Medical doctors were already aware that withdrawal was chemical in nature, yet Wikler and others interested in "addictive personality" denied the primacy of physiology in addiction.[60] They instead theorized addiction as a psychological process of highs and lows: users were addicted to the euphoric lifts and declines effected by drugs and kept using because of a psychological dependence (somewhat similar to the way we might think of gambling addiction, which, unsurprisingly, is often understood as a question of personality, rather than physiology).

Importantly, Wikler determined sexuality to be central in addictive tendencies. He notes how "many drug addicts are individuals in whose psychosexual development has been arrested at, or had undergone regression to, infantile or even to more primitive levels" (567). Like Freud and Radó, Wikler considered the possibility that drug use was a libidinal fetish—the drug user is either masturbating like a child, or else a person whose normative psychosexual developments have not taken place. More likely, Wikler saw both drug use and non-normative sexuality (like homosexuality) as deviant, related to some previous psychological trauma or event.

Indeed, Wikler and Burroughs' reading of libido and addiction couldn't be more at odds. Burroughs notices a libidinal connection between opiates and sex, yet instead of seeing the waning of sexuality as the *cause* of drug addiction, Burroughs argues it to be a chemical effect. As he puts, "[j]unk short circuits sex. The drive to non-sexual sociability comes from the same place sex comes from, so when I have an H or M shooting habit I am non-sociable…When I come off the junk, I often run through a period of uncontrolled sociability" (*Junky*, 104). Burroughs' point of contention, and indeed the point of *Junky*,

[60] This wasn't the only model that Wikler proposed for addictive mechanisms, yet it remained an important and influential part of his work throughout his career.

is to show how addiction results from the physical and chemical effects of drugs. Sexuality, and the lack of libido for heroin addicts, is *chemical* rather than *psychic* in Burroughs' estimation.

But even the libidinal dimensions of drug addiction were ultimately a case of personality for Wikler. In explaining the epidemiology of addiction, Wikler supposed that there were four distinct kinds of enabling motivations, which he termed Neurotic, Psychopathic, Psychotic and "Normal" (566). Whereas "Normal" people became addicted to drugs when seeking relief from pain, "psychotics" used drugs to alleviate depressive feelings. These terms were adopted from the work of Lawrence Kolb, an American doctor and psychiatrist who studied narcotic addiction at the U.S. Public Health Service Laboratory in Washington starting in 1923 (*Dark Paradise*, 134). Kolb's work would become influential after he became the head of Public Health there in 1934. According to drug historian David Courtwright, Kolb theorized that the greater the degree of psychic disturbance, the greater the euphoria that the addict would derive from drugs (134). We can see this in the thought of Wikler above, when he claims that "[t]he repetitive use of such agents is ascribed to the predisposition itself and the contrast between the elated state produced by drugs and the disillusionment which ensues when such effects wear off" (567). That is, in a person whose psychological balance/economy is already disturbed, drugs offer an attractive counterpoint to their "disturbed" state.

Wikler built on Kolb's work and reasoned that if habits were always acquired due to personality, then the actual drug itself was immaterial: an addict would abuse *any* substance that suited their psychological needs. In his words, "opiates and their analogs, marihuana, cocaine, barbiturates and alcohol, are equivalent with respect to the purposes

served by the chemical agents except that repeated, regular use of some (e.g., opiate-like drugs and barbiturates) produces 'physical dependence'" (566). For Wikler, physical dependence was, at best a side effect of addiction to certain substances.

Personality theories of addiction appear conspicuously in *Junky* during Lee's time at a sanitarium in Louisiana. In a notable scene, Lee is interviewed by one of the staff doctors about why he uses junk:

> He asked the question they all ask. 'Why do you feel that you need narcotics Mr. Lee?'
>
> When you hear this question you can be sure that the man who asks it knows nothing about junk.
>
> 'I need it to get out of bed in the morning, to shave and eat breakfast.'
>
> 'I mean psychically.'
>
> I shrugged. Might as well give him his diagnosis so he will go. 'It's a good kick.'
>
> Junk is not a 'good kick.' The point of junk to a user is that it forms the habit. No one knows what junk is until he is junk sick.
>
> The Doctor nodded. *Psychopathic personality*.
>
> […]
>
> 'Is your sex life satisfactory?' he asked. 'Do you and your wife have satisfactory relations?'
>
> 'Oh yes,' I said, 'when I'm not on junk.'
>
> He straightened up. He didn't like my answer at all. (82)

In Wikler's terminology, *psychopathic* personality indicates someone who uses drugs to achieve a state of "positive euphoria," which corresponds to Burroughs' feigned reasoning: he does drugs for kicks. Indeed, what Burroughs wants to say (that he does drugs because he is physically dependent on them) doesn't "fit" into the Wikler's schema because physical dependence isn't motivated by anything but the drug itself. As Burroughs would argue in many places, physical dependence and withdrawal, and not personality or psychological trauma, were the primary motivations for people to use opiates.

Wikler's belief in addiction as a personality disorder became popular throughout the 50s, and other doctors (such as Victor Vogel, who also worked at Lexington) began to apply his theories to broader cultural trends. Vogel, alongside David Maurer (a linguist interested in drug subculture in the 1940s and 50s) tried to understand how *cultural* differences might explain tendencies towards using different drugs. They suggested that the laid-back atmosphere of China led to opium abuse because its pharmacological effects "fit" general social expectations. They similarly supposed that Americans enjoy alcohol owing to their outgoing and brash sensibilities: "Americans tend to admire a vigorous, aggressive, ambitious type of personality of the go-getterstamp…Therefore, in America, where people believe mainly in getting things done, the per capita consumption of alcohol is very high" (17). That alcohol was technically a depressant—and in practice likely interfered with people's ability to work—didn't seem to cross their minds. Again, the psychoanalytic community was refusing to acknowledge a materialist basis for addiction in favour of understanding it as a kind of personality disorder. In fact, their

"scientific" findings were more indicative of the prejudices of the medical community than any sort of objective reasoning.

It was this sort of rhetoric that Burroughs positioned himself against, insofar as the psychiatric discipline was drawing conclusions about drug addiction that in no way coincided with his own experiences. As his pseudo-self William Lee says, "[n]o one knows what junk is until he is junk sick" (*Junky*, 82). In presenting his experiences from the De Paul Sanitarium, Burroughs attempts to contain and redress the misunderstandings that he saw in psychiatric approaches to addiction. Importantly, Lee's episode at the sanitarium is about more than just a factual retelling of his experiences. It is a microscopic example of the much larger struggle for authority over addiction. Like Cocteau before him, Burroughs thought himself to be a much better judge of addiction because of his experience.

Whatever his disposition towards theories of the human psyche in general, Burroughs remained critical of the application of those theories to addiction. His major point of contention involved how psychological approaches to addiction fetishized personal, and subjective motivations for drug use over and above chemical ones. As an experienced user Burroughs saw chemistry and biology as the keys to addictive tendencies. For Burroughs, who would discuss his apomorphine cure[61] regularly, curing addiction did not involve changing the addict's state of mind or their emotional health, but instead involved retooling the addict on the cellular level: in recalibrating thirsty junk cells. Junkys, for Burroughs, were much more like malfunctioning machines than people with mental disorders.

[61] According to Burroughs, he was cured several times by Dr. J.Y. Dent using apomorphine, a solution of morphine that is boiled in hydrochloric acid.

Ultimately what Burroughs saw in the psychiatric treatment of addiction was just one more attempt to snare human being into a system of discipline and control. Indeed Burroughs, throughout his writings, would often describe drug addiction in terms of *need*. He states as much quite clearly in his "Deposition" in *Naked Lunch*:

> In the words of total need: "*Wouldn't you?*" Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do *anything* to satisfy total need. Because you would be in a state of total sickness, total possession, and not in a position to act any other way…A Rabid dog cannot choose but bite (xi).

This is Burroughs' "Algebra of Need," and while this claim seems straightforward enough, Burroughs's actual thoughts on addiction were much more nuanced. As we will see next, Burroughs also thought that exposure and environment played major roles in the acquiring and maintenance of a junk habit. Yet his logic of total need was crucial to his anti-government stance: if institutions were going to ignore the physiological symptoms that drugs produced in human beings, then Burroughs would pursue that logic to absurdity. Contrary to the findings of both the state and the medical practice, Burroughs would see addiction as a fundamental human drama, no more in need of legislation than breathing or sex.

Enforcing the Obscene

All of these laws result from misinformation, mismanagement, and what can only be called deliberate bad intentions…The present hysteria on the subject of drugs has been fomented by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, local narcotics agencies and the sensationalism of the press. Drug control is a thin pretext, and getting thinner, to increase

police powers and brand dissent as criminal…To classify all opposition as criminal is, of course, a simple device by which a fascist regime takes over a country.

- William S. Burroughs, "The Drug Revolution," *Burroughs Live* (148)

Psychiatry wasn't the only authority that Burroughs sought to contradict in *Junky* and *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs also found points of contention in the sweeping legal changes that were enacted throughout Burroughs' life, wrought largely by his nemesis Harry Anslinger and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics during his tenure from 1930-1970. As his biographer notes, Anslinger "*was* the Federal Bureau of Narcotics" (McWilliams, 19). Burroughs saw in the work of Anslinger an attempt to extend the powers of the state by engineering a society in which drug users (or potentially anybody at all) could be a made a second-class citizen.

It is here that we find Burroughs' motivation for the totalitarian society of *Naked Lunch*'s Interzone where subjects are, in very Kafkian fashion, at once distant from and totally immersed in the letter of the law as it is enforced nearly arbitrarily. This is exactly the problem that Burroughs saw in his own contemporary American society, because the increasing strictures of its drug laws contradicted everything that Burroughs had known or experienced about drugs. It is in this sense that Burroughs locates the Harrison Act as the origin of the "drug problem." As a measure that was based on moral objections against drug use, rather than its physiology, Burroughs saw the Harrison Act as the source, not solution, of the harms caused by drugs. In his controversial opinion, "[i]f drugs weren't forbidden in America, they would make the perfect middle-class vice" ("White Junk," *Burroughs Live*, 65). Drug laws turned substances into exactly the

dangerous vices that legislators proclaimed them to be, and so armed a host of society's most unfortunate denizens with weapons of sublime chemical warfare.

Burroughs saw in drugs a flexible medium of human experience that could be altered radically depending on the circumstance in which they were consumed. As "forbidden" substances, drugs possessed an allure that distinguished them from alcohol and tobacco. And because drug use was illegal it tended to incite paranoia in users while increasing the costs and risks of use. Drug and cultural scholar Nathan Adler articulates this idea precisely in his examination of what he calls the "pharmacological fallacy." In his words, "[t]he consumption of drugs is not merely a physiological event. The drugs we use, whether as beverages, pills, injections, or smoke, exist within a matrix of psychological, cultural and social values; and it is the roles and meanings of these that we incorporate with the drug." (7). When drugs are illegal, and when users have to keep a constant cautious eye for cops and rats around every corner, it alters the formula by which people get high just as it teaches them to avoid the lows of incarceration and sobriety.

Starting with the Harrison Act, as well as revisions to state laws in the 1950s (followed by the Boggs Act of 1952), laws became an integral part of drug experience. It altered how, where, and at what price drugs were used. A few years before, Louisiana, in the State Revised Statutes of 1950 (40:962A) outlawed *being* an addict, as was also the case in Kentucky in 1948 (Vogel, "Treatment," 48). Burroughs remarks the significance of the change in these laws in *Junky*: "[w]hen I jumped bail and left the states, the heat on junk already looked like something new and special. Initial symptoms of nationwide

hysteria were clear. Louisiana passed a law making it a crime to be a drug addict…This is police-state legislation penalizing a state of being" (120).

What we find in *Junky* is an example of what drug literature looks like when the legal status of drugs becomes implicated in their physiological effects. Drug and literary scholar Marcus Boon similarly notices how *Junky* is a much better indexation of the social and legal developments around heroin than a description of the drug itself. Following the criminalization of drug addiction, "where once a user would simply go to a pharmacy and buy laudanum like any other commodity, the user now had to adopt a whole new regimen of activities in order to purchase the same substance" (*The Road of Excess*, 75). So what we see in *Junky* is a new and profound re-articulation of what addiction "really is" as it adapts to a new social and legal context.

This legal context was especially important for Burroughs because he would be charged under the new, punitive measures in Louisiana for marijuana. Burroughs himself wasn't the biggest fan of marijuana, nor of marijuana users,[62] but that didn't stop him from decrying the propaganda leveled against what he saw as an innocuous drug. Ignorance of the drug's effects was emblematic of the tyranny that Burroughs located in the machinery of drug controls. History would prove Burroughs right, as marijuana is now widely considered a safe, if not totally harmless, drug (having been legalized in several U.S. States and the whole of Canada). Burroughs reasoned that the only possible cause for outlawing and demonizing such an innocuous drug was as an attempt to extend state controls. As Burroughs opens his 1998 introduction to *Reefer Madness* (a scathing

[62] "Tea heads are not like junkies. A junkie hands you the money, takes his junk and cuts. But tea heads don't do things that way. They expect the peddler to light them up and sit around talking for half an hour to sell two dollars' worth of weed. If you come right to the point you are a 'bring down'…To me, tea heads are unfathomable." (*Junky*, 14-15).

histroy of Anslinger's expansion of drug control), "Harry J. Anslinger becomes comprehensible only as part of a conspiracy" (xi).

Burroughs' estimation of the political climate surrounding drugs wasn't too far off. One house representative from New York, Victor Anfuso, called for the death penalty for drug trafficking in 1955 because it was "a crime worse than murder"[63] (qtd. in McWilliams, 115). Indeed, the successive escalation of mandatory minimum sentences initiated by the Boggs Act would serve as the grandparent of the modern "3 Strike" laws"[64] of states such as Louisiana. These punitive laws, in no way based in empiricism, experience or scientific study, remained the outward signs of a moral and political crusade being waged by government against its own citizens, a war that Burroughs was all too eager to escape in 1950 when he fled to Mexico following his arrest on drug charges.

Junky and Naked Lunch

Burroughs' literary work is largely an extension of his political and philosophical thought, and both *Junky* and *Naked Lunch* capture different, important aspects of that thought. *Junky* offers a correction to the state sponsored drug myths by documenting the life and times of the junk addict. *Junky* is anthropological in nature, and Burroughs resists the dominant discourse of addiction by assuming a stance of (relative) objectivity.

[63] From *Traffic in, and Control of, Narcotics Barbiturates, and Amphetamines, Hearings*, Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Ways and Means, 84th Congress, 1st Session., 1955. 1010.
[64] Several American states use what are commonly known as "habitual offender" laws that disproportionally punish criminals on their third offence. The most severe versions of these laws (known as "three strike" laws) include mandatory life sentences for any person with three prior convictions, so long as one was a violent felony. In one particularly egregious case, Bernard Noble was sentenced to 13 years in prison for possession of two joints of marijuana (he was paroled in 2018 after serving eight years).

According to critic Alex Wermer-Colan, "Lee assumes the neutrality of an ethnographer monotonously reporting the facts, ostensibly as uninterested in his confession as he is unconcerned about his reader." (503). Burroughs documents the stool pigeon (*Junky*, 47), the pimp (64), Chinese junkies (92), mooches and short-changers (42). He documents the kinds of cons junkies pull: how to roll a lush (27) and what to tell a doctor to get a "scrip" for morphine (21). Burroughs describes a world of lack in which the junky world is constantly feeding on its own appendages, cannibalizing itself to try and get together just enough for the next score as they "burn down" every available resource. What we see in *Junky* is a variety of characters, innumerable and interchangeable, all little cogs in the wheel of the great American junk machine.

Importantly, Burroughs finds his realist and explanatory style in the precise antithesis of the US government's (and Anslinger's) moralistic take on addiction. Burroughs lays out, in the barest and most simple terms, what the everyday lived experience of addiction looks like. In so doing, he contests the very grounds upon which Anslinger assumed the right to judge addicts in advance; in examining the common, everyday lives of junkies, Burroughs insists that it is only through experience, and through knowledge of the *practice* of addiction, that we get a worthwhile look into what addiction is really like. Towards this end, Burroughs lists ten common misconceptions about drugs in his original introduction to *Junky* (140-142), as if to offer one upturned middle finger to state authority.

One common strategy of reading *Naked Lunch* (and a reading that was also employed at its obscenity trial) involves seeing it as symbolic of the ills that Burroughs saw in society. This strategy makes some sense insofar as defending the grotesque and

violent imagery of the novel has to involve some sort of *reason* in order to not be considered obscene. That the narrative was essentially symbolic and critical—that it used characters and scenes to "symbolize" various aspects of society and various people—might excuse the novel's excessive content. In this reading, all of the grotesque imagery of the novel is ultimately symbolic: a distorted version, to be sure, but one that actively represents and critiques things that exist in the world.

But this contradicts Burroughs' own take on the work. Burroughs famously referred to the title of *Naked Lunch* as just what it says: the simple, obscene object that is "really" there at the end of the fork (*Naked Lunch*, ix). While realism might at first seem at odds with its parodic and hallucinatory style (it is not representative of our world in any obvious sense), there is a sense in which Burroughs is digging at something that is all too real: found precisely in the dramatic, senseless and obscene style that Anslinger himself employed in the demonization of drugs. In the reading of literary critic Frank MacConnell, the realist logic of *Naked Lunch* may be found in its presentation of absolutes. He suggests that *Naked Lunch* formalizes the fundamental issue of our own consumer society, "something that could not possibly have been done without the precondition of a full-flowered drug traffic: writing a book in which the only alternatives are absolute (and therefore dynamically formless) will or its absolute lack" (n.p.). McConnell finds in *Naked Lunch*'s presentation of addiction not a symbol but rather a kind of discursive structure: a narrative straitjacket that abhors questions of meaning and symbolization in favour of the radical and grotesque intensities of drugs, addiction, and fascist state control. *Naked Lunch* is a radical collection of images that are "true" despite being impossible, in the sense that they emulate a reality that escapes our direct

experience of it. The figures are not symbolic, because they represent nothing in reality: they merely articulate the boundaries of a reality that are typically invisible to us.

This is nowhere clearer than in the multiple, and multiplying, forms of "junkies" that populate *Naked Lunch*. It showcases fiends like the Sailor whose face stretches impossibly to suck black mist from a tube (48-49),[65] and Willy the Disk who has "a round, disk mouth lined with sensitive, erectile black hairs. He is blind from shooting in the eyeball…his body a mass of scar tissue hard and dry as wood" (8). Willy and kind are not "symbolic" of addicts but rather their hyper-realization, a junky that is realer than real: as Burroughs puts it in *Junky*, "[j]unk is a biological necessity when you have a habit, an invisible mouth. When you take a shot of junk you are satisfied, just like you ate a big meal. You don't want another shot right away" (103).

As critic Timothy Melley similarly notes in his anthologized work, "A Terminal Case: William Burroughs and the Logic of Addiction," the grotesque transformation of Junkies in *Naked Lunch* is simply a question of form matching function: as addiction atrophies and commands what was once a variety of desires, so too does the body follow suit by adapting to maximize exposure to junk. The body becomes insectile or liquid protoplasm in an attempt to bridge the gap between subject and substance. These creatures don't *symbolize* addicts but are rather their literalization, in accordance with the principles of addiction that Burroughs outlines in the "Algebra of Need" ("wouldn't you?").

[65] "His face came back into focus unbearably sharp and clear, burning yellow brand of junk searing the grey haunch of a million screaming junkies. 'This will last a month,' he decided, consulting an invisible mirror" (49)

Naked Lunch (and perhaps *Junky and Nova Express* as well) is a technology that enables us to "see" the end of the fork *as it really is*. In what was most likely a reference to *Nova Express* (1964), Burroughs writes that

> I have almost completed a sequel to *Naked Lunch*. A mathematical extension of the algebra of need beyond the junk virus. Because there are many forms of addiction I think that they all obey basic laws. In the words of Heisenberg: 'This may not be the best of all possible universes but it may well prove to be one of the simplest.' If man can *see*. (*Naked Lunch*, xvi)

Burroughs' interest in the "basic laws' of addiction are made manifest in precisely the terms outlined by McConnell: it as if the novel takes the full scope of human experience and edits out everything *but* what can be expressed in terms of the most desperate form of need, of what is willed and what is forced. *Naked Lunch* is not an exaggeration of total need but merely its isolation: the purest way of "seeing," of "revealing" the algebras of need that already entangle us.

This "nudity" of expression is also apparent in the sexual violence and obscenity plastered all over *Naked Lunch*, as Burroughs prods and pokes at what he saw as the utter limits of what can and can't be considered sexual, at its absolute intersection with addiction. The coupling of sex and death are nearly ubiquitous, as in the sexual attacks of the Mugwump in "Hassan's Rumpus Room" (69), and the unsettling episode of Mary, John and Mark in "AJ's Annual Party" (80). What makes this final example so disturbing is the fact that the monsters in this section are ordinary boys and girls with none of the "monstrosity" elsewhere featured. While any complete interpretation of these scenes is difficult (owing to their emphasis on image and spectacle over and above traditional

modes like character and plot), what they convey is a fascination with sexuality *as* compulsion, and what the limits of sexuality are in the arena of total need. Burroughs replaces motivation with spontaneity, emotional climax with grim spectacle, and in so doing undoes the "coding" of literary narrative, alongside the stability of its object of representation. Perhaps these hideous descriptions are, like his presentation of addicts, Burroughs' attempt at literality, what he imagined sex "really was" in his contemporary America: "sex as a biological weapon. I feel that sex, much like practically every other human manifestation, has been degraded for control purposes, or really for anti-human purposes" ("White Junk," *Burroughs Live*, 81).

Accordingly, Burroughs saw the algebra of need as the most pressing political question of his time, an effect that he saw operative in everything from junk peddlers to car salesmen. As Burroughs has it in one interview,

> by 'the algebra of need' I simply meant that, given certain known factors in an equation and the equation comprising a situation of absolute need—any form of need—you can predict the results. Leave a sick junkie in the back room of a drugstore and only one result is possible…The more absolute the need, the more predictable the behavior becomes until it is mathematically certain. ("Prophet or Pornographer," *Burroughs Live*, 93)

Burroughs saw human agency as ever more contained, and ever more subject to governmental, social and economic control. *Naked Lunch* happens at this point of mathematical certainty, making it a near rabid indictment of what addiction "really is" in what he would call a control society. Ultimately what we see in the transition between *Junky* and *Naked Lunch* is not so much a change in intent but rather a change in tactics.

Burroughs saw an opportunity in the rhetoric of Anslinger to publish an authoritative account of addiction that was unblemished by populist mythology. This required two distinct styles of addiction: one. *Junky*, an exploration of the "facts at hand," and the other, in *Naked Lunch*, a hallucinatory revelation that shows the addictions that are already there in front of us.

Unlike medical theorists and practitioners interested in disease theory, Burroughs refused to see drugs as the sole addictive substance. While he recognized the necessity of medical treatment he, unlike doctors, saw addiction everywhere: in the power addictions of police officers, in love and sex, in the human structures of language and grammar, even in the most fundamental understandings of human identity and subjectivity. Contrary to his contemporaries' theories of addiction, Burroughs proposed a new metaphysics of addiction that could grasp it not only on the micro level of cells, but also in its broadest political sense: as a war of desire that was waged by those in power, the purveyors of which were just one more set of junkies in the great American junk machine.

Burroughs and The Metaphysics of Addiction

A major part of Burroughs' thoughts on addiction were the product of inconsistencies in other, dominant modes of thought. As we have already seen, this led Burroughs to think about addiction in varying ways, as his own "disease" model troubled dominant political and psychoanalytic takes on addiction. And while disease theory would prove an important aspect to Burroughs' own theory of addiction, it was not the only conceptual weapon in his addictive arsenal. Burroughs was also interested in

addiction on a more philosophical level: the ways in which addictive phenomenon troubled other assumptions about human being, desire, society, and physiology. In fact, as we will see next, Burroughs would theorize addiction in several ways above and beyond his algebra of need: most notably, in his theorizations of addiction as "exposure," or as a "cellular" phenomenon, and his concept of the "junk virus." Ultimately, I argue that while Burroughs' writing fails to show recognition of the contradictions and disagreements between various theorizations, it is productive to think about them as what theorist Giorgio Agamben has called an "apparatus," insofar as he attempts to describe an immense series of forces, practices, and actors that could, in the abstract, produce nothing but contradiction.

First and foremost, Burroughs theorized addiction as a question of exposure, inclination and opportunity. This version first appears in *Junky* as he describes addiction as something that one simply drifts into:

> You become a narcotics addict because you do not have strong motivations in any other direction. Junk wins by default. I tried it as a matter of curiosity. I drifted along taking shots when I could score. I ended up hooked. Most addicts I have talked to report a similar experience. They did not start using drugs for any particular reason they can remember. They just drifted along until they got hooked. If you have never been addicted, you can have no clear idea what it means to need junk with the addict's special need. You don't decide to be an addict. One morning you wake up sick and you're an addict. (*Junky*, xl)

Burroughs' idea matched up fairly well to medical science. According to Nils Bejerot, a Swedish physician who began researching addiction in 1965, "[o]ften the initial abuse is

completely incidental: curiosity, the desire to belong to an in-group or careless medical treatment" (xiii). This formulation more or less coincides with the plot and action of *Junky* itself, as Lee has a very similar experience to Burroughs as he drifts through the narrative, recording and explaining the junky subculture, either unaware or uncaring of any of his own psychological motivations or moral wrongdoing. Burroughs' interest is instead on the action of the drug itself, and the action of drug laws upon it, what he calls the "junk equation": "I have learned the junk equation. Junk is not, like alcohol or weed, a means to increased enjoyment of life. Junk is not a kick. It is a way of life" (*Junky,* xli).

In an interview conducted with Conrad Knickerbocker in 1965, Burroughs expands on his introduction to *Junky*, talking about addiction as a matter of exposure:

> Knickerbocker: You regard addiction as an illness but also as a central human fact, a drama?
>
> Burroughs: Both, absolutely. It's as simple as the way in which anyone happens to become an alcoholic. They start drinking, that's it. They like it, and they drink, and then they become alcoholic. I was exposed to heroin in New York…the effects were pleasant. I went on using it and became addicted…It's a matter of exposure. ("White Junk," *Burroughs Live*, 63-64)

Of interest here is the way in which Burroughs here confirms not one, but three versions of addiction: as disease, as a human "drama," and also a matter of exposure. Of course, as Burroughs well knew, addiction could never be "merely" a question of exposure, though this formulation does afford a great deal of explanatory power to drugs themselves. Burroughs means "exposure" in a simple, material sense: that proximity to drugs increases the likelihood of addiction. As he recounts in the same interview, "[r]emember

that if it can be readily obtained, you will have any number of addicts" ("White Junk," *Burroughs Live*, 63-64). As Marcus Boon has similarly noted, Burroughs saw addiction as "a disease of exposure similar to a viral infection, rather than a disease of character" (*The Road of Excess*, 78).

Yet ultimately Burroughs' rhetoric here contradicts what he would say elsewhere. According to his introduction to *Junky*: "You don't wake up one morning and decide to be a drug addict. It takes at least three-months' shooting twice a day to get any habit at all…I think it no exaggeration to say it takes about a year and several hundred injections to make an addict" (xl). Burroughs seems unable to make up his mind, yet it can't be both: either the drug is all-powerful, and addicts most who come into proximity with it, or else it requires determination, perseverance, and inclination.

In his interview with *Playboy*, which also featured Harry Anslinger, he offers another contradictory, or at least supplementary, take on addiction, that elucidates a political reality for drugs that we might add to his ideas on exposure and habit: "[i]f society really wants to curtail drug use, it must alter the conditions that give rise to it. The plain fact is that modern urban life is virtually intolerable" ("The Drug Revolution," *Burroughs Live*, 149). This version differs importantly from the formulation of "addiction as exposure," insofar as it recognizes the political and social effectivity of drug use as well: that the motivations for drugs aren't *only* a question of exposure, but also of curing the misery of modern life, making addiction not only chemical but also circumstantial.

Frederick Whitling, in his evocative contribution to *Twentieth Century Literature*, "Monstrosity on Trial: The Case of *Naked Lunch,*" expands on this idea of addiction as political critique. In Whitling's reading of Burroughs,

> addiction is a state of manufactured dependency created to advance the interests of the network of suppliers and the antinarcotics establishment whose existence depends on this network. Physical addiction is ultimately precipitated by social causes; it results from and contributes to political and economic phenomena that are themselves addictions—addictions to the manipulation and control of others and to power as an end in itself. (Whitling, 166)

Whitling captures the "other side" of Burroughs' thought in highlighting the political dimensions of his work, which contradict his previous claims about addiction as exposure and addiction as habit. Here, addiction is the realization of a much more widespread an pernicious force: almost a symptom rather than a disease.

Like his theory of exposure, Burroughs' political take on addiction sees representation in his literature. As Burroughs has it in *Naked Lunch*,

> …there is no drag like U.S. drag. You can't see it, you don't know where it comes from. Take one of those cocktail lounges at the end of a subdivision street—every block of houses has its own bar and drugstore and market and liquorstore. You walk in and it hits you…And our habits build up with the drag, like cocaine will build you up staying ahead of the C bring-down (*Naked Lunch*, 13).

In this version, addiction is, again, *symptomatic*, insofar as it comes by way a series of social and economic forces: the typical life in the suburbs which allows a certain amount of financial freedom and a certain amount of boredom. Here Burroughs figures drug use as a response to the "drag" of American life, which is consistent with his earlier description of addiction as the result of "drifting" (i.e. boredom), but inconsistent with his

opinions on exposure. While the cocktail lounge must certainly exist in order to be used, there is no sense here that the denizens of New Jersey are flocking to their neighborhood pubs to get a taste.

Given the multiple and competing versions that Burroughs would pursue throughout his life, I would argue that his own "realism" of addiction should be considered as varied and nuanced as each of these competing metaphors: disease, drifting, exposure, and the material conditions of life in America. In this way, Burroughs' work is not merely addressing itself to addiction as phenomenon, but also to what Giorgio Agamben has called an apparatus. In his terms, we might call addiction an "*oikonomia*,[66] that is, a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control and orient—in a way that purports to be useful—the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings" (12). The work of Burroughs' realism is an attempt to capture precisely this: the intersection between the political and the chemical that modifies, in subtle and contingent ways, many aspects of drug use and, accordingly, the behaviours that it produces.

It is in this sense that scholars have read Burroughs' take on addiction at the intersection of political and legal controls, in addition to being the product of drugs' chemical effects. Ultimately for Burroughs, addiction only happens given a matrix of power and control that co-opts desire effectively. As Marcus Boon has suggested, "[n]arcotics addiction, for Burroughs, is merely the crudest example of a matrix of techniques of control that addiction to human being, to being itself, makes possible" (*The Road of Excess*, 81). Agamben would seem to agree in his claim that "[a]t the root of

[66] More literally this is "economy" but also "apparatus."

each apparatus lies an all-too-human desire for happiness. The capture and subjectification of the desire in a separate sphere constitutes the specific power of the apparatus" (17). If we can safely assume heroin and consumerism to be the sorts of apparatuses that co-ordinate the operations of "natural" human desires, then what both Burroughs and Agamben recognize is an all too human instinct. Burroughs is not claiming that we are naturally addicts, but rather that our constitution as *driven* allows for very particular forms of exploitation. The exploitation of those tendencies through drugs is merely a point of convenience; drugs are an efficient means of harnessing the desires of human beings.

The contradictions that I have here traced in Burroughs' work, finally, should then be read as symptomatic the task in front of him. In responding to the politicization of addictive being, and in employing the authority of experience in opposition to dominant discourses, Burroughs' own formulation of addiction could hardly be "real": yet it could be *realistic* in a new and productive way. Burroughs' view was developed in a highly circumscribed context that had, in his eyes, warped the social and cultural meanings of drugs beyond recognition. By asserting the pure chemical capacities of drugs to cause addiction ("exposure" and "total need"), and alternatively by insisting on addiction as a response to human misery, Burroughs found a point of contradiction against both psychiatric and moral accounts.

Addiction in a Time of Need

Substance use disorder, commonly known as addiction, is a disease of the brain, and many misconceptions surrounding it have contributed to harmful stigmas that can prevent

individuals from seeking the treatment they need. By treating substance use disorders as seriously as other medical conditions, with an emphasis on prevention and treatment, people can recover.

- Barack Obama, "Presidential Proclamation - National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, 2016," August 31st 2016

By 2016, you could make the case that the disease theory of addiction—and a version of it that was not dissimilar from Burroughs'—had become dominant in a field of other competing theories. Gone were simplistic moralistic takes: people were instead interested in the stigma and health problems that Burroughs had been screaming about for decades. While doctors and politicians had argued over the pathology of addiction for years, Obama's tenure marked an era in which the disease theory of addiction was finally accepted as an essential part of state rhetoric. As we have seen, this rise to prominence was far from coincidental, as sociologists, physicians, and writers continued to contest moralistic views of addiction throughout the 20th century. It would seem that Burroughs' vision of addiction as "total need" would prove a popular and effective critique: so much so, that it would ultimately become useful for the American Government.

Of particular interest is the way Obama's position mimics Burroughs' emphasis on the chemical powers of addictive drugs and the necessity of their treatment through medical professionals. While Burroughs may have disagreed with how his "algebra of need" was applied in policing addicts in the 1980s, its central theme of addiction as "uncontrollable need" would remain largely intact as it transitioned from the revolutionary discourse of the Beats into the dominant ideology of the state. Today, the

disease model is beginning to look ever closer to Burroughs's now prophetic arguments; medical treatment, harm reduction and legalization are now more prominent than ever in discussions of drug policy.

Burroughs' (re)presentation of addiction marked a necessary and revolutionary break with both the American state and with conventional forms of addiction narrative in his own time. In *Junky*, Burroughs upset the idea that drug addicts were simply depraved, weak-willed monsters through his anthropological "study" of junk culture and junk "being." In *Naked Lunch* he does something of the opposite, in showing how the "monstrosity" of drug addiction isn't particular to junkies, but is deeply implicated in biological and psychological/social controls. Yet by the 1990s, the grounds of political opposition had shifted. As state and medical authorities began working together to police addiction—under the banner of the War on Drugs—the subversion that Burroughs had enjoyed by way of disease theory had been all but exhausted. By adopting disease theory, the state fundamentally neutralized the kinds of opposition that Burroughs embodied, leaving a new generation the task of constructing progressive theories of addiction, and more broadly of critiquing the unquestioned dominance of the "self-help" movement that became nearly synonymous with it. As we will see, writers such as Ann Marlowe, in her experimental memoir *How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z*, would pick up where Burroughs left off.

During the 1990s, disease theory was relatively uncontroversial. Commonly, the public believed that addicts were indeed suffering from a disease, and needed help to get clean, but should still largely be held responsible for their actions: especially if they weren't actively seeking recovery. The real onus of "choice" in this model was about

redemption rather than origins; if a person was sick and needed help, they were really suffering and deserved that help. Alternatively, anyone who was unwilling to admit their illness, or unwilling to seek recovery, must be willfully hurting themselves and others.

Disease theory dominated the context in which Marlowe wrote, and was thus an important counterpoint to her version of addiction. Marlowe was suspicious of disease theory because of the way in which it tended to dominate popular thought and culture. In a way similar to Burroughs, Marlowe thought that her own experience—and the lack of experience among people claiming addiction was a disease—authorized her position. By questioning the reality of addiction as disease, and also the narrative model of recovery as teleological, Marlowe constructed a revolutionary form of addictive realism[67] that would differ substantially from her contemporaries.

Marlowe's work equally marks an important cultural moment in which the benefits of disease theory were being outweighed by its costs. Not only had America become a nation of self-proclaimed, helpless addicts—dependent on everything from chocolate bars to sex—but in so doing had obscured the toxicity of consumerism itself. The later version of disease theory located the "illness" of addiction in the subject, never in the substance. In an abrupt turn, "drugs" became an innocent bystander in the addictive tendencies that humans tended to develop. Ultimately, disease theory started looking like an empty signifier because it described a gross range of behaviours that were—psychologically and physiologically speaking—quite disparate.

While this shift towards disease theory was not immediately apparent, by the 1980s "total need" had taken hold of popular thinking. Fueled by the expansion of

[67] That is, a combination of innovative form and realistic content that should strike us as plausible.

twelve-step programs and scientific research into the chemical power of drugs, the concept of "disease" emerged in this period as a powerful metaphor for just about any ill, either psychological or actual. As early as 1985, newspapers were popularizing research of the brain's "pleasure centers" which seemed to be the key to the action of addiction as pathological disease.[68] The problem was no longer an *individual* or *personal* weakness, but a weakness of human biology in general.

Yet the state adoption of the Burroughsian logic of "total need" was by no means a simple acknowledgment of the "truth" of disease theory. It was instead a convenient means to pathologize both the emergent excesses of consumer culture (and its increasingly evident effects on public health and well-being[69]) and the state's ongoing difficulties in the War on Drugs. As sociologist Gerda Reith has suggested, in an era where personal freedoms and individualism were running high on the back of neoliberal ideology,[70] pathology offered a salient metaphor for the tendency of individuals towards self-destruction and self-abuse. In her words,

> [t]he notion of addiction was not, then, the 'discovery' of some new disease; but rather, to return to Marx's phrase, the creation of a fetish. It was the emergence of a politically expedient discourse that articulated concerns about social disorder in a way that connected the consumption practices of particular groups with wider social trends. (290)

[68] "Brain circuitry may be key to addiction; New theory of compulsive behavior causes scientists to change strategy." *The Gazette*. Montreal, Que. 04 Feb 1985: B4.

[69] Most notably in the case of obesity, but also for cigarettes, alcohol and the like.

[70] That is, the dominant economic and social logic of the 1970s and 80s that encouraged a radical version of individualism and free-will, which was in turn used to justify economic policies like free trade, and criminal policies related to the War on Drugs.

Addiction, most simply, explained why free people tended to do stupid things with their freedom. Disease theory wasn't an epiphany or invention on the part of the state: it involved the recovery of a political ideology that had hitherto been useless, and now offered significant rhetorical advantages.

By endorsing the marriage of a series of social issues to disease (like obesity, smoking and alcohol related diseases, gambling etc.) the state basically shrugged its collective shoulders: if addiction was a biological reality of human beings then there was little they could do aside from supporting programs meant to allow people to "help themselves." It is in this sense that we might call addiction a "fetish" following Reith: disease theory obscured the reality of addiction as a social and economic relation (between consumer and producer, between consumer and the state's regulation of commodities and drugs) by calling it a bare biological reality. Addiction "stood in for" and replaced a complex series of motivations, policies, desires, and biological realities that were by no means commensurate.

Indeed, it is in the 1980s that we first see people *identifying* en masse with their addictive tendencies. And if regulating hamburgers contradicted the radical individualism that the state espoused, than "addiction" was the perfect mechanism by which to institute *self-regulation* on the part of consumers. If, as Raymond Williams has it, "[t]he true condition of hegemony is effective *self-identification* with the hegemonic forms" (118), then by the 1980s—when almost everyone had identified themselves with some addiction or another—this hegemony had been quietly secured. In terms of "practice" this was carried out in church basements, legion halls and community centers in the myriad forms of twelve-step programs that allowed users to navigate the strange paradox in which their

excessive desires were packaged. The proliferation of anonymous groups, which began with NA in 1953, is now difficult to understand as anything other than parody. As journalist Amy Wilson noticed in 1988, there were more than 500,000 self-help groups serving about 15 million Americans (*Chicago Tribune*). Gamblers Anonymous was founded in 1957, Emotions Anonymous in 1971, Sex Addicts in 1977 and Food Addicts in 1987. Codependency, a self-help buzzword of the 1980s, would draw similar amounts of attention from anyone who had ever had any sort of personal or romantic problem. As journalist Wendy Kaminer has it, "[c]odependency offers a diagnosis, and support group, to virtually anyone with a problem who can read or listen to a tape cassette" (10). It became common, as many critics of the movement have noticed,[71] for people to blame everything from genes to a lack of parental care for just about any problem.

The expansion of self-help groups simultaneously empowered and undermined personal will. On the one hand, the movement suggested that we are born "sick" but, through the help of group therapy, we can free ourselves from the shackles of our imperfect constitutions (an oddly Christian sentiment, as Kaminer notices). As Kaminer observes, "[l]abeling all of their problems symptoms of disease, people in recovery find not only the promise of a cure but an external cause for what ails them—the dysfunctional family (and their family in particular)" (26). This brought about a strange contradiction in the logic of self-recovery: addicts were both not responsible for their behaviour, owing to the fact that it was a "real disease," and also wholly responsible in that only they could correct and manage their behaviour.

[71] See Kaminer's *I'm Dysfunctional You're Dysfunctional* and Peele's *Diseasing of America*.

One of the consequences of the self-help movement, owing to its individualistic approach in both diagnosis and treatment, was that just about anyone could be an addict if they "felt" like one. Feeling a "loss of control" over one's behaviour, or inability to stick to plans to consume less became hallmarks of addiction diagnosis. As Reith claims in reference to the *DSM*, "[b]y making subjective assessments of loss of control themselves diagnostic criteria, the field of addiction becomes potentially infinite, expanding to embrace ever-increasing substances and behaviours, across ever wider swathes of the population" (Reith, 291-92). Accordingly, addiction became universal (in the sense that anyone could experience addiction with just about any object or behaviour) while maintaining an extraordinary amount of explanatory power.

This is not to say that twelve-step programs were not having an important and positive impact on addicts. Their popularity during this period was in part a product of their success, as many drug and alcohol users found sobriety. While scholars have questioned the statistics on success rates,[72] there are many anecdotal cases of success through AA and NA. During a time when treatment for addiction was hit and miss, these programs provided a useful avenue for those struggling with addictions.

Importantly, it was also in this period that conspicuous holes began to appear in the already fraying fabric of the War on Drugs. After a decade of harsh control, American legislators had failed to eradicate the drug menace despite astronomical funding increases to police narcotic departments.[73] Not only had the War on Drugs failed to appreciably curb drug consumption, but it had also failed to alleviate the public hysteria that it had

[72] Reliable data is difficult here, as only long-term, committed members can register as sober. Those who leave and stay clean on their own don't count, for instance, and it is difficult to confirm the habits of those who leave the program.
[73] See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

instigated. The drug war was in limbo: it had become larger than life in the minds of Americans, and the reality of drug use was increasingly incapable of matching up to its image. For Americans, the problem wasn't merely that there was an increasing feeling of compulsion and loss of self-control: given the availability of fast food, alcohol and cigarettes, we would almost expect people to feel more temptations and less control over their appetites.

While this was certainly a problem, it is unquestionably compounded when we start viewing those compulsions as a disease, rather than a habit that develops in accordance to environment. Literary critic Timothy Melley (who has written on the work of William Burroughs) formulates the idea concisely, saying that

> [t]he increasing popularity of this view[74] would be unremarkable it if signaled merely a growing belief that the compulsion to repeat behaviours is a normal human tendency, rather than a sign of disease. But many Americans seem to have adopted…the idea that *any* habit, drive or compulsion indicates a lack of self-control so dangerous that it merits medical attention. (39)

People weren't simply using addiction as a metaphor for what their desires were "like": people began, quite literally, seeing their desires as the sign of disease. People sought out, in record numbers, treatments for even the most innocuous addictions. Just as drug laws produced the criminality that it supposed to be symptomatic of drugs, so too did the new culture of addiction create record numbers of self-proclaimed addicts.

[74] That is, consumerism as addiction.

How to Stop Time

Not for a minute can I subscribe to the popular view, encouraged by William Burroughs, of addiction as uncontrollable need…This is an unpopular view: Americans are eager to read addiction as a virtually uncontrollable drive. The twelve-step programs encourage this nonsense with their obtuseness about psychoanalytical thought.

- Ann Marlowe, *How to Stop Time*, "need" (228)

The new legitimacy of disease theory left cultural critics the task of constructing alternative forms of addictive realism that were not based in pathology. Some, like social psychologist Jeffrey Schaler, attempted to demonstrate that addicts actively choose to repeat their addictive behaviours. Schaler reasoned that addiction can no more be considered a disease than drunk driving: doing drugs is merely a bad choice, and the fact people have trouble breaking those behaviours speaks more to their lack of concern than to some uncontrollable compulsion.[75]

Stanton Peele, a popular sociologist who published many works on addiction (and was commonly featured in news media) would similarly argue that addiction cannot be a disease in any typical sense because it varies on the basis of cultural context. As he argues, "[b]ehaviors and appetites are addictions only in particular cultural contexts—obviously, obesity matters only where people have enough to eat and think it is important to be thin. Symptoms like loss-of-control drinking depend *completely* on cultural and personal meanings" (*Diseasing of America*, 6). While Peel overstates the point here, the more general idea that addiction varies from country to country, as well as from person to

[75] As we will see in Chapter 3, this idea would also be mimicked by drug and SF writer Philip K. Dick.

person, makes sense: the idea of "loss-of-control" coffee drinking likely strikes us as absurd, despite the fact that caffeine is often considered addictive. Because there are few social or legal consequences for drinking too much coffee, its consumption fails to register the kinds of behavior (theft, violence, public disorder) that many assume is a natural or inherent part of addiction.

Bruce Alexander of the "Rat Park" experiments similarly disagreed with disease theory, yet he would argue that understanding the *individual* as the locus of addictive behaviours was its key failing. He supposed, contrary to the self-help movement at the time, that "[i]f conditions are so harsh that significant numbers of people are unable to achieve minimal mature functioning, does it not follow that society needs therapy rather than its individual members?" ("The Disease and Adaptive Models of Addiction," 60). Alexander saw addiction as a social disease that resulted from the broad political and economic makeup of society. Accordingly, he reasoned that examining addiction on the level of the individual was pointless at best.

The cultural field of the 1990s similarly offered diverse accounts of addictive experience that would fluctuate, alongside empirical models, between addiction as "choice," disease, moral failing and personal responsibility. This was as much the case in medicine and sociology as it was in popular culture. Addiction was particularly visible in the alternative music scene, which had inherited its predecessors' penchant for drugs. Whole albums would take addiction as their theme. Tool's aptly named *Undertow* (1993) would take a perspectival view of addiction in correlating substance abuse, sexual abuse and even codependency under the overarching metaphor of the "undertow": the current of human desire that runs freely through all our excesses and failures. Alice in Chain's *Dirt*

(1992) expresses the pleasures and pains of heroin in terms of the frailty of the human condition; featuring three tracks that are more less explicitly about heroin, the album supposes drugs as both an accelerant for, and solution to, our own mortality. Trent Reznor's "Hurt" from *The Downward Spiral* (1994) would operate as a different symbol for the self-absorption and destruction that characterized both the drug addict and the agnostic and disaffected youth of the 1990s. While heroin's visibility in popular culture was by no means new (see Neil Young's 1972 "The Needle and the Damage Done"), it had begun to take on a unique symbolic life: addiction, and heroin in particular, was not only a commonplace of the rock star lifestyle, but had increasing symbolic resonance with themes of self-indulgence and nihilism that were easier to score than heroin could ever be.

It should then be no surprise that one of the most creative and controversial modern contributors to heroin culture should begin with an investigation of rock music. Ann Marlowe's "Listening to Heroin" (1994), and her follow-up memoir *How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z*, would capitalize on the currency of heroin culture. To do so, it read heroin as more than just a drug: it was a pharmakon, both poison and remedy, for a generation that could no longer look to its future for meaning. Far Marlowe, heroin is a question of "nostalgia"—what she calls "a form of mourning for the irrecoverable glories of the first time" ("addiction," 9)—as much at stake in the consumption of drugs as in the clothes that we wear and the music scenes we identify with. According to Marlowe, if heroin was a solvent for the boredom and disaffection of modern urban living, then it could hardly be a disease. We might, at best, consider it a form of self-medication. In this way, Marlowe both agrees and disagrees with the work of Burroughs. In a strange

reversal, Marlowe would attack the dominant ideology of addiction, not for its punitive or moral dimensions as Burroughs had done, but instead for its tendency to treat addicts exactly as Burroughs had supposed: as victims of "total need."

Part of *How To Stop Time*'s intrigue involves the nuance with which it critiques disease theory. Marlowe's interest is not so much in declaring disease theory "false," but rather in critiquing its value to her own cultural moment. As she notices, "addiction isn't a hunger for a high, it's a disease, a system of thought and a way of being. Reading about dope doesn't create addicts; a combination, probably, of biochemistry and life experience creates addicts" ("glamour," 155). She insists that addiction is not a simple question of total need, but instead a complex question of partial need(s); addiction is a need that is engineered in the interplay between state, society and biology.

For Marlowe, disease theory operates strictly at the intersection between culture and biology, a fact that is largely missed in populist thought. According to Marlowe, "[m]ost people who've never used addictive drugs become suspiciously upset when you suggest that heroin isn't that devilishly habit-forming, that we choose our addictions. They want to locate the horror in the remedy, but the horror's in the zeitgeist" ("need," 230). Because the public was all too willing to find "addiction" in the drug itself, any thought that society and circumstance might condition the desire for drugs was often lost. According to Marlowe, addiction as "total need" ignores the contexts that produce drugs as desirable and useful; an ignorance that is reflected by the populist hunger for extremes.

Another powerful component in Marlowe's version of addiction lies in her interest in choice and individuality. Theories of addiction have long struggled with trying to explain why someone might engage in self-destructive behaviours like addiction.

Rather than suggest addiction is a question of total need, Marlowe argued it as a question of predisposition, if not entirely of choice. She contends this was certainly true for her own case: "addiction, such as it was, was chosen. Most are. For some of us, once you realize addiction is out there, you have to try it…Getting a habit isn't an accident, or the result of the 'power of the drug'; it's what you were after. Would you order an entrée again if you threw up the first time you ate it?" (*How to Stop Time*, "free will," 145).[76]

Marlowe walks an interesting line here theoretically. On the one hand, her version of "choice" comes close to the psychoanalytic versions we've already examined, with "personality" as an analog for Marlowe's "some of us": some people have a hunger to use drugs that allows them to push through negative symptoms (famously heroin use often leads to sickness in first-time users). Yet this interferes with her "choice" model insofar as such predispositions seem automatic: just as drinking might appear easy to someone who's been exposed to alcohol from a young age, so too might heroin use differ depending on the background of the potential user, a fact that Marlowe largely fails to note. In this way, Marlowe rescopes the problem of addiction entirely. For Marlowe, addiction is produced at the intersection of a substance and a *willing* subject: someone who is at least capable of submitting to the process of addiction, and willing to deal with its negative consequences. As she suggests above, it may be precisely the "negative" consequences that users seek when they first start using, a position that could not be more antithetical to disease theory.

Yet Marlowe's critique isn't just a question of content, as *How to Stop Time* also addresses addiction on the level of narrative form. Confessions (popular in the 80s and

[76] Of course what Marlowe's analysis misses is the impact of her class position on the way in which she encountered drugs.

90s) would typically follow standard biographical arcs that stressed linearity and agency. By examining the *development* of a drug addict through linear time it becomes possible to see the mistakes, flaws, and failures that lead to addiction: to see where one has gone wrong. Often such narratives focus on agency as a major condition of narrative movement: addicts progress when they take responsibility, or take ownership, or come to understand the "true" motivations behind their use.

How To Stop Time upsets this progressive, linear train of thought and instead mirrors the structure of a dictionary or encyclopedia. Taking the flattened and atemporal register of the alphabet as its main organizing feature, Marlowe breaks down the "grand narrative" of addiction into its composite parts. In so doing her narrative marks one more shift in the dialectic progression of addictive realism. A major part of this is Marlowe's use of the alphabet. According to her,

> [u]sing the alphabet as an organizing device for a book allows the writer the appearance of authority, logic and order. But the framework is completely arbitrary. The real threat of the loss of organization is symbolized by the vertiginous suggestion of infinity implicit in alphabetical order: you can always sandwich another word in. (*How to Stop Time*, "vertigo," 281)

Alphabetization is then an arbitrary, though necessary, constraint. Most simply, it is a construct: an architecture that redistributes conventional lines of meaning and association. The typical devices of plot, and the chronological introduction of characters are replaced by the more unpredictable machinery of random distribution. In this way, it evades the "grand meaning" and didacticism that is often associated with confession narratives; indeed, at the end of Marlowe's text, there is very little to take away.

Marcus Boon similarly notices that the function of this alphabetization is, for Marlowe, to impose order on what is otherwise chaos (*Road of* Excess, 79). Yet the arbitrariness of its organization speaks to a more subtle operation of the text. Alphabetization is central to Marlowe's project precisely *because* it is arbitrary. The fragmented, discontinuous, and uncoordinated actions of alphabetical arrangement speak to something very real in the experience of heroin itself. Marlowe supposes no good reason her use: there is no central trauma, no life of hardship, nothing but vague curiosity.[77] Like the alphabet, Marlowe's foray into addiction resists any greater meaning that we might like to impart.

Contrary to the confession, which assumes in each transition of plot some essential meaning by which we might decode the logic of addiction (motivations, traumas etc.), Marlowe leaves us only the "facts": the events of her life (carefully selected no doubt), without the implicit logic of chronology. For Marlowe, addiction is in many ways like an alphabet insofar as it provides structure:

> One reason people become junkies is to find some compelling way of organizing their lives on an hour-to-hour basis. Addiction responds to ruptures in traditional chronology by reshaping it, reorganizing otherwise pointless and fragmentary time around the 'need' for a drug, setting up a schedule that is as independent of clock and calendar as big city life. (*How to Stop Time*, "chronology," 57)

Here, the action of heroin on the body, and on human psychology, is to impose an arbitrary redistribution of time. Gone are the conventions of the week, the month and the year as measures of success or of progress. Heroin rejects beginnings and ends in favor of

[77] Very reminiscent of Burroughs.

accumulation; one more hit, one more bag. Heroin, like a dictionary, is endless, depending on the scale at which you view it.

Yet Marlowe's point is not simply that heroin restructures the experience of the user in time, but that heroin is just one way in which American society is turning backwards; it is in this sense that heroin is *nostalgia* for Marlowe. As she has it, "[a]ddiction can show us what is deeply suspect about nostalgia. That drive to return to the past isn't an innocent one. It's about stopping your passage to the future, it's a symptom of the fear of death, and the love of predictable experience" ("addiction," 10). Much like "meditation and yoga" ("car," 49), nostalgia is a perfectly rational reaction to the state of modern life as an attempt to "stop time": "[o]nce upon a time, the future was supposed to be brighter, shinier and more fun…When did the word 'new' lose its luster? Now the past is supposed to hold the hopes that we once confided to the future" ("nostalgia," 235). In this way, heroin is symbolic of modern life: even if people don't use heroin, they use *something* that allows them to cope with the melancholic character of the present, and its relationship to an ever-receding future horizon. Marlowe reasons that when the future holds no promise for a better world, then heroin is just one more technology that we employ: not a disease, but simply a tool with which we might slow down an increasingly unpleasant march forward.

In supplanting the linear and progressive recovery narrative with the circular, semantic "loop"[78] of the encyclopedia, Marlowe insists that the "reality" of twelve-step recovery programs, and their ubiquity in populist notions of addiction, is as convenient as it is artificial. For Marlowe, staying "true" to the story of addiction means displacing, if

[78] See Marlowe's "loop" entry (*How to Stop Time*, 194-198) for more on drug loops.

not totally reinventing, its narrative conventions: a movement from the whole and complete to the partial and fragmented, a movement that replicates the experience of heroin itself. As critic Abigail Gosselin puts it, "[t]hrough the use of vignettes, Marlowe shows us the objective, non-situated, and ever-present nature of being on heroin in a way that a chronological story of drug use, with corresponding explanations of its effects, could never accomplish" (134). Accordingly, it offers a very different realism of addiction than either the purveyors of disease theory or the "tell all" accounts of her addict-peers. It recounts friendships and romantic relationships alongside copping drugs on Saturday night; it puts in conversation the history of her father's illness and her musings on the marketing strategies of heroin dealers (35-36). These accidental juxtapositions speak to a reality central to the experience of heroin itself: unlike the clean and tidy confessions that move inescapably towards recovery, Marlowe presents a world in which recovery is far more accidental than it might seem.

In a literary paradigm dominated by the "bare honesty" of the confession, Marlowe's experimental memoir stands out like a dirty needle. Yet Marlowe's innovative presentation is more than a critique of the genre. It is an attempt to capture something in the experience of addiction that had hitherto been unavailable. As Gosselin points out of Marlowe (among others),"[t]hrough their alternative narrative structures, the authors represent aspects of lived experience more realistically than they could otherwise, as they are unconstrained by the limitations of the dominant paradigm and thus able to achieve more sophisticated purposes." (134) A big part of Marlowe's contribution involves her distaste for the omnipresence of recovery in addiction narratives. As a disease, recovery is framed as the ideal (or perhaps only) proper resolution for addiction. There is no space,

in other words, for an addict to say "I want to be an addict." Unconstrained by the conventions of recovery, Marlowe sees in addiction something other than a disease, and instead constructs a version of addiction that recognizes the value and pleasure that the addict gains from their experience. In many ways, Marlowe's story is precisely this: a lament for something beautiful that had to be left behind.

Where for Burroughs, telling addiction "as it really was" required emphasizing the power of the drug, undisguised and naked on the end of a fork, Marlowe had to upend his representational logic in order to challenge its ideological assumptions. It is in this sense that Marlowe conducts something akin to the "negation of the negation" (as it is called in Marxist criticism). By reimagining Burroughs' logic of addiction, rather than denying it outright, Marlowe adapted and advanced an addictive realism that was relevant and representational. Indeed, as Tomashevsky of the formalist school argues, "realistic material in itself does not have artistic structure and that the formation of an artistic structure requires that reality be reconstructed according to aesthetic laws. Such laws are always, considered in relation to reality, conventional" (Tomashevsky, 83). Realism is dialectic in this sense, as new forms of realism attempt to supersede the conventions of the past, rendering it not realistic in itself, but more realistic by comparison.[79] This is not merely a question of "showing the world as it is," but of altering the grounds by which something like reality becomes visible.

[79] This is one point at which the question of realism becomes murky. On the one hand, Marlowe is establishing the conventions of realism by way of opposition. This is about the genre and style of realism from a literary perspective, but it is equally about showing something "as it really is": that is, the actual events which occurred, and presumably, an accurate cross-section of her own thoughts, feelings and reflections.

Yet what was most controversial about Marlowe's memoir was not its form, nor even its content, but rather the person of Marlowe herself. This is nowhere more evident than in the very critical receptions of *How to Stop Time*, which broadly supposed Marlowe's experience to be "inauthentic" owing to the relative lack of harms her addiction caused her. Of particular interest is the way in which reviewers challenged the authenticity of Marlowe's account: not because they disagreed with the truth of the events depicted but because Marlowe's life failed to replicate the "reality" of addiction that culture had already internalized. The difference, then, was not a question of "truth" but of *style*. Most critics addressed her class position as the default sign of the inauthenticity of her drug experience. They cast doubt either on her motivations for using heroin ("chasing the dragon of hipster cred," according to Rhonda Lieberman), or else imply that her own inability to hit "rock bottom" distinguishes her account from the experience of "real" junkies.[80] These critiques, which steadfastly ignore Marlowe's own acknowledgment of the advantages afforded to her by class, confuse realism with reality: that is, they expect her account to match up to the accepted conventions of "authentic" drug literature, and, finding that comparison lacking, suppose that her version is inauthentic rather than simply different. It is as if, for these critics, any person of a certain class position is incapable of becoming addicted in the first place. They forget that her account of addiction, constrained as it is by the life and times of Ann Marlowe, is the account of a certain time and a certain place, no more meant to replicate the pulp confessions of celebrities than John Cage meant to imitate Elvis.

[80] Gates says of the memoir that it "isn't always the rational and trustworthy disquisition it affects to be."

Because the 1990s saw failure, self-harm and addiction as synonymous, Marlowe's account of a "high-functioning" heroin addict had very little literary traction. As Lieberman jabs, "there's something revolting about a yuppie smirking at the other wrecks while she plays native informant to the 'underground' and ennobles her own habit with lofty intellectualizations" (Lieberman). Of course, the intellectualization of addiction is far from absent in the genre, as the pontifications of Cocteau and De Quincy were precisely the fire in which the "confession" was initially forged. While it might lack the spectacularism of Jerry Stahl and Jim Carroll, *How to Stop Time* nonetheless presents, indeed crafts, a novel vision of addiction: though perhaps one that speaks more to the older realities of De Quincey and Cocteau.

The point of contention then, is not so much a question of reality between reviewer and author (whether Marlowe was "really" addicted or not), but rather a question of *style*, and a contestation over what I have already termed "addictive realism." *How to Stop Time* presents addiction contrary to the "usual cautionary-pornographic thrills: no cooking up with saliva in a spoon, no needles in the neck" (David Gates, *New York Times*). Instead, it presents addiction as a phenomenon. What both reviewers also miss is their own sense of entitlement to Marlowe's perspective, as if they, as writers for *The New York Times*, were somehow self-authorized to critique her experience despite having (likely) no experience with heroin whatsoever. Indeed, if the dominant conventions of heroin memoir tend to be coloured by masculine coding of the grotesque and violent (themes picked up on by both critics), then perhaps one key difference for Marlowe is simply her identity as a woman: almost by default, her experience of heroin

will differ from those in the popular imaginary, and perhaps, be judged "inauthentic" on those grounds.

Of course her style is more informed by her own journalistic background rather than the conventions of pulp: but this doesn't make her account somehow false. In subverting common forms, and in offering her own contrary, "inauthentic" account of addiction, Marlowe challenges dominant ideas of the addict as repentant, desperate, and diseased. Accordingly, we should avoid reading Marlowe, as her detractors do, as the haughty account of an upper-class hipster who's trolling the junk world for kicks,[81] and instead read her as a poignant critic of the times in which she lived. Disease theory had been accepted far and wide, but nonetheless demonstrated some theoretical weaknesses that were not commonly noticed. Accordingly, Marlowe pushed the wheel of addictive realism one groove further and made visible the aspects of addiction that had been previously invisible. And while "nostalgia" has so far lacked the metaphorical success of disease, it remains a usefully different vision of addiction at a time when it is increasingly difficult to view it as anything other than sickness.

Conclusion – Fugitivity

The addict can become a masterpiece. A masterpiece which is above all discussion. A perfect masterpiece, because it is fugitive, without form and without judges…To say of an addict who is in a continual state of euphoria that he is degrading himself is like saying of marble that it is spoilt by Michelangelo, of canvas that it is stained by Raphael, of paper that it is soiled by Shakespeare, of silence that is broken by Bach.

[81] Another notable overlap with Burroughs.

- Jean Cocteau, *Opium The Diary of His Cure* (70-71)

Our culture has lent dark powers to narratives of drug use, more than to the drug itself, and I am taking advantage of them, like a painter using the severity of northern light.
- Ann Marlowe, *How to Stop Time,* “thread” (280)

While I hesitate to follow Cocteau in his reading of the addict as masterpiece, it is hard to deny that the perfect “essence” of the addict lies in its being, as he puts it, *fugitive*. Cocteau’s use of the term is insightful, given that the Latin root *fuga* (flight) was the basis for the French *fuir* (to flee), and finally in English, *fugue*.[82] Indeed, calling addiction *fugitive* furnishes a productive reading of its duality: not only is it a fugitive experience in the body of the addict—fleeting and impermanent—but it is also a phenomenon that is deeply implicated in memory and forgetting. What is intoxication if not an attempt to forget oneself, one’s surroundings? What is withdrawal if not the memory of the body, stuck in a constant state of nostalgia for an irreconcilable loss? If addiction is synonymous with deprivation (that one cannot “feel” addicted unless one goes without), then addiction is itself a fugitive processes, only ever appearing where the drug is not.

The preceding chapter has tried to show that addictive culture is no less fugitive than the addict her/himself. By examining the history of disease theory relative to its literary endorsements and critiques, we can see how the “meaning” of addiction is a cyclical and repetitive process that moves through the body of the addict just as it moves

[82] Cocteau’s work wasn’t composed in English, but the French *fugatif* is nearly identical in use and derivation.

through the revolutions of history. It is a process that implies memory and forgetting, as the ideas of the past are recycled into new forms and put to new uses. It is hard to ignore the fact that new theories of addiction are seldom created: they are more typically recovered, brought back from a context in which they lacked the requisite realism to be believed.

Consequently, it is tempting to understand addiction as metaphor: something that tries to capture a "real" process that we can never quite understand. And as a metaphor, it is equally tempting to dismiss its various incarnations as "cultural" and "constructed" rather than as "real" or "objective." But one of the most curious aspects of addiction, and one that I have tried to detail in the preceding chapter, is that addiction is unlike most metaphors insofar as its variations actively change its experience. Disease theory didn't passively "represent" an abstract idea that would be otherwise unavailable: it changed people's understandings of themselves and their desires, and had far reaching economic, social and political effects. Disease theory is inescapably symbolic but is no less powerful for it.

The effects of this variance in addictive realism are nowhere clearer than in the opposing accounts of Marlowe and Cocteau above. Where Cocteau notices transcendent powers in the drug, Marlowe sees heroin as an idol that no simple chemical can live up to. For Marlowe, the pleasure of drugs is ultimately no pleasure at all: as she says, heroin, "is designed to disappoint you" ("addiction," 9). For Cocteau, drugs represent the highest pinnacles of human being, and its fault lies not in its pleasures, but the impossibility of their maintenance: "I remain convinced, despite my failures, that opium can be good and that it is entirely up to us to make it well-disposed. We must know how to handle it" (29-

30). To be sure their drugs of choice were different, as Marlowe snorted heroin while Cocteau smoked opium. Yet this difference seems to me incapable of accounting for such a wide gap of experience: one sees the drug's pleasures as incredibly real, and the other sees them as symbolic (to borrow from Lacanian terminology).

Between them lies something closer to the truth. As I hope to have shown, the pleasures and pains of addiction are neither wholly on the side of the drug itself (despite its addictive chemistry and its profound euphoria), nor wholly on the side of environment, culture and subjective experience. That we desire drugs both on the level of culture and chemistry seems inarguable. And if there is no inescapably "real" mode of addiction (and certainly no one has come up with such a model yet), then "realism" is only ever achieved through *difference*.[83]

It is in this sense that I would understand addiction as "fugitive" on the level of culture, as it moves from the codes and confines of one ideology to the next, ever seeking new forms of overlap, legitimacy and mutual assurance. Whether in science or sociology, narrative or history, addiction has multiple points of entry and exit by which it might secure an ever more sophisticated sense of realism. As Marlowe suggests, it is culture itself that has lent her narrative "dark powers." So too was the case for Burroughs, where an authoritarian regime of anti-narcotic sentiment lent him an extraordinary amount of power. In creating a given hegemony, society produces its own points of contestation and difference that can be usefully exploited, a strategy that has been liberally applied in addiction narrative.

[83] That is, in a contingent style that emphasizes certain aspects of addiction while ignoring others.

At the same time however, it is important to note that resistance against a cultural dominant of addiction must be as fugitive as the phenomenon it attempts to describe. If addiction has a history, and the experience of addiction is truly variable over time, then any version of addiction may be outdated the moment it is set down. Burroughs' algebra of need possessed great critical power, only to be subsumed into dominant models years later. So too might Marlowe's contributions—if nostalgia ever becomes incorporated into a dominant paradigm—be made to serve a purpose that is quite distinct from her intentions.

Both Marlowe's and Burroughs' accounts show the same kinds of conspicuous holes that we see in the accounts of Anslinger, holes that other authors would correct, oppose and (re)imagine. For one, Burroughs' and Marlowe's first-hand observations on junk culture showed only one side of the addictive coin; Burroughs was among the poor and the depraved members of the junk community, but was never really one of them.[84] While his years of impoverished experience might say otherwise, Burroughs sometimes saw himself almost as a tourist in the junk world: as he said to Ginsberg about *Junky*, "[y]ou might say it was a travel book more than anything else. It starts where I first make contact with junk, and it ends where no more contact is possible" (*Letters*, 83).

Similarly, Marlowe was working a high-power corporate job during most of her addiction. While she saw friends and acquaintances throw away their lives with heroin, such inclinations never crossed her experience. Indeed, she was disposed to thinking about junk as a "choice," and its concomitant self-destruction as a similar kind of choice: as she puts it, "[t]he people who 'ruin their lives' with heroin (or any drug) were

[84] Burroughs received financial support from his family for most of his life.

searching, consciously or not, for some way to self-destruct" ("Listening to Heroin," 27). This might have been true for Marlowe, but how far does the authority of her experience reach? Does every addict follow the rule of her experience? Does every addict have to have some sort of death wish? Clearly Marlowe's experience is far from universal, and we should be careful when examining her perspective relative to her historical circumstance, and how that circumstance differs importantly from others.

For both writers then, as powerful and compelling as their own realisms are, it is important that we not confuse their accounts with reality. Their views, while instructive of how heroin operates under certain circumstances, are no more "real" than disease theory in regard to some inalienable "truth" about drugs. In part, moving away from the scope presented by both Burroughs and Marlowe would require again upsetting the assumptions of their presentation. Where for them, addiction was at least partially a literary pursuit, such detachment was not a luxury afforded to every author.

My next chapter pursues authors who understand addiction to be a fundamentally different problem. If, for Burroughs and Marlowe, writing about addiction meant capturing something about its phenomenology—what it "really was" from the perspective of cautious proximity—other authors would attempt to capture addiction as it was up close, by presenting an unflinching, "brutal honesty" that was as much the product of experience as it was of the popular genres in which they wrote. Writers such as Donald Goines, Iceberg Slim and James Frey would generate a very different literary discourse of addiction, one that was not interested in the finer philosophical points of what addiction was or wasn't, but instead focused on the spectacle, horror and brutality of addictive experience.

Chapter 2 – Antagonizing the Popular: Publication, Politics and Addiction After Burroughs

Introduction

As we've seen in the previous chapter, 1950s America was the first period in which addiction was being understood as a major political problem and not just simply a question of medicine and morality. As the early writers of addiction—Jean Cocteau, William S. Burroughs, Alexander Trocchi[85]—insisted, addiction could never be simply a pastime for the immoral and the insane. It was instead a phenomenon that touched many aspects of human life: psychology, class, and social circumstance were all effective of and (affected by) the habitual use of drugs. These writers argued for addiction as a human tendency, one that belonged as much to the people of the street as did to workers and families.

Yet for all their innovation in showing addiction as it "really" was, these writers had only gone part way in solving the problem posed by experience; while they were able to insert experience as an important aspect of understanding the plight of addicts, they ultimately failed to consider the fallibility of their own experience, and the fact that their encounters with addiction might not resemble the experiences of everyone. By insisting on addiction as a human capacity, and as a problem of exposure (or even of boredom), writers like Burroughs and Marlowe deemphasized factors such as racism, poverty, and trauma in favour of a more general metaphysics of addiction.[86] They each espoused a

[85] While not studied at length in the following analysis, Alexander Trochi's incredible 1960 novel, *Cain's Book*, is a fascinating investigation into the metaphysics of addiction.
[86] As detailed in the previous chapter this is to say that Burroughs and Marlowe derived general principles of addiction from their own experience and theorized addiction writ-large: how addiction operated outside

theory of addiction *in general*, and in so doing overlooked some of the implications of their own position, especially in terms of class and race, and the way it coloured their experience.

The implications of class and race would be central, rather than tertiary, for later writers who saw addiction happen every day at the intersection between disenfranchisement and drugs after the 1950s. This opened up space for writers such as Donald Goines, Iceberg Slim, Clarence Cooper Jr., and Claude Brown, who operated as a corrective to earlier works on addiction. While these writers weren't responding directly to the work of Burroughs, they offered a version of addiction that wasn't the result of "boredom" or "drifting": for these writers, drugs and addiction were part of the everyday rhythms of their environments. For many, drugs offered an escape from the conditions of living in urban poverty; they could not wander into drugs simply because they were always already surrounded by them. This tradition of representation, which begins in the 1960s, remains relevant today in television, most notably in David Simon's *The Wire*, which presents drug addiction alongside the trappings of a very specific environment: an environment that coordinates the usefulness and desirability of drugs.

While Burroughs had experienced the slum life, he was never its product. He may have delved into the lifestyle of the street but wasn't beholden to it as other writers of addiction would be. And because a healthy amount of distance was always possible, if not always enjoyed, for Burroughs and Marlowe, there were aspects of that life that remained under realized and under theorized in their works. Marlowe retained a high

and beyond empirical knowledge and moral implications. What they forget is just how important their own point of view (as well as their historical and economic situations) were in determining the theories of addiction that they favoured.

paying job throughout the course of her addiction; Burroughs continued to receive regular financial support from his family, who also bailed him out several times when he was criminally charged.[87] Accordingly, their versions of addiction missed important aspects of drug use, especially for disenfranchised users.

Donald Goines, for instance, was an African American writer who spent the majority of his life in the ghettos of Detroit, using drugs in places that were identical to those he wrote about. For Goines, addiction wasn't merely a question of "drifting" into a junk lifestyle. As Malcolm X wrote of Lower Harlem 1965, "this was the worst of the ghetto, the poorest people, the ones who in every ghetto keep themselves narcotized to keep from having to face their miserable existence (118). The point of difference between Burroughs and "street fiction" is not so much their content (needles, overdoses, withdrawals) but the conclusions that their narratives draw. The grand speculations of nostalgia, "junk time" and "junk cells" are absent in Goines, having been replaced with the horror and spectacle of the street: events, characters, and places that are too terrible to be true. Indeed, many such situations were fictitious, yet their placement in gritty street literature gives them a strange character, somewhere between true and false. On the one hand, these works try, as Burroughs did, to walk the uninitiated through the everyday life of heroin use. Yet unlike Burroughs, whose content was largely plausible (though still shocking for readers[88]), these texts present "real" and spectacle in the same breath: hyper-realized and exaggerated versions of the truth alongside common, everyday experiences.

[87] Anne Douglas describes the situation aptly in her introduction to the Burroughs anthology *Word Virus*, saying that "[h]e always had some family funds at his disposal, and he was quite aware that he possessed, in Kerouac's word, 'finish,'—it was visible at all times that he did not belong to the 'torturable class'" (Douglas, xviii).

[88] One can think of episodes in *Junky*, such as Lee rolling lushes in the subway, or people ratting on friends etc, that are shocking but also in line with what one might expect. Goines presents events that are not

For Goines and his literary precursor, Iceberg Slim, heroin was certainly a lifestyle, but one that had more to do with disenfranchisement than middle-class malaise. The street literature is neither philosophical nor didactic in its pitch; instead, these works refocus "experience" on the grotesque spectacle of human-being-on-drugs.

For these writers the theoretical abstractions of drugs are lost in the difficulty and repetition of the hustle, the score and the comedown. In so doing they produced a new style of addiction, one that was capable of speaking to the reality of *their* own experience.[89]

As we saw in the previous chapter, there is no such thing as simply "telling the truth" about addiction.[90] This is perhaps doubly so for writers who tried to describe the brutal and violent conditions that were commonplace in the urban ghettos where drug use flourished in 1950s and 60s America. For one, the conditions of poverty that were intimately tied to drug addiction prevented the majority of addicts from being able to tell their stories at all. Indeed, for some writers, publication was a way out of the poverty-stricken lifestyle that had seen them hooked in the first place. Goines was paid only $750 per book according to an interview with Wanda Colman, an editor at Holloway House ("Harvard in Hell," 123). Because these writers were so economically disadvantaged, the logistics of publishing accounts of black addiction narrative limited the genre in the volume of contributions while altering the characteristics of their composition.

plausible: particularly in the character and events surrounding Porky, and his maniacal control of addicts in his "care."

[89] Following the work of the introduction, this is also to claim that despite doing the same drug, Burroughs and Goines had radically different experiences. This is because, at base, the consumption of drugs is as much a product of the drug itself as the environment in which it is used, and the purposes for which it was consumed.

[90] To an extent this is the case for every work of literature, as no narrative can somehow exhaust an event it describes. Yet the particularities of addiction—its status as both a criminal and medical reality—make it importantly different, and arguably more difficult to describe than common phenomenon.

It should be no surprise that many of the popular American drug narratives published in the later 20th century were either written by wealthy white people (Burroughs, Frey, Kiedis), or by poor black writers who used publication as a way to escape the street (Robert Beck, aka Iceberg Slim, Donald Goines).[91] The class and racial implications of addiction thus tailored a very particular kind of narrative, one that tends to be either unreflective of the material conditions of addiction generally (owing to the favorable class position of an author), or else is the product of an impoverished author for whom writing popular fiction was the most attractive (or only) means of publication. This was certainly the case for Beck, whose influential *Pimp: The Story of my Life* inspired generations of black artists, from his immediate successor Donald Goines to hip hop artists of the 90s. In 1965 when Beck was writing, he had just had his 3rd child and could hardly afford milk and cigarettes, making authorship a golden opportunity to improve the conditions of his life after his career as a pimp.[92]

Yet for these writers, popular fiction was more than just a cash cow: it was an opportunity to bring the political dimensions of street life before the public eye. As James Gifford (Beck's biographer and scholar of street literature) documents in *Street Poison*, Beck was less interested in the critical reception of his book, and more interested in writing for "the disadvantaged whites and blacks, on a fifth grade level"[93] (Qtd. in *Street Poison*, 158). Gifford also mentions how writing pulp fiction promised economic mobility to Goines, who "looked to publishing ghetto crime novels as a way to escape his

[91] This isn't to say that these were the only ways of writing addiction post-Burroughs. It is for instance difficult to say where the drug fueled science fiction of Phillip K. Dick, or the drug induced accounts of Hubert Selby Jr. fit into this continuum. These writers were neither wealthy nor a product of the racist and systematic poverty that Goines and Beck experienced. Their situations will be explored in more depth in the following chapter.
[92] According to his biographer, James Gifford (155),
[93] From "Ex-Convict Now Movie Author." Interview, *Boston Herald*, Feb 5 1973 (p.17).

criminal past": that he "had to write as much as a book per month to support his wife and two young daughters as well as an ongoing heroin habit" (*Pimping Fictions*, 75).

These kinds of restrictions meant that the most common form of publication for addiction narratives at this time were the popular genres because they offered the best avenue for commercial success. Poor addicts, while likely capable of writing great literary accounts of addiction, were more incentivized by the economic advantages posed by writing quickly and prolifically. Accordingly, what we find within the literary record are many narratives that are caught between two antagonistic drives. On the one hand, the desire for the political representation of addicts and addict experience (a depiction of what life on the street is *really* like), and on the other, the desires of publishers who wanted fast, disposable and sensationalist forms of narrative that were both truthful (a sign of their authenticity and a definite aid in marketability), and dramatic (in some ways the opposite of authentic).

Several writers managed to fit these constraints and created some of the most compelling and unique addiction narratives ever written, especially in the 1960s and 70s. While this was not the first period in which addiction had been pursued within popular genres (with the work of Burroughs and even De Quincey arguably fitting the bill), it was a novel period in terms of the legal and social sanctions against drugs. Goines was writing at a time when heroin had an established history amongst urban black communities (as documented in Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*, as early as 1940s), yet just months before full war was declared on drugs in 1971.

As I will argue, the texts born of these twin desires for both political representation and commercial success succeeded only in producing a politics of

disarticulation whereby the revolutionary, critical and realist force of such novels/memoirs are simultaneously undone by the forms and genres through which they are rendered. Following the work of Fredric Jameson, I suggest that popular novels of addiction, post-1960, tend to articulate the real, material grounds for addictive tendencies and then proceed to solve them on the level of fantasy. Rather than leave open the antagonisms of class and race that are rife in accounts of addiction, these texts actively disarticulate their own political force, to borrow a term from Ernesto Laclau, and produce a version of addiction that is as stillborn as the horrifying image of a dead infant that concludes Goines' *Dopefiend*.

Ultimately this chapter investigates what happens to properly political representations of the addict when they were filtered, as they almost had to be, through the generic conventions of the popular. Part of this involves examining the role of the commodity form: the ways in which publication, and the necessity of commercial success, became an internalized and integral part of their forms and, accordingly, their ideological position. Part of this analysis is inevitably a question of style; as popular works, this typically involves a kind of "brutal honesty" where the validity of a confession or account of addiction is measured by the degree to which it horrifies. It also rests on the authenticity of language[94]: the kinds of slang and street talk that spoke to the reality of black experience. As Gifford has said *Pimp*, "it is written in black street slang

[94] As Mauer and Vogel noted in 1954, "[t]he association of certain terms with specific experiences tends to create an associative pattern which undoubtedly plays a part in the satisfaction which the addict gets from the use of the argot" (*Narcotics and Narcotic Addiction*, 259). This is particularly the case in urban literature, which demonstrates a distinct lexicon depending on the city in question.

so obscure that there is a glossary in the back to translate words like 'mudkicker' (prostitute), 'crumb crusher' (baby), and 'Hog' (Cadillac)" (*Street Poison, 3).*

Following the work of Birmingham school scholar David Morley, I suggest that the "realism" of these popular works cannot solely be measured by their ability to match the people and events that were said to have taken place. Realism is also produced at the intersection of reader and author, such that the text, in order to be considered realistic, must overlap with the expectations and beliefs of its audience. For the case of Holloway House (Goines and Beck's publisher), this audience was almost exclusively black, for both their novels and magazines.

The chapter will begin with an overview of Fredric Jameson's definitive work on popular culture, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" and Marxist theorist Ernesto Laclau's "Metaphor and Social Antagonisms." Together, these works establish a theoretical lens that clarifies the complex interplay between popular texts and the ideological contexts that permeate their production. Ultimately, this provides an avenue for thinking about how addiction narratives were forged under a complex set of ideological assumptions, which in no small degree accounts for their complicated and contradictory views of addiction, class, gender and race.

I will then turn to an analysis of several popular works of addiction narrative, and analyze in each how, as Amiri Baraka has said, "[i]deology and style are the same thing" (n.p.). While Goines' *Dopefiend* and Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* could not be further apart in terms of their contexts, they each speak to the double-bind of representing addiction "truthfully" within the popular. As we'll see, Goines' style of "brutal honesty" is caught halfway between raw street authenticity and melodramatic spectacle: it bears

the marks of work that has been written quickly, driven by a plot that alternates between moving tragedy and outlandish horror. Its dialogue is sometimes predictable and often extensive, with a liberal smattering of curse words. Yet the most compelling dimension of Goines' style might be found it what I would call its psychological realism: its ability to contextualize the actions and behaviours of addicts using backstories and flashbacks. These moments of intense introspection offer invaluable insights into how addiction is not merely a choice, but is instead the product of a hundred other choices, events, and traumas that preceded it.

The second half of this chapter will examine how this style of "brutal honesty" had, by the time of James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, become so internal to the genre that Frey's own fictitious narrative was able to appear realistic while being melodramatic and fictional throughout: a strange reversal of Burroughs' own deadpan presentation of events. While Frey's style has its roots in the work of Burroughs, and in particular his use of short, simple, declarative sentences ("Junk wins by default." "I ended up hooked."), the stylistics of truth telling would continue to develop as writers adapted to new legal, medical and political contexts. Frey's work is an inversion of Goines; whereas *Dopefiend* had to be a trashy version of the truth in order to publishable, *A Million Little Pieces* had to be a truthy version of trash.

Each uses distinct styles to (re)articulate dominant theories of addiction in an attempt to say something "true" about the nature of addiction. Each offers a radical critique of how American society understands addiction, yet both ultimately fail to cross the generic constraints as they present oddly realist accounts of addiction that dissolve in the face of their fantastic conclusions. Indeed, both Frey and Goines's work enact very

powerful critiques of dominant addictive theories, yet the conclusions of both narratives undo some, if not all, of their critical work by resolving on the level of fantasy. These fantasies merely reiterate the dominant codes of addictive discourse and bring into relief (and in some ways dilute) their avowedly political messages. In this way, these accounts end up largely reiterating the dominant and available ideology of addiction: that addiction is the problem of individuals, and not necessarily of society; that addiction is a disease, in a way, but one that individuals can, and perhaps should, be held responsible for.

Theorizing the Popular

The previous chapter examined texts that could easily have been studied in light of the popular. *Junky* was, during its initial publication in 1953, packaged as a work of pulp well before anyone considered Burroughs to possess any literary merit (a proposition that even Burroughs himself doubted). Even the earliest example of addiction narrative, De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, had its own popular, and perhaps spectacular sensibilities. Yet what we find in the works of Goines and Frey is an exaggeration of the same popular qualities found in earlier examples. As I have outlined previously in the introduction, there is no such thing as a single, or unified impulse in the construction of addiction narrative. A work may be both a clear example of popular culture and still be innovative and political; while there is an assumption of popular works that they lack skill in writing or political impact (likely a hangover of predispositions in Marxist examinations of popular culture, which tend to repudiate popular forms and celebrate intellectual ones, in accordance with Modernist thought), many works in this dissertation will demonstrate the opposite. In relegating some works

under the designation "popular" I am by no means excluding the popularity of innovative works or the innovative style of popular ones. Rather, I am identifying one dominant style of addiction among many that exist simultaneously in the same text.

Most of the narratives studied in this dissertation are works of popular culture to some degree, yet only some of them are best described through recourse to the popular. This is to say that for Frey and Goines, their status *as* popular works are indispensable to the forms of addiction that they articulate, especially in regard to the unusual processes of their publications. That *Requiem for a Dream* presents addiction using a variety of characters and points of view, while *Junky* takes a detached, anthropological view of addiction signifies fundamentally different styles and, accordingly, a different politics of addiction. While these are both popular texts, their popularity is somewhat incidental to what I am locating as fundamentally different approaches to addictive realism. In understanding texts *as* works of popular culture I am interested primarily in two elements of their production and consumption. First, I am interested in their status as commodities, and their place within a culture where commodities are the dominant forms in which we encounter cultural artifacts. Here I want to think about the cultural function of popular texts, as well as their relative possibilities for expressing "real" political struggle and critique (as they are certainly capable of). Second, I am interested in the reception and cultural function of popular texts: how they anticipate an audience, how an audience anticipates them, and how that very act of anticipation and consumption modifies the ideological profile of a given text.

Jameson has usefully argued that what we call mass or pop culture has been operative for just as long as cultural artifacts have understood themselves as

commodities. Jameson identifies a shift in cultural production between popular folk art of the past and popular culture today, along the lines their supposed ends or purposes. Unlike today's popular productions, older forms of popular art weren't created with any particular point or purpose. For Jameson, it is the commodity form that

> introduces the possibility of structural and historical differentiation into what was conceived as the universal description of the aesthetic experience as such and in whatever form… we can now phrase their instrumentalization, their reorganization, along the means/ends split, in a new way by saying that by its transformation into a commodity, a thing, of whatever type, has been reduced to a means for its own consumption. ("Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," 131)

This is to say that the popular work, in its very form and structure, operates as the justification of, or argument for, the value of its own consumption. Today, popular culture is created and designed for consumption, and accordingly it has internalized the formal qualities of "consumptabiltiy." Jameson cites the example of detective fiction, where the narrative "payoff" (whodunit) becomes the locus around which the consumption of the text operates. The process of the mystery itself (as well as the quality or joy of the reading process) is reduced, in his words, to "sheer means." (132)

Jameson's findings are helpful in the context of addiction narrative because it allows us think about how the *formal* qualities of a text engineer the possible expressions of its content: how the structure of a text, as commodity, determines in advance its capacities for representation, even its sense of realism. Usefully, Jameson provides a way of reading the ideological function of popular texts without resorting to classic models of false consciousness and distortion. For Jameson, a text may contain different and

contradictory impulses at the same time: it isn't so much that popular, or even literary texts, are refusing to be political or realist, but rather that their sense of political realism is undermined by the purposiveness of their forms, either as commodity or (as in the case of the avant-garde) not.

Characteristically, Jameson turns to Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* concerning the forms of ideological manipulation and distortion found in popular culture. Unsatisfied with their general claim that the ideological force of culture merely distorts political reality, Jameson turns to the Freudian notion of repression to solve the psychic and social function of cultural commodities: according to Jameson, conceiving of

> desire in social terms now allows us to think repression and wish-fulfillment together within the unity of a single mechanism, which strategically arouses fantasy content within careful symbolic containment structures which defuse it, gratifying intolerable, unrealizable, properly imperishable desires only to the degree to which they can again be laid to rest. (141)

Jameson describes the work of mass culture in terms of repression: that mass culture represses social anxieties through "the narrative construction of imaginary resolutions and by the projection of an optical illusion of social harmony." (141) It is not so much that popular culture hides or conceals political realities, but rather that it expresses them in an ideologically neutral form by resolving implicit ideological conflicts and antagonisms on the level of fantasy: in ways that could never happen *in reality*. As we will see, this is a question of particular import when we are dealing with addictive texts that are invested in notions of authenticity and truth-telling.

In thinking of the conflict between political realism and popular impulses, Jameson's work recalls the work of another celebrated Marxist thinker who is useful in describing precisely these kinds of political antagonisms. Ernesto Laclau's essay, "Metaphor and Social Antagonisms," echoes Jameson's claims about the fantastic resolution of material conflicts in its discussion of antagonism and difference. Laclau defines antagonism as "the experience of the limits of any possible objectivity, the way in which any objectivity reveals the partial and arbitrary character of its own objectification…And in this sense antagonism locates itself in the limits of language and can only exist as a disruption of language, that is, as metaphor." (256) Laclau's work speaks directly to the case of addictive realism that we are here concerned with, because it realizes the limits of language as it may be employed in the service of realism: its always failed attempt to describe a "realistic," "objective" story of addiction reveals the core ideological antagonisms at the heart of the very concept of addiction.

For Laclau, "antagonism" is always political and structural, while "differences" are objective (a matter of fact or of reference). Today for example, various "addictions" are presented as though they were a question of mere difference ("I am addicted to cigarettes, you are addicted to cheese") through recourse to a hegemonic understanding of addiction as a universal experience. So while these different forms of addiction seem to express mere "difference," owing to the fact that each is an example of "addiction" writ large, they are in fact *antagonistic* formulations. They each articulate a fundamentally different etiology, a different system of signs and symptoms by which their respective objects are understood. When we unite these two, properly separate, phenomenon under the same categorization we disarticulate the fundamental antagonism

by which they are opposed. In so doing we lose the political potentials of their articulation *as* antagonism.

As we will see, so too do the cultural expressions of addiction proceed by reducing antagonism to difference, particularly in their realization of fantastic solutions to the beleaguered lives of addicts. Often this disarticulation operates on the level of spectacle, either in the valorized image of evil (in the figure of the pusher) or good (in the figure of a recovered addict-hero). Other times it may be found in valorizations of the drug itself, which becomes either an all-powerful, irresistible force of pure compulsion, or else a casual, almost trivial excuse for self-destruction.

Dopefiend

The white powder looked innocent lying there in the open, but this was the drug of the damned, the curse of mankind: heroin, what some call 'smack,' others 'junk,' 'snow,' 'stuff,' 'poison,' 'horse.' It had different names, but it still had the same effect. To all of its users, it was slow death. Smokey stood up and swept the room with her brutal stare. She was one of them and they knew there was no story they could tell her because she had heard them all.

- Donald Goines, *Dopefiend* (15)

Donald Goines' bestseller *Dopefiend* was published in 1971, just three years before his death. Indeed, his own first-hand experience of impoverished life in urban Detroit would serve as a powerful mark of his work's authenticity. While it would be difficult to call Goines work "realist" in any typical sense, its commitment to showing, in

gritty detail, the lived experiences of poor, urban blacks offered a new take on addictive realism that had, up until that point, been largely unexplored. The earlier works of Chester Himes (most notably in *If He Hollers*), Richard Wright[95] (in *Native Son*), as well as Claude Brown, provide some context on urban black experience, and even sheds some light on the ways in which drugs and alcohol featured into those communities. But it wouldn't be until later, in the writings of Goines, Beck, and Clarence Copper Jr.,[96] that the raw, visceral, lived experience of the junkie would take center stage.

Himes' novel is a particularly interesting forerunner to Goines as it outlines the lived experience of blackness prior to the explosion of the War on Drugs and its devastating effects on black urban populations. *If He Hollers* takes place in Los Angeles in the 1940s, where, 40 years later, crack cocaine and police brutality would be introduced into the already volatile racial conflicts that had been brewing there for decades. Himes outlines a context in which drugs could come to have the impact that they did; the volatility that would later be blamed on drugs was in fact the product of a deeply seeded history of social and economic disparity. While a detailed history of race and drugs in LA, or in other urban centres such as Detroit, Chicago, and New York,[97] are beyond the scope of the present work, it's worth noting that there is a deep and important history connecting racialized experience and drugs in America's largest cities.

In terms of Goines and Beck, this history informs the parameters of "authenticity" as it applied to their works. Unbeknownst to Goines, his own authentic, lived experience

[95] Wright's work, while it avoids the question of narcotics, is instructive in terms of thinking about the kinds of social conditioning that motivate the decisions of impoverished urbanites, like those featured in Goines and Beck. Wright's naturalism is also an instructive context for thinking about how Goines would similarly attempt to show the lived experience of life in the ghetto.
[96] And arguably Gil-Scott Heron, at the very least in his street "whodunit," *The Vulture*.
[97] New York in particular has produced a disproportionate amount of addiction narratives.

of the urban ghetto, its poverty and its violence, would become a complex locus for a host of different ideological interests. This would come to include the commercial interests of both himself and his publishers, as well as the political interests of an underrepresented black working class whose lives and experiences Goines was able to capture and transmit in ways that had, until that point, been all but impossible. What is most interesting about Goines' work might be found in its paradoxical style of realism and exoticism, an ambiguity that is operative in his work just as it was in the social and economic environment that rendered his style a successful commodity. That is, the "spectacle" of urban black experience as a novel form of representation became encoded in Goines according to the generic constraints of pulp. Thus Goines' work was made to serve a contradictory cultural function in terms of its publication. Paradoxically, it had to be "authentic" (in the sense that it could speak to the lack of representation felt by urban, working class blacks) but a very regimented form of that authenticity: one that would avoid the messy questions of race and politics that Goines' publishers sought to avoid.

Initially, the political dimensions of blackness were of interest to Goines' publisher, Holloway house (as can be seen in their publication of Beck's *Naked Soul of Iceberg Slim* in 1971, which contained radically political material). Yet by the time that Goines was working with Holloway a few years later, the publishers were far less interested in anything having to do with politics.[98] As Emory "Butch" Holmes (a former editor of Holloway's *Players* magazine) says in one interview, "[n]o Stories about blacks in history at all…No stories about blacks in any other country…No stories about blacks in any kind of trouble…No stories relating to black painting or the plastic arts…No

[98] Most obviously because of the political fallout of the civil rights movement and rise of the Black Power movement—the publishers thus wanted to avoid any unwanted tension that might be racially motivated.

Stories about politics. So you couldn't [have covered] the Obama campaign" ("Harvard in Hell," 130-33). Gifford notices the paradox of representation that authors like Goines and Beck faced. According to Gifford, Holloway House "provided an innovative commercial space for [Beck] and other black writers to expand the representation of African American culture in the public sphere," but did so "within a narrowly conceived field of literary production…which sought to contain the representations as sensationalist exoticism." (*Pimping*, 47) Gifford calls black crime literature a "paradoxical expression of black popular culture" (*Pimping*, 5) precisely because of this mix of realism, on the one hand, and stereotyped spectacularism on the other.

So the realism of *Dopefiend* was made to serve distinct ends. For Holloway House, the "reality" of Goines' narrative was spectacular and marketable; a device for profit and a source of entertainment for readers. Indeed, the value of Goines' gritty, affective style that alternates between soul crushing realism and melodramatic spectacle was by no means lost on his publisher. The "authentic" experience of Goines was critical to the press' marketing strategy after his death. As the back of *Brazilian Nights* (1992) says of Goines' *Black Gangster*:

> FICTION, but it's based on personal experience! A large part of Donald Goines' 39 years was spent being a successful pimp with a new Cadillac, a thief, an armed robber and a small time heroin dealer…DONALD GOINES, savagely gunned down at the age of 39, was the undisputed master of the black experience novel. He lived by the code of the streets and exposed in each of his 16 books the rage, frustration and torment spinning through the inner city maze. (172)

Gifford notices a similar, and unsettling, strategy in earlier editions as well:

> In the weeks following Goines's death, Holloway House sent the following ad copy to book distributors: 'Donald Goines is dead. Executed. The most talented writer of the black experience novel died in a real life scene from one of his own books. Stock up on all of Goines's books now. Use our special new display. They will be in great demand.' ("Harvard in Hell," 126)

The style of Goines, and its uneasy combination of first-hand experience and melodrama captured precisely Holloway House's desire for a depoliticized realism of black experience. This style was capable of speaking to the void of representation left by the racism of other presses who refused to publish black "street" authors, yet in such a way that hegemonic and stereotyped views of black experience could remain intact. This is not to suggest that Goines somehow wrote his characters in stereotype, as this was far from the case. Rather, I would suggest that there is a nuanced balance in Goines between representing black culture according to the conventions of the pulp genre, and showing a plausible, genuine motivational psychology behind black experience.

For Holloway House this involved repeating the cycles of exploitation found everywhere in America at the time. For Goines this exploitation was acute, as his publishers profited directly from the hardships of his life. By criminally underpaying Goines they secured a steady flow of "authentic" experiences of hardship and poverty. The profitability, and indeed marketability, of this genre of fiction was thus predicated on the failure and tragedy of its authors. It was more than exploitation; it was a cruel and grotesque appropriation of the text's authenticity that inverted its immanent and radical politics. As Gifford argues,

> [h]ere we can see how sinister this use of the 'real' can become employed as a marketing strategy to sell books in the Holloway House system. Rather than a descriptive or critical category, the discursive use of authenticity becomes a convenient tool for the culture industry of black street literature to rationalize its own existence. (*Pimping*, 95)

Not only did this authenticity provide Holloway house with a marketable product, it also gave them the satisfaction of contributing to the vacuum that racism had created in the cultural landscape. It solidified them as a "progressive" publisher for black writers.

The case of Goines is definitive of the paradoxical relationship between the disenfranchised black addict of the 1970s and political representation. *Dopefiend* is a short, violent and graphic pulp novel that traces the drug-fueled experiences of a young black couple in the poor neighborhoods of Detroit. Very little scholarship on Goines exists, arguably owing to the "pulp" quality of his works, and their focus on the violent and grotesque realities of life in underprivileged, black ghettos. More specifically, the novel's graphic depictions of heroin injection (often in people's necks, or into abscesses and infections), sexual violence, murder, and the squalid, destitute environments in which the addicts persist (the shooting gallery, burnt out motels, jail) are a visceral assault on the sensibilities of its readers. *Dopefiend* combines the most melodramatic, unreal, and spectacular scenes of violence and gore alongside stark forms of psychological and political realism. In this sense, it is a realism that expands the scope of what might constitute realism in the first place.[99]

[99] In the sense that portraying something "realistically" is as much about scope as it is content. A very small cross section of heroin culture (perhaps wealthy, white, male users in New York) could be "realistic" without being representative of addiction. Goines' work contributes very usefully to addictive realism by stretching its scope, being a more "exemplary" (realistic) take on what addiction is and how it operates.

The narrative's political ambiguity is apparent in two competing narrative strands that follow two distinct sets of class interests. One narrative, Terry's, uses her as a warning against the dangers of heroin. As a young, middle-class black girl Terry's life is slowly picked apart through mere *exposure* to heroin. The powerful drug slowly takes over until she succumbs to prostitution to pay for her habit, fully owning the life of the dopefiend. The second narrative depicts Teddy (Terry's boyfriend) and Minnie (who Terry later joins in the sex trade). Heroin for them is not merely a question of exposure but rather a way of coping with the realities of their existence. Each is afforded a brief (though indicative) back-story that explains how their environments condition their present experience of drugs. Unlike Terry's story (which suggests that drugs are dangerous in and of themselves, and furthermore dangerous to anyone that consumes them), Goines uses Teddy and Minnie to demonstrate a "logic" of addiction: the poverty and abuse that may affect or condition the importance of drugs in people's lives.

The first narrative traces the fall of the more or less innocent Terry, who has a supportive family, her own car, and a part-time job at a local department store. Her use is initiated through her association with Teddy who is already an addict. Most striking in their relationship is the wide gap in class that separates them, and the fantastic, quick and dramatic means by which Terry becomes hooked. The implausibility of Terry's speedy addiction is echoed in the views of her father Herman:

> Herman had no doubts about his daughter. Dope was something you read about, not something that came home and hit you in the face. Not if you were the kind of man he was. He worked hard so that he could give his family everything they wanted within reason. Dope was something the kids in the slums used, not a girl

> like Terry. She had everything a young girl could want…No, dope was one problem he didn't have to worry about. (Goines, 127)

On the one hand Herman is quite naïve to believe that class is a shield that protects people from drugs. Yet at the same time Herman isn't entirely wrong either. Numerous studies have suggested that drugs are not in fact an "equal opportunity disorder" with poor people making up a disproportionate number of users.[100] While Herman's concern about his daughter might appear minor to the novel, it expresses one of the fundamental ideological antagonisms of Goines' work as it tries to symbolize, and make sense of, the material operation of class in drug addiction. Fantasy here expresses the "objective limit" (Laclau) of *Dopefiend's* realism as it attempts to capture what is beyond representation.

Herman's opinion of addiction is of particular interest given the class position of Goines' audience. As Gifford suggests in his interview with *Players*[101] editors Wanda Coleman and Emory Holmes II, Holloway House's paperbacks appealed to an underrepresented black working class for whom any representation at all was at a premium ("Harvard in Hell," 111). The fantastic and unlikely elements of Terry's addiction thus serve, as Jameson might suggest, to resolve a material conflict on the level of fantasy; in positioning Terry as a victim of dope, the novel serves not only to entertain its audience but also symbolically "solves" the real conflict of class in drug addiction by showing that it can, in fact, happen to the innocent alongside the damned. Ideologically,

[100] As Gene Heyman says in his critique of disease theories of addiction, "Addiction is not an equal-opportunity disorder; indeed, there is no psychiatric disorder that is more closely tied to circumstance" (39). Heyman cites several studies (Brownsberger, "Prevalence of Cocaine use in Urban Poverty Areas," Anthony and Helzer, "Syndromes of Drug Abuse and Dependence") that detail rates of addiction relative to income and environment.

[101] A *Playboy*esque magazine for a black audience

Terry operates as a kind of "suture" that pulls together the impossible gap that class leaves in the real experience of drug addiction.

The fantastic elements of Terry's addiction are equally evident in the speed and power of her addiction. Terry initially "believed she was too strong to become addicted" (20), and that "the small amount of heroin she took when she was out with [Teddy] was nothing" (20). After the shooting gallery's sexually deviant pusher, the aptly named Porky,[102] takes a liking to Terry, her boyfriend Teddy begins using her to score for himself. After ten days, Terry "wondered if it was possible for her to have gotten a habit in such a short amount of time" (31). Indeed, the novel's explanation for Terry's quick descent into addiction focuses explicitly on the power of the drug itself, and the way in which Porky manipulates the lives of women he desires:

> Porky disappeared into the bedroom. After closing the door behind him, he removed a small piece of tinfoil and began dumping a measured amount of dope into it. Then he took some pure heroin, uncut, and sprinkled it on top of the amount he had already measured out, making it extra strong. (140)

Goines here taps into the mythology of fear surrounding drugs and addiction, explaining both the "reality" of Terry's quick addiction while also legitimizing the fears' of his readership. Terry is in danger precisely because of her virtues of innocence and beauty as she catches the eye of the insatiable and inhuman Porky. In this way, Terry's character lines up quite closely with other tragic, female characters in need of rescue, common in

[102] Who is unabashedly sexually interested in Terry throughout. He is also considered sexually deviant by his henchman as he considers raping a man who ripped him off him at the novel's conclusion (271). This deviancy certainly exists for dramatic effect in terms of Terry, as the plot hinges on the growth of Terry's desperation for drugs. While she remains repulsed by Porky throughout, her submission to his sexual appetites is all but assured until the death of her friend Minnie (and her own subsequent hospitalization).

pulp works.[103] And while a victimized woman in need of rescue would be common to novels of the time, it is worth emphasizing the role of drugs in this scenario: the power of heroin, fostered by the presence of a monstrous, inhuman dealer, is enough to "turn" any good human being bad by reducing their rational selves into desperate kinds of drug machines. This idea is demonstrated aptly by Terry as she tries to resist going to score from Porky: "When Minnie got out of the car, she followed behind her, unable to control her own will. She felt a genuine desire to put an end to the self-punishment, but the urge for the drug was too strong to fight alone" (131).

If taken to its logical extreme, the idea of heroin as an "all-powerful drug" runs very close to the conservative thought of the 1980s. In 1986, just a few years after Goines' death, Ronald Reagan referred to crack cocaine as "an uncontrolled fire."[104] Indeed, a great deal of political rhetoric—including the drug-free America ads of the 1980s which featured rats becoming addicted to cocaine[105]—attempted to convince the public that drugs were dangerous *in and of themselves*: that drugs alone were capable of turning people into addicts regardless of other factors. At the same time such campaigns served to obscure the racist laws and law enforcement that were far more determining than drugs themselves. If the goal of *Dopefiend* was, at least in part, to provide political representation to a disenfranchised group, then Terry's story is a significant foil. Gifford notices that this may have followed for Goines' audience more broadly, insofar as they were given "popular stories that offer fantasies of overcoming forces of white oppression

[103] While not exactly a pulp novel, Frey's work will also demonstrate this convention.
[104] On September 14th, 1986, in a televised public address.
[105] Partnership for a Drug-Free America PSA, "Cocaine Rat" (1988). These were dramatized depictions of experiments in which rats became uncontrollably addicted to cocaine. Research has since established that these claims were quite dubious, owing to some inconsistencies in the experiments themselves. See Morgan and Zimmer (135, 143)

combined with realist narrative conclusions that foreclose these possibilities" (*Pimping*, 70). The double-bind of Goines' writing is precisely its desire, on the one hand, for a realistic depiction of the racist and classist situation in which the urban working-class found itself and, on the other hand, the impossible fantasy of the resolution of those conflicts.

Terry's narrative, ultimately, seems out of place in this narrative given the presence of characters like Teddy and Minnie for whom no real alternative to drugs, turning tricks, and robbery exist. They do not become addicted by "chance" as Terry does but rather by design: by their exposure to the harsh realities of "slum" life, with drugs being both cause and solution.[106] As the mistress of Porky's shooting gallery, Smokey, says, she "despised women like Terry. She considered them as pampered bitches, never having really experienced any of the hardships of life" (44). The question we might ask then is how determinate are such "hardships" for addicts, and does Goines' representations of addicts fall plausibly in line?

Teddy for instance suffered family hardships since he was a child. Like many others characters, his history is provided by short flashbacks (kinds of psychological outlines or summaries) that attempt to lend his character realistic motivations. For example, after Teddy wakes up junk-sick one morning (and Terry denies him a "blow" of heroin), he considers stealing his sister's welfare cheque to buy drugs. The narrative then switches to one of these flashbacks, as if to provide background on Terry's consideration of such a deplorable act (which he later does anyways):

[106] This narrative line comes closer to the works of Wright and Himes.

> He couldn't begin to remember what his father had looked like. When he was four his father was stabbed to death in the neighborhood bar. Since then, his mother and sister had worked, always making sure there was enough food in the house and that the place stayed clean. Sometimes he would steal enough stuff from various stores and bring some of the stolen meat home. Though his mother would complain about his stealing, she always accepted the food. She knew if she didn't accept it, he would only take it out and sell it to one of the neighbors. (57)

Such sections serve two functions in Goines' work. The first establishes psychological motivations for his characters that offer an explanation to readers who may not believe or understand the acts of characters (and perhaps offer a point of commiseration to those that know them all too well). The second purpose involves presenting the importantly *material* factors that govern and influence the lives of characters. It is difficult to see, for instance, how a character's complex history might motivate the act of sticking a needle in their arm; these episodes tie the present moment to certain aspects of characters' material histories (their economic situations, traumatic events etc.). This is one way in which Goines' contradicts himself between the addictions of Terry and Teddy; when Terry uses, the reader is provided no explanation other than the strength of the drug itself. Accordingly, her story has little or nothing to say about the politics of addiction.

Teddy's story is the opposite as it indicts poverty and opportunism as the core of addictive experience. Here, the murder of his father and the poverty suffered by his family are tied into his present bout of sickness, and his inability to break the cycle of addiction and poverty. For Teddy, heroin is not merely an accident, or the result of

hanging out with the wrong crowd: it is a method of adapting to his surroundings. Later, when Teddy gets high, we see how "[t]he dope invaded his mind, bringing on a false empyrean. For a few hours he wouldn't have any worries in the world. All his problems became insignificant as he fed the insatiable monster known to all users as their personal monkey" (27).

This is similarly the case for Minnie, fellow sex worker and friend of Terry who sets her up with a place to stay after she is kicked out of her home. Together, they provide an interesting contrast given their personal histories. After a particularly grim and graphic episode (in which Minnie is forced into sex with Porky's dogs to get a fix) the narrator considers Minnie's troubled past. For Minnie, "[l]ife had always been difficult. Since her early childhood, things had always worked out harshly for her (247)." Earlier, she recounts never being able to afford winter boots, an episode that is recalled while trying (and failing, given her pregnancy) to turn a trick in the cold (239). Clearly affected by the abuse she has just endured, Minnie loses her fix after burning herself with a match. What follows is a troubling account of her past:

> Then she remembered one of her drunken mother's boyfriends getting into bed with her one morning while she was a child. The pain, her mother's anger, directed more at her than the man. Later that morning she had prayed to die while lying in her bed. When she awoke she had been hurt and angry that her prayer hadn't been answered (247).

While the episode is of course fictive, as is (hopefully) Minnie's character, it importantly distinguishes the narrative of Minnie from that of Terry. While being forced into sex acts with dogs is not something that happens in reality, it is symbolic of the desperation that

many people experience as addicts: it is another kind of ideological "suture" whereby the classist, antagonistic depiction of addiction is tethered to a symbolic, and sensible, fantasy. That is, Minnie's history is of the traumatic sort that "explains" what might seem irrational or senseless, and answers "why would someone ever choose to use drugs." So too does it dramatize the power of addiction by showing the inconceivable lengths that addicts will go to in order to get their fix. Minnie's flashback contextualizes her subsequent actions (she hangs herself, leaving the reader with the utterly grotesque image of her unborn child hanging from her, a sight that sends Terry into a mental hospital for the rest of her life). This is where the strength of Goines' political critique becomes most aggressive, as symbolically, Minnie's trauma leaves the next generation stillborn; the unfortunate product of a place and a people gone horribly and terribly wrong.

Terry's addiction (and her melodramatic fate in an asylum) signal addiction on the level of fantasy: what drugs "could" do to someone who isn't careful, the depths to which drugs might take someone. Yet this fantasy is largely contradicted by the experiences of both Teddy and Minnie, who are given plausible psychological and emotional motivations. For them, addiction is not merely an accident or a chance event, or one decision that went awry; Goines is very particular in highlighting the material factors that affect their ability to get clean, and the economic and legal struggles that influence their lives at all points. As Minnie says, everyone manages to get clean, but "'[t]he only thing is that, when they do stop, they're usually in jail or someone is tossing dirt in their faces…it'll be just another dopefiend gone honey" (130).

The primary result of these two antagonistic narratives is what Ernesto Laclau has called *disarticulation*: a process by which a properly political antagonism is rendered as

mere difference (as will be discussed in more detail in the following analysis of *A Million Little Pieces*). In this way, the novel serves the paradoxical function of "warning," especially to its contemporary black audience. It is in this sense that *Dopefiend* hangs on the precipice of diverse ideological interests and antagonisms. As a commodity for the working class, it serves as a leveling of experience as Terry is, symbolically, sacrificed to the all too real dangers of heroin. Yet in so doing the novel undoes the very realism[107] by which it might realize its political capacities, making it the perfect depoliticized commodity that its publishers desired. *Dopefiend* is finally neither political critique nor sensationalist commodity but somehow caught between, stillborn as it is trapped between the generic expectations of its audience and publisher and the all too real truths that it conveys about the racial and environmental causes of drug abuse and addiction.

A Million Little Pieces

James Frey's controversial memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, shares little on the surface with the work of Donald Goines. As a member of the white middle-class who finished college and grew up with a supportive family, Frey's experience differs greatly from that of the black crime writers. Not only does Frey's work address a very different political context (the white middle-class hardly suffered from a crisis of representation in the early 2000s), but also addresses a very different audience. Despite their many differences, both Goines' and Frey's work becomes conspicuously similar given their

[107] Of course, even Goines' representations of life on the street—the simple interactions between him and his friends, and the language they use—is as much the product of literary convention as it is Goines' experience. Goines' style is not simply a transparent representation, it borrows from other writers and the conventions of crime and black literature (most notably from the writings of Iceberg Slim).

respective positions within popular genres. Both, for instance, skirt the line between fiction and autobiography[108]; both present situations that appear, at first glance, rather unrealistic. Yet the brutality and ugliness of the situations and people that populate their novels nonetheless portray a certain kind of reality. For Frey, the line between fact and fiction would become an important one, as his audience became very invested in the "truthfulness" of his account following his promotion on *Oprah*. As Julie Rak, a scholar of memoir and biography has argued, the controversy of *A Million Little Pieces* "created a situation of genre boundary policing that, in an unusual way, laid bare the role of publishers in creating genre expectations in the reading public and connected issues about genre directly to the workings of a market economy" (228). Accordingly, what Frey and Goines share in common are the ways in which their work indexes the politics of publication: each reveals the culture industry's interests in curated, edited, and "authorized" versions of addiction narrative.

But where the spectacularism of Goines transformed an otherwise realist work into a depoliticized fantasy, it has something of the opposite effect in Frey. In *A Million Little Pieces*, the graphic, excessive descriptions of addiction and violence serve to lend Frey credibility as he attempts to capture a style that is stranger than fiction. As autobiography, Frey's "brutal honesty" signals his unflinching commitment to telling everything just as it was. And by authorizing the "truth" of his work (by publishing it as memoir rather than fiction), Frey's publishers radically altered its cultural function: rather than be simply a work of entertainment, or a kind of pulpy torture porn, *A Million Little*

[108] Of course the "memoir" has its own set of conventions, which don't preclude a bit of poetic license. As we will see, Frey's account takes this a little further than his audience would have liked.

Pieces was instantly and irrevocably *politicized* because it purported to speak to the real, lived experience of addicts.

In both Goines and Frey we see the operation of realism precisely at the intersection between competing interests for "authentic" representation.[109] Much like Goines, Frey's narrative had to have the right amount, and the right kind, of authenticity: it had to be a first-hand account, wrought from the "truth of experience," but had also to fit into a narrowly circumscribed idea of addiction as entertainment. Publishing a fictional account of addiction, with larger than life characters, grotesque scenes of pain and torment, and impossibly melodramatic situations left Frey's Publisher (Random House) with the best of both worlds: it produced not only a compelling story of personal triumph, but also a commodity that captured all the regular lures and titillations of popular fiction. Frey merely took the inverse route to Goines, as his account initially lacked the "authenticity" that Goines had in spades; only by claiming the authority of experience could *A Million Little Pieces* be considered relevant, entertaining, *compelling*.

Interestingly, if Frey pursued his premise realistically in the novel (that Frey is as bad as drug addicts get), he would end up either dead or incarcerated as so many "others" have in the American justice system. Instead, *A Million Little Pieces* assumes the "spectacle" of the addict/other without any of his/her reality; Frey's "memoir" concludes by solving addiction symbolically, on the level of fantasy, as he recovers once and for all on his first trip to rehab. It is in this way that that *A Million Little Pieces* resolves the

[109] This is another tricky use of realism. Here I mean to say that the forms, styles and conventions that these authors employ are strategic and interpretative relative to being "authentic": that is, because their experiences are produced as narrative, they must make certain strategic decisions about how to do that "authentically," both in terms of being true to their own experience and also appearing plausible to their audience.

class antagonism of addiction as difference (in Laclau's terms); rather than admit class antagonism as a root dynamic in the experience of addiction (between whites and blacks, or between poor and wealthy), Frey supposes it as mere difference. By positing the severity of addiction as insurmountable, regardless of class or circumstance, Frey hypothesizes the "will" as the ultimate factor in both "getting hooked" and "getting clean." For Frey it would seem that addiction is Nietzschean: merely a case of strong and weak wills.

Yet before we examine Frey's version of addiction, it's worth sketching the context that lead to both its popularity and controversy. Scholarship has documented the peculiar circumstances of Frey's publicity at length (Megan Brown, Borst, Aubrey, Rak). Broadly, three years following the publication of *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) the memoir was picked up and endorsed by Oprah's book club. Shortly after her endorsement aired, *The Smoking Gun* (a website that specializes in providing public information in terms of criminal activity, convictions, etc.) found a series of inconsistencies in Frey's account. It appeared that his supposed criminal past, as well as the details of his dental surgeries, were demonstrably false. After interviews with Larry King, and a follow-up episode with Oprah, most of the public blame for the mis-publication of his "memoir" was foisted onto Frey and his publisher, Random House, as Oprah tried to deflect the controversy and pass the buck.

Perhaps the most important detail of *A Million Little Pieces*' publication was that Frey initially tried to sell it as a novel rather than a memoir, a fact that was disclosed in Frey's interview with Larry King on January 11, 2006. As critic Julie Rak notes of the interview, "Nan Talese, a vice president at Doubleday, which is a publishing company

owned by industry giant Random House Inc., read the manuscript and suggested that the book be published as a memoir, presumably because she thought that a factual account about addiction would sell better than a fictional one" (228). In fact, Janet Maslin, an early reviewer of *A Million Little Pieces* (from April 2003) knew that Frey initially tried publishing the work as a novel (Maslin, "Cry and Cry Alone?"). Maslin's rather cynical review recognizes just how common and familiar his story is, and how Frey "makes it" by translating his "authentic" experience as an addict into a viable commodity with a knowing wink.

In establishing Frey's narrative as memoir rather than fiction, and in authorizing his account *as a commodity,* Frey's publisher created a rather unique situation in which the integrity of Frey's story was intimately related to its status as commodity. That is, in order to be deemed publishable, Frey's account needed to more than an interesting story: it needed to be compelling in the manner of memoir and autobiography. As Rak has noticed, the importance of "authenticity" in memoir varies in relation to the size of the author's personality. So unlike a work like *Scar Tissue* (published in 2004 by Hyperion, just a year after Frey) where the extraordinary personality of Anthony Kiedis (lead singer of the rock band The Red Hot Chili Peppers) is enough to make even the most common events of his addiction interesting, Frey's story must instead make the ordinary extraordinary. Frey (and his publisher) opted to do so by exaggerating the scale and spectacle of his recovery, and by publishing at as a recounting of "true" events.

A big part of *A Million Little Piece*'s impact involved the inspiring nature of the story: a downtrodden addict succeeding against all odds. In Rak's words, authenticity is so important for Frey because it facilitates readers' "attachment to the protagonist

through the account's veracity (the event's status as a ‘true story’ makes the protagonist into someone heroic)” (229). “The story cannot be read as an account of recovery within a middle-class frame of reference” (230) because “this portrait of the addict as utterly abject and not middle class could *not* be read with sympathy unless it were a ‘true’ story about recovery” (230). In other words, there is very little that is interesting about a fictional character who manages to succeed against impossible fictional odds (reminiscent of the problem of superhero movies today, in which the powers of the protagonists preclude the possibility of failure). If, however, the narrative is based on a true story, the accomplishments of the protagonist become meaningful: they facilitate a connection with the audience and prove, after the fashion of the American Dream, that we really can conquer all adversity. As autobiography *A Million Little Pieces* could capture a “truth” that spoke to a mass audience, a truth that would be general enough to sell his work. This is why Frey’s narrative reads as equal parts *Junky* and *Days of our Lives*: his style has to represent addiction as a real, material and “realist” problem (one that could, at least plausibly, happen) and then solve it as if it were fiction. This is how *A Million Little Pieces*, as Jameson might argue, anticipates and incorporates the commodity in its very form.

In order to achieve this Frey’s narrative employs an extraordinarily spare prose style that serves a variety of narrative functions, most notably by lending it the character of truth, admission and honesty. This follows from Frey’s frequent, emphatic use of the first person, and the slow, repetitive, lulling rhythm of his prose:

> I wake to the drone of an airplane engine and the feeling of something warm dripping down my chin. I lift my hand to feel my face. My front four teeth are

> gone. I have a hole in my cheek, my nose is broken and my eyes are swollen nearly shut. I open them and I look around and I'm in the back of a plane and no one's near me. I look at my clothes and my clothes are covered with a colorful mixture if spit, snot, urine, vomit and blood. I reach for the call button and I find it and I push it and I wait and thirty seconds later an attendant arrives. (1)

By presenting the bare "facts" of his experience, it is as if Frey has pared down his story to its most elementary parts. The assumption is that nothing has been left out, and only what is essential has been left in; Frey presents his confession in a way that signifies both truth telling and detachment (an effect that is heightened by his use of the historical present tense). Accordingly, the novel stylistically accounts for the distance between narrator and reader as it establishes Frey, grammatically and conceptually, as an "other."

The memoir's opening passage is indicative of a nigh libidinal attachment to the "I" as both the conceptual and grammatical focus of Frey's confession. Frey's "I" is regularly set between the opposing poles of himself as criminal and himself as human, as if Frey's history of addiction set him apart from the rest of the human race. As he puts it throughout the novel, "I am a drug addict, I am an alcoholic, I am a criminal" (74). This self-identification serves to separate author from reader but also emphasizes *A Million Little Pieces*' radical sense of individualism. Even on the level of form, Frey's narrative resists communal and submissive forms of recovery in favour of the brute force of an "I" that is strong enough to persevere.

Because Frey is so radically other, his account strikes readers as "true" because it is bare, sparse and hideous. Its presentation, perhaps ironically, bears a similar logic to

that of medical theories of addiction[110]; just as no one would suffer from the pain of withdrawal by choice, so too would no one confess to addiction and depravity without feeling a deep personal need to do so, making it appear motivated by a "true" experience. Critic Timothy Aubrey has likewise noted how "both the book's capacity to inspire visceral forms of credulity and its remarkable implausibility are symptoms of Frey's effort not to describe his life in a truthful fashion, but instead to deliver something that readers could register as 'the truth'" (Aubrey, 155). In this way, the "realism" of Frey's account is the product of a certain style that corresponds with the expectations of an audience rather than reality. Frey's style reads as realism not because it is necessarily true, but rather because it produces the effects of realism in its audience: it follows the logic and style of confession such that readers found themselves unable to deny its veracity. It is in this way that Frey's work, as fiction, is threatening to the very suppositions of memoir: Frey exposes how authenticity, even in supposedly "true" works of autobiography, is the product of style rather than experience.

Accordingly, the stylistic work of *A Million Little Pieces* involves creating a *reality effect* rather than replicating reality. As we have already seen, "realism" for Morley is not merely the presence of an event, or character or narrative that corresponds to the real world, but is instead an effect that is produced between reader and text: "[w]hat we may call the 'reality effect' is not the product of the required reduplication of the empiricist subject in the discourse of realism but the effect of an achieved alignment between subjects and texts which the discourse itself accomplishes" (Morley, 167). Just as *Dopefiend* produced a sense of realism and authenticity by emulating the language of

[110] Ironic because Frey insists his addiction is not a disease.

the streets, so too does *A Million Little Pieces* engineer a reality effect by appealing to the sensibilities of its readers.

As Aubrey has noted, the text's designation as memoir facilitated the kinds of affective responses that would in turn serve as evidence of the text's authenticity: "Thus the belief that *this actually happened* enhances the emotional response to the narrative, and the emotional response to the narrative lends credibility to the belief that this is the kind of story that could actually happen" (Aubrey, 169). The affectivity of Frey's text was a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: its "realism" had an emotional impact of in its audience, and thus "rang true." Paradoxically, the implausibility of its events is a critical aspect of its realism as Oprah herself noticed: "one of the reasons why we're all so taken with the book is because it feels and reads so sensationally that it…it…you you can't believe that all of this happened to one person" (*Oprah*). I would add that the affective realism *A Million Little Pieces* was equally generic. Most simply, Frey transformed Burroughs' story of total need ("wouldn't you?") into a Disney fairy tale: Frey employs the most melodramatic forms of fantasy in order to suture together his "authentic" experience to the generic demands of the popular. This is nowhere clearer then when Frey "gets clean" with one his counselors:

> What time do you start drinking?
>
> When I wake up.
>
> She marks it down.
>
> How much per day?
>
> As much as I can.
>
> How much is that?

Enough to make me look like this. (9)

He not only admits to doing cocaine, but of doing it in "every form that it exists" (9), as if he had scoured the world looking for novel applications of the drug. Frey's admission of drug use serves not only the purposes of transparency in his narrative, but also expresses addiction in the most excessive (and unlikely) terms possible.

In fact, Frey's drug use openly defies reality in Frey's experience of withdrawal symptoms. At one point he writes that "I haven't had a drink in three days and I haven't done coke in five so the sickness isn't as bad as normal" (33), yet in another place confesses to not having gone twelve hours without a drink in years (95). Similarly, Frey is unable to stand when he arrives in rehab due to withdrawal sickness, and yet is still capable of getting in a fight that intimidates the patient population (consisting of bikers, mafia, and thugs of all sorts). Frey's narrative, in exaggerating the depth of his addiction, generates impossible situations with regularity. The problem, from the point of view of realism, is that Frey cannot have his cake and eat it too. Despite being grotesque and sensational the novel must somehow conclude Frey's tale *as if it were real*. As a now sober author, Frey has to be clean "for good" if the plot's events are to be believed, a situation the narrative can never bring into balance with its unreal descriptions of Frey's drug use.

Frey's believability is once again jeopardized at the novel's climax, as the narrative blends romance and addiction memoir for maximum effect. Frey's fantasy narrative concludes, perhaps predictably, with Frey rescuing a fellow patient and love interest from relapse and a return to prostitution (as if Frey's recovery required the rescue of a damsel in distress in order to be read as a truly inspiring tale). Lily, after being told

by administration that she would be unable to see Frey anymore, decides to leave the rehab center. After hearing of Lily's escape Frey grabs his copy of the *Tao Te Ching* and charges off into the night to find her. With all the gusto of a last-minute drive to catch a departing flight, Frey miraculously locates Lily after relying on the kindness of a downtown crack dealer who had just sold her drugs (351). Although the dealer tries to convince Frey that "[c]an't nobody quit. The shit's too strong" (351), Frey tracks her to an abandoned building and convinces her to leave.

The episode also details Frey's own temptation, suggesting that Frey resists because he has replaced his old addiction with a new one: "The smell of crack, like bittersweet peppermint gasoline, drifts through the room. The smell taunts me and it enrages me I would love to taste that smell, but I want Lily more than the great and terrible rock" (353). Echoing the novel's conclusion, in which Frey orders a drink just so he can convince himself that he doesn't need it, the narrative here transposes narrative resolution onto Frey's resolve. For the non-using reader, this means reinserting Frey into a normative heterosexual matrix of desire that re-contextualizes the power of love: a force that really can conquer all, even fantastic, disproportionate drug addictions.

The masculine heroics of Frey are symptomatic of addiction narrative more generally, and its inability to imagine women as anything other than sex workers. Indeed, Frey does another disservice to the reality of drug addiction by supposing Lily to be nothing more than a tool in his own recovery. Frey proceeds as if it were somehow obvious that Lily should be the one to relapse while Frey is the empowered hero-in-love that will save her. This shows a profound lack of imagination in regard to the gendered dynamics of addiction, just as it shows a kind of thoughtless adherence to the conventions

of pulp more generally. Accordingly, Frey's heroism signals and symbolizes his transition from deviant outsider to normative insider. Symbolically, addiction is "solved" just as it is in the film of *The Man with the Golden Arm*, as Frey replaces his drug addiction with true love.[111] Frey, having spent the entire narrative convincing readers that he is beyond redemption, turns out to be a nice guy after all. Importantly, Lily's own relapse is merely a vehicle through which Frey achieves his sobriety, rather than an inspiration in its own right: it is as if Frey's sobriety depends on the restoration of his manhood and can only be assured through its indexation in heterosexual love. This is another way in which Frey's narrative bridges the empirical gaps in the story's authenticity, and how it produces a "reality effect": by giving readers what they want (conventional, masculine love stories apparently), rather than what follows plausibly from the characters and situations presented, Frey satisfies the "reality effect," especially in the context of his Oprah motivated viewership (which, as Borst notes, has already drank deeply of the kool-aid of self-help).

Part of achieving this "reality effect" involves attention to the codes by which audiences read and translate media. As Birmingham school theorist Stuart Hall has pointed out, there is a sense in which the modern media produces culture according to dominant, or preferred codes. As he puts it,

[111] Of course, the novel on which *The Man with the Golden Arm* is based (by Nelson Algren) deviates remarkably from the Hollywood conclusions of the film. Algren's work is undoubtedly relevant to the study of contemporary addiction narrative, yet it has not been included at length in this dissertation for a few reasons. As a representative of the post-war period it competes for space with Burroughs' *Junky* (though it does importantly speak directly to the post-war context). It also deviates somewhat from what I've defined as an addiction narrative: that is, because Frankie's plot is so haphazard (he gets arrested halfway through and gets clean in jail), it lacks the more regular structure of other narratives I've examined. Generally, each of the narratives I examine encapsulate a single story of addiction in its entirety: from the first hit to either sobriety or death.

> [t]here are significantly different ways in which events – especially problematic or troubling events…can be encoded. The selection of codes, those which are *preferred* codes…and which appear to embody the 'natural' explanations which most members of the society would accept…casts these problematic events, consensually, somewhere within the *repertoire* of the dominant ideologies. (343)

If we can count drug addiction among these "troubling events" for Oprah's audience, then we can begin to make sense out of how and why the "gloss" of romanticism was so central to Frey's narrative. In rendering recovery as romance, Frey justifies the affectations of his audience by satisfying their expectations of how things "should be," rather than how they really are. His conclusion, conveniently, reaffirms what people already wanted to believe about addiction according to their own discursive *repertoire*: that addiction is a choice, that people who are strong enough *can* fight their way out, that we too, like Frey, can conquer impossible odds if we try hard enough.

This conclusion is both sign and symptom of the underlying impossibility of Frey's narrative, which attempts to solve a very real and material problem (addiction) on the level of fantasy (romance). The implicit contradiction of Frey's recovery echoes the findings of Laclau, as it expresses not merely a personal truth about addiction, but instead registers a political antagonism as it represents "the experience of the limits of any possible objectivity, the way in which any objectivity reveals the partial and arbitrary character of its own objectification" (256). In presenting an account that tries to capture something "true" about the nature of addiction in general, Frey replaces the empirical with the fantastic, and reaches the limits of "realist" presentation. As Jameson has argued, this is more or less the fate of popular culture as it inevitably lacks the qualities and

capacities of realism to represent situations and persons in a politically viable way, restricted as it is by being a commodity. In Frey's narrative, this is most obvious in the narrative's inability to solve addiction *as* addiction.

In reality class does play a role in recovery, and not every user is equal. Drug addiction does not affect every person in the same way, and material privileges of race and class affect peoples' ability to recover. Yet rather than be considered a materialist conflict, addiction in Frey becomes *climactic* and dramatic; a conflict whose resolution may be symbolized and solved once and for all. *A Million Little Pieces* doesn't outright lie about how addiction works, but merely overemphasizes and focuses on one truth about addiction from among any. Certainly, some people do conquer their addictions through pure "force of will" but the narrative makes it seem as though this is the only way sobriety happens. Unfortunately, by meeting his reader "halfway" Frey produces a theory, or interpretation of addiction that is as contradictory as the narrative forms through which he presents it. If Frey has a coherent "theory" addiction it is caught somewhere between the axes of moral conflict, disease and spectacular melodrama. Indeed, it is in some ways all of these at once. Frey's story is so interesting in this regard because it walks the line between fiction and realism; the novel's style, much like Frey's character, are equal parts drug addled, existential angst and melodramatic whinging.

As bio and autobiographical critic Leigh Gilmore suggests in his reading of Frey, this may also be symptomatic of the confession narrative more generally in the context of contemporary American literature. As he suggests, "the reproduction of redemption creates a preference for certain kinds of narratives that seem to substantiate, through repetition, the impossible access to mobility promised by the American dream." (658) On

the level of fantasy, Frey's narrative reinforces the idea that anyone can do anything despite the fact that in reality, most addicts fail in their first attempt at recovery; it reinforces the idea that America is a classless society, despite the fact that most addicts lack the means to afford recovery, or the legal fees that coincide with being arrested for drugs. Like celebrity accounts of addiction that end in lifelong sobriety, *A Million Little Pieces* participates in a fantastic form of addictive realism that we should already be familiar with.

Yet Frey's work, at least initially, offered something different from the typical confession precisely because it was fictive. While it is common to have a "true story" that ends on a positive note, and equally common to have fictional stories that end in tragedy (*Go Ask Alice*, *Requiem for a Dream*, *The Man with the Golden Arm*), Frey's work does neither. As a work that is both fictional and inspirational, it somehow evades, and perhaps contradicts, the very assumptions of the genre. It is common to assume, for instance, the most attractive thing about memoir is that it is a "true story." Yet perhaps what we are looking for, whether we are reading Burroughs, or Frey, or Goines, is a kind of voyeuristic pleasure. As Ann Marlowe relates, "[w]hat novels of addiction do have going for them for the non-using reader is the pleasurable security of reading about a disaster that won't afflict you" ("fiction," *How to Stop Time*, 142). Frey (and perhaps Goines) then gives us what we want without the ideological buffer of identification: the raw, horrifying pleasure of watching someone else fall apart.

And if Frey's inspirational fiction is uncommon to addiction writing, we might equally wonder about the opposite end of the spectrum. Where are the "true" tragedies? The stories that reflect what is, statistically, the most common experience of addiction?

The answer, I think, is to be found in the very machinery that brought both Goines and Frey into the limelight, namely the publishing industry that transforms narratives into commodities. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be a great deal of publishing money in detailing the tragedies of those who lacked the means to recovery.

Conclusion - (Dis)Articulating Addiction

I suppose that many journalists do not want to lie but lie they do, in the effort to obtain style by using the mechanism of poetry and history, which gradually distort.
- Jean Cocteau, *Opium Diary of His Cure* (33)

Publication is an interesting marker of ideology because it is constantly tested by its status as a commodity: any narrative that is "unfit" for popular consumption (and incompatible with dominant ideologies) will be quickly relegated to the discount shelves. Far from the lost art of "organic" creation that Jameson laments in "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," what we find in popular publication is a complicated process of selection, editing and marketing that constitutes the transformation of the art object from "authentic" expression into "edited" commodity.

Stuart Hall (alongside celebrated Marxist theorist Raymond Williams) similarly identifies the creation of dominant ideologies as a matter of *selection* through means of emphasis and ignorance (331). It is not so much that social intuitions (like education or the culture industry) distort "reality," but rather they preselect and engineer a certain version of the truth which becomes "naturalized" through a broad and consistent presentation through various institutions and organizations. So when the publishing

industry selects for certain qualities in popular literature (or certain analogous qualities in the newspaper or the 6 o'clock news) they engineer and present a contingent form of realism that appears quite natural to its audience. This in turn reinforces the dominant conventions or styles by which we identify something as "real," and fosters a widespread belief in what is, empirically, only one version of the truth among many. It lends credibility to a *style* of presentation, a set of codes, rather than to the reality as such of any given event, situation, or person. As William Burroughs realizes in his original introduction to *Junky*, "official propaganda opposes any factual statement about junk, so that almost nothing accurate has ever been written on the subject. When newspapers, magazines and movies deal with junk they seldom deviate from the officially sponsored myth" (140).

When it comes to addiction, a genre dominated by the "authentic" confession of first-hand experience, this is of particular importance as popular audiences are consistently exposed to works that are "authenticated" by the publishing industry. In effect, this creates a situation in which the dominant codes of addictive realism replace its empirical realties. Of course, empiricism is only one way of understanding addiction. The problem with popular (and populist) accounts of addiction is not so much that they contradict empirical accounts, but that they tend to ignore them completely. The sociology of addiction, a discipline that has gone a long way in helping us understand the non-biological factors that motivate drug use, are virtually absent in the popular media's claims about cheese, chocolate and TV addiction. What we see, especially in the popular media, is a codified version of addiction that tends to ignore or deemphasize the political aspects of addiction, and the ways in which class, race, gender and social environment

are determinate factors in the harms posed by it. The popular media, in favouring "feel good" accounts of addiction, and its near constant equation of cheese (Harris, "Cheese Really is Crack") or sugar (Payton, "Sugar Addiction 'Should be Treated as a Form of Drug Abuse'") with "real" drugs disarticulates the political and class antagonisms that operate at the core of addictive tendencies.

This isn't to say that science, and its theories about the brain being "hardwired" for addiction are somehow false. Rather, it is to say that within the popular, the process of selection and editing constitutes a monoculture of addictive realism whereby certain elements of addiction are prioritized and made to "fit" with a popular audience. There may indeed be some truth to the idea that fats and sugars are habit forming as research has indicated: but the version we see in the media is a distorted one, one that allays our fears of overeating as we discover that we are actually doing what we are "designed" to do. As a cultural *function*, these sorts of incursions into popular discourse serve, ideologically, as a crutch that not only justifies *what we are already doing*, but also removes the political antagonisms that underlie the very possibility of "food addiction": as if it were chemistry, and not class, that determined our pensions for shopping and fast food. So what at first appears as a profound example of inclusivity, as "addiction" goes mainstream, becomes a profound disarticulation of the politics of their experience. What was once a cultural antagonism (the Junkie *vs* "squares," or the moral majority vs the "dropouts") is seen as mere *difference*: suddenly, *everyone* gets to be an addict. Cheese, sugar, heroin: we all have *our own* poisons.

As Hall says, "the general manner in which the ideologies of the dominant culture function is to mask, conceal or repress these antagonistic foundations of the system"

(337). This suppression operates, according to Hall, by means of absorption and containment as dissenting ideologies are included, piece by piece, into a dominant ideological form. It is in the sense of which another Birmingham scholar, David Morley, applies Laclau's concept of disarticulation to the work of "popularization," as it describes "the way discourses can convert opposition and contradiction in to mere difference, thereby neutralizing a potential antagonism" (166). In terms of publication, we can see how this disarticulation operates by finding ways to include and contain oppositional discourses within a dominant one. In the case of addiction narrative, innovative forms of addictive realism may offer challenges to moral and individualistic theories. But according to cultural theorist Dick Hebdige, "they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions" (96) as they are once again rearticulated alongside the dominant discourse: "[i]t is through this continual process of recuperation that the fractured order is repaired and the subculture incorporated as a diverting spectacle within the dominant mythology from which it in part emanates" (94).

So in publishing Goines and Robert Beck Holloway House didn't test or expand the political possibilities of black representation, or draw attention to the fundamental antagonisms of racial representation in America: they merely tested and expanded the limits of what can and can't be a commodity. In publishing Goines and Beck they didn't reveal the "truth" about black experience. Instead they found the qualities of the commodity that were already hidden in their stories, as "black experience" was given its own place in official culture as *spectacle*.

More recently, popular culture has seen this exact movement in the case of hip-hop and its inclusion in the mainstream. As a form that adapted organically from the

work of writers like Beck and Goines, we can see how the attention to "authentic" language and experience becomes neutralized in the commodity form. Just like these works, hip-hop initially showed a critical and revolutionary capacity in its antagonism to white, middle-class culture. As rapper Ice T (Tracy Lauren Marrow) testifies in his introduction to *Pimp*: *The Story of my Life*,

> [g]hetto hustlers in my neighborhood would talk this nasty dialect rich with imagery of sex and humor. My buddies and I wanted to know where they picked it up, and they'd told us 'you better get into some of that Iceberg stuff'!...Here was a man that a lot of black kids could relate to because he spoke *their* language (v).

Marrow notices that unlike some of his own contemporaries, Beck didn't try to glorify or glamorize criminal experience, but rather "gave it to you straight" (vi). But as we've already seen, language is never "straight": it is historical, and speaks to the thoughts and practices of the culture which expresses them. That one group of black, urban drug users in the 1950s would refer to heroin as "horse" while Burroughs would call it "junk," speaks important volumes to how they conceptualize the drug, and perhaps, also to the practices and rituals of drug taking.[112]

For writer and musician Greg Tate, the question of politics and style are intimately related as marketability becomes an antagonistic and opposite force to political representation. As he puts it, "[t]he problem with progressive Black political organizing isn't hiphop but that the No. 1 issue on the table needs to be poverty, and nobody knows

[112] Of course, part of this is euphemistic, but there is also room here for an in-depth comparative study of drug language. Chicago, Detroit, New York, L.A.: each of these cities have a rich history of drug using cultures, and there is easily a sufficient volume of writings to start thinking about the connections between language and cultural practices of drug use at various times and places in America.

how to make poverty sexy" (Tate, n.p.). Tate wonders, if hip-hop is supposed to be the greatest and truest representation of black culture and experience, and one that is celebrated as the grounding force of political representation in black America, then why is it dominated by spectacle, bling and sex rather than dedicated to the political problems of black experience?

As a commodity, Tate finds that "hiphop floats through the virtual marketplace of branded icons as another consumable ghost, parasitically feeding off the host of the real world's people—urbanized and institutionalized—whom it will claim till its dying day to "represent" (n.p.). While hip-hop attempted to fulfill the void of representation left by racial prejudices (just as Goines and Beck did) what it actually did was the same thing white culture had already been doing for years. The success of hip-hop wasn't based in representation, but in translation: in rendering black experience according to the laws of the commodity form. Just like Holloway House, the culture industry that popularized hip-hop wasn't so much interested in exposing the realities of black experience, but in exposing the consumable aspects of that experience as spectacle. One need only to think about the fetishization of money and wealth in hip-hop culture to see the perilous inversion of the poverty that Tate recognizes as an important part of its politics. The genre has internalized—as spectacle—the fundamental antagonism of its production (that is, the fantasy of class and social mobility that it offers). Once again, culture is more than happy to include new forms that are capable of domestication and adaptation to dominant ideologies.[113]

[113] There is also the question of drugs and addiction in hip-hop, which are a regular thematic in the genre. Most commonly, at least in 90s gangster rap, was marijuana: an interestingly "soft" drug given the hard content of the genre. So while it is possible to discuss the drugs of hip-hop, it is more difficult to speak to

Similarly, novels such as Goines' offer a very real political critique that could have threatened the assumptions of his contemporary political system. His work is antagonistic to dominant ideologies and offers ways of thinking about drugs and addiction outside of the dominant discourses of his day. Yet the inclusion of Terry's narrative neutralizes the force of his political critique by reducing the fundamental antagonism of class and environment to mere difference. The novel's conclusion, especially in its final valorization of Porky as the non-user par excellence, argues that it is the pusher himself that offers the greatest threat to black communities. This end seems incongruous, at best, with the political force that his narrative elsewhere expresses. *Dopefiend*'s conclusion disarticulates this message by focusing, ultimately, where it begins: with the evil of drugs themselves over and above the racist society that makes them ghetto pharmekons.

So too was the publication of *A Little Million Pieces* prevented from being the antagonistic indictment of the of "true stories" of addiction that it initially promised. In being co-opted into the service of "authenticity" it was instead just another test of how far the truth can be pushed in relation to a marketable commodity. Of particular interest is the way in which it became a sort of precedent, as its publication set a new paradigm for what could and could not function as an "authentic" story of addiction in the public eye. In so doing it didn't challenge the premises of confession as commodity, but rather contracted and refined its scope, and its ability to "fit" into a particular ideological milieu: it served as a (re)articulation—a replacing—of the dominant discourse of addiction rather than a contradiction of it.

addiction, insofar as songs seldom constitute narratives. There may be references in songs, or biographical details to artists, but an analysis of addictive narrative in hip-hop would be difficult.

We can see this concretely in the "moral" of the story with which *A Million Little Pieces* concludes. Even if we all know that addiction is a persistent and difficult disorder, we still cheer for Frey as he makes it through his unlikely recovery "as if" it were real: as if it expressed something human and universal. Yet the narrative requirements of the novel make Frey recover in his first trip to rehab just as it glosses over the advantages of his class: the overarching message, that we too can conquer adversity, obscures the fact that the very consumer addictions with which we relate to Frey are predicated on economic factors that are, according to his narrative, of no consequence at all. Instead, *A Million Little Pieces* figures addiction as a personal and moral problem that we can all learn from because we too have desires that overreach themselves; we too make mistakes. What this distorts is precisely the situation of people like Teddy, for whom the "choice" to use drugs is a very different proposition than middle-class white America.

Indeed, perhaps the most important "unspoken" circumstance of Frey's work is its implications as a racial text. Again, in accordance with Oprah, Frey's text was meant to be a narrative that spoke to everyone. Yet within the popular, drug addiction has been, both consciously and unconsciously, presented as a non-white problem for decades. While fentanyl and OxyContin (drugs that are becoming increasingly visible in white middle-class communities) have gone some way in dispelling such mythology, there is a marked imbalance in the way that race sees presentation, especially within popular literature. Indeed, Frey's own white privilege is conspicuous in the context of drugs, just as Burroughs' class position was 50 years prior. Even the "fantastic" elements of narrative—the things we are unlikely to believe—became unthinkable without Frey's whiteness. Starting fights, breaking rules: there is always some sort of "mysterious" good

fortune that follows Frey throughout all his bad decisions. Indeed, it is possible, and perhaps necessary, to read the middle-class drug narrative as an overrepresented—if not pernicious—element in the genre of addiction narrative more broadly. Such works make claims about what addiction "really is," but seldom investigate the vantage points and circumstances from which that knowledge comes.

In the contemporary moment, contradictions similar to those of Frey are omnipresent. Anthony Kiedis's *Scar Tissue* uses addiction as a supplement to his own, personal and spiritual journey to health and wellness. The narrative claims, on the one hand, that as addicts we are all the same, yet on the other, describes the Hollywood rehab and infinite last-minute flights to kick in the Bahamas. His is unquestionably a narrative of fantasy, though a strange one in which the fantasies are real.[114] Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic* is a more literal form of this disarticulation. Not only does her protagonist suffer from an addiction of class *par excellence* (shopping), but she solves it using the generic romantic fantasy where a knight in shining armour (and a high-power job) saves her from debt forever. All of these texts possess a fractured, antagonized form of addiction that is indicative of a political reality while simultaneously diminishing it. This is precisely the mode in which addiction operates in the popular: as a commodity that neutralizes political critiques in fantasy. This is particularly the case on the level of publication, where the selection of works as commodities secures their compatibility to dominant ways of thinking. And if in order to seem realist narratives must replicate the

[114] That is, Kiedis' extraordinary wealth as a rock star allows him be an addict in a way that is totally beyond the real conditions of the overwhelming majority of addicts. While the everyday of his addiction looks like any other (needles in arms, pushing away loved ones, damaging his career etc.) there are certain elements of it that defy reason: his ability to check in or out of private, expensive rehab at will, his ability to take spontaneous vacations to get clean, etc.

already given terms of addiction, then the possibilities of revolutionary and critical representations are meager indeed.

Perhaps most troubling is the clearly legible instinct within the popular to do otherwise: the desire to give voice to the ghetto, its horror, its addictions and its poverty, to make real the pain of withdrawal and the vulnerability of coming clean. Popular texts are not "merely" popular works, and not "merely" commodities engineered to produce capital. They are also, I think, sincere attempts to connect a broad audience to realities they might otherwise not know (or perhaps to comfort them in a reality they know all too well).

The next question then is what happens when we once again alter the terms of addiction's presentation towards a newer, more "authentic" form of realism.[115] As we will see, this became a question of perspective as much as politics, as later writers would try adjusting the vantage point from which addiction was viewed. Writers such as Hubert Selby Jr. and Philip K. Dick provided new insights into addiction by fragmenting an assumed, singular, all-knowing addict/writer into a distinct set of voices, viewpoints, compulsions and tendencies. For these writers, no single perspective could possess the authority to tell addiction "true" because perspective itself is an essential aspect of how addictive realism is forged.

[115] That is, the generic styles by which a version of addiction appears realistic to its audience.

Chapter 3 – The Broken and the Fixed: Subjectivity and Perspective in the Works of Hubert Selby Jr. and Philip K. Dick

There is no ultimate layer of tiny micro-particles to which macro-identities might be reduced. At whatever point we fix our gaze, entities are assembled from other entities: they can be viewed as unified things when seen from the outside, yet they are always pieced together from a vast armada of autonomous components.

- Graham Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism* (172)

Introduction

In his reading of Manuel DeLanda's work during a 2008 lecture in Norway, Graham Harman elucidates an innovative view of realism that is useful far beyond his own interests in object-oriented ontology.[116] Identifying DeLanda as a novel sort of realist, Harman suggests that what we perceive as reality is composed of more than what we see in front of us, and is equally subject to the point of view from which we perceive it; reality "coheres" depending at the point of view from which it is viewed. Like a painting that looks like random spots and blotches close up, but absolutely photographic at a distance, reality is a question of assemblage rather than brute existence: the ways in which different objects and entities are brought into context and communication with each other. As DeLanda has it, "[g]iven that at each scale one must show that the

[116] Notably, Harman is less interested in this sort of perspectavlism than DeLanda is. Harman's typical argument would be the opposite: that "entities" exist in reality outside of the ability of a human mind to perceive or interact with them, regardless of the level of perception we are talking about. Nonetheless, Harman's characterization of Delanda provides invaluable insight into the work of this chapter.

properties of the whole emerge from the interactions between parts, this approach may be characterized as ontologically 'bottom-up'" (*A New Philosophy of Society*, 32). In other words, no "ultimate" identity exists for a particular assemblage because its identity is a function of its composition and the interactions of its components at any given level.

The notion of an unstable reality is not new. Since Descartes and Kant we've had good reason to doubt the "brute" reality of our surroundings whether they are social or material in nature. But what is novel in Harman and DeLanda is the idea that different realities exist simultaneously; that what is "really" real is, at least potentially, a matter of plurality rather than singularity. The painting is *both* photographic and a series of paint splatters; government is composed of *both* collective and individual interests, codes, and policies. Additionally, this means that "realism" is somewhat flexible; while political structures or modernist novels don't change themselves when we look at them, our relative perspective and position will reveal different and contradictory realties depending on the way in which they are apprehended. Again, this is not a new idea per se, but it does accord in useful ways with the present topic of discussion. Addiction, as we have seen, has very much depended on both perspective and point of view in its intellectual history. Whether viewed by a user with direct experience, a lawmaker interested in controlling outcomes and impacts, or a medical practitioner trying to treat it, there has been a great deal of debate over what addiction "really is." This is, I would suggest, in part the result of the way in which addiction is an assemblage in the way that DeLanda describes it: a complex phenomenon that is composed, simultaneously, on biological, individual and social levels of reality.

This dissertation has so far attempted to elucidate elements of the lived experience of addiction alongside the conventions of their expression in writing, and in so doing, show the temporary and tentative connection between theories of addiction and a given aesthetic or style. In the first chapter I examined disease theory in light of literary authority, and the ways in which first-hand experience might be used either for or against the notion of addiction as "total need." In the second chapter, I looked at popular fiction, and how the class dynamics of publication forged strange and conflicting versions of addiction. The present chapter is something of a variation on the first, insofar as it is similarly interested in the fundamental conflict between addiction as choice and disease. Yet where the first chapter was interested in the *experience* of addiction, this chapter takes *perspective* as its fundamental analytic tool. Most simply, it will examine how "the will," "disease," and "perspective" are concomitant terms in addiction literature. Just as a first-person narration assumes a certain amount of agency[117] in its protagonist, so to do third-person and perspectival works implicitly understand their characters as the effects of other wills. DeLanda's point, and one that will be important for the following chapter, is that this "will" depends importantly on the way in which, as Heidegger might say, it is "enframed."

Take for instance Eve Sedgwick's example of the A.A. member in her ground-breaking contribution to addiction studies, "Epidemics of the Will." Sedgwick examines the standard A.A. mantra, "one day at a time," and suggests that such a philosophy attempts to detach choice from the chooser: it is "a technique of temporal fragmentation,

[117] Agency is meant to encompass not merely the ability to act but also to have relevant knowledge that might affect one's action. So in terms of narrator/addicts, their agency assumes that they are capable of learning from their mistakes and making adjustments, taking responsibility, etc.

the highly existential 'one day at a time' that dislinks every moment of choice (and of course they are infinite) from both the identity-history and the intention-futurity that might be thought to constrain it" (134). I would only add, following DeLanda, that this is as much a question of practice as it is perspective. This strategy does not produce some kind of "ultimate" reality but rather a distinct one among many: one that appears useful for some addicts.[118] Rather than understand choice as relative ("I can use sometimes but not others"), in A.A. every choice is a simple one: either for drugs or against. And from this perspective, a certain reality of addiction emerges: one that is binary, to be sure, but also one that structures reality in reliable and useful ways. However artificial it may be, such an approach speaks remarkably well to the lived experience of some addicts. Of course the reality changes once again when viewed at a different scale. From the macro-social point of view, we begin to see a statistical kind of reality: the relapse rates of users trying to take it "one day at a time." Or perhaps we might see the proportion of users who manage to lead normal lives while remaining addicts and ignoring "one day at a time" altogether.

DeLanda refers to each potential layer of observation as a "nested level," and each produces a dynamic kind of realism:

> At any one of the nested levels, assemblages exist as part of *populations*: populations of persons, pluralities of communities, multiplicities of organizations, collectives of urban centres, and it is from these interactions within these

[118]For Sedgwick, addiction is both a conceptual and political problem, insofar as the practice of American will-mongering is slowly undoing any concept that one could even call "free." The more we look for absolute free will, the more it becomes invisible, and the more addiction begins to totalize the field of human intention. She identifies addiction as a "counterstructure" to free-will, insofar as it is a discursively necessary, and antagonistic, concept.

> populations that larger assemblages emerge as a *statistical result*, or as a collective unintended consequence of intended action. (20-21).

Importantly, we see here how intention (the "will") again appears in relation to perspective: that something like "the will of the people" becomes visible only given the proper scale. If addiction is a similarly complex and layered phenomenon, one that is composed at the micro level of drives, desires, withdrawal and biology, and also "realistic" at the level of social analysis, then perspective becomes an invaluable mode of analysis when examining addiction and addiction narrative. Put more simply, every narrative of addiction assumes a "natural" point of view from which addiction appears. The problem is, according to DeLanda, no such "nature" exists because the object that we are attempting to capture—the addict and/or addiction—is subject to the level at which we view it.

This chapter's analysis will take place using several exemplary narrative texts that employ very different approaches to both "will" and perspective. Perspectival narrative strategy became prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s, and, by the 1990s, would become a common narrative form.[119] My goal is not to provide an exhaustive reading of "perspective" in addiction literature, but rather to show the ways in which "will" is contorted no matter what perspective one takes: it will argue, following DeLanda and Harman, that no "real" exists for the author of addiction literature; there is only ever a partial and incomplete object. Representing that object then becomes, necessarily, a question of shorthand: attempts to capture and cohere an addictive realism that does not actually exist in a total or ultimate form.

[119]David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* and David Simon's *The Wire* are a few examples.

More specifically, this chapter will examine the works of Hubert Selby Jr. and Philip K. Dick, understanding them in the intellectual and historical context of the United States in the 1970s. Sociological and medical contexts will be important, as will the initiatives of the US government which informed, in both negative and positive ways, both authors' takes on addictive realism. Indeed, the 1970s in America were marked by a profound sense of ambiguity when it comes to addiction, due largely to the competing "assemblages" that were vying for control over the meaning of addiction. Given a series of new contexts—including the continued difficulties of treating addiction medically, the war in Vietnam (where drug use was common and highly visible to the American public), and increases in government controls and recreational drug use—there was no single clear idea of what addiction was or should be.

These authors offer a novel version of addiction insofar as their work resists the standard confessional form, just as they resist unified, first-person narration. Selby, for instance, chooses to tell his story from the views of multiple characters, which obscure and fragment "addiction" in interesting ways. It attempts, I would suggest, to move closer to a "macro" or "statistical" realism of addiction in its use of multiple perspectives: to show the connection between a craving and the ideology of the American dream, as DeLanda says, from the "bottom-up." Ultimately, his characters transform from subjects into objects, as their quest for what Selby calls "love" transforms them into helpless addicts. For Selby, this is precisely the function of the American dream: to coopt "will" into the service of some other will.

Alternatively, Dick's approach involves undoing the authority of the subject altogether. Rather than assume his protagonist as a stable vehicle from which to perceive

reality, he constantly interjects problems and complications. Dick's addicts are complicated and contradictory beings: at once empowered and constrained by the ambiguous *gnosis* that drugs provide them. Whether drugs themselves are the culprit or instabilities in reality itself, Dick affords agency to plenty of entities above and beyond the subject. The addict becomes just one more agent in a sea of others, until it is able to learn the ambiguous, "true" conditions of its existence.

Taken together, these authors provide a small survey of addictive literature that shows the operation of distinct layers in perception. In so doing, they build importantly on the ongoing dialectic of addictive literature, which is constantly exposing new territories and new styles of realism. Where the spectacular, popular literature of addiction of the last chapter was happy to start and end with the individual, these authors insist that it is only when viewed from a different perspective that a viable realism of addiction emerges.

Levelling Addiction

In attempting to analyze the various "levels" at which literary culture was approaching addiction in the 1970s United States, it is essential to consider what was conceptually available at the time. Just as it would be somewhat pointless to consider "macroscopic" views of addiction during the time of De Quincey (no high-level research or statistics existed at the time), so too is it important to consider what realism(s) of addiction were available to 1970s America. Indeed, De Quincey's view on addiction makes sense when author/users were the only authorities on the topic: but looking back

on what we now know of Britain in the 19th century, De Quincey's drug use was hardly representative of how the public used drugs.

In terms of the 1970s, DeLanda's work is instructive precisely because of the diversity of perspectives available at the time. Medicine and psychology were pursuing addiction at its smallest, microscopic elements: the cellular biology of withdrawal, and the psychological relationship of drives, cravings, and behaviour. On a grander scale, the US government was executing policies that understood addiction on a national scale: drug PSAs, as well as research and communications concerning drug use in Vietnam, all tended to understand addiction on the broadest scale. As I will demonstrate, these two different scales produced dramatically different takes on addiction and would serve as a background against which Selby and Dick forged their own, nuanced takes on addictive realism. As we will see, when it comes to defining agency in relation to addiction, both micro and macroscopic views tended towards binary thinking, rather than what DeLanda (following Deleuze and Guattari) would call "molecular" thinking.

The medical profession for instance tended to think about addiction as a disease during the period (though not universally so), and as of 1975, there was no firm understanding of the biomedical basis of addiction or withdrawal.[120] Consequently, there was no firm biochemical basis for the *mechanism* of addiction. Generally, medical doctors were aware that addiction was composed of both physical and psychological symptoms, and that the action of withdrawal symptoms tended to operate opposite to the function of the drug in question. Heavy users of marijuana under this model would, for instance, often experience insomnia and loss of appetite when discontinuing use. Because

[120] See *A Handbook on Drug and Alcohol Abuse* for an overview on the discipline's approach to dependence and withdrawal circa 1975.

marijuana tends to increase appetite and induce drowsiness, the body "adjusts" to regular use, which in turn causes an opposite effect when the drug is withdrawn.[121]

Accordingly, without physical evidence of addiction's operation in the body (perhaps the most microscopic realism of addiction possible), the smallest visible layer was to be found in human psychology and behaviour: how cravings, desires, and drives were converted into observable behaviour. And without a scientific basis, this work was largely a kind of reverse engineering, similar to Burroughs' interest in the "cellular" logic of addiction[122]: it was a question of deriving what had to be the case biologically and psychologically in order for addicts to act the way that they did.

As a result, scientific approaches tended to bridge between medical science and psychology. One instructive example comes by the way of Swedish physician Nils Bejerot's 1975 work, *Addiction: An Artificially Induced Drive*. The volume's forward (written by the then-executive editor of the *World Medical Journal*) provides a relevant summary of the medical discipline at the time: "We know an enormous amount about the action of drugs, about the psychological make-up of addicts, about the sociology of addiction. What we cannot as yet do is put our data together and make a sensible explanation of the whole" (v). The problem, in other words, involved moving between different levels of explanation: as I suggest, different levels of realism. While the physiology of addiction was not really understood, scientists were getting closer to

[121] "As a result, the withdrawal syndrome is often spoken of as a 'rebound' phenomenon, as if the depression of the central nervous system by addicting drugs is rather violently reversed when the restraining influence of the drug is no longer present. We agree with those who feel that this general view of the nature of physical dependence and the origin of the withdrawal syndrome is oversimplified and inadequate" (*A Handbook on Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 59).
[122] As Burroughs figured it in the prologue to *Junky*, "[j]unk is a cellular equation that teaches the user facts of general validity… I experienced the agonizing deprivation of junk sickness, and the pleasure of relief when junk-thirsty cells drank from the needle" (*Junky*, xli).

understanding the relationships between the action of drugs and their experience as symptoms. Statistics might explain the broad patterns of use, and case studies could explain why individual persons used. The problem was that no "ultimate" layer of reality cohered between the various entities and elements: or at least, not one that was visible to researchers.

Lacking an empirical model, Bejerot's solution was theoretical in nature, and attempted to marry the experience of drugs with the basic, microscopic elements of psychology: the drives. As he explains it, addiction is "*an artificially induced drive with the strength and character of a basic drive*" (5). Unlike psychoanalytic approaches that supposed, at most, two drives (death and life), Bejerot supposed a third drive which could be generated by way of biochemistry and served to supplant the proper functioning of the others. He goes into some detail explaining how addiction comes to supplant sexual desire (6-7) and applies Freud's pleasure principle in understanding the action of addiction.[123]

Bejerot's analysis should be read in distinction to other psychiatric and sociological studies at the time, which tended to focus on addiction in the macroscopic sense. Psychiatrist Norman Zinberg, who was similarly interested in applying psychoanalysis to the study of addiction, came to a profoundly different set of conclusions in the same time period. As I've already pointed out in the introduction, Zinberg was interested in "set" and "setting": the ways in which the purpose and location of drug use affected its experience and, potentially, the degree to which a substance might

[123] "It seems as if the pleasure-pain principle is the primary biological steering mechanism for the whole animal world, including humans" (5).

be addictive. Relying on a 1974 study, Zinberg argued that heroin use during Vietnam was an attempt to make the life of a soldier bearable:

> final army data makes it possible to say assuredly (despite the army's early claims that only those who were heavy drug users before service became addicted) that these young men displayed a wide variety of personality types, that they came from diverse social, ethnic, geographic and religious backgrounds, and that few were drug users before they went to Vietnam…[124] The determining factor in their heroin use had been the intolerable setting of Vietnam, and once they returned to the United States neither the power of the drug nor a susceptible personality proved to be decisive in keeping them drug dependent. ("Addiction and Ego Function," 150-151).

In Zinberg's model, the physiology of addiction is secondary to the setting in which it occurs and the motivations for use. Compared to Bejerot's microscopics, this macroscopic point of view (army data) produces a realism that allows for a much more nuanced view of agency. Rather than suggest that the movement between abuse and addiction is caused by chemistry (and hence deterministic to an extent), Zinberg's model allows for much more precision; addiction and abuse may wax and wane according to the circumstance and needs of the potential addict. For Zinberg, "choice" is a function of environment: a vector that alters the relative values of drug use.

But unlike the macroscopic scale of Zinberg, Bejerot's analysis favoured the individual as the locus of addiction, and accordingly produced a different realism of addiction. In distinction to Zinberg, Bejerot claims that

[124] Zinberg references Robins' 1974 study, "A Followup Study of Vietnam Veterans' Drug Use." *Drug Issues* (4), 1974.

> we often hear that addiction is only a *symptom* of maladjustment, psychological disturbances, or social grievances…I contend that the above line of reasoning in based on a misconception. While *drug abuse* is often a symptom of maladjustment, this is by no means always the case…*In principle*, *any individual and any animal will develop addiction of this type if certain substances are administered in certain quantities during a certain period of time*. (3-4)

If we might assume the Vietnam veteran as "maladjusted" in Bejerot's terminology, then this logic supposes that the conditions of war are immaterial to addiction; or at the very least, treating the addict from Vietnam is a question of treating a chemical imbalance rather than a person. Taking the individual as his focus (and even more specifically, the physiology of the individual), Bejerot separates the motivations of addiction from its operation as "disease" (4).

Fidelity to the body and the individual here produces a certain form of addictive realism which leaves little room for the "molecular" logic of statistical analysis and agency. Once addicted, the addict is fundamentally determined by a biological adjustment in their body: as Bejerot claims, "[e]ven if he now really wants to stop, it is rare, at this stage, that an addict is able to resist his craving for the drug" (3). We see here the full binary logic of "disease," in the sense that the physiological basis of addiction trumps even the "real" desire of the addict to get clean.

While this binary logic would limit the theoretical possibilities of Bejerot's approach, macro level approaches to addiction at the time were also binary in nature: nowhere more evident than in the United States Government's political response to addiction. Famously, on June 17th, 1971, President Richard Nixon declared drugs to be

public enemy number one.[125] In so doing, Nixon was addressing two simultaneous aspects of the newly emergent American "drug problem." Primarily, Nixon's speech was addressed to data coming out of Vietnam, which revealed that a surprisingly high number of military personnel were using and/or addicted to heroin. Second it stressed the need for American policy to reach beyond its own borders, arguing for stricter drug controls in other countries, especially those which produced "illegal" drugs.

For my own purposes, Nixon's address is interesting in terms of the scale at which it addresses addiction. Rather than consider the causes or motivations for individual drug use, or what the lived experience of addicts was like, it aims at correcting the "drug" problem on a grand scale. Nixon declared that

> [t]his will be a worldwide offensive, dealing with the problem of sources of supply as well as Americans who may be stationed abroad, wherever they are in the world. It will be government wide…and it will be nationwide in terms of a new educational program that we trust will result from the discussions we have had. (n.p.)

Of interest is the fact that drugs are here seen as the problem rather than the symptom of another problem.[126] There is no sense in Nixon's speech that the individual circumstance, nor biochemistry, nor drives of any particular individual are relevant to the drug problem.[127]

[125] Though notably, Nixon's "offensive" was as interested in both treatment and criminalization, unlike the punitive and excessive drug laws that would become instituted in the 1980s under Ronald Reagan.
[126] As Americans would figure out many, many years later as the War on Drugs became visible as a colossal failure, drugs themselves were only part of the problem.
[127] Though Nixon did endorse treatment for addicts, as did his chief medical advisor Jerome Jaffe. See "Conversation with Jerome H. Jaffe." *Addiction*. (94:1). 1999, 13-30.

What Nixon does recognize is the scale at which the drug problem operated, and the scale at which it should be addressed: both the nation and the globe. According to historian Dessa K. Bergen-Cico's research, some 30% of Vietnam vets experienced substance abuse problems of some sort (79). In terms of heroin specifically, "[b]y the end of the Vietnam War, U.S. Army medical doctors reported that between 10 and 15 percent of the servicemen in Vietnam were heroin users" (83). While such numbers would become the target of some skepticism later on,[128] they empowered the US government to take measures in the summer of 1971, including an increased budget for vet detoxification, and a screening process for vets returning home (Bergen-Cico, 86). Indeed, two years later, Nixon would sign the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) into being, which would amalgamate several organizations and unify, on a large scale, drug control.

Strategically, we also see Nixon's attention to *education* as another point at which to address drug use and abuse. Practically, this would include a series of PSAs that attempted to "educate" the population on the dangers of drugs. Early ads in the 1970s bore similar themes to the more widespread campaigns of the 1980s.[129] *Ten Little Indians* (1972), for example, drew on a nursery rhyme to drive home the dangers/loss of innocence posed by drugs, and implied, most simply, that drugs are going to kill you if you take them. Another PSA, produced by Hanna-Barbera (1970), posited a similarly gruesome end for anyone who decided to smoke a joint.

[128] As outlined by Kuzmarov (4), reports exaggerated the scope of drug abuse for the purposes of political expediency.
[129] "This is your brain on drugs" being the most popular of these.

The logic presented by such ads—that drugs were *always* bad and dangerous—was unforgiving. As media whose function was, ostensibly, to frighten people into never using, they found value in obscuring or exaggerating reality. Of course, some youth did harm themselves with drugs. But the message of such ads was rhetorical, rather than informative: a strategy that would prove contentious among America's youth.[130] As Philip K. Dick puts it, "[w]ords have ceased to mean much to these kids; they have had to listen to too many. They cannot be taught, because there has been too great an eagerness, too conspicuous a motive, to make them learn" ("The Android and the Human," *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick,* 135). Indeed, as narratives that sought to prevent or guide behavior on a large scale, such approaches were simplified versions of reality by definition: the scale at which they approached the problem of addiction, I would argue, constrains the type or character of the realism they are able to employ.

In the broad scope of popular opinion, drugs in America were still mired somewhere between a disease of the body and a moral failing, and laws continued to grow in scope and penalties as they had been for years. As Zinberg suggested in 1972, following hundreds of interviews with professionals, users and non-users, "[t]he public response to nonmedical drug use is overwhelmingly one of moral disgust, condemnation, and fear at the threat of social and personal chaos that drug use seems to portend" (*Drugs and the Public,* 29). This led to a situation of both ambiguity and conflict, as American youth had a very different perspectives on drugs than their parents' generation: especially considering the political climate in Vietnam.

[130] As Zinberg and Robertson suggested in 1972, the American "cultural revolution" by youth movements complicated the political scheme of drugs. Most simply, plenty of young people had first-hand experience of the drugs that were being demonized, which in turn produced only more dissonance between government propaganda and the demographic they sought to "educate."

Given the plurality of approaches to addiction at the time—physiological, psychological, criminal, moral, experiential, etc.—there was a privileged opportunity for literature to achieve a kind of representation that was absent from medicine, science and government. A biologist could not, for instance, bridge between the pharmacological reality of addiction, the pleasures of being high, and the statistical effects of “x” number of drug users overseas in Vietnam. So amongst all of these different attempts to identify a single, discrete layer at which addiction would become “visible” were literary authors who were more interested in addressing addiction as fundamentally contradictory and antagonistic. Unlike empirical disciplines and government agencies that tended to employ singular perspectives, literary authors were capable of reconstructing and reconstituting addictive reality at simultaneous and contradictory points: of dissecting the perspectives from which a realism of addiction might be produced in the first place. In this way, literary authors did more than simply “reflect” the empirical and ideological positions available at the time; they contributed new ways of seeing, new realisms, to the ongoing history of addiction.

Burroughs had to an extent already done this years before. As we saw in Chapter 1, Burroughs did not confine his interpretation of addiction to any single point of view. In terms of the physiology of addiction, Burroughs had already supposed a “cellular” logic of addiction decades before. Of course, he had no scientific knowledge of junk’s operation in the body, he was merely abstracting based on his experience. But he was equally interested in addiction on a macroscopic scale: how drug laws constrained and controlled addicted bodies, how individuals were trapped between moral panic and criminalization while suffering from what he imagined to be a debilitating physiological

disease. Yet despite the various scales at which Burroughs viewed addictive realism, his final conclusions afforded very little flexibility in terms of what addiction "really was." As we've already seen, Burroughs saw biology as the core reality of addictive experience, and every other aspect of the drug problem stemmed from that inescapably biological reality. There was no sense in Burroughs that different "realities" of addiction might exist simultaneously, and that addiction could be *both* wholly determined by biology, and also "purely" a matter of choice. In order to see that addiction could be *contradictory*, we would need to reassess the perspective from which addiction was viewed; away from the singular, authoritative viewpoint assumed by Burroughs, and towards the fragmented, partial, and incomplete perspectives of later writers of addiction.

Where medicine and government policy (as well as Burroughs himself) would assert an "ultimate" and reliable layer of reality, Hubert Selby Jr. and Philip K. Dick would find themselves in a much more uncomfortable position. Their work, rather than avoid contradiction and paradox, engages the difficult processes of moving between various realisms and perspectives, attempting to understand the connections between them rather than assume an ultimate layer at which they might be spliced together. Importantly, this new realism of addiction would require abandoning the classic form of the confession, which inescapably relied on the authority of a single, knowing point of view. These writers would rely on different genres and different narratives: science fiction, tragedy, third-person narration, and multiple or unreliable narrators. In so doing they advanced the capacities of addictive realism and demonstrated that no single point of view was capable of containing the complexity and difficulty inherent in the phenomenon that we call addiction.

Fraught Desires and American Dreams: The Works of Hubert Selby Jr.

After finding themselves in a novel set of historical circumstances following the political, sociological, and philosophical events of the 1960s and 70s, writers needed to adapt the strategies and styles by which they represented addiction. The confession narrative, with its emphasis on character, plot, and (often) a happy ending, seemed increasingly detached from the reality that drug use represented. Selby would emphasize other literary forms and styles that were closer in line with what they saw as the reality of addictive experience.

At a time when narratives tended to advocate the power and ability of individuals to conquer adversity no matter what, Selby's work represents a productive counterpoint. Otto Preminger's 1955 film, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, is an instructive counterpoint to Selby's approach. The film follows the perspective of a morphine addict, Frankie "Machine" Majcinek, as he tries to get clean. The narrative traces his numerous failures, and the domestic problems with his wife that result. After a plot twist that casts his wife as the ultimate antagonist (a move that differs dramatically from Algren's novel) Frankie finally gets clean, meets a new girl from the apartment downstairs, and lives happily ever after. The general structure—from addiction, into central conflict, into resolution and sobriety—is one we have already seen in the work of James Frey and a host of others.

But Preminger's Hollywood take on addiction is a far cry from the original from which he takes the core story. Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949) is a grim novel in which our "hero" Frankie dies halfway through. Indeed, Algren's gritty and unforgiving realism is much closer to the scene painted by Selby than to the glamorized version imagined by Preminger. Selby's point (and likely Algren's as well) is that stories

do not always end happily, and that there is something valuable, something "real" in the failure of addicts to integrate into society. Perhaps even more pressingly, there is good reason to examine the material conditions that contort the lives of addicts (military service, poverty, injury, etc.).

Selby's presentation differs starkly from the "Hollywood" examples, and not merely in its refusal of a happy ending. Unlike confessions, which tend to follow a single, authoritative, and unified point of view (typically of the protagonist, either in first person or limited third person), Selby's novels use multiple narrators who typically fall in and out of the lives of other characters at various times. As a result, we see Selby's characters as both subjects and objects; sometimes, a character provides a lens with which we view their world; at other times, we see them as either obstacles or aids in the designs of other characters. The result, stylistically, is a kind of claustrophobia in which we never get the "real" story: every interaction, every desire, every dream, is either personal and biased (when viewed by the character themselves), or else subject to the interpretation of another character. The only real consistency between characters is in the tone of narration, as it dips in and out of descriptions, dialogue, and internal monologue: a dysphoric effect that is only augmented by Selby's characteristic lack of quotation marks and attribution of dialogue.[131]

As I argue, for Selby there is no "ultimate" layer of reality precisely because the perspective from which reality is apprehended is constantly changing: everything is as

[131] "I also had to create the natural flow of conversations, which meant I had to eliminate all the conventional 'he saids' so I could create the feelings of the streets and the people of the streets. This meant concentrating on the specific vocabularies and rhythms of speech of individuals so the reader doesn't get bogged down trying to figure out whose talking…they will either know or it wont make any difference to them." ("Introduction," *Last Exit,* x)

embodied, flawed, and fragmented as the psychology of the characters that his narrative follows. Everything in Selby is partial, which is why his work is so effective in detailing and movement between various "layers" of addictive experience. At various times, Selby's narrative follows the minute psychology of craving and withdrawal, and at others moves to the social and political environments in which addicts use. In so doing, Selby constructs a realism of the subject as subject to; his interest is in the burdens, flaws and biases of ourselves, as well as the institutions, ideologies, and social conventions that direct our identities and desires. In short, he is interested in the process by which drugs, and as a result addiction, become *desirable*.

Yet while Selby's presentation of addiction is nuanced and varied, his own theory of addiction is somewhat less so. While his two major addiction novels, *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and *Requiem for a Dream*, don't openly make a case for what addiction "really is," they are nonetheless a demonstration of Selby's philosophy. For Selby, addiction is a substitute for authentic, connected attachment: what he simply calls "love." As Selby suggests, addictions are a replacement for *love*: "I think you can see where one of my basic obsessions in life is love, the perversion of love, and the lack of love" (*Face to Face*, 205). Michael Silverblatt, an American broadcaster and friend of Selby's, puts it this way in the context of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*: "The subject of *Last Exit to Brooklyn* is about the disappearance of love, and its substitute in all kinds of forms. It's America, so business, unions, prostitution, all kinds of moneyed activities substituting for love" (*It/ll Be Better Tomorrow*).

For Selby, "love" provides a core force or motivation that *drives* characters, and in general, his narratives detail the push and pull of forces as they move towards

seemingly inevitable (and unhappy) conclusions. While his novels are, on the one hand, exceptionally astute at moving between layers of addictive reality, they move towards a loaded and foregone conclusion. Put simply, Selby's works are tragic and melodramatic as a rule. Dramatically, every story revolves around characters who know they are harming themselves (are at least they should) but are unable to resist doing so. Paradoxically, Selby's use of prophecy and foreshadowing serve to accentuate agency: every moment of choice is rendered hyper-visible, as readers are made aware that *this* is the moment where hubris precipitates addiction and loss in a downward spiral.[132] And while Selby is brilliant in his ability to connect a craving to watch TV with the broadest ideology of the American dream, that such a relationship is inevitably *tragic* falls outside the boundaries of realism.[133] For all its versatility, Selby's version of addictive realism is not without its flaws and constraints.

Despite his innovative style, Selby remains an obscure contributor to American literature. Little academic attention has been paid to his writing, and it is often considered a derivative or afterthought to the more recognized Beat writers that preceded him. Certainly, his stylistic lack of punctuation and long, wordy paragraphs and sentences are reminiscent of Jack Kerouac. So too is his presentation of obscene, violent situations likely to remind readers of the work of William Burroughs.

[132] That is, the moments in which characters try to convince themselves that they aren't "strung out," that they can stop whenever they want etc. This moment, in which a character gets "set-up" for an inevitable downfall is an important dramatic structure in the work of Selby, and also serves an important function in terms of how his works conceive of agency.

[133] Selby's work compares interestingly with classic Greek tragedy, in that the tragedy is often introduced early and inevitably. Just as the dramatic action of Greek tragedy involves the audience wanting desperately for characters to avoid what we all know is going to happen, so too does Selby make the tragedy of his narratives clear and obvious.

People have certainly heard of Selby, and his works have, in places, achieved a kind of cult popularity (especially in Europe[134]); after all, *Last* Exit was popularized, in part, by its trial for obscenity in the UK. Filmmaker Kennith Shrifin has suggested that Selby's lack of popularity is the result of his particularly "un-American" viewpoint (*It/ll be Better Tomorrow*) though this reading begs the question of the overwhelming popularity of Burroughs and Kerouac who held similar political views and presented them in a comparable style. His work is more likely to be recognized in North America through director Darren Aronofsky who, in 2001, released his film version of Selby's *Requiem for a Dream*.

One of the most striking features of Aronofsky's film, and indeed one of the stylistic features that sets Selby apart from the Beats, is its use of multiple perspectives. Just as Selby would use multiple and fragmentary viewpoints to address a similar instability in the modern subject, so too would Aronofsky mirror that fragmentation visually. In the opening scene of the film, which features a split scene between Harry Goldfarb and his mother Sara, Aronofsky mirrors one aspect of Selby's perspectivalism. Each half of the screen represent situations "realistically" by showing them in terms that are realistically impossible: the different and competing "levels" at which reality occurs. In following the perspective posed by the split camera, viewers are allowed insight into an otherwise unthinkable conflict: the violence and confusion of a theft by one's own child, told from the perspective not of one, but both participants simultaneously.

As we will see, Selby's work is at all times interested in retaining the fundamental fractures, confusions, and contradictions that have been accepted as an essential aspect of

[134] As noted by several commentators in *It/ll Be Better Tomorrow*.

subjectivity and, arguably, of addiction. No longer whole, complete, and autonomous individuals, the characters that populate Selby's world are distinctly flawed: either through their pursuit of impossible (American) dreams, through their inability to grasp their own addicted motivations, or through their placement in a complex network of objects, people, and environments that determine their lives beyond something that might be simply called "free will." For Selby, the "individual" is no longer a useful container for the story of addiction because people lack the self-awareness and control required to manage modern life and the excessive desires that come with it. Accordingly, his world is constantly shifting between the perspectives of different characters, places, and things. As Michael Silverblatt puts it, Selby's is a world "where all kinds of wriggling figures are jostling each other for pride of place," where "you never know what's coming up next" (*It/ll be Better Tomorrow*).

A major contribution from Selby involves what I would call his psychological realism of addiction. This constitutes the base layer of Selby's realism,[135] where he relates the conditions by which the subject is made subject-to. This is nowhere more evident than in *Last Exit's* Georgette, who has fallen in love with a local thug named Vinnie. After Vinnie promises that he'll come by to see her, "Georgette tried to believe him and for a moment she forgot her previous fears and the old dream flashed briefly across her mind and she could see her room, the bed, Vinnie…" (26). Vinnie is Georgette's "dream" (an important idea in Selby, as we'll see shortly), and because readers are aware that Vinnie is up to no good, the "Dream" plot here is essentially tragic.

[135] Here I mean realism in the sense of being "true to life": Selby's work pays attention to the minute details, urges, second-guessing, and longings that go through people's minds in reality: a reality that is very, very difficult to replicate in a convincing or plausible way.

Just as the American dream promises what it cannot possibly deliver, so too is Vinnie a poor facsimile of what Georgette imagines him to be.

Georgette, despite having every opportunity to realize the danger and precarity of her situation, continues to act against her own best interests. Selby pays close attention to the mental gymnastics required to maintain this kind of fantasy, demonstrating a sophisticated and detailed understanding of desire and psychology. Selby's attention is microscopic as he follows the back and forth in Georgette's mind: her overwhelming desire that mystifies and obscures, and in so doing reconciles fantasy with reality. Georgette is a kind of "Vinnie addict," and her psychology is a precise and instructive analog for addiction; just as the addict bends reality to serve the logic of the fix, so too does Georgette find evidence of her fantasy in an otherwise uncooperative reality.

Viewed from behind her lovesick eyes, the reader is stuck inside the flickering images in Georgette's mind as she finally achieves "intimacy" with Vinnie: "O Vinnie, Vinnie my love my love – Stop the shit man start suckin. (my love, love) He flicked ashes, laughing, and took a drink" (66). In reality, Vinnie threatens Georgette's fantasy in virtually every way: referring to her as "man," and refusing any recognition of the romantic dimensions so obviously at stake for Georgette (Vinnie is drinking, laughing, etc.). While confronting the unpleasant reality of the situation—including the fact that Vinnie has just had sex with another queen—Georgette maintains her delusion at great cost. Like the addict's, her dream is at once specific and exemplary: a means by which she can continue in the self-destructive, dangerous behaviour that makes up her cycle of desire and satisfaction.

In this way, Selby's depiction is reminiscent of Jacques Lacan, who considered desire and fantasy to be fundamental elements of human psychology. For Lacan, as for Selby, the negative and symptomatic effects of such desires are a positive condition of them; much like the addict, pain and anguish or (withdrawal) are symptoms that allow for (or enhance) the pleasures and relief provided by consumption, which in turn ensures the repetition proper to desire itself (as per his logic of the *objet petit a*). As Georgette is pushed away from Vinnie, the precondition for repetition is once again set, allowing for a predictable and (roughly) satisfying cycle of desire.

For Selby, this double-movement of desire—both for and against the subject—is essential to the literary function of "dreams"[136] because subjective desire is the conduit by which subjects are made the objects of other desires: just as Georgette is coopted by Vinnie as a source of entertainment, so too are the subjects of capitalism co-opted through our desires. It is for this reason that I identify Selby as a kind of motivational psychologist. Just as the medical and social sciences were attempting to locate the "building blocks" of addiction (that is, the individual particles/drives that make up addictive behaviour in the smallest scale), so too would Selby attempt to understand *why* people were motivated to use drugs and, eventually, become addicts. The difference, as we will see next, is that Selby's work *connects* various levels of realism, tracing the connections between individual desires and drives, and the broad ideological conventions (most notably the American Dream) by which those desires are made to work against the

[136] "The Dream" is a prominent fixture in the writing of Selby. While it is on the one hand thematic (particularly in *Requiem* where it stands in for the American Dream), "dreams" can also be read as a central narrative structure in Selby's work. In *Requiem*—as in *Last Exit* and Selby's "addictive" short story, "The Fortune Cookie"—the narrative begins with characters who have very simple dreams or desires, and the central narrative arc is quickly attached to their resolution or frustration. Harry, a salesmen in "The Fortune Cookie," just needs to make his next sale, and the narrative progresses by way of his newfound obsession with fortune cookies that he believes give him the ability to get business.

subject. Just as Georgette's desires are ultimately turned against her, so too is Selby more broadly interested in how authentic, microscopic desires come to play out on a grand scale: how subjects operate as the objects of an "other."

Where addiction has been otherwise supposed to be a physiological disease (as the works of Burroughs suggest), or a moral/personal failing (as in many first-person confession narratives), Selby paints it as a kind of psychological adaptation: a way of desiring, and subsisting, under the conditions of the American Dream. Each character has very little in the way of wealth or even family, and the tragedy is that addiction is just the most common way of getting by. As we learn of Sara's TV addiction,

> [h]er conditioning had been long and thorough and Sara was able to do anything while watching the television, and do it to her satisfaction, without missing a word or gesture…No matter what she is doing one and a half eyes on the television makes the job, the day and life pass bearably on. (42)

Importantly, Selby describes Sara's adaptation as one of satisfaction: that she, by means the TV, has found a way to subsist under the conditions of her life. For Selby, dreams are meant to be just that: the tools by which life passes bearably on. Accordingly, the "objects" that become so critical to Selby's characters are more like fetishes than they are drugs: they are a replacement, a stand in for something else they have lost.

This is certainly the case for Sara's "use" of chocolates. As we learn early in the novel, Sara "always played a game. For how many years the same game? ten? Maybe more. Since her husband died" (43). Sara's "game" is to wait as long as possible to eat a cherry filled candy in her box of chocolates, and it is here we see Selby connect the minute drives of addiction with reified behaviours, as Sara's "game" comes to represent a

lost, symbolic relationship with her dead husband. After having a dream (implied to be about her husband), Sara eats her cherry chocolate while half asleep. The next morning "she remembered her dream and almost collapsed in her chair and shook slightly as she fully realized that she had eaten the chocolate covered cherry with the cherry juice filling the night before and couldnt really remember eating it…That was a bleak day in the life of Sara Goldfarb. She never let that happen again" (44-45). Sara admits defeat in the game and, after trying so hard to resist temptation, never resists again.

Of course, Sara can always go out and buy more chocolates. Selby's interest—and arguably Sara's sadness—is related to what the chocolate represents: the melancholy condition of Sara's life after the death of her husband. In this way, chocolates might be a drug for Sara (she certainly gets high from them[137]), but only because of the conditions which have made them desirable: Sara's desire, and its satisfaction, is instigated by a fundamental loss, one which makes the chocolate-as-fetish a reliable, pleasurable escape. Selby's movement from the microscopic scale of desire to a more legible realism of the subject operates by way of fetishism: the way in which, mechanically, a desire becomes attached to an action (or series of actions) that come to represent more than any simple drug could.[138]

This is not to suggest that Sara is somehow resolving or attempting to resolve a psychological conflict by way of addiction. Nor is it to suggest that all addictions operate as fetishes in this way. Rather, it is to say that Sara's case (and Selby's astute description) demonstrates one important way thinking about the connection between individual

[137] "…almost fainting as the first rush of flavor assailed her brain and she folded in her viewing chair" (44).
[138] This is the same operation as we see in the rituals and superstitions of drug addicts, where the regularity of consumption might easily represent a profound psychological investment.

drives, behaviours, and the broad ideological context of the American dream. As a kind of case study, Sara Goldfarb is an invaluable demonstration of the "practice" of addiction: a story of how individual drives and desires become "captured" by way of commodities. This scene, despite its overwhelming sense of tragedy and melancholy, thus offers a very precise and instructive form of addictive realism, as we get to see how and why addiction takes hold.

While this version of motivational psychology should, by no means, be considered universal (not everyone is motivated in the same way as Sara is), it is worth noting how different this scene operates from the standard confession narrative. Told from the third person, we get to see Sara as both object and subject to a number of different forces (historical, social, etc,). Accordingly, she is not the hero of her story, and its narrative does not depend on her success (her TV addiction is, after all, the brightest and happiest part of her life). There is, in other words, a certain kind of *realism* in her tragedy, despite the fact that Sara's story is melodramatic. In abandoning the narrative trajectory of the confession (the movement from addiction to sobriety) and replacing it with a tragic plot (the movement from sobriety to addiction), Selby provides an instructive counterpoint to the logic of the confession.

As I argue, this is one major contribution from Selby to the ongoing history of addictive realism. Here, agency is a function of perspective, and the more able we are to see addicts as objects, the more complicated the question of agency becomes. As we will see next, perspective is not only limited to the viewpoint of individual characters but is equally at stake in the environments in which characters live.

The Scaling of Dreams

All situations comprise an area of attention (figure) and a very much larger area of inattention (ground). The two continually coerce and play with each other across a common outline or boundary or interval that serves to define both simultaneously. The shape of one conforms exactly to the shape of the other. Figures rise out of, and recede back into, ground, which is con-figurational and comprises all other available figures at once.

- Marshall and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media* (5)

The most compelling and most complicated aspect of Hubert Selby Jr.'s *Requiem for a Dream* is its unusual sense of scale: not only its variable point of view, which alternates between four major characters, but also its constant attention to the *environment* in which characters exist. On the one hand, its scale is straightforward, as virtually all aspects of the plot happen in or around New York City (excepting a brief trip to Florida at the novel's conclusion). On the other hand, there is a great deal of complexity in terms of its landscape, background and foreground; places, characters, and even addiction itself serves as protagonist, environment, subject or object, depending on the point at which the narrative focuses its gaze. By integrating "perspective" as a variable, rather than a given, in its narrative form, *Requiem* goes a step further than something like cubism which apprehends reality through a volume of different perspectives. *Requiem* starts approaching something closer to the work of Graham Harman: a world in which the relationships between people, objects and places is entirely

and radically contextual, where "meaning" is only ever produced at a given intersection, when seen from a particular point of view.

As we have already seen at the beginning of this chapter, Harman and DeLanda theorize the points at which reality and meaning occur, or perhaps cohere, in the exterior world. Harman's interest in particular, surely related to the work of Selby, is in finding a perspective that is broad enough to see relationships, meaning and *being* outside of the preconditions that compose perception in the first place: he is attempting to see in objects, places and things the radical kind of autonomy that is typically reserved for human beings. Just as Harman is fascinated by the ontological relationship between a nail and a piece of wood that make up a bridge, so too is Selby interested in the complex interplay between the addict, a bag of heroin, Brooklyn, TV, and the American Dream: clusters of beings, objects, meanings and desires, that overlap, interact, and contradict one another to varying degrees. Indeed, as we shall see, his perspectivalism is constantly staging and repositioning characters, places, and things in an attempt to show a complex, nuanced reality. As I suggest, it is precisely this perspecitvalism that allows Selby to advance a form of addictive realism that is unlike any other: a realism that insists on the intimate connections between psychology, identity, and place. For Selby, addiction is not reducible to this or that drug, nor to physiology alone: it is found only in the lived, embodied experience of addiction in a particular place at a particular time.

In this way, the novel should remind us somewhat of David Simon's *The Wire*, which maintains an incredibly vibrant sense of claustrophobia, grounded similarly in a single location (Baltimore). Like *The Wire*, *Requiem for a Dream* is not simply about the visibility of characters in a landscape: it is equally about the visibility of the landscape in

characters. Omar Little and Avon Barksdale have scarcely ever left the city limits of Baltimore: for them, there is simply nowhere else to go. I would argue that a major reason for this is that *The Wire* is as focused on the city of Baltimore as it is on the people who live there. For Selby, as for Simon, the story of addiction is inevitably an embodied one, and while it may belong to any number of characters in any number of places, showing the places and people that populate a given story is essential in capturing its reality. This is the sense in which I point to "scale" as an integral, and understudied, element in Selby's writing. In establishing the reality of something as complex as addiction, Selby abandons the addict as the sole locus of meaning. The individual, the community, institutions, drugs, TV, the nation: each of these are what Bruno Latour might call "actors," and for Selby, each contains a discrete and useful reality when examined from the right point of view, when put in the context of another object, or character, or place.

So too is Marshall McLuhan's notion of figure and ground extremely useful in the study of Selby. Similar to Heidegger's concept of "enframing,"[139] McLuhan suggests that there exist discrete and simultaneous realities in objects, depending on the point from which they are viewed. Every area of attention (foreground), requires an area of inattention (background), making the reality of any given object a question of positioning within an environment. In terms of literary analysis, McLuhan's concept allows us to see discrete and autonomous realities that exist simultaneously: that is, it allows us to see

[139] See "The Question Concerning Technology." Most simply, Heidegger argues that objects in the world vary in their function, purpose, and meaning depending on the way in which they are viewed. A river, for instance, can operate simultaneously as an object of aesthetic beauty and a source of power when dammed. This analysis is quite similar to Heidegger's tool analysis from *Being and Time*, which is examined at length by Harman in *Towards Speculative Realism*.

character as a function of environment, and environment as a function of character. Accordingly, the following analysis will attempt to see the ways in which various grounds and figures emerge, interact, and contradict each other throughout *Requiem*.

The first grounding in Selby's narrative involves language and dialect. Quite literally, the language of drugs is a "fix" in *Requiem*: it welds characters to a certain time and place, just as it crystallizes a set of substances, motivations, and behaviors. Indeed, as prominent drug sociologists Maurer and Vogel suggested in 1954, the words with which the addict apprehends their world can be decisive: "The association of certain terms with specific experiences tends to create an associative pattern which undoubtedly plays a part in the satisfaction which the addict gets from the use of the argot" (*Narcotics and Narcotic Addiction*, 259). In their reading, part of the pleasure, and indeed, the reality of drug use, is *linguistic*, a notion that is certainly useful in approaching the reality of place proposed by *Requiem*.

The specificity of language is most obvious in the "pound of pure" that Harry, Tyrone, and Marion are endlessly seeking: an object that is at once real (a pound of uncut heroin), and also tremendously symbolic. So too is the language of heroin that pervades the novel telling: "copping," a "taste," "getting off," and being "straight." While the subcultural diction is, on the one hand, a representation of "reality" (people do use these words), it is also *productive* of reality. In McLuhan's terminology, above, this is a question of language's operation, alternatively as either *figure* or *ground*. In one case, language is something that characterizes the place and time in which our narrative is set: in another, language is a meaningful and indispensable site of personal meaning and expression on the part of characters.

Landscape can also play the role of figure or ground in Selby. At times, he characterizes a place by allowing an otherwise empty landscape to come alive: "Heads popped from windows, people occurred in doorways and from bars asking what happened and the cops yelled for everybody to shutup then asked what was going on" (*Last Exit*, 9-10). Here, characters emerge from the background and into focus as police investigate the beating of a soldier from the local military base. What was once a passive background (the neighbourhood) suddenly becomes focused and figured. Almost as if it were presented on stage, the scene becomes alive with people that emerge from an inconspicuous background.

Selby also dramatizes figure/ground relationships such that characteristics of a landscape become embodied in its people. For Tyrone "the streets" capture this metaphysical transformation:

> When you know the streets an stay away from the nuts, those drunken madmen who run around with butcher knives and guns, then theys just streets that you got to beat, but when you got somthin that somebody elses is wantin then you got trouble jim. Then its more than just concrete and tar you got to fight…you got to be fightin the fuckin crazies that those streets put into dudes. (*Requiem*, 120)

This is one way in which Selby refigures the relationship of figure and ground: while a character is typically brought into focus by her/his environment, we see here the way in which an environment comes into focus by means of characters. The "streets" are an antagonist for Tyrone, both as a kind of anti-metaphor (the "streets" themselves, concrete and tar), but also their embodiment in people (the "drunken madmen"). Selby figures environment as character: a force or entity that can be described through its relief against

another character. Interestingly Selby here constructs environment, and addiction itself, as an agent in his narrative: unlike the confession, which assumes addiction as a conflict of a subject against itself, Selby here imbues both addiction and environment with agency.

This is similarly the case later on, as Harry and Tyrone proceed through a wasteland slum where every junkie in New York seems to be scrounging for dope:

> And so the city became more savage with the passing of each day, with the taking of each step, the breathing of each breath…The sections were like cities under siege, surrounded by the enemy trying to starve them into submission, but the enemy was within. Not only within the boundaries of the cities, the neighbourhoods, the deserted buildings and piss stained doorways, but within each and every body and mind and, most of all, soul. (190)

Here, the individuals that populate the city's slums become incorporated into its character: the breaths and steps of people giving life and form to the conflict being waged against both flesh and concrete. In terms of scale, of particular interest is the movement of perspective at successive levels: first, on the level of the city, and then moving to the neighbourhood before focusing ever closer on the body, mind, and finally, soul. While Selby refrains from delving deeply into each, it creates a very different kind of realism: one that incorporates an entire landscape of entities, from the macroscopic forms of the city to an invisible soul.

As Harman suggests in his reading of Bruno Latour's actor network theory, "[t]he actor is not quite an object and not quite a subject; or rather, it can behave like both of these, depending on how we view it" ("The Assemblage Theory of Society," *Towards*

Speculative Realism, 80). This is more or less the function of what I've called "scale" or "perspective" in the work of Selby. In varying the scale at which objects, people and landscapes interact, Selby presents a world of addiction that is fractured, tenuous, and perspectival. Like other thinkers interested in the boundaries entailed by the limits of subjectivity, Selby attempted to capture something "real" in the plurality and complexity he saw as proper to addiction and the lives of addicts. Where character and plot has dominated the literary landscape of addiction, Selby instead wrote what could be called a "characterless" version of addiction that values plurality over singularity. Indeed, as director Darren Aronofksy has argued, the real "hero" of *Requiem* is addiction itself.[140] Characters serve alternatively as foreground and background, making the "subject" of his novel less about the people and more about circumstance: the situations that produce the desires, places, and relationships by which addicts are systematically undone.

Yet points of view and environment are only one strategy among many that might address the distinct and discrete levels at which a realism of addiction operate, and the forms of agency that are afforded to addicts under those constraints. As we will see next in the works of Philip K. Dick, "plurality" is not only a question of multiple points of view within a community: plurality is equally a problem of the individual, and of their ability to navigate intoxicated states. For Dick, addiction is a question of perspective, to be sure, yet Dick's work performs a much more radical interrogation of what even Selby takes for granted: the authenticity of perception, subjectivity, and the very possibility of "knowing" that comes from any supposed combination of the two.

[140] "The hero was the characters' enemy: Addiction. The book is a manifesto on Addiction's triumph over the Human Spirit." ("Forward to the New Addition," *Requiem*, I)

Breaking the Fix: The Drug Novels of Philip K. Dick

The 'subject' is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is.—Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis. In so far as the word 'knowledge' has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings.— 'Perspectivism.'

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (267)

As we've already seen, science, medicine and psychology all attempted to find the most minute building blocks of addiction during the 1970s. Whether they focused on the drives, or individual behaviours, there were useful ways in which to sperate the addict as a whole from the microscopic impulses that appeared to motivate their use and abuse of drugs. Nonetheless, it is also possible, as Nietzsche reminds us above, to move further back than even impulses, drives and psychology will allow. In order to establish even something as simple as a *motivation* to use drugs, we first need a "doer"[141]: a unified subject that is capable of acting in accordance with its desire. While I am not inclined to go as far as Nietzsche and suggest that "the doer" is a fiction added after the deed, there is good reason to investigate how exactly our subject comes to the knowledge that might allow them to act. In the present context, this is to again question what "layer" of reality we are interested in when considering addiction: what "reality" is produced when we do away with the subject altogether, and suppose "desire," "drive," and "motivation" to be

[141] "But there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed-the deed is everything" (*The Genealogy of Morals*, 45)

leftovers of a much more microscopic set of reality processes? That is, if we do away with the "doer" and focus on the "deed," what does addiction tell us about the type of being that an addict is?

Where Selby would delve deeply into the exterior forces that shape addicts from the outside in, Dick would do the opposite in examining the parameters of reality and perception on a more fundamental level. As Dick put it one essay,

> [i]f I knew what a hallucination was I would know what reality was. I have examined the topic thoroughly, and I assert that it is impossible to have a hallucination; it goes against reason and common sense. Those who claim to have had them are probably lying (I have had a few myself). (*Shifting Realities*, 60)

If, as DeLanda has claimed, reality is an effect of the point of view from which it is viewed, then Dick's insights into hallucination are more than just contrarian. For Dick, subject and object bear a meaningful and complex relationship, with one depending on the other for its identity and perhaps, its agency. Many of Dick's works are interested in the porous boundary between illusion and reality, but his three drug novels—The *Three Stigmata* of *Palmer Eldritch* (1965), *Now Wait for Last Year* (1966), and *A Scanner Darkly* (1977)—investigate this question by means of substances rather than his typical androids. These works dramatize the problem he outlines above: once we accept the indeterminacy posed by drug induced states, what becomes of "reality"? Is there any "waking up" after we consume a drug? Can a hallucination be "false" if it is something we experience in reality? And what are the opportunities for knowledge (or perhaps solipsism) posed by intoxication?

As I argue, Dick poses two distinct forms of addictive realism. The first, pursued in the earlier works (*Now Wait* and *Three Stigmata*), posits drug use and addiction as a form of *gnosis*. Here, drugs are components or tools in his characters' quests for ultimate knowledge[142]: returning to Nietzsche, this is to say that as "deed," addiction does coordinate an essential aspect of "being." As the addicts become increasingly mired in the gnostic highs that allow them to navigate mysterious and complex realities, addiction begins to take shape as a pathway either to doom or enlightenment. Here we encounter a fundamental paradox in Dick's work; if knowledge is the ultimate goal of Dick's characters (including his addicts), then his narratives assume that knowledge might empower addicts to act differently. Yet as we see over and over again, Dick's addicts operate mechanically, having full knowledge of the state of their addiction while being totally powerless to do anything about it.

His later drug novel, *A Scanner Darkly*, proposes a second version of addictive realism in his investigation of the addict as insectoid robot. Modeled largely on Dick's experience living with heroin addicts, *A Scanner Darkly* describes them as "reflex-machines": an insectile robot that is incapable of independent thought and action. Told largely through the perspective of protagonist Bob Arctor, this narrative is similarly caught between absolute agency and utter determination, as Arctor is coerced into becoming an addict while believing himself to be in control. These two perspectives—*gnosis* and roboticism—operate as antitheses, in the sense that they offer inverse narrative arcs. Where the quest for *gnosis* is a movement from ignorance to knowledge,

[142] One complication in this analysis will be the question of which drugs we are considering: hallucinogens such as LSD, peyote, and magic mushrooms are more typically tied to quests for knowledge, enlightenment, and transcendence. While such drugs were certainly on Dick's radar, they fall somewhat outside of the scope of this dissertation, as do writers who focus specifically on those drugs.

the "robotic" narrative is something of the opposite, as the addict moves from a state of knowledge and self-possession to mechanistic ignorance.

As works of science fiction, these novels differ from the other texts examined elsewhere in this dissertation, and equally from confession narratives that were popular at the time. Selby, even as he pursues a pluralized, fictional account of addiction, still presents his characters in a familiar time and place. Burroughs, even in the hallucinogenic nightmare that is *Naked Lunch*, aims his political critique at a real-world enemy. As we will see, establishing realism is much more complicated in relation to Dick, and not only because his addicts use fictional drugs in fictional worlds. Dick's interest isn't so much in drugs in the "ontic" sense[143] (that is, drugs that exist in the world, consumed by real people). Dick's interest, especially in his earlier works, is in drugs and addiction as an *ontological* category: the ways in which drugs and addiction reveal, or fail to reveal, something "true" or essential about ourselves, our place in the world, and the meaning or reality of our existence.

Where Burroughs, Selby, Marlowe, Frey, and many others examine addiction "in the real world," Dick seeks to defamiliarize and distort the very signposts by which we distinguish between appearance and reality. Where those writers take the veracity of perception for granted, Dick injects doubt and fracture into the very seeing eye by which readers might apprehend something "true" in his narratives. This is not to say that Dick's work cannot or should not be read in the context of its own historical moment. Quite to the contrary, I will be suggesting that Dick's work becomes all the more interesting given its tentative, subtle, and contradictory position on drugs. Indeed, in his hesitancy to attach

[143] This is Heidegger's terminology, and its use in the work of Dick was proposed in Marcus Boon's "Between Scanner and Object: Drugs and Ontology in Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*."

any "ultimate" meaning to either to drugs or addiction, he simultaneously affirms them all. Drugs are sometimes all powerful, transforming characters into robots. They are at other times transcendent, leading characters to higher forms of knowledge. Yet at the conclusion of *A Scanner Darkly*, Dick confirms the more or less conventional wisdom of 1970s America: that drugs are a choice, and as such pose consequences for those foolish enough to engage in their use. Such a conclusion is surprising given the potentially revolutionary character of Dick's thought, and as I will suggest, this follows more or less directly from the varied, fractured perspective that Dick employs.

Addiction as *Gnosis*

Knowledge tends to drive both action and resolution in all of Dick's novels, and his early drug novels, *Now Wait for Last Year* and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* are no exception. Both present characters who are seeking, finding, or failing to find "ultimate" knowledge, or *gnosis*. As I suggest, Dick's work prevents any ultimate resolution in terms of what addiction "really is" because of the implicit tensions between knowledge, will, and action: in order to define addiction, in other words, we first need to be able to determine the difference between the "doer" and the "deed," a prospect that Dick makes all but impossible.

Typically, addiction narratives present addiction as a state of ignorance where the addict is unaware either of the harm they are doing to themselves or are in denial about the "true" nature of their addiction. Dick's version is somewhat different: his addicts more or less embrace their addictive tendencies from the very start, and then proceed to learn the "true" nature of reality using the motivation and insight provided by drugs. We

normally assume addicts to be *disempowered* by their lack of knowledge, and that the cycle of addiction is informed by an inability to act in accordance with knowledge that they have gained. Yet in Dick, characters are *empowered* by their addictions, which in turn allows them to gain the insight they need to get off drugs. In this way, Dick upsets the typical "layers" at which we view addictive realism by modifying the connection between motivation and action. Where Selby's work sought to show the minute connections between physiology, psychology, and behaviour, Dick's work seeks to undo these connections entirely, calling into question the very parameters of realism by which we might distinguish between true and false, or between free choice and predetermination.

But before we approach an analysis of Dick's literary works, it is important that we understand how his own historical situation informed the philosophical approach demonstrated in his work. Illusion, reality, and knowledge were central to Dick's own spiritual and philosophical beliefs. From a young age, Dick believed that the "real" or phenomenal world was basically a kind of illusion: a mere appearance of some other, "realer" world that was hidden beneath what we could perceive. As Dick recounts of his time in university, "[f]inally I came to believe that in a certain sense the empirical world was not truly real, at least not as real as the archetypal realm beyond it…Hence in novel after novel that I write I question the reality of the world that the characters' percept-systems report" (*The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick,* 46).

Generally speaking, Gnostic Christians similarly believe that "reality" is nothing but an idea in the mind of God. While we see and interact with the world as if it were real "in itself," that reality is only possible by way of God's production of it. Key to

Gnosticism are two types of knowledge: not only God's knowledge (which produces the world), but also human knowledge of the divine, "ultimate" knowledge. According to religious scholar John Harris, former head of religious studies at Gwent University, *gnosis* "is equivalent in meaning to the English word 'knowledge.'" (3) However, it is a special kind of knowledge, "not discursive, or analytical, or abstract but 'insight' into reality that is beyond the reach of normal intellectual understanding" (3). The goal of such divine knowledge is to reach union with God (3), making this knowledge a case of transcendence, and being able to discern between the false world (represented by reality) and the "real" world that exists behind. While this thematic is absolutely critical in Dick's later work (namely in the *VALIS* books), they are nonetheless helpful in considering his drug novels.

As Marcus Boon has already pointed out in his analysis of *A Scanner Darkly*, "the drug related delusions in his work become material in a gnostic struggle for transcendence over the fallen world." (*The Road of Excess*, 208). In so doing, Dick's novels investigate the philosophical conditions by which we might establish something as "true," while simultaneously pointing to drugs as a wrench in an already complicated reality machine. These two novels in particular (*Now Wait and Three Stigmata*) address twin metaphysical problems pertaining to drugs and reality: especially considering their conceptual blurring between drug use, time travel, and *gnosis*. Of particular interest to the present study are the drugs that feature into the two protagonists' (Barney Mayerson and Eric Sweetscent) quests for *gnosis*, and how both become addicted to substances on their way to divine knowledge.

This is more or less the entire plot of *Now Wait for Last Year*, which explores addiction through the alternating poles of illusion and reality. On the one extreme is the case of Kathy Sweetscent: Eric's estranged wife who becomes hooked on a new drug: JJ-180. After taking the drug the first time, she watches a fellow user disappear into thin air. Later, taking the drug by herself, Katherine travels back in time. While there is a great temptation to read such scenes as hallucinations, Dick assures us that the hallucinations are in fact real. As Katherine suggest, "[n]ow I understand what the drug does, she thought. Why it causes objects and people to become insubstantial. It's not so magical, and it's not merely hallucinogenic; my cut is really gone – *this is no illusion*" (*Now Wait*, 100).

This is the most important Gnostic "twist" in Dick's version of drugs: rather than have drugs alter our *perception* of reality, they instead alter reality *itself*. It is precisely this destabilization that instigates the process of addiction, as Kathy tries to avoid the "unreality" posed by her withdrawal symptoms: "...ordinary things, whichever way she looked, seemed to be gaining density. They were no longer susceptible to being moved or changed, affected in any way, by her" (69). When Kathy isn't high, reality becomes uncooperative and antagonistic: it is only when she travels back to the past that reality once again becomes malleable. Paradoxically, it is only when Kathy returns to the past that she becomes certain of the reality of her perception, unlike drugs in our world, where intoxication is typically marked by an *inability* to act and process information.

Addiction is *gnosis* in the sense that it transforms the world from a given set of facts, relationships and interactions into a very different place: a place where the categories of experience and perception can no longer be taken for granted. This

instability is precisely Dick's interest, as it defamiliarizes our false understandings of the reality in front of us. As we learn in the novel, the effects of JJ-180 "'[vary] from person to person. Somehow involved with your sense of what Kant called the 'categories of perception'" (29). The reference to Kant is no accident, as Dick takes seriously the possibility that drugs alter our fundamental relationship with the world. Dick is quite serious in questioning the action of drugs, and the philosophical grounds by which we determine the difference between reality and hallucination.

Eric's addiction to JJ-180, for instance, is synonymous with his desire to change the present. Indeed, one could make the case that he is more addicted to the knowledge he gains from taking drugs than he is to the effects of drugs themselves. Here, addiction is figured as an incredibly human capacity, one that is deeply implicated in the flawed, ignorant state of being that Dick imagines us to inhabit. It is precisely *because* we are detached from something like the "truth of reality" that addiction becomes a possibility in the first place. As Boon notes of *Three Stigmata*, "the novel's plot disintegrates at the moment when paranoia becomes so strong that it is no longer possible for the reader to distinguish the real world from the virtual, or drug-induced, event" (*The Road of Excess*, 207). Thus the latter part of *Now Wait*, where characters' confidence in their understanding of reality becomes increasingly difficult, is synonymous with the action of addiction. Just as the addict's control over reality descends into a levelled down, meaningless repetition, so too does the narrative descend into variations on the same question: is this real or not? Yet Dick is careful not conflate sobriety with reality either: it is not as though drugs are the only means by which we become separated from the "real."

Dick is equally interested in how the *desire* for something real can be a form of intoxication.

Kathy's boss, Virgil Ackerman, is as addicted as Kathy, though his drug of choice is *nostalgia*. Unlike Kathy, who travels to a "real" past by way of drugs, Virgil travels by way of reality in his careful reconstruction of a fantasy world that includes the objects, sounds and people of his past life on Earth. Built on Mars, he calls this simulation Wash-35, a near perfect replication of the city of his youth. Just like Ann Marlowe, who insisted that addiction to heroin is fundamentally a question of nostalgia,[144] Dick is very much interested in the obsessive and compulsive character of looking backward, figured here as a desire for a reality that transcends the limitations of the present. Eric ponders this early in the novel on a trip to Wash-35:

> We live with illusion daily, he reflected. When the first bard rattled off the first epic of a sometime battle, illusion entered our lives; the *Iliad* is as much a 'fake' as those robant children trading postage stamps on the porch of the building…And, deprived of the past, the moment—the present—has little meaning, if any. (26)

Virgil becomes positively giddy as he hears about an "authentic recording" (73) of a program that he used to listen to as a child. Just as a drug user curates their high by way of dosage, so too does Virgil curate the reality of his past: "I think we'll finally decide to exclude that from Wash-35 because when I was a boy my parents didn't take the Hearst papers" (73). Just as withdrawal from JJ-180 fuses together subject and object, so too does nostalgia pose problems of reality, authenticity, and subjectivity for Dick. In

[144] *How to Stop Time*, 232-236.

nostalgia, the gap between subject and object is unbridgeable: there is no way to get back to the past, which makes every to attempt to do so a question of more or less sophisticated illusions (like Wash-35). Drugs on the other hand, at least in the world of Dick, actually bring subjects in touch with an inescapably "true" reality because it is *present*.[145]

Now Wait thus contains two distinct forms of drugs and consequent addictions: one, JJ-180 the time travelling drug which "really" brings the user back to the past, and two, *nostalgia*, the drug by which we encounter an image or representation of the past without actually being there. Returning to my earlier interest in DeLanda, I would suggest that Dick is dissecting the various layers by which we me might apprehend something as "real." Dick's interest is in the *mechanics* of reality: the ways in which human beings interface with the world, and the possibilities of their gaining knowledge, either "true" or not. This is a novel point of view from which to approach addiction, insofar as it favours the metaphysics of addiction over its lived experience. Indeed, the addicts in Dick are not particularly realistic: they use fictional drugs that operate quite differently from drugs in our reality. Yet the "realism" here is to be found precisely in the interchanging, antagonistic "realities" that characters encounter: just as DeLanda would argue that reality is an assemblage, so too does Dick show how our most basic

[145] Boon's work on Dick and counterfeiting is instructive here, as he stresses the inverted importance of illusions vs. reality. Drugs for instance, if they produce an illusion, do so in a special way: "For Dick, it is precisely the most obvious 'counterfeit' objects in the world that have potential ontological import, because their inauthenticity already contains a negation of conventional notions of authenticity and, as such, they are closer to the truth than those objects which human beings consider real or authentic" ("Drugs and Ontology," 73). Both Wash-35 and JJ-180 are these "ontological" types of counterfeits because they are "real" illusions in the strictest sense: as Boon explains, the difference between counterfeits and fakes are their respective values in a symbolic economy (71).

assumptions about the action of drugs, and how they interact with perception, are far less predictable than we assume.

The ultimate irony of the novel involves the fact that its characters are wholly aware of their addiction, and yet appear totally powerless to do anything about it. As Kathy realizes when she's coming down from a JJ-180 high,

> …these changes, experienced as taking place in the outside world and in her body, were actually minute alterations in the metabolism of her brain. But—
> This knowledge did not help her. For these changes in herself and her world were not beliefs; they were authentic experiences, reported by the normal sensory channels, imposed on her consciousness against her will. As stimuli they could not be avoided. And the alteration of the world's physiognomy continued; the end was not in sight. In panic she thought, How far will this go? (70)

Like medical and social scientists, Kathy at first supposes her overt perceptions to be the effects of internal mechanisms. Dick's point however is that such a judgment constitutes a substantial leap of faith. As Kathy's experiences appear to be alterations in the real world (rather than in her head), Dick similarly asks readers to question the authority by which they judge the veracity of their own perceptions.

The wrinkle, however, is that this knowledge is ineffective. As Kathy puts it, "[t]o herself she wondered when she would have an opportunity to look for Corning. And get more capsules of the drug. It was clear now she had become an addict. By now she had to face it. She felt only resignation" (70). Knowledge, paradoxically, is then both empowering and not, as Kathy begins acting like a drug robot, fully aware of her own

addiction, yet seemingly unable to do anything about it. While Eric ultimately manages to find a cure for JJ-180,[146] Kathy is hospitalized for the rest of her life.

Dick's other early drug novel, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, is similarly interested in themes of knowledge, perception, illusion and reality. And here again, drugs come to work their way into our ability to determine the true from the false. Yet rather than being a straightforward journey from ignorance to certainty, *Three Stigmata* is structured through the oscillation between two competing poles of certainty and indeterminacy. The novel itself—much like the powers of its "precogs" who can see only possible rather than definite futures—is unable to commit to any one version of the truth. Addiction—as well as "intoxication"—can only be found between scare quotes.

This profound indeterminacy is one more way in which Dick's work marks a sharp break from the traditions of addictive literature. Where many narratives (including his later work, *A Scanner Darkly*) are linear in their presentation of drugs, no such clean divide exists in *Three Stigmata*. After using for the first time, characters can never again be quite sure whether what they see is real or not. In so doing, Dick upsets the very possibility of defining addiction in the first place: after all, how can someone be an addict if they're not even sure if they're high?

Three Stigmata investigates the limits and boundaries of reality using two competing drugs. The first, Can-D, transports users back to a fantasized version of California's past, where "[i]t was always Saturday" (*Three Stigmata*, 43). Users inhabit the bodies and lives of two pre-constructed personalities: Walt and Perky Pat. The drug

[146] Interestingly, Eric's search for an antidote is more literally a search for knowledge. There is a lab in the future that knows the formula for JJ-180's cure, and Eric travels there to learn the recipe so he can replicate the cure in his own time.

acts by way of a communal hallucination, whereby several users join together using "layouts" which contain items (cars, furniture, clothing) that are purchased in the real world for use in the hallucination. Can-D can be interpreted quite literally as *candy*, insofar as it is a pacifier for colonists trapped on Mars. It offers a temporary and pleasurable escape, and users are addicted simply because it offers an alternative to their dismal lives: "'No more hovel. No more frozen methane. It provides a reason for living. Isn't that worth the risk and expense?'" (24) And unlike JJ-180, whose chemistry seems to automatically addict users, the colonists appear quite capable of pleasure, guilt, and resistance relative to the drug's pull.

The second, more properly Gnostic experience comes by way of the central antagonist's (Palmer Eldritch) new drug, Chew-Z: "*be choosy*. *Chew Chew-Z*" (60). Like Can-D, the drug is made from a lichen, though it was found in a distant solar system and brought back to market by Eldritch. The drug's name is similarly meaningful (as names often are for Dick[147]), and *Three Stigmata* is more or less beating readers over the head with its Gnostic imperatives. In ancient Greek, *hairetikos* is "the ability to choose," or in the modern spelling, *heretic*.[148] As a Gnostic drug, Chew-Z allows users to "choose" rather than, as in the case of Can-D, simply be pacified. Given the religious and metaphysical tones within the novel this conflation of drug use, irreligiosity, and agency is clearly important.

[147] This is also at play in *Now Wait for Last Year*. Himmel, the first character we meet, translates as "sky" or "heavens" in German. This is important given that Himmel is a God figure in the novel, through his creation of small, friendly automated carts that are actually the reanimated corpses of Martian animals used in industry.

[148] Dick's *VALIS* books follows this thread more closely, speaking to some of Dick's more eccentric beliefs involving time slippages between the present and ancient groups of Christian heretics.

Chew-Z is a similarly ambiguous drug, though unlike Can-D, it varies widely in terms of its effects. For Leo Bulero, the first user of Chew-Z, the effects are at times indistinguishable from reality. It is only the content of a hallucination that indicates the reality of what he sees: like a dream in which everything appears real until you realize that it isn't. At various times, Leo believes himself to be in the Prox system, "translated" into a world concocted for users of Chew-Z, or back at the offices of P. P. Layouts. When taken by Barney Mayerson, the drug's indeterminacy becomes even more pronounced, as he too loses the ability to distinguish reality from hallucination, save through confirmation of Eldritch's three stigmata: "steel teeth, dead pupilless eyes, and a gleaming artificial hand" (169). Like Bulero, Barney believes again and again that he has "woken up" from the effects of the drugs, only to find himself once more in the horrifying presence of Eldritch.

Dick is again inverting the standard mechanics of drug use. Where drugs typically have a period of high, followed by "coming down," no such economy pertains when using Chew-Z. This is another way in which drugs tend to empower users in Dick; by going through the forced, indeterminable hallucination entailed by Chew-Z, Barney comes to gain critical insights into his past and take ownership of his actions (especially relating to the major turning point of his life, his divorce from his ex-wife). Paradoxically, his addiction to Chew-Z is what sets him free. Drugs, in this case, allow users to be "choosy": in effect, it allows them to experience a reality that, however false potentially, is a point of distinction against the "real" false world. Drugs then, are useful precisely because of the perspective they allow: they defamiliarize and break up our assumptions of the "real" world.

Yet in describing a reality that is tenuous, ambiguous, and fragmented throughout, Dick produces an equally fragmented realism of addiction. Addiction is at once the precursor to "ultimate knowledge" and also its antithesis. Addiction is both a way of coping with negative circumstances and also a kind of brute metaphysical habit. Lacking the fundamental signposts that might allow us to determine what is "true" about addiction, readers are left without a resolution to the connections and contradictions between drug use, addiction, agency, and reality. As we will see next, Dick's later work would be much more willing to set down a definition of addiction. Where his early works are interested in drugs on a broad philosophical level, *A Scanner Darkly* paints a much more concrete picture of the addict as robot, incapable of choice or meaningful thought.

Addiction as Roboticism

Dick's later work on addiction, most notably in *A Scanner Darkly* and several essays/talks, would deviate from the Gnostic considerations of his earlier works. Part of this change in attitude was informed by personal experience. Around 1970, Dick was living with a number of friends who were heroin addicts. His 1988 book of letters and essays, *The Dark Haired Girl*, goes into detail:

> [a]s you may remember, I've written two novels about dope already: THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH and NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR. Neither covers the area of my more recent experiences; these books are naïve. You have to know junkies to write about them—if they let you live to do so—and in those days I didn't (179-180).

Where the earlier works, as we've seen, are concerned with *gnosis*, nostalgia, and choice, *A Scanner Darkly* examines the opposite: addiction as pure automatism. *A Scanner Darkly* imagines drugs as the absolute end of humanity through a fictional drug, Substance D.[149]

Dick owned the property that they lived in, and it was during this period that Dick's house was broken into. The burglary involved someone getting into Dick's safe and going through his papers, though little of value (outside of some cheques) was missing. The event is dramatized tangentially in *A Scanner Darkly*, and had a profound effect on Dick. Indeed, the novel's paranoia, and the inability of its characters to hold fast to anything close to "reality," is symbolic of Dick's own struggles to locate the culprit of the burglary. Famously, the investigating police accused Dick of committing the burglary himself, which finds representation in Bob Arctor's sabotaged cephalochromoscope: "'You think I did it,' Arctor said. 'Screwed up my own cephscope, with no insurance'" (70). Unable to confirm or deny the identity of the burglar, and unable to determine even the conditions upon which "what really happened" might be figured out, the mystery continued to preoccupy Dick for years.

It was also during the 1970s that Dick started becoming obsessed with the "Dark-Haired Girl," a figure that was both literal and metaphorical[150] for Dick. On a literal level, Dick started pursuing a never-ending series of college-aged girls after being divorced, most of them about 20 years his junior. Each of them were thin, hip, and had long, dark

[149] Given Dick's experience at the time with users of heroin, it's likely that Substance D is, at least to a degree, an analog for a real drug (heroin), unlike the fictional drugs of his early work.
[150] As will be explained shortly, the dark haired girl was a force of light and beauty that opposed another figure, what he calls the "mantis." The mantis is synonymous with addiction to heroin: "The enormous warmth of a young girl's heart is the subject of part one of my novel, and the extraordinary shutdown in empathy of the heroin addict's brain, his massive coldness, is that of part two" (*The Dark Haired Girl*, 185). The novel he mentions is almost certainly *A Scanner Darkly*, or at least an early draft.

hair. One of them, Linda Levy, released some letters years later, providing background on her relationship with Dick, the circumstances of the break-in, and how it affected him:

> When I met Phil in 1972, the break-in was (and continued to be for years) a major topic of conversation. It came up often. Some details were consistent, others were mentioned only once or twice. The missing checks were in the first category—in the second was the subject of grapes. I can't remember whether they took grapes or left grapes but something about grapes and the break-in wigged Phil a lot…My impression at the time was that something clearly happened. But how much of this story has been embellished over time is not clear. (*Philip K. Dick Newsletter*, #20 1989)

Dick was incredibly paranoid at times, and believed that the CIA was following him, events which are dramatized in *VALIS*. Dick's paranoia goes some way in explaining the style of *A Scanner Darkly*, and also the inclusion of scanners into Arctor's house in the early stages of the novel. The house's scanners are a kind of fantasy for Dick: a sci-fi short circuit, a "what if" that would've allowed him to see to what "really" happened during the burglary.[151] This is the first sense in which *A Scanner Darkly* investigates different levels or layers of addictive realism. We have, on the one hand, the realism of Bob Arctor's own experience: authentic, though muddled from drug use and basic human flaws in perception. But we also have the realism of the scanners, or the police, or

[151] As Dick suggests, "…in a novel I can creatively assign a cause, motive, guilty parties, a conspiracy in fact, that would account for all the facts." (*The Dark Haired Girl,* 184)

whatever entity is behind the scenes: an "objective" reality that sees drugs and drug use for what it really is.[152]

As I will suggest, Dick's newfound experience with drug addicts left him in a complex position relative to what he believed (or claimed to believe) in regard to addiction. On the one hand, Dick's feelings towards users are damning. His version of the heroin addict, the "mantis," is an inhuman robot who clicks and clacks around asking for money and drugs; for Dick, the heroin addict is "everything that I decry in terms of what a once human, highly recognizable individual person can become" (*The Dark Haired Girl*, 179). This is the addict as robot, and *A Scanner Darkly* traces the transformation from human to mantis through the fragmented, disfigured perspective of the addict him/herself in Bob Arctor.[153]

On the other hand, Dick was himself a user, and had sympathy for the drug using community. His interest in the youth counter-culture, and in that culture's ability to oppose the failures he saw in his contemporary state, are curious in the context of his hatred for drug addicts. Drugs were an important part of the rebellion they enacted: both in terms of breaking laws, but also in terms of gaining authority over the propaganda being circulated by governments and institutions. Part of Dick's suspicion towards drugs was likely caused by watching the disintegration of the users around him, as even the original "dark-haired girl" was, likely, herself a heroin addict. As Dick writes in "The

[152] One of the most notable qualities of the scanners' footage is how boring and inane it is. Here Dick sets up an interesting opposition, insofar as he points out the gap between the mythology of drug use (wild, reckless, transgressive, exciting) and its actual practice (just sitting around, doing nothing, getting high).
[153] While *A Scanner Darkly* takes the robot as its central addict figure, addiction as automatism is hardly lacking from Dick's earlier works. As Kathy Sweetscent imagines of the JJ-180 addict: "'Just reflex machines acting out the externals of living, going through the motions but not actually there.'" (79). Indeed, Kathy as an addict embodies robotic qualities, as she simply admits her addiction rather than resist it.

Evolution of Vital Love, "I've found the dark-haired girl and lost her to something with insect eyes that clacks mandibles and crawls on metal legs toward us to eat us up" (*The Dark Haired Girl,* 186-187).[154]

Finally then, what we see in Dick's work is, surprisingly, a kind of failure of the imagination relative to dominant ideologies of addiction. Dick is ultimately unable to reconcile his different opinions on what an addict "really is," and ends up presenting a version of the addict that is as distorted as the scramble suit that both protects and alienates Bob Arctor from those around him. In his author's note, which concludes *A Scanner Darkly*, Dick claims that "Drug misuse is not a disease, it is a decision, like the decision to step out in front of a moving car" (277), yet the novel itself is entirely an account of an addict who is brutally manipulated into becoming a brain-damaged tool in the novel's invisible drug war.

But before proceeding to Dick's conclusion, we will first need to establish Dick's views on the "mantis" throughout *A Scanner* Darkly. In stark contrast to the existential dimensions of JJ-180, Can-D and Chew-Z, Substance D transforms users into robot-like figures or, in Dick's terminology, into a "mantis":

> In this piece the mantis is not a literal insect but metamorphized from it by extension: it is a mantis-like entity, an insect entity, that I encountered first about two years ago, and which I have fled from with intense dread and aversion, only to encounter it again, as I do the dark-haired girl, again and again. This is the heroin addict. It is such an acutely dehumanized entity that I am having difficulty writing about it…If the dark-haired girl is what I move toward, then it is this

[154] This may be the historical basis for the fictional Kimberly Hawkins from *A Scanner Darkly*, a close friend to Arctor and also an addict (75-79)

> mantis, the smack freak, that I flee. Lest I be devoured. (*The Dark Haired Girl,* 179)

Dick describes the addict as "dehumanized": a kind of husk that is all the more terrifying because a human used to live there. Dick's characterization of the mantis is thoroughly robotic: as he has it in *A Scanner Darkly*, "[a] reflex machine. Like some insect. Repeating doomed patterns, a single pattern, over and over now. Appropriate or not" (65). Here, robotocism takes a sharp turn from Dick's earlier work, in which the distinction between person and machine was by no means pejorative. For instance, the automated cabs in both *Now Wait* and *Three Stigmata* are basically just people with a sense of humour who happen to be machines. Oddly enough, the cabs even go so far as to advise and congratulate their respective protagonists on their moral integrity.[155] As Dick puts it himself, "if a mechanical construct halts in its customary operation to lend you assistance then you will posit to it, gratefully, a humanity which no analysis of its transistors and relay-systems can elucidate" ("Man, Android, and Machine," 202-203).

This begs the question of Dick's complex understanding of robots more generally. For Dick, android is as android does, in the sense that humanity is defined by compassion, sociability, and the ability to deviate from influence or instruction. Human beings are capable, for instance, of rebellion where robots are not, in Dick's view.[156] Indeed for Dick, the real problem with heroin addicts is their inability to escape their

[155] Barney Mayerson's cab: "'It's patriotic to go into the service,' the cab said. 'Mind your own business,' Barney said. 'I think you're doing the right thing.'" (119)

[156] Indeed, Dick is extraordinarily interested in the youth "hippy" movements of the 1960s for this reason: "...the android, like any other machine, must perform on cue. But our youth cannot be counted on to do this; it is unreliable. Either through laziness, short attention span, perversity, criminal tendencies—whatever label you wish to pin on the kid to explain his unreliability is fine. Each merely means: we can tell him and tell him what to do, but when the time comes to perform, all the subliminal instruction, all the ideological briefing, all the tranquilizing drugs, all the psychotherapy, are a waste." ("The Android and the Human," *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick,* 13)

junkie programming, which forces them to move through life in an endless, repetitive quest for more of the same:

> When a heroin addict confronts you, two insect eyes, two lightless slots of dim glass, without warmth or true life, calculate to the exact decimal point how many tangible commodities you can be cashed for. He, being already dead, views you as if you were already dead, or never lived. (*The Dark Haired Girl*, 3)

As machine, the heroin addict sees social life as exchange value. Social interaction is about what can be leveraged to obtain more drugs: friends, furniture, credit, good will, just about anything that can be converted into drugs.

The first appearance of the mantis in *A Scanner Darkly* comes by way of the delusions of the drug addled Jerry Fabin who, after years of Substance D abuse, has become obsessed with imaginary "bugs" that infest his house. Fabin supposes them to be aphids, but they are more simply the "mantis," making his hallucinations merely a miniscule and multiplied portrait of himself. But the robot *par excellence* ends up being Arctor under the guise of "Bruce." After developing severe brain damage from prolonged use of Substance D, Arctor is admitted to New Path rehabilitation by his friend, dealer, and love interest, Donna. Unknown to Arctor is the fact that Donna is also a police officer like himself, but rather than investigate individual users and dealers, Donna is attempting to uncover how and where Substance D is manufactured; her mission is to get someone inside their production facilities. Arctor as drug-addled-robot is the perfect candidate: incapable of memory or identity, Arctor is allowed to harvest Substance D because he is now nothing but a robot. As Arctor discovers, but is unable to comprehend, the novel's rehab programs are actually recruiting addicts to farm more drugs. After being damaged

from prolonged exposure to substance D, ideal candidates are recruited from among rehab patients and sent off to remote farms where substance D is grown. The story ends somewhat ambiguously, as Bruce seems to have some residual programming from Donna: he wants to bring back one of the "pretty flowers" for his friends.

It is here that what might at first appear to be a unified and consistent realism[157] (addiction as roboticism) starts fraying at the edges, as Arctor is simultaneously an agent of his own demise and tool of a higher power. Part of the horror of addiction for Dick is that it transforms an otherwise happy and healthy individual into a robotic insect; but does Arctor really have any agency in the first place? From the head injury which seemingly causes him to leave his family, to his surveillance assignment to a group of junkies who get him using, Arctor is largely a pawn in a game that is outside of his control.

As a result of this somewhat confused etiology, Dick ultimately lacks the confidence to assert any definitive definition, and this leads to *A Scanner Darkly*'s multi-faceted—and indeed contradictory—views of addiction. The addict, for Dick, is capable of many things: of incredible evil (like Jim Barris), of incredible stupidity (Charles Freck), of extraordinary compassion (Jerry Fabin), and equally of being programmed for the purposes of others (Bob Arctor). As we see early in the novel, Jerry Fabin tries endlessly to rid his dog, Max, of the aphid infestation: "Sometimes he stood in the shower with the dog, trying to wash the dog clean too. It hurt to feel the dog suffer; he never stopped trying to help him" (5). The compassion showed by Fabin seems extremely

[157] In this context, realism is a theory or version of addiction, more so than its literary representation. "Realism" starts looking a bit like metaphor in this context, excepting of course that there is a robotic quality to the lived experience of addiction, as Burroughs has attested to many times.

characteristic of human, rather than robotic actions by Dick's own logic, making the clean divide between robot and human untenable.

Despite the complexity of perspectives employed in *A Scanner Darkly*, Dick does attempt his own definition at the novel's conclusion, though it too takes a certain amount of perspectivism into account. As Dick has it in the afterward,

> [d]rug misuse is not a disease, it is a decision, like the decision to step out in front of a moving car. You would call that not a disease but an error in judgment. When a bunch of people begin to do it, it is a social error, a life-style. In this particular life-style their motto is 'Be happy now because tomorrow you are dying,' but the dying begins almost at once, and the happiness is a memory. (277)

Of particular interest is the different scales at which Dick here views addiction: it is, on the microscopic level, an error in judgment. Viewed differently, it becomes a "social error, a life-style." Here Dick seems to be following the logic of his novel, and supposing in addiction a set of distinct realities. At the same time Dick's formulation is clear enough. While drug use might "appear" differently when looked at from a social point of view, it is ultimately just a common mistake rather than an illness.

Dick tells us that *A Scanner Darkly* is a cautionary tale. That "[t]his has been a novel about some people who were punished entirely too much for what they did. They wanted to have a good time, but they were like children playing in the street" (276). This reading is in accordance with literary critic Christopher Palmer, who suggests that "Dick is here, as he sees it, writing an anti-drug novel; he is writing about what happened to him and his friends" (177). Indeed, there is a sense in which this is exactly what Dick's novel does, yet there is again no "ultimate" layer of reality here, as Dick's work is

contradictory. If Bob Arctor is being punished for a mistake is difficult to see what he may have done wrong, aside from trust his friends and do his job.

The addict as robot, the addict as animal lover, the addict as child, the addict as surveillance object: each of these produces a distinct realism of addiction, and Dick's work is unable to resolve those differences in a unified way. Ultimately, Dick's position on the humanity of the addict is torn, as he seems incapable of deciding whether the addict should be an object of sympathy or scorn: either a robotic insect, or a delusional victim of psychology and circumstance. Unlike other addiction narratives which take a stable and unified subject as their narrator, Dick here derails the mechanisms by which such a reality might be secured. While Dick would very much like for there to be an "ultimate" perspective from which to view reality, we are left only with the flawed, biased, and contradictory glimmers of our own perceptive capacities.

This is only compounded by Dick's own roboticism, especially in regard to his presentation of women. A casual reading of *A Scanner Darkly* reveals that Dick finds it nearly impossible to introduce a women without also commenting on her breasts, whether she's wearing a bra, or if a man is sexually interested in her.[158] Closer to the themes of this dissertation, there is a profound sense in Dick's work that women have very little of import to say about drug addiction: Kathy, from *Now Wait For Last Year,* is little more than an overbearing harpy bent on making Eric's life miserable. Even through her addiction, she contributes little to the plot aside from representing a moral imperative for

[158] "Flat out illiterate. But foxy. So she can't hardly read or write; so what? What matters with a fox is nice tits." (16); "The waitress, foxy and nice in her yellow uniform, with pert boobs and blond hair, came over to their table…Over his head Charles Freck could see a thought balloon in which Beth was stripping off her clothes and moaning to be banged" (38); "'Scatterbrained, somewhat. Like you'd expect with a chick, especially the darker ones. Has her brain between her legs, like most of them.'" (40); "A girl appeared, pretty, wearing an extremely short blue cotton skirt and T-shirt with NEW-PATH dyed across it from nipple to nipple," (50) etc., etc.

Eric (whether he should bother to save her or not given all of the terrible things she's done to him). In *A Scanner Darkly*, Donna doesn't even use Substance D (she just smokes pot), and Dick seems again incapable of integrating femininity in any meaningful way into his development of addictive realism.

Finally then, despite being a work of science fiction, there are elements of Dick's work that are all too real: all too representative of the dominant ideologies which he opposed, rejected, or accepted without question. Just as he attempts to speak to the lived realities of addiction, he excludes feminine perspectives, more or less in their entirety. Just as he claims to be a revolutionary, anti-government thinker, he adopts astoundingly conservative positions on morality and drugs use as well. As a result, Dick's work ultimately falls short of capturing a sensible version of addiction because he is mired from the outset: unable to confirm either a stable point of view from which to see, or even a unified "subjectivity" that is free from the influences of a dominant and antagonistic culture. It is then in this sense that the "realism" of addiction advanced in *A Scanner Darkly* is emblematic of the fracture and dissonance that we tend to find elsewhere in so-called "postmodern" works: given the possibility that drug addiction might be simply a disease, or simply a choice, or the effect of a totalitarian drug regime, Dick presents a perspectivial take on addiction that is, contradictorily, all of these at once.

Conclusion – Subjects, Objects, Addicts

Because we forget that valuation is always from a perspective, a single individual contains within him a vast confusion of contradictory valuations and consequently of

contradictory drives. This is the expression of the diseased condition in man, in contrast to the animals in which all existing instincts answer to quite definite tasks.
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (149)

Given the complex and varied disciplines and theories that have been used to apprehend addiction in the past, contradiction and antagonism has been the rule, rather than the exception, when it comes to addiction's intellectual history. As I hope to have pointed out in the preceding chapter, some of this conflict is the product of a difference in perspective rather than a difference in objective reality: or, put differently, that antagonisms in "reality" may very well be concomitant with a difference in perspective.

Above, Nietzsche is similarly interested in these fundamental contradictions but focuses his gaze on the *drives*: how humans are always seeing the world from an isolated perspective, a perspective which is itself fractured and fragmented by desire and motivation. For Nietzsche, this antagonism is a *disease*, and it is here that we might begin to think about the connections between perspectivism and addiction more concretely. In Nietzsche's philosophy, perspectivism exists on both micro and macro scales; just as an *individual* is conflicted by different desires, so too does the "truth" involve struggle between individuals. "Disease" appears as the pathology that explains this conflict: only a "sick" being (or group of beings) would be capable of conflicting desires. Addiction, if it is a disease, might then be a "social disease" from Nietzsche's point of view: an illness that expresses "sickness" on a large scale.

If, as DeLanda and Harman have argued, there is good reason to believe that there is no "ultimate" layer at which we might perceive an absolute reality, then it is imperative

that we consider how perspectives shape the objects that we seek to define, and to see in them a fluidity and elasticity that we seldom attribute to material realities. In terms of addiction narratives, agency is where this impact becomes most visible: by altering the scale, and by multiplying and fracturing narrators, Selby and Dick call into question the easy agency that had been employed in addiction narrative up until the 1970s. Gone were the assumptions that addict-protagonists had total control over their fates, being replaced with a furious sea of conflicting desires and drives. Here, the addict appears, if anything, overdetermined[159]: the product of drives, impressions, longings, misconceptions, desires, and fears. By including perspective as part of their narrative machinery, these authors rendered visible the complex, contradictory, and overlapping forms of desire that were an essential part of addiction in reality. Just as sociologists and doctors would come to understand plurality as a rule, rather than exception in addictive experience, these writers imagined a new form by which that plurality might be made visible.

This is, in many ways, a part of the policies and politics of addiction today. Harm reduction (to borrow a current example) is an increasingly visible imperative in the treatment of addiction, being predicated on the fact that knowing the "real" causes of addiction is secondary to treating it. It also relies on the belief that "perspective" is an essential aspect in the apprehension of addiction, insofar as harm reduction resists judging the outcome of addiction in advance. There is no moralizing, nor criminalizing of the addict itself in harm reduction: there is only an illness that merits treatment. Harm reduction neither requires nor argues for any "ultimate layer" of realism, except perhaps

[159] Borrowed from the Marxist tradition. That is, the ultimate behavior, "addiction," is sort of like the straw that broke the camel's back because it is caused in multiple ways. We could consider psychological trauma, physiological relief/pleasure, ideological conditioning etc., each as factors that overdetermine the practice of addiction.

that users deserve compassion and care. What addiction "really is"—the motivations for use, the mechanisms—is immaterial.

Looking back on the history of addiction, it is worth noting how often people and institutions were quite willing to define addiction once and for all. Pluralism would have been intolerable 50 years earlier: Burroughs *knew* that the cure for addiction involved medical intervention (preferably using apomorphine), just as Anslinger *knew* that incarceration was the only viable solution for addicts. Such certainty seems to be the providence of an earlier time, as such certainty has become unthinkable by the beginning of the 21st century. Instead of Burroughs we now have *Infinite Jest* and *The Wire*: works that incorporate pluralism into the very fabric of their narratives and avoid defining addiction at all costs. They instead prefer to show as many faces of addiction as possible, and in so doing begin to approach the "truth" by way of accumulation rather than declaration.

Yet, we fall equally into error if we suppose plurality and subjectivity to be the end of the story, as if there were no stable conditions, no essential rules or boundaries proper to addiction. Quite to the contrary, this chapter has tried to demonstrate some of the necessary connections between perspective and "the will": the patterns, connections, and relationships that tend to operate between a narrative and a theory of addiction.[160] Addiction is by no means "subjective" in the crude sense: a question of simple "difference," as if one opinion is as good as another. Instead, I am trying to point out the stability in variation—or the variation that plagues stability—as new and antagonistic forms of addictive realism emerge, adapt, an (re)emerge over time.

[160] Even neuroscience supposes some kind of narrative, if only how a chemical reaction in the brain causes predictable behaviours in some users but not others.

So too do we err if we think that the styles employed by Dick and Selby constitute a sort of "end of history" for addiction narrative. Just as the raw, unadulterated "truth" espoused by Burroughs' *Junkie* in 1953 now appears less realistic than it once did, so too will the pluralistic, philosophical, and fractured narratives of the Selby, Dick and others begin to deviate from our expectations of "real" addiction. Although perspectivism solves for some of the irregularities particular to the narratives that preceded it, it is by no means an all-encompassing solution to the ongoing history of addiction. As new drugs, new theories, and new contexts emerge, literature will undoubtedly be right there, offering insights that the narratives of science, medicine and the state would otherwise leave behind.

Conclusion – On Fentanyl and Oxycodone

In concluding this dissertation, there is perhaps no better application for my work than in the current issues surrounding fentanyl and oxycodone: drugs that have gained a great deal of density in our cultural imaginary over the last decade. They, very much like heroin, have been imbued with meanings and mythology that have far exceeded the action and properties of simple chemicals. Heroin produces “dirty junkies,” or else perhaps people who are “substance dependent,” or people who suffer from a “disease.” Fentanyl and oxycodone have similarly produced a wide range of “subjects” of addiction. My interest is not so much in reading the semantics of these characterizations, but rather in the stories that inevitably exist behind them: the ideological and imaginary conditions that enable such readings to become part of our cultural imaginary.

The chemical that we call fentanyl—$C_{22}H_{28}N_2O$—was first synthesized over 50 years ago, but our cultural interest in fentanyl has doubled and redoubled in recent history. Similarly, oxycodone—$C_{18}H_{21}NO_4$—was developed much earlier in 1916, yet it has become a fixture in popular media of late, rivaling even the unease that has accompanied fentanyl. My goal in this conclusion is to think about why our cultural narratives of these drugs have come about the way they have: why is *this* drug so horrifying? Why does it come to the forefront now after having existed for so long?

Some answers to these questions are obviously material: relating the cost, availability, and chemistry of the drug itself. As we know, fentanyl addiction—for many addicts—was preceded by addiction to prescription painkillers such as oxycodone. Fentanyl is then just one logical step in the spiral of addiction; as the addict’s tolerance increases the amount of drug needed, there is a need for ever cheaper substances. This

very typical narrative is outlined more or less verbatim in the recounting of New Yok Photographer Nan Goldin, a three-year oxycodone addict who overdosed on a mixture of heroin and fentanyl before seeking treatment.[161] From a purely economic perspective, fentanyl is simply the cheapest substance which satisfies addicts' needs, and as such comes as the "answer" to the problems of availability and economics that accompany heavy use of opioids. Yet our cultural reaction to fentanyl—the cultural context in which we understand, debate, and police what is to be done—is not necessarily dependent on costs or chemistry. As I would suggest, the current hysteria—if I may call it that—surrounding opioids is as much the product of an inherited set of narratives as it is the actual drugs: or more precisely, this hysteria is a combination of historical circumstances and cultural narrative.

One of the most important elements of such narratives is the figure of the addict her/himself; a figure that, as we have seen, has shown a great deal of mutability over time. As has been clear throughout my dissertation, when the identity of the addict changes, so too do the narratives, mechanisms, and perspectives by which we try to apprehend him/her. At the beginning of the 20th century the addict had little identity to speak of, insofar as few people seemed to care who was doing what drug and why. It was only after the introduction of drug laws, starting with the Harrison Act of 1914, that a solid identity began emerging. Coloured by racial prejudice, fears of an unsecured Southern border, and a conspicuous lack of knowledge or experience in the realm of drugs, legal sanctions and popular opinion began targeting the underprivileged and disenfranchised members of American society as the poster children of drug use.

[161] As outlined in her essay for *Artforum* (Jan 2018, 56:5), in which she also notes the privilege of being among the few who can afford treatment to deal with their addictions.

Marijuana was characterized as a rage inducing intoxicant that fueled violence in the hands and minds of Mexican migrants. Cocaine was similarly supposed to fuel the violent, criminal actions of African Americans. In reality, such drugs were used by a wide variety of groups. Over time, America's position on the addict became a self-fulfilling prophecy. As laws continued to punish the vulnerable members of American society—those who used drugs for relief, or for fun, or simply lacked the resources that allowed middle/upper class users to stay out of prison—a disproportionate amount of non-white people began to fill the ranks of those incarcerated by drug laws. As Michelle Alexander has convincingly argued, this constituted a "new Jim Crow": a cultural and political logic which amplified the disenchantment of African Americans by means of drug and seizure/forfeiture laws through the 1980s onward.

This is the historical context which is so critical to understanding the opiate addict today. Statistically speaking, fentanyl users are white and male.[162] Yet when we examine the coverage of fentanyl in the popular media, a somewhat different pattern begins to emerge, one that is critical in ascertaining the current state of fentanyl's addictive realism. One striking example comes by way of the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC), which ran a story in 2016 called "The New Face of Fentanyl Addiction: Kati's Story." It traces how Kati became an addict: initially using fentanyl as a party drug and pain reliever before becoming addicted (an overwhelming common story, one that is intimately tied to the over prescription of oxycodone through the 90s and early 2000s). The "new face" mentioned in the story is obviously Kati's: the pretty, 22-year-old face of

[162] According to numbers from Centres of Disease Control and Prevention for 2016 and 2017, overdose ratios were over 2:1 in favour of males to females, and over 75% in favour of whites to other racial demographics ("CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report," Jan 4/2019).

a white woman living on the streets of Surrey British Columbia, buying drugs every day to feed her habit. Historically, a story about someone living on the street would hardly be considered news: those living in urban centres such as New York, Toronto, Baltimore, or Philadelphia surely pass by such people every day. What makes the story headline worthy is the way in which it updates or contradicts our accepted narrative by replacing the face of the addict. The poor, downtrodden face of the person of colour has been replaced with Kati: using makeup to cover the bloody scratches she's dug into her face.

There is a similar trend in American news media that has emphasized the experiences of women. Jennifer Percy's article in *The New York Times*, titled "Trapped by the 'Walmart of Heroin'," focuses on the lives of several women living on the streets of Philadelphia. One striking picture shows a young addict and sex worker named Jax, wearing a shirt that reads "LOVE." The density and consequences of such images cannot easily be overstated. Their affective charge is overwhelming one of contradiction, as the dirty, ugly reality of drug use comes into contact with white femininity. These pictures and stories force the reader to ask: how can pretty, young, white women come to be on the streets? Why would they give up everything for a drug, and drag themselves through hell to get there by selling their bodies?

These images and stories of women are so shocking because they are at odds with our perceived and accepted realism of addiction. But what is critical here is, again, the way in which *identity* is suddenly and importantly at stake in the addict; the unfortunate logic behind these stories that addiction isn't news until it starts affecting white people (and especially women). And following the explosion of fentanyl use—especially among whites who became addicted through prescription painkillers—we are finally at a point

where things change: laws start to be reconsidered, stigma becomes a central concept in addressing addiction, and harm reduction starts finding its way into policy initiatives.

When we consider the relationship between addiction and narrative, it's relatively easy to see the fictions and distortions that are built in to the identity of the addict. Obviously, all sorts of people use drugs in reality. But it is much more difficult to see a similar set of distortions in the representation of the *chemical* nature of drugs, which we might assume to be more properly in the realm of fact. Yet when we examine the raw, chemical power of drugs—or at the very least the representation of that chemistry—we see a similar process to the one outlined above.

The most striking story in this vein comes by way of a police officer offer in Ohio, who supposedly overdosed on fentanyl after brushing it off his uniform with his hand. As Artemis Moshtaghian put it for CNN in May 2017, "[a] police officer in East Liverpool, Ohio, collapsed and was rushed to the hospital after he brushed fentanyl residue off his uniform, allowing the drug to enter his system through his hands" (CNN).

Of course, while such a narrative makes for a great headline, it doesn't necessarily match up well to reality. According to the American College of Medical Toxicology (ACMT), fentanyl cannot cause overdoses by means of touch alone, and the event in Ohio did not much up to the known science of fentanyl:

> Despite concerning stories of emergency responders developing symptoms after exposure of skin to drug residue or powder, the reported symptoms have not been consistent with poisoning by opioids. In addition, these drugs are not absorbed well enough through the skin to cause sickness from incidental contact. ("ACMT Position Statement on Fentanyl Exposure - July 2017").

This should be common sense: if fentanyl were capable of causing overdoses merely by touch, we would see a substantial number of overdoses in non-users (like drug dealers), not to mention that users wouldn't need to go through all the trouble of cooking/snorting the drug in order to get high: they could simply touch it.

While this is an extreme case, it nonetheless had a profound effect as police officers, and even court officials, enacted new policies for protective equipment when dealing with fentanyl. Such a situation—where people are taking extreme measures against a drug that doesn't pose any actual health risks for non-users—is indicative of a certain brand of *realism* rather than reality. This case of "dangerous" exposure, and others like it, indicate an overlap between an event and a set of beliefs that constitute what I have called addictive realism. It is almost as if we *want* fentanyl to be this kind of unstoppable poison: some "ultimate" drug that destroys everything it touches.

Such an idea is consistent in terms of popular media at the very least. Fentanyl is described as anywhere from 10[163] to 50[164] times as powerful as heroin, depending on who you talk to. Such variance seems more a question of style than substance, as if media outlets are having an arms race to see who can make the boldest claim about a deadly "new" drug. Yet the point that I am making is that there is nothing particularly new about fentanyl, either in terms of its chemistry (it has existed for quite some time) or the idea of a new unstoppable drug. The only thing new about fentanyl is the ease with which it is falling into the hands of addicts. Is the anxiety over fentanyl really so much different from the "drug epidemics" we've seen before, like crack cocaine in the 1980s? What

[163] https://www.theintelligencer.com/local/article/Taking-heroin-epidemic-head-on-10445911.php
[164] https://www.cnn.com/2016/05/10/health/fentanyl-opioid-explainer/index.html

separates this "crisis" from every other "drug crisis" that has been stapled all over the news?[165]

One article from the *New York Times*, written by two practicing physicians and members of Harvard's medical school, suggest that there is an interesting overlap between fentanyl and another "crisis" in the 1980s. As Jeremy Faust and Edward Boyer suggest in their op-ed, "Opioid Hysteria Comes to Massachusetts Courts,"

> [w]e've been here before, and with similar destructive effect. In 1987, four years after it was determined that H.I.V. could be spread only through sexual or blood-to-blood exposure, there were still doctors and dentists who refused to see H.I.V./AIDS patients out of lingering and irrational fears about its contagion.

H.I.V., much like fentanyl, produced a situation in which the mythology had more traction than reality, even in medical circles. This disconnection is not merely a problem of belief or ideology; I would also call it a crisis of *realism*. That is, it is a crisis in the conditions of realism by which we understand the "truth" of an event: the means by which a story rings true. In historicizing fentanyl by way of H.I.V., we gain critical insight into how this sort of narrative has operated before, and how this narrative has managed to convince an audience of its reality.[166]

If, as cultural theorist David Morley has suggested, realism is produced between an audience and a text (60), then we must think concretely about what an audience must already believe in order for such a narrative to "ring true." That is, a story like that of our

[165] Despite my emphasis on the hysteria surrounding fentanyl, it is important to note that it is an extremely dangerous and toxic chemical, and the dangers posed in terms of overdose exceeds that of other opiates.
[166] Again, I am not suggesting that fentanyl does not pose a danger to public health, it clearly does. But there is still a sense in which there is an overwhelming cultural reaction that goes above and beyond whatever dangers the drug itself might pose.

Ohio cop (or Kati, or Jax) only makes sense if the addict is already some “other” that we distinguish from ourselves: someone (or something) that is capable of inhuman acts. “Othering” was a key element in the popular mythology surrounding H.I.V., and we find a very similar process a work in the case of fentanyl. Ideologically, the addict as other encourages us towards scorn and fear, as the very body of the other becomes dangerous. Such a move is conspicuous, especially concerning the modern-day emphasis on ending stigma in mental health and addictions: it is as if our culture is composed of two, competing, and contradictory voices. We are unsure whether addicts are deserving of human sympathy or should be quarantined so that they cannot infect the rest of us.

In order to believe that people suffering from a disease are “dangerous” or “infectious” we must already believe certain things about their identity: who and what they are in relation to ourselves. If we believe that only a tiny amount of fentanyl can cause an overdose, and that this can happen merely by touching a small amount, then what must we assume about the fentanyl addict who consumes many such doses a day? And if we are meant to find fentanyl alarming (which many people did) it can only be alarming *if it is realistic*: if it replicates the conditions of an existing realism. What we see in this news story is then an indication of a kind of cultural unconscious; a set of ready-made narratives that allow us to “see” something true in the addict.

But “seeing” the addict is only one narrative function: we can also consider the ways in which narratives allow the addict to remain invisible. Given the ubiquity of addictive terminology, we’ve all made some claim to addiction at some point: either to some relatively harmless substance (like coffee or tea), or to some substance that poses real risks despite being legal (unhealthy foods, alcohol). When we talk about these

addictions, it's worth noting the quality of our characterizations: when one admits to being a drinker, it's usually a kind of comedic self-effacement. When we talk about our Stilton problem, we say as much about the quality of our tastes as we do our poor decision making. These examples bring us to a very different type of addiction narrative which has largely fallen outside the scope of this dissertation: addiction as comedy rather than as tragedy or romance.

Such narratives serve as a foil to tragic ones; rather than critique and make visible the dangers of addictive tendencies, they instead mask and diminish them. Indeed, such a move goes a long way in *normalizing* such behaviors, as we find common ground in the foibles and bad habits that most, if not all people, have to some degree.[167] In terms of chemistry, addiction to heroin and caffeine might look very similar: regular, repeated doses which lead to dependency, which in turn causes withdrawal symptoms if the drug is not consumed at regular intervals. Coffee and the like are not merely intoxicants, but are the very definition of substances which are considered "habit-forming": they render users' behaviours as predictable as the tides, punctuated, every single day, by consumption of a drug. Yet the narratives by which we capture that process (for heroin, a downward spiral into incarceration or death; for caffeine, the funny realization that one spends entirely too much money on espressos) could not be more different. Indeed, it may be a ripe time for authors of addiction to start—by way of science fiction—transposing substances to reveal the incredible distance between these two perspectives: why not have the coffee addict go to "bean houses" where they can get their fix? Or have

[167] Which is why the status of addiction as *pathology* is so important in narrative; suggesting that we all have bad habits is one thing, but suggesting that pathological addiction is a common or universal quality of human being is quite another.

the dutiful son cook their parents a shot of dope when they come over to visit the grandkids?

Oxycodone has also catalyzed a new and unique perspective on opioids, most obviously in the cascade of lawsuits now being hurled at its principal patented trademark, OxyContin. In a recent article posted on *CNBC*, we learn that 48 separate states have engaged in lawsuits against the makers of OxyContin (Purdue Pharma and the Sackler family, its private owners) as of June 4th, 2019. We also learn that some 218,000 Americans have died from overdoses of prescription opioids between 1999 and 2017. The legal actions against Purdue, interestingly, are based on the argument that the makers of OxyContin knew about the addictive and dangerous effects of the drug, yet they used a titanic amount of marketing and lobbying resources to convince physicians otherwise, and to prescribe the drug widely.

While all this data appears, at least today, to be fairly obvious, it is again important to historicize the outrage now pointed squarely at Purdue, and to do so along the lines of addictive realism. In reality, people have been using oxycodone as a recreational drug more or less since its inception. Indeed, different iterations of the drug have included measures to prevent tampering (making the pill gummy so it cannot be crushed and snorted, for instance). In other words, both the users and the makers of oxycodone—as well as anyone else who cared to look it up on the internet—has been aware of this “problem” for at least 20 years. So if the reality of oxycodone has not changed since the drug was an accepted form of treatment, then something else must have changed relative to our ability to “see” the problems it posed.

While, as I've outlined above, this has something to do with the visibility of oxycodone's users (increasingly from the middle-class), it is also a question of believability: that it was once possible to believe in the good intentions of pharma in a way that it presently is not. I'm not naïve enough to believe that people trusted pharmaceutical companies in the 90s, but there is currently a populist contention against big pharma that was previously lacking. The other question, of course, is who exactly was Purdue fooling? Anyone informed on the subject should know that opioids are addictive: doctors knew this (or should have), as did the government officials who legalized its prescription, as did the people who made the drug in the first place. The politicians and legislators who are now hanging Purdue out to dry—as well as the citizens and doctors who drank deeply of the pharma kool-aid—had good reason to doubt the authenticity of Purdue's claim from the very beginning.

What has changed, perhaps, is our willingness to see weakness not on the part of the user, but on the part of the system that made addiction so very easy for so many people. It was perhaps much easier to believe, 20 years ago, that drug users were responsible for their plights (or at least, those who didn't seek help after discovering their addiction), and that people getting addicted were the exception and not the rule. But given the recent movement of addictive realism, it would seem that the "believability" of big pharma has shifted somewhat, at least relative to OxyContin: it is now possible to see a malicious, reckless attempt to generate value for stakeholders in what was once, quite obviously, a drug that offered valuable therapeutic options to doctors and patients.

This is, of course, intimately related to the question of "scale" as I've outlined it in the final chapter. Interviewing a single addict about their experience of OxyContin

might reveal a history of drug use, a troubled family life, and a sports injury that precipitated their initial use: all factors that point to circumstance rather than the drug as the starting point of addiction. Yet when we view addiction on a grander scale, seeing thousands and thousands of the same sorts of stories, it becomes possible to start looking elsewhere: the makers of the drug, their awareness of its effects, and the means by which they pushed it to the level of infamy that it now unfortunately enjoys. What is at stake then, finally, in the shifting views of oxycodone are the codes, signs, and conventions by which we grasp the reality of drug use. For non-users—those who lack direct experience of the chemicals in question—the management of the signs and codes is vital to the political outcomes of drugs. It is here that "realism" is about more than literary expression: it is equally a strategy by which corporations and governments avoid, displace, or transfer blame for the horrific consequences of chemicals gone wrong.

I would suggest that we have all, quite unconsciously, assumed important connections between substances and the people, places, and circumstances in which they are used. If it strikes as absurd that heroin should be used in living rooms, and cheese should only be eaten in the gutters, then it would also be worth examining the narratives and processes by which history has shaped the use of opiates as well. This is at stake today in the emergent narratives, memoirs, and first-hand accounts of those caught in the middle of the opioid crisis. *The Walrus*, for instance, published the story of Chris Willie of British Columbia, who died of an overdose before publishing a memoir of his fentanyl use. Nan Goldin has similarly documented her experience with oxycodone. These are the sorts of stories that will undoubtedly shape the future of addictive realism.

This dissertation can be boiled down to three arguments, each of which bear relevance to the situation in which we now find ourselves relative to opiates. The first is that narrative is a critical aspect of *any* theory/ideology of addiction; it is in this sense that I suggest that addiction can never be a purely empirical pursuit. Prognosis and epidemiology are *stories* that structure and explain the progress and incidence of disease. As *stories*, they are editorial: they include certain facts and events while deemphasizing others. It is in this sense that I, following the suggestions of Bruno Latour, would argue that narratives and science or both *constructed*: not in the simple sense that they are fictions, but rather that they are built on research, experience, and findings that produce a compelling version of what "really happens." This is one of the reasons why we have yet to come to some "ultimate" layer of truth in regard to addiction: as narrative: there is no final sense in which one story might represent every experience.

Second, I have tried to demonstrate that narrative—and literary narrative and memoir specifically—have played an active, rather than passive role in the ongoing intellectual history of addiction. Memoir does not merely reflect the findings of science, and novels do not merely reproduce the social mores of its time. From the first forays of Thomas De Quincey up to the wide-ranging thought of William Burroughs, addict-writers have had an active hand in how the future would think about addiction. This is not merely an argument for literary heritage (though it is fairly clear that we do not get James Frey without having Burroughs first); it is to suggest that writers have shaped the thought and beliefs of a staggering amount of people. For those who have never used drugs, and who read Burroughs to figure out what all the fuss was about, literature has had an undeniable impact. For recovering addicts who find support in the words of another user,

there is an unquestionable and important degree of influence. No matter how readers engage in the literary tradition of addiction, our current theories, culture, and practices are unthinkable without the contributions of narrative.

Finally, I have tried to demonstrate something of the structure and meaning of these narratives in my theorization of *addictive realism*. As I define it, addictive realism is a tentative connection between a given historical context (which includes sociology, medicine, law, social mores, etc,) and a given style (genre, tone, audience, etc.) by which an author or theorist attempts to show addiction "as it really is."[168] I argue that no single representation of addiction can be all-encompassing because the experience of addiction is so varied: not only in terms of biology, but also in terms of the expectations, knowledge, and experience of users.[169] Put slightly different, this is to say that any theory or experience of addiction can be "authentic" without being "representative." Where many other illnesses might have a typical case, the very *experience* of addiction has varied over time, as well as from person to person.

And if addiction cannot be unequivocally expressed as something "real" (or universal/consistent across users), then we are left in the realm of *realism* or *realisms*. What I hope to have shown is that "realism" is conventional when it comes to addiction, and it is only by paying attention to those conventions that we begin to see *how* the

[168] This argument relies on a somewhat unconventional definition of realism. I suggest that the vast majority of works of addiction narrative are realist in the sense that they inevitably make decisions in terms of what addiction is and isn't. As *narrative*, such stories invariably demonstrate cause and effect, reasoning, or a chain of events that characterize the experience of addiction: "how it happened." In terms of "style," I would also suggest that experimental works can be realist.

[169] The idea that the expectations of users have profound effects on the "high" that a drug produces is widely recognized. But even beyond this, as Zinberg and others have convincingly argued, the situation of the user also has profound effects on the relative values of drugs: that is, drugs may be a "relief" for one user who is under negative circumstances, and the same drug might provide very little to someone situated differently.

theory, science and ideology of addiction has moved and developed over time. One way to understand the history of addiction would involve studying the medical and political record and see the reflection of that history in literature. But an inverse study is also possible: to read the history of addiction literature, and then trace its influences on the sciences.

If this dissertation achieves anything, I hope that it contributes to dispelling the mythology that is so commonly attached to drugs and their users. While narrative is necessary in establishing any theory of addiction—and indeed, it will be an essential part of any initiative that seeks to free addicts from stigma, disenfranchisement, and the criminal consequences of use—our current moment is one in which our collective imaginary is working against rather than for the addict. Indeed, the recent legalization of marijuana—in both Canada and the United States—represents just one of what I hope may be many opportunities to reconsider the narratives by which we frame drug use and addiction.

Yet after learning so much about the history, politics, and practices of addiction, it is difficult to ignore the misinformation and consequent prejudice that is active in society today. Media is certainly one part of this problem, as I have outlined above. This struggle between narrative, reality, and belief is at the very heart of the paradoxical positions that are possible today: a situation in which we can both identify with the addict ("I'm so hooked on Starbucks") while simultaneously shunning them ("not with my tax dollars"). Given the complicated relationship between popular opinion, science/sociology, and public policy, we are unlikely to find a quick fix to this any time soon.

So for those of us who do not know what it is “really like” to be addicted to opium and its derivatives—that is, for those of us who have never used such drugs ourselves—I can do little more than mimic what should be conventional wisdom and suggest that addicts deserve the sympathy and respect proper to anyone who suffers as they do. After many years, I have come to the conclusion that we still understand precious little about addiction; admitting that, I can see no other rational response than to lend the addict the benefit of the doubt as we continue to apprehend—and hopefully one day find effective treatments and policies for—the phenomenon we call addiction.

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