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Feeling Better: The Therapeutic Drug in Modernism

Philip Glennie

The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor

Dr. Allan Pero

The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of
Philosophy

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Feeling Better: The Therapeutic Drug in Modernism

(Spine title: Feeling Better)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Philip Glennie

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Supervisor

Examiners

Dr. Allan Pero

Dr. Marcus Boon

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Stephen Bruhm

Dr. Joel Faflak

Dr. Alison Lee

Dr. Michael Gardiner

The thesis by

Philip Anthony Glennie

entitled:

Feeling Better: The Therapeutic Drug in Modernism

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy

Date

Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

Abstract

This project argues that by reading first-person accounts of drug intoxication in European modernism, one can uncover qualitative structures that broadly inform the modernist experience of space, time, language, desire, and embodiment. These structures emerge from modernism's inheritance of a Victorian penchant for systematic thinking, in conjunction with modernism's effort to uproot such thinking from its objectivist origins and apply it to the subjective pole of experience. Evidence for this systematization of subjective experience appears in the early twentieth-century movements of phenomenology, existentialism, psychoanalysis, and even structural linguistics. In addition to their systemic approach to subjective experience, however, these movements also insist that some form of psychic or existential discomfort is inherent to modern experience, and all of them engage in a marked attempt to address this pain therapeutically. Thus while modernist thought conceives of experience within a certain set of qualitative structures, it also aims to alleviate the pain that these structures conversely make possible.

By reading the first-person accounts of Jean Cocteau, Aldous Huxley, and Walter Benjamin, I argue that representations of drug intoxication reveal the extent to which European modernists draw upon similar qualitative structures when giving form to their experiences. Since these writers – like many modernists – also suggest that some form of chronic pain is inherent to modern existence, I theorize how the psychoactive drug might achieve a therapeutic effect by altering the subject's position within these same qualitative structures. More specifically, I argue that it is by moving incrementally toward death *while stopping short of it* that the modernist subject achieves a therapeutic experience through drug intoxication. This method of palliation ultimately reveals that in modernist thought, the subject is located on an experiential spectrum spreading from the pole of discrete, reflexive

consciousness to the utter non-being of death. In the interest of exploring this spectrum, I read Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin's work through the theory of Jacques Lacan, Georges Bataille, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Martin Heidegger. To understand the therapeutic drug's place in modernism requires a renewed conception of modernist experience in general, and it is in this regard that an exploration of drug intoxication holds significant import for the ongoing study of twentieth-century thought.

Keywords

Drugs and Literature, Jean Cocteau, Aldous Huxley, Walter Benjamin, Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology, Jacques Lacan, Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking my supervisor, Dr. Allan Pero, who provided me my first in-depth encounter with the work of Jacques Lacan, Maurice Blanchot, Georges Bataille, and Jean Cocteau in his course on Modernism and Poetic Space in the fall of 2007, and who helped guide my dissertation from its very inception. Like many graduate students, I hammered out the topic of my project while writing proposals for provincial and federal graduate funding, and Allan was there to help and advise me every step of the way. In addition to Allan, I would like to thank Joel Faflak, who has been not only a supportive and rigorous reader of my work, but also a wonderful friend. It was his course on Confession and the Talking Cure in the summer of 2007 that first steered my literary interest toward the question of therapy.

It is no secret that many graduate students, while sticking their noses into books, remain blind to the more practical concerns that underpin their daily lives. That is why I'd like to extend a very deep thanks to the amazing administrative staff at UWO's Department of English: Leanne Trask, Vivian Foglton, and Beth McIntosh. These were some of the first names I learned when I arrived a Western, and I'll never forget how much help and support these people have provided me during my time here.

While my post-graduate education might have concluded at UWO, it began at Saint Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. My decision to continue into graduate studies in English was without doubt precipitated by the help and guidance of Dr. Jonathan Boulter, who happened to move to Western the same year as myself, and who continued to help me through my early (and most difficult) years in graduate studies.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the friends who have made my time at Western the most fun and emotionally fulfilling period of my life (thus far!): Tina Northrup, Jenna

Hunnef, Raj Kapila, Pat Casey, Ross Bullen, Donnie Calabrese, David Drysdale, Sarah Pesce, Tom Barnes, Rebecca Mudge, Andre Cormier, Alicia Robinet, Matt Peebles, David Hickey, Mike Choi, and Jeff Douglas.

This project could not have been completed without financial assistance from the Department of English at UWO, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship program, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and express my gratitude for this funding.

Finally, I would like to thank my family: my parents, Judy and Ray, and my brothers Joe and Andrew. I have not always been the world's most selfless individual, but your support has always been unconditional. Last but not least, I want to thank my partner Stephanie, whose love and support over the past five years has helped me grow in ways that (I am convinced) would never have been possible without her. Her talent, passion, work-ethic, and overall approach to life are things I can only hope to emulate.

Thank you all again, and I wish all of you the very best!

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Introduction

Feeling Better: The Therapeutic Drug in Modernism

For the modernist writer, the drug is a signifier whose meaning is fraught with ambivalence. Yet it is also something more than a signifier: a chemical agent that alters signification itself, for one can never separate signification from lived experience. The drug appears as a discrete object within texts, but it also exerts a material influence upon the flesh-and-blood people who write those texts, as syntax and diction can transform on the most fundamental levels when the subject begins to write from an altered state. Although the drug might not seem to be physically present in a text, readers can trace its effects through the dross that intoxication leaves on writing. This residue can reliably demonstrate the extent to which the drug manipulates human experience, altering the speed of time, the boundaries of the body, and the nature of desire. The effects of these changes can be unpredictable, ranging from revelation and ecstasy to narcosis and death. But for the following study, one point remains un-ambivalent: that for the modernist consciousness, there is no aspect of experience that escapes the drug's transformative potential.¹

This project argues that by reading first-person accounts of drug intoxication in European modernism, one can uncover general *qualitative structures* that condition the experience of space, time, language, desire, and embodiment in the early twentieth-century. These structures, I argue, historically emerge from modernism's inheritance of a

¹ In the spirit of Sadie Plant's *Writing on Drugs* (1999), this study affirms that "[w]hether they are organic or synthetic, old or new, stimulating, narcotic, or hallucinogenic, all these drugs have some specific psychoactive effect: they all shift perception, affect moods, change behaviour, and alter states of mind" (Plant 3). In other words, "[w]hen drugs change their users, they change *everything*" (3; my emphasis).

Victorian penchant for systematic thinking, combined with modernism's move to uproot such thinking from its objectivist origins and to apply it to the subjective pole of experience.² Evidence for this rigorous systematization of subjective experience appears in many of the conceptual movements that emerge at the beginning of the twentieth century, which include phenomenology (Husserl), existentialism (Sartre), and psychoanalysis (Freud). Perhaps the most rigorous systematization of subjective experience, however, comes with the advent of Saussurian linguistics and its consolidation in the movement known as "structuralism." As I will argue, the intersection of these distinct modes of thought ultimately inscribe (and reciprocally draw upon) certain fundamental structures of modernist experience, structures that will be gathered together and explicitly formalized several decades later in the work of Jacques Lacan. Before I unpack my theorization of these structures, however, I would also like to note that in addition to their systematic approach to the subjective pole of experience, the fields of phenomenology, existentialism, and psychoanalysis share another significant characteristic: all of them insist that some form of psychic or existential discomfort inheres in modern subjectivity as such, and all of them imply that twentieth-century thought contains some imperative to address this pain *therapeutically*. Thus, I argue that while modernist thought conceives of experience within a certain set of qualitative structures, this conception is inseparable from an impulse to alleviate the pain that these same structures make possible.

² In this respect, one could characterize my project as an example of historicist structuralism (or structural historicism). In other words, I argue for the existence of certain general structures that broadly inform modernist experience, while at the same time positing these structures as historical, discursive productions. As I will argue later in this chapter, these structures of experience are by no means ahistorical, yet their entrenchment in modernist thought nonetheless informs modernist experience on the most fundamental levels.

By reading the first-person drug accounts of Jean Cocteau, Aldous Huxley, and Walter Benjamin, I argue that first-person representations of drug intoxication reveal the extent to which modernist thinkers (from distinct cultural backgrounds) appeal to similar qualitative structures to describe their experience of time, space, language, embodiment, and desire. Since these writers also suggest that some form of chronic pain is inherent to twentieth-century experience, I will also theorize how the drug might achieve a markedly alleviatory effect by altering the modernist's subjective position within these structures. Since the structures that give rise to pain are also those which give rise to subjectivity itself, the drug experience can only palliate these pains by breaking down the boundaries of human consciousness. That is to say, the modernist subject must relinquish her very sense of selfhood insofar as she wishes to palliate the fundamental pain of existence. This method of palliation suggests that in modernist thought, the subject exists not on one side of a rigid life/death dichotomy, but on an experiential spectrum that spreads from the pole of discrete, reflexive consciousness to the utter non-being of death. In the interest of exploring this experiential spectrum, I read Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin's work through the theory of modernist thinkers like Jacques Lacan, Georges Bataille, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Martin Heidegger. It is by moving toward death – while stopping short of it – that the modernist subject achieves a therapeutic experience through drugs. Such palliation requires nothing less than a transformation of experience on its most fundamental levels, and it is in this regard that an exploration of the drug experience holds significant import for the ongoing study of modernist thought.

“Everydayness” and Modernist Discomfort

A feature that distinguishes the modernist conception of experience from previous eras is its explicit break from the Cartesian dichotomy of *res extensa* and *res cogitans*.³ With the emergence of phenomenology, existentialism, and psychoanalysis, the former divide between mind and matter transforms into a divide between embodied consciousness and the terrain of space/time, and this development sparks a proliferation of discourses on the lived experience of temporality at the beginning of the twentieth century. Henri Bergson’s *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889) becomes a monumental text for modernist thought, and a precursor to Martin Heidegger’s magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1927). These works aim to help twentieth-century subjects re-conceive their experience of time from both a philosophical and everyday perspective; but behind their obvious intellectual commitments lies a palpable therapeutic impulse: a desire to help subjects achieve a less alienated or less painful existence. Bergson’s theory of duration criticizes the scientific/philosophical tendency to chop time into a chain of discrete, quantifiable fragments. This rendering of time, he argues, alienates people from a more immediate knowledge of their inner sense of duration: the qualitative experience of time that varies its speed depending upon the individual’s state of consciousness, exceeding quantification. In his effort to restore duration “to its original purity,” Bergson aims to “recover contact with the real” and thus restore a lost sense of immanent meaning and affective comfort in lived experience (Bergson 241).

³ I use the word “explicit” to characterize this break, because without doubt one can find intimations of this break with Cartesian dualism which predate the modernist era.

Heidegger similarly attests that modern experience has undergone a fall from authentic Being or *Dasein*, and that the source of this fall finds its symptom in a “distinctive mode of temporality” (*Being* 351). Heidegger’s phenomenological remedy to this problem might not be the same as Bergson’s, but his diagnosis of it is similar in principle. Like Bergson, he links this problem of modern experience to the rise of quantifiable clock-time, and its manifestation in lived experience as “everydayness.” In *Being and Time*, he writes that “‘Everydayness’ manifestly stands for that way of existing in which Dasein maintains itself ‘every day’ [‘alle Tage’] ... In everydayness everything is all one and the same, but whatever the day may bring is taken as diversification (422).⁴ Everydayness is the experience of time that inscribes ever-the-sameness on all human experience, and yet it undermines the notion of permanence by also rendering experience

⁴ Heidegger no doubt draws many of his thoughts on everydayness or modern “boredom” from his German predecessor Georg Simmel, who speaks of a similar predicament in modern thought in “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903). In this text, Simmel identifies clock-time, and more specifically the “universal diffusion of pocket watches,” as an embodiment of the modern “blasé attitude” (185/186). The clock renders time as a series of spatial intervals which travel in a circle and inscribe each moment as a distinct, but equally empty gap. When people make an effort to fill these moments with activity, the hand of the clock simply travels to the next empty interval and renders any such effort transitory. To this extent, the dominant affect of modernity is one in which “the meaning and the differing values of things, and thereby the things themselves, are experienced as insubstantial” (186). Or in other words, as Simmel states in “The Conflict in Modern Culture” (1921), “[e]ach cultural form, once it is created, is gnawed at varying rates by the forces of life” (11). Bergson’s *Time and Free Will* does not possess the same German affiliation to Simmel as Heidegger’s work, but its expressed goal is also to overcome the alienating effects of quantifiable clock-time, and to replace them with a more intimate relationship to time as a subjectively lived phenomenon. To be fair, Heidegger’s phenomenological approach to the affective “problem of modernity” is by no means the same as Simmel’s historico-materialist approach. In *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*, Elizabeth Goodstein remarks that “[i]f for Simmel the global, sociological framework is decisive in defining the significance of the negative form of subjectivity epitomized by blaséness, for Heidegger, it is the relation to individual mortality that renders the problem of boredom philosophically significant” (282). That is to say, Simmel and Heidegger come at the “problem of modernity” from different angles, yet for the purposes of my project, I will emphasize those similarities in their thought that provide evidence of modernism’s therapeutic imperative. For more on the specific discordances between them, see Goodstein (281-84).

as ephemeral.⁵ All days, in other words, are ever-the-same in their perpetual passing away, and people's awareness of this fact makes them susceptible to chronic despair or affective numbness. The problem Heidegger identifies here is similar in nature to that which Bergson battles against – the experience of time as an ever-unfolding succession (or chain) of discrete moments. The lack of both permanence *and* progress gives experience a quality of unfolding emptiness and induces a “dull suffering” for Heidegger. Heidegger's work, however, attempts to trace a path back to authentic being through a lived encounter with the impending possibility of death. The encounter with death is not intended to produce anxiety, but to reinvest the contents of life with immanent meaningfulness. Both Bergson and Heidegger ultimately argue that a less-alienated and painful form of experience must reorient the human subject's perception of time, which carries with it a sea-change in the fields of desire and language. I will soon discuss the implications of this last clause, but for the time being, I merely want to affirm the importance of the therapeutic impulse that drives these two central proponents of phenomenology in European modernism. My exploration of this therapeutic impulse will inform much of the coming discussion about mind-altering substances and their importance to twentieth-century thought.

⁵ In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929), Heidegger becomes even more explicit about the therapeutic intentions informing his thought. He claims that *all* philosophical inquiry must proceed from the recognition of a fundamental mood or “attunement” that dominates modernity, and that this attunement is that of a pervasive “boredom.” In a statement that alludes to his concept of Being-towards-death, Heidegger says of the modern predicament: “[t]he *mystery* is lacking in our Dasein, and thus the inner terror is missing... that gives greatness to the Dasein. The absence of the distress is...the *at bottom boring emptiness*” (244; original emphasis). Here again, Heidegger connects the experience of modern boredom to an inauthentic experience of time embodied in the phenomenon of everydayness. For a more comprehensive account of Heidegger's therapeutic intentions, and boredom as a distinctly modern phenomenon, see Elizabeth Goodstein's *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (2005).

Alongside the phenomenology of Heidegger and Bergson, Freudian psychoanalysis explicitly brings the question of psychic therapy to the forefront of modernist thought. Turn-of-the-century texts like *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) all highlight the alienated character of human desire, and gesture toward the methods by which the modernist subject might best negotiate such alienation. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud lays out his theory of the human “unconscious,” a psychic space formed by the thoughts and desires that the subject has repressed from conscious awareness. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud establishes his reading of the Oedipus myth and speaks of how repressed desires stem from their incompatibility with fundamental familial “laws,” an incompatibility that he unpacks further in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). These texts do not, however, attribute the inherent discomfort of desire uniquely to modern life. If Simmel,⁶ Heidegger, and Bergson speak

⁶ In his characterization of modern experience, Simmel no doubt draws on the thought of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, on whom he published a book in 1907. Schopenhauer’s 1818 text on *The World as Will and Representation* (which did not receive widespread attention until the publication of its second volume in 1844) attempts to establish that the fundamental pain of human experience is not dependent on any external object-cause. Writes Schopenhauer: “[t]he measure of our overall pain and well-being is [rather] at every moment subjectively determined” (371). Pain comes from within, and to ascribe it to an object is merely a fantasmatic alibi, designed to hide from the individual the fact that his pain comes from a fundamental “boredom,” which lies in wait for anyone who overcomes the immediate concerns of material sustenance. This notion of boredom influences not only Georg Simmel’s conception of the modern blaséness, but Martin Heidegger’s description of boredom as a “fundamental attunement” of modernity in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929-1930). Throughout his work, Schopenhauer advocates for an ascetic attitude of removal that can help the individual avoid the disappointment of attaining the object of desire, only to discover that “the goal was only illusory: possession removes the stimulus; under a new form, the desire, the need recommences” (*World as Will* 368).

Schopenhauer finds the desire for tangible goals to be nothing other than an endless series of empty promises. In *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), however, Simmel contends that such a sequential, teleological experience can provide people happiness when it unfolds according to a vital *rhythm*, since the undulations of rhythm (e.g. a life with affective ups and downs) “satisfies the basic needs for both diversity and regularity, for change and stability” (486). A profound dissatisfaction has emerged in modernity, Simmel contends, because this rhythm has been disrupted by the “levelling effect of culture” (487). In other words, the widespread availability of life’s material needs frees “the general conditions of life [...] from

of psychic pain's everydayness, Freud represents this pain as universal. For psychoanalysis, the task is not to overcome the normative psychic structures into which the human subject is born, but to orient the subject *within* these structures as comfortably as possible. When Freud reaches these insights, he renounces his earlier endorsement of cocaine⁷ as a treatment for psychic pain and formulates his theory of the talking cure, a theory that he turns into practice in the case studies included in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918). Throughout both his theory and practice, Freud affirms that one must engage the causes of psychic pain through language instead of psychoactive chemicals. As his career unfolds, he drifts ever further away from physiological explanations⁸ for psychic pain, and instead attributes this pain to the human unconscious. A drug presumably cannot deal with discrete (and individualized) unconscious phenomena the same way an informed use of speech might; the former is a broadsword in cases where the latter might provide a scalpel. If the task of

rhythm; they are more even and provide individual freedom and possible irregularity. The elements of regularity and diversity that are *united* in rhythm are now separated by means of this differentiation" (488; original emphasis). When human existence is separated from the rhythmic alternations of material necessity (like those of sleep and wakefulness, satiety and hunger), the undulating flow of time affectively "flatlines" with regularity. Thus the flattened, horizontal movement of time begins to render human activity ever-the-same. As Schopenhauer also notes, this freedom from need soon creates a sense of boredom, as "we see that almost all persons who are made safe from hardship and concerns, having finally cast off all other burdens, are now a burden to themselves and now esteem every hour through which they have gotten as a gain" (*World as Will* 367). In other words, the subject's greatest concern once it has overcome material need is to "kill time" (367). Schopenhauer's thought will have more impact on the latter half of the nineteenth century than the first, and its attempt to formulate a systematic, subjectivist theory of non-contingent human dissatisfaction helps lay the groundwork for a theorization of desire as a distinctly temporal, or series-based phenomenon in both late-Victorian and modernist thought.

⁷ I provide a more in-depth reading of Freud's "Cocaine Papers" (1884-87) in my conclusion.

⁸ One can see an explicit expression of this movement in the very form of Freud's *Studies in Hysteria*, in which Freud takes up a psychoanalytic approach to cases of hysteria, and leaves the realm of physiological explanation to his writing partner, Josef Breuer.

psychoanalysis is to look past repression and bring the unconscious contents of experience to light, language must be the vehicle of this revelation.

As Freud's career continues into *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1917) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), he begins to speculate that the talking cure is a process without end, one whose work remains forever unfinished. To this extent, one might characterize the talking cure as the talking *palliative*, since it is the palliative's prerogative – by definition – “to alleviate (a disease or its symptoms) without effecting a cure” (*OED*). However, the French verb “pallier” and English verb “palliate” also derive from the latin *pall*, meaning to conceal. This element of palliation clashes with Freud, who at this point in his career still insists that the nature of psychoanalytic⁹ knowledge is revelatory, even if its therapeutic work is forever incomplete. However, as his career unfolds, Freud becomes more and more concerned with the problem of psychic “transference” between analyst and patient, and the question of how one can ever know which unconscious thoughts originate in the former and in the latter, respectively. By the time he writes “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1937), Freud speculates that the therapeutic effect of psychoanalysis might be based on concealment as much as revelation. In other words, any therapeutic or palliative effects of psychoanalysis might emerge from a sort of anti-knowledge. One simply cannot tell whence unconscious

⁹ When I say that Freud insists upon the revelatory nature of psychoanalysis, I refer to his belief that psychoanalysis can reveal the basic principles that govern the human unconscious. When it comes to the discrete contents of the *individual* unconscious, however, Freud admits to a certain amount of fantasy or concealment in the therapist's knowledge, and this concession appears as early as his *Studies in Hysteria* (1895). This admission of fantasy appears most explicitly, however, in *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918), in which Freud admits that in his attempt to break down the defenses of the (Wolf Man's) conscious mind and uncover a repressed “primal scene,” it ultimately might not matter whether the scene itself is a product of fantasy, or a true historical occurrence from the patient's past. Rather, Freud implies that in order to achieve its therapeutic effect, the primal scene need only fit neatly into the patient's reconstructed memory, and provide a sense of closure where before there was only a gaping psychic wound.

thoughts emerge in the analytic situation because of the indeterminacy that transference creates. The palliative impulse can only exist in ambivalent relation to the notion of knowledge-as-revelation. For Heidegger, the revelation of authentic being is a curative, as opposed to palliative response.¹⁰ But for psychoanalysis, the anxiety of palliation's concealing tendency is much more apparent. Thus one finds that as the therapeutic impulse of modernist thought emerges, it cannot help but provoke ambivalence when it runs up against the project of revelatory knowledge, which can often produce discomfort. Further, the psychic pharmaceutical does not simply disappear from modernist thought following Freud's renunciation of cocaine. It persists in a history parallel to that of psychoanalysis, and operates upon an assumption that might seem antithetical to Freud's privileging of language: that the psychoactive substance is capable of manipulating experience on *every level*, including the most fundamental structures of language itself.

Critical Debt

This project owes the lion's share of its inspiration to three contemporary texts: Marcus Boon's *The Road to Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* (2005), Bice Benvenuto's *Concerning the Rites of Psychoanalysis; or, The Villa of the Mysteries* (1995), and Alphonso Lingis' *Foreign Bodies* (1995). To begin, Boon's text offers the most sustained analysis of the connection between drugs and literature from the Romantic period onward, and as such, it touches upon certain strains of thought in modernism that I

¹⁰ The everyday, in fact, is found to be the *result* of a palliative response (if one traces Heidegger's thought back to Simmel). The everyday comes from the self-numbing of consciousness provoked by an increase in the amount of stimuli that the modern subject must engage.

wish to examine more closely.¹¹ When he lays out his methodology, Boon contends that the drug is a “hybrid” substance – both a product of human discourse and a chemical (even natural) agent that can exceed such discourse:

Drugs are hybrid in precisely the way Latour defines the word: material and constructed... Although I do not dwell on the word ‘hybrid,’ my concern in writing these histories has been to pay particular attention to the way in which drug literature is composed of nature-culture hybrid tropes and to map the moments where connections of particular significance between science and literature, nature and culture, chemical substance and discursive practice occur, and to show their reliance on each other. (11)

In my study, I adopt Boon’s view of the drug and wish to extend its application to a systematic treatment of the subjective “structure” of intoxication in modernism. In doing so, I also support Boon’s desire to affirm “an inclusive, polyvalent movement around the boundaries that modernity has built for itself that would integrate transcendental experience within the realm of the possible” (12). The transcendental experience, Boon affirms, “continues to return as a category, and it is important to help explain its persistence in the face of theoretical movements that might appear to have ruled out its possibility” (12). Thus, in my investigation of drug intoxication in Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin, I shall make an ongoing argument for the theoretical legitimacy of transcendent experience in twentieth-century thought, even while I engage certain

¹¹ Despite the drug’s crucial role in European modernism, there currently exists no focused study of its tenuous meaning and/or significance for this specific period of literature. Critics like Crosland (1990), Walton (2002), and Rudgley (2002) explore the importance of drugs in literature, but their studies all encompass multiple centuries and continents.

theories which are conventionally thought to preclude it, particularly those of Lacan and Merleau-Ponty. I am not the first to emphasize this aspect of these last two thinkers, however. Bice Benvenuto's *Concerning the Rites of Psychoanalysis* and Alphonso Lingis's *Foreign Bodies* both concern themselves with the mystical, transcendental veins of thought that persist in Lacan and Merleau-Ponty, respectively.

The importance of transcendental experience to psychoanalysis is the subject of Benvenuto's book, and in many ways it is the subject of my study as well. Benvenuto reads psychoanalysis according to general principles that I try to emphasize throughout this project. She writes, for example, that even though psychoanalytic therapy does not aim at "an ideal or standard cure, be it the union with god or the end of an endless headache" (xviii), it nonetheless points to the possibility that a subject *can* suspend or temporary alleviate the experience of psychic pain. Benvenuto focuses on love, and more specifically mystical love, as the basis for an achievable, positive transformation of the subject's fundamental mode of being. She also comments on the difficulty of writing about transcendental experience, which "can be 'known' and evoked but not defined" (4), and I find a similar difficulty in trying to speak of the drug as a chemical reality, while acknowledging that I can only do so through a historically conditioned discourse. Like Benvenuto, I wish to focus on the places in Lacan's work where he speaks of a "fragmentariness, a discontinuity, [in which] *a fading away of the subject* takes place, s/he becomes invisible to her/himself in order to enjoy her/his own indecency and the other's" (Benvenuto 7; my emphasis). In comparison to the sober subject, who pursues prudent and well-defined forms of enjoyment, the intoxicated subject "enjoys nothingness, runs toward the dissolution of our human boundaries, exceeds them,

overflowing uncohesively towards an absolute, which we can reach, if only in the imagination, in death” (9). Benvenuto speaks constantly of the polarity between the discrete, regulated pleasures of sobriety and the self-annihilating impulse of mystical love. I shall use this same polarity to theorize the qualitative structures that inform the modernist conception of experience, and to demonstrate how these structures reveal themselves most explicitly in first-person accounts of drug use. Ultimately, I argue that the conceptual boundary distinguishing the “normal” pursuit of pleasure from the experience of mystical love is the same boundary that distinguishes the sober from the intoxicated subject. Before I theorize precisely what I mean when I use the word “intoxication,” however, I will try to distinguish my project’s aim from three recent efforts to interpret modernist literature with the psychoanalytic framework of mourning. These efforts are important to my project insofar as mourning implies an ongoing, linguistic working-through of experience for therapeutic ends. However, I argue that such readings often privilege the concept of an endless, linguistic working-through precisely by *eliding* modernism’s therapeutic commitments.

Critical Intervention

In the collection *Modernism and Mourning* (2007), editor Patricia Rae claims that modernist literature manifests a profound form of “resistant mourning.” She contends that modernist writers refuse to dissociate themselves from objects of personal or cultural loss, or to absorb or introject their loss in a “comfortable” way. One of her key points of reference is the work of Jacques Derrida, and in her introduction, Rae explicitly endorses a form of activist melancholia that “keeps things unsettled; it prevents a preventable

catastrophe from becoming assimilated into the order of things” (18). In this endorsement of unsettling melancholia and resistant mourning, Rae morally rejects efforts at interpretive stability or a therapeutic forgetting that seeks consolation and comfort. She implies that the aim of modernist literature is to perpetuate discomfort in the service of “positive political change” (23). Rae, in fact, predicates the question of modernism’s relative goodness or badness upon its involvement in this ongoing political project of discomfort and unsettling.¹² Any defense of modernism must be made on the grounds that it keeps the contents of experience and knowledge unsettled,¹³ and any condemnation of the literature derives from the accusation that modernists only care about alleviating personal anxiety or malaise.

¹² Rae’s argument once again presumes that a practice of textual unsettling is ethically good, and a practice of comfortable totalizing is bad. Writes Rae: “[t]o the extent that the essays in *Modernism and Mourning* represent resistant mourning as politically progressive, and insofar as they also show modernist texts encoding resistant mourning within their formal experiments, they implicitly endorse the promodernist argument in this longstanding debate” (37).

¹³ David Ayers, in *Modernism: A Short Introduction*, contends that structural linguistics sought to undo the ideal of the Romantic imagination as an origin of creation, and cites Roland Barthes’ “Death of the Author” as the principal iteration of this trend. At the end of his book, he contends that modernism bears a strong poststructuralist tendency, marking the turn from author to text, and therein acknowledging the slippage and proliferation of meanings in both text and lived experience. Ayers concludes with a discussion of the ideal of love in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which he characterizes as “an elusive ideal of a reconciled totality in a world where mind attempts to grasp body in a chain of desire...a chain which never leads to complete finality, closure or satisfaction, but in which one must learn to rest where one is” (133). But this moment of rest can never occur, argues Ayers, and it is “a moment in an endless and open process, in which the reciprocal subject and object of love combine not in unity but in endless slippage” (134). After he argues for the impossibility of stillness or transcendence in modernist being, Ayers concludes that for Joyce (and implicitly, for modernism in general), the “purpose of the journey [of existence] lies in the pleasure of merely circulating” (134). I do not argue with the notion that a perpetual pleasure of circulation is a central ideal for the modernist consciousness. Randy Malamud, for example, makes a similar claim for modernism in *The Language of Modernism* when he writes that “Woolf exposes the lame and empty language of false Victorian stability; Woolf, Eliot, and Joyce all embrace the flux, uncertainty, and confusion that are essential to a language reflecting the truth of modern instability” (3). However, while I acknowledge that the collective turn toward subjective circulation and instability might be the visible aesthetic of modernism, I affirm that the modernist experience is defined by its *failure* to find lasting fulfillment in this circulating model of experience, or even to take consistent pleasure in it. Throughout this project, I hope to argue for this inability and the therapeutic impulse toward closure and stasis that it engenders.

Rae's argument, however, contains a post-Derridean bias that does not always do justice to the spirit of modernist literature. More specifically, her reading valorizes discomfort and the endless displacement of meaning in a way that is antithetical to the modernist impulse toward interpretive comfort, an impulse that is present in T.S. Eliot's concept of a "mythical method,"¹⁴ Wallace Stevens' "Supreme Fiction," George Santayana's notion of "cosmos" in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900), and Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1966).¹⁵ All of these writers suggest that for modernism, it is the role of narrative to comfort and confer stable meaning on experience rather than to discomfort and endlessly unsettle. Add to these examples the precedents of Bergson, Heidegger, and Freud, and one finds that the consolatory, therapeutic impulse is paramount in modernism, even if it might seem distastefully conservative to a post-Derridean ethics like Rae's. Rae speaks of the need to unsettle those psychic comforts that would eventually calcify into totalitarian structures, while seeming to forget that it *was* the modernist sensibility which oversaw the rise of numerous totalitarian movements. That said, I do not reject Rae's arguments entirely, but only wish to shift her representational emphasis away from modernism's more resistant, unsettling elements

¹⁴ Martha Celeste Carpentier speaks of how myth, for Eliot, "did not merely supply allegories for modern experience; rather myth, as felt and lived by the modern writer, could provide an antidote to the sterility of modern life" (2). How, I ask, does one reconcile the idea of perpetual creation with the desire for a stable metanarrative in myth, or beyond that, a transcendental experience beyond language and change? A modernist like Wallace Stevens, I admit, includes the imperative "It Must Change" in his "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" (1947). However, I would note that Stevens is not necessarily happy to concede this point. Rather, he offers this imperative because he wishes to develop a form of spiritually fulfilling narrative that can apply to reality in all its ephemerality. It is the frustrated concession of a man trying to grasp Proteus.

¹⁵ "Right down at the root," writes Kermode, stories "must correspond to a basic human need, they must make sense, give comfort" (44) without getting caught up in the cynical play of "subtle disconfirmation and elaborate peripetia" (30). Yet Kermode is also very aware of the slippery slope by which this impulse for narrative comfort might lead to totalitarian thinking, in that "[t]here may even be a real relation between certain kinds of effectiveness in literature and totalitarianism in politics" (39).

and toward its more therapeutic ones. What I affirm is that the desire to escape the discomfort of unsettled meaning is tantamount to modernist thought from psychoanalysis to existentialism, phenomenology to sociology, and that it is not always consonant with an ethics of unsettling. If the modernist writer fails to find comfort, in other words, it is not always for lack of trying.

Jonathan Flatley's *Affective Mapping* (2008) provides a view of mourning and modernism that is more akin to the spirit of my project than Rae's, in that it uses Heidegger's theories of "mood" to demonstrate how the unsettling nature of melancholia (and its unwillingness to introject the lost object) need not always be affectively depressive. There can be an *enjoyable* melancholia, Flatley argues, if one sees it as an opportunity to become more engaged with the defamiliarized contents of experience. That said, Flatley (like Rae) also predicates the value of this project on the goal of political change:

My aim, besides my desire to argue for the importance of an antidepressive, political, and politicizing melancholia, and the local arguments the book pushes about the particular practices I am concerned with, is to make the case for the importance of mood and affect to a Marxist concern with the representability of history—"what hurts," in Jameson's memorable phrase—and the possibility for our collective participation in and transformation of our own history as it unfolds. (27)

In affirming his progressive political commitments, Flatley (like Rae) neglects a major aspect of modernist thought: that the personal (even insular) impulse to feel better is an end in its own right, and that this end might sometimes trump any concerns for political

or ethical responsibility. This is not to say that modernist thought is in any way “beyond” ethics or completely dismissive of it. However, the movement does contain a strong impulse simply to “feel better,” and this impulse is in many ways connected to a cessation of critical engagement, and not its perpetuation via an endless unsettling.

Of the recent studies on modernism and mourning, Madelyn Detloff’s *The Persistence of Modernism* (2009) provides perhaps the strongest critique of a project like mine. In this study, Detloff looks at the work of Virginia Woolf, H.D., and Gertrude Stein to show how these authors provide us with “conceptual resources for living in the midst of loss and violence” (3). Backing this claim, Detloff invokes Woolf’s imperative for ‘making happiness’, but makes sure to add:

[w]hile at first glance this claim seems hopelessly naïve, it is embedded in the context of the nuanced political analysis of fascism, nationalism, and unequal gender and class relations, an analysis that Woolf articulated throughout her works of the 1930s. (18)

Detloff’s claim highlights the limits of my own study, which centres its three primary chapters on three European male authors. It is true that the therapeutic desire to “feel better,” for many marginalized individuals, is inextricable from a change in political consciousness and social conditions. To be fair, I do not argue that any of my authors draw a clear line between the alleviation of personal psychic pain and the impetus for political change (it would be especially ridiculous to argue this point with respect to Aldous Huxley or Walter Benjamin). However, I contend that the general *emphasis* of progressivist political readings often overlooks modernism’s deeply conservative impulse

toward psychic closure and comfort. But I will not dissemble, either. The sympathies of this project ultimately belong to the lotus-eater.

What Rae, Flatley, Detloff, and Mester's readings – based in an ethics of endless unsettling and/or progressivist change – tend to elide is modernism's conservative, therapeutic impulse. By the term "conservative," I do not refer only to individual modernist writers who might have embraced totalitarian politics, but rather the sort of conservatism Freud speaks of when he outlines the operation of the death drive or *thanatos* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the subject's impulse to seek comfort by resisting stimuli altogether and returning to the primordial, tensionless calm of inorganic matter.¹⁶ A post-Derridean argument like Patricia Rae's operates on the premise that the endless unsettling of interpretive closure is an indispensable feature of human knowledge, which cannot appeal to any object or presence "outside" the field of language.¹⁷ This premise, however, misses the extent to which modernist thinkers seek a therapeutic escape from such unsettling, and by varying degrees *manage to succeed*. It is this last point to which I devote most of my theoretical attention in this project, for it is this point that distinguishes my argument from a traditional reading of modernism like Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*. Without doubt, my project is not the first to recognize the therapeutic urge for comfort in modernist literature. Kermode's text, however, reads the effort toward comfort as an endeavour of *narrative*, one that works within the endless transformations of language and aims to provide people a sense of

¹⁶ This interpretation of the death drive is not without its challengers, and I will address this theoretical debate in my discussion of Lacan later in this introduction.

¹⁷ I will also offer a more in-depth discussion of this premise and of early Derridean thought as this introduction unfolds.

closure by positively imagining the forever-deferred arrival of an end to human history. Unlike Kermode, I do not focus on efforts at interpretive closure that work exclusively through narrative, but rather give my attention to the modernist attempt to manipulate consciousness chemically in order to achieve an experience that escapes language and narrative altogether. These attempts, I argue, express a desire for *static*¹⁸ peace and comfort that is profoundly uncompromising, to the extent that writers who manifest this desire pursue an escape from language to the point of self-annihilation. In making my argument, I do not ignore or neglect twentieth-century theories that posit language as a constitutive element of human consciousness. Rather, I hope to engage with these theories and reinterpret them as I argue that modernist writers, when they begin to write from a chemically altered state, trace a path by which one can incrementally cancel out language's role in human experience. It is in the interest of engaging these theories that I now turn to a discussion of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, whose works from the mid-to-late twentieth century make explicit many conceptions of experience and language that exist in embryo in early twentieth-century literature.

¹⁸ Terri Mester contends that modernist literature idealizes a form of subjective experience that fuses the principle of eternal stasis with that of change and movement, and this form of experience finds its apotheosis in modernist depictions of dancing. "For Yeats and Eliot," Mester continues, "unity of being was essentially a mystical idea which signified an escape from the temporal world into some timeless realm" (22). Dance also poses a form of communication without words; it is ephemeral and changing, yet connected to something spiritually eternal. Ultimately, I do not deny that such a fusion of static comfort with the principles of movement and contingency constitutes an ideal for the modernists. I simply argue that modernist thought is largely characterized by its *failure to realize* this ideal, and that this failure creates the very psychic discomfort that plagues countless modernist authors. I will, however, return to a discussion of this ideal in my conclusion, where I hope to treat it more comprehensively with a retrospective look at my studies on Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin.

Derrida, Lacan, and the Displaced Subject

In his essay “Plato’s Pharmacy” (1968), Derrida argues that the “drug” is a concept whose meaning is endlessly unsettled by a constitutive ambivalence – an ambivalence that we can find in the Ancient Greek word “pharmakon,” which denotes both “poison” and “cure.” Derrida claims that this unsettled meaning is inherent to the drug insofar as it is a concept “caught up in a chain of significations” (*Dissemination* 95). This comment gestures broadly across Derrida’s early work on language and textuality in the history of Western philosophy, work that includes (along with his 1972 *Dissemination*) *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference* (all published in 1967), and his seminal essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1966). More specifically, Derrida’s comment about the chain of significations refers to the theory of language that he outlines in his essay “Différance” (1967). Derrida’s notion of “différance” uses the dual meaning of the French verb “différer” (which means to both “differ” and “defer”) to demonstrate how language produces meaning by both temporally deferring it and constructing spatial differences within it. In other words, language is always unfolding and deferring meaning through time, since it can never completely exhaust or calcify meaning as a finished object of interpretation. Secondly, Derrida claims that language works this way because the fact of semiological difference must *precede* words’ ability to signify. A word cannot have content without existing in relations of difference to other words.¹⁹ Derrida also chooses the term *différance* because the “a” in this word remains undetectable when the word is

¹⁹ A fundamental example of this production of difference is the inscription of binary oppositions, in which a term like “hot” cannot signify without referring to “cold.”

phonetically spoken. In this regard, Derrida gestures toward another component of his early work – his investigation of how Western philosophy has historically privileged the spoken word (*phonocentrism*) as a direct expression of humanity’s “inner” thoughts, giving transparent access to the self-present, immutable substance of human consciousness (*logocentrism*).²⁰ As Derrida also argues in his critique of Edmund Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*, the supposed “inner thought” of human consciousness cannot have meaning without being preceded by the fact of linguistic or semiological difference. Thus, similar to the production of meaning in language, human subjectivity can only sustain itself through the endless production of differences (the difference between an “inner” mind and “external” world, of speech and writing), and to this extent, it cannot be a positive entity unto itself, but only a presence endlessly deferred through time. Thus the very basis of human consciousness is its production by language, and its subjection to endless deferral through a proliferation of differences. At least in this regard, Derrida’s early work on human subjectivity and its production through/in language resembles the work of Jacques Lacan.²¹

While Derrida’s early work on writing and language addresses Western philosophy dating back to Plato, Lacan bases his early work on a psychoanalytic “return

²⁰ In *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology*, Derrida further explores this historical privileging of the spoken voice and the denigration of writing in the tradition of “logocentrism,” this being the tradition that conceives of human consciousness as an immutable, self-knowing presence. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida specifically challenges the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and its perpetuation of the Western “metaphysics of presence,” which posits this same self-knowing presence only by locating the production of knowledge or meaning “inside” consciousness, without acknowledging that this inside emerges only from the production of a supposed “outside.” This is what Derrida means when, in *Writing and Difference*, he claims that writing (externalized meaning) precedes speech (the “inner voice”).

²¹ Before going any further, I want to make clear that I am in no way equating Derridean and Lacanian thought here. Rather, I am making a specific comparison between their respective treatments of language and language’s role in the production of human subjectivity. There are without doubt discordances between the two thinkers on this point, and I will address these discordances as this discussion unfolds.

to Freud.” Further, Lacan makes this return to Freud (at least initially) on the basis of the division between the linguistic signifier and signified that Ferdinand de Saussure describes in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916).²² Lacan notes in “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud” (1957) that “the primordial position of the signifier and signified as being distinct orders [is] separated initially by a barrier resisting signification” (149). He goes on to claim that “this fact of linguistics is seen to occupy the key position in this domain, and the reclassification of the sciences and a regrouping of them around it signals, as is usually the case, a revolution in knowledge” (149). This revolution in knowledge stems primarily from the radical recasting of human consciousness that Freud’s work inaugurates, and that the use of Saussure’s theory makes more explicit. In this early work, Lacan’s primary elaboration upon Freud comes in his claim that “what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language” (147). However, it is not simply language that subtends and even logically precedes consciousness, but a language based upon the differential relations between words that appears in Saussure’s theory of linguistic “value.” This theory posits that a word can only produce meaning by referring to other words, and since the unconscious itself is “structured like a language,” this primordial fact of difference creates a “slippage” in the subject’s very constitution and keeps it from becoming a self-present *ego*. Thus among its many concerns, Lacan’s reading of Freud aims to discredit the ego psychologists of the 1940’s and ‘50’s, who (in Lacan’s eyes) ignored or neglected the radically destabilizing influence of the

²² I have not yet discussed Derrida’s connection to Saussure, yet as I will argue shortly, Derrida’s models of subjectivity and of *différance* owe a debt to Saussure that Derrida does not fully acknowledge. It is on the basis of this debt that I draw a parallel between Derrida’s model of displaced subjectivity and Lacan’s.

unconscious in Freud's work. Thus the work of psychoanalysis, for Lacan, does not seek to restore a previously whole subject by rooting out a repressed object of trauma. Rather, it works with the knowledge that the subject is never whole to begin with, and that its irreducible difference from itself is precisely what constitutes its very being as a subject-in-language.

When Lacan claims in "The Agency of the Letter" that the unconscious is structured like a language, he means that its basic operation follows the rules of "metonymy." More specifically, he borrows from Jakobson's 1956 work "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance" and writes that signification emerges from "the signifying game between metonymy and metaphor" (166). Further, he borrows from Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of linguistic value when he describes metonymy as a chain of signifiers that generates meaning through the differential or contiguous relations between words. What is perhaps most important for my discussion, however, is Lacan's insistence that metonymy inscribes an unfolding of time, "[f]or the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by unfolding its dimension before it" (153).²³ In this model, the chain of signifiers can never add up to a final

²³ In this model of language and desire, Lacan in fact harks back to his concept of lived temporality as he explores it in an essay from twelve years prior entitled "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism" (1945). It is in this piece that Lacan lays out his most explicit treatment of time as a lived phenomenon, but I argue that in doing so, he anticipates many of the structures of language and desire he will later formalize more comprehensively in "The Agency of the Letter." In "Logical Time," Lacan studies a sophism to determine the nature of lived temporality, a sophism that works in the following way: three prisoners are informed by a guard that one of them will be set free. The choice of who will be set free will be determined by a form of puzzle, in which each of the prisoners will have a coloured disc affixed to his back, and he will attempt to find a logical conclusion for what colour his own disc is, based upon what he can see on the other two prisoners' backs. The guard claims that the three discs he assigns have been chosen from a pool of three white discs and two black ones. What Lacan finds so informative about this sophism is that any prisoner's decision cannot come from a moment of pure or instantaneous deduction. Rather, the prisoner must study both the colours of the others' discs *and the way these others behave themselves*. For the sake of my study, the main point to take away from this early writing of Lacan's

signified, for the two are subject to “an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” and thus kept separate by an uncrossable bar of signification. It is specifically the work of metonymy that Lacan associates with the differential, displacing aspects of the Saussurian chain, which creates the “bar of signification” and endlessly displaces both linguistic meaning and the subject itself through time. In this piece, Lacan also suggests that the subject is able to conceive of herself as a thinking substance only through her inception into the “symbolic order” of language. The constitution of language pre-dates the subject’s birth, and to this extent, the subject learns to think of herself only through its incorporation of (and *into*) a set of signifiers that are fully impersonal to her.

In “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious” (1960), Lacan shows how this impersonality of the symbolic order formalizes the “split” at the heart of subjectivity, as the “cut in the signifying chain [the bar between S and s] alone verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity” (299). In making this argument, he borrows from and elaborates on Freud’s concept of psychic “castration,”²⁴ suggesting that the subject’s internal split-ness produces a fantasy by

is the fact that *truth is a production of the relations between subjects who are “undefined except by their reciprocity”* (4; original emphasis). Further, the reciprocal relations between subjects bases their ability to make judgments – by virtue of a logical necessity – upon an unfolding axis of time, in which the subject endlessly slips away:

This can be seen in the logical determination of the *interruptions* [,] [that moments of doubt] constitute, this determination – whether logician’s objection or subject’s doubt – revealing itself at each moment as the subjective unfolding of a temporal instance, or more aptly stated, as the slipping away (*fuite*) of the subject within a formal exigency. (3; original emphasis)

Thus, just as signifiers can only produce meaning by referring to one another in an unfolding dimension, so too can a human subject only make judgments about truth by referring to other subjects through time.

²⁴ In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud writes that it is the threat of castration from the father that causes the male child to repress an incestuous desire for its mother. In Lacan, however, the threat of castration only serves as a fantasmatic alibi for the fact that from the very inception of consciousness

which he seeks to regain that lost wholeness that he never possessed to begin with. This potency after which the subject strives is something that Lacan, again drawing from Freud, calls the phallus of the symbolic order. The phallus comes to stand as a “Master signifier” in Lacan’s terms; it stabilizes meaning in the symbolic order through relations of authority, and yet it does so only by remaining absent. In other words, it holds authority because it is removed from (and thus unverifiable within) the system of language that it structures. It is because of this operation of the Master signifier that metonymic displacement does not render human meaning and experience completely chaotic. Similarly, the Master-signifier-as-phallus provides consistency to the displaced, split subject by orienting it around the impossible fantasy of total self-presence.

The subject’s constitution within the symbolic order of language generates two other terms of experience to which Lacan refers throughout his career: the real and the imaginary. The real – to quote Slavoj Žižek – is a “hard kernel”²⁵ of experience that resists incorporation into the symbolic order. The signifying power of language is not omnipotent, and this limitation always produces an ineffable excess in the symbolic. The imaginary, on the other hand, is the realm of fantasy produced by the subject’s symbolic split-from-itself. It first emerges in what Lacan calls the “Mirror Stage” of a child’s development, a stage he explores in his essay of the same name (1949). In this stage, the child learns to recognize its reflection in a mirror, and through a set of experimental and

onward, the subject never possesses the power for total self-affirming presence (represented by the phallic signifier).

²⁵ Žižek uses this term throughout his work, but I am here thinking specifically of his *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989): page 45, and *Looking Awry* (1991): page 136.

playful gestures comes to *identify* with this image. This identification brings an end to a period in the child's awareness in which it does not fully understand its separation from the surrounding world (for example, when the infant that does not know where its mouth ends and its mother's breast begins). As Lacan notes, however, this identification is a false one, since the child's body appears in the mirror as a self-enclosed, completed entity, even while the young child is still bound to the limitations of its undeveloped physiology. This identification with the Ideal-I of the image thus produces a fantasy of imaginary wholeness, a goal after which the subject will strive for the remainder of her symbolic life.

In "The Subversion of the Subject," Lacan adds that once the subject is fully incorporated into the symbolic order, it attempts to retrieve its lost wholeness by projecting the image of such wholeness onto a discrete object, or "little other." What Lacan calls the *objet a* (for the French word "autre") is a formal representation of the subject's own lack, and it is by striving to possess this object that the subject tries to regain the fantasmatic wholeness that symbolic castration supposedly took from him. However, once the subject possesses the discrete object, he discovers that this object cannot provide the satisfaction he or she has sought from it, and as the subject moves on to another object, its imaginary pursuit of the *objet a* takes on the sequential, endless unfolding of metonymy. Because each object can only provoke desire without satisfying it, the subject must pursue these partial objects (or signifiers) in unending succession, for to possess any one of them immediately empties the object of its desirability; thus the hope of finding completion through it can only be a fantasy. Such a hope can only be a fantasy because the lack or "split" constitutive of desire is constitutive of subjectivity

itself. In other words, the human subject's self-awareness is fully predicated on the fact that it can take itself as an object of thought, and it can only do so by appealing to the same impersonal, symbolic source of meaning that castrates it in the first place, a source that Lacan refers to as the "big O" Other. In this introductory discussion of Lacan, it has probably become apparent how I wish to compare his theory of language and subjectivity with Derrida's. But before moving on, I will make this comparison explicit, while accounting for some of the potential discords that emerge between the two thinkers.

To paraphrase, Derrida and Lacan both (in their early work) argue that the supposedly immutable self-presence of human consciousness is preceded by the fact of linguistic difference. The fact that consciousness can have no contents of determinate value without first appealing to language catches it up in an endless production of differences, which in turn produces an endless temporal deferral of the subject's arrival as a complete, self-determining presence. In *The Parallax View* (2006), Slavoj Žižek makes a similar comparison when he claims that "[t]he magic trick of self-relating lies in the way my very 'decentration' [lies in] the impossibility of the I's immediate self-presence [in Lacan], [or] the necessity of what Derrida would have called neural *différance*" (213). To this extent, both Derrida and Lacan base the constitution of human subjectivity on the principles of linguistic difference and deferral that characterize Saussure's theory of the signifying chain.²⁶ Žižek also points out in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) that

²⁶ One could argue here that Derrida's concept of *différance* does not draw from Saussure nearly as much (or in the same way) as Lacan's model of metonymy. In fact, Derrida often criticizes Saussure's work, and most notably his phonocentric privileging of speech over writing (*Of Grammatology*). However, I find that Russel Daylight's 2011 text, *What if Derrida Was Wrong About Saussure?* convincingly argues that while Derrida might spend more of his time engaging with Husserl, Plato, or Heidegger, "[i]t is even worth considering that Saussure's premier position in the discourse of *différance* might be something that Derrida cannot do without" (12). Daylight also notes that while Derrida does mention Saussure in his work, he does

the general claim that “[t]here is no metalanguage” – that there is no language that supersedes the displacing effects of language – “is a commonplace found not only in Lacan’s psychoanalysis and post-structuralism (Derrida) but also in contemporary hermeneutics (Gadamer)” (171). Like Žižek, I compare Derrida and Lacan on the basis of their denial of any object of human knowledge prior or exterior to language, in tandem with their conception of the linguistic subject as a split and displaced entity. However, it is important to note that Žižek goes on to add that by making this comparison “we usually lose from view how Lacan’s theory treats this proposition in a way that is completely incompatible with post-structuralism” (171).

In *Looking Awry*, Žižek claims that for Derridean deconstruction, “the very unit of the experience of meaning is conceived as the effect of signifying mechanisms, an effect that can take place only insofar as it ignores the textual movement that produced it” (142). Lacan, on the other hand, “thematize[s] a certain real, the traumatic kernel whose status remains deeply ambiguous: the real resists symbolization, but is at the same time its own retroactive product” (143). In this sense, the real remains for Lacan “the central impossibility around which every signifying network is structured” (143). Derridean thought takes the differences and deferrals of the signifying chain, and uses them to

not seem to do so as much as one should expect; such is the case with Derrida’s critique of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*, which “brings to bear the pressure of semiological difference upon phenomenology.” Daylight here finds it “quite odd that Saussure’s contribution is nowhere acknowledged” (35). In summation, Daylight claims that Derrida critiques Saussure without ever mentioning his theory of linguistic “value,” the very model of the signifying chain upon which a concept like *différance* is predicated. In other words, “Derrida can acknowledge the advancement of ‘the difference involved in signs’ while at the same time undermining Saussure’s own contribution to such a theory” (43). In demonstrating the extent to which Derrida’s work truly relies upon the differential, displacing aspects of the Saussurian chain, I hope I have helped establish a certain affinity between Derrida’s and Lacan’s early theorizations of language and subjectivity.

emphasize the infinite transformation and dissemination of meaning, whereas Lacan's thought takes on a more centripetal form, in which the difference and deferral of meaning circulate around a "central impossibility." I would argue in this case that one can draw a productive contrast between Derrida and Lacan on the basis of the dual nature of the English verb "to defer." In Derrida's use of Saussurian principles, the relations of language defer meaning temporally, resulting in endless transformation and unsettling. In Lacan's theory this same effect is also at work, and yet language also *defers to an authority*, the authority of the Master signifier that establishes itself in the space opened up by the central impossibility of the real.²⁷ There are without doubt many other elements of discord between Derridean and Lacanian thought. However, for the purposes of this project, I wish only to establish the parallel in their uses of Saussurian linguistics to conceive the subject as an entity constituted in and by language. Presumably, the subject's linguistic constitution renders it impossible to conceive of an experience "beyond" language, yet it is this basic principle of Lacan and Derrida's early work that I investigate and challenge in my reading of the modernist drug.

To reiterate the claim of my opening paragraph, I argue that in modernist experience, there is no aspect of experience that escapes the drug's transformative potential, and I extend this claim to the realm of language as well. As I have mentioned, I engage with Derrida and Lacan here because when I speak of the drug as something that can carry human experience beyond language, I do not want to make the argument by

²⁷ Both Lacan and Derrida understand that the transcendental signified is in fact absent from language, yet Derrida's emphasis becomes clear in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" when he writes that "[t]he absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely" (280).

ignoring these important theorists. Rather, I want to explore how such an experience might remain possible in the face of the linguistic conception of subjectivity, which (at first glance, at least) seems to preclude the possibility of such a transcendent experience. As I go on to theorize the modernist conception of intoxication, I will draw more from Lacan than I will from Derrida. I do so because throughout his career, Lacan continues to theorize a direct relationship between language and perceiving, desiring, embodied experience, and it is the intersection of language, writing, affect, and phenomenological perception that concerns me most in this project, particularly in its bearing upon the question of psychic therapy.

Before I proceed with my discussion of Lacan, I also want to make explicit the connections I plan to draw between the linguistic conception of subjectivity, modernism's therapeutic impulse, and the modernist conception of drug use. All three of these concerns intersect in the realm of lived experience, and I plan to show how modernist writers-on-drugs demonstrate that the experience of "altered states" carries with it fundamental changes in the subject's sense of embodiment, its awareness of time, and its relationship to language. It is for this reason that I focus my three chapters on Jean Cocteau, Aldous Huxley, and Walter Benjamin (respectively), each of whose corpuses include a book-length, first-person account of drug use. Direct reflection upon their intoxication makes explicit the qualitative structures by which these modernist writers give shape to their experiences, structures that persist not only in their own writing, but in that of thinkers like Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Georges Bataille, Martin Heidegger, and Roman Jakobson. Following from the work of Lacan and Jakobson, I call these

structures by the names of *metaphor* and *metonymy*.²⁸ To be sure, both of these thinkers write extensively about how these models of language form the basic models of experience. However, as broadly as they trace the implications of these models, I argue that they still do not go far enough. The basic principles inscribed by metaphor and metonymy persist throughout modernism through a genealogy that in many instances remains hidden from critical view. It is only by highlighting this genealogy that we can begin to appreciate how much these models of experience affect twentieth-century thought in ways Lacan and Jakobson never make explicit (or even anticipate). In doing so, I do not call for a return to Jakobsonian (or early Lacanian) structuralism, but only for an appreciation of how deeply entrenched these historical models of being became in the early-to-mid twentieth century, and of how profoundly they structured people's experience of "everyday" being. Most importantly, I want to chart the unique pains that these interpretive structures created, as well as the methods of therapy that they conversely made possible.

The Hidden Genealogy of Metaphor and Metonymy

I have already described Lacan's theory of metonymy as it appears in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious." Like Saussure's theory of linguistic value, it asserts that words signify through their differential or contiguous relations to one another. These differences create a slippage between signifier and signified that defers meaning

²⁸ Ultimately, I use these terms only as shorthand for the experiential and textual structures of modernism that appear *in a distilled form* in the models of metaphor and metonymy (even to the point of mathematical representation, in the case of Lacan's "Agency of the Letter"). In other words, Lacan and Jakobson's work lends formal articulation to experiential structures that appear in modernist literature at least a half-century prior.

through time – hence the conception of metonymy as a signifying “chain.”²⁹ This endless slippage of meaning (the inability for the signifier to crystallize into a fixed signified) is represented by what Lacan calls the “bar” of signification. In “The Subversion of the Subject,” he goes on to equate this uncrossable bar with the phallus, since it marks the barrier that prevents the subject from ever realizing a state of complete self-presence. However, in “Agency of the Letter” Lacan also describes a *second* model of signification: that of metaphor. Metaphor, in contrast to metonymy, does not depend upon a chain of differences between words. It functions according to relations of similarity; operates instantaneously as opposed to unfolding through time; and finally, “represents here the crossing of the bar” that separates the signifier and signified (164). This exceptional ability to cross the bar of signification is something Lacan calls the “poetic spark” of metaphor (156), and it will become crucial to my understanding of the drug as both a textual and chemical entity in modernism.

At first, it would appear as though the existence of metaphor would require a radical rethinking of the subject’s position within the endless differences and deferrals of language. However, Lacan bypasses such a reading by classifying metaphor as a *secondary* operation, relative to metonymy. He writes that regardless of what one might naively wish to think, metaphor’s basis in relations of similarity does not disrupt the

²⁹ The notion that metonymy inscribes the subjective unfolding of time itself will be of central importance in my coming argument. Alenka Zupančič supports this reading of time in *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two* (2003), when she claims that

[w]hat characterizes the subject of desire is the difference between the (transcendental) cause of desire and its object, the difference that manifests itself as the ‘temporal difference’ between the subject of desire and its object *qua* real. The subject is separated from the object by an interval or a gap, which keeps moving with the subject, and makes it impossible for her ever to catch up with the object... *This accounts for the metonymy of desire.* (176; my emphasis)

differential relations of the signifying chain, since it represents only a *substitution* of one signified for another (rather than the more radical possibility of a merging between signifier and signified). To this extent, one signifier substitutes for another in the signifying chain and “the occulted signifier remain[s] present through its (metonymic) connexion with the rest of the chain” (157). Yet one can instantly see that there is something wrong with Lacan’s demotion of metaphor to a secondary status, relative to metonymy. On the level of Lacan’s structural logic, the operation of metaphor could not represent “a crossing of the bar” of signification if it involved only the substitution of one signified for another in the unfolding metonymic chain.

Further, Lacan also implies that any metaphor relies upon the pre-established structures of grammar: for example, the metaphor “*love is a pebble laughing in the sun*” still requires the unfolding of grammatical and lexical difference in order to signify, and to this extent, Lacan writes, “metaphor occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense” (158). However, Lacan’s theory runs into a chicken-versus-egg problem at this point, in that it precludes the possibility that a primordial continuity or indifference could precede the differential relations of language, and that metaphor, by crossing the bar of signification, could short-circuit language and tear a hole in the symbolic order. To this extent, metaphor would then mark the place where *nonsense* emerges from sense, and it would possess a privileged ability to puncture the signifying chain with nonsense, even while the relations of metonymy might continue to unfold. As I continue with my discussion of Lacan, I hope to show that his suppression of

metaphor's radical power³⁰ serves to consolidate the differential, deferred model of subjectivity that he believes to be Freud's most revolutionary concept. I do not wish to flip Lacan's distinction on its head and suggest that metaphor precedes metonymy in his thought. Rather, I wish to show that Lacan himself fails to render his model of metaphor secondary to metonymy. It is when he speaks about the "signifying game between metonymy and metaphor" that Lacan comes closest to expressing how these antithetical models of signification serve as *the two basic poles* of human experience, and how each pole's relative influence over experience is subject to change.³¹

Lacan, perhaps unknowingly, implies in his seminar on *The Psychoses* (1955) that the relative influence of metonymy or metaphor is variable in lived experience, and even goes so far as to privilege the *metaphor-dominant* form of experience over the metonymic. It is specifically in the speech of a psychotic or extremely neurotic subject, he notes, that "relations of contiguity [metonymy] dominate, following the absence or failure of the function of meaningful equivalence by means of similarity... What imposes itself on the subject is the grammatical part of the sentence" (220). The speed of the

³⁰ This suppression of metaphor is not limited to Lacan. For example, the first edition of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2001) cuts Lacan's discussion of metaphor completely from "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," while leaving that of metonymy in its entirety. Although the point might be somewhat speculative, I argue that the editors do so to consolidate Lacan's arguments about subjective displacement and deferral, which lead neatly into the movements of poststructuralism and deconstruction.

³¹ Lacan is not the only thinker to suggest that the relative predominance of metaphor or metonymy marks a distinct mode of experience. Roman Jakobson, from whom Lacan borrows the metaphor/metonymy distinction, similarly affirms in "Two Aspects of Language" that "[i]n normal verbal behaviour both processes are continually operative, but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality, and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other" (76). The predominance of metaphor or metonymy, adds Jakobson, has similarly conditioned the historical differences between romantic and realist modes of literature, respectively. Metaphor gains the upper hand in romantic literature, while the metonymic wins out in the realist mode, and one has to think that Lacan draws from these exact passages when he discusses the psychotic subject and the mystic in his seminar on *The Psychoses* (a discussion with which I will engage shortly).

subject's speech accelerates in this case, and one can find the cause for this acceleration in the fact that the relations of grammatical contiguity are inherently linked to the "diachronic" unfolding of time. But the exact opposite of such an experience, Lacan adds, is found in the case of the poet or mystic, as "even in the briefest testimony of an authentic religious experience you can see a world of difference" (*Psychoses* 77). In the language of the mystical/poetic experience, relations of similarity dominate, and one detects a deceleration of signification.³² The poetic-mystical experience finds its symptom in the sense of freshness and intimacy that its language manages to create via poetic images, the meaning of which is perceived to be more immanent (or synchronic) to subjective experience. Lacan's observations here will become crucial for my project, for they affirm that one can examine the structure of written language and therein find symptoms that mark the relative predominance of metonymic or metaphoric forces in subjective experience. It will be the movement from metonymy-dominant into metaphor-dominant experience that will primarily inform my conception of drug intoxication as something that can manifest itself in specific forms of textuality. What is thus crucial to my project is Lacan's claim that with respect to the mystical or metaphorical experience, "consuming certain toxic substances may lead us to the same feeling" (207). It is in such an instance that I find a connection between the linguistic conception of subjectivity, the ingestion of drugs, and a therapeutic relief from the uncomfortable experience of "everydayness" in modernism.

³² In an extremely similar passage, Jakobson notes that of the two basic types of aphasia, one entails a predominance of the metonymic, contiguous forces of consciousness, and the other a predominance of the metaphoric and substitutive forces. On this point, he claims that "[t]he patient confined to the substitution set (once contexture is deficient) deals with similarities, and his approximate identifications are of a metaphoric nature, contrary to the metonymic ones familiar to the opposite type of aphasics" (72).

As an unending sequence of distinct, yet equally ephemeral days, everydayness inscribes the same displacing chain of signifiers that Lacan attributes to metonymy. Similar to the feeling of everydayness, the signifying chain can offer a series of limited or partial meanings, but cannot prevent meaning from being swept away by the chain's endless unfolding through time. Conversely, the mystical or poetic experience that can provide relief from this condition, at least provisionally, is structurally akin to metaphor, since this experience dulls the subject's awareness of unfolding time and roots her in the sensation of a synchronic "present." In the works of modernists like Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin, all three writers speak of how the horizontal unfolding of time constitutes a form of fundamental pain. Cocteau, for example, refers to such pain as a "horizontal fall through time," while Benjamin deems it the unfolding of a "homogenous, empty time." The first-person drug records of all three authors gesture toward the way in which a subjective immersion in the synchronic present inaugurates an alleviation of temporal pain, and further, all three signal this immersion through a proliferation of metaphorical language. As this project unfolds, I will establish new connections between metonymy and the pain of modernist everydayness, and sketch out how this pain also renders possible the form of therapy that is implicit in the shift from metonymic to metaphoric forces in experience.

The structural dynamics of metaphor and metonymy might seem to disappear from Lacan's thought as his career unfolds, but I argue that they persist in hidden ways. For example, Lacan's concepts of *Das Ding* and *Die Sache* in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60) serve as correlatives of metaphor and metonymy, respectively. In this seminar, Lacan asserts that "[t]he *Sache* is clearly the thing, a product of industry

and of human action as governed by language” (45), but *Das Ding* “is found somewhere else” (45). *Das Ding*’s exceeding of knowledge, perception, and desire (like the interruption of metaphor) is exactly that lack which is present *as lack* in human consciousness, and the symbolic force of metonymy “hallucinates it in the form of a system of differences” (53). However, when Lacan writes that the subject must remain “at a certain distance from that which it gravitates around,” he also adds another set of associations to what I will call *the hidden genealogy of metaphor* in his thought.

Metonymy is correlative to Freudian *Eros*, or the pleasure principle, insofar as such desire pursues an unfolding “series of satisfactions” (58). The movement toward *Das Ding*, however, involves a crossing of the regulated boundary between desire and its utter fulfillment, a crossing beyond which “there is neither perception nor effort” (52). To such an extent, Lacan relates the subject’s movement toward *Das Ding* with Freudian *thanatos*, or the death drive.

If we allow metaphor its true power in Lacan’s thought, we thus see how it too is correlative to such a death drive. Lacan warns in *The Psychoses* that if the forces of similarity achieve too great a control over language, they command an intoxicating power “to such an extent that the entire species of preestablished, [or] lexical, connections comes undone” (218). Roman Jakobson echoes this same point when he writes that in cases where the forces of metaphor predominate too much, there is a truncation of “the extent and variety of sentences,” and “the degeneration of sentences into a mere ‘word heap’” (71). In other words, if the use of metaphor confuses the differences between words too much, syntax itself will dissolve, words will not signify, and the subject might even face the annihilation of its own consciousness. In short, the complete breakdown of the

signifying chain would cause the death of the subject, and his or her experience would become *nonsense*, in both linguistic and sensory terms. That said, I argue that if we keep in mind the notion that subjectivity is constituted by “the signifying game” between metaphor and metonymy, we recall that a subject is rarely (if ever) completely subject to one side of this polarity over the other. Rather, this signifying game implies that the subject’s lived experience unfolds on a spectrum that opens up between the poles of metonymy and metaphor. To plunge fully into metonymy would entail a pathological subjection to the temporal displacement of meaning, while a complete subjection to metaphor would entail the subject’s removal from the signifying chain and thus its symbolic death.

It is clear from the metaphor/metonymy reading of Lacan that the subject always exists somewhere between these poles, and that its position therein is radically variable. In this instance, then, human consciousness is not always subject to the displacements of language to the same degree. I thus propose that the modernist subject, by manipulating her location between the metonymic and metaphoric poles of experience – can approach the metaphoric pole and thus *incrementally* remove herself from the signifying chain of metonymy. However, to approach the metaphoric pole of experience is to approach the point of death itself, and this conclusion helps explain Lacan’s connection between metaphorical language and the mystical experience of self-dissolution. Further, it helps explain how an incremental escape from linguistic displacement could achieve therapeutic effects in modernist experience. As this project unfolds, I will argue that Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin’s writings on drugs all display this mode of palliation, since the psychoactive drug allows these writers to manipulate their proximity to death,

and thus incrementally to remove themselves from the discomfort of linguistic displacement that structures their experience of the “everyday.”

In his seminar *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality and the Limits of Love and Knowledge* (1972-73), Lacan reinscribes the fundamental binary between the metonymic principle of unfolding, differential sequence (pleasure principle, eros), and that of the metaphoric collapse into in-difference (death drive, thanatos). In this seminar, Lacan famously posits that there can be “no sexual relation” between man and woman, and supports this claim by articulating the discursive positions of male and female in the symbolic order, which he finds to be incompatible. The male position essentially exists in the realm of fantasy, in which the divided subject pursues the *objet a* as something that promises to fill his symbolic lack.³³ Lacan metonymically relates phallic *jouissance* to the partial object, it being the “*jouissance* of the organ” (7) that inscribes a sequential movement through time, as this form of enjoyment “can only be the serial” (19). As I have mentioned, however, grasping this object only reveals the fantasmatic nature of its promise, and the masculine subject³⁴ must ultimately move onto other metonymic objects in unending sequence. The female position, however, entails a “giving oneself over” to the impersonal Other of language – the Other being the absent guarantor of meaning in the symbolic order. When the “female” completely gives herself to the Other, the absence of this Other is revealed, and the subject either retreats from this encounter with the

³³ As Bruce Fink notes in his essay “Knowledge and Jouissance,” “[p]hallic jouissance is the jouissance that fails us, that disappoints us... [b]ecause it reduces our partner, as Other, to what Lacan refers to as object *a*, that partial object that serves as the cause of desire” (37)

³⁴ I say “masculine subject” because Lacan does not equate these positions in discourse with the anatomical difference between male and female. According to his terms, an anatomical “female” could occupy a “masculine” discursive position just as much as an anatomical male could occupy a female one.

abyss, or plunges into it and dissolves the very grounds of her subjectivity. In this second case, the moment of mystical love comes to represent the same basic principles embodied by Lacan's model of metaphor, thus reinscribing a link that Lacan himself makes in *The Psychoses*, in which he suggests that metaphorical language holds a privileged relationship to mystical experience.³⁵

From Seminar XX onward, however, one can find intimations of the turn that Lacan's later thought takes from the dynamics I have described so far. For example, this later work gives a newfound emphasis to the "real" as something that exists in relation to the subject's "enjoyment" or *jouissance*.³⁶ After this shift, one can sense that the psychic "death drive" does not find enjoyment in moving toward the subject's dissolution, but through its very "failure" to grasp the real. This dynamic in Lacan's thought appears explicitly in Slavoj Žižek's *The Parallax View*, in which Žižek warns readers not to confuse "desire" with "drive." We cannot speak of "drive," he claims, in the metonymic

³⁵ Bruce Fink also characterizes this experience as ineffable, and yet becomes perplexed by Lacan's suggestion that it can be spoken about. He claims that "[t]he most concrete thing Lacan says is that it corresponds to 'making love,' as opposed to sexual intercourse (which is related to object *a*), 'making love' being akin to poetry" ("Knowledge" 40). Ultimately, he writes: "[h]ow that is compatible with the notion that it is an *ineffable* experience where the bar between signifier and signified does not function, I do not profess to know, though it seems to have to do with talking about love" (40; original emphasis). I argue, however, that my reading of metaphor and metonymy can help provide a glimpse of something beyond Fink's impasse. I argue that for Lacan, we can speak about this ineffable experience insofar as poetic, metaphorical language vertically staves (in the sense of "punctures") the symbolic order and thus opens onto the ineffable.

³⁶ In the preface to the edited collection *The Later Lacan: An Introduction* (2007), Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf write that "[i]n this pragmatic perspective, the unconscious no longer appears as a repository of repressed truths but as an enjoying apparatus whose main purpose is to preserve the subject's elective mode of *jouissance*" ("Preface" x). In this approach, the psychoanalyst does not attempt to "uncover the truth" of the patient's condition, but to bring that patient into proximity with the hard kernel of the real around which it structures its own unique mode of *jouissance*. Pierre-Gilles Guéguen also notes in "Discretion of the Analyst" that analysis "aims at the cause in the real and at the cut that produces the subject having cancelled his subscription to the unconscious, not the truth of the subject but a *veri-fixe* subject—that is, to say with a certainty as to his *jouissance*, his mode of enjoyment [*mode de jouir*]" (21).

terms we use to describe “desire” (which can *only* occur through a metonymic stand-in for *Das Ding*), and he adds that

This is why we should not confuse the death drive with the so-called ‘nirvana principle,’ the thrust toward destruction or self-obliteration: the Freudian death drive has nothing whatsoever to do with the craving for self-annihilation, for the return to the inorganic absence of any life-tension. (62)

The drive, on the other hand, embodies the subject’s “very failure to reach its goal, the repetition of this failure, the endless circulation around the object, generat[ing] a satisfaction of its own” (63). Yet Žižek’s argument, I argue, never *rules out* the possibility of a “nirvana principle”; it rather claims that this principle does not warrant the designation of “drive.” Žižek implies that, as opposed to a drive, the conventional interpretation of Freud’s “death drive” is in fact a form of “pure desire” – a desire that refuses any form of compromise in its pursuit of *Das Ding* (for which the *objet a* is a stand-in) (63). Before continuing, I will therefore re-signify what I have called *thanatos* up to this point, and deem it a “death desire,” a desire that renders itself pure (in Žižek’s terms) by taking death itself as its object. Thus if the subject refuses to compromise in its pursuit of tensionless, affective peace, then its eventual attainment of death consummates its desire and thus “purely” annihilates its very subjectivity. According to this interpretation, the “drug” of my project would appear as the subject’s metonymic stand-in (*objet a*) for the death it seeks (*Das Ding*). Death is thus not the substance of a “drive,” but rather an object of desire so powerful that it transforms (or transubstantiates) desire into “pure desire” – a force that can overpower the very drive that keeps the subject

circling around the “hole” of experience. (Here, I maintain my argument that the neurochemical drug, by manipulating the subject’s proximity to death, can numb the symbolic order itself and even the “drive” that characterizes the subject’s endless, failing circulation around the “hole” in subjective experience). To this extent, the principle of metaphor persists in Lacan’s thought as something that draws the subject toward annihilation, while metonymy maintains its relationship with an endless series of partial objects, the same mode of desire that structures the alienation and dullness of everyday experience.³⁷

Metaphoric and Metonymic Expressions of Embodied Perception

This reading of Lacan’s work is central to my understanding of the drug experience in modernism. But I will also combine it with a reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work in order to demonstrate how (in modernist terms) the metaphor/metonymy duality finds its correlative in discrete forms of perception and embodiment.³⁸ In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty argues that from the outset, a human being does not possess an “implicit notion of the relation between [her] body and

³⁷ In “The Purloined Letter and the Tao of the Psychoanalyst,” Eric Laurent writes that Lacan’s later text, entitled “Lituraterre” (1971) “is clearly the rewriting, in the seventies, of ‘The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious’” (26). He then adds that this later piece, like the earlier one, is “centered on two aspects of the function of the letter: the letter insofar as it makes a hole and the letter insofar as it makes an object (*a*)” (26). What is so different about this later text is that it asks about “the relations...between the effect of signification and jouissance” (34). However, as I have hoped to argue through my reading of the masculine and feminine positions in discourse, Lacan’s models of metaphor and metonymy *do* persist, in a hidden way, in Lacan’s later theorization of the two gendered modes of *jouissance*.

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty was an acquaintance of Lacan’s, and attended Lacan’s seminars in Paris throughout the 1950’s. Upon Merleau-Ponty’s sudden death from a stroke in 1961 (aged fifty-three), Jacques Lacan wrote the essay “Merleau-Ponty: In Memoriam,” in which he laid out both the contributions and errors (as he saw them) in Merleau-Ponty’s work. To be sure, these thinkers do not always agree, but as I plan to draw parallels between their models of human subjectivity, I will address Lacan’s explicit criticism of Merleau-Ponty shortly.

things, or [her] hold on them” (Merleau-Ponty 75). Awareness of one’s body in space is fragmentary at first, and the body pre-reflexively learns to orient itself as an autonomous spatial form situated within a world of things. It is by experiencing “motility as intentionality,” Merleau-Ponty argues, that human subjects know their bodies not as a set of fragmented movements, but as a single sensory organ situated in the spatial world.³⁹ Further, the consolidation of this organ is expressed in the subject’s awareness of his body as a unified, specular image.⁴⁰ “Body image” describes the phenomenon by which the body situates itself as an autonomous form within the spatial world, a phenomenon that is “founded upon the unity and identity of the body as a synergic totality” (316). For Merleau-Ponty, the unified form manifested in the body image is “finally a way of stating that my body is in-the-world” (101).

The fact that the body consolidates its imaginary, practicable synthesis through its “intentionality” means that it projects its intentions outwards onto the world of objects. Insofar as the discrete physical object stands to confirm the subject’s self-enclosed autonomy, however, it can “never be reached. If the thing itself were reached, it would be from that moment arrayed before us and stripped of its mystery. It would cease to exist as a thing at the very moment when we thought to possess it” (233). Thus, the subject can only sustain the fantasy of its corporeal autonomy by continuing to project its motor intentions onto physical objects. Further, it is by persisting in this fantasy that the subject

³⁹ In *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (1999), Gail Weiss notes that there exists in Merleau-Ponty an actively constituted “corporeal schema” that “informs us from moment to moment, and in a largely unthematized way, how our body is positioned relative to the people, objects, and environment around us” (Weiss 9).

⁴⁰ It is the orthopaedic synthesis of this “body image,” for example, that allows one to walk down the street without having to consider all of the intermediate movements that constitute the act of walking.

gains an awareness of time itself, as “the hold which [the object] gives us upon a segment of time, the synthesis which it effects are themselves temporal phenomena which pass, and can be recaptured only in a fresh act which is itself temporal” (240). Like Lacan, Merleau-Ponty says that the subject’s residual awareness of her own limited nature does not destroy her belief in an objective world, but that this belief is sustained through an anonymity present in her body image, which strikes her with the authority of a capital “O” other. “It is in his own body,” Merleau-Ponty adds, “that the patient feels the approach of this Other whom he has never seen with his eyes” (206).⁴¹ It is my intention to argue that this model of embodiment is nothing other than a corporeal correlative to Lacan’s metonymic model of desire, in which the subject consolidates her imaginary wholeness on the basis of her pursuit of a partial object (*a*), and yet this pursuit always takes place with a certain awareness of the abyss onto which the *a* has been projected. The anonymous Other stands at the brink of what Merleau-Ponty calls “the invisible,” and from there objectifies the subject in its anonymous gaze. However, it is this very gaze that also sustains the subject’s body image, and thus her conception of herself as an enclosed being.⁴² Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodied perception thus operates

⁴¹ In his later text, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty reflects further on this interplay between the subject’s fantasy of autonomy and its awareness of “being seen” by some anonymous Other, and he theorizes this relationship by positing a “flesh” that situates the subject’s body in the world while accounting for the subject’s reversible status as both subject and object: “[a]nd thus, for the same reason, the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity” (139).

⁴² Before making any further connections between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty, I would like to point out that Lacan explicitly disagrees with Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body image, particularly in his essay “Merleau-Ponty: In Memoriam” (1961). In “The Specular Body: Merleau-Ponty and Lacan on Infant Self and Other” (2008), Jonathan Kim-Reuter notes how the notion that “the perceptual life of the subject forms a primal bond with the world, that via embodiment there are available non-linguistic layers of meaning [ultimately] refer[s] back to the position of ego psychology” (77). In short, what Lacan rejects about Merleau-Ponty’s theory is its alleged insinuation that subtending the “thinking self” is a “natural self” (Kim-Reuter 80). Kim-Reuter is correct to point out this explicit disagreement between Lacan and Merleau-

according to the general principles of metonymic and metaphoric experience, as I have traced them through Lacan's thought. In the fields of both desire and embodiment, the subject is capable of both pursuing partial objects in unending succession, and releasing her hold on the world and dissolving into an ineffable non-sense. In many instances, then, the work of Lacan and Merleau-Ponty explores how these forces become manifest within

Ponty. However, I argue that a Lacanian re-reading and incorporation of Merleau-Pontian thought is much more productive than a concession to sheer difference. Kim-Reuter, for example, claims that Lacan cannot agree with Merleau-Ponty because the latter does not realize how "the symbolic and the real are terminally separated" (81). I argue, however, that if we strip Merleau-Ponty's body image of its claim to "nature," we can find in it a corporeal analog to Lacan's conception of subjectivity. If the claim to a natural self is what separates Merleau-Ponty from Lacan, one can strip away this claim without significantly altering the general dynamics of Merleau-Ponty's "body image." As I have tried to point out above, the comprehensive similarities between Merleau-Ponty's and Lacan's work are too compelling to allow Merleau-Ponty's appeal to nature to keep them from speaking to one another.

However, Kim-Reuter also notes that Lacan possesses a deeper objection to Merleau-Ponty. For it is not simply Merleau-Ponty's naturalization of the body image that conflicts with Lacan's views, but rather his apparent inability to acknowledge the role of *thanatos* in embodied perception:

For Lacan, it is a question of distinguishing between the pleasure of the drive, that pleasure in which the subject disappears (which Lacan called *jouissance*), and, by contrast, the order of desire in which the subject finds its life. According to Lacan, this is the antithesis that Merleau-Ponty uncovers, without pursuing it in the direction Freud requires us to take: the experience of being under the gaze, and more precisely the satisfaction that attends it, is precisely the experience of the scopical drive, that primordial experience which is always a possibility of the subject, but one in which desire is lost, and the subject moves toward its own annihilation. (84-85)

Alphonso Lingis, however, writes in *Foreign Bodies* (1994) that Merleau-Ponty's work *does* contain this very element that Lacan finds lacking. Lingis implies the possibility of such an element when he asks of Merleau-Ponty: "[w]hat of the possibility of releasing our hold on the levels, drifting into a sensible a-peiron without levels, into that nocturnal oneirotic, erotic, mythogenic second space that shows through the interstices of the daylight world of praktognostic competence?" (21). For Merleau-Ponty, only the practicable world is imperative, and yet we know that "[p]ainters find hidden laws in the colours of the manipulable things of the world, and obey visions they find more imperative than the carpentry of practicable reality" (Lingis 23). In other words, Merleau-Ponty's work *does* contain the very polarity between metaphoric and metonymic principles that makes it parallel to Lacan's thinking. For in Merleau-Ponty, the sort of phenomenon that Lingis refers to as "praktognostic competence" is nothing other than an embodied correlative of eros. It is the embodied subject's fantasmatic constitution of its imaginary wholeness by polarizing its attention on discrete objects. What is this phenomenon, if not a Merleau-Pontian correlative of the drive for the *a* – the partial object which creates the fantasy of wholeness? On the other hand, as Lingis points out, Merleau-Ponty's theory also implies a movement toward annihilation in the corporeal schema, which would implicitly manifest itself when the body lets loose its practicable hold on the world and thereby allows its imagined synthesis to dissolve. Thus to the extent that the embodied subject lets go of its pursuit of objects, the lived boundaries of its body begin to dissolve, and its awareness of time wanes as well.

specific fields of experience (spatial, temporal, desiring, embodied) and specific configurations of subjectivity (the hysteric, aphasic, psychotic). But before I move on from my theoretical framework, I wish to theorize fully the more *macroscopic* properties of these forces, and to solidify the metaphor/metonymy framework that allows me to draw parallels between Merleau-Ponty and Lacan. To do so, I turn to the work of Georges Bataille, and more specifically his texts *Inner Experience* (1943) and *Eroticism* (1957).

Georges Bataille, a contemporary and acquaintance of Lacan,⁴³ draws on interpretive structures that are very similar in nature to Lacan's models of metaphor and metonymy in his conception of human experience. In *Inner Experience* (1943), for example, Bataille writes that "[l]ife is never situated at a particular point: it passes rapidly from one point to another (or from multiple points to other points), like a current or like a sort of streaming of electricity" (94). In this image, Bataille gestures toward the same principle of sequence that Lacan introduces in his model of metonymy and implies throughout his discussion of *Die Sache* and Freudian *Eros* (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*). Similar to Lacan, Bataille also suggests that this principle of sequence is directly related to the subject's desire to produce meaning. Bataille uses the term "project" to denote this human effort. The very notion of meaningful action, in other words, "is utterly dependent upon project. And what is serious, is that discursive thought is itself engaged in the mode of existence of project. Discursive thought is evinced by an

⁴³ Perhaps this is somewhat of an understatement. Lacan would develop a romantic relationship with Bataille's estranged wife, actress Silvia Maklès, and begin living with her in 1938. Silvia and Georges would not divorce until 1946, but Silvia and Jacques had a child together in 1941, a girl named Judith. Judith Lacan would go on to become Judith Miller, the psychoanalyst. It was in 1953 that Silvia and Jacques would marry.

individual engaged in action: it takes place within him beginning with his projects, on the level of reflection upon projects” (46). Bataille’s parallel with Lacan persists here, as he claims that this subjective investment in discrete, self-affirming projects can never break from the displacement of fulfilled meaning that fuels it. Project is ultimately a deferral, “a way of being in paradoxical time: it is the putting off of existence to a later point” (46). Much like Lacan’s theory of subjectivity found in “The Subversion of the Subject,” Bataille insists that all human projects constitute a form of fantasy, a fantasy to reach out and grasp the totality of meaning as though it were a discrete possession. In the end, however, “where you would like to grasp your timeless substance, you encounter only a slipping, only the poorly coordinated play of your perishable elements” (94). This failure occurs because the subject’s devotion to project is ultimately based upon a fantasy of subjective autonomy. In simple terms, the subject cannot grasp the totality of being while remaining a limited and bound individual. Rather, it is only through “an ‘immediate cessation of all intellectual operations’ that the mind is laid bare. If not, *discourse* maintains it in its little complacency” (*Inner* 13; original emphasis). Discourse, in this instance, is tantamount to the realm of the symbolic order, the realm that introduces split-ness within the subject, resulting in the subject’s effort to regain its lost wholeness.⁴⁴ To actually retrieve this wholeness, however, would entail the subject’s reduction to inorganic being.

⁴⁴ Alan Stoekl in *Bataille’s Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability* (2007) further establishes the connection between project, unfolding time, and textuality in Bataille: “[t]he project and representation—and writing—are inseparable. To write is to plan, to project, to put off pleasure, to render permanent, to put to use what is there, what is natural” (61).

Against the sequential, metonymic principle of project, Bataille contrasts the principle of “ecstasy,” which is “obviously distinct from project, from discourse” (112). For in entering the “yawning gap” between itself and an object, “[t]he questions of the subject, its will to know are suppressed: the subject is no longer there; its interrogation no longer has either meaning or a principle which introduces it” (59-60). There is also an “annulment of time” in moments of ecstasy (*Inner* 73), since this experience is antithetical to the sequential displacements of project, which give rise to the structure of progressive temporality. In ecstasy, the subject gives itself over to dissolution and renounces its fantasy of fulfilled self-enclosure or autonomy. As it does so, it is able temporarily to transcend the realm of discourse, along with the deferrals and differences that structure it. In articulating this experiential model, Bataille uses the terms “discontinuity” and “continuity” to name the two poles between which human experience unfolds. Discontinuity opens up the realm of project. It refers to the subject who has fallen into a form of “split” being (similar to Lacan), and who spends her life trying to regain a sense of the total being from which she has fallen - a total being that, for Bataille, transcends the subject. It is by the name of “continuity” that Bataille refers to the transcendent, complete being from which the subject has fallen. It is a form of being without boundaries or differences, a being exterior to and incompatible with language, fully immanent and indifferent to the principle of temporal change. Andrew Hussey writes that Bataille’s descriptions of authentic inner experience:

all have in common a salient characteristic: they are all experiences which cannot be described adequately because they take place beyond language
[...] The mystical aspects of inner experience as a physical event, no less

than its erotic content, are predicated upon a parallel construction which suspends thought. In this way they represent a form of poetic activity which actively works against the possibility of limiting inner experience to a textual process. (*Inner Scar* 5/9)⁴⁵

For Bataille, however, human existence does not play out in an either/or fashion between the poles of continuity and discontinuity. It exists at a variable position between these two poles, on a spectrum of experience that stretches between them. It is to this extent that Bataille's work foretells an aspect of Lacan's work that will become central to this project, for it is the modernist drug that most effectively manipulates a subject's position on this spectrum for therapeutic ends.

In *Eroticism* (1957), Bataille further explores the possibility of a spectrum of experiences to which he alludes in *Inner Experience*. He opens the book by reintroducing the fundamental stakes of his argument: “[w]e are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity” (*Eroticism* 15). Bataille clarifies what he means by the term “eroticism” when he claims that “[t]he transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity” (*Eroticism* 17). “The whole business of eroticism,” he adds, “is to destroy the self-

⁴⁵ Hussey continues: “More specifically, Bataille uses these metaphorical terms to describe an experience which, because it is beyond discourse, establishes a limit to the multiplicity of meanings and their free play which is a defining characteristic of metaphorical language” (20). Hussey calls this relation between experience and metaphor an irreconcilable paradox, but I argue that it is not paradoxical to the extent he imagines. Hussey is correct about Bataille's interest in speaking about something beyond language, but he lumps metaphorical language together with language in general, and fails to see the fundamental connection between the excessive, nonsensical aspect of metaphor and Bataille's wordless experience. I certainly agree that Bataille's notion of inner experience “demonstrates the limits of metaphor as an expressive form of language” (29). But by appealing to my reading of metaphor and metonymy, I hope to show how metaphor's relation to “inner experience” is not as discordant as Hussey might find it.

contained character of the participants as they are in their normal lives” (*Eroticism* 17). Eroticism is the force that draws subjects toward self-dissolution, but as it does so, it also negates the phenomena that cause the discomfort of discursive, project-oriented existence. Eroticism destroys the principle of sequential time, it annihilates the differences between objects on a plane of total continuity, and it destroys the boundaries of the subject which give rise to consciousness itself. It is a desire that makes itself pure by taking death as its object, a desire that will not compromise in its movement toward continuity, and as such, it proves itself capable of lifting the subject out of its linguistic and alienated existence. There is nothing in this contention that disagrees with Lacan’s later conclusions. However, what Bataille more fully draws from this observation is the fact that the subject, at any one moment, can move incrementally closer to continuity without having to die. Its place on the spectrum of experience between the poles of everyday blaséness and immanent dissolution is variable at any given moment.

To summarize my arguments to this point about metaphor and metonymy as fundamental modes in the modernist conception of experience: the metonymic mode inscribes the subject’s uncomfortable experience of everydayness, and this experience forms a gestalt of “discontinuity” whose effects include 1) the subject’s sensation that time is endlessly passing away, and thus endlessly emptying life of meaning; 2) the subject’s alienation from its sensory surroundings; and 3) the subject’s constitution-in-language, based upon the endless displacement of interpretive meaning. Polarized against this gestalt is the metaphoric experience of self-dissolution (or the move toward continuity), which modernist thinkers see as a potential alternative to the displacements and discomfort of discursive being.

Reversibility and the Persistence of Derrida's *Pharmakon*

To say that the drug materially inflects the structures of language does not deny that the “drug” itself is a concept bound to a textual history. In his interview “The Rhetoric of Drugs” (1989) Derrida highlights and demystifies many of the historically constructed oppositions that have influenced the denigration of drug use, for “[t]here are no drugs ‘in nature,’” he affirms, because the drug is a culturally determined concept. Indeed, “[t]here may be ‘natural’ poisons and indeed naturally lethal poisons, but they are not poisonous insofar as they are drugs” (229). Instead, “the concept of drugs supposes an instituted and an institutional definition: a history is required, and a culture, conventions, evaluations, norms, an entire network of intertwined discourses, a rhetoric, whether explicit or elliptical” (229). These comments lead me to add another qualification to my study of drug use: that the experiential categories of metaphor and metonymy are bound to a historically-inflected discourse, formalized in Jakobson’s *The Fundamentals of Language*, but realistically dating back much further.⁴⁶ Derrida is right to suggest that the ambivalence between the positive and negative poles of interpretation is always-already present in the concept of the drug, but my project also hopes to explore the circumstances in which one pole of the pharmakon’s poison/cure dichotomy can begin to gain historical prevalence over the other. In other words, just because the meanings of poison and cure

⁴⁶ It is crucial to remember here that Jakobson insists that metaphor and metonymy are not two elements within a multiplicity, but that they are *the* two fundamental poles of language as such. He also applies this polarity to forms of literary genre and human consciousness in general, claiming that “[i]n manipulating these two kinds of connection (similarity and contiguity) in both their aspects (positional and semantic) – selecting, combining, and ranking them – an individual exhibits his personal style, his verbal predilections and preferences” (77). Lacan adopts this sort of view explicitly in his earlier work, and I insist that this polarized dynamic comes to define the *pharmakon*’s historical iteration in modernism.

always exist in ambivalent relation, they do not necessarily balance one another in equilibrium at all times. At any given moment, one pole of the dichotomy can and does gain prevalence, as does the pole of therapy and/or palliation in many modernist texts.⁴⁷

Before moving on, however, it is also important to note that modernism does not always interpret drug use from that pole of “metaphoric” palliation or ecstasy. Rather, the structure of metonymy can just as easily gain predominance in the interpretation of drug use, as one can see in the pejorative framework of addiction, which depicts the drug primarily as a metonymic signifier.⁴⁸ Within this mode of representation, the drug-user mistakenly believes that he or she exerts self-control, but succeeds only in moving toward death in an endless chain of contiguous “fixes.” Stacey Margolis makes a similar observation about the metonymic nature of addiction when she writes in “Addiction and the Ends of Desire” (2002): “At the turn of the century, the term ‘addiction’ actually

⁴⁷ It is significant to realize, further, that just as the ecstatic/metaphoric interpretation marks the drug positively, this same mode of interpretation always determines the experience of *therapeutic alleviation* for all three authors in this study.

⁴⁸ Parallel to my reading of therapy and drug use in modernism is the cultural history of morphine, the quintessential painkiller of the early twentieth century. As Marcus Boon is right to point out, “[t]o describe repeated acts of human self-destruction, such as can be found in the history of morphine and heroin, without [morally and ethically] commenting on them would be dishonest—a form of intellectual posturing” (15). My focus in this project centres upon the connection between drugs and death as a state of alleviatory transcendence, and yet I cannot speak of drugs (and especially palliative drugs) in the modernist era without calling attention to its most infamous painkiller. Since its inception, morphine has caused massive problems with addiction. But its history as a cultural response to twentieth-century trauma is typified principally by the devastating effects it wrought on addicted veterans of the two World Wars. Huxley’s *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), for example, associates morphine with addiction and blindness – an endless grinding at the mill-stone of life. The drug’s palliative effects are all but disregarded. Perhaps the most damning modernist depiction of morphine-as-palliative, however, appears in D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* (1913), in which Paul Morel and his sister Annie kill their mother with an overdose of morphine dissolved in milk. In this case, the palliative drug manifests the poison/cure dichotomy that Derrida puts forward in his essay on “Plato’s Pharmacy.” Thus the *pharmakon*, he famously writes, “partakes of both good and ill, of the agreeable and the disagreeable” (*Dissemination* 99). The drug will always be both a poison and a cure, and Derrida expands this point beyond the discrete, physical drug when he affirms in “The Rhetoric of Drugs” that “malediction and benediction always call to and imply one another” (229). Without doubt, the problem of addiction is always a concern for my three primary authors, as we will particularly find in the coming chapter on Jean Cocteau.

encompassed both of these forms of desire, the desire ascribed to the victim and the desire ascribed to the drug itself” (Margolis 20). Or in other words, the rhetoric of addiction is characterized by a “substitution of desiring object for desiring subject” (Margolis 22). Richard Klein, in *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (1993), sees the phenomenon of chain-smoking as a primary twentieth-century expression of metonymic experience, since “each cigarette immediately calls forth its inevitable successor and rejoins the preceding one in a chain of smoking more fervently forged than that of any other form of tobacco” (26). To return to Margolis’s point, the rhetoric of addiction often subverts the presumed agency of the subject by suggesting that it is the *drug* that consumes the user, rather than the other way around. The drug becomes the symbolic Other, stringing the subject along while offering the fantasy that she remains fully in control of herself. The rhetoric of ecstasy, however, preaches a metaphoric language of revelation. It narrates the drug experience as a synchronic event (exterior to time’s flow) – something that frees the subject from the normative symbolic structures of consciousness. However, while it is important to acknowledge how either the metaphoric or metonymic pole of interpretation can gain the upper hand in a twentieth-century conception of drugs, I argue throughout this project that these *poles themselves* retain an impressive durability and *conceptual currency* in spite of any such ambivalence. Ultimately, I attribute these findings to how deeply the metaphoric and metonymic poles of experience are truly entrenched in modernist thought.

This project does not assert that the structures I identify by the names of metaphor and metonymy influence experience independently of any historically-inflected discourse. However, I still wish to speak of how the material drug affects signification

itself, even if we must always already interpret its effects through a historically conditioned discourse. My project thus suggests that the linguistic poles of metonymy and metaphor together constitute the pharmakon's predominant iteration in modernist thought. However, the problem remains that for Derrida, the pharmakon as a product of discourse is "caught up in a chain of significations," while for my project, the drug is something that exceeds the displacements of any signifying chain, something that carries the modernist subject beyond language via the transformative power of metaphor. To this extent, I agree with Derrida's later interview, "The Rhetoric of Drugs," in which he also notes that the drug engenders changes in the user's embodied experience, changes that are "qualitatively highly differentiated, occasionally even for the same individual, and which we cannot mention without multiplying qualifications and points of view" (243). Derrida speaks of the experiential content of drug use as something that exceeds specific discourses. Discourses attempt to establish categorical boundaries around certain types of experience, but "these boundaries run between a non-finite number of *experiences*" (242; original emphasis). Experience, says Derrida, is the excessive "voyage that crosses the boundary" (242), and like Derrida, I assert that the study of experience in modernist literature constantly gestures toward an experience that crosses the boundary of language. Unlike Derrida, however, I also affirm that even within the linguistic or textual conception of the subject, we find the possibility that metaphorical language can (paradoxically) hold a privileged relationship to something *outside* language. It is not the purpose of this project to emphasize the endless, transformative play of meaning or any ethics of interpretive "unsettling." Rather, I wish to speak of the urge for psychic comfort

in modernist consciousness, and I find that this comfort is often antithetical to any process of endless textual unfolding.

Primary Authors, First-Person Records of Intoxication

I open the body of this project with a chapter on Jean Cocteau, who recognizes early in his career that the temporal unfolding of life afflicts humanity with a chronic psychic discomfort. In his novel *The Miscreant* (1923),⁴⁹ Cocteau refers to this pain as a form of “seasickness.” In his subsequent diary of opium detoxification, entitled *Opium: Diary of a Cure* (1930), he asserts that his personal turn to drugs stems from a need to palliate this fundamental pain. He describes this pain as a “horizontal fall through time” and connects it directly to the endless temporal displacement of meaning that occurs through language. Thus in the fields of both language and time, he attributes his pain to what I will call the metonymic structure of modernist experience. Nothing, it seems, can palliate Cocteau’s pains like the drug opium. Further, a close reading of *Opium* reveals that the psychoactive substance possesses its therapeutic potential because it can chemically short-circuit the human subject’s experience of language and time altogether.

My second chapter investigates Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception* (1954) within the overall trajectory of his writing career. His earlier novel *Brave New World* (1932) represents a dystopian future in which a drug called *soma* is used to keep a population ignorant and sedated. To this extent, Huxley’s work reveals the dark, conservative side of the modernist desire for psychic comfort, in that it can potentially

⁴⁹ It was this same year that, after the passing of his friend Raymond Radiguet, Cocteau first became addicted to opium.

serve propagandistic and totalitarian ends. However, by the time he writes *The Doors of Perception* (1954) Huxley comes to endorse the social use of drugs in a nearly unequivocal way. In the long run, he decides, drugs appear to alleviate more problems than they exacerbate. The primary problem that Huxley hopes drugs will alleviate is the chronic despair that accompanies the modern subject's existence within language, its obsession with the progressive unfolding of time, and its alienation from the phenomenal world. Huxley's final novel *Island* (1962) revisits the utopian (or dystopian) speculations of *Brave New World* and attempts to describe a society in which the communal use of drugs and transcendental meditation can overcome the problems associated with a twentieth-century being-in-language. In this sense, I argue that Huxley's work also ultimately links the drug's beneficial effects with a self-dissolving or "metaphoric" pole of experience.

Walter Benjamin's essay "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929) suggests that the thinking of modern subjects has become numb and complacent, and that the only way to break free from this complacency is to experience something Benjamin deems a "*profane illumination*, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson" (*Reflections* 179; emphasis in original). The complacency from which such an illumination provides relief is by no means a painless one. Later, in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), Benjamin describes the malaise of modern consciousness, and like Cocteau and Huxley, claims that this malaise is rooted in the sensation that time is endlessly passing and thus emptying human life of meaning, and that the subject is alienated from its surrounding world. If we look at Benjamin's first-

person records of drug use collected in *On Hashish* (1927-1934), we find that he engages in a form of psychic self-therapy through drugs, a therapy that draws him toward the point of death while stopping short of it. This dynamic, I argue, shows that in Benjamin's thought, just as in Cocteau's and Huxley's, experience exists on a spectrum between the temporal-displacing-differential (metonymic) mode of experience and that of immanent self-dissolution and a movement beyond the realm of cogent linguistic meaning (metaphoric). For Benjamin, however, the subject's death does not mark her escape from language. Rather, there is no safety in death when human history as a whole continues onward, for this history holds the power to incorporate the dead subject into a dominant social narrative, and to use it as a tool for oppressive ruling classes. Thus the kind of peace that Cocteau and Huxley might find in self-mortification can only – for Benjamin – occur at the end of history itself. As I will argue in my third chapter, it is this imperative that causes Benjamin to return to his early *messianic* conception of history in his final “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940).

The first-person drug records of Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin are ideal for investigating the modernist conception of experience because they engage explicitly and exhaustively with a set of dynamics common to the “altered state.” When they ingest drugs, all three writers describe an obliviousness to temporal change, a sense of affective communion with their surroundings, and the breakdown of language. When they do so, all three authors speak of a fundamental movement from a metonymic (sequential-differential-displacing) pole of experience to a metaphoric one (immanent-equating-dissolving). However, the most significant implication I find in their accounts is that by engaging the metaphoric pole of experience, the modernist subject can incrementally

approach the point of self-dissolution without having to die. I find this implication significant because if the modernist subject is truly capable of making this experiential approach, then within the terms of twentieth-century theory, it is also capable of incrementally *bypassing* the constitutive displacements of time and language. It is the modernists' exploration of the experiential spectrum emergent between metaphoric immanence and metonymic displacement that I wish to investigate, for it is only by acknowledging it as a *spectrum* that we can properly theorize the death-desiring element of modernist thought which is often elided by post-Derridean or critico-progressivist readings of modernism. The modernists' intoxicated approach to death, within my interpretive framework, becomes synonymous with mystical transcendence and the move toward continuity, and I argue that no works of literature thematize this incremental movement through "altered states" like first-person drug records.

I focus my attention on first-person narratives in this project because, as I suggest in my opening paragraph, I also wish to treat the drug as something more than a textual signifier, and I believe that the first-person narrative might show us a trace of its material effects on the writers in question.⁵⁰ Cocteau and Benjamin record their experiences of intoxication as these experiences unfold, while Huxley reflects on his own after the fact with the aid of friends' observations and tape recordings. In each instance, we have an

⁵⁰ A modernist writer like Mary Butts might appear to warrant as much discussion in this project as Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin, for along with being a heroin addict and practising occultist, Butts was Cocteau's friend and translator, and Huxley's friend as well. The author Bryher helped Mary Butts to publish, and also helped several German exiles flee the Nazis, including Walter Benjamin. Yet in spite of these historical connections, Mary Butts does not offer a sustained record of her direct experiences of drug use. Certainly, an author can write poetry, novels, or any number of works while on drugs. But Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin are the three most prominent modernist writers who offer sustained descriptive engagement with the content of their intoxicated experience. To this effect, they reveal that certain fundamental structures for representing experience exist between all three of them, despite whatever factors might distinguish them.

example of a modernist writer reflecting directly on the drug experience itself, and we can thus study a distilled version of what happens to his language (and the structures he uses to interpret experience) after he ingests the drug. To this extent, Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin belong to a modernist history of drug narrative that finds its roots in Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*; yet these modernist writers do always not follow the same logic as this 1821 text. De Quincey writes his confessional as a literary memoir, while Cocteau, Benjamin, and Huxley all assume a position of "self-experimentation" with their drugs, and invoke some form of pseudo-clinical language in their records. However, what remains common from De Quincey's narrative to Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin's is that they invariably involve some appeal to social usefulness – that is, they insist that their reflections on drug use are not simply for personal pleasure, but for the benefit of social knowledge.⁵¹

As I bring this introduction to a close, I will say that the greatest difference between my authors' work and De Quincey's lies in the influence that the advent of phenomenology, existentialism, and psychoanalysis historically had upon modernist thought, an influence that brought newfound interest in exploring the subjective pole of experience within a set of qualitative structures. In the early twentieth century, the ideas of thinkers like Husserl, Bergson, Freud, and Sartre spread through Europe, and these ideas encouraged people to start thinking less about what subjective experience *meant* (in the spiritual or poetic sense) and more about how it *worked* (in the phenomenological or psychoanalytic sense). Without doubt, the poetic tone of De Quincey's autobiographical confessions persists into later nineteenth-century texts like Charles Baudelaire's *The*

⁵¹ I will explore this point further in my first chapter on Cocteau.

Flowers of Evil (1857) and *Artificial Paradises* (1860).⁵² But by the time this trend reached the twentieth century, it had passed through the Victorian era's scientific and objectivist approach to drug use, which aimed to provide a systematic understanding of how drugs affect the brain's chemistry in a physiological sense. Thus in a broadly transformative way, the phenomenological, existential, and psychoanalytic turn of modernism adopted the Victorian era's scientific rigour, uprooted it from its objectivist basis, and applied it directly to phenomena studied from a subjectivist "inside." With this application of scientific rigour to subjective experience came an articulation of the qualitative structures of perception, desire, and embodiment, and these structures emerged in tandem with a radically new language of experience. What this project ultimately seeks to explore are the forms of perception, pain, and palliation that this language historically made possible. It is with this thought in mind that I now turn to my first chapter.

⁵² For the sake of continuity, I would like to add here that Baudelaire's work (particularly *Artificial Paradises*) repeatedly expresses admiration for De Quincey's *Confessions*. For example, see *Artificial Paradises*, p. 79.

Chapter One

Banished from the Vegetable Kingdom:

Opium and Palliation in the Prose of Jean Cocteau

Everything one does in life, even love, occurs in an express train racing toward death. To smoke opium is to get out of the train while it is still moving. It is to concern oneself with something other than life, with death.

Jean Cocteau, *Opium*

We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear.

Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*

“Life to us appears insoluble,” laments Jean Cocteau in *The Difficulty of Being* (1947), “too vast, too small, too long, too short” (152). It is our very inability to find a recognizable order in life’s contradictions, he suggests, that afflicts us with that very “difficulty” his title attempts to articulate: a recurring nervous pain that can “grow quickly into a kind of nausea” (152). The issue of a fundamental pain of being is one that appears consistently in the literature of Cocteau’s age. His use of the word “nausea,” in particular, recalls the existential anguish that Jean-Paul Sartre describes in his novel of the same name (1938), along with *Being and Nothingness* (1943), a monument of twentieth-century philosophy that appears in France only four years prior to Cocteau’s *Difficulty*.⁵³ Cocteau constantly turns to writing in order to represent this pain, but does

⁵³ Cocteau, however, uses the word nausea to describe existential pain as early as his 1923 novel *The Miscreant*.

not always achieve the therapeutic effects he seeks by doing so. In fact, writing often seems to exacerbate his anxiety, and over time, Cocteau discovers that it is an experience beyond writing – and beyond language itself – that he requires in order to alleviate his formless pain, an experience toward which only the drug opium seems to carry him.

When it comes to the amelioration of anguish or discomfort, Cocteau does not view all forms of therapy as synonymous. In *Difficulty*, he claims that opium operates in his life, first and foremost, as a “palliative” [*palliatif*] for anxiety’s “constantly recurring attacks” (152). His use of the word “palliative” is not haphazard, and this is not the first passage of *Difficulty* in which he invokes it. “Palliation” inscribes a field of concerns that is more specific than that of therapy in general, referring to the mitigation – but not the curing – of a given affliction. As a palliative agent, opium can curb Cocteau’s acute pain of being, but never effect his final cure. In this regard, Cocteau echoes Charles Baudelaire’s characterization of opium as a form of spiritual “balm” in *Artificial Paradises* (a text Cocteau read and admired), where Baudelaire writes: “Oh!, just, subtle, and mighty opium! that to the hearts of poor and rich alike, for the wounds that will never heal, and for the pangs that tempt the spirit to rebel, bringest an assuaging balm... and to the proud man, a brief oblivion...” (77). Cocteau’s assertions about drugs and palliation might appear self-explanatory, but rather than providing a conclusion, they lend us a point of departure for investigating the fraught, often torturous experiences that inform his writings on opium. They are experiences that, throughout his career, carry the author between ecstatic endorsements and jilted condemnations of the palliative drug, marking an ambivalence that Cocteau endlessly seeks to drive from his thoughts. Before I delve any further into this ambivalence, however, I would like to take a moment to

acknowledge my debt to the existing criticism on Cocteau, as well as to chart the ways in which my therapeutic reading of the author's opium use might diverge from this criticism.

Critical Background

From Cocteau's time to the present, many studies have looked at this man's artistic oeuvre through a biographical lens. Margaret Crosland, for one, argues that many of Cocteau's works were written under the influence of opium, and that the author's initial turn to the drug was the direct result of his close friend's – Raymond Radiguet's – passing away.⁵⁴ Crosland is not demonstrably wrong on this point, but in making it, she typifies the sort of critical emphasis that has created a cult of personality around Cocteau.⁵⁵ Another symptom of this biographical emphasis appears in the very titles that grace many book-length studies on Cocteau, most of which include nothing more than the

⁵⁴ For a sample of the tone that informs such criticism, I offer the following passage from Crosland's introduction to *Opium*: "In the three years since the death of Radiguet nothing, not even opium, nor his new protégé Jean Desbordes, nor the writing of *Orphée* had convinced Cocteau that life was worth living; his successes with books of poems and criticism were not enough. The disappearance of Radiguet was not merely an irreparable personal loss; more and more Cocteau had become preoccupied with what the young poet's death could signify, and with what possible means he himself could find to approach and interrogate death" (81).

⁵⁵ The emphasis on Cocteau's personality in his writings also bleeds into an overwhelming critical interest in his tone and style. Margaret Crosland argues that the value of Cocteau's observations "lies obviously in the way he makes them, in that sad and splendid aphoristic turn of phrase that marks everything he writes" ("Introduction" 12). Crosland ultimately argues that Cocteau does not have anything conceptually new to say about opium, and Elizabeth Sprigge and Jean-Jacques Kihm, in *Jean Cocteau: The Man and the Mirror*, agree with her. I, however, argue that Cocteau's work contains crucial and unique observations not only about opium, but about the modernist conception of experience in general. Further, I argue that these observations come out most potently in his writings on opium as a form of self-palliation. That said, Crosland's introduction to *Opium* is the best and most comprehensive account to date of Cocteau's relationship with the drug. It makes many key observations about Cocteau which I will draw upon throughout this chapter.

author's name.⁵⁶ My study, however, examines Cocteau's literature according to structures of experience that are not unique to him, but are deeply entrenched in the thought of European modernism. Despite Cocteau's tendency to "live his art," there are forces at work in his prose that come from a space beyond his personal invention, and it is these forces I wish primarily to engage in this chapter and throughout this project. That said, I will still refer to Cocteau-the-author when making many of my claims about his literature; in discussing his first-person diary *Opium: Diary of a Cure* (1928), for example, I will often refer to Cocteau the flesh-and-blood man, and not some narrative "I" that speaks through him. This approach might seem contradictory to the Lacanian inflection of my project, but I would here remind readers that I am using my theoretical framework primarily to explore the qualitative field of *human* suffering, and the use of psychoactive substances to ease this suffering.⁵⁷

Critics like Marie-Claude Schapira and Soraya Le Corsu emphasize the extent to which Cocteau's associations with the surrealist movement (and more specifically André Breton) influence his work, particularly in his self-representation as a courageous artist-hero who uses art to approach the abysmal limit of human experience.⁵⁸ In this reading,

⁵⁶ To list some of the books simply titled, *Jean Cocteau*: Roger Lannes (1945), Margaret Crosland (1955), Gerard Mourgue (1965), Bettina L. Knapp (1970), William Fifield (1974), Claude-Jean Philippe (1989), Jean Touzot (1989), Nancy Lieberman (1990), Henry Gidel (1997), James Williams (2006). Similarly, *Jean Cocteau: The Man & The Mirror* is an intellectual biography by Elizabeth Sprigge and Jean-Jacques Kihm, who speak of Cocteau's artistic productions only insofar as these productions fit into the chronology of his personal life. As its title suggests, the text contains many implicit psychoanalytic observations, but it remains stylistically limited to the language of literary biography.

⁵⁷ I believe I can proceed in this manner by speaking of the drug-in-literature as a *hybrid substance*, as Marcus Boon does so well in *The Road of Excess*. On the one hand, I argue that certain qualitative structures of experience speak through a modernist consciousness like Cocteau's, and yet on the other, I argue that the physical ingestion of the drug by the flesh-and-blood author alters the physical act of writing on its most fundamental levels.

⁵⁸ In "Voyageur dans la nuit," Schapira writes that "[à] l'opposé exact du créateur proustien, Cocteau, volontairement aveugle et amnésique, se laisse envahir par une nuit qui lui demeure opaque et qu'il éjacule

Cocteau approaches the limit-experience as the origin of beauty, and believes that it takes possession of him as a medium to give form to beauty. I agree with the general principle of these readings, and would add that this abysmal limit, for Cocteau, is not only the origin of beauty, but that of language as well.⁵⁹ This limit-experience no doubt presents a great danger for Cocteau, but it is also something that Cocteau voluntarily approaches through opium for the purpose of calming his mind.⁶⁰ The surrealist approach to Cocteau takes the limit-experience as a dangerous-yet-beautiful origin of creation, but I argue that it does not successfully account for the therapeutic comfort Cocteau seeks and gains by approaching this same experience. Bearing these observations in mind, my chapter will delve as deeply as possible into the qualitative structures that condition not only Cocteau's "pain of being," but also the forms of palliation this pain makes possible.

The current work on Cocteau most akin to mine can be found in Marie Jemma-Jejcic's *Jean Cocteau, ou, l'énigme du désir: ce que le poète apprend au psychanalyste* (2006). This text investigates the places in Cocteau's work where the author borrows explicitly from

en langage poétique" [From a position opposite to that of the proustian creator, Cocteau, willingly blind and amnesic, allows himself to be invaded by a night that leaves him opaque, and which he then ejaculates through poetic language] (56). In *L'image surréaliste dans l'oeuvre de Jean Cocteau* (2006), le Corsu also writes that the general manoeuvre (démarche) of Cocteau's work "[t]ypique du Surréalisme... correspond certainement chez Cocteau à une double nécessité: dévoiler le monde sous un jour nouveau et ouvrir les portes de l'inconnu" [typical of Surrealism... [the general movement of the work] corresponds for Cocteau to a double necessity: to unveil the world beneath a new day and to open the doors to the unknown] (40).

⁵⁹ Also, Schapira suggests that Cocteau confronts the deathly limits of meaning in order to bring its beautiful gifts to the rest of humanity: "Ce qu'il entretient envers et contre tout, c'est la fermeture à un monde humain, personnel, intime. L'ouverture à laquelle [Cocteau] consent donne sure une nuit universelle, mythique, hors d'atteinte de toute investigation volontaire" [That which he cares for against all else is the closing of a personal, intimate, human world. Cocteau then consents to the opening of this world, and it bestows upon him a universal night, something mythic, and outside the realm of voluntary apprehension] (55).

⁶⁰ Crosland in *Jean Cocteau* articulates this same point, saying that "Cocteau smoked opium not for the sake of excess but for stability" (*Cocteau* 82).

psychoanalysis, and also offers a comprehensive psychoanalytic reading of his oeuvre. Like my project, Jemma-Jejcic's attempts to bring some sense of systematic unity to Cocteau's work, and does so by focusing on the deep-seated psychic forces that inform his fears and desires. I agree with her contention that many of Cocteau's ideas are precursors to Lacan's: "[p]ourtant, les dates sont formelles et, définitivement, Cocteau précède Lacan" (31).⁶¹ However, I disagree with her conclusion, which interprets Cocteau within the framework of Lacan's later work and emphasizes how Cocteau's endless circulation around the ineffable "real" of his desire constitutes the fundamental *jouissance* of his work. Writes Jemma-Jejcic, "[s]a façon de tenir son malaise à distance à l'aide de sa plume constitue sans doute ce qui le rend difficilement abordable par une étude littéraire dont l'approche, volontiers historique, linguistique ou esthétique, tient le corps à l'écart" [his manner of keeping his malaise at a distance with the help of his pen constitutes, without doubt, the manner by which Cocteau renders what is difficult accessible by literary study, through which his approach, gladly historical, linguistic, or aesthetic, gives form to his inner split] (263). Further, while she writes that Cocteau's work does display some effort toward self-annihilation, she ultimately characterizes this trend as masochistic, and asserts that this trend does not work against the endless unfolding of his desire.⁶² As I outlined in my introduction, I do not disagree with readings of Lacan that posit the subject's endless circulation around the "real" of experience as the source of *jouissance*. Rather, I think that these readings elide a

⁶¹ Further, she writes that in a comparison with Lacan, Cocteau in some regards "fut le plus lacanien" [was the more lacanian] (34).

⁶² Jemma-Jejcic adds that "[s]on masochisme ne s'oppose pas à la persévérance de son désir" [his masochism did not work in opposition to the perseverance of his desire] (201).

dimension of Lacan's thought that is important for exploring the comfort-seeking impulse in modernist experience, an impulse that often assumes the form of what Slavoj Žižek calls the "passion for the real."⁶³ According to Jemma-Jejcic's understanding, one is always a being-in-language, and is thus subject to the fundamental lack that governs all human desire; one can only escape the discomfort of such desire at the moment of death. This reading assumes that according to Lacan, the absence behind desire can never be eradicated, and that the best one can do is develop a more enjoyable relationship to it. But

⁶³ In *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003), Žižek foregrounds his arguments in *Parallax View* (2007) by claiming that the conclusions of Lacanian psychoanalysis have "nothing whatsoever to do with the craving for self-annihilation" (*Parallax* 62). I have outlined in my introduction, however, how Lacan's *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* seminar (1959-60) expresses just such an idea in its reading of the Freudian Thing (*Das Ding*). Žižek anticipates such an argument in both *The Puppet and the Dwarf* and *The Parallax View*. In the former text, he argues that

Far from being the seminar of Lacan, his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* is, rather, the point of deadlock at which Lacan comes dangerously close to the standard version of the 'passion for the Real.' Do not the unexpected echoes between this seminar and the thought of Georges Bataille—the philosopher of the passion for the Real, if ever there was one—point unambiguously in this direction? (54; original emphasis)

The "passion for the real" is the expression Žižek uses to denote any twentieth-century concept that posits the craving for total self-annihilation as a determining force of subjectivity. Žižek also anticipates the connection I attempt to draw between Lacan and Bataille on this point when he rhetorically asks: "[i]s the temporal coincidence of Lacan's seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis and Bataille's *Eroticism* more than a mere coincidence?" (54). Žižek refers to Lacan's *Ethics* seminar as "dangerous" because its supposed passion for the real threatens to undermine the radical nature of Lacan's observations, which (as we discover more in Lacan's later work) consists not in the push-and-pull between the subject's desire for stimuli and its desire for death, but in its endless vacillation around the "hole" in symbolic experience opened up by the real. As I have argued, however, there is nothing in Žižek's work that conclusively *denies* the possibility of such a reading. The very embarrassment that Žižek expresses over Lacan's *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* seminar (in contrast to the importance I assign to it) rather points toward a deep-seated discordance between our readings of Lacan. Without doubt, I approach Lacan with a certain passion for the real – a marked interest in the subject's desire for self-annihilation, yet Žižek approaches Lacan from a determinate position as well, a position that privileges the *jouissance* of the subject's endless circulation around the ineffable real. Ultimately, I believe that the discordance between a reading like mine and Žižek's uncannily takes on the same discordance involved in Lacan's claim (in his twentieth seminar) that "there can be no sexual relation." For it is phallic *jouissance*, we recall, that is based on the subject's endless "failure" to reach the real, while it is feminine *jouissance* which gives itself over to the Other and ultimately carries the subject toward mystical dissolution. Further, my project does not ultimately rely upon the question of whose reading of Lacan is better, *per se*. For as I expressed in my introduction, I believe that Lacan's early work (1949-60) provides a distilled expression of interpretive structures that were *historically* paramount to the first half of twentieth-century thought. So if (as Žižek suggests) *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* expresses thoughts popular during its time (eg. its coincidence with Bataille's *Eroticism*), it serves all the better as a point of historical reference for my project. This does not mean that as my project proceeds, I will ignore Lacan's later work. Nonetheless, I will approach it unapologetically with the same "passion for the real" as I have demonstrated thus far.

I would argue that when we speak of Cocteau, we never speak of life and death – only of *relative proximities* to death. Thus if one’s proximity to death is variable, it stands to reason that so is one’s fundamental being-in-language. With this thought in mind, this chapter will point out how throughout his work, Cocteau draws attention to the fact that being-in-language and death do not form such a clear dichotomy as certain interpretations of Lacan might suggest.⁶⁴

My study proceeds from the observation that within the experiential structures of modernist experience, the subject can manipulate its proximity to death, and therein manipulate – on a fundamental level – its experience of desire and language. In saying that Cocteau can manipulate the distance between himself and the limit of experience, I am of course borrowing from readings that position him as a surrealist artist-hero who confronts an ineffable void at the heart of human existence. But in following Jemma-Jejcic’s Lacanian reading, I also intend to speak of this aspect of Cocteau in somewhat systematic terms. Jemma-Jejcic’s reading, like Lacan’s, presupposes the inescapability of desire, save in the moment of death. But my project continues to ask: what of the possibility of palliation or therapy? If the alienating effects of language and desire are inescapable, then certainly they are not *invariable* at a given moment of lived experience. When we establish this reading of Lacan, we find that an entire spectrum of experiences opens up between the poles of being-in-language and death. I should note here that this single observation lies at the heart of my entire study. Through it, I hope to shift current

⁶⁴ These conventional understandings of Lacan, I would add, not only condition Jemma-Jejcic’s reading of Cocteau, but contemporary understandings of experience in the twentieth century. I cannot stress enough how much significance I find in the possibility that according to modernist thought, one’s being-in-language is structurally variable on its most fundamental levels.

understandings of modernism and this movement's investment in the notion of being-in-language. If one can manipulate one's proximity to death, then one can discover an entire spectrum of experiences (or non-knowledges) that Lacan's work, under a conventional interpretation, would supposedly deny. Further, I argue that in modernist understanding, there are two primary, opposing forces that pull the individual between being-in-language and death, thereby setting the terms of this non-knowledge or liminal experience.⁶⁵ I use Lacan's own terms in calling these forces by the names of metaphor and metonymy, but as I have also said, these names serve as shorthand for general structures that inform not only the modernist experience of language, but that of embodiment, temporality, and desire as well. The subjective displacements of language, Cocteau's work demonstrates, are not felt invariably by the individual. They are subject to manipulation *insofar* as one can alter his proximity to death. When the gap between Cocteau and death begins to close during moments of opium intoxication, the meaning of language begins to dissipate, fundamental desires dissolve, and a feeling of "vegetable calm" comes over him. I argue that we can only successfully account for this phenomenon if we read it through the very system that is supposed (by the readings I have mentioned above) to preclude it.⁶⁶ Thus before we can fully understand the significance of drugs in Cocteau's brand of modernism, we must re-evaluate the fundamental principles of what it means to be a being-in-language.

⁶⁵ When I refer to the battle between two forces of language, I refer specifically to the ongoing "competition" that Jakobson observes between the metaphoric and metonymic poles of cognition in "Two Aspects of Language." Lacan refers to this same relationship as the "signifying game" between metaphor and metonymy.

⁶⁶ Bice Benvenuto does not fall into this category of conventional understanding. In fact, it is her work, along with that of Georges Bataille, that has most deeply inspired my re-reading of Lacan.

Cocteau's Difficulty of Being

When Lacan describes the functioning of the pleasure principle, he indicates that the subject must maintain a regulated distance from the complete fulfillment of enjoyment, since such fulfillment would completely fill the subject's lack and dissolve her into ineffable non-being. But Cocteau –throughout his work – insists that the subject can palliate its sensation of lack by bypassing this regulated distance and surrendering her sense of discrete selfhood to a temporary, half-dissolved experience which Cocteau refers to as a “vegetative” state of consciousness.⁶⁷ However, when Cocteau himself returns to sobriety following an opium trip, he always feels the pang of guilt that springs from his existence within symbolic law, a law that compels him to enjoy according to the regulated fantasy of autonomous selfhood and the pursuit of discrete objects or goals. With this critical context in mind, I would now like to turn back to my preliminary discussion of the palliative drug in Cocteau's work.

It is immediately subsequent to his designation of opium as a palliative that Cocteau in *The Difficulty of Being* explains his desire to free himself from his addiction to the substance. The author insists, perhaps untruthfully, that he gave up the drug “ten years ago, on account of an honesty which is perhaps [his] foolishness” (152). Expanding on this notion of foolish honesty, Cocteau adds that he ultimately gave up opium because he “wished to rely on [his] own resources alone” (152). He regards the palliative drug as an agent fundamentally external to the man he conceives as Jean Cocteau proper. Further,

⁶⁷ As this chapter unfolds, I will demonstrate how this subjective movement into vegetable consciousness is one of Cocteau's most durable concepts. Cocteau mentions it as early as his 1923 novel *The Miscreant*, carries it into *Opium* (1928) and *Children of the Game* (1928), and continues to invoke it in later works like *The Difficulty of Being* (1947) and his descriptive essay “Corrida, 1st of May” (1957).

the connection he draws between honesty and a reliance on one's own resources implies that *dishonesty* characterizes any personal dependence upon an external palliative.

Already, we can see Cocteau invoking the dichotomy of inside and outside that Derrida, in both "Plato's Pharmacy" and "The Rhetoric of Drugs," deems crucial to the historical condemnation of drugs.⁶⁸ According to this moral position, only the powers that come from a supposed "within" should aid the individual in his struggle with the pain of being. Yet as quickly as Cocteau invokes this boundary marking what is inside and outside the individual, he dispels it, claiming that the supposed honesty of his drug-free existence "does not make sense, since our inner self is made up of what we feed upon" (152). The author cannot ultimately believe in the moral rightness of his attempts at detoxification, and yet as his corpus consistently indicates, he can never fully shed his tendency to feel that something is fundamentally wrong with his opium use.

Cocteau's dilemma is not likely to astound the reader, for its constitutive ambivalence has formed the basis for many ongoing debates regarding the relative morality of drug use.⁶⁹ Yet consider for a moment that, along with the mitigation of pain,

⁶⁸ For further discussion of these essays and their contribution to this project, see my introduction (51).

⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, for example, also claims in "The Rhetoric of Drugs" (1989) that one of the drug's constitutive social evils is its tendency to render the subject blissfully unproductive. Lack of productivity, in the eyes of a work-based social order, *should* cause anxiety and a restless hunger for activity, and it is only by reintegrating him or herself into the sober world of production that the drug user "restores the normal order of intelligible production; he produces and his production generates value" (236). Derrida further investigates the moral condemnation of the drug user in modernity when he asks: "[w]hat do we hold against the drug addict? Something we never, at least never to the same degree, hold against the alcoholic or the smoker: that he cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community" (235). These binaries inscribed between the "real" world of work and the "false" world of intoxication, sociability and solipsism, productivity and idleness will all come into play in the coming discussion of Cocteau's relationship with opium. As Derrida writes in "Plato's Pharmacy" as well, the Western condemnation of the pharmaceutical as a dangerous poison dates back at least as far as Plato's *Phaedrus* (370 B.C.E.), which aligns the drug with writing itself, and claims that like a drug, writing comes to represent a malevolent entity that enters the human being from a supposedly artificial "outside" and corrupts the authentic "inner" realm of speech and memory, causing an

the definition of the French verb “pallier” also denotes a concealment of one’s true feelings, both from others and from oneself. Within the conceptual territory that palliation delimits, the alleviation of incurable pain is inextricably linked to an act of both personal and interpersonal dishonesty. Thus as the drug assumes the status of a palliative, its alleviatory and morally dishonest implications become especially interwoven. As this chapter argues, the necessity of incurable pain marks an ethical necessity in Cocteau’s work; or in other words, Cocteau suggests that people *should* feel their pain if this pain is incurable.⁷⁰ However, I also argue that just as Cocteau recognizes the differences between discrete forms of therapy, his work also recognizes that there is no single, definitive act of palliation. The ameliorative and dubious sides of palliation do not limit us to reading this concept in two discrete, opposing ways; rather, they serve as bookends enclosing a spectrum of possible meanings. It is the push and pull between these contrasting forces of alleviation and dissimulation – their perpetual struggle for interpretive influence – that renders the palliative agent of opium an especially troubling concern for Cocteau.

atrophy of these inner faculties by rendering them dependent upon an external technology. This concern with dependence upon an “external” entity (and its association with “inner” atrophy) is something that plagues Cocteau throughout his writings on opium.

⁷⁰ One could find a parallel here between Cocteau’s suspicion of palliation and Patricia Rae’s theory of “resistant mourning” in her introduction to *Modernism and Mourning*. Cocteau understands that his unsettling turn of mind is precisely what keeps him aware of his experience in a critical way. To “palliate” this pain would inevitably mean to conceal it, and therein prove to be irresponsible in the same measure as it is alleviatory. Rae suggests that in modernism, the sense of ethical responsibility ultimately trumps the desire to absorb loss or pain comfortably. In Cocteau’s modernism, however, this ethical priority is not so clear. Cornelia A. Tsakiridou, for example, suggests in “Classical Cocteau” that the tendency to “idealize the incomplete, the ir retrievable, and the absent can certainly make a precursor of Cocteau. But Cocteau’s world revolve[s] around a diametrically opposed ethic that valued completeness, recovery, and presence even when they see[m] impossible to reach or difficult to accomplish” (100). As I mention in my introduction, if modernists like Cocteau turn inward with their writings and fail to find some stable, comfortable meaning in (or outside of) language, it is certainly not for lack of trying.

Before launching into a discussion of palliation's constitutive impasse, however, I will further articulate my ground for departure. For this ground, I return to Cocteau's designation of opium as a palliative, by which he means an agent that mitigates pain without curing it. The fact of some pre-existent pain, as one might reasonably conclude, is inherent to any attempt at palliation. Yet it is this seemingly self-evident point that raises a substantial question regarding Cocteau's opium use: what *particular* pain does the palliative drug serve to mitigate? Simply put, this pain is none other than the "difficulty of being." One cannot figure the nature of opium as a palliative agent in Cocteau's writing without first figuring the nature of this "difficulty" that it works to mitigate. At this preliminary point, I will not commit to identifying this pain of being in physiological, psychoanalytical, or phenomenological terms. Rather, I will first explore Cocteau's early fiction for clues to its nature. It is in the interest of opening this preliminary stage of investigation that I turn now to a reading of Cocteau's 1923 novel, *The Miscreant*, a work whose value to this study I hope will become evident in the coming discussion.

***The Miscreant* - 1923**

1923 was the year that Cocteau's close friend, Raymond Radiguet succumbed to typhoid fever at the age of twenty, and it was not long after that Cocteau – aged thirty-four – first began to take opium. This same year, Cocteau wrote and published a novel entitled *The Miscreant* or, in its original French, *Le Grand Écart*, which translates into English as that acrobatic manoeuvre commonly known as "the splits." Cocteau's novel follows the life of Jacques Forestier, a young man whose romantic infatuation with a

more sexually experienced woman (named Germaine) proves agonizing, and eventually lures Jacques to the brink of suicide. Yet from the text's outset, it is clear that poor Jacques's suffering comes from a source less contingent than his lover's capricious jilts. That is, Jacques harbours a sickness that precedes his first meeting with the older Germaine, a sickness for which he then looks to the woman as a remedy. Twenty years prior to the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, Cocteau invokes brief-yet-telling references to "nausea" when he attempts to describe Jacques's personal suffering. In one of its early passages, *The Miscreant* informs readers that the young Forestier simply "felt unstable. He built no foundation except for amusement. He was the kind of sailor who cannot get over his seasickness" (23). Shortly after this passage, the text elaborates on Jacques's condition, claiming that the young man "believed too much. He did not limit his beliefs or define them" (24). Jacques suffers from a form of philosophical homelessness – a lack of stable ground on which to base his thoughts or feelings, since "[h]aving a vague belief makes the mind dilettante" (24). At this early point in the novel, it is obvious that the qualities of instability and superficiality pervade Jacques's experience, yet one must remember that it is specifically the young man's reflexive *awareness* of this pervasion that afflicts him with a chronic sickness. His penchant for amusement and pleasure, coupled with a converse "bourgeois love of order" (22) thus commits his desire in opposing directions, inducing a split consciousness that harks to those same acrobatic splits that appear in the book's French title.

Along with the figure of a seasick sailor, Cocteau's early text invokes that of a diver to express Jacques's response to his surface-oriented, yet ultimately groundless experience. The young man's life of floating amusements renders him a sailor, yet he is

aware of a lack in this life that keeps him from finding stable ground and thus keeps him chronically nauseous.⁷¹ It is an acute sensitivity to his condition that alienates him from “normal” people, who can lead the same superficial life he does without experiencing the same sickening lack, and to this extent Jacques also resembles a diver, a young man who, plunging into the waters of life, “dug around on the bottom. No one brought him to the surface again” (23). This diver-figure lies in contrast with those people whom Jacques finds living about himself, the ones who feel no need to look beneath the surface of life as he does. The novel continues: “[h]e saw a dance through the windows [and saw] the race who have their papers in order, who are glad to be alive, in their proper element with no use for diving-suits” (23). Normal people’s particular quality of “having their papers in order” demonstrates that Jacques lacks not only their happiness, but also a clear, fixed principle that would provide his experiences with a sense of symbolic legitimacy,⁷² as the young man rhetorically wonders, “[w]here is the document that authorized him to enjoy a meal, a fine evening, a girl or men? Let him show it” (23). Yet this search for some philosophical substance or principle to fill his sickening lack, while it causes Jacques acute nervous pains, is also something that defines him as a young man, and without

⁷¹ Here, I would like to refer the reader back to Ayers’ and Malamud’s readings of modernism, which I treated in the introduction. Both critics point to the pleasure of circulation – or a fulfillment in uprooted and transformative meaning – that serves as the ideal of modernist consciousness. I argue that while these critics might be right about this ideal, the modernist consciousness is also characterized by an *inability* to find fulfillment in this ideal. I believe that Cocteau’s portrayal of Jacques Forestier as someone made “seasick” by constant subjective groundlessness is as good an example as any to demonstrate the modernist anxiety toward the uprooted circulation of meaning in experience. Sartre’s notion of nausea would eventually become one of the most powerful articulations of this central modernist problem.

⁷² Throughout this text, Cocteau is not quite certain of how to represent those individuals who do not share Jacques’s pain. Sometimes, they appear as people who are perfectly at home in a world of unstable meaning; they take nothing but pleasure from constant amusement and changing fashions. At other times, they seem to have a potential for uprooted satisfaction only insofar as they possess a pre-existing symbolic legitimacy: i.e. their papers are in order. In any case, Jacques’s fundamental pain is specifically that of a young man who merely circulates, and who believes that this circulation keeps him from settling into a stable sense of symbolic purpose.

which he would cease to exist. The young man knows himself well enough to see that “[t]o come up, to take the helmet and the suit off, was to pass from life to death” (23). It is not until he becomes hopelessly infatuated with the beautiful Germaine that Jacques truly believes he has found a remedy for his difficulty of being.

The fact that Jacques seeks a cure for his split consciousness and chronic sensation of lack through the possession of a love-object has already inspired Lacanian readings of Cocteau’s early text.⁷³ It is thus Lacan’s concept of the *objet petit a* (as it appears in his “Subversion of the Subject” and throughout his subsequent work) that I will first invoke to help articulate Jacques’s difficulty. Moving between the images of floating seasickness and lonesome diving, Cocteau attempts to give form to the essentially formless lack that afflicts his young protagonist. At first, Jacques believes that the discovery of some fixed symbolic principle will alleviate his sickness by setting his papers in order. But later, he looks to the young woman Germaine and recognizes that “[f]or the first time, his desire did not manifest itself in the form of a sick feeling. For the first time, he did not hate his own reflection. He thought he was cured” (38). The notion of hating one’s reflection harks back to Lacan’s description of the “mirror stage” in the essay that bears this concept’s name. In this piece, Lacan describes the formation of the psychic imaginary at the moment when the infant recognizes her own reflection in a mirror and internalizes this reflection as an avatar of her self-enclosed, autonomous

⁷³ The most comprehensive Lacanian reading of Cocteau’s work to date is Jemma-Jejcic’s *Jean Cocteau, ou, l’énigme du désir* (2006). Jean Bernard Vray’s “Le Grand Écart,” however, also focuses on the Lacanian aspects of *The Miscreant*, particularly the concept of a “split self” inscribed by the text’s French title. In his reading, Vray focuses on the trope of the mirror image and the “split” or “écart” that it induces, writing that “[l]e début du roman, toutefois, insiste sur un autre écart qui préexiste à la rencontre de Germaine” [the beginning of the novel always insists that another split precedes the meeting with Germaine] (107).

being. This instance, Lacan adds, “would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (2). It is the later inception of this imaginary wholeness into language, signaled by the adoption of the first-person pronoun, which creates a split in consciousness between one’s imaginary wholeness and the radical displacements wrought by the differential, impersonal operations of the symbolic order. For Jacques Forestier to no longer hate his reflection suggests that he has experienced a psychic movement away from the alienation of the symbolic order, and toward the ideal wholeness of the imaginary. This fantasy of wholeness, in the terms of Lacan’s “Subversion of the Subject” (1960), is available to Jacques through the fantasy of the *objet petit a*. To clarify, the *a* or “little other” is an object onto which the subject projects its sensation of lack and corresponding fantasy of future wholeness. The subject then comes to believe that the possession of this object will fill his lack and restore to him the supposed non-lack that characterized his existence prior to his arrival into language. This is not to say that Cocteau possesses direct knowledge of Lacan’s theories, which did not appear in France until ten years following the publication of *The Miscreant*.⁷⁴ However, we can find fruitful parallels between Cocteau and Lacan when considering the aggressive sense of possession with which Jacques thinks of his young lover: “[h]e did not want to be Germaine. He wanted to *possess* her” (38; my emphasis). It is this same

⁷⁴ Despite this admission, I would like to repeat Jemma-Jejcic’s well-argued claim that “[p]ourtant, les dates sont formelles et, définitivement, Cocteau précède Lacan” [nevertheless, the dates are formal and, definitively, Cocteau precedes Lacan] (31). In making this claim, Jemma-Jejcic claims that Cocteau is not only a historical predecessor of Lacan’s, but a conceptual one as well.

fantasy of possession that stokes Jacques's hope for finding a final, lasting fulfillment through his romantic pursuits.

As one discovers in both Lacan's work and the tale of Jacques Forestier, the fantasy of the object *a* always remains a fantasy, and it can never truly put an end to the subject's desire. Cocteau's text addresses the imprudent, unrequited nature of Jacques's psychic investment in Germaine when it notes that

Jacques was trying to satisfy a boundless desire. The first embrace disappointed him. When one bouquet fades, you buy another. But Jacques was taking root. His abnormal love was growing normally, slowly. He loved himself, he loved travel, he loved too many things, in his mistress. Germaine loved only her lover. (42)

Ultimately, the fantasy of the object *a* is a narcissistic one. Jacques finds in Germaine only partial reflections of the end-of-desire he seeks to achieve by possessing her, but what he fails to do is move onto a new object of desire once the former object has lost its lustre. The relationship between him and Germaine soon sours, and Jacques is devastated to discover that *he is merely one more man in Germaine's endless chain of lovers*. Further, he realizes that even if he *could* retain Germaine's love, he would fail to cure his underlying sickness. For in loving the girl, he hopes to wring from his formless lack a perfected, whole image of himself, and the text consistently undermines this aim by affirming that, "[t]he story of our Narcissus is more complex. He was in love with the river. But rivers flow on heedless of the bathers, the trees they reflect. Their desire is the sea" (40). Thus it is not the discovery that Germaine no longer loves him, but that nothing will ever cure his sickness which truly devastates the young man.

Germaine eventually leaves the unfortunate Forestier for an Englishman named Peter Stopwell, a man whom Jacques finds unbearably superficial. It is the thought of these two young lovers together that fully convinces Jacques of how unsuited he truly is to a world populated by people who are neither intellectually nor emotionally as sensitive as himself. Alone and losing hope, Jacques begins to believe that his suffering has allowed him to perceive a dark truth that underlies not only his own life, but that of all humanity. *The Miscreant's* third-person narrator reflects this psychic development in remarking that “[w]hen we wake up it is the animal, the plant in us, that thinks. Naked primitive thought. We see a dreadful universe, because we see aright. Soon afterwards we are loaded with the tricks of the intellect. It brings us playthings which man invents to hide the emptiness” (70). Jacques has come to perceive this emptiness that underlies all human efforts following his recognition of the object *a*'s false promise in Germaine. As I mentioned in my introduction, the Lacanian real is that kernel of experience that resists incorporation into the symbolic order, and any attempt to approach this real directly and to hold it in one's mind as grasped knowledge is doomed to confront the subject with a profound absence. Thus Jacques, when he abandons the fantasy of the object *a*, leaves himself with no recourse but to wait for death. To better articulate this psychic movement, however, we must travel backwards from Lacan's seminar on “The Subversion of the Subject” (1960) to the seminar in which he first argues for the linguistic structure of desire itself – “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious” (1957), for it is in this earlier piece that Lacan most comprehensively formalizes the temporal “waiting” of desire.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Perhaps I should qualify this statement by claiming that “comprehensively formalizes” is the operative

Drawing from Saussurian linguistics, Lacan argues that desire functions first and foremost in a metonymic fashion.⁷⁶ That is to say, the subject signifies desire through an endless, diachronically unfolding chain of partial signifiers which never crystallize into a final signified. As Lacan later notes in “Subversion of the Subject,” this mode of signification also inscribes the subject’s sensation of unfolding time, as “the subject becomes at each stage what he was before and announces himself – he will have been – only in the future perfect tense” (306). Thus we can find in Lacan’s early theory a potential framework for understanding Jacques’s reversion from romantic fantasy to the sensation of an endless waiting. Having given up his belief that freedom from lack is an attainable end, Jacques leaves himself with nothing to contemplate but the alienating, temporal displacements of the symbolic order itself. It is this same perpetual passage from signifier to incomplete signifier that induces the return of the young man’s seasickness, as Jacques discovers after his breakup with Germaine that “[h]e could not get a foothold. He was heavy, floating over the surface of this buoyant city. He was oil on the water; wreckage. He made himself sick at heart” (81). According to the terms of Lacan’s “Agency of the Letter,” the supposed wholeness promised by the object *a* would constitute a subjective movement across the bar of signification, traveling from the

phrase here. As I mentioned in an extensive footnote (f20, 21) in my introduction, Lacan’s most explicit treatment of time as a subjective phenomenon comes in his early essay “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism” (1945), written twelve years prior to “Agency of the Letter.” However, as I pointed out in this earlier footnote, Lacan’s early arguments about the unfolding temporal dimension of subjective experience (which itself emerges from the signifying relations between subjects who cannot exist outside such relations) are condensed and formalized to the point of mathematical articulation in “Agency of the Letter,” in which Lacan brings the Saussurian model of the signifying chain to bear not only on psychoanalytic knowledge, but all forms of human experience in general.

⁷⁶ To see these concepts unpacked more thoroughly, please consult my introduction (20-35).

endless passage of incomplete signifiers (temporary amusements) into a final signified (a filling of Jacques's lack). Reflecting Jacques's utter submission to symbolic forces, the narrator of *The Miscreant* thus claims that "[w]aiting is the most diminishing occupation. If our frivolous senses disturb it, they are paralysed by the bees of suffering. We must wait, wait, wait; eat mechanically to provide energy for the factory of false sounds, calculations, memories, hopes" (71). At this point in my discussion, I can say with confidence that Jacques's particular "difficulty of being" marks the submission of the Lacanian imaginary (the realm of fantasy) to the groundless displacements of the symbolic order, signifying a waiting that will end only with the subject's death. The recognition that his sensation of lack will never cease to torture him leads Jacques to conclude that only death can end his suffering. Acting upon this conclusion, he purchases a (supposedly) deadly dose of white powder from a dealing bartender and consumes it with the hope of finding peace in oblivion.

When Jacques attempts to take his lethal dose of drugs, he does not seek mere palliation, but a final cure to his pain. Yet the dose proves non-lethal and the young man ultimately recovers. It is the described effects of his failed suicide, however, that are most important for understanding Cocteau's later writings on the palliative effects of opium. When the white poison creeps through Jacques's body in *The Miscreant*, it achieves an effect that (as we will see) becomes characteristic of intoxicated experience in Cocteau's *Opium* (1928) diary, as well as his later essay "Corrida, 1st of May" (1957). That is, the drug markedly diminishes the subject's experience of temporal diachrony and symbolic difference: "[o]n his bed Jacques began to confuse his symptoms with external phenomena. The walls were breathing. The ticking of the clock came first from the

inkwell, then from the wardrobe” (75). Time slows and spreads outward in three dimensions, and as it does so, the differences that allow discrete objects to signify blur into one another synesthetically. Yet in this shift, Jacques overshoots the ideal-I that forms the basis for his fantasy of imaginary wholeness. Rather, he floats beyond this image as he travels toward a primordial experience of non-differentiation, much like a child that is not cognitive of where its suckling mouth ends and its mother’s breast begins.⁷⁷ The journey marks only a transitory approach to this space beyond the systemic differences of the symbolic, for as the reader can intuit by this point, a final “cure” would entail Jacques’s complete arrival into the unsignified continuity of death.⁷⁸ Jacques,

⁷⁷ More specifically, Jacques experiences a dissolution in his “corporeal schema” or “body image,” in the terms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This concept of Merleau-Ponty’s is one that I will pursue further in chapters two and three. The correlation between a fading of selfhood and a blurring of perceptual boundaries is something I will also theorize further in these coming chapters. Suffice it to say for now that the metonymic pole of consciousness works to consolidate the discrete self through the pursuit of an object. This phenomenon occurs on a psychic and physical level, since for Merleau-Ponty, the embodied self can only consolidate its sensation of wholeness by polarizing its intentions upon a discrete object and approaching that object as a goal. To slacken one’s hold on the psychic/physical object entails a simultaneous dissolution of self, body, perception, and desire, as one can find in Jacques Forestier’s brush with death. I hope to better express this correlation of phenomena by using Bataille’s concepts of “mystical eroticism” and “continuity” throughout the rest of this chapter.

⁷⁸ In *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek writes that the Lacanian “real” is both that “hard kernel” that resists incorporation into the symbolic order, and the utter continuity of non-linguistic existence that presses in on this order from without, like a “grey and formless mist, pulsing slowly as if with inchoate life,” and threatening to dissolve the symbolic into unsignifying continuity (14-15). In this same discussion, Žižek mentions that the real manages to manifest itself in works of art, and that it does so through a number of “different modalities of the real” (viii). In one sense then, I argue that the “metaphoric” forces of language exhibit a certain modality of the real, yet at the same time I suggest something more than what Žižek does. Žižek does not speak explicitly of a *spectrum of incremental subjective states* running between the fully symbolic subject and the annihilation it faces through a direct encounter with the real (19). In both *Looking Awry* and *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek often refers to Lacan’s reading of *Antigone* (found in his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*) to demonstrate how the death drive and the encounter with the real can manifest themselves in a text. One aspect of Lacan’s reading that Žižek does not address explicitly, however (for one cannot address everything) is Lacan’s suggestion that Antigone’s proximity to her own *atē* or self-annihilation finds expression in her increasing appeals to “the aesthetic register” (239). Further, Lacan claims that as Antigone incrementally draws nearer to the moment of her death, the reader can detect this nearness “[w]ith the precision of a Geiger counter... by means of references to the aesthetic register that the subject will give you in his associations, in his broken, disconnected monologue” (239; my emphasis). It is this “Geiger counter” image, I believe, that helps legitimate the possibility of relative or incremental states of symbolic immersion in Lacan. To put this point more clearly, my framework for a

however, returns to health after making this approach to death and thus returns to the same sensation of groundless waiting that has always afflicted his “sober” life. It is this same rejection by death that re-encumbers him with the full weight of the symbolic order’s alienating, displacing forces. The mortal world, Jacques now feels with utter certainty, is not fit for men like himself. It is people like Germaine and Stopwell who can thrive within it, those who experience the same insubstantial movement through life’s transitory events as himself and yet *do not require* these events to hold the deeper significance that he requires. These people constitute a different race, a “diamond race” (79) that is immune to the sickness that plagues Jacques Forestier, who cannot help but feel anguish at life’s *Grand Écart*.

Throughout his work, Jacques Lacan outlines the discrete properties of the imaginary, symbolic, and real as registers of psychic being. Yet as a practising psychoanalyst, he is acutely aware that the relative influence of these registers upon a given psyche (at a given moment) is subject to variability, and it is the spectrum of plural states made possible by this variability that forms the basis of my discussion. I thus argue that Jacques Forestier, moving into a realm of diminished symbolic forces during a moment of drug intoxication, reveals a crucial fact about Cocteau’s “difficulty of being” – that one can *willfully manipulate* her psychic positioning relative to the opposing forces of symbolic differentiation and primordial non-differentiation. Within the terms of

subjective spectrum in Lacan (which I bring to Cocteau’s work) runs against those interpretations that suggest that an encounter with the real can only ever be a sharp eruption (or interruption) in the operations of the symbolic order, and that such an encounter cannot persist in any sustained or – more importantly – incremental way.

Lacan's early structuralism, this spectrum of possible states produces a multiplicity of "non-knowledges," forms of knowledge that cannot signify within comprehensible symbolic discourse. To further unpack this notion of "non-knowledges," however, I will place Lacan's thought in dialogue with that apotheosis of the "passion for the real," the philosopher Georges Bataille.⁷⁹

In *Inner Experience* (1943), Bataille does not speak within a psychoanalytic framework, or (for that matter) in any framework that one could assign a singular classification. His language suggests an amalgam of psychoanalysis, existentialism, phenomenology, and historical materialism; but like Lacan's distinction between symbolic difference and the unsignifiable in-difference of a direct encounter with the real, Bataille's work does not describe two rigidly discrete spheres of human experience, but rather two opposing poles between which there emerges a spectrum of possible subjective positions. "Discontinuous" existence denotes the experience of embodied consciousness as something fundamentally distinct from a surrounding world, a characteristic that Lacan associates with the imaginary synthesis of the body-image in the mirror stage and its inception in language. "Continuity" marks the state of the subject prior to birth and its subsequent constitution in discourse, a state to which it can return when experience "attains in the end the fusion of object and subject, being as subject non-

⁷⁹ With a common acquaintance in André Breton – perhaps *the* leader of the French surrealist movement – Cocteau and Bataille certainly knew of one another's work. In *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* (1992), Michel Surya documents a trial in 1956 in which Bataille and Cocteau served as two (of four) defense witnesses for Jean-Jacques Pauvert, who had been brought to trial for publishing four books by D.A.F. de Sade (the other two witnesses were Jean Paulhan and André Breton). Surya goes on to note that in this trial, "Bataille's position is not only courageous, it is also faithful to what he always required: to elude nothing!" (479). In this respect, Bataille and Cocteau's ties to the surrealist movement reveal a common desire to bring thought to its most abysmal limits (and perhaps beyond), or as Michel Surya puts it (echoing Bataille): "To think everything to a point that makes people tremble" (479).

knowledge, as object the unknown” (*Inner* 9). Within the terms of Lacan’s *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* seminar, this fusion of object and subject begins to occur when the subject transgresses the regulated boundary separating it from the unnameable (and ultimately absent) *Thing* producing its desire. Similar to what one finds with the drug-induced experience of Jacques Forestier, the subjective movement away from discontinuous experience does not blur one or two specific lines of symbolic difference, but *all of them at once* as the subject makes its way toward the utter continuity of death. Like Lacan’s notion of the real, however, this continuity of infinite in-difference ultimately collapses the distinction between life and death. In short, there is no signifying difference between the infinitude of pure being and that of death; both simply mark the annihilation of the subject as a split or discontinuous entity. Jacques Forestier’s moment of intoxication, which moves toward the continuity of death without proving lethal, thus qualifies as an experience that Bataille would call “erotic.”

It is in *Eroticism* (1957) that Bataille most thoroughly engages the spectrum of “non-knowledges” that emerges between the opposing poles of continuity and discontinuity. To begin, he offers a definition of “physical eroticism” that bears significant similarities to the Lacanian fantasy of the object *a*. Physical eroticism is an encounter with another person that operates in obedience to the “regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals” (*Eroticism* 18). In other words, this possessive form of erotic encounter is the one that commits subjects to the imperatives of symbolic difference, and it is a phenomenon that Bataille believes to hold “a heavy, sinister quality. It holds on to the separateness of the individual in a rather selfish and cynical fashion” (*Eroticism* 19). This form of eroticism

shores up the subject's status as an entity separate from its surrounding world, a fantasmatic status that the egocentric subject strives to protect at any cost. Yet beyond this impulse, Bataille privileges the force that carries subjects toward their lost continuity, for the ultimate cause of their incurable suffering is the fact that

[w]e are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. (*Eroticism* 15)

This statement, I argue, encapsulates Jacques Forestier's sickening sense of groundlessness, along with the loneliness levied by his very status as a discrete individual. It is also his project of physical eroticism, treating the erotic other (Germaine) as an *object* of desire, which proves incapable of curing the pain that is part and parcel of Jacques's discontinuous being. Yet this "selfish and cynical" eroticism is not the only kind of which Bataille writes. A "mystical" or "religious" eroticism, says Bataille, facilitates the individual's movement toward continuity.⁸⁰ As in the case of Jacques's

⁸⁰ The movement toward continuity is a prevalent theme throughout David Garrett Izzo's *The Influence of Mysticism on 29th Century British and American Literature*, and throughout the work of Aldous Huxley, which is the subject my next chapter. However, while the principle of continuity is crucial to these understandings of modernism, it is very rarely incorporated into any understanding of modernism that seeks to emphasize the importance of contingency and transformation, like those of Rae, Detloff, Flatley, and Mester. In the spirit of Derrida's *pharmakon*, critics tend to emphasize one of the two sides of the continuity/discontinuity binary. Spiritually-inflected readings privilege the stillness and peace of continuity, regarding change and contingency as superficial illusions. Those who emphasize contingency and the endless transformation of meaning, however, seem to bring a post-Derridean bias to modernist literature. My project works to account for both sides of this dichotomy, although I am fully willing to admit that my sympathies lie more with the spiritually-inflected readings. I agree heartily with Cornelia A. Tsakiridou's "Classical Cocteau," which claims that unlike the post-Derridean thinker "who writes from a space of self-imposed exile within writing and language," Jean Cocteau cannot find pleasure in linguistic displacement because it is "never final and perpetual and because – and this is the breaking point with the postmodern – it is within art's power to dissolve and cancel [displacement] out" (79). For Cocteau, there cannot be such a thing as an art of absence, exile, and annihilation because in being called to art, "the artist is called to make

drug intoxication, this form of eroticism does not police the individual's symbolic difference from the erotic object, but rather "reveals an absence of any object. Objects are identified with discontinuity, whereas mystical experience, as far as our strength allows us to break from our discontinuity, confers on us a sense of continuity" (23). This state, Bataille is quick to add, is not one that can signify within the symbolic structures of "knowledge" proper. Rather, only descriptive, metaphorical language can attempt to convey it, and this task is itself nearly impossible, since it attempts to describe a state of continuity in words whose ability to signify relies upon systemic difference.⁸¹

To give proper credit to a psychoanalytic reading, I would add that in his later seminar *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge* (1972-73), Lacan distinguishes between the experiences of phallic and feminine *jouissance* in terms very similar to those of Bataille. Like physical eroticism, it is the phallic desire that seeks to maintain the subject's sense of discrete consciousness while possessing the love-object. Lacan makes this point by claiming that "[f]or one pole [of subjectivity], *jouissance* is marked by the hole that leaves it no other path than that of phallic *jouissance*" (8). But "[f]or the other pole," he rhetorically asks, "can something be attained that would tell us how that which up until now has only been a fault (*faulle*) or gap in *jouissance* could be realized?" (8). Feminine *jouissance* entails what Lacan deems

present again a forgotten but never an empty, purged, or specularized cosmos" (80). I do not necessarily agree that Cocteau's work succeeds in canceling out linguistic and subjective displacement completely, but I do argue that opium and a predominance of metaphoric forces in language can significantly curb the effects of linguistic displacement by varying degrees.

⁸¹ On a more speculative note, Bataille claims that "Saint Theresa has been the only one to depict [this mystical experience] strongly enough in words" (*Eroticism* 240).

a “giving oneself over to” the big Other, a relinquishing of symbolic difference which carries the mystical subject toward primordial non-difference, or as Bataille deems it, continuity. As I mentioned in my introduction, these poles of subjectivity are akin to Lacan’s earlier distinction between the metonymic and metaphoric poles of desire. The metonymic is the pole of phallic *jouissance*; it unfolds diachronically and is subject to the differential displacements of language and the subjective lack that these displacements sustain. Metonymy is also correlative to the mechanism by which the subject produces the fantasmatic image of itself as a discrete, self-determining presence. Metaphor, on the other hand, is akin to the feminine pole of subjectivity and its constitutive mode of *jouissance*. Metaphor operates upon relations of similarity rather than difference, and thus it breaks down the signifying chain to the extent that the diachronic flow of time can dissipate almost entirely. Further, metaphor numbs the subject’s fantasy of discrete autonomy and the symbolic lack that fuels this fantasy, thus achieving a mode of self-sacrifice that leads the subject incrementally toward a state of primordial non-being.

As I have also mentioned in my introduction, these poles of metonymy and metaphor (phallic and feminine *jouissance*) are structurally aligned with Bataille’s distinction between discontinuity and continuity, respectively. Both Lacan and Bataille, however, while asserting the possibility of mystical dissolutions of consciousness, adamantly affirm that any such dissolutions are partial and temporary. For Lacan, to attain total non-difference would lead the subject into death, while to remain simply disconnected from symbolic forces without dying would mark a descent into psychosis.⁸²

⁸² As I have argued, my exploration of modernist experience does not necessarily emphasize Lacan’s later conception of *jouissance* as a product of the subject’s endless circulation around the real. However, I do

Thus at this early point in our investigation, we can say that Cocteau's "difficulty of being" stems from the nervous pains induced by the drawbacks that are part and parcel of discontinuous, symbolic, metonymic existence. As the subject rushes into futurity, the symbolic meaning of its being is endlessly displaced, and its inability to "plant its feet on the ground" afflicts it with a dizzying vertigo or nausea. Having introduced this theoretical groundwork, we can now apply this provisional understanding of Cocteau's "difficulty of being" to this chapter's primary concern: how opium attains the status of a palliative in the author's work.

find something akin between the drug experience and what Jacques-Alain Miller in "Interpretation in Reverse" calls the "post-interpretive practice" of Lacan's later work (8). In using this phrase, Miller refers to the manner in which Lacan's later work does not follow from the imperative of the Freudian "talking cure": to remain within language and to neutralize psychic trauma by giving it narrative form. Rather, as Véronique Voruz notes in the introduction to *The Later Lacan*, "the deciphering of the unconscious becomes less central in the analytic treatment. The relation to meaning and truth is less valued, and for the Lacan of the later period the analytic treatment is oriented on a reduction of the symptom" (x). The later Lacan focuses less on articulating the subject's symptom and more on bringing the subject into an encounter with the real "cut" in the symbolic order that gives form to that subject's unique mode of *jouissance*. In this model, the subject's encounter with the "hole" in its symbolic existence does not annihilate it, but rather causes it to return to the process of circulating around this hole, but with a major difference: the former "symptom" causing discomfort has been transformed into a "*sinthome*," and the subject has learned to *work with* the real rather than seek to fill it completely. It is to this extent that Voruz writes that "[t]he *symptom* has to be emptied of the *jouissance* procured through its articulation with the fantasy so that the subject can make use of his *sinthome* to love, work, and desire" (x; original emphasis). Thus at the very point where analysis "prevents the proliferation of meaning that makes analysis interminable" (xi), the subject's relationship with its unique *jouissance* truly begins. Lacan's later work can speak to my reading of Cocteau's opium use insofar as it (Lacan's later work) speaks of the terminal point of analysis as the subject's encounter with its real. Where Cocteau's relationship with opium departs from this work, however, is in its expressed inability to base *jouissance* or enjoyment upon an endless circulation around the "hole" or "cut" of the real. While Cocteau might use opium to approach the real and to reach a terminable point in his narrative self-analysis, he does not do so with the thought that encountering the cut will allow him to return to sober life with a newfound enjoyment of endless circulation. Rather, he approaches the real to numb the boundaries of his subjectivity and to achieve temporary alleviation from the pressures of being a circulating subject *qua* subject. To this extent, we could interpret Cocteau's opium addiction as the affliction of a man who cannot transform his symptom (the chronic pain of endless circulation) into a *sinthome* (the *jouissance* of endless circulation). This is not to confuse *jouissance* with unequivocal joy, but rather to characterize it as an oscillation between pleasure and pain which is a welcome alternative to chronic suffering. That said, Cocteau's later reflections on friendship in *Diary of an Unknown* (1953) might begin to show closer allegiance to Lacan's later thought, and I will treat these reflections in the final section of this chapter.

***Opium* – 1928**

From the outset, Jean Cocteau claims that his purpose for writing *Opium: Diary of a Cure* is to give artistic form to his personal transformation from addiction into a “normal” state of being. Not wishing to valorize the sober subject, he reminds readers of the influence of popular morality when he claims to be “passing from a state *considered as abnormal* to a state *considered as normal*” (18; my emphasis). Further, there is a radical disjunction between the cured subject and the one who speaks throughout *Opium*, as Cocteau assures his readers when he claims that he is a completely different person before and after being addicted to the drug. It is because of the transformative nature of his process of detoxification that Cocteau elects to employ the form of a diary, for “[i]n two weeks, despite these notes, I shall no longer believe in what I am experiencing now. One must leave behind a trace of this journey which memory forgets” (*Opium* 25). In his words, there can be no such thing as a cured subject, but only the destruction of the sick one and substitution of the sober. The fundamental difference between an opium addict and a “normal” person is something that Cocteau discusses throughout the text, and his overwhelming conclusion is that there can be no contact between the two, as “[e]ven without any spirit of proselytizing, it is impossible for a person who does not smoke to live with a person who does. Each would inhabit a different world” (*Opium* 54).⁸³ On a similar note of ambivalence, Cocteau claims that his diary will capture the movements of a “wound in slow motion,” but leaves it to his readers to decide whether this wound’s movements work toward healing or perpetual aggravation. Opium addiction is a disease

⁸³ This statement very closely resembles Lacan’s claim that there can be “no sexual relation” in his twentieth seminar, and I will explore the implications of both as this chapter unfolds.

of which Cocteau stands to be cured, but despite the promise of such a cure, what continues to remain foremost in Cocteau's thought is the original pain of being for which he first turned to opium as a palliative.

Cocteau refers to certain images and concepts in *Opium* that require knowledge of his other works, and I have found that for the purpose of initiating this discussion, a preliminary reading of *The Miscreant* can provide an introduction to many of these images and concepts. This is not to say that some of the meanings of these things do not change throughout Cocteau's career, and I will try to draw upon as many works as possible as I continue to flesh out these meanings. But to begin, Cocteau claims in *Opium* that it is the difficulty of being that opium serves to palliate. Even more so than in *The Miscreant*, he claims that it is specifically the temporal experience of a horizontal "fall through time" that afflicts him with acute nervous pain (*Opium* 32).⁸⁴ This onrushing movement through life's ephemeral events, as I have suggested earlier, marks an

⁸⁴ From this point onward in Cocteau's work, he comes to associate his pain more with the horizontal movement of time than a vertical "diving" beneath the surface of things (which we find in *The Miscreant*). This "diving" serves in *The Miscreant* as an image of the stubborn belief that one can discover some substantial truth beneath the surface of life's contents. This "depth" model of experience, in other words, marks the persistence of the subject's object *a* fantasy, and its belief that it can find a stabilizing principle of truth underlying the superficial surface of life's endless sequence of amusements. Cocteau's abandonment of this image (in the years between 1923 and 1928) marks his acceptance of the idea that no unchanging truth can be discovered this way. As we will find in the remainder of this chapter, this abandonment of a truth principle leads Cocteau to focus all his attention on the horizontal axis of time, and on the question of how one can find a sense of therapeutic "equilibrium" in time. He sheds his belief in the promise of the *objet a*, and can no longer entertain the idea of a fulfillment-to-come. Yet he cannot find a way to face his sensation of lack (symptom) and reorient himself toward it in a more enjoyable way (turning it into the *sinthome*). One Lacanian reading would suggest that Cocteau's palliative drug use thus casts a *pall* over the "hole" in experience, which keeps him from encountering it in a way that could transform it into a *sinthome*. Another reading, however, would suggest that for Cocteau, there can *never* be reliable pleasure in circulating around this hole, and thus his only comfort can come from incrementally approaching this hole as a space of self-dissolution. Much like Lacan's claim that there can be no sexual relation, I do not see how these two readings of Cocteau's drug use could be compatible. Thus as Cocteau begins to forget about finding a "deep" truth, he accepts the endless displacement involved in his movement through the temporal, horizontal axis of experience. His effort at self-therapy then attempts incrementally to slow down his movement along this axis, in hopes that such a slowing down can palliate the pain that comes from this movement.

unbalanced influence of the forces of metonymy (discontinuity) in the speaker's experience. In Lacanian terms, the sensation marks the subject's hypersensitivity to its internal split-ness, as well as its affective dislocation from the object *a* fantasy that promises (but always fails) to close this split.

Much like the young Jacques Forestier, the Jean Cocteau of *Opium* believes that "normal" people possess some form of inner "fixative" that keeps them from feeling the difficulty of being as acutely as himself. Without this fixative, Cocteau adds, "any life perfectly and continually conscious of its speed would become intolerable. It enables the condemned man to sleep. I lack this fixative" (*Opium* 32).⁸⁵ In this text, Cocteau revisits his earlier attempts to explain the difficulty of being in both spatial and temporal terms (eg. the abyss *beneath* life's events and the death waiting at its *end*), and then melds these images into a single symbol of dizzying pain – that of a horizontal fall through time. Further, this fall through time is conditioned by the ephemerality of life's signifying contents, which are metonymically arranged in a perpetually displacing succession. In claiming that opium is able to palliate his sickness, Cocteau affirms that "[w]ithout opium, plans, marriages and journeys appear to me just as foolish as if someone falling out of a window were to hope to make friends with the occupants of the room before which he passes" (*Opium* 32). The mention of plans, marriages, and journeys helps forge a link between Cocteau's description of nervous suffering and Bataille's concept of

⁸⁵ Again, a Lacanian reading could interpret this comment in two discordant ways: either Cocteau's claim to lack a fixative stands as an alibi for his persistent inability (or unwillingness) to encounter the real and reorient himself toward it in a less painful way, or Cocteau is a subject for whom it is truly impossible to find any *jouissance* in the endless circulation around the real. In the second interpretation, the very capacity to transform a symptom into a *sinthome* would mark the "fixative" that Cocteau lacks. It would be difficult, then, to envisage any source of comfort for such a subject *other than* the comfort of palliative self-obliviation.

discursive projects: that is, the narratives that language adds to existence to mould it into a series of meaningful events and ambitions. Like the narrator of *The Miscreant*, the Cocteau of *Opium* asserts that “[e]verything one does in life, even love, occurs in an express train racing toward death” (*Opium* 36). But unlike the story of Jacques, *Opium* traces the effects of a potential palliative, for it asserts that “[t]o smoke opium is to get out of the train while it is still moving. It is to concern oneself with something other than life, with death” (*Opium* 36). Thus in using opium to decrease the forces of metonymic and discontinuous existence, Cocteau claims to manipulate his awareness in a way that leads him toward inorganic continuity (an encounter with the real) while stopping short of death. It is in fact the suggestion that the perceived speed of his horizontal fall is *variable* that allows Cocteau to engage in successful acts of palliation; it is thus not life’s horizontal fall, but the *relative speed* with which an individual experiences this fall that causes pain. The palliative question thence becomes: is the perceived speed of the fall variable, and if so, is it open to willful manipulation? If so, one might figure that an ability to slow down the sensation of speed would help to alleviate (although never fully cure) the experience of a fall through time.

Margaret Crosland, an editor of *Opium*, offers what is perhaps the best account of Cocteau’s relationship with death via the drug experience. She does not emphasize a palliative angle when reading Cocteau’s writings on the drug, but instead claims that through opium, Cocteau explicitly seeks to approach and explore death for purposes of artistic or intellectual curiosity.⁸⁶ Drawing from Cocteau’s biographical background, Crosland focuses on the fact that the author’s introduction to opium was precipitated by

⁸⁶ I would add, however, that palliation and the approach to death are intimately connected for Cocteau.

the suicidal depression that afflicted him following the death of his young writing companion, Raymond Radiguet. In making this point, Crosland argues that:

In the three years since the death of Radiguet nothing, not even opium, nor his new protégé Jean Desbordes, nor the writing of *Orphée* had convinced Cocteau that life was worth living; his successes with books of poems and criticism were not enough. The disappearance of Radiguet was not merely an irreparable personal loss; more and more Cocteau had become preoccupied with what the young poet's death could signify, and with what possible means he himself could find to approach and interrogate death. (81)

My therapeutic reading does not disagree with Crosland's in any irreconcilable way, but it interprets Cocteau with a different emphasis in mind. The experience of intoxication and the impulse toward palliation no doubt draw Cocteau toward a state of inorganic continuity, and to this extent they achieve an approach toward death. What I would contest about Crosland's argument, however, is the idea that Cocteau takes drugs out of a conceptual fascination with death. Cocteau, I rather argue, takes drugs first and foremost as a response to his personal sensation of lack, and any conceptual satisfaction he might achieve in approaching death is a side-effect of what is primarily a therapeutic act. Cocteau is thus like the mythical hero Orpheus, who was in fact the subject of a play Cocteau wrote in 1925 (*Orphée*), only two years into his opium addiction. Like the mythical hero who ventures into the realm of death to find his beloved Eurydice,⁸⁷

⁸⁷ It is also important to recall here that according to the Greek myth, Orpheus returns to the world of the living with Eurydice, *on the condition* that he can never look at her. When Orpheus *does* look back upon

Cocteau takes opium to venture toward the very origins of his personal sense of lack, and to find therein some form of relief from the pains that this lack causes him in moments of sobriety.⁸⁸

In his diary of detoxification, Cocteau claims that he is predisposed toward the taking of opium, and insists that doctors will never fully cure him because they cannot cure the personal turn of mind that throws him out of psychic equilibrium. In a moment

Eurydice, however, she returns to the world of the dead. For Cocteau, this scene no doubt thematizes the fact that while the living subject can approach the point of death, he can never gaze upon it directly, without this limit either turning to ash before his eyes, or worse yet, without this limit enveloping the subject himself and drawing him into death beyond the point of no return. This precise reading of the Orpheus myth appears in Cocteau's work from the 1920's, but it would be stated even more explicitly by Maurice Blanchot in *The Space of Literature* (1955), a text that without doubt works with a knowledge of Cocteau's famous play, which would later become a widely renowned film in 1950. In this text, Blanchot explicitly connects the figure of Orpheus and the act of perpetual dying to the work of the poet, remarking that

Orpheus is an act of metamorphosis: not the Orpheus who has conquered death, but who always dies, who is the demand that we disappear and who disappears in the anguish of this disappearance, an anguish which becomes song, a word which is the pure movement of dying. Orpheus dies a little more than we do, he is we ourselves bearing the anticipated knowledge of our death, knowledge which is dispersion's intimacy. If the poem could become a poet, Orpheus would be the poem: he is the ideal and the emblem of poetic plenitude. (142-43)

Cocteau would no doubt appreciate both the philosophical sentiment and the poetic tone of this passage, as would Bataille. In it, Blanchot describes how the work of the poetic subject draws this subject along a spectrum of experience toward continuity. Blanchot describes this move toward continuity as "dispersion's intimacy," which is something the subject approaches through "the anticipated knowledge of our death." This move ultimately reveals to him "the emblem of poetic plenitude" that marks continuous existence.⁸⁸ Crosland also claims in *Jean Cocteau* that as long-term palliatives, "neither opium nor religion had been as helpful to Cocteau as hard work" (84). I provisionally agree with this claim, and will address it later in this chapter when I explore how Cocteau often responds to his chronic pain by resigning himself fully to the unending project of writing: an act that for this study represents a submission to metonymic symbolic forces rather than an attempt to escape them. In Ayers' terms, Cocteau thus attempts to find fulfillment in the sheer circulation of language. Crosland's claim about the ultimate victory of hard work as a palliative refers to the fact that, following his rehabilitation at St.-Cloud, Cocteau turned toward Christianity to help stem his nervous pains by assigning clear and stable symbolic meaning to his experience. As Bettina L. Knapp points out, "[a] return to religion, at least for a while, have him strength and a sense of belonging. Life now had boundaries, order, direction, and most important of all – a future" (71). The status of religion is a difficult thing to determine within this palliative reading, for in having the individual give himself over to metaphorical forces greater than himself, religion seems to direct the subject toward the transcendent realm of continuous existence. Yet on the other hand, the fact that it is religion's symbolic discourse which projects a cosmological order onto the universe suggests that it can also serve the metonymic, discursive forces that both Cocteau and Bataille find insubstantial. According to this latter interpretation, religion would simply be one more way of putting one's papers in order.

of confession, he mentions an earlier attempt in his life to quit opium, but claims that it failed when he returned to his “unbalanced state of mind,” because he ultimately “preferred an artificial equilibrium to no equilibrium at all” (*Opium* 20). In describing this decision, Cocteau admits that he has ultimately chosen opium for its ability to palliate what he often describes as a personal turn of mind. Yet his sensitivity, as we have mentioned, also seems to be that of a canary in a coalmine. Cocteau feels the pain of being because he is sensitive; but as with the proverbial canary, he believes that his pain makes him aware of a truth that underlies *all* people’s lives. “Normal” people have simply been more successful in sedating their awareness of life’s irredeemable lack through the distractions of symbolic thought. For those who become sensitive toward this darkness beneath life’s contents, and who begin to feel a seasickness like Jacques Forestier, it seems that only opium can offer genuine palliation. However, says Cocteau, it is still often “a matter of luck when opium steadies them and provides these souls of cork with a diver’s suit. For the harm done by opium will be less than that caused by other substances and less than the infirmity which they try to heal” (*Opium* 27). This passage is crucial for charting Cocteau’s conception of opium, at least at this early stage in his diary. For in short, Cocteau completely equates the naïve belief in the object *a*’s promise with the ability to enjoy endless circulation around the void of experience. He later claims that in order to palliate the pain of life’s fall through time, one “must be cured not of opium but of intelligence,” for there is ultimately no difference between the philosophically-minded “diver” who searches for life’s deeper truths and those who do not concern themselves with such things (*Opium* 68). Both are intellectually incapable of gazing directly upon the abyss that renders all things equally insignificant. To put it

another way, the notion that one could encounter the hole in experience and develop an attitude of enjoyment toward it is not possible within the interpretive structures that condition Cocteau's experience.⁸⁹

The responsibility to provide souls of cork with divers' suits suggests that Cocteau sees some good being done in pulling people beneath the discursive value of life's projected fantasies. He attempts to turn people's minds inward to the depths of their experience,⁹⁰ but cannot promise that they will find anything reassuring therein. In fact, once one has read *The Miscreant*, it appears that the only thing Cocteau *can* promise the philosophical individual is discomfort. If anything, we have seen through Jacques Forestier's example that philosophical "diving" takes one closer to the source of life's emptiness. But in taking himself further inward, Cocteau also begins to explore the space that one inhabits on opium, and finds that opium can approach the same abyss as philosophical thought, but can do so in a far more positive spirit. In other words, the depth of opium intoxication "leads the organism toward death" but does so "in euphoric mood" (*Opium* 22). On opium, one begins to approach the point of the subject's dissolution, but not with that same rigidly autonomous (discontinuous) presence of mind that gapes at this same point with horror. Writes Bataille: "[t]he uncertain opposition of autonomy to transcendence puts being into a position which slips [...] It then renounces autonomy for the sake of the whole, but temporarily: the will for autonomy is only abated for a time" (*Inner* 85). This quotation describes the same tension between continuity and

⁸⁹ In the terms of the later Lacan, his interpretive structures preclude the possibility of turning the symptom into a *sinthome*.

⁹⁰ See Ayers (130).

autonomy (discontinuity) that informs Cocteau's relationship to the drug, and as I will eventually argue, also that of modernists like Huxley and Benjamin.

In the taking of opium, the boundary between the individual and his or her surroundings begins to fade from perception, and there is a subjective movement from discontinuous existence toward a continuous one – which in Bataille's terms marks an experience of mystical eroticism (and in Lacan's terms, feminine *jouissance*). Further, as I have partially explained through a reading of the Lacanian symbolic, this movement toward inorganic continuity dissolves the subject's experience of diachrony as such, thus palliating the suffering caused by life's racing, horizontal fall. The fall through time that Cocteau believes to cause the difficulty of being is in fact a fundamental symptom of discrete, discontinuous, and ultimately alienated consciousness. As one learns from Freud's concept of *thanatos*, the total stilling of time would occur in the moment of death. What opium achieves is a movement toward death that mitigates the pains of Cocteau's sober sensitivity while stopping short of death's subjective terminus.⁹¹

In the movement toward continuity, Cocteau notes, “[t]he addict becomes as one with the objects which surround him. His cigarette, a finger, falls from his hand” (*Opium* 63). The operations of the Lacanian symbolic have an especially relevant application in this case, for what Cocteau describes here is a movement from symbolic discontinuity (split consciousness) toward primordial continuity. More specifically, he describes this movement through an adoption of metaphorical language, thus revealing a resignation of

⁹¹ Sprigge and Kihm speak of Cocteau's opium use as a brute distraction from the memory of Raymond Radiguet's death, a distraction which then leads to a mere chemical addiction. I argue, however, that Cocteau's opium use *successfully* addresses a pain he believes to be inherent in him from birth. In taking up this line of argument, I hope to legitimate Lydia Crowson's bold claim that “[h]is experiments with drugs, whatever their origin and however faddish they may seem, led to *cures*... [for] a state resembling abulia: everything appeared totally gratuitous, without meaning” (24; my emphasis).

metonymic to metaphoric experience.⁹² In other words, while the speaking Cocteau makes his movement toward continuity, he dissolves the sensation of diachrony inscribed by language's metonymic unfolding. Further, he begins to blur the differences between himself and perceived objects, and conveys his movement in this direction by adopting heavily metaphorical, descriptive language. This is not to say that his language has somehow surpassed the symbolic order, for Cocteau's words could not signify anything if they were to collapse *all* differences. Rather, the metaphorical forces of language operate in this instance like a linguistic death drive, working to dissolve the metonymic differences between discrete signifiers incrementally by valuing *similarity* over difference. This reading of opium (as an agent that helps Cocteau incrementally bypass the symbolic order) is furthered by Cocteau's expressed belief that his opium use aims to "cure [him] of the tiresome habit of *writing*" (90; my emphasis). The metonymic forces of the symbolic pull language in the direction of systemic difference, and any triumph of the metaphorical would prove to be the same as the triumph of continuity in the organism – death and non-sense, in both physical and symbolic terms.⁹³ When Cocteau attempts to describe his movement toward continuity, and the forces of metaphor begin to exert more

⁹² Roman Jakobson claims that people have neglected to speak about the two fundamental poles of language because of a historical bias toward metaphor in Western knowledge, insisting that "[t]he actual bipolarity has been artificially replaced in these studies by an amputated, unipolar scheme which" neglects relations of contiguity (82). Lacan, on the other hand, seems to exhibit just the opposite bias, insisting throughout "Agency of the Letter" (and throughout his career) that the contiguous relations of metonymy always precede and subtend the melding relations of metaphor. Part of my project's intention is to help re-establish that the relative influence of metaphor or metonymy in language is contextually variable, with neither pole ever holding the trump card. Any other position on this issue, I believe, must proceed within the terms of a chicken-versus-egg argument.

⁹³ Jakobson similarly notes in "Two Aspects of Language" that in cases where the forces of metaphor predominate too much over those of metonymy, there is a truncation of "the extent and variety of sentences," and the loss of grammatical contiguity causes "the degeneration of sentences into a mere 'word heap'" (71).

influence than they would in a “sober” exposition, it is not surprising that he feels as though language has begun to fail him. To attempt the articulation of this movement toward continuity is to attempt the articulation of a true “non-knowledge,” in symbolic terms. Metaphoric comparisons begin to radiate from the consciousness that feels itself blurring into its surrounding world,⁹⁴ just as the signification of language verges upon incomprehensibility in moments of intoxication. The speaker and language itself move toward the in-difference⁹⁵ of death, and it is only the language of metaphor that can leave indirect traces of the intoxication that stops short of this death. Thus in every sense that the embodied subject can experience the de-differentiating forces of intoxication, so too can language undergo this blurring of difference through the ascendance of metaphor.

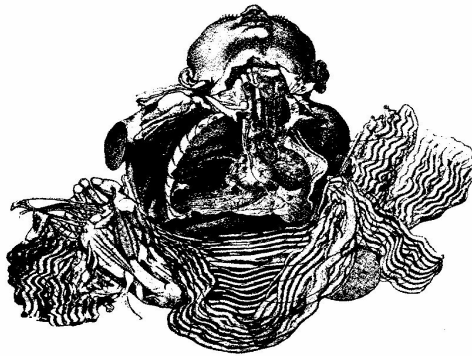
The struggle between metonymic and metaphoric experience expresses itself through Cocteau’s prose, but also through a visual syntax that appears in the drawings that the author inserts throughout his diary. In nearly all of his work, Cocteau constantly reaffirms that the artist’s practice of poesis is essentially that of giving form to concepts and emotions that inherently lack form. His desire to insert drawings throughout *Opium* further demonstrates that prose alone cannot express his conversion into sobriety. The book’s drawings appear in chronological succession,⁹⁶ and they display a visual syntax

⁹⁴ Marie-Claude Schapira similarly speaks of how the “corps solide émet un langage trivial” [the solid body emits a trivial language] while the access to beautiful language renders the body “ectoplasmique” (54).

⁹⁵ In Lacanian terms, this space of non-difference that exceeds (though still inheres within) all efforts of symbolic and imaginary representation marks the subjective encounter with the “real.”

⁹⁶ In her introduction to *Opium*, Crosland writes that “[t]he real struggle with opium, as though it escaped words, is expressed not in this text but in the drawings that go with it, some of them only rapid sketches but all of them horrifying. They show the extreme, not so much of physical pain, but of the physical expression of desperate mental conflict” (84). I believe that my discussion of metaphor and metonymy contributes to this observation by offering a more specific and comprehensive account of how Cocteau’s drawings demonstrate a painful movement between fundamentally different modes of experience. Further, mine is

that is symptomatic of his *transition from intoxication to sobriety*, marking the concession of *metaphoric to metonymic* forces of experience. When Cocteau opens his diary, for example, he visually depicts the initial pains of chemical withdrawal in a remarkably metaphorical way. In the image entitled “Exquisite Pain,” he represents his pain by exploding the human innards into a wave-like image that connotes nausea and stomach pains in a highly visceral, surrealist style.



3 Exquisite pain



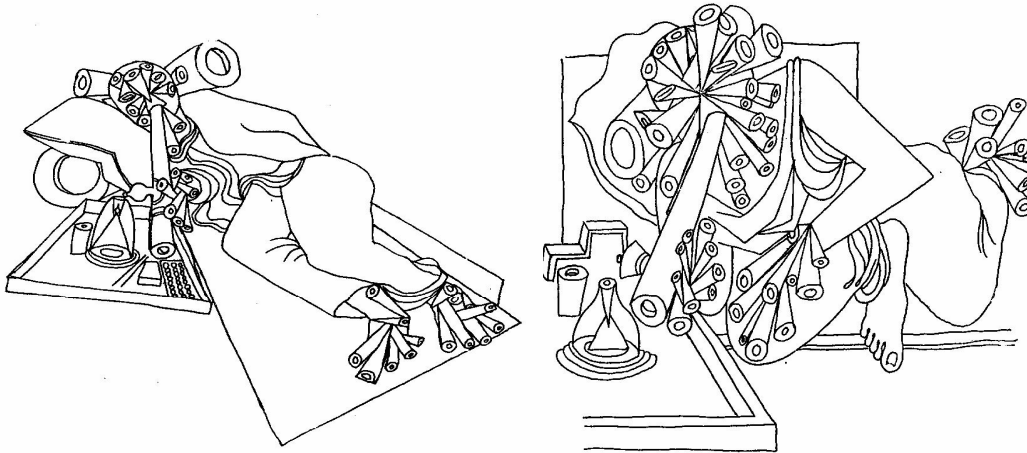
20 Night of December 30th, 1928

[Figs. 1 & 2. Sequential drawings three and four from *Opium* (18, 67), entitled “Exquisite Pain” and “Night of December 30th, 1928,” respectively.]

In the drawing entitled “Night of December 30th, 1928,” Cocteau represents the pains of chemical withdrawal again, this time through a series of sharp points (resembling knives or lightning bolts) striking the suffering body, and a gaseous substance escaping through a wound in the figure’s chest. Yet while both of these drawings convey an immanent, visceral sensation of pain, it is important to recognize that they do so by paradoxically

the first study ever of *Opium* that finds a coherent developmental *trajectory* in the arrangement of Cocteau’s drawings.

confusing the boundaries of the body itself. As the diary (and process of detoxification) unfolds, however, Cocteau's rejection of opium is marked by the drawings' stylistic conversion into visual *metonymy*, as an endless number of opium pipes begin to sprout from the bodies that Cocteau represents, and the body of the addict is metonymically replaced by the drug apparatus to which he or she is tethered by addiction.



30 Drawing

31 Drawing

[Figs. 3 & 4. Sequential drawings thirty and thirty-one from *Opium* (107,108), each entitled "Drawing."]

In these drawings, the body assumes increasingly rigid boundaries, and yet it is within these same boundaries that the body paradoxically seems to go missing. Thus to judge by Cocteau's sketches, it would appear that the subject's immanent (or erotic) connection with its body comes at the moment this body itself begins to dissolve, just as the disappearance of the body is inaugurated by this body's adoption of hard outer lines. This shift in imagistic syntax, coupled with the shift in Cocteau's recognition of himself as an addict, helps to show how his transformation into sobriety occurs on a structural level of

cognition.⁹⁷ The early, metaphorical drawings represent Cocteau’s erotic (and immanent or *synchronic*) connection with his body as it dissolves metaphorically into its surroundings. As he moves into sobriety, however, Cocteau comes to perceive the opium experience very differently: not as an immanent experience of self-transcendence, but as a metonymic movement from fix-to-fix (pipe to pipe) in an unending, unfulfilling succession. The shift is of course not as black and white as this discussion might make it seem, but what I want to emphasize here is that the shift in influence between the forces of metonymy and metaphor is symptomatic of a shift in the fundamental structure of Cocteau’s experience from intoxication to sobriety.⁹⁸

“The Speed of Plants” (1928-1957)

As Cocteau documents his immersion into opium intoxication, he associates sympathetically with the surrounding world, and as a direct result, discovers a slowing in his experience of time: “[i]t is 11 O’clock at night,” he writes, “[o]ne smokes for five minutes and finds that it is five in the morning” (*Opium* 63). As I have mentioned, Cocteau attempts in this passage to describe the space of intoxication as it carries him toward continuity and yet stops short of death. The most consistent, and probably most

⁹⁷ In a brief passage, Jakobson also accounts for just such a phenomenon, for he insists that the alternative predominance of one or the other of these two processes is by no means confined to verbal art. The same oscillation occurs in sign systems other than language. A salient example from the history of painting is the manifestly metonymical orientation of cubism, where the object is transformed into a set of synecdoches; the surrealist painters responded with a patently metaphorical attitude. (78)

While my reading of the visual images might seem somewhat impressionistic, I nonetheless contend that it reveals the same metaphor-to-metonymy trajectory that I find within the prose of *Opium*.

⁹⁸ Bettina L. Knapp notes how Cocteau turned to religion following his stay at St. Cloud. Her description of his return to a more sober existence displays recognizably metonymic (diachronic) terms, as it claim that “[a] return to religion, at least for a while, gave him strength and a sense of belonging. Life now had boundaries, order, direction, and most important of all – a future” (71).

successful image that Cocteau uses to depict this intoxicated space is that of the vegetative state, for opium, he writes, is “the only vegetable substance that communicates the vegetable state to us. Through it, we get an idea of the speed of plants” (*Opium* 92). In *Les Enfants Terribles* (1928), which he wrote at the same time as *Opium*, Cocteau speaks about the fifth grade of school, “where the tenebrous instincts of childhood still predominate: animal, vegetable instincts [...] Their rites are obscure, inexorably secret; calling, we know, for infinite cunning, for ordeal by fear and torture; requiring victims, summary executions, human sacrifices” (*Enfants* 4-5). The connection that Cocteau draws here between vegetative states and human sacrifice aligns his ideas even more closely with those of Bataille, who writes that the only authentic palliative experience is one that confronts the abyss underlying the meaning that discourse attempts to thrust onto the world. It is in the case of human sacrifice, Bataille adds, that this confrontation reaches its most potent expression; one wastes a life without any redeeming gain, and onlookers face death directly in its utter negation of discursive meaning and discontinuous existence. The taking of opium slides the subject along the spectrum of being, away from the autonomous selfhood and discursive meanings that serve discontinuity.⁹⁹ This movement carries one toward the total continuity of death, but stops short of it, as Cocteau notes that “[d]eath separates completely our heavy waters from our

⁹⁹ It is this move away from discontinuity and the symbolic that keeps Cocteau from trying to argue for his perspective in rational, systematic terms. This approach runs counter to Aldous Huxley, who proves unable to leave this sort of argumentation behind (see chapter 2). In this case, I firmly agree with Crowson’s claim that Cocteau’s distinguishing feature is “not so much that he lacked ideas but, rather, that he was a man who communicated by means of images instead of arguments, that his very mode of expression remained evocative and indirect instead of rational and assertive” (163). Cocteau shares this tendency to think in images with Walter Benjamin. With respect to Huxley, it might have been this very tendency that led Huxley, like many thinkers, to peg Cocteau as a superficial aesthete, writing that a “mixture of the amusing and tiresome [is all] we have learned to expect from him and from the members of his school” (qutd in Scales 43).

light waters. Opium separates them a little” (91). There is a spectrum that exists between discontinuity and continuity, and opium leads the subject into a less-differentiated, “vegetative” state of being, one that numbs the oversensitive intellect and dissolves the subjective experience of time.¹⁰⁰ It is in this manner that opium thus palliates the pains that Cocteau associates with discontinuous, reflexive being and the sense of a fall through time that it produces.

As I mentioned in my introduction, Lacan provides another conceptual distinction that helps to make sense of Cocteau’s representation of opium: that between *Das Ding* and *Die Sache*. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan asserts that “[t]he *Sache* is clearly the thing, a product of industry and of human action as governed by language” (45), but *Das Ding* “is found somewhere else” (45). Lacan goes on to speak of the manner in which human perception acts as a sieve that filters reality for experience. What the subject ends up experiencing after this filtering is the perception of discrete things as *Sache*, interpreted through language. *Das Ding*, however, is something that exceeds not only conscious perception, but also desire:

The world of our experience, the Freudian world, assumes that it is this object, *das Ding*, as the absolute Other of the subject, that one is supposed to find again. It is to be found at the most as something missed. One

¹⁰⁰ In this claim, I disagree with Crosland’s assertion that “[o]pium had not brought oblivion, but a change of state, a semblance of death, and most of all a lightening, an increase in speed. Cocteau’s experiences as an opium-eater were in contrast to those of his predecessors. Whereas others, including De Quincey, had popularized the notion that opium led its addicts into a world of inaction and slow beautiful dreams, Cocteau found that everything he wrote under its influence, such as the poems that made up *Opera*, was particularly rapid” (82). I see little evidence of such rapidity in either Cocteau’s poems or prose from the 1924-28 period of which Crosland speaks here, and in the absence of any direct textual examples from Crosland, I can only continue to highlight the slow, aphoristic meditations of *Opium* as examples of Cocteau’s cognitive *deceleration* while on opium.

doesn't find it, but only its pleasurable associations. It is in this state of wishing for it and waiting for it that, in the name of the pleasure principle, the *optimum tension* will be sought; below that there is neither perception nor effort. (52; my emphasis)

I emphasize the words "optimum tension" here because they are conceptually akin to the psychic equilibrium Cocteau believes he can find in an experience of vegetable consciousness. *Das Ding's* exceeding of knowledge, perception, and desire is exactly that lack which is present *as lack* in human consciousness, and which the symbolic "hallucinates... in the form of a system of differences" (53). Without this hallucinated system of differences, it would not be possible to perceive and consciously apprehend the world as a series of discrete objects. *Das Ding* is the wordless materiality, the "beyond-of-the-signified" that would collapse the realm of perception into total continuity were it ever encountered directly, and it would thus mark the subject's passage into death. Lacan is certainly aware of this point, and yet he asserts that *Das Ding* still exists as a presence within language, because "dumb things are not exactly the same as things which have no relationship to words" (55). *Das Ding* is the representative of the symbolic Other insofar as it is unrepresentable. The sober subject unfolds within a "series of satisfactions," and it is the pleasure principle that maintains this unending pursuit "at a certain distance from that which it gravitates around," which is *Das Ding* (58). Further, this sober mode of experience manifests itself not only on a psychic level, but a corporeal one as well, as we can see in the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

As I mentioned in my introduction, Lacan openly criticizes Merleau-Ponty's naturalization of the body-image as something prior to language, but Merleau-Ponty

nonetheless articulates something in *The Phenomenology of Perception* similar to an experience of *Das Ding* when he writes that

before the reflection, and in order to make it possible, a naïve frequenting of the world is necessary, and that the *Self* to which one returns is preceded by an alienated Self or a Self in ec-stasy in Being. The world, the things, what is, is (one will say) of itself, without common measure with our ‘thoughts.’ If we try to find out what ‘the thing’ means for us, we find that it is what rests in itself, that it is exactly what it is, wholly in act, without any virtuality or potency, that it is by definition ‘transcendent,’ outside, absolutely foreign to all interiority. (51)

Jean Cocteau, however, claims that this regulated distance between himself and *Das Ding* must sometimes be manipulated chemically in order to experience the equilibrium he finds in vegetable consciousness. Lacan argues that when the organism exceeds this limit in its proximity to *Das Ding*, however, it moves beyond the “*Lust/Unlust*” polarity – a limit that must not be exceeded¹⁰¹ — “because it is the end, the terminal point, the abolition of the whole world of demand, which is the one that at its deepest level structures man’s unconscious” (68). Cocteau’s work therefore suggests that if the subject is willing to let go of all differences, including those that give rise to consciousness itself, it can move beyond the regulated boundary of the Thing without having fully to die. To

¹⁰¹ He adds to this claim: “[i]nstead it is scattered and diffused within the psychic organism; the quantity is transformed into complexity. In a kind of expansion of the lighted zone of the neuronc organism, here and there in the distance, it lights up according to the laws of associative facilitation, or constellations of *Vorstellungen* which regulate the association of ideas, unconscious *Gedanken*, according to the pleasure principle” (59). The phenomenon that Lacan describes here is similar to the *Rausch* or “rush” that Walter Benjamin associates with drugs. But for Cocteau, the ego simply seems to dissolve calmly at this point. I will explore this concept further in my chapter on Huxley, where I begin to discuss the structures that determine whether one has a positive experience or suffers from a “bad trip” when taking the drug.

this extent, I emphasize Cocteau's correlation with the Lacanian seminar that Žižek claims to come closest to a "passion for the real" – of which Georges Bataille is the apotheosis.

The connection between Cocteau's notion of vegetable consciousness, Bataille's concept of sacrifice, and the palliative goes particularly deep in Cocteau's later work. Cocteau's descriptive essay "Corrida, 1st of May" (1957), for example, recounts his experience of a bullfight in terms similar to those Bataille uses to describe the experience of sacrifice.¹⁰² What links Cocteau's ideas of sacrifice with those of vegetation is the notion that some primitive form of mind can exist free of the pains caused by the reflecting intellect. Cocteau speaks of the corrida as a Spanish "drug," thus linking the event to his general conception of drugs. Secondly, he relates this event to ideas that Bataille articulates twenty years earlier, when he speaks of a subjective encounter with the abyss that discursive thought tries to conceal. When Cocteau writes of the bullfight, he affirms the failure of project and discursive thought, and of "those beliefs through which men have tried for centuries to transcend their carcasses and give a superior meaning to the most mediocre, to the most hazardous of adventures, to this tragedy of being and of being nothing, against which their pride rebels" (277). As is the case with opium's provocation of a vegetative state, Cocteau finds himself in the Spanish arena among "the linen and mandragoras of this Theotocopoulos garden, which takes its siesta

¹⁰² In *Saints of the Impossible* (2002), Alexander Irwin gives a succinct account of this concept when he writes that "[t]he height of death destabilizes, decenters, de-selves the witnesses who live the death of a fellow being as the revelation of their own absolute contingency and vulnerability" (145). True sacrifice is a loss without any corresponding productivity or gain, and as such it exists completely outside the realm of utility. To this extent, "[t]he sacrificer's renunciation of utility determines a changed relationship to time and opens the way to an experience of/as loss... This implies nothing less than the transfiguration of 'the whole of life' in the light of an intimate experience of death" (144).

lying on the armlike shape of its road” (281).¹⁰³ As with his descriptions of opium intoxication, Cocteau claims that the move toward vegetable consciousness achieves a characteristic slowing of time: “this deceptive slowness worked for me as I participated in the sacrifice” (296). But what is always front and centre in the moment of sacrifice is death, for the bullfight ultimately “negotiates the nuptials” between the matador and death (279).

In studying the effects of the bullfight, Cocteau allows himself to speak of his meditations under the banner of a “science of tauromachy” (279), and just as Bataille claims that sacrifice tears a hole in the fabric of discourse, Cocteau affirms that the science of bullfighting “is no better protected than the others against the *hole that leads to something* that Nietzsche mentions” (279; original emphasis). This hole in discourse causes the people and objects around Cocteau to take on a defamiliarized beauty, and in describing this beauty of intoxication, Cocteau explicitly positions himself within a modern history of drug writing, comparing his experience to

[f]or example, Baudelaire and hashish making a kiosk divine, Huxley and mescaline making armchairs divine (splendid feet and apotheosis of the Last Judgment), or myself finding that the opium addict becomes a social

¹⁰³ Mandragoras, it is important to note, are a mythical species of human-plant, figures that connect the vegetative state of being with a move toward the space of sacrifice. In her Lacanian reading of Cocteau’s opus, Jemma-Jejcic similarly notices that this experience of the corrida bears a particular biographical relation to Cocteau’s opium use: “En 1940, quand il abandonnera l’opium, son oeuvre connaîtra un nouvel élan. Le dernier voyage qu’il fera en Espagne jouera un rôle décisive puisque la tauromachie et le flamenco vont accidentellement l’exposer à son fantasme” [In 1940, when he would abandon opium, his work took a new direction. The previous voyage he had made in Spain would play a decisive role as the arenas of bullfighting and flamenco would accidentally confront him with his own phantasm] (41). What my discussion adds to Jemma-Jejcic’s readings is an analytic approach to the qualitative *passages* Cocteau feels himself making between relative states of discontinuous (metonymic) and continuous (metaphoric) being. It is an account like Jemma-Jejcic’s, however, that has helped me articulate the precise forces that set the terms for these passages.

masterpiece, without feeling the slightest need to inform anyone outside his kingdom. (276)¹⁰⁴

The sacrifice of a bull's life – the drug of the corrida – unfolds in a communal arena and achieves effects similar to those of opium intoxication. The event dulls the subjective experience of time in the revealed ecstasy of death, and in the plunge of a living thing from discontinuous into continuous existence. The experience of such immanence allows the subject to confront the emptiness beneath life in a moment outside of (or at least within a blurred version of) discourse and time. The mention of people becoming vegetative mandragoras directly aligns Cocteau's notion of the "Spanish drug" of the corrida with his meditations on opium.¹⁰⁵ The eroticism of the ecstatic moment carries people into the presence of death, which gives them a glimpse of continuous existence without actually having to die. Jemma-Jejcic confirms the potential complement that this reading finds in Lacanian psychoanalysis, claiming that "[I]'estocade finale de la corrida

¹⁰⁴ As we will see in the coming chapters, Huxley and Benjamin draw upon numerous discourses to qualify their recorded experiments with drugs, including those of philosophy, politics, science, technology, and historical materialism, to name only a few. While Cocteau might briefly allude to medical discourse in *Opium*, however, he positions his relationship to opium almost exclusively within the history of art. In *Opium* and "Corrida, 1st of May," he explicitly names De Quincey and Baudelaire as his artistic predecessors. As I will go on to suggest in my third chapter, his acknowledged debt to Baudelaire's personal accounts of hashish and opium-taking in *Flowers of Evil* and *Artificial Paradises* links him to Benjamin, who also derives many of his own ideas from Baudelaire, and who recorded many of his own experiments with drugs (1927-1934) in France at the same time that Cocteau was writing *Opium* (1928).

¹⁰⁵ Jean-Bernard Vray in fact points out that the Spanish corrida appears explicitly in Cocteau's *The Miscreant* as well, and he does well to mention how both this work and Cocteau's "Corrida, 1st of May" dramatize the subject's willful movement toward dissolution and death. Linking the two works, Vray concludes that in *Le Grand Écart*, "[I]es images de corrida, loin d'être pieces rapportées, décoratives, dans le roman, en constituent le Coeur" [The images of the corrida, instead of being decorative elements in the novel, constitute its heart] (115). His discussion offers an excellent account of this willful movement toward dissolution, and of how this movement mars Cocteau's therapeutic response to the "difficulty of being." However, I do not believe that Vray gives proper emphasis to the potential spectrum of states that exists between continuity and the split subjectivity of discontinuous being. It is the comprehensive investigation of this spectrum between the symbolic and primordial non-difference, between the forces of discontinuity and continuity, that constitutes my project's primary contribution to current understandings of the drugs, modernism, and language.

figure moins la confrontation du *toreo* et du taureau, de l'intelligence et de la force, que le ravissement, l'éblouissement du matador [et l'arène]" [the final strike of the corrida describes less the confrontation between the toreador and bull than the intelligence and the force, the rapture, the dazzling sight of the matador and the arena] (262). In this essay, however, Cocteau conceives of the "drug" as an agent of visionary ecstasy. It is not until he begins once again to feel the pains of his "normal" state – of the fall through time tied to discontinuous existence – that he will again address these issues from a palliative angle.¹⁰⁶

Throughout his body of work, Cocteau discusses the relationship between human and vegetable states of being. At one point in *Opium*, however, he speaks of vegetable calm not in terms of depth and diving, but in terms of a profound lightness and a sensation of floating. The tone of the passage is sincere, and yet the imagery it employs

¹⁰⁶ Compare Cocteau's description of the corrida with that found in Ernest Hemingway's non-fiction celebration of bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), along with his novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), which is perhaps the most famous twentieth-century literary depiction of the practice. Cocteau speaks of the experience as one of profound intoxication, while in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* one detects a perpetual suppression of intoxication. For Hemingway, the corrida represents the opposite of Cocteau's drug. In *Death in the Afternoon*, it marks the triumph of discontinuous existence and establishes the male matador as a proud, rigidly autonomous individual, a man who gives himself entirely to the skill involved in his work and who asserts the dominance of human strength and ingenuity over the natural world. In the case of *The Sun Also Rises*, I have heard many friends and colleagues describe their experiences with this novel, and the one aspect of this book that nearly all of them remark upon is the offhand manner in which Hemingway's narrator (Jake Barnes) speaks of alcohol consumption. One reads that at a single meal, the narrator of this text consumes five or more bottles of wine, and yet the prose of the novel always continues in that same tone of journalistic sobriety that is Hemingway's trademark. Even after hearing of such massive consumptions of alcohol, the reader is merely led to think that the characters are highly functioning alcoholics rather than drunks. The text does not suppress the amount of alcohol consumed, but it does somewhat suppress the direct conveyance of intoxication through its language. In Hemingway's text, the sober voice persists, endlessly admiring the incredible independence, pride, and power that the matador embodies. It is not communal vulnerability, but the matador's individual *venerability* which is celebrated. One might wonder whether Cocteau, writing over twenty years later, was in some way responding to this famous book in his own descriptions of the same event. Perhaps the contrast I invoke here is not as simplistic as I am suggesting, but I nonetheless believe that a more thorough comparison of these texts on this issue would prove fruitful.

suggests an underlying superficiality in the moment of palliative euphoria. In it, Cocteau begins to map out a potential ambivalence in opium's palliative effects:

It was the olive trees of Provence which those young sleepers evoked in me, the twisted olive trees on the flat red earth, their silver clouds hanging in the air...In that place I could almost believe that it was all this profound lightness that alone kept this most monumental ship floating on the water.

(*Opium* 78)

In recounting this specific vision, Cocteau encounters a problem that Bataille also faces when speaking about erotic or intoxicating experiences in *Inner Experience*:

I first wanted to return from a contemplation which brought the object back to me (as usually happens when we enjoy scenery) to the vision of this object in which I lose myself at other times, which I call the unknown and which is different from Nothingness by nothing which discourse can enunciate. (*Inner Experience* 114)

In spite of the moment's profound effects, however, Bataille retroactively decides that the experience in question "was a prolonged pleasure, a pleasant possession of a slightly insipid sweetness" (114). Seeming to reject the value of a palliative experience *a priori*, Bataille distrusts the "insipid sweetness" of any such euphoric moment. He gains too much pleasure from it, and returns to sober life too much in possession of himself for the experience to be authentic or sacred, because any proper "transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity" (*Eroticism* 17). Cocteau similarly possesses a personal bias against any sensation resembling the "insipid sweetness" that Bataille mentions. For what

is at stake, both thinkers ultimately ask, in the crucial distinction between authentic and inauthentic experiences of intoxication?¹⁰⁷ For example, how can one feel the pleasures of opium, fix after fix, without sensing that this journey constitutes a superficial floating between ephemeral amusements, or an endlessly displacing movement through a chain of incomplete metonymic signifiers, which promise a “crossing of the bar” into lasting fulfillment without ever achieving it? How can one tell the difference between this exceedingly metonymic pleasure and one that produces an authentically metaphoric movement toward continuity?

The relative authenticity of the palliative experience is a question that never ceases to trouble both Cocteau and Bataille. It is important to note that Bataille himself never uses a language of palliation when discussing the means by which a subject attempts to alleviate the suffering caused by discontinuous being. For Bataille rather, only the term “narcotic” is suited to these efforts. The difficulty of being comes from an awareness that is – for Bataille – fundamentally more truthful than the fantasy of autonomous, self-determining presence. To attempt to numb one’s awareness of the pain of being is to will oneself into ignorance, and such a move always constitutes for Bataille an irresponsible plunge into false consciousness. Likewise, Cocteau in *Les Enfants Terribles* even questions the relative goodness of opium’s calming, palliative function. In a passage that describes the three young protagonists of the novel’s first half, his narrator claims that “[i]n their strange world of childhood, of action in inaction, as in the waking

¹⁰⁷ It is this very question that polarizes the critical reception of both Cocteau’s drug use and the use of drugs for many people in the twentieth century. As we will find in chapter two, Aldous Huxley faces a similar problem concerning the issue of authentic and inauthentic states of intoxication, and how the ‘spirit’ of the drug-taker largely determines the moral goodness or badness of the intoxication he or she experiences.

dream of opium eaters, to stay becalmed could be as dangerous as to advance at breakneck speed” (69). In other words, the subject might face an intellectual responsibility to confront the abyss of meaning over and over, hoping to reconcile him or herself to it, no matter how painful the experience may become. In a similar critique, Cocteau turns in *Opium* to the question of social “Progress,” and ambivalently asks:

Is it a good thing to give birth in the American fashion, with anaesthetics and forceps? And is not this kind of progress, which consists in suffering less, a symptom, like the machine, of a universe in which exhausted mankind substitutes other forces for its own, avoiding shocks to a weakened nervous system? [...] But here we come back to the problem of progress. Is suffering a regulation or a lyrical interlude? (23-24)

Because of his penchant for philosophical inquiry, Cocteau must struggle between his impulse to mitigate the pain of self-reflexive consciousness and his sense of intellectual duty. The pain of life’s horizontal fall is connected to a negating darkness, but this darkness also constitutes a fundamental truth for Cocteau. Like Bataille, Cocteau finds that to seek sheer comfort through oblivion might constitute an intellectual betrayal, for “[t]he drama of opium, as I see it, is none other than the drama of comfort and the lack of comfort. Comfort kills. Lack of comfort creates. I am speaking of the lack of both material and spiritual comfort” (30). For Bataille, any authentic state of ecstasy “only remains possible in the anguish of ecstasy, in this sense, that it cannot be satisfaction, grasped knowledge” (*Inner* 52). A fundamental ambivalence persists over what sort of experience is actually produced by the taking of opium: an insipid sweetness in which

human beings metonymically “substitute other forces for their own,” or an authentic renunciation of discontinuous existence.

In dealing with the question of proper and improper uses of the palliative drug, Cocteau attempts in *Opium* to draw a distinction between himself and “amateur smokers” who do not engage opium in an authentic way: those “counterfeit smokers, the elegant smokers, those who combine opium, alcohol, drugs, the setting (opium and alcohol are mortal enemies), or those who pass from the pipe to the syringe and from morphine to heroin” (*Opium* 26). For Cocteau, there is without doubt an epistemological hierarchy of smokers. True smokers of opium are drawn to something only *it* can offer, while “[t]he amateurs feel nothing, they wait for dreams and risk being seasick” (26). The mention of seasickness directly ties these types of smokers to the movement between ephemeral amusements that characterizes Jacques Forestier’s early life in *The Miscreant*. But Cocteau adds in *Opium* that a drug as beautiful as opium “cannot bear impatient addicts, bunglers. It moves away, leaving them morphine, heroin, suicide and death” (26). Opium itself emerges as an entity that one must not profane; the drug protects itself with a moral code, just as Cocteau implicitly believes that whenever opium takes a toll on his body, it is punishment for some wrong he has committed against the drug.

Even as he weans himself from opium, Cocteau never provides any satisfactory endorsement of sobriety. At points, he implies that his bodily health is the concern that moves him,¹⁰⁸ but ultimately he adopts a sad and almost nostalgic tone when speaking

¹⁰⁸ Crosland rightfully insists that we cannot overlook this practical drawback of opium, for “if it is taken too long, even as Cocteau took it, under medical supervision, it causes physical illness” (83). With this point in mind, I argue that even this apparently airtight condemnation of opium works within a certain metonymic bias. One suggests that opium destroys the body, when one could equally say that an endless

about the drug in later passages in *Opium*. Opium is not something Cocteau has cast out of his system, it seems, but rather something that has dismissed *him*, something that has banished him from a realm of experience that he would never have known without the substance. Just as there is a risk in taking opium (the risk of addiction and its effects on bodily health), there is an equal risk in *not* taking the drug, since one will never know the internal truth that the drug could have otherwise revealed. As he begins to think less and less about the drug, and seems to need it less and less on a chemical level, Cocteau finds that even as “one gets up, talks, acts, is sociable, and appears to live, his gestures, gait, skin, looks, and words, do not reflect any the less a life subjected to other laws of paleness and gravity” (91). It remains an unavoidable fact, at least for the authentic smoker, that “[i]t’s difficult to take earth seriously after having known opium, and unless you’re a saint, it’s tough to live without taking earth seriously” (92). In other words, the authentic smoker must be a subject who seeks out opium as a palliative for the incurable disease of sobriety; to reject the drug (or be rejected by it) will only leave this subject with the same pain of being that drove it to take opium in the first place.

The ultimate verdict of *Opium* charges Cocteau with cowardice. He regrets having to return to a sober life, and finds fault with himself for doing so. Cocteau believes that he has failed opium, and the drug has banished him from a realm whose beauty he will

investment in new projects renders the body perpetually invisible to consciousness, and thus endlessly destroys it by taking the subject away from the present sensory moment. Therefore, even the argument for physical health emerges within a certain metonymic interpretation of opium. The authentic smoker would ask us: who ruins their bodies more, the addicts who become present to their immediate flesh through drugs (while materially destroying it), or the project-oriented people who never pay attention to their bodies until these bodies fail them? Even as their flesh survives, these latter project-oriented types might never spend a single moment being conscious of their bodies.

never experience again. The banishment is punishment for his weakness, for in guarding a lingering sense of his creative autonomy and in deciding to pursue his artistic projects, Cocteau fails to give himself to opium completely. One can see that even in keeping a diary throughout the experience, he has engaged in a discursive project, and thus betrayed the drug that is supposed to draw him toward continuity. But after he weans himself, the pains of sober reflection quickly return, as he notes that “[o]pium has a broad shoulder. After my cure I begin to experience once again the sufferings that I blamed it for and which it mitigated; I remember the same sufferings tortured me in the past, when I did not know opium” (136). All of the same sufferings that first drove him to take opium still curse him, and Cocteau can only lament: “[n]ow that I am cured, I feel empty, poor, heart-broken and ill. I float. The day after tomorrow I leave the clinic. Where should I go? (146). In Bataille’s terms, Cocteau has been unable to sacrifice himself to opium, to follow the metaphoric path toward continuity without caring whether it will ultimately lead him into death. Cocteau, banished from the kingdom of opium, does not know where to go; now that he is sober, he must turn his thoughts to the same future that has always struck him as empty and pointless.

Just as Lacan claims that there is no sexual relation between the phallic and feminine forms of *jouissance*, Cocteau claims that there can be no connection between the opium addict and the normal person invested in a life of work and accomplishment. Similarly, in being unable to give himself to opium completely, Cocteau proves that he is unable to renounce his intellect, his discontinuous being, and the writing through which he attempts to render his discrete experience immortal. Cocteau explicitly states that he writes his opium diary so that he might contribute to the store of medical knowledge –

that is to feel validation at the hands of a symbolic authority or social Other. It is in this regard that he most closely resembles Thomas De Quincey, whose *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* similarly exhibits a need for social legitimacy when De Quincey states his wish to contribute to the overall knowledge and wellbeing of humanity.¹⁰⁹ Also, Cocteau's other professed predecessor, Baudelaire, writes in his opium passages from *Artificial Paradises* that his personal experiences on opium "will prove not merely an interesting record but in a considerable degree, useful and instructive" (77). Further, it is this usefulness and instructiveness, Baudelaire adds, which "must be [his] apology for breaking through that delicate and honorable reserve which, for the most part, restrains us

¹⁰⁹ Cocteau indeed mentions De Quincey by name in his diary, and his work on opium shares many similarities with the latter's *Confessions*. But in many ways, the texts are also distinct. As De Quincey's title indicates, his primary purpose is to confess, whereas Cocteau expressly desires to capture the movement of "a wound in slow motion," namely the passage of a mind from opium addiction to sobriety. De Quincey touches on this point as well, but to a different degree, and this difference manifests itself most explicitly in the temporal perspective of each author's writing. Cocteau, for example, documents his thoughts and experiences as they happen, hoping to record phenomena that will be inaccessible to him once he is no longer addicted to opium. The diary form is necessary to his project insofar as he wishes to document the movements of a mind in its transformation from addiction to sobriety. In keeping with this distinction, Cocteau composes his work as a series of brief, fragmented aphorisms, recording them at the moment of their conception. De Quincey, on the other hand, speaks of his opium experiences in the past tense, at the retrospective distance of a memoir, and from this distance attempts to discover (or invent) some hidden meaning that connects his visionary journeys on opium. Whether he succeeds in arranging his biography into a stable past-tense narrative is a subject for debate, but we can say with some confidence that the attempt to wrest interpretive connections from diverse drug experiences is more manifest in De Quincey than it is in Cocteau.

I am reluctant to delve any deeper into a discussion of De Quincey's *Confessions*, for my project focuses specifically on twentieth-century drug narratives, and any further discussion would require me to apply my metaphor/metonymy model to a text that precedes (by more than a hundred years) Jakobson's seminal work on this dichotomy. If De Quincey's work can be fruitfully read with this same model, I will save this reading for another time. Suffice it to say for now that Cocteau no doubt understands that De Quincey's *Confessions* is an obvious predecessor to his own diary on opium, and that the greatest similarity between their works lies in their desire to contribute to general medical knowledge. In both cases, the writer seeks a clear, symbolically valid reason for writing about his drug experiences, since such writing (and the taking of drugs in general) could very easily provoke charges of insular self-absorption. As Derrida notes in "The Rhetoric of Drugs," we hold against the drug addict "[s]omething we never, at least never to the same degree, hold against the alcoholic or the smoker: that he cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community" (235). To ingest the mind-altering drug is to betray the symbolic order, and when drug-takers sense this betrayal they attempt to extenuate their guilt, as we find in De Quincey and Cocteau's expressed desire to contribute to medical knowledge. In other words, both authors appeal to official medical discourse in order to "palliate" the guilt of their opium addiction.

from the public exposure of our own errors and infirmities” (78).¹¹⁰ Despite such claims for social usefulness, however, Jean Cocteau ultimately disparages himself for being too cowardly to smoke himself to death, an act that would not only provide him a final cure for his difficulty of being, but confirm his status as an authentic smoker.

Plants Cannot Laugh (1928-1957)

Despite his claims for the palliative effect of “vegetable rhythms” in *Opium*, Cocteau also acknowledges that plants probably do not live in the serenity he often attributes to them. It is “[o]ur blindness, our obstinacy in judging everything according to our own rhythm, of existence,” he claims, that has led us “to mistake the slowness of plant life for an absurd serenity” (*Opium* 23). It is the sped-up visual footage of plants, Cocteau suggests, that can reveal “the grimaces, gestures and contortions of the vegetable kingdom. The same progress in the world of sound will no doubt enable us to hear the cries of plants” (23). As we have seen in the preceding discussion of *Opium*, Cocteau’s ambivalence about the relative happiness of plants cannot help but impact his view of opium as a palliative. Cocteau revisits this theme of vegetation in his later *The Difficulty of Being*; but in this work, he speaks of a palliative that human rhythms possess and that plants, in fact, do not:

Although I know, from films about plant-life, that the serenity of nature is
a myth, that only its rhythm, different from ours, makes us believe in that

¹¹⁰ Readers of De Quincey will no doubt recognize these lines, for Baudelaire (albeit in translation) lifts them word-for-word from the opening two lines of De Quincey’s *Confessions* (1). Baudelaire’s direct quoting of De Quincey serves, in this case, as a radical example of the profound currency this sort of social apologia holds in modern first-person records of drug use. I thank Dr. Joel Faflak, editor of the Broadview edition of De Quincey’s *Confessions*, for bringing this detail to my attention.

serenity, that a garden is continually a prey to eroticism, to vice, to anxiety, to anguish, to hatred, to agitations of every kind, and that it *lives on its nerves*, I acknowledge that it has not the gift of laughter. (110; original emphasis)

The roles between humans and plants have reversed in this passage, and unlike many of the claims he makes in *Opium* and his earlier works, Cocteau now writes that plants require palliation just as much as humans, and do not even possess the human palliative of laughter. Cocteau claims that laughter is a fine palliative because it “purges me of disgust. It ventilates me. It opens my doors and windows. It beats my upholstery. It shakes my curtains. It is the sign that I am not quite sunk by contact with the vegetable world in which I move” (110). “If they could,” he adds, plants would laugh, “[f]or laughter is a great privilege which we have. Our consciousness is lightened by laughter. It lightness consoles us for having such heavy soles to bear us to the scaffold” (112). When he pities plants in the following passage, Cocteau could very easily be speaking of the human subject who has completely given him or herself to the vegetative oblivion of opium:

It is because everything has to be paid for. Plants pay for this privilege of not dying by the torment of occupying such a mean space, of their static condition, of cramp, of the lack of liberty (relative) to move about, which man possesses and pays for very dearly by the knowledge of the small stretch he is given to cover and by death. (111)

Bataille does not necessarily agree with Cocteau’s claim for laughter as a palliative, for he would not want to align laughter with the narcotic that dulls one’s awareness of life’s

negating abyss. Rather, Bataille claims that “poetry, laughter, ecstasy are not the means for other things. In the ‘system,’ poetry, laughter, ecstasy are nothing” (*Eroticism* 111). Laughter marks an opening onto nothing outside of discourse, but this does not make it a narcotic,

[f]or knowledge ‘works,’ which does neither poetry, laughter, nor ecstasy. But poetry, laughter, ecstasy are not completed man – do not provide any ‘satisfaction.’ Short of *dying of them*, one leaves them like a thief (or as one leaves a girl after love), dazed, thrown back stupidly into the absence of death, into distinct consciousness, activity, work. (111; original emphasis)

This passage could easily describe Cocteau’s feelings about being banished like a thief from the kingdom of opium. But it also shows how laughter – for Bataille – is associated with eroticism, meaning a movement from discontinuous toward continuous existence, and assumedly entailing a dissolution of the subjective experience of time. These qualities would render it a palliative in Cocteau’s understanding, but Bataille wishes to downplay any notion of palliative or therapeutic alleviation because he does not want to endorse anything that might conceal (or even cushion the impact of) the emptiness lurking beneath discursive thought.

Cocteau, for his part, interprets the erotic moment – the move toward continuity that stops short – as a temporary alleviation of the pain that afflicts the despairingly “normal” life of work and solitude: that is one’s lonely fall through time. While the move toward project and work might verge upon the irresponsible space of narcosis, the move toward continuity and a blunting of time marks the more authentic and ethically

responsible space of palliation. We can see how it is difficult to sort out the ideas of Cocteau and Bataille, for they seem to agree on many points while diverging on the issue of therapy, of which Bataille is unerringly suspicious. The reason for this discrepancy, as I have tried to point out, stems from the reversibility of metaphoric and metonymic interpretations of opium. If one interprets opium as a metaphoric agent, one finds in its use the mystical eroticism that Bataille endorses: a collapsing of difference and renunciation of personal ambitions and even basic cognition, an attempt to collapse the boundaries of the body and psyche into an authentic encounter with continuity. If one interprets the drug metonymically, one can see only a superficial movement between incomplete fixes in an unending chain, a movement that numbs one's awareness of authentic knowledge and mistakenly proceeds as though the body were immortal.¹¹¹ Because of this inescapable dichotomy, Cocteau can only suggest that there is such a thing as authentic palliation and inauthentic narcosis, while endlessly worrying about which experience he personally achieves when taking opium.

Throughout his literary career, Cocteau persists in his efforts to make sense of the pain he believes to be a non-contingent aspect of human being. He speaks of his constant attacks of malaise and despair in his appropriately titled work, *The Difficulty of Being* – attacks during which “[l]ife appears to us insoluble, too vast, too small, too long, too short” (152). It is at this moment that Cocteau explicitly introduces the term palliative, claiming that “[o]nce, as a palliative for these constantly recurring attacks, I used to take

¹¹¹ Reinhard Kuhn, in “The Hermeneutics of Silence: Michaux and Mescaline” offers such an interpretation of drug writing. He finds that nearly all drug-inspired literature is “terribly depressing” because of the “terrible sameness” of the visions that visit Cocteau, Huxley, Burroughs, or even De Quincey. From a metaphoric perspective, however, such a sameness does not hold a negative status. One seeks in drugs, rather, the undifferentiated and the unexceptional; one seeks to escape a world that is preoccupied with (and ultimately imprisoned by) its obsession with ever-unfolding difference.

opium, a remedy inducing euphoria” (152). His commentary on the matter, however, does not end with the invocation of this concept of the palliative. Rather, he proceeds immediately to confront the guilty feelings that accompany both his taking of the drug and his later abandonment of (or *by*) it. He claims to have given up the drug “on account of an honesty which is perhaps my foolishness. I wished to rely on my own resources alone, which does not make sense, since our inner self is made up of what we feed upon” (152). Cocteau admits that a lingering (although groundless) loyalty to subjective autonomy – to discontinuous being – has pulled him away from opium. Ultimately, rejecting the use of any palliative, he decides to confront the pain of being directly, as he claims: “nothing is left to me but to endure these attacks and wait for the outcome” (*Difficulty* 152). He has been unable to give himself completely to opium, and now he must suffer the consequence of endless suffering. Even as he remains residually aware that his sensation of subjective autonomy is a farce, he cannot withdraw his investment in it.

Self-Defence

This chapter has stressed Cocteau’s efforts to travel toward continuous being, but it is also the case that Cocteau often expresses an equally strong desire to shore up his sense of autonomous selfhood. The very act of writing an autobiographical text, whether it be *Opium*, *Diary of an Unknown*, or *The Difficulty of Being*, testifies to Cocteau’s desire to consolidate or monumentalize his supposedly unique self. Writes Cocteau in *The Difficulty of Being*:

And I leave you. Without leaving you, needless to say, since I am so closely merged with my ink that my pulse beats into it. Do you not feel it under your thumb, as it holds the corner of the pages? [...] This is the whole difference between a book that is simply a book and this book which is a person changed into a book. Changed into a book and crying out for help, for the spell to be broken and he reincarnated in the person of the reader. This is the sleight-of-hand I ask of you. Please understand me.

It is not so difficult as it seems at first sight. (*Difficulty* 154)

Cocteau often talks in *Difficulty* about how he plans to live on in his writing. But just as Maurice Blanchot notes in *The Space of Literature* (1955), such an attempt is always doomed to failure, since the space of writing is one that carries the author into an abyss of impersonality. A “tyrannical prehension” takes possession of the writer’s hand, and the impersonal abyss lurking beneath language takes hold of his or her consciousness, just as sometimes, writes Blanchot, “when a man is holding a pencil, his hand won’t release it no matter how badly he wants to let it go” (25). The writer seems to master the meaning of words, but “his mastery only succeeds in putting him, keeping him in contact with the fundamental passivity of the word, no longer anything but its appearance—the shadow of a word—never can be mastered or even grasped” (25). It is because of this inability to master language that the pencil becomes “the ungraspable which is also the unreleaseable” (25). The diary, above all other forms, says Blanchot, marks the individual’s attempt to fight back against the impersonality of writing. In Bataille’s terms, the Cocteau who wants to live on through the written word is a project-oriented subject. But the narcotic effects of this activity never work for long, as Cocteau consistently

returns to the knowledge that writing is neither a true palliative nor a successful form of self-immortalization. He concludes that, if anything, writing carries him toward the depersonalizing darkness and loss of self also found in Bataille's conception of sacrifice.

What *can*, however, achieve a form of palliation-in-writing for Cocteau is the total loss of self entailed by poetic possession, as is the case when the subject becomes possessed by a new poem that uses him or her merely as a vehicle to release itself from ineffability. On this subject, Cocteau writes:

To be aware that within oneself are such mysteries is not conducive to comfort. Therefore one's discomfort, the uneasiness it causes and the resulting wear and tear do not by any means cease with the work. A new kind of torture begins and not a minor one, the torture of the desert, of mirages and other cruel phantasmagoria of thirst and lingering echoes. Until the good fortune of a new discharge that consents to make use of our machine again, to take advantage of it, to set it going once more, bringing in its train a whole apparatus of ferocious egotism and total indifference to pain. (97)

Like opium, the giving of oneself to the impersonal movement of writing *can* carry one (palliatively) toward continuity, if this activity is undertaken in the right spirit. This state, like that of opium intoxication, can induce a euphoric insensitivity to pain, along with a sympathetic connection with one's surroundings. In this case as well, however, Cocteau still guards his sense of autonomous selfhood through a "ferocious egotism." There can be no hard-and-fast solution to his pain of being because Cocteau cannot overcome the fundamental ambivalence he feels toward the prospect of approaching death. In the end,

he remains proud of his autonomous selfhood and his intellect, and fears that his opium use might irrevocably damage these things. Once again, he must look elsewhere for comfort, and toward the end of his life, he finds his most satisfying comfort in the prospect of friendship.

Friendship as Palliation (1957-1963)

Ultimately, Cocteau concludes in *Diary of an Unknown* that human friendship has always been his most effective and personally satisfying palliative. On this note, he claims that “[t]he journey we take between life and death would seem unbearable to me without the junctures of friendship” (*Diary* 188). “Friendship alone,” he adds, “can find the very simple look or phrase to dress our wounds, wounds which we exacerbate and scratch at with the tenacity of those who, knowing that they suffer from an incurable disease, find an outlet in the extremity of pain” (*Diary* 193). Cocteau’s conclusions here should not come as a surprise, for if we retrace the trajectory of his career-long search for palliation, we can decipher a clear path that has led him to this point. Friendship, unlike love, opium, or writing, does not hold out the Lacanian *a*’s false promise of a final cure for the lack that gives rise to sober subjectivity; it is an intersubjective agonism, something that Cocteau knows to require endless renegotiation. “One should not believe friendship exempt from the test of inclement weather,” Cocteau insists, and one must take into account the “long study that should precede friendship” (204). In his earlier work, Cocteau writes extensively on the subject of love, which is different from friendship in that it involves the subject’s attempt to possess the other as a lack-filling object, much like the fantasy of Lacan’s object *a*. This same realization makes Cocteau very suspicious

of the possibility of heterosexual friendship, as he writes in *The Difficulty of Being* that “[f]riendship between man and woman is delicate; it is still a form of love. In it jealousy is disguised” (*Difficulty* 53). He reminisces about other friendships from his younger years, carried on with people who were too extreme in their genius and who died young. The specific connection between the death of Raymond Radiguet and the palliative of opium is something Cocteau establishes earlier in his writing, but which he refers to again in *Diary of an Unknown*:

I know quite well that I used to seek the friendship of machines that spin too fast and wear themselves out dramatically. Today paternal instinct keeps me away from them. I turn towards those who are not marked with the evil star. Cursed be it! I detest it. Once again I warm my carcass in the sunshine. (*Difficulty* 54)

In contrast to the possessiveness of love, friendship is an encounter that leaves two people separate: “[a]nd if I speak of an art of friendship, it is of an art that leaves man free, and not of one that enslaves him” (197). True friendship, Cocteau claims, is an art that requires endless attentiveness “because it questions itself, continually sets itself aright, and signs a peace treaty in order to avoid the wars of love” (192).¹¹² Toward the

¹¹² Alenka Zupančič in *The Shortest Shadow* gives a reading of Lacanian love which, in fact, bears close relationship to the bond of friendship that Cocteau articulates in the above passages. Zupančič’s central point about real love is that it neither objectifies the other as something to be possessed (object *a*), nor sublimates the other into a divine *Thing*. Rather, “[t]he miracle of love consists, first of all, in perceiving the two objects (the banal object and the sublime object) on the same level”; additionally, this means that neither one of them is occulted or substituted by the other. Secondly, it consists in becoming aware of the fact that the other *qua* ‘banal object’ and the other *qua* ‘object of desire’ are one and the same” (175). In this instance, I find Zupančič’s characterization of love to be metaphorical, but not in the same way as I have spoken earlier about a metaphorical merging of the subject with its surroundings. Rather, she claims that “the miracle of love consists in ‘falling’ (and in continuing to stumble) because of the Real which emerges from the gap introduced by this ‘parallel montage’ of two semblances or appearances, that is to say, because of the real that emerges from the non-coincidence of the same” (175). In his model of

end of his life then, Cocteau seems to accept that the palliatives he has always used for his nervous pains can only ever be palliatives: agents that alleviate without curing. Opium can become monstrous even while it provides bliss, and writing can sweep the author into oblivion even when he thinks he is immortalizing himself. In his depiction of friendship, however, Cocteau ends up reaffirming the same fundamental ideal he gestures toward in *Opium*, which is that of a living, *changing* sensation of equilibrium, one that perpetually calls the subject to attention and requires an endless working-through.

Even with his new ideal in mind, however, Cocteau remains painfully aware of the problems his culture finds with investing too much intense emotion in friendship. The public, he knows, will always view his most powerful friendships cynically, labeling them as either brazenly homosexual or opportunistic. But friendship, Cocteau argues, brings him and his friends together “without constraint,” so that each member can “blossom according to his own abilities” (195). Cocteau’s valorization of friendship might seem naïve when one considers how fraught nearly all of his friendships were reputed to be,¹¹³ and how often throughout his career Cocteau has exhibited intense

friendship, Cocteau seems to articulate something akin to a *jouissance* that is found in endless repositioning with respect to the “hole” of the real that opens up in gap (“non-coincidence of the same”) between the human other’s status as both sublime Thing and object *a*. To such an extent, his friendship with a human other requires Cocteau to participate in the endless circulation and repositioning that allows him to find a sense of *jouissance*. This *jouissance* is by no means a sedated form of comfort. It requires constant renegotiation and involves affective highs and lows, but for Cocteau it is without question preferable to the chronic suffering that he associates with the lonely pain of being. That said, we must wonder if Cocteau is only able to make this brave affirmation of friendship-as-endless-negotiation because at this point in his life, he himself was approaching the moment of his own death.

¹¹³ See Crosland’s *Jean Cocteau* for a thorough discussion of this aspect of Cocteau’s life.

paranoia about the true feelings of those closest to him.¹¹⁴ Further, Cocteau dealt with endless public speculation that his supposedly platonic friendships with younger men were sexual and even pedophilic in nature. Cocteau is aware of these accusations, and he waves them away by claiming that they are the products of a public that is jealous of his friendships and secretly desperate for his favour. Further, it is “[w]hen the great battles draw near,” he affirms, that “we escape on a boat where friendship sequesters us once more” (197). However, just when the dynamics of friendship *seem* to exist clearly in his mind, Cocteau contradicts himself by claiming that there is something sedative about finding comfort in friendship. Only moments earlier, he claims that friendship involves many storms that threaten to tear people apart, but he then claims that friendship appears as “a life without fire, a life resigned [and] I must confess to preferring my glowing embers to any blazing fire of delights” (197). Even when it comes to friendship, Cocteau cannot be anything but ambivalent when he speaks on the nature of his personal palliative. It is something that both comforts by sedating and remains fresh by requiring constant negotiation; for Cocteau, it seems, there is simply no way to bypass the ambivalence that is implicated in anything that provides one with therapeutic comfort.

¹¹⁴ Crosland, Knapp, and Williams all provide strong evidence for this view. For example, Crosland in *Jean Cocteau* writes of one of Cocteau’s many fallings-out with Claude Mauriac (202); Knapp writes of how Paul Claudel and Francis Jammes wrote to Cocteau claiming he had been “exorcized by the devil” following his scandalous support of Jean Desbordes’s sexually explicit *J’adore* in 1929 (86); (See Crosland’s *Jean Cocteau*, 202; Knapp’s *Jean Cocteau*, 71; finally, Williams speaks of notes that Jean Cocteau’s relationship with Picasso “proved almost a masochistic addiction,” since despite his “permanent infatuation with the artist,” Picasso was ultimately “at best merely tolerant of him” (209). What all three of these texts suggest, in one way or another, is that Cocteau had a sad tendency to love most those “friends” who thought little of him, and to suspect those who loved him most of secret disloyalty. For Cocteau’s own commentary on his friends and acquaintances, there is no source better than *My Contemporaries* (1968), a collection of essays and character sketches edited by Margaret Crosland, which includes specific pieces on Guillaume Apollinaire, Raymond Radiguet, Marcel Proust, André Gide, Pablo Picasso, and Charlie Chaplin, to name a few.

In Cocteau's work, the agonistic, changing space of friendship cannot be interpreted within any set category. It proves to be an ongoing negotiation, but also a form of comforting sedation, exuding the same "warm glow" that has for centuries been a European descriptor of drug-induced pleasure. Further, Cocteau's relationships with opium and writing have shown themselves to be endless negotiations as well, negotiations that seem to bestow comfort with one hand as readily as they bestow agony with the other. Friendship, like opium smoking, must therefore have its authentic and inauthentic forms. It has to entail a very exclusive set of circles, says Cocteau, for "[i]t has taken me a long time to develop the friendships with which I am comfortable. One more and the circle will overflow" (200). When it comes to friendship, he adds, it is very important not to step outside your limited circle of close friends. But one thing Cocteau is willing to admit about friendship which he does not seem to admit about opium or writing is that a large "element of luck" is involved in its alleviatory success (204). If it has offered him nothing else, friendship has helped Cocteau to reconcile himself to the "jarring shocks" and "unforeseen directives" of life that are beyond his control (204). The space of writing and the taking of opium on the other hand, even while they might aim toward self-dissolution, always involve Cocteau's somewhat egotistical effort to assume full control over how he feels. In friendship, Cocteau seems to have found a true palliative to the individual's lonely fall through time. It is the involvement of the symbolic other, it seems, that helps defend friendship from devolving into the complacency and abuse that is always a threat with opium or writing.

Conclusion

The palliative seeks to alleviate pain while leaving consciousness present to this same pain, lest the experience spill at any moment into the false consciousness of narcosis. This conclusion helps make sense of Cocteau's self-accusation at the end of *Opium*. On the one hand, he condemns people who use drugs simply to produce pleasure instead of seeking relief from the pain of being. Yet he also wonders about his own responsibility to opium, one that dictates that he should forsake his ambitions for individual, poetic glory and smoke himself all the way to death. He possesses conflicting loyalties which pull him in opposite directions, toward the symbolic project of writing on one side and the space of self-sacrifice on the other. Ultimately, Cocteau does not appeal to a sense of intellectual responsibility, but merely a cowardly impulse for self-possession to explain his return to sobriety. In this instance, one could say that he is, in fact, more addicted to sobriety than he is to opium, and that he has simply made a choice between conflicting addictions.

Cocteau condemns instances in which he thinks palliation has come at the expense of authentic consciousness and thus become a form of narcosis. Citing the advent of the term "escapism" during the 1930s, he laments that art itself has become a brute narcotic in the modernist era, something that simply provides relief from boredom:

[o]ur era is very sick. It has invented 'escapism.' The horrors afflicting the victims of the frivolity of a war amply provide it with certain outlets. It dopes itself through the medium of its newspapers and even the atomic bomb is the occasion for a kind of Jules Verne lyricism – until the moment when a practical joker pulls their leg over the radio. (*Difficulty* 89)

Only a few pages prior this passage, Cocteau attempts to renounce his urge for psychic comfort altogether, claiming that without the pain of being, there is in fact no being at all:

From suffering I gain one advantage; it calls me constantly to order. The long periods in which I used to think of nothing, only letting words float around in me: chair, lamp, door, or other objects over which my eyes were roaming, these long periods of vacancy no longer exist. Pain harasses me and I must think to distract myself from it. It is the opposite of Descartes. I am, therefore I think. Without pain I was not. (*Difficulty* 76)

Compare this last claim to Lacan's conception of the ego's formation: "I think where I am not." As we saw with his description of *Das Ding*, Lacan's model of subjectivity operates on the premise that without lack, the conscious "I" as such cannot exist. It is not only that the I is split between the body and a symbolic *elsewhere*, but because the lack in language is also that which creates desire, and therein the conscious I to begin with. Cocteau, in fact, has recognized that without any trace of being's pain, he would no longer be human (Lacan says as much when he speaks about what would happen if the subject's lack were ever filled). Cocteau retains a desire to rely on his own resources alone, and this desire for autonomy cannot come without a certain embracing of his founding lack.

Ultimately, it might appear as though Cocteau, by accepting the pain of being, sides with the kind of resistant mourning that critic Patricia Rae finds characteristic of modernism. Indeed, perhaps in certain aspects of Cocteau's work, Rae's reading of modernism is astute, although I will certainly not concede such a point about Huxley, whom I discuss in the following chapter. I also do not believe that Cocteau's eventual

embrace of an endless unsettling through friendship should retroactively determine the meaning of his career-long struggle with opium and palliation. After all, it is not some irrefutable argument that brings Cocteau to his eventual conclusions on friendship, but merely his personal failure to establish a non-abusive relationship with opium. In fact, if one reads his prose comprehensively, it is impossible to attribute his final views on friendship to any argumentative necessity. Perhaps it is only by arriving at the end of his life that Cocteau can bravely affirm his belief in the ethical responsibility of discomfort. In any case, his work certainly does not express much pleasure in the endless slippage of linguistic meaning and the transformative, circulating nature of twentieth-century experience. Without doubt, Cocteau harbours a desire for inner peace that one could deem mystical, and this desire often brings him to the very edge of self-annihilation. But in the end, he cannot make himself deaf to the call of the symbolic – the call that deems him selfish, irresponsible, and antisocial for seeking comfort in oblivion, even while his approach to oblivion provides him an intimacy with time and his surroundings that is utterly inaccessible to the sober (and presumably more responsible) subject. Banished by opium and mocked by writing for his persistent vanity, Cocteau turns to friendship because there is something internal to the experience that helps keep his equilibrium in check: the sheer presence of a human other who can speak back to him and insist on being heard. It is on this note that I would like to conclude my discussion of Cocteau's work, as the question of human others and ethical responsibility provides an amenable segue into Aldous Huxley's conception of drugs as therapeutic agents. It is thus to Huxley's work that I would now like to turn for my second chapter.

Chapter Two

I and Eye: The Palliative and the Psychedelic in Aldous Huxley

We propose that the world itself, in Merleau-Ponty's sense, is set in depths, in uncharted abysses, where there are vortices in which the body that lets loose its hold on the levels of the world, the dreaming, the visionary, the hallucinating, the lascivious body, gets drawn.

Alphonso Lingis, *Foreign Bodies*

One slips back too easily, one slips back too often.

Aldous Huxley, *Island*

While my previous chapter investigated the status of opium in the prose of Jean Cocteau, this chapter will give much of its attention to the concepts of the “narcotic” and “psychedelic” as they appear in the work of Aldous Huxley. It is these two concepts that primarily inform Huxley’s ambivalence toward drug use, an ambivalence that stems from the drug’s status as both an agent of experiential concealment (narcotic) and one of revelation (psychedelic). As I argued in my first chapter, Cocteau’s musings on opium grow out of a literary and philosophical tradition rooted in Thomas de Quincey’s *Confessions*, Charles Baudelaire’s *Artificial Paradises*, and the French surrealist movement with which Cocteau associates early in his career. It is this last factor that largely contributes to Cocteau’s perception of his drug use as a response to artistic sensitivity – a “cure for intelligence” or insatiable creative ambition. Cocteau regards himself as an exceptional figure, one of the select few who can see the abysmal void lurking beneath all people’s lives, and who thus requires opium as a spiritual palliative. Aldous Huxley’s writings on drugs, however, explicitly combine scientific, political, and

mystical forms of thought. From his 1931 essay “A Treatise on Drugs” to his final novel *Island* (1962), Huxley speculates endlessly on how the chemistry of psychoactive drugs might be better developed to help *all* people cope with the pains of modern existence. While he does so, however, Huxley also remains wary of the dark political implications of widespread satiety. Cocteau worries about the dark side of drug-induced euphoria as well, but as I have argued, he tends to denigrate such satiety to the extent that it kills his *own* exceptional desire to create. In short, I do not think it unfair to claim that Cocteau’s writings on drugs are more explicitly insular or solipsistic than Huxley’s. Huxley’s concerns about the socio-political stakes of widespread drug use and the increasing powers of pharmaceutical technology are starkly present in texts like *Brave New World* (1932) and *The Doors of Perception* (1954). What connects Huxley’s drug-writings to Cocteau’s, however, are the general structures of experience to which both writers appeal, both in their descriptions of modern despair and in the role that drugs might play in alleviating such despair. Like Cocteau, Huxley believes that drugs hold the power to alleviate psychic pain. Further, he affirms that such alleviation must numb the subject’s sense of autonomy and sedate her experience of both language and diachronic temporality. To this extent, Huxley’s work demonstrates that even while he and Cocteau might approach the question of drugs and therapy from distinct discursive contexts, they both appeal to a similar set of experiential principles that – as I continue to argue – become deeply entrenched in modernist thought.

In *The Doors of Perception* (1954), Aldous Huxley argues that human beings have always (and *will* always) use psychoactive substances to free themselves from reality. The reason for this practice, he insists, is that most people “lead lives at the worst

so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul” (62). Huxley universalizes the human desire to transcend a reality that causes chronic anguish, but in doing so, he also threatens to undermine his primary conceptual argument in *Doors*: that the drug is not an agent of psychic escape, but one of revelation. This escapist undercurrent in Huxley’s argument harks back to his sinister depiction of *soma* in his dystopian novel, *Brave New World* (1932).¹¹⁵ In fact, many of the arguments Huxley presents in the latter half of *Doors* sound eerily similar to *soma*’s utilitarian justification, especially when he claims that “[w]hat is needed is a new drug which will relieve and console our suffering species without doing more harm in the long run than it does good in the short” (65). That said, the feature that most distinguishes the drug in *Doors* from that of *Brave New World* is that the former allegedly affects perception in a revelatory, as opposed to narcotic way. This rhetoric of revelation is also the means by which Huxley signifies the difference between authentic transcendent experience and a superficial, ethically dubious escapism. Contrary to Jean Cocteau, Huxley does not ultimately deem psychic pain to be a prerequisite of authentic human experience. Rather, he argues that the dissolution of human selfhood is the final end of drug use, and that the modern subject’s ultimate responsibility lies in bringing an ecstatic knowledge of selflessness back to the everyday world of lonely and frustrated human others.

¹¹⁵ As I will argue shortly, the tone of Huxley’s work shifts dramatically over his career. In early books like *Crome Yellow* (1921) and *Brave New World*, Huxley treats his subject matter with a satirical and profoundly skeptical (sometimes cynical) tone. The publication of *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), however, marks a turn toward a more spiritual or mystical tone that Huxley maintains for the rest of his career. As this chapter unfolds along a chronological trajectory, I will continue to comment on this shift in Huxley’s thought.

In *Doors*, Huxley also claims that language and conceptual thought are the primary sources of humanity's discomfiting experience of reality, since every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born—the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality. (*Doors* 23)¹¹⁶

Echoing Robert Graves's 1927 poem, "The Cool Web," Huxley argues that language is the principal mechanism by which humans work to deaden perception,¹¹⁷ while making their experience vaguely communicable to others,¹¹⁸ and this experiential compromise is one that Huxley hopes people can bypass through an informed use of psychedelic drugs.

¹¹⁶ He goes on to add: "[t]hat which, in the language of religion, is called 'this world' is the universe of reduced awareness, expressed, and, as it were, petrified by language" (23-24).

¹¹⁷ In this poem, for example, Graves writes that children (for better or for worse) are able to experience the world in all of its vivacity precisely because they lack the *perspicacity* of adults. Adults on the other hand "have speech, to chill the angry day, / And speech to dull the rose's cruel scent, / We spell away the overhanging night, / We spell away the soldiers and the fright" (Graves 563). While Huxley might not have Graves's poem specifically in mind when he writes on these issues, I find it almost inconceivable that a man as well-read as Huxley would not have been aware of such a famous poem by a contemporary British poet, who might I add was a profoundly mystical thinker in his own right. Graves's *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948), for example, was perhaps the most influential account of spiritualism, occultism, and poetic myth-making in all of twentieth-century Britain.

¹¹⁸ Marcus Boon observes that in Huxley's work, "[m]escaline's visual pyrotechnics are gifts that pour out of the Gnostic modernist darkness, to save the psychonaut from the heaviness of the world" (238). Boon, however, goes on to add that this escape from heaviness "is a temporary phenomenon, just as childhood is, a regression that cannot hold back forever the storms of history" (Boon 238). Boon is not wrong to argue this point, but in doing so he reads the drug experience from a perspective that emphasizes the ultimate transitoriness of intoxication. Yet Huxley's work also suggests that the unfolding of historical time might *itself* be an illusion, and that the informed use of mescaline allows the subject to participate in an eternal unity that underlies the superficial changes of historical time. In other words, one can live a lifetime in three minutes on mescaline. To speak of the drug's transitory nature, and to insist that one must "always come back to reality" reinforces the symbolic authority that denigrates drug use as a *metonymic* fulfillment: the pursuit of merely partial, temporary "fixes" in an endless chain. We saw this same sort of double-sided interpretation in Cocteau's ambivalence toward opium, and I reaffirm here that one's moralizing of the drug (at least within the terms of modernism) depends largely on whether one reads it from a metonymy- or metaphor-dominant position.

Like the previous chapter, my coming treatment of Huxley will read language as a founding principle of lack that the drug aims to alleviate. Huxley, like Cocteau, demonstrates his ambivalence about the apparent concealment that comes with alleviating humanity's fundamental sense of lack. To return to my most prominent example, Huxley acknowledges the sinister side of drug-induced euphoria in *Brave New World*, but as his career progresses, he exhaustively re-signifies the drug as a revelatory (rather than concealing) agent, or in his own words, as a psychedelic rather than a narcotic. His view of the drug experience, it is important to note, does not alter in its basic structure as he makes this shift; what alters is the rhetorical pole from which he represents this experience, in terms of what I have thus far called the poles of metaphor and metonymy. That is to say, Huxley's early, skeptical work represents the drug through a more metonymic conception of experience, while his later, mystically inflected work represents the drug from a metaphoric position.

More specifically, Huxley represents the narcotic *soma* in *Brave New World* as an agent that supplements the subject's mindless pursuit of partial enjoyments in ongoing succession, enjoyments based upon an endless chain of consumer goods that literally stand for happiness in metonymic relation. In *The Doors of Perception*, however, Huxley depicts the drug as a psychedelic or revelatory agent that bypasses the sober mind's tendency to dull its reception of external stimuli, and thus brings the subject to an awareness of a timeless present in which its very sense of autonomy is annihilated.¹¹⁹ In the latter case, it is not the drug, but sober consciousness itself that supplements the

¹¹⁹ As I have argued in my preceding chapters, Lacan's work characterizes such an experience as metaphorical.

subject's endless pursuit of fulfillment through a fantasy of mastery (over both oneself and the supposedly external world), a fantasy I have already articulated through Lacan's concept of the object *a* and Bataille's notion of project. In addition to these two thinkers, I will also invoke the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in this chapter to apply the metaphor/metonymy model of language and experience to discrete states of human embodiment, and I will continue to relate these states of embodiment to the general principles of Bataille's continuity/discontinuity dichotomy. Ultimately, I argue that the therapeutic drug holds a place in Huxley's thought that is similar to Cocteau's designation of opium as a palliative: the drug dulls the boundaries of subjectivity and language in order to alleviate the modernist sensation of chronic despair that is an integral part of subjectivity itself. In leading the subject toward her dissolution, the drug gives rise to a profound interpretive ambivalence, yet I will continue to argue that the modernist structures of experience that condition this ambivalence remain markedly consistent. That said, I will now turn to a brief overview of the existing criticism on Huxley, and give particular emphasis to those works which I find to be most pertinent to my coming discussion.

Critical Background

In this chapter, I shall argue that throughout Huxley's writing career, the tone of his work dramatically shifts from one of satirical, skeptical removal to one of spiritual faith. Further, I shall argue that this shift in tone is informed by a deeper shift in Huxley's general conception of human experience, a shift that is crucial to understand if one wishes to explore Huxley's changing attitudes toward the drug experience. Critics Jerome

Meckier (1969) and Peter Edgerly (1972) emphasize the importance of a skeptical, satirical voice in Huxley's novels. Meckier, for example, comments on how Anthony Beavis – the protagonist of Huxley's 1936 novel *Eyeless in Giza* – views human personality as a series of incongruous states, in which people desire to move from a chronology of past, present, and future, into an “atomic present” (146). On a similar note, Kulwant Singh Gill charts the conceptual movement from satire to spirituality through Huxley's unfolding career, remarking that “[t]hrough he started his literary career on a note of agnosticism, adopted an attitude of ‘pawky playfulness’ toward eternal verities, and debunked mysticism as an ideal, his later writings affirm his belief in the Ultimate Reality” (Gill 208). What I would like to add to Gill's account (along with Meckier's and Edgerly's) is the same conceptual framework I have used to read Cocteau, in order to study Huxley's work according to the same qualitative structures that, I argue, more broadly inform modernism's therapeutically oriented conception of experience.

When critics discuss Huxley's views on experience in general, they rarely employ a theoretical framework that relates Huxley's work to a broader, distinctly modernist conception of experience. Instead, many of them tend to engage Huxley in his own words to provide a general gloss on what the author means when he engages spiritual concepts like a “Divine Ground,” “Unity of Being,” and “Perennial Philosophy.” Bhaskara Ramamurty (1974), for example, discusses how Huxley's literature speaks of the spiritual and mental degradation of the modern subject, and of the desire for alleviation that such degradation evokes.¹²⁰ She positions Huxley within a modernist tradition that

¹²⁰ See Ramamurty, *Aldous Huxley: A Study of His Novels* (1974).

[s]eek[s] a cure for the spiritual sickness. Forster relies on a cultural awakening of the self, Eliot and Edith Sitwell lumber through the waste land to arrive at the reaffirmation of the Christian faith, Virginia Woolf finds solace in suicide, and Aldous Huxley in the Vedantic¹²¹ doctrine of non-attachment. (3)

In this passage, Ramamurty interprets Huxley within the very strain of modernism in which I wish to situate him (alongside Cocteau and Benjamin): namely, the strain that works therapeutically to alleviate the “spiritual sickness” of the twentieth century.

Charles M. Holmes (1970) similarly speaks of Huxley’s desire for spiritual fulfillment, focusing on Huxley’s insistence that the modern individual’s sense of selfhood must die altogether for such fulfillment to be possible.¹²² Holmes is right to argue this point, and like Ramamurty he is correct to note Huxley’s insistence that self-mortification must occur in order for the subject to unite itself with the form of continuity he deems the “Divine Ground of Being.” But like Ramamurty, Holmes speaks largely in an impressionistic, paraphrastic version of Huxley’s own language, which limits him to the connections and associations that are already somewhat explicit within Huxley’s work.

¹²¹ The term “Vedantic” refers to a form of spiritual philosophy named *Vedānta*, a term that originally served in Hindu philosophy as a synonym for the Veda texts, known also as the Upanishads. By the 8th century C.E., the term referred to an assemblage of Hindu philosophical traditions that sought to understand reality in its most fundamental nature. Huxley was first introduced to Vedānta by his close friend, Gerald Heard, after the two of them moved (along with Huxley’s wife Maria and son Matthew) from England to Hollywood, California in 1937. In 1938, Huxley formed a friendship with Jiddu Krishnamurti, whose teachings stressed that any social revolution must come from a drastic shift in human consciousness itself, and not a social system imposed from without. During this same year, Huxley became an official Vedantist by joining the circle of Swami Prabhavananda. These years saw a dramatic shift in the tone of Huxley’s work, which moved from one of political skepticism to one of spiritual credulity. The spiritual ideals that Huxley championed after this move to The United States appear most emphatically in his 1945 text, *The Perennial Philosophy*, a text that I will discuss at length later in this chapter.

¹²² See Holmes, *Aldous Huxley the Way to Reality*, in which Holmes contends that Huxley’s experiential ideal “is a gloss, in highly undistinguished prose, on the author of the poetry, the fiction, and the personal essays—a personality ‘in which the natural discords are harmonized by some principle of unity’” (52).

Ultimately, nearly all critics who speak generally of human experience in Huxley recognize that Huxley devotes the latter half of his working life to an experience that occurs beyond language. It makes sense, therefore, that these critics would not immediately turn to linguistic or Lacanian frameworks to speak of this experience. However, by using Lacan's metaphor/metonymy dichotomy to speak of the modernist subject's drug use and her variable proximity to self-dissolution, I not only link Huxley with Cocteau, but demonstrate how deeply connected are their modernist conceptions of lived temporality, the human subject's alienation of from her surroundings, and the unsettling lack that lies at the heart of desire.

June Deery (1996), like the other critics I have mentioned, gives an expository account of Huxley's belief that human beings can achieve an unmediated experience of the Divine Ground uniting all of existence.¹²³ But in many ways, she still operates largely within Huxley's own lexicon, and does not interpret his concept of experience through a framework that could be readily applied to other modernist authors. Unlike other critics, however, Deery does give sustained attention to the connections between Huxley's representation of experience and his discrete uses of language. She explicitly points out the differences between Huxley's non-linguistic brand of "negative theology" and the arguments of Jacques Derrida, the latter of which affirms no essential substance prior to language.¹²⁴ Deery recognizes that for Huxley, the "biggest drawback" of writing is that

¹²³ See Deery, *Aldous Huxley and the Mysticism of Science*.

¹²⁴ Deery understands "negative theology" as a discourse that posits the limit-point of human knowledge – the eruption of the ineffable – as a form of proof for the existence of a theontic principle that transcends such knowledge. Derrida however "insists that [negative theology] differs from his own project in its movement toward some form of hyperessentiality. *Différance* is, of course, antithetical to mystic monism" (197).

“literature’s medium is language. Whatever limits were encountered before, for example, in expressing scientific ideas, are exacerbated in mystical discourse” (119). Mystics, she observes, “claim it *is* possible to escape language’s hardwiring of the self” (Deery 120; original emphasis), a claim I shall explore by reading Huxley in dialogue with modernist thinkers like Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, and Bataille. I shall also build on Deery’s claim that Huxley’s view of mystical experience manifests itself in discrete uses of language.¹²⁵

This desire to escape language – and therein escape the alienation of discrete selfhood and the empty passage of diachronic time – is a desire that Huxley shares with Cocteau. More specifically, my framework highlights telling similarities between Huxley’s account of mescaline use in his autobiographical *The Doors of Perception*, and Jean Cocteau’s experience of a “vegetable calm” in his *Opium* diary. Huxley, like Cocteau, uses the drug to manipulate his proximity to death without actually having to die, and he does so for patently therapeutic reasons. Huxley’s depiction of the alleviatory moment is similar to Cocteau’s, but what distinguishes them most is Huxley’s ultimate endorsement of subjective dissolution or self-mortification, and his relative lack of ambivalence toward such an experience (at least in comparison to Cocteau).

Towards the end of his career, Huxley becomes downright emphatic about the moral and therapeutic goodness of a drug-induced dissolution of the self.¹²⁶ He speaks constantly of a need for the subject to shed its discrete, possessive ego, and to attain

¹²⁵ His use of a mystical lexicon and a “regressive, apophatic syntax” are the two uses of language that Deery specifically mentions in conjunction with Huxley’s representation of ecstatic experience (197).

¹²⁶ In reference to Huxley, David Garrett Izzo, in *Aldous Huxley and W.H. Auden: On Language*, observes that “[i]n equating the poet’s motivation and writing experience to being the same as or reasonably similar to the mystic’s, it follows that just as the mystic may get *therapeutic* benefit from his process, the poet may also” (154; my emphasis). The importance of therapy is something I wish to render apparent throughout this project, not only with respect to Huxley’s work, but to modernism in general.

direct experience of the One (or continuity) that connects all things in sameness. This is not to say that he ignores the potentially dark side of drug use. Throughout his career, Huxley remains acutely aware of the many perils of drugs. He thus insists that the drug-taker must be well-informed, and more importantly, must *always* take drugs with an unselfish spirit that Huxley – at the end of his life – ultimately calls “compassion.” He consistently expresses his desire for people to have mystical experiences, but also wants these people to bring the spirit of these experiences back to their “sober” lives among social others. Within the terms of my project, I shall argue that Huxley’s work ultimately seeks to fuse the metonymic and metaphoric poles of experience, and to synthesize therein a form of “mystical compassion” that draws the phallic and feminine forms of *jouissance* together in a “sexual relation.” Lacan of course deems such a relation fundamentally impossible, and my reading ultimately agrees with him. Nonetheless, I plan to explore how it is this very impossibility that Huxley attempts to overcome in the final moments of his literary life. In the interest of understanding how Huxley comes to these final thoughts, I will begin with a discussion of Huxley’s early thinking on drug use, and from there trace the trajectory that this concept follows as his career unfolds.

Soma (1931-1941)

Huxley’s interest in the drug experience first became explicit in 1931, shortly after he encountered “a ponderous book by a German pharmacologist”¹²⁷ named

¹²⁷ The author’s name was Louis Lewin. In 1886, Lewin published the first extensive, methodological analysis of the peyote cactus, a plant that was originally named in his honour – *Anhalonium Lewinii*. For more information, see *Moksha: Aldous Huxley’s Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience*, ed. Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer (1977).

Phantastica (1924). It would be another twenty-two years before Huxley made his first self-experiments with drugs,¹²⁸ but it was only briefly after encountering this book that he sat down to write an essay entitled “A Treatise on Drugs” (1931). Early in this treatise, one can find passages that anticipate the pivotal role that drugs will come to occupy in his body of work, as Huxley writes that “[t]he story of drug-taking constitutes one of the most curious, and also, it seems to me, one of the most significant chapters in the natural history of human beings” (4). The purpose of the drug, he suggests, is to provide a “holiday out of space, out of time, in the eternity of sleep or ecstasy, in the heaven of limbo or visionary fantasy” (4).¹²⁹ However, Huxley also understands that “[a]ll existing drugs are treacherous and harmful. The heaven into which they usher their victims soon turns into a hell of sickness and moral degradation” (4). Thus, he suggests that the project of civilization should neither suppress nor promote the use of existing drugs, but rather find “an efficient but wholesome substitute for these delicious and (in the present imperfect world) necessary poisons” (5). On this matter, Huxley concludes that “[t]he man who invents such a substance will be counted among the greatest benefactors of suffering humanity” (5). This notion of finding a less-harmful and yet more-effective drug is one that Huxley will continue to revisit throughout the rest of his career. Further, this early essay helps set the conceptual stage for Huxley’s novel *Brave New World*, which he publishes only a year later.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ See *Moksha* (4).

¹²⁹ This rhetoric of the “holiday” from historical reality becomes, as we will see, central to Huxley’s depiction of the drug *soma* one year later with the publication of *Brave New World*.

¹³⁰ In the year preceding *Brave New World*, Huxley also wrote an essay entitled “Wanted, A New Pleasure” (1931), in which he attempts to articulate the unique intoxication that modernity offers to its subjects. This intoxicant, Huxley speculates, is none other than that of *speed*. Modern subjects, it seems,

In *Brave New World* (1932), the mind-altering drug holds an ambivalent status at best and a sinister one at worst. The futuristic, technocratic “Fordian” society of this text takes the elimination of displeasure to be the fundamental goal of its civilization, and mobilizes the fictional drug *soma* as an agent that is both universally available and potently capable of bypassing the primary shortcomings of other intoxicants. “Euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant,” the substance possesses “[a]ll the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of the defects [...] Take a holiday whenever you like, and come back without so much as a headache or a mythology” (46).¹³¹ However, readers soon find that the alleviatory project of this Fordian society entails not only an affective amelioration, but the numbing of conceptual thought itself:

“not a moment to sit down and think – or if ever by some unlucky chance such a crevice of time should yawn in the solid substance of their distractions, there is always *soma*, delicious *soma*, half a gramme for a holiday, a gramme for a weekend, two grammes for a trip to the gorgeous East, three for a dark eternity on the moon; returning whence they find

have renounced their former search for peace and stasis, and embraced the rush of speed: “The nearest approach to such a new drug—and how immeasurably remote it is from the ideal intoxicant!—is the drug of speed” (9). In this regard, Huxley seems to suggest that the rapid, unfolding nature of modern life constitutes an intoxication of its own, even though such an intoxication is subject to the same potentially harmful effects as any drug, as Huxley goes on to write that “indulged in to excess, [pleasures] become their opposites. Each particular pleasure has its corresponding particular pain, boredom or disgust” (10). The concerns of Huxley’s two 1931 drug essays come to a head in his 1932 novel, *Brave New World*.

¹³¹ The above passage also aligns the psychoactive drug with the therapeutic aspect of religion, a connection that Huxley will continue to develop throughout his career. Yet even religion, in *Brave New World*, has proven that it cannot satisfy this therapeutic desire on its own, for the inhabitants of this world know that there once existed “a thing called Heaven; but all the same they used to drink enormous quantities of alcohol. There was a thing called the soul and a thing called immortality... But they used to take morphia and cocaine” (45). Even by the time he writes *Doors*, Huxley still refers to drugs as the “chemical surrogates” of religion.

themselves on the other side of the crevice, safe on the ground of daily labour and distraction, scampering *from feely to feely, from girl to pneumatic girl, from Electro-magnetic Golf Course to [...]*" (48; my emphasis)

As this final sentence shows, nearly every object of everyday desire serves as a temporary and incomplete distraction in Huxley's text, operating within a perpetual chain whose significance is based upon fundamentally metonymic unfolding (the endless parts that try to stand for an affective "whole" of satiety). Alongside this effort toward a perfect, perpetual distraction is the Fordian society's hypermanagement of cathexis, which insists that the individual subject not invest too much of his or her emotive energy in any single object. The non-diversified investment of psychic energy appears imprudent within this model, and it threatens to set its investor up for profound disappointment. Such a managerial strategy finds its greatest example in the fact that the Fordian world has strict laws against parent/child bonds and monogamous relationships. Thus even while this world attempts to bombard citizens with constant stimuli, it makes certain that these subjects never invest too much of their psychic energies in any *one* of these stimuli. Such a management of desire proceeds according to the laws of the signifying chain, in which every enjoyment is different, but the distractions come with such rapidity that the individual does not have time to reflect upon any final signified meaning underlying this succession.

This Fordian management of desire, however, is not without its dangers. The model paradoxically aims at complete communal stability while trying to avoid the stasis

of death. In other words, it aims to regulate affective experience without becoming depressive:

The machine turns, turns and must keep on turning – for ever. It is death if it stands still [...] Wheels must turn steadily, but cannot turn untended. There must be men to tend them, men as steady as the wheels upon their axles, sane men, obedient men, stable in contentment. (36)

This society is based upon a principle of social cohesion and unity, along with a complete lack of individuality in its citizens. But as we have seen, the pursuit of partial enjoyments – or object *a*'s, in Lacanian terms – is supposed to consolidate the fantasy of *discrete agency* in the subject. Thus, even while it endorses the pursuit of enjoyment, the Fordian society has to constantly work to curb the individualistic fantasy that this pursuit might precipitate.

The society of *Brave New World* uses a combination of drugs, chanting, and erotic touch in order to dissolve the individual subject's corporeal boundaries and sense of discrete selfhood. When Lenina and Henry – two happy proponents of the Fordian ethos – take *soma* together, they find themselves caught up in a movement among four hundred other couples in “the warm, the richly coloured, the infinitely friendly world of *soma*-holiday” (66). It is not stasis, but a form of enchanted dance that best represents the dynamic of *soma* intoxication.¹³² This sensory flux eventually leads to a form of euphoria in which Lenina and Henry resemble “twin embryos gently rocking together on the

¹³² This, of course, is certainly a dark example of the dancing ideal we find in Mester's *Modernism and Movement*, an ideal I will continue to invoke throughout this study and revisit in my conclusion.

waves of a bottled ocean of blood-surrogate” (66).¹³³ The passage suggests that the drug *soma* can carry the fully developed adult toward an experience like that of the embryo. Further, this experience is explicitly connected to the movement from a diachronic to synchronic experience of time, as Lenina repeatedly claims that “[w]as and will” simply make one ill. When she gives four grammes of *soma* to the dissenting Bernard Marx, Marx finds that “roots and fruits were abolished; the flower of the present rosily bloomed” (90). Roots and fruits are conceptual correlates of what is past and what is to come, neither of which concern the individual on *soma*.

These depictions of the *soma* trip render intoxication in terms that are structurally similar to those Cocteau uses when he describes “vegetable consciousness.” The invocation of an embryonic state further corresponds to the Lacanian transgression of the regulated boundary between the subject and the filling of its lack. In most cases, Lacan represents this transgression as a fall into death. But when he discusses the myth of the “lamella” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), he suggests that we can view this transgression as a *return* to a pre-sexed, pre-linguistic state – the primordial realm of continuous being that one must give up when one enters the realm of linguistic meaning. “Let us illustrate what we are dealing with here,” Lacan says, “namely, the being of the subject, that which is there beneath the meaning. If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning” (211). In a sense, the *soma*-taker chooses being over meaning, and nowhere is this choice more apparent than in the character Linda’s self-annihilating overdose of *soma*. In this

¹³³ In light of Lacan’s formulation of the lamella, which I will introduce shortly, it is important to remember that Lenina and Henry dance within the same red light that bathes the embryonic test tubes in *Brave New World*, whence comes the connection between their intoxication and their return to a womblike state.

instance, the diachronic movement of the signifying chain submits itself to synchronic drag, giving the subject a sensation of temporal stasis and corporeal dissolution, as conceptual thought gives itself over to a more sense-oriented engagement with one's surroundings. This is not to suggest that soma-takers truly experience pure being, but rather that the drug carries them along a spectrum *toward* the relative continuity of death. The symptoms of their transgression show a recognizable movement from the symbolic toward non-symbolic continuity and the diachronic toward the synchronic. Further, the Fordian powers-that-be recognize this potential in *soma*, and invent "Solidarity Services" to help render it useful for social cohesion.

In *Brave New World*, a solidarity service consists in a communal ingestion of *soma*, followed by a ritual that works toward a climactic annihilation of the subject's fantasy of autonomy. The character Bernard Marx, however, attends this mandatory practice with a sense of foreboding, since he is one of the only individuals in the Fordian society who still clings desperately to such a possessive sense of subjective autonomy. As he looks about the service, Bernard understands that the group of people surrounding him is "complete, the solidarity circle perfect and without flaw. Man, woman, man, in a ring of endless alternation round the table. Twelve of them ready to be made one, waiting to come together, to be fused, to lose their twelve separate identities in a larger being" (69). Participants drink to their annihilation and hear a repeated hymn not from the ears, but from the midriff:

Round they went, a circular procession of dancers, each with hands on the hips of the dancer preceding, round and round, shouting in unison, stamping to the rhythm of the music with their feet, beating it, beating it

out with hands on the buttocks in front; twelve pair of hands beating as one; as one, twelve buttocks slabbily resounding. (72)

As the language of the passage becomes increasingly visceral, the individual participants begin to feel themselves “melting” into one another. Their collective movement toward subjective dissolution marks a direct response to the pains of loneliness and boredom which the palliative soma works to numb. This scene offers one of the most sustained and vivid representations of the drug experience in all of *Brave New World*, and its correlation with my theory of metaphoric self-dissolution thus bears further theorization. I now wish to explore how the modernist conception of experience accounts for the poles of metonymic fantasy and metaphoric dissolution in the field of *embodiment*. Before moving on with my discussion of Huxley, I shall engage Merleau-Ponty’s “corporeal schema” or “body image”¹³⁴ in order to theorize how the metaphor/metonymy dichotomy of experience manifests itself on a corporeal level in modernist experience. Finally, I will align his “body image” with the same bodily gestalt Lacan explores in his “Mirror Stage”

¹³⁴ I mention both of these terms here, although many critics tend to choose one or the other. Gail Weiss and Alphonso Lingis, for example, tend to use the term “body image.” I believe that the “corporeal schema,” however, best conveys the sense of motor-intentionality that Merleau-Ponty lays out in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, the active drawing-itself-together that the body achieves by orienting itself toward discrete objects. The term “body image,” on the other hand, does a better job of conveying the manner in which the body’s lived gestalt is also sustained through its awareness of being-looked-at, an internalized awareness of itself seen-from-without. To this extent, the term body-image better conveys the dynamics of embodiment Merleau-Ponty emphasizes in *The Visible and the Invisible*. I believe that it is the very intersection of these concepts in Merleau-Ponty’s two works that makes his theory of embodiment especially akin with the bodily gestalt Lacan discusses in “The Mirror Stage.” In the latter’s case, this bodily gestalt comes from an orthopaedic synthesis performed *in tandem* with the subject’s recognition of its body in the mirror. The two forces – that of outwardly-directed motor-intention and the internalized sensation of being-looked-at – must always operate *together* to form this gestalt.

essay,¹³⁵ in order to forge a link between drugs, language, and the sensation of corporeal dissolution in Huxley's novels.

As I mentioned in my introductory chapter, Merleau-Ponty argues in *The Phenomenology of Perception* that the body draws itself together and consolidates its imagined wholeness by polarizing its attention on discrete objects. From the outset, a human being does not possess an "implicit notion of the relation between [her] body and things, or [her] hold on them" (75). Awareness of one's body in space is rather fragmentary at first, but over time the body pre-reflexively learns to orient itself as an autonomous spatial form, situated within a world of things. The "corporeal schema" or "body image" is what Merleau-Ponty names the phenomenon that is "founded upon the unity and identity of the body as a synergic totality" (316). The unified form manifested in the body image is not simply a fantasmatic presence, but "finally a way of stating that my body is in-the-world" (101). This body image, however, is not something that exists as an unalterable fact once it has been synthesized. Rather, it requires perpetual re-articulation, since it is only "sustained through its orientation towards tasks" (303). It is

¹³⁵ This alignment is one I have already attempted to legitimate in my introduction. I make this alignment by dispelling the two primary reasons for a discord between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty. First, Lacan explicitly critiques Merleau-Ponty's ontologization of the body image as something authentically pre-symbolic. I argue, however, that it is not difficult to strip Merleau-Ponty's theory of such a claim, leaving only a bodily gestalt whose formation is actively synthesized within a set of symbolic forces, and thus congruent with Lacan's notion of the bodily gestalt that emerges from the mirror stage. Second, I have noted in my introduction (f42, 44) how the critic Jonathan Kim-Reuter argues that Merleau-Ponty's body image does not sufficiently acknowledge the profound *thanatos* at work in the lived sensation of embodiment. As I have also tried to point out, however, Alphonso Lingis in *Foreign Bodies* provides a convincing counterargument, claiming that Merleau-Ponty's body image (in being sustained by a constant synthesis) is always capable of releasing its hold on the world of discrete objects and falling back into perceptual nonsense. For an excellent example of how Merleau-Ponty's body image can be considered a symbolic or social construct (particularly with respect to gender), see Iris Marion Young's *On Female Bodily Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (2005). (Her seminal essay on this issue, "Throwing Like a Girl," was first published in her 1990 book, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*).

only in the realm of motor-tactile experience that all of the body's surfaces pull themselves together into a unified, autonomous form and come into possession of a clear spatiotemporal orientation. On an orthopaedic level, the body orients itself as a spatial form by perceiving discrete things as tactile objectives: things to be touched or grasped. Merleau-Ponty refers to this bodily orientation towards things as sensory imperatives, as a form of "motor intentionality."

Similar to Lacan's notion of the metonymic (or what he later reconceives as the "phallic") model of desire, the Merleau-Pontian body constantly works to consolidate its imagined wholeness by polarizing its sensory forces upon discrete, although always-partial objects. Thus, when the body *releases* its hold on these objects (or *a's*, in the desiring sense), the world retreats to a distance, and the body loses an implicit sense of its boundaries and position within space. Slackening one's hold on discrete objects of desire blurs both the boundaries of the lived body and the psychic boundaries of conscious selfhood, and in general terms, provokes a move from discontinuity toward continuity along the spectrum of experience. We can infer from these observations that Merleau-Ponty's thought admits to the possibility of distinct symbolic *styles* of embodied experience, ranging between the metonymic and metaphoric poles of consciousness.¹³⁶

The former endlessly works to consolidate the embodied consciousness as a physically

¹³⁶ It is important to note here, however, that Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* speaks constantly against the possibility for philosophy to achieve a fusion with Being itself. There is an "overlapping" of body and world that emerges from the "flesh" of perception, but this overlapping is not a fusion, he says. There is a pre-experiential unity of things, but any attempt to regain this unity must bear the traces of the reflective process that leads us toward it. Lacan would no doubt agree with this point in principle, claiming that one's conception of One-ness can only be conceived *after* one has fallen into language; such is his strongest argument for the priority of metonymy over metaphor (language can only move toward sameness by using the differential, diachronic structure of syntax). Nonetheless, it remains this project's contention that there are *relative degrees* of intimacy and alienation between the body, language, and perceptual experience, and that the drug persists a means of manipulating this variability.

and psychically discrete ego, while the latter slackens its hold on desire and motor projects, thus slackening the subject's very sense of discrete selfhood.¹³⁷ This dynamic reveals a close correlation between Merleau-Ponty's theories of embodied perception and Lacan's theories of language and desire, a correlation that is broadly visible within the dynamics of Bataille's continuity/discontinuity dichotomy, but which I will continue to call by the names of metaphoric and metonymic experience.

When the solidarity service instills a sensation of melting in its participants, it also exploits this ecstatic experience to affirm the power of Ford, who stands in as a sort of absent God in Huxley's *Brave New World*.¹³⁸ To be sure, this mystical experience operates in recognizably Lacanian terms, since the participants, at the height of their dissolution, give themselves over to the impending arrival of a greater symbolic Other that unites them. As this arrival becomes more immanent, the symbolic import of language degenerates into infantile non-sense in the repeated chanting of "Orgy-porgy." In Lacanian terms, the participants in this solidarity service strive toward a collective experience of feminine *jouissance* that Lacan outlines at length in his 1972-73 seminars

¹³⁷ Bataille writes that authentic inner experience is antithetical to and "obviously distinct from project, from discourse" (*Inner* 112). The subject's fantasy of asserting his or her autonomous power comes through the performance of discursive projects. By discourse, Bataille explicitly means "whatever language may add to the world" (*Eroticism* 264). The subject's fantasmatic assertion of its own autonomy through project is similar in principle to both Lacan's *a* fantasy and Merleau-Ponty's theory of a corporeal schema. In principle, the pursuit of a discrete end consolidates the fantasy of the subject's autonomy and selfhood, rendering it unique from its surrounding world.

¹³⁸ Following the dystopian outlook *Brave New World*, the 1930s would see the rise of fascism in countries like Spain, Germany, and Italy. During this time, Huxley became even more concerned about the potential use of drugs by totalitarian regimes, as he expresses in his 1936 essay, "Propaganda and Pharmacology." In this essay, he explicitly notes that "[a]ny suggestion made to the patient while in this artificially induced trance penetrates to the very depths of the sub-conscious mind and may produce a permanent modification in the habitual modes of thought and feeling" (16). Further, he understands that "[a] system of propaganda, combining pharmacology with literature, should be completely and infallibly effective. The thought is extremely disquieting" (16). From a historical point of view, it is thus not surprising that Huxley's work from 1930 to 1945 might emphasize the dark, totalitarian potential of drug use.

On Feminine Sexuality and *The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. In speaking of this distinct form of enjoyment (which can also verge upon pain), Lacan refers to “a *jouissance* that, with respect to everything than can be used in the [phallic/metonymic function], is in the realm of the infinite” (103). He compares this same enjoyment to “[w]hat is best in Buddhism[,] [which] is Zen, and Zen consists in answering you by barking, my little friend. That is what is best when one wants, naturally, to get out of this infernal business, as Freud called it” (115). The “infernal business” Lacan mentions here is that of a “phallic” pursuit of *jouissance*, a pursuit that is the conceptual descendant of Lacan’s earlier theory of metonymic desire. For phallic *jouissance* unfolds according to the sequential dynamic of “one by one” (10), and in this regard it is connected to the displacements of the symbolic order, since “[f]rom the moment there are names, one can make a list of women and count them. If there are *mille e tre* of them, it’s clear that one can take them one by one – that is what is essential” (10). This form of experience, Lacan adds, “is entirely different from ‘the One of universal fusion’” (10).¹³⁹

¹³⁹ To a great extent, Lacan’s notion of feminine *jouissance* is a correlate for his earlier model of metaphoric or poetic experience. Lacan’s connection of this experience with mystical thinkers, for example, harks back to his description of mystical experience as a metaphorical phenomenon in his *Psychoses* seminar, as well as his description of the subject’s movement toward *Das Ding* in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. However, we must also remember that Lacan places limits on that experience which brings the subject into contact with the symbolic Other as a hole in discourse. This model of experience, for example, “while it is true that it has a relationship with the One, never makes anyone leave himself behind” (*Feminine* 47). Subjects remain limited to a phallic or metonymic encounter with human others especially, since “one can only enjoy a part of the Other’s body, for the simple reason that one has never seen a body completely wrap itself around the Other’s body, to the point of surrounding and phagocytizing it” (*Feminine* 23). Huxley’s passage suggests, however, that with the help of drugs, the citizens of the Fordian society can numb the metonymic laws of experience and truly allow their bodies to envelop and “melt” into one another. Lacan claims that a fusion of distinct subjects is impossible precisely because such a relation “drops into the abyss of nonsense” (*Feminine* 87). I would argue, however, that such a drop into nonsense is exactly the point of Huxley’s scene of communal melting, which is heralded by the subjects’ chanting of the words “Orgy-porgy,” a form of gibberish that resembles the very “barking” Lacan associates with the Buddhist state of Zen. In other words, when Lacan claims that love always fails to fuse separate subjects, he asserts the “non-existence of the sexual relationship... *insofar* as it would be conceptualized (*pensé*), in

Huxley's representation of such melting bears further comparison with Lacan's twentieth seminar, as it suggests that the participants of the solidarity service achieve their intersubjective melting by collectively anticipating the arrival of a supreme Other named Ford, which causes a great flash of dissolution akin to orgasm. "[T]he possibility of a bond (*lien*) of love between two of these beings," Lacan suggests, "manifest[s] the tension toward the Supreme Being," or symbolic Other whose ultimate status as a "hole" or absence in the symbolic order makes any contact with it ineffable. In Huxley's solidarity service, the Lacanian Other (manifested as the Supreme Being of Ford), slowly approaches the participating subjects, and the great flash of its "arrival" annihilates not only language, but the discrete objects of perception as well.¹⁴⁰ If one thinks of the signifying chain as operating "along the staves of a score," then the stave here is the synchronic element that vertically skewers the diachronic flow of time. Thus it is this vertical stave-ness of signification that is temporarily able to *stave* desire; in Lacan's terms, the solidarity service scene depicts the experience of feminine *jouissance*, while in Merleau-Ponty's terms, it marks a release of the imaginary body-image into dissolution. As a woman named Fifi reflects afterward,

other words, something that could conceivably be conceptualized (*pensé pensable*), and that discourse would not be reduced to beginning solely from semblance" (114; my emphasis).

¹⁴⁰ "Come, Greater Being," chant the participants, "Social Friend/Annihilating Twelve-in-One! We long to die, for when we end/ Our larger life has but begun" (70). Here, the participants render a direct link between the Greater Being, self-dissolution, and death. Even the isolated Bernard Marx cannot help but feel "a little melted" (70). The sensation of dissolution, it is important to remember, builds *gradually* in this scene, and the recognizable movement from word- to image- based experience is but a symptom of the greater journey from symbolic being toward complete annihilation. The participants all dissolve at the single moment when the Other (Ford) seems to arrive, which in Lacan's terms is also the moment that the Other reveals itself as complete absence. Leading up to this arrival is a constant build, a gradual transgression of the pleasure principle's regulating boundary.

the calm ecstasy of achieved consummation, the peace, not of mere vacant satiety and nothingness, but of balanced life, of energies at rest and at equilibrium. A rich and living peace [...] She was full, she was made perfect, she was still more than merely herself. (*Brave* 74)

What is so significant about this description is that Fifi comes away from the limit experience bearing tangible traces of it. She re-enters a more sober form of consciousness afterward, but is still inhabited by a spirit of immanence, and this immanence balances her desire. It is specifically a living, dynamic peace that persists within her, a peace stabilized by her awareness that some extra presence – the presence of the ineffable Other – continues to inform her experience.¹⁴¹ Despite the sinister political overtones of this scene, Huxley endorses these same principles of mystical experience throughout his career, and particularly in his final novel, *Island* (1962). From this experience, participants return to their (relatively) sober world with a refreshed sense of their pre-conceptual connection to experience. Bernard Marx, however, is ashamed of his inability to take full advantage of this service, and upon its conclusion he experiences acute loneliness. It is also important to note here that despite the popular understanding of *Brave New World* as a dystopian novel, the text *never* unequivocally condemns the happy obliviousness of its Fordian citizens.

Bernard Marx appears to be the only person within the Fordian society who believes that something can be a waste of time, that individuals must give meaning to their lives through tangible accomplishments – or in Bataille's terms, discursive projects.

¹⁴¹ It is not until the final passages of Huxley's last novel *Island*, I argue, that the significance of such a living peace is truly established.

For others around him, Marx's obsession with personal distinction is too abstract a thing to worry about; their endless distraction keeps the meaningfulness of any activity either seemingly immanent or inconsequential. Bernard believes that people should go for solitary walks and use speech to explore one another's deepest sensations of lack. In his desire to speak intimately with Lenina, for example, Bernard pursues this endless activity of a verbal engagement with lack: a talking cure in opposition to the Fordian world's pharmaceutical annihilation of lack. When he receives reprimands from his superiors for acting this way, Bernard only grows prouder of his insubordination, because he ultimately believes that his rebelliousness makes him an exceptional individual: "Bernard left the room with a swagger, exulting, as he banged the door behind him, in the thought that he stood alone embattled against the order of things; elated by the intoxicating consciousness of his individual significance and importance" (85). Bernard is a man who gets off on defiance, and in the end he is a coward and not necessarily an object of much respect in *Brave New World*.¹⁴² He wants to prove himself with pain, much like John the "Savage," whom Bernard retrieves from a Reservation and later introduces to Fordian civilization.

John, like Bernard, rebels against the world of easily-won happiness. He continues to believe in the soul: in an ideal self beyond the here and now-ness of the material world. His words are a symptom of his unwillingness to believe that the sensation of lack could be completely gone from civilization, for without this lack the world is no longer human in his eyes. One cannot mitigate the pain of existence without

¹⁴² Like the Cocteau who wishes to wean himself from opium, Bernard wishes to rely on his "inward resources" and to be "*soma*-less" while being subjected "to some great trial, some pain, some persecution" (89). He even longs for affliction so he can substantiate the fantasy of his individuality.

dispelling existence itself. For John there is an ethical imperative to feel self-consciousness, to feel guilt, and to ask the same “to be, or not to be?” question of life that Hamlet does. When questioned about why this must be the case, John appeals to his idea of God – that is, the imperative of the Lacanian Other, the origin of alienated desire and guilt. But the Fordian society’s top representative, Mustafa Mond, makes just as strong a case against John; the text’s moral verdict on the Fordian world is thus tenuous at best, and it certainly does not depict the pain-fetishizing John as a positive alternative. As I argue in the coming discussion, much of Huxley’s ambivalence on this point stems from his conception of the drug as both narcotic *and* psychedelic. As we have seen from his early writings, Huxley is by no means opposed to the use of drugs to palliate the malaise of modern life. However, *Brave New World* presents readers with a portrait of what can happen if future pharmacology works *too well*, eradicating any and all traces of human discomfort. Without this trace of fundamental lack, the drug by definition is no longer a palliative, but a narcotic, which presupposes only the sleep-like numbing of sober consciousness. In *Brave New World*, Huxley fails to determine whether the drug is a metaphoric vehicle of self-dissolution or a metonymic fix in an endless, empty chain. By the time he writes *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley’s attitude toward the drug experience becomes much more positive. This shift in perception, I argue, stems fundamentally from the gradual ascendance of a metaphoric interpretation of experience, relative to the metonymic one that heavily conditions his conception of drugs in *Brave New World*.

Self-Negation (1941-1954)

In his revised foreword to *Brave New World* (1946), Huxley attempts to envision a society in which one possesses a choice other than the pseudo-masochistic ethos of John the Savage and that of the technocratic Fordian society. In attempting to articulate an alternative, Huxley adds that the ambivalence of his novel seems inescapable precisely because

[t]he Savage is offered only two alternatives, an insane life in Utopia, or the life of a primitive in an Indian village, a life more human in some respects, but in others hardly less queer and abnormal. At the time the book was written this idea, that human beings are given free will in order to choose between insanity on the one hand and lunacy on the other, was one that I found amusing and regarded as quite possibly true [...] If I were now to rewrite the book, I would offer the Savage a third alternative. Between the utopian and the primitive horns of this dilemma would lie the possibility of sanity – a possibility already actualized, to some extent, in a community of exiles and refugees from the Brave New World, living within the borders of the Reservation. (xviii-xix)

The question remains, however, of what a “sane” society looks like for Huxley. When he uses the word “sanity,” he implies some form of equilibrium between the horns of insanity and lunacy. Insanity is what emerges when civilization goes too far with its project of self-therapy and obliterates the human experience of discomfort altogether. Lunacy describes the case of John, who reifies pain as the source of authenticity and ultimately commits suicide, either from an impulse to escape the world or to affirm his

egotistical self-possession. When it comes time for Huxley to articulate a difference between a veritable utopia and the Fordian world, he claims that science and technology must be, “like the Sabbath,” made for humanity, instead of being agents that subjugate humanity to their own purposes. It remains unclear, though, whether Huxley ever gives a satisfying portrait of this supposedly better society. Ultimately, he repeats that in this better world, “[r]eligion would be the conscious and intelligent pursuit of man’s Final End, the unitive knowledge of the immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman” (xix). In this supposed world, the principle of happiness or therapeutic comfort that dominates the Fordian future would be “secondary to the Final End principle” (xix). But in this introduction, it is still not clear what the “Final End” is for Huxley. As his career unfolds, he makes explicit attempts to articulate it, and in the latter half of his life, he always keeps this Final End principle in mind when he speaks about drugs; for it is this Final End that is supposed to ensure that people take drugs in the proper spirit.

Ultimately, Huxley argues that the relative morality of drug-taking depends upon the spirit that an individual brings to the drug.¹⁴³ The proper spirit is one that seeks revelation instead of narcosis, since it is this dichotomy that distinguishes the psychedelic from the palliative and/or narcotic. To mark this shift, Huxley replaces the concept of the escapist *soma* with that of the revelatory psychedelic.¹⁴⁴ But as with Jean Cocteau,

¹⁴³ As with Cocteau, it is impossible for Huxley to speak without ambivalence about the drug’s benefits without first overcoming the constitutive ambivalence of poison and cure, or of metaphoric and metonymic interpretation. Like Cocteau’s distinction between authentic and inauthentic smokers, though, Huxley negotiates this ambivalence by suggesting that there is a proper and improper attitude toward the drug. Depending upon this attitude, any given subject can make the drug into an unequivocally beneficial or harmful thing.

¹⁴⁴ It is the purpose of this study to represent this transformation as a passage from metonymic to metaphoric structures of language, a correlative movement from diachrony to synchrony, and in Bataille’s terms, from discontinuity to continuity. The drug offers an experience *other* to that of discursive thought,

“palliation” also becomes a key concept in his writing, one that he addresses most explicitly in his 1942 text, *The Art of Seeing*. In this text, Huxley attempts to affirm the value of the “Bates Method” of optometry: a form of optical rehabilitation that gained popularity in the 1950s and 60s, and claimed that it could strengthen the muscles of the eye and restore its ability to see through strategic exercises. Huxley uses the word “palliative” in this account to refer to the use of corrective lenses to address problems with vision. He speaks of the palliative in terms of paralysis or concealment, and claims that corrective lenses doom proper seeing by locking the eye into a set of poor habits. Corrective lenses, he reminds us, can only operate if the eye continues to perform the same problems that already afflict it. Thus the palliative is, in principle, a negative phenomenon.

In *The Art of Seeing*, Huxley’s expressed purpose is “to correlate the methods of visual education with the findings of modern psychology and critical philosophy” (vii). His central argument is that the defective functioning of an organ “can be re-educated toward normality by proper mind-body coordination” (25). Huxley refers to proper seeing as an art or a “psycho-physical skill,” and compares proper seeing to the ability to play a piano: a full-bodied coordination, whose success is based in no way on that person’s knowledge of the individual, physiological movements harnessed by that coordination (11). In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, Huxley perceives the art of seeing as a form of “motor competence,” an embodied skill that cannot be conceptually broken into its component

and its positive aspects are always connected to the privileging of what I have attempted to articulate as metaphorical experience.

movements without ceasing to operate. Proper seeing, he insists, as with any mark of good health, involves the proper coordination of the entire body. Treatment cannot simply target the afflicted organ. The ideal state of perception, Huxley affirms, is not one of visual mastery but one of “dynamic relaxation,” for one cannot hope to perceive well by staring at the objects of perception in an attempt to control or dominate them. One must rather adopt a state of passivity that allows the eye to relax, and therein to function better and see more dynamically. For the purposes of this study, the most crucial aspect of Huxley’s *Art of Seeing* is its explicit overdetermination of physiological science by general philosophical principles. For example, Huxley states that his purpose in this text is “to demonstrate the essential reasonableness of a method, which turns out to be nothing more nor less than the practical application to the problems of vision of certain *theoretical principles*, universally accepted as true” (vii; my emphasis).¹⁴⁵ In other words, he explicitly informs readers that *The Art of Seeing* is not simply a book about optometry, but a book about experience and thought in general.¹⁴⁶ More specifically, he suggests from the outset that a spirit of dynamic passivity is the only thing that can allow a subject to “see” properly, in both a physiological and spiritual sense.

¹⁴⁵ Huxley addresses the empirical reason for why Bates has been rejected: namely the Hemholtz hypothesis, which attributes “the eye’s power of accommodation to the action of the ciliary muscle upon the lens” (10). Bates historically claimed that the eyeball itself lengthened and shortened as it adjusted to near and far objects, a claim that even in its time was thought to be demonstrably false. Huxley however reaffirms that he does not care whether Bates is right on this point or not: “[f]or my concern is not with the anatomical mechanism of accommodation, but with the art of seeing – and the art of seeing does not stand or fall with any particular physiological hypothesis” (11). Again, he asserts on general principle that it is absurd to think the eye is completely incapable of healing itself, and this claim highlights his overdetermination of all physiological knowledge with general philosophical principles.

¹⁴⁶ When Huxley speaks of the “general principles” of vision, one cannot underestimate how heavily he relies on the moral dichotomy of revelation and concealment. These general principles so profoundly overdetermine *The Art of Seeing* that they lead Huxley to advocate the seemingly ludicrous practice of “sunning” the eyes. Because the eye is a revelatory organ, he argues, that is something designed to let light into the organism, one should take time every day to raise one’s head and look at the sun (47).

In his argument against poor seeing habits, Huxley reserves his strongest criticism for artificial, corrective lenses, which he refers to consistently as “palliatives.” Palliatives, in principle, are antithetical to the proper functioning of the human organism, whether they are corrective lenses for myopic eyes or crutches for broken legs. Palliatives, Huxley argues, “neutralize the symptoms, but do not get rid of the causes of defective vision,” and from this observation we can draw two conclusions: “either defects in the organs of seeing are incurable, and can only be palliated by mechanical neutralization of symptoms; or else something is radically wrong with the current methods of treatment” (1). The doctor must work in tandem with the body’s inherent ability to cure itself, Huxley claims, and the palliative – being a general principle as much as any discrete object – quickly becomes an object of moral condemnation:

[i]t is perhaps worth remarking that, even if the value of Dr. Bates’s technique were generally recognized, there would be small likelihood of any immediate or considerable decline in the consumption of optical glass. Visual re-education demands from the pupil a certain amount of thought, time and trouble. But thought, time and trouble are precisely what the overwhelming majority of men and women are not prepared to give. (9)

It is the vices of human sloth and inertia, writes Huxley, which will continue to guarantee the opticians at least nine-tenths of their current business. He goes on to make psychosomatic arguments for the connection between poor vision and immoral behaviour, and praises the wisdom of studies that link poor vision with telling lies and being a “boring” person (28). On a similar note, he speaks of ulcers and tuberculosis developing from stress (47). This connection that Huxley draws between the physiology

and psychology of the individual subject prepares the ground for his general conception of morality and experience. But of all the moral failures that cause an individual to lose his or her good seeing habits, Huxley finds one worse than all the others.

It is ultimately the possessive, individualistic, dominating ego that prevents the individual subject from seeing properly. Huxley makes this point as clear as possible when he writes that

[m]alfunctioning and strain tend to appear whenever the conscious 'I' interferes with instinctively acquired habits of proper use, either by trying too hard to do well, or by feeling unduly anxious about possible mistakes. In the building up of any psycho-physical skills the conscious 'I' must give orders, but not too many orders – must supervise the forming of habits of proper functioning, but without fuss and in a modest, self-denying way. (13)

The problems that the interfering 'I' creates for perception are self-compounding. A decrease in the ability to see leads an increased effort to see, which leads to further strain and ocular degeneration. Here, Huxley connects proper seeing to a certain human attitude, and the argument he provides in this oft-overlooked text, I argue, is essential to any reading of his later work (particularly *The Doors of Perception*). Conceptual, language-centered thought and the domineering, self-possessive ego are the enemies of both proper seeing and moral behaviour. The subject who would attempt to master something by breaking it into component parts will never see well, for he or she is morally incapable of dynamic relaxation, which requires a submissive, peaceful, and

relaxed attitude. Huxley does not cease with moralizing at this stage in the argument, as he goes on to characterize the spirit of proper seeing in religious terms:

‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest shall be added.’ This saying is as profoundly true on the plane of the psycho-physiological skills as it is upon the planes of spirituality, ethics and politics [...] If, on the contrary, we persist in behaving as greedy and thoughtless end-gainers, aiming directly at better vision (through mechanical devices for neutralizing symptoms) and increased efficiency (through unremitting strain and effort), we shall end by seeing worse and getting less work done. (40)

The Art of Seeing always returns to the ideal of “dynamic relaxation” as the best means to cure poor seeing and live a happy life, and this state of relaxation can only be achieved by those who have curbed the interference of the conscious ‘I’ in experience. These ideals will come to a head in Huxley’s final novel, *Island*, but Huxley provides earlier cues to his theory of a Final End for experience, the pursuit of which is supposed to define a proper relationship to perception and desire.

The title of Huxley’s 1944 novel, *Time Must Have a Stop*, alludes to the metaphorical notion of stilled time I have explored throughout this project, but the connection is not as comfortable as it might appear at first glance. The novel’s largely satirical tone tends to resemble the “pawky playfulness” that Kulwant Singh Gill claims to typify Huxley’s novels prior to 1932.¹⁴⁷ It follows a young poet named Sebastian

¹⁴⁷ See Gill (208).

Barnack, and describes the life and death of his worldly uncle Eustace.¹⁴⁸ Despite the imperative that the novel's title seems to put forward, Uncle Eustace does not enter a place of completely stilled time following his death, since his arrival into such a space would be impossible to articulate in language. Eustace is a sceptic to the core, and does not believe in religion or an afterlife. However, when he suffers a fatal heart attack midway through the novel, he finds himself caught up in a ghostly limbo between life and death, a limbo that he himself seems to have created by struggling against the forces of self-dissolution that call him toward continuity.

In the passage representing his experience immediately following his heart attack, Eustace finds that

[a]ll sound had died away, and it was quite dark. But in the void and the silence there was still a kind of knowledge, a faint awareness. Awareness not of a name or person, not of things present, not of memories of the past, not even of here or there—for there was no place, only an existence whose single dimension was this knowledge of being ownerless and without possessions and alone. (136)

In this instance, Eustace confronts the void of death as a place of “absence ever more total, more excruciatingly a privation” (136-37). Rather than embracing this absence,

¹⁴⁸ The novel also contains significant political undertones, exemplified by the menacing presence of the Italian fascisti. While I will go on to discuss the overall trajectory of Huxley's thought more thoroughly, I will for now suggest that the defeat of fascism in Germany and Italy in 1945 helped precipitate Huxley's shift from a politically skeptical view of drugs to a spiritually encouraging one. When Huxley wrote *Brave New World*, fascism was beginning to emerge as a potent political force in Europe, and Huxley would have understandably been wary of any pharmaceutical substance that offered relief from the discomfort of too much skeptical thinking (the primary purpose of *soma* in *Brave New World*). At the moment of fascism's defeat in Germany and Italy, however, Huxley seems to take a marked turn toward a more spiritually-inflected view of drug use, as one can find in *The Perennial Philosophy*, which he published in 1945, discussed below.

Eustace meets it stubbornly with a mixture of despair and “growing hunger” (137). At perhaps no other point in his entire opus does Huxley so fully engage the violent ambivalence of a *jouissance* based in the subject’s failing circulation around a “hole” in symbolic awareness.¹⁴⁹ That said, the experience also appeals to a feminine model of *jouissance*, in which the subject feels him or herself given over to a supreme Other, as Huxley’s novel indicates that “[t]hat within which the awareness of absence knew itself, that by which it was included and interpenetrated, was no longer an absence, but had become the presence of another awareness. The awareness of absence *knew itself known*” (137; my emphasis). The absence, in knowing itself known, also verges upon a blissful dissolution into the absent Other, just as “there was joy in being known, in being thus inclined within a shining presence, in thus being interpenetrated by a shining presence” (137).¹⁵⁰ In his worst moments of anguish, Eustace feels himself to be “[a]n unhappy dust of nothingness, a poor little harmless clot of mere privation, crushed from without, scattered from within, but still resisting, still refusing, in spite of the anguish, to give up its right to a separate existence” (140). This struggle between the forces of metaphoric dissolution and metonymic self-steeling (or in Bataille’s terms, between continuity and discontinuity), appears to go on “[f]or an immense duration [as] the two awarenesses

¹⁴⁹ In this comment, I compare Eustace’s experience to the notion of failed circulation that Žižek claims to mark Lacanian *jouissance* (see my discussion of Žižek in my introductory chapter, pg. 39). One could find a similar description of *jouissance* in Lacan’s twentieth seminar, in which he writes that such a *jouissance* “is promoted only on the basis of infinity (*de l’infinitude*). I will say which infinity – that, no more and no less, based on Zeno’s paradox” (*Feminine* 7-8). In other words, it is a *jouissance* based on the subject’s endless approach to the object of its desire, an approach that can come closer to its object without ever fully reaching it. Lacan adds, however, that this model of *jouissance* stands only for “one pole of sexed beings,” this being the phallic or metonymic pole (8).

¹⁵⁰ This space of *jouissance* intensifies with the vacillation between desire and its explosion in a bliss unchanging in its infinitude, as “[t]here was hunger still. Hunger for yet more knowledge of a yet more total denial of an absence. Hunger, but also the satisfaction of hunger, also bliss. And then as the light increased, hunger again for profounder satisfactions, for a bliss more intense” (18).

hung as though balanced—the knowledge that knew itself separate, knew its own right to separateness, and the knowledge that knew the shameful absence and the necessity for its agonizing annihilation in the light” (140). Eventually though, the light of bliss wanes and Eustace begins to have recollections of his past life. It is these recollections that circle around him and restore to him his sensation of separate existence, a sensation that is “without bliss, but profoundly reassuring” for Eustace’s sense of discrete selfhood (141). In this passage, the subject actively chooses its separate existence, the realm of hunger and privation, over its annihilation in radiant bliss, and this rejection makes a ghost of it. As such, the passage exists in profound tension with the title of Huxley’s text, which issues the imperative that, if Eustace’s time has not come yet, it *must* come eventually. This passage marks perhaps the last strong depiction of a character clinging to selfhood¹⁵¹ in Huxley’s career (in the vein of Bernard Marx), for it is only a year

¹⁵¹ As the text continues, Uncle Eustace is eventually summoned into the presence of the living during a séance. The scene is largely satirical toward the fortune-teller medium who runs the séance, and who repeatedly misinterprets the messages that Eustace tries to communicate. To such an extent, one could find in this scene a confirmation of Helen Sword’s argument in *Ghostwriting Modernism* (2002), which asserts that “ghosts affirm the interpretive imperative of all modern existence, communicating in code (raps, knocks, anagrams, opaque metaphors) from beyond or within the mysterious crypts they inhabit” (164). “Ghosts, after all,” Sword continues,

are hermeneutic entities, both etymologically—like Hermes, the Greek messenger god, they possess a privileged ability to pass between the worlds of the living and the dead—and practically: all ghosts demand interpretation. Their indeterminacy appeals mightily, as we have seen, to a postmodern sensibility. Yet their very insubstantiality also offers a kind of interpretive cloud cover, an exhilarating opportunity for those who invoke them to escape semantic precision. (165)

To this extent, Sword connects ghosts and spirits to Saussurian linguistics, claiming that Saussure “anticipates not only a major principle of modernist poetics but also the spiritualist narratives of the literate mediums [...] whose synesthetic fantasies, despite their sometimes transcendental vocabulary, evince a keen awareness of the essentially arbitrary and unstable nature of the signifier” (19). Indeed, *Time Must Have a Stop* has a strange place within the trajectory I am outlining here. It demonstrates a satirical attitude toward those who wish to communicate with a ghostly afterlife. In this sense, Huxley might critique the human fantasy of retaining a sense of selfhood after death (along with the human attempt to communicate with such a ghostly self). In *The Perennial Philosophy* (published one year later), Huxley suggests that one can glimpse the limit experience of death only indirectly, and that one cannot treat it as something that can be addressed directly, through the projected form of a human other (a ghost). For as the title of Huxley’s novel insists, the self can struggle against its self-dissolution all it wishes, but eventually *time must have a*

following *Time Must Have a Stop* that Huxley writes his most sustained critique of autonomous selfhood and its rootedness in jealousy and desire – *The Perennial Philosophy*.

It is in *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945) that Huxley most thoroughly explores the concept of a Final End that he invokes in his revised forward to *Brave New World*, *The Art of Seeing*, and throughout the rest of his career. He also introduces many of the spiritual virtues that he will later connect to the drug experience in *Doors of Perception* and *Island*. As the title of *The Perennial Philosophy* suggests, Huxley wishes to illuminate a spiritual truth to which human thought returns again and again in the course of its history:

Philosophia perennis – the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing – the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being – the thing is immemorial and universal. (9)

stop. That said, one could also read the spirit-realm in this instance as a liminal space between living selfhood and total self-dissolution, a space that does not have a comfortable place within Huxley's thinking, and which Huxley can only approach by reverting to his earlier tone of satirical removal. To this extent, *Time Must Have a Stop* occupies a fascinating and somewhat incongruent status within Huxley's otherwise smooth movement toward an endorsement of psychedelics and mystical self-dissolution.

Aspects of this unitary Reality or Ground of all being are to be found in every religion in the world, Huxley claims,¹⁵² for it is an absolute universal truth. Further, the thing humanity must overcome to participate in this Perennial Philosophy is conceptual knowledge in general, which emerges in the psyche as the child grows older and (as we might expect by now) is connected to the dominating, possessive ‘I.’¹⁵³ Echoing Robert Graves’s “The Cool Web” once again, Huxley admits that the mind might increase its store of “useful” material as the child grows older, but “these gains are offset by a certain deterioration in the quality of immediate apprehension, a blunting and loss of intuitive power” (10). Huxley aligns himself directly with a Wordsworthian conception of childhood when he says that “the habit of analytical thought is fatal to the intuitions of integral thinking, whether on the ‘psychic’ or the spiritual level” (37). But no matter how alienated consciousness might become, Huxley affirms that any mind, at any stage in the life-cycle, can experience a direct awareness of eternal consciousness.

¹⁵² June Deery, in *Aldous Huxley and the Mysticism of Science* gives a stinging critique of Huxley’s *Perennial Philosophy*. But she shows compassion when she adds that Huxley, like others this century [...] was desperately looking for a way to transcend dogmatic disputes. He therefore identified a highest common denominator which freed him of allegiance to any one religious tradition. Similar cross-cultural descriptions of the mystical experience were reassuring, so Huxley tended to override diversity to suggest that there is only one version of this experience or that his preferred interpretation is superior. (Deery 102)

I agree with Deery’s verdict, although I would still suggest that it is somewhat predicated on a fundamental privileging of heterogeneity and difference over homogeneity and similarity, an attitude that has flourished in many fields of literary study since Huxley’s time.

¹⁵³ The connections between *The Art of Seeing* and *The Perennial Philosophy* are many, but Signe Toksvig, in a review of the latter, articulates these connections wonderfully by writing: “In *The Art of Seeing* Mr. Huxley told how to cure physical myopia. Since spiritual myopia is no less common, perhaps Mr. Huxley in *The Perennial Philosophy* has, at this time, written the most needed book in the world” (361-62 in *Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage*).

The Perennial Philosophy is concerned with an unchanging divine Reality.¹⁵⁴

Further, this reality subtends “the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfill certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit” (11).¹⁵⁵ In this sense, one cannot use conceptual knowledge to grasp wilfully this divine Ground, for it is “ineffable in terms of discursive thought” (40). The fact that this knowledge is in fact an ineffable non-knowledge helps explain why Huxley constructs *The Perennial Philosophy* the way he does: as a series of fragmentary quotations interspersed with brief commentary, much like Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*. It is by saturating the reader’s awareness with fragmentary citations that Huxley hopes to convey an *intuitive trace* of the mystical experience, something that clings to language like a residue but can only appear to people who have achieved a suitable submissiveness of spirit. Huxley tries to speak of something that is clearly beyond the realm of the signifying chain, for it is something that “can be immanent without being modified by the becoming of that in which it dwells” (17). Thus it is not enough for the subject to know this Oneness in his or her own soul; one must be able to

¹⁵⁴ In making this claim, I do not mean to ignore the earlier phases of Huxley’s work, in which he undoubtedly assumes a position of skeptical removal toward the bourgeois-idealist search for absolute truths. However, I do agree with Singh Gill’s portrayal of Huxley’s conceptual arc, which traces a movement from early, satirical accounts of religion to a later credulity toward the fulfillments of mystical experience.

¹⁵⁵ Holmes writes that Huxley, “who wrote in so many styles of verse, whose strategy in fiction allowed the projection of various selves, must find the principle ‘that shall preserve him identical with himself through all the changes in the outward and inward environment of his mind’” (Holmes 52). I disagree with Holmes’s contention here, and argue that Huxley does not wish to find his unchanging identity in the sense of a discrete ego. It is not a harmonization of his diverse psychic tendencies that he seeks, but a Oneness that connects him to all things in a profoundly self-mortifying way. Holmes later acknowledges Huxley’s emphasis on the dissolution of the self, but editorially adds that “the degree of [Huxley’s] insistence on mortification is a mistake” (147). I believe that this claim amounts to little more than Holmes’s personal moral opinion. For Huxley, the emphasis on self-mortification is of irreplaceable importance for mystical experience.

perceive oneness *amidst* the ephemerality and plurality that conditions the world of material phenomena. Huxley perhaps offers a complete privileging of the metaphoric or continuous pole of experience when he claims that “[i]t is from the more or less obscure intuition of the oneness that is the ground and principle of all multiplicity that philosophy takes its source [...] All science, in Meyerson’s phrase, is the reduction of multiplicities to identities” (20). One seeks to collapse differences, but as one does so, he or she comes to an experience of something beyond language. As I suggested in the previous chapter, it is through the metaphoric collapsing of difference that one moves toward a limit experience; it is a movement from discontinuity toward continuity that metaphorically takes the subject beyond the alienating, displacing structures of metonymic being.¹⁵⁶

In his advocacy of the self-mortifying spirit, Huxley claims that even language itself recognizes the evil inherent in the fall from original Oneness. It is the “principle of the two,” he argues, which leads humanity astray from the divine One that unites all things. For Lacan, the split-ness of the two is the very principle that allows for signification, and yet Huxley insists that

[t]he Greek prefix dys- (as in dyspepsia) and the Latin dis- (as in dishonourable) are both derived from ‘duo’ [...] Traces of that ‘second which leads you astray’ can be found in ‘dubious,’ ‘doubt’ and *Zweifel* – for to doubt is to be double-minded.” (26-27)

¹⁵⁶ Hal Bridges similarly notes that in Huxley’s work “the troublesome ego becomes in his exposition the opposite of good, the substance of evil” and that like Master Eckhart, Huxley “link[s] evil and the self with time... For the desires of the self corrupt all temporal acts, even those of supposedly selfless men, such as idealist scientists” (347). I believe that my re-reading of Lacan can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the correlation Bridges draws here between the self, desire, and unfolding temporality.

The two is what alienates the one from itself, says Huxley, and it is precisely the perception of the world as alien to the self that is the founding moment of the split-mindedness that humans spend the rest of their lives trying to overcome. One can find the Ground of Being within or without the subject, but the subject can best conceive it as a reciprocal relation between perceiver and perceived. Without doubt, there are dangers inherent to the intoxication involved in focusing exclusively on one's Inner Light, solipsism being one of them. That is why Huxley ensures that there must be an interpersonal ethos¹⁵⁷ involved in this mystical Oneness, an ethos that the subject can bring back from its limit-experience and continue to perceive within the realm of symbolic, discursive plurality:

When God is regarded as exclusively immanent, legalism and external practices are abandoned and there is a concentration on the Inner Light. The dangers now are quietism and antinomianism, a partial modification of consciousness that is useless or even harmful, because it is not accompanied by the transformation of character which is the necessary prerequisite of a total, complete and spiritually fruitful transformation of consciousness. (44)

¹⁵⁷ B.L. Chakoo insists that no chemical substance in Huxley's work can ever lead the mind to a consistent ethos, and insists that one can only come upon an ethos through intense contemplation:

If spiritual advancement can be had by a change in body-chemistry, is there not the danger that morality and self-discipline will be regarded as superfluous? Certainly it is ethics and the cultivation of virtues, wisdom and renunciation, faith and grace that differentiate the bliss of a mystic from the peace of a mescaline-eater. (256-7)

I maintain, however, that Huxley accounts for this problem through his articulation of the "proper spirit" of drug use. Nearly all charges against Huxley's endorsement of mescaline insist that he views the drug as a guarantor of authentic mystical experience. These charges ignore the substantial ethical dilemma that Huxley exhibits in *Doors* and throughout his career, and they ignore Huxley's unending efforts to articulate the "proper spirit" in which one *must* take the drug for its positive effects to become manifest.

Within the terms of social utility, one can only hope die to oneself and shine the light of achieved Oneness outward so that others might perceive it. One can only be a pacifist in this regard, because just as “dynamic relaxation” achieves the best seeing in the eye, it is pacifism that achieves the most cumulative good in the world. One cannot speak of a personal mystical experience in words and dogmatically compel others to accept this testimony. “There can be no taking of motes out of other people’s eyes,” Huxley insists, “so long as the beam in our own eye prevents us from seeing the divine Sun and working by its light” (377). However, Huxley is also emphatic that while the mystical experience can only ever be temporary, it is important that one return to normal awareness retaining a spiritual trace of this glimpse into eternity.

As *The Perennial Philosophy* unfolds, Huxley puts more distance between his concept of a divine Ground and the principles one would associate with the Lacanian symbolic (and signifying chain). Huxley criticizes modern experience for being “an indefinite number of successive and presumably causally connected events, involving an indefinite number of separate, individual things, lives and thoughts, the whole constituting a presumably orderly cosmos” (56). He criticizes not only the interpretation of experience as an unfolding chain, but as an unfolding chain constituted by the law of symbolic difference and discrete entities.¹⁵⁸ But if we wish to think of the world as a continuum beyond this structure, he admits,

we find that our traditional syntax and vocabulary are quite inadequate

[...] [for] the divine Ground of all existence is not merely a continuum, it

¹⁵⁸ David Garret Izzo also insists that for Huxley “art and romantic love are rivers to the ocean from which all Awe really derives: the Vedantic ocean of mystical consciousness. Awe, however it chooses to manifest itself, intimates the unified consciousness of the psychic Eden” (146-47).

is also out of time, and different, not merely in degree, but in kind from the worlds to which traditional language and the languages of mathematics are adequate. (56)

Perhaps some day, he speculates, humanity will develop a way of representing this continuum, but that day has not come yet. Ultimately, he picks up from his ethics of perception in *Art of Seeing*, and asserts that the principle of self-mortification can provide the individual with an experience of the divine Ground. Direct knowledge of the Ground, he concludes, “cannot be had except by union, and union can be achieved only by the annihilation of the self-regarding ego, which is the barrier separating the ‘thou’ from the ‘That’” (57). The social manifestation of the dominating, possessive self is something Huxley expresses in terms similar to Bataille’s notion of project, as Huxley contends that people still “hold fast to the religion of Inevitable Progress” and use this religion as an excuse for behaving toward nature as “an overweening conqueror and tyrant” (108). These people, Huxley affirms, never manage to find happiness, and their rage for dominance derives from their rage at being unable to experience union with the Ground of being. If one were to compare the ethos of this text to that of the Fordian society in *Brave New World*, one of the greatest differences would be the attitude toward technological progress and consumerism, which serve in *Brave New World* as a means to distract individuals perpetually from their alienated being. However, the mystical experience in *The Perennial Philosophy* does not necessarily contradict an experience like that of *Brave New World’s* solidarity service, save for the latter’s cooption of the experience for the purposes of social control. Huxley wants to take the “melting” dynamic of these services and resignify it as a site of ecstatic revelation, rather than a

dizzying spell that simply consolidates a loyalty to autocratic power. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Bataille similarly writes in *Eroticism* that “mystical experience reveals an absence of any object. Objects are identified with discontinuity, whereas mystical experience, as far as our strength allows us to break from our discontinuity, confers on us a sense of continuity” (23). What Huxley struggles with here, as he will in *Island*, is the attempt to wed the metaphoric pole of experience with the metonymic. The psychedelic drug provides a revelatory limit-experience, but it can only ever be a temporary one. Huxley describes the ideal experience as wordless and eternal, but he cannot resist his urge to convey this experience in a linguistic context and somehow apply it within a prescriptive social model.

It might be the case, however, that the experience of which Huxley speaks is inherently excessive to symbolic structures, and that the two cannot be brought together. In the metonymic, diachronic framework, happiness can only seem like a temporary fix. Thus Huxley tries to escape this structure altogether and focus on a metaphoric interpretation of experience. The solidarity services of *Brave New World* do not appear so sinister when one looks at Huxley’s entire opus, because these services serve the synchronic, metaphoric pole of experience. In a metonymic interpretation of desire, however, the moment of dissolution in these services can only appear as concealing and narcotic; it is just another temporary “fix” in an ongoing chain that cannot be transgressed. In a metaphoric interpretation, though, the psychedelic gives the subject a glimpse of the permanent unity that exists beyond the illusory unfolding of the sober, signifying chain.

The Doors of Perception (1954-61)

When he makes his case for psychedelic drugs in *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley is certain to avoid the charge of narcosis (something one could level against *soma*) by aggressively re-signifying the drug as a source of revelation.¹⁵⁹ But how, we must ask, does he consolidate this re-signification? The answer to this question is clear from the outset: Huxley depicts the *natural operations of the human eye as fundamentally palliative and/or narcotic*. Drawing from the idea that a mind develops a protective shield against external stimuli,¹⁶⁰ Huxley insists that the eye operates first and foremost as a filter for experience, selecting for apprehension only those bits of reality that will not overwhelm or confuse the perceiver. In this sense, the natural operations of the eye act as a palliative against hyper-stimulation, and the psychedelic drug is therefore necessary if the subject hopes to arrest this palliative operation and allow the bulk of stimuli to enter his or her consciousness. It is in *The Art of Seeing* that Huxley explicitly begins to argue against conventional views on human optics, but in this earlier text he also argues that the eye is first and foremost an organ designed to *allow light to enter* the perceiving

¹⁵⁹ Holmes identifies some of the same connections I attempt to draw here, writing that “[i]nstead of the highly verbalized education rooted in our culture since the Middle Ages, we need training in the non-verbal humanities, illumination by our not-selves that will let us get out of their light. Much of the training involves proper use of the body, by Alexanderism, the Bates method for vision, and ‘systematic relaxation’” (176).

¹⁶⁰ This marks the governing dynamic of Freud’s death drive. However, Georg Simmel in “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903) anticipates this same element of modern psychic being when he writes that the sheer quantity of mental stimuli confronting the modern subject threatens to dissolve it entirely. Thus “[t]he reaction to metropolitan phenomena is shifted to that organ which is least sensitive and quite remote from the depth of personality. Intellectuality is thus seen to preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life” (184). The numbing of psychic stimuli marks, in Simmel’s case, not a subjective attempt to decrease stimulation to the tensionless, inorganic point of death, but rather to preserve the subject in the face of overwhelming external forces. It is a bitter reality, however, that “[t]he self-preservation of certain personalities is bought at the price of devaluating the whole objective world, a devaluation which in the end unavoidably drag’s one’s personality down into a feeling of the same worthlessness” (187).

organism. This earlier conception of vision (1943) leads Huxley to argue that in order to see properly, one must achieve a state of dynamic relaxation. However, Huxley argues in *The Doors of Perception* that the sober eye in fact reduces stimuli, and that the human subject might often require a psychoactive drug to inhibit this psychically palliative (or narcotic) function. Thus while corrective lenses appear to be the “palliative” culprits behind poor seeing in *The Art of Seeing*, it is the sober mind (and particularly the *modern* mind, steeling itself against unprecedented levels of sensory bombardment) that assumes this function in *The Doors of Perception*.¹⁶¹ This conceptual shift does not alter Huxley’s general views on the importance of a passive, self-mortifying experience, but it *does* assign much more importance to the role of drugs in achieving such an experience.

Implicitly, *The Doors of Perception* connects the narcotic operations of the eye to the feelings of dullness and daily suffering that plague all modern individuals. In this respect, the eye’s response to sensory bombardment results in a sensation of blind drudgery similar to that implied by the title of Huxley’s earlier *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936). Like the blind Samson (the subject of this title), the modern individual becomes subject to the tyranny of an eye that provides him or her *only* enough awareness to continue working at the utilitarian mill-stone of everyday life, yet not enough to glimpse any truth or beauty beyond this oppressive horizon. For Huxley, language-oriented thought replicates the eye’s palliative dynamic, converting experience into words and thus diluting its contents in the same measure as it makes them palatable. In *Doors*, Huxley

¹⁶¹ I make this contrast for the sake of clarifying this shift in Huxley’s thought, but would like to add that conceptually, the eye can never exclusively allow or block stimuli in Huxley’s thought. What shifts is Huxley’s representational *emphasis* regarding the eye’s operations. When one takes his work as a whole, one finds that the eye occupies a paradoxical position, both letting stimuli into consciousness while simultaneously filtering it out.

also speaks of humanity's existence in language as a source of its chronic dissatisfaction: "[i]n a world where education is predominantly verbal," he says, "highly educated people find it all but impossible to pay serious attention to anything but words and notions" (76).

Ultimately, the individual seeks out the psychoactive drug in order

[t]o be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and inner world, not as they appear to an animal obsessed with survival or to a human being obsessed with words and notions, but as they are apprehended, directly and unconditionally, by Mind at Large—this is an experience of inestimable value to everyone and especially to the intellectual. (73)

Mind at Large is a mystical category for Huxley, one that is neither linguistic nor survivalist, but which transcends these partial categories; it is the *sum* of human consciousness, a plenitude that recalls the Divine Ground of *The Perennial Philosophy*.

From the very beginning of *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley dismisses physiological drawbacks as a possible point of objection to drug use, just as he does in *Brave New World*. "Administered in suitable doses," he affirms, a drug like mescaline "changes the quality of consciousness more profoundly and yet is less toxic than any other substance in the pharmacologist's repertory" (9-10). He also attempts to undo the conceptual boundary separating the human subject's corporeal "inside" and "outside," for this boundary is of paramount importance for the moral denigration of drugs.¹⁶² The decomposition of adrenaline, the experience of pain, or even sheer hunger can create a hallucinatory experience like that of mescaline, Huxley argues, and all of these

¹⁶² See Derrida's "The Rhetoric of Drugs," pg. 229.

phenomena originate in a human's supposed "inside." By undermining the traditional and practical objections to drug use, Huxley thus forces readers to confront the root causes of their objections, and the fetishism of pain that they might ultimately share with John the Savage (and even Jean Cocteau).

In terms very similar to Bataille's theory of eroticism, Huxley describes human loneliness in *The Doors of Perception* as yet another cause for the desire of self-transcendence:

[w]e live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves [...] Embraced, the lovers desperately try to fuse their insulated ecstasies into a single self-transcendence; in vain. By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude. Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies – all these are private and, except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable [...] From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes. (12-13)

In *Heaven and Hell* (1956), Huxley also writes of how "[i]n the nuptial embrace personality is melted down; the individual (it is the recurrent theme of Lawrence's poems and novels) ceases to be himself and becomes part of the vast impersonal universe" (130). Humans attempt to use language to connect with one another, he says, but this is an ultimately imperfect and unsatisfying means of intimacy.¹⁶³ We require something more immanent, and different people – born with different biological predispositions –

¹⁶³ "The universal human need for liberation," he adds, "from the restrictions of mundane existence is satisfied by experiencing altered states of consciousness. That we dream every night—whether we remember it or not—shows that we have a natural predisposition to these altered states, but people also pursue them in more active ways" (4).

require different things¹⁶⁴ and are not likely to understand one another's experiences. But whether it is through hypnosis, systematic meditation, or drugs, one could presumably know "from the inside, what the visionary, the medium, even the mystic were talking about" (14). As I have suggested about Cocteau, Huxley's argument for drugs thus aligns "sober" consciousness with alienation from one's surroundings, an apparent lack of meaning in conceptual thought, and a desire to escape diachrony as such.

Perhaps the most important moment in Huxley's re-signification of the drug as a psychedelic occurs when he suggests that the normal human mind – via the domination of the eye – functions as a concealing palliative: "[a] sensory apparatus, Freud tells us, doesn't only play the role of extinguisher or of shock-absorber, like the [pheta] apparatus in general, but also plays the role of sieve" (47). In the end, humans deal only with "selected bits of reality" (47).¹⁶⁵ Mescaline does not add something to the body, Huxley affirms, but rather inhibits the brain's production of enzymes that keep perception's "reducing valve" operational. The brain never gets its once-and-for-all dose of sugar, but is constantly producing it. Notice how Huxley signifies the normal operations of the brain and eye as forever unfolding:

Most people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve. In others temporary by-passes may be

¹⁶⁴ From *Crome Yellow* (1921) to *Island* (1962), Huxley never ceases to speak of the need to account for people of various genetic predispositions. This aspect of his thought reveals the extent to which scientific discourse influences his writings more than someone like Jean Cocteau.

¹⁶⁵ Both Huxley and Walter Benjamin acknowledge this same model of experience, and both suggest that there is little difference between a sieve and a shock absorber.

acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate ‘spiritual exercises,’ or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. (24)

Through an informed use of mescaline, Huxley thus seeks an experience that bypasses the work of the mind’s palliative sieve, and he claims to find just such an experience through his personal use of mescaline. It is this personal experience of mescaline intoxication, in fact, that is the primary subject of Huxley’s *Doors of Perception*.

After Huxley reportedly ingests mescaline,¹⁶⁶ he is asked by an observing friend whether an object of thought is agreeable or disagreeable, and tends to reply that it is neither. Rather, he claims that the object simply *is*, beyond the use of any binary opposition. He uses the term “Is-ness” to describe this phenomenon, which he borrows from Master Eckhart, a thinker whom he quotes continuously in *The Perennial Philosophy*. Huxley voices a strong disagreement with Plato’s abstraction of the Idea from the material world, and claims that one must instead find the divine One in the physical objects of perception. Plato, Huxley jibes, could never have seen the flowers that *he* does on mescaline, for Plato

¹⁶⁶ Huxley admits that he sat down and recorded his intoxication a full day after his mescaline trip had ended. He reconstructed the experience from the accounts of his wife and Dr. Humphrey Osmond, along with an audio recording of the event. Critic Stuart Walton is deeply critical of this maneuver, claiming that *Doors* is “a piece of overblown philosophical journalese,” which only gives readers access to the “pre-mescaline Huxley” who unconvincingly assures readers “that his fondness for Eastern mysticism is plumbed more deeply than ever” (313). I, for one, find this criticism somewhat harsh, but I agree with Walton’s general observation that there is something dishonest, hypocritical, and even vain in Huxley’s unwillingness to give readers a sample of writing taken down *during* his intoxication. The unwillingness seems particularly hypocritical when one thinks of how forcefully Huxley asks his readers, throughout his later career, to let go of their jealous sense of self-control and autonomy. Reinhard Kuhn puts the point better, I think, when he writes that “[a]t best then it would seem that the experimenter with mescaline can describe his hallucinations only after the event, but the results then are usually both banal and false. Banal because all such descriptions resemble each other and false because the very faculties which he employs to depict the extra-sensory state are the ones whose suppression was essential for the creation of this state” (“Hermeneutics” 139).

could never have perceived that what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they were – a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence. (18)

While intoxicated, Huxley witnesses the constant death and renewal that comes with living in an ephemeral world, but he insists on the presence of a Oneness that subtends all the creations and perishings of matter. There is a physical vibration to his perceptions that defies words, and which is similar in this respect to Kant's conception of the beautiful.¹⁶⁷

Huxley, for his part, calls this perceptual phenomenon by the name of "grace":

¹⁶⁷ By this, I refer to Kant's claim in *The Critique of Judgment* that the contemplation of the beautiful "is not directed to concepts; for the judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment (either theoretical or practical), and thus is not *based* on concepts, nor has it concepts as its *purpose*" (53; original emphasis). In other words, the apprehension of beauty is a profoundly disinterested, subjective phenomenon, free from both the imposition of a conscious will or appeal to conceptual understanding. The beautiful is also free of desire, since such an interest "presupposes or generates a want; and, as the determining ground of assent, it leaves the judgment about the object no longer free" (53). The experience of the beautiful, however, still remains a universally communicable state. Huxley similarly attests that his experience of beauty in the mescaline intoxication is something that any human being can also experience, although he might not be able to convey it to them in conceptual language. According to Kant, the experience of the beautiful entails a form of singularity that exceeds the *purpose* of conceptual thought (Reason), and yet at the same time one cannot engage an object without making such an appeal (*purposiveness*) to concepts. The beautiful is thus born out of the existence of purposiveness that finds no correlative purpose, creating a free play or vacillation (Huxley suggests a *vibration*) that repeatedly calls the beautiful object to conceptual apprehension and repeatedly fails to gain a hold, thus throwing the categories of thought itself into play. The beautiful, writes Kant, marks this "excitement of both faculties (Imagination and Understanding) to indeterminate, but yet, through the stimulus of the given sensation, harmonious activity, viz. that which belongs to cognition in general" (66). As I discussed in my previous chapter on Cocteau, Lacan appeals to Kant's notion of beauty in order to describe the intermediary state by which Sophocles's Antigone approaches the moment of her own death. Huxley's experience of beauty similarly short-circuits the workings of the individual will (along with symbolic or conceptual thought) while stopping short of the self-annihilation that Kant would characterize as an encounter with the "sublime," in which "[t]he transcendent (towards which the Imagination is impelled in its apprehension of intuition) is for the Imagination like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself" (*Critique of Judgment* 120). Further, writes Kant, this encounter with the sublime "annihilates the condition of time ... since the time-series is a condition of the internal sense and of an intuition" (121-122). It is also important to make the qualification that for Kant,

I continued to look at the flowers,¹⁶⁸ and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing – but of a breathing without returns to a starting point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning.

(18)

As Huxley continues to move about his house, his medical observer – Doctor Humphrey Osmond – asks him about his sensitivity to spatial relationships, and Huxley claims it is a difficult question to answer. He claims that straight lines break down and walls no longer seem to meet at right angles. He effectively describes a phenomenon antithetical to the consolidation of a Merleau-Pontian body-image when he claims that “[s]pace was still there; but it had lost its predominance [...] And along with indifference to space there went an even more complete indifference to time” (20-21). His watch, Huxley affirms, exists in a different universe than the one he enters on mescaline. This new form of perception also gives him a heightened sense of intercorporeal sympathy with the objects around him. He claims that while looking at a chair’s tubular legs he “spent several

this fear of the Imagination is counterbalanced by an attraction of the suprasensible faculty of Reason, for which the sublime “is not transcendent but in conformity with law to bring about such an effort of the imagination, and consequently here there is the same amount of attraction as there was of repulsion for the mere Sensibility” (120-121). In other words, Kant meets the dangerous, annihilating power of the sublime by affirming that the human faculty of Reason is something suprasensible, and thus capable of holding the willful subject together in such an encounter. In this case, concludes Kant, “wherein the Imagination reaches its maximum, and, in striving to surpass it, [it] *sinks back into itself*, by which, however, a kind of emotional satisfaction is produced” (112: my emphasis). As I will argue in my next chapter, this tendency for the imagination to encounter the abysmal sublime and, via the faculty of Reason, sink back into itself will come to characterize several of Walter Benjamin’s reactions to intoxication in his “Hashish Protocols.”

¹⁶⁸ In a proliferation of words about flowers, he seems to adopt the intoxicated flower-language of his contemporary and friend, D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence, however, rejects the use of drugs in order to attain this position. He seeks this experience in the sober perception of flowers as such, as one finds especially in the explosive (and often exhaustive) descriptions of flower-fields he inserts throughout his first novel, *The White Peacock* (1911).

minutes—or was it several centuries?—not merely gazing at those bamboo legs, but actually *being* them” (22). The body begins orthopaedically to identify with the objects of perception as the differences between them begin to dissolve. Bataille similarly writes that “[e]xperience attains in the end the fusion of object and subject, being as subject non-knowledge, as object the unknown” (*Inner* 9), and one can without doubt find a similar movement toward continuity in Huxley’s description of the mescaline experience.

As one might expect, Huxley finds an opportunity in *Doors* to speak of the profound dilution in self-will that comes with the mescaline experience:

Though the intellect remains unimpaired and though perception is enormously improved, the will suffers a profound change for the worse.

The mescalin[e] taker sees no reason for doing anything in particular and finds most of the causes for which, at ordinary times, he was prepared to act and suffer, profoundly uninteresting. (25)

The subject’s will is what makes him or her pursue objects and projects with the hope that they will eventually provide fulfillment. But this mode of thinking loosens its hold on consciousness in the intoxicated state, for “[w]hen the brain runs out of sugar, the undernourished ego grows weak, can’t be bothered to undertake the necessary chores, and loses all interest in those spatial and temporal relationships which mean so much to an organism bent on getting on in the world” (26). One would experience total satiety, Huxley adds, “[j]ust looking, just being the divine Not-self of flower, of book, of chair, of flannel. That would be enough” (35). But like Cocteau, he continues to feel the call of something like a social, moral imperative. How, he wonders, “could one reconcile this timeless bliss of seeing as one ought to see with the temporal duties of doing what one

ought to do and feeling as one ought to feel?” (35). His immersion within the inhuman objects of the room leaves him little space, Huxley realizes, “for the ordinary, the necessary concerns of human existence, above all for concerns involving persons. For persons are selves and, in one respect at least, I was now a Not-self, simultaneously perceiving and being the Not-self of the things around me” (35).

This lack of interest in other people is perhaps the single greatest problem Huxley finds in the psychedelic experience, for when he becomes intoxicated he sometimes finds that he is perhaps *too* intimate with his surroundings, too indiscriminating in his love of existence. In his movement away from the operations of the symbolic order, Huxley experiences difficulty in looking at the faces of human others, for there is no greater reminder of the symbolic order than to look into the eyes of another subject.¹⁶⁹ Huxley becomes preoccupied with the question of how he can escape the pains of sober thought without leaving the rest of humanity behind. He is demonstrably worried about the quietist attitude that the drug creates in him, and still possessed by a sense of progressive, goal-oriented duty. Mescaline, it seems, cannot fully solve this dilemma. Without a suitable answer to this question of social responsibility, Huxley quickly retreats from the

¹⁶⁹ This unwillingness to meet the eyes of another human subject marks an incommensurability between Huxley’s movement toward self-dissolution and his awareness of symbolic “little others,” whose eyes (metonymically) contain the symbolic demand to pursue enjoyment within the realm of symbolic law – that is the realm of fantasmatic individuality and the pursuit of objects *a*. It is this very incommensurability that leads Lacan in his twentieth seminar to conclude that there can be no such thing as a “sexual relation” – a relation of love that allows two or more human subjects to “leave themselves behind” by loving one another. I will engage this aspect of Lacan’s thought more fully in my discussion of Huxley’s final novel *Island*. Further, I argue that this unwillingness to look into the eyes of human others during periods of intoxication assumes a central role in Walter Benjamin’s drug protocols, which I will explore in my next chapter. For the time being, I wish to point out that Huxley’s unwillingness to look at human others while on mescaline reveals what is perhaps *the* greatest limitation of self-dissolution – that this largely inhuman experience might be incapable of allowing for the recognition of human others, since the recognition of the “little other” as a thinking, feeling entity must always occur via its appearance as a symbolic being-in-language.

question and tries unequivocally to defend the principles of quietism: “[t]he one-sided contemplative leaves undone many things that he ought to do; but to make up for it, he refrains from doing a host of things he ought not to do. The sum of evil, Pascal remarked, would be much diminished if men could only learn to sit quietly in their rooms” (43). Ultimately, one cannot force other people to value the mystical experience. One can only experience it for oneself, and hope that by some vague process of osmosis others will feel the warmth of its radiant light.

In *Doors*, Huxley also acknowledges the possibility that one can have a horrifying experience of intoxication. He claims that at a certain moment in his mescaline intoxication, he “had an inkling of what it must feel like to be mad. Schizophrenia has its heavens as well as its hells and purgatories” (54). He later adds that those who suffer from depression or chronic anxiety cannot enjoy the mescaline experience. In his intoxication he begins to panic, and claims that this panic is a symptom of his ego fighting its movement toward the point of its own dissolution. He states this point as clearly as he can when he claims that “[i]n theological language, this fear is due to the incompatibility between man’s egotism and the divine purity, between man’s self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God” (55). One notices here that bypassing the regulated distance between the subject and its dissolution creates a profound experience of anxiety for Huxley, just as it does for Cocteau. But while other critics of Huxley might stop at this observation, I would like to invoke Lacan once more in order to offer a more detailed, systematic account of Huxley’s notion of a “bad trip.”

In his seminar on *The Psychoses*, Lacan insists that the individual’s self-image, “on its own, initially adopts the sexualized function, without any need of an intermediary,

an identification with the mother, or with anything else” (204). However, in order for this image (and the ego) to take on coherent meaning in the symbolic order, “the notion of the father, closely related to that of the fear of God, gives him the most palpable element in experience of what I’ve called the quilting point between the signifier and the signified” (268). In other words, the recognition of the father requires the child-ego to undergo the alienating process of castration, in which it recognizes that it did not create the signifying system into which it has been born and therein takes on the split awareness of itself as both the subject *and object* of meaning. For Lacan, however, “psychosis” emerges when an act of foreclosure, or *Verwerfung*, occurs in the developing ego. Foreclosure is a more radical form of repression, because while repression is a function of the symbolic, foreclosure is a psychic event that inhibits the proper establishment of the symbolic order itself. “Prior to all symbolization,” writes Lacan, “this priority is not temporal but logical – there is, as the psychoses demonstrate, a stage at which it is possible for a portion of symbolization not to take place” (*Psychoses* 81). The child becomes an ego that has denied castration and taken the role of symbolic Other for itself. In essence, the ego attempts to capture the totality of meaning while preserving its discrete sense of imaginary selfhood (albeit at a primordial stage). The fact remains, however, that this ego cannot have it both ways. The symbolic retains its impersonal power with or without the ego’s recognition, and after the act of foreclosure, the symbolic order fuses with the subject’s perception of reality and expresses itself through a proliferation of hallucinations. The subject’s situation at the centre of experience makes it respond to these hallucinations with an intense paranoia, not necessarily because the hallucinations

are physically “real,” but because the ego is narcissistically certain that they all concern it in some way.

In the case of a patient named President Schreber – whom Lacan discusses at length – the psychotic subject is ultimately so tortured by its paranoid, wearying hallucinations that it desires to submit itself sexually to God, in a dynamic similar to that found in Lacan’s model of feminine *jouissance*. The psychotic can never accomplish this act in a fully mystical way, however, because it has never properly undertaken the process of castration that makes the route back to self-annihilation possible. In other words, a mystic like St. John of the Cross is able to leave the symbolic order behind *only because* he has recognized it as such and chosen to undergo the process of self-negation necessary to bypass it. The psychotic like President Schreber, on the other hand, never properly establishes its position within the symbolic to being with, because he forecloses upon it before his subjectivity becomes fully formed. In other words, the psychotic cannot bypass the symbolic because he has never sufficiently recognized or internalized his existence within it. To put it even more simply, unconscious ignorance does not equal bliss for the psychotic subject. The psychotic ego puts off the moment of castration, hoping to establish itself as the founder of all meaning. The impersonal source of meaning, the symbolic, retreats into the fabric of perception itself, and when the ego recognizes this Otherness in language, it is too late for it to adopt a normal position relative to it. Thus the ego goes from having complete control to being a dead object in a world full of other dead objects. When Lacan tries to articulate the difference between the subject that becomes normal and the one that becomes psychotic, he claims that “[i]t’s precisely the greater or lesser intensity, the greater or lesser presence of this *ego*, that

decides between the two forms” (*Psychoes* 286-87). Further, he claims that “[c]onsuming certain toxic substances may lead us to the same feeling” as that of psychosis (207). What I want to emphasize here is that the potentially “bad” drug trip, full of torturous hallucinations and paranoia, is based (for Lacan) primarily on the ego’s refusal to acknowledge its inability to *be* all things at once, even as it tries to go on living as a discretely embodied knower.¹⁷⁰ It is with respect to this point that I find a significant correspondence between Lacanian psychosis and Huxley’s general ideas concerning the bad drug trip.¹⁷¹

Lacan goes on to imply that the fundamental difference between psychotic and genuine mystical experience is that of metonymy and metaphor, respectively. In his discussion of psychosis, Lacan frequently contrasts President Schreber with Saint John of the Cross, whom he deems to be a subject of “genuine mystical experience.” The difference between the two subjects, Lacan argues, reveals itself primarily through a “phenomenology of language.” As a psychotic, Schreber expresses himself entirely through syntagmatic relations that lack any direct rooting in experience (no synchronic points of meaning), while the mystical experience nearly forsakes the syntagmatic relations entirely. In Schreber’s case, for example,

[t]he relations of contiguity dominate, following the absence or failure of the function of meaningful equivalence by means of similarity [...] What imposes itself on the subject is the grammatical part of the sentence, the one that exists only by virtue of its signifying character and by being

¹⁷⁰ “The desire for escape from present suffering is there,” writes June Deery, “but reason and fear of self-annihilation prevents it” (104).

¹⁷¹ This theory of psychosis will become even more important in my discussion of Walter Benjamin.

articulated. This is what becomes a phenomenon imposed within the external world. (220)

The proliferation of *metaphoric similarity* in mystical experience, on the other hand, “presupposes that a meaning is the dominant datum and that it deflects, commands, the use of the signifier to such an extent that the entire species of preestablished, I should say lexical, connections comes undone” (218). The psychotic can construct out of perception “an entire fringe of syntactic verbalization,” but if you ask this person for a metaphoric equivalence, “he cannot follow you” (220). This increase in the powers of metonymy over metaphor (in psychosis) also creates a constitutive rapidity of speech, a diachronic acceleration of language, and this same loss of the capacity for metaphor stems from the subject’s inability to discover the psychic route that leads to mystical dissolution.

The intensity of the psychotic’s perception is so great that it “scares him into interpreting its unremitting strangeness, its burning intensity of significance, as the manifestations of human or even cosmic malevolence, calling for the most desperate countermeasures” (56). The bad drug trip is, in principle, the same as psychosis, in which the ego attempts to consolidate its fantasy of autonomous selfhood without having to confront the lack that structurally makes this fantasy possible. In this case, the symbolic order retreats into the real itself by an act of foreclosure, and terrorizes the subject with hallucinations and paranoia. At first, this experience can be a happy one, but over time it inevitably becomes exhausting and terrifying. Thus one cannot properly experience the effects of the psychedelic drug unless one approaches this drug with a submissive willingness to let go of one’s autonomous selfhood. This willingness to dissolve is the same thing that distinguishes authentic mystical experience from psychosis for Lacan,

who also speaks of specific uses of language that are symptomatic of the difference: more explicitly, the relative predominance of metaphoric or metonymic structures of experience.

“If you started [taking the drug] the wrong way,” Huxley writes in *Doors of Perception*, “everything that happened would be a proof of the conspiracy against you. It would all be self-validating. You couldn’t draw a breath without knowing it was part of the plot” (56). That is, if one enters the drug experience with an ego-centred spirit, it will not take much provocation for this self-centredness to assume the form of paranoia.¹⁷²

For when the drug experience goes bad, Huxley writes,

individualization is intensified and the negative visionary finds himself associated with a body that seems to grow progressively more dense, more tightly packed, until he finds himself at last reduced to being the agonized consciousness of an inspissated lump of matter, no bigger than a stone that can be held between the hands. (136)

Ultimately, it is the fear and anger of the isolated, isolating self that bars the drug-taker’s way to heavenly experience. One cannot take the drug’s psychedelic power for granted. Cocteau speaks of inauthentic smokers, and Huxley similarly speaks of inauthentic mescaline-takers. Without doubt, there is an ambivalence inherent to the drug’s unpredictable effects.¹⁷³ But like Cocteau, Huxley affirms that the effects *are* predictable

¹⁷² As we have seen with President Schreber, paranoia emerges when one feels that the ego has somehow dissolved unwittingly, while the mystic’s experience involves some form of decision (whether conscious or unconscious) to leave it behind.

¹⁷³ Implicit within this argument lies what Singh Gill deems “the most fundamental question about the possibility of synthetic sainthood” (208). Huxley’s claims about psychedelics caused an uproar in his time over the possibility of chemically-induced mystical experience, and over the question of whether such an

if one can learn to take the drug in the right, self-mortifying spirit. I argue here that Huxley acknowledges this inescapable ambivalence in his endorsement of drugs, and that he attempts to address it, like Cocteau, by articulating a form of “proper spirit” in which one must take a drug. I invoke Lacan’s theory of psychosis to help explore the manner in which Huxley essentially tries to think his way beyond the pharmakon’s constitutive ambivalence. I would also repeat here that, whether one takes a positive or negative view of the drug in modernist thought, each of these positions implies an entire set of correlative experiential phenomena, which are articulated through the basic structures of metaphor and metonymy. To take the drug with a spirit of rigid self-possession creates a painful backlash in the subject who feels him or herself dissolving – losing control over consciousness – and who transforms the euphoria of drug intoxication into paranoia. In both the mystical experience and the bad trip, the drug essentially fills the world with a plenitude of meaning. In the mystical experience, the drug causes everything around the subject to take on meaning in a beautiful way, whereas in the bad trip, the drug causes everything to take on meaning in a menacing way. For the subject who approaches the drug experience with a willing spirit of self-mortification, the move toward dissolved continuity is a divine gift, while for the egocentric subject, this move toward dissolution

“artificially” produced experience could ever be considered authentic. R.C. Zaehner, a specialist in Eastern religions, was perhaps the most vocal of his critics. He took a dose of mescaline and attempted to reproduce the same sort of mystical experience that Huxley describes in *Doors*. However, Zaehner insists that “the experience was in a sense ‘anti-religious’ and that ‘self-transcendence’ of a sort did take place, but transcendence into a world of farcical meaninglessness” (*Mysticism* 226). Zaehner also claims that it was a paranoid discomfort, rather than a sensation of bliss, that characterized his essentially bad trip. His comments show the reverse image of Huxley’s drug experience, a bad trip that can never completely be overcome through the drug’s chemical engineering.

induces paranoia by constructing every object of perception as a threat to the subject's continued existence.¹⁷⁴

Huxley, however, seems to undo his argument for the revelatory power of drugs when he finishes describing his intoxication in *Doors* and moves into a sober, sociological justification for drug use. When he embarks on this new line of argument, Huxley claims that people will always want to transcend everyday consciousness, for it is clear that they already spend more money on tobacco and alcohol than they do on education. People die from drinking and driving, and tobacco causes cancer, but still society tolerates them. One cannot just slam certain "doors in the wall" of perception, Huxley insists, but must replace more the more harmful doors with less harmful ones.

Some of these other, better doors will be social and technological in nature, others religious or psychological, others dietetic, educational, athletic. But the need for frequent chemical vacations from intolerable selfhood and repulsive surroundings will undoubtedly remain. (64)

Huxley, however, could be criticized here for simply repeating (word-for-word) the endorsement of *soma* in *Brave New World*, particularly when he writes that the modern drug

must be less toxic than opium or cocaine, less likely to produce undesirable social consequences than alcohol or the barbiturates, less inimical to heart and lungs than the tars and nicotine of cigarettes. And, on the positive side, it should produce changes in consciousness more

¹⁷⁴ For a good example of this latter effect of intoxication, recall Jean Cocteau's fear that opium will chemically ruin his brain and prevent him from accomplishing the great creative feats that might one day confirm (once and for all!) his status as a unique, ego-centred genius. (Chapter One, pg. 131)

interesting, more intrinsically valuable than mere sedation or dreaminess, delusions of omnipotence or release from inhibition. (65)

Despite the possibility that a totalitarian regime could take advantage of widespread drug use, Huxley's response to political threat remains quietist. He is convinced that those who aspire to worldly power harbour an inner sickness, and that to fight them would only effect a capitulation to this sickness. Like Lacan, Huxley can only characterize authentic mystical experience through an attitude of submissiveness, combined with an ability to recognize a non-discursive singularity or "Suchness" in all of human experience.

Ultimately, he claims that the truly enlightened individual must bring the spirit of the limit experience back to normal, social consciousness, and therein harmonize the two ways of knowing. This harmony is embodied in the Buddhist principle of compassion – *karuna* – and it is the single most significant principle that Huxley tries to convey in his final novel, *Island*. The mystical experience can only provide the individual with a temporary experience of the One that transcends all worldly concerns. However, the subject must learn how to take this limit experience back into the realm of human interaction – to unfold him or herself within the chain of discourse with a constant awareness of that which staves this discourse.

In "The History of Tension" (1956), Huxley writes that humanity cannot go on forever seeking a *final* cure for the pains of its existence: "It is clear, I think, that the problem of tension will be completely solved only when we have a perfect society—that is to say, never. Meanwhile, it always remains possible to find partial solutions and temporary palliatives" (1956). When he wrote this passage, Huxley was already working

on the manuscript of his final novel, *Island*. The conservative underpinnings of such strivings for palliation still remain prominent in his mind, however, for

[s]o long as they indulge in crowd-intoxication at football games and carnivals, at revival meetings and the rallies of democratically organized political rallies, no harm is done. We must never forget, however, that the spellbinders, the rabble-rousers, the potential Hitlers are always with us.
(127)

In his 1959 essay “The Final Revolution,” Huxley tries once more to articulate what exactly he hopes to save from the dark side of palliation, and decides that it seems to deserve the name of “spontaneity.” Huxley thus wonders whether humans can resist the “categorical imperative” of technology, which is efficiency, and answers that

[i]t’s not a question, as I say, of hoping to abolish techniques. This is quite hopeless, I think. It is a question of somehow making the best of both worlds so that we can enjoy the results of technology, which are order and efficiency and profusion of goods, and at the same time enjoy what human beings have always held to be of supreme importance, that is to say, liberty and the possibility of spontaneity. (172)

“This question of spontaneity,” Huxley continues, “is terribly important, and it is actually one of the great enemies of technique” (172). Thus as I turn now to a reading of Huxley’s final novel *Island*, I do so by highlighting the fact that Huxley considers the marriage of Eternal Oneness and the principle of experiential spontaneity to be “an incredibly difficult problem,” and one that at the end of his life might still prove to be insoluble.

Karuna (1962-63)

In *Island* (1962), what distinguishes the island nation of Pala from the Fordian society of *Brave New World* is its rural setting, its replacement of consumerism with creative work,¹⁷⁵ and its insistence that individuals engaged in the use of psychedelics bring something substantial from their drug experience back to sober consciousness: something called compassion.¹⁷⁶ The text draws upon many of the ideas Huxley explores throughout his body of work, but especially those found in *The Perennial Philosophy* and *The Doors of Perception*. Will Farnaby, the book's protagonist, is an Englishman who accidentally wrecks his ship and washes up onto the rocks of Pala. The first thing Farnaby hears upon his arrival onto the island is the voices of talking birds, which continuously call out the word "Attention." These birds, he later discovers, have been trained to repeat this word in order to keep the Palanese people's thoughts from wandering too deeply into self-obsessed abstractions. The call for attention is an imperative in itself, a demand that the individual remain intimately aware of his or her immanent surroundings:

¹⁷⁵ In this text, people work in the fields of science and agriculture rather than going to the "feelies" or playing Electromagnetic golf. There is something more essentially here-and-now, Huxley implies, in the act of making, or of poesis, than there is in receiving perpetual distraction from without, as is the case in *Brave New World*. Perhaps the Palanese ideal is what he seeks when he claims in his foreword to *Brave New World* that technology should be made for humanity, and not the other way around.

¹⁷⁶ The respective worlds of *Brave New World* and *Island* certainly call for such comparison and contrasting. Whereas the former is a very dark dystopian world, the latter seems to mark Huxley's articulation of a true utopian society, and as I have argued in this chapter, readers can better understand this difference by looking at the trajectory of Huxley's entire career, which moves from an early tone of satirical removal into a later tone of spiritual credulity or faith. James Sexton, in "*Brave New World* and the Rationalization of Industry" also tries to articulate the difference between Huxley's dystopian and utopian novels, claiming that the Fordian society "is close to the utopian solution of *Island*. But the *Brave New World* will take the easier path by tripling the duration of idiotic-machinelike existence, from eight hours to twenty-four hours per day" (100). I believe that there is more to the distinction than this, although I agree that the resemblance between the two can be a point of true discomfort for Huxley scholars. In the end, I argue that the primary difference is the manner in which Huxley signifies the drug experience as revealing rather than narcotic. Huxley's chronological shift (from a metonymic to metaphoric interpretation of experience) leads him to paint all things Palanese as revelatory and immanent, whereas all of the essentially same phenomena in *Brave New World* appear sinister, awareness-deadening, and ever-unfolding.

out popped a large black bird, the size of a jackdaw—only, needless to say, it wasn't a jackdaw [...] After which it opened its orange bill, whistled ten or twelve notes of a little air in the pentatonic scale, made a noise like somebody having hiccups, and then, in a chanting phrase, *do do sol do*, said “Here and now, boys; here and now, boys.” (6)¹⁷⁷

As a writer who is interested in the deadening effects of conceptual language, Huxley in *Island* assigns particular importance to deictic shifters like “here” and “now” in *Island*.¹⁷⁸ These words from the talking mynahs thus call direct “Attention” to the phenomenal positioning of the listener’s lived body, which according to Merleau-Ponty is lived through the corporeal schema or body image. The constant repetition of *here* and *now* perpetually *punctures* discursive thought and tears a hole that opens onto a direct experience of the material present. The repetition of these terms across the island further works against language’s tendency to carry the individual away from the material present. In linguistic terms, these repeated deictics mark a synchronic punctuation of the

¹⁷⁷ The addition of “boys” here is very confusing for me, for the words here and now aim to root the listener in the sensory particular, but the gendered designation of “boy” (at least in Lacanian terms) marks a fundamental re-incorporation of a subject into symbolic alienation.

¹⁷⁸ In *Problems of General Linguistics* (1966), Émile Benveniste offers a structuralist account of deixis that can help us theorize the importance of these words in the subject’s cognition of its surroundings:

The personal pronouns provide the first step in this bringing out of subjectivity in language. Other classes of pronouns that share the same status depend in their turn upon these pronouns. These other classes are the indicators of *deixis*, the demonstratives, adverbs, and adjectives, which organize the spatial and temporal relationships around the ‘subject’ taken as referent: ‘this, here, now,’ and their numerous correlatives, ‘that, yesterday, last year, tomorrow,’ etc. They have in common the feature of being defined only with respect to the instances of discourse in which they occur, that is, in dependence upon the *I* which is proclaimed in the discourse. (226)

The “I,” Benveniste adds, refers to a slot in discourse, the splitting of the subject in language, but it also refers to the *material* “here” and “now” of the body in moments of lived speech. Words like *here* and *now* “delimit the spatial and temporal instance coextensive and contemporary with the present instance of discourse containing I” (Benveniste 219).

signifying chain.¹⁷⁹ These words do not refer to any objective reality, but only to the unique physical circumstances that condition each living utterance. Thus the mynah birds must endlessly repeat them, constantly returning the listener to the here and now, which is like a rock one must take hold of in order to slow the rush of conceptual, symbolic thinking.

The self-professed spiritual leader of Pala is the female Rani, but her views on spirituality do not necessarily reflect those of the Palanese people at large. She embodies a religious spirit completely abstracted from the material world, platonic in a way that does not suit Huxley's belief in the here-ness and now-ness of a divine Ground. She professes the importance of the immaterial spirit and of conventional morals, but she is easily co-opted for totalitarian ends. She is "a female tycoon who had cornered the market, not in soya beans or copper, but in Pure Spirituality and the Ascended Masters, and was now happily rubbing her hands over the exploit" (57). Her son, Murugan, is Pala's leader-in-waiting, and his plan for the island's future is one of industrialization, progress, and endless revolution. The true ethos of the Palanese people, however, is not reflected in either of these figures. It is contained, rather, in a book written by their former leader, the Raja, which bears the quaint title: *Notes on What's What*. The book's message is essentially the same as that of Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*, containing a general invective against selfish thought and the principle of two-ness.¹⁸⁰ The text also criticizes modern psychiatry, claiming that this practice pretends that a person does not

¹⁷⁹ Lyotard reinforces this interpretation of deixis in *Discours Figure* (1971).

¹⁸⁰ Barry Leal similarly observes that "[t]he society of Pala is frozen in time in the sense that its members devote their attention solely to the materiality of the present, but this present is perceived as participating in the eternity of God and thus manifesting Huxley's ideal of the Eternal Present" (189-90).

have a body, apart from a mouth and an anus: “[h]e isn’t an organism, he wasn’t born with a constitution or a temperament. All he has is the two ends of a digestive tube, a family and a psyche” (77). Doctor MacPhail, a Palanese man sympathetic to the Raja’s teachings, asks Will Farnaby at what point “does psychiatry simply tell the patient to think about the here and now” instead of just leaving “the unfortunate neurotic to wallow in his old habits of never being all there in present time?” (78). Finally, the text of *Notes on What’s What* also affirms the value of employing drugs in ritual practices. At first glance, however, the rituals undertaken in Pala do not differ greatly from the solidarity services of *Brave New World*, save for one thing: that their aim is not to precipitate the arrival of some alien Ford, but to allow subjects to participate communally in an ineffable Mind at Large that joins all plurality in a professedly non-hierarchical way.¹⁸¹

The climax of Huxley’s *Island* occurs when Will Farnaby ingests the “moksha” mushrooms that serve as the communal psychedelic of the Palanese people. At first, Will closes his eyes and experiences a brilliant collage of visions similar to what Huxley describes in *The Doors of Perception*. But Farnaby’s spiritual guide Susila is quick to insist that he open his eyes to the external world. What is at stake here is Farnaby’s need to harness the beautiful Oneness of his mystical encounter and to bring its spirit back into

¹⁸¹ Huxley is committed to conceiving this Mind at Large in a non-abstract way. James Hull similarly writes that Huxley’s work culminates in a theory of “physiological conscience,” which “goes deeper than what may be called personal conscience” and is a “built-in guide that attempts to keep the psycho-physical organism in equilibrium” (569). Much like the art of proper seeing, the art of compassion must exist within the fundamental here-and-now of the biological organism. In order to be metaphoric, it must become bodily and erotic, which is why the inhabitants of Pala participate in a communal form of Tantra, a religion of touch and non-abstract immanence.

a world of multiplicity and ephemerality.¹⁸² When he first attempts to do so, however, Farnaby's trip turns ugly: directing his attention to a line of ants walking across the floor, he notices that "[t]he endless column of insects had turned abruptly into an endless column of soldiers" (322). Will sees in these creatures all of the brutal horror of the world: wars, faces achieving petty orgasms, and the totalitarian slogan of "One Folk, One realm, One Leader" (322). Within this bad trip, the only thing that seems permanent about human existence is suffering, and "[i]n all other respects one [i]s grotesquely, despicably finite" (323). Farnaby feels an infinite force closing around him on all sides, but it is not the wonderful sensation of the One that drives this force. It is rather an abysmal silence, a silence that does not render meaning immanent but rather removes it altogether from the contents of experience.

In the midst of his bad trip, Farnaby can feel Susila beginning to touch him. She massages his face while a mynah bird calls for attention from outside his window. Attention to what, exactly? "To *this*," Susila tells him, "[a]nd she dug her nails into the skin of his forehead. '*This*. Here and now. And it isn't anything so romantic as suffering and pain. It's just the feel of fingernails'" (325). The word "this," like here and now, is a deictic shifter, referring not to any other words in a signifying chain, but only to the material present. Through the repetition of deictics and the physical pressure of her touch, Susila tries to pull Will out his abstractions, which have only served to make the world appear meaningless (or worse yet, doomed) once he has taken the psychedelic drug. As our reading of psychosis and the bad trip would suggest, one cannot submit the mystical

¹⁸² Deery similarly notes that "[f]or the experience to have a spiritual significance, Huxley insisted that subjects must come to it with the right attitude and subsequently be prepared to enact what they have learned in their own lives" (108).

move toward continuity to the terms of sober, self-centred consciousness, lest these terms pollute the experience and re-signify infinite plenitude as a complete *absence* of meaning. Will Farnaby (and the possessive human “will” in general) faces a nightmare in intoxication because he allows conceptual thought to corrupt his experience and drag him into a monstrous, deformed version of discontinuous, symbolic being. That said, Susila *insists* that it is not enough for him to enjoy the euphoria of moksha intoxication with his eyes closed. Will’s closing of his eyes relates directly to the same dynamic Huxley describes in *The Doors of Perception* when he claims that while intoxicated, he wishes to avoid the eyes of human others. Will’s closed eyes reflect the anti-social danger of mystical experience, since as I have discussed, the subjective dissolution required of this experience runs counter to the patently *symbolic* ability to recognize human others as thinking, feeling entities.

When Susila attempts to coax Will out of his insular encounter with the Void of existence, she insists that this Void ““won’t do you much good unless you can see its light in *Gongylus gongyloides*. And in people... Which is sometimes considerably more difficult”” (325). When she says this, Farnaby finally opens his eyes once more and turns to look into a mirror, where he instantly encounters all the bodies dead from human war and claims that it is impossible for him to see divine oneness in the scene. Susila insists, however, that he cannot be a “greedy contemplative” who simply focuses on his inner light and forgets about other people. Farnaby must take his achieved sense of oneness and return to the symbolic world with a spirit that Huxley calls compassion. He gets his first

taste of what compassion¹⁸³ might feel like when he focuses on the touch of Susila's hands and finds that "[t]here was nothing, of course, that one could say, no words, no consolations of philosophy—only this shared mystery of touch, only this communication from skin to skin of a flowing infinity" (329). In Merleau-Pontian terms, Will finds that his relinquishing of motor intentionality allows him to experience a form of mutual touching he has never before known, a mutual touching whose tactile immediacy gathers him into the fold of infinity. The touch serves as a form of material proof for the possibility of glimpsing infinite Oneness. But the problem with this experience of Oneness, Will realizes, is that one simply "slips back too easily, one slips back too often" into the realm of symbolic, sober being (330). That said, Will professes that he will endlessly fight this slippage, for the Oneness glimpsed in moments of mutual touch forms the basis of humanity's ultimate experiential ideal – compassion.¹⁸⁴

For Lacan, psychosis leads not only to paranoia, but to a perception of other people as flat, empty, and unreal entities. The bad trip can provoke a similar, if not even more cynical response for Huxley, and this phenomenon tends to afflict those subjects who take the drug with a self-possessed spirit. That said, even when the subject learns to let go of its discrete consciousness, he or she has not gone far enough in Huxley's mind. In order to achieve authentic inner peace, Huxley implies that one must both have an experience of the Mind at Large *and* carry the substance of this experience back into his

¹⁸³ "Thus the reader," writes Ramamurty, "is led to the utopia of *Island* where sex and spirituality, passion and reason are harmonized, the individual and the society are re-habilitated in a benign symbiosis, and a psychological alchemy practised to achieve harmony of being as the basis for integral living" (16).

¹⁸⁴ For Huxley to end this work with the words "here," "now," and "*karuna*" implies a similar spirit, in my view, as that of Eliot's conclusion of "The Waste Land," which repeats the Vedantic word "Shantih" three times. In both cases, a subject caught amidst the flux and contingency of contemporary experience appeals to an immanent and eternal peace beyond discursive understanding.

or her sober, symbolic existence. Compassion, as it is called, is the most difficult aspect of spiritual improvement. In Lacanian terms, it means to take the spirit of metaphor back into metonymic existence, and to find comfort therein, manifesting this comfort in a profound care for the other. The drug experience can only ever be temporary, but Huxley wants to chart a way beyond this ephemerality, a way that can make the individual feel infinitely fulfilled even as he or she engages an everyday life filled with social others.¹⁸⁵ In arguing for an overlap between mystical and sober experience, Huxley works toward a meeting of metaphoric and metonymic forces which Lacan would deem impossible, since it is correlative in principle to a sexual relation. With these ideas in mind, I will turn once more to Lacan's seminar *On Feminine Sexuality and The Limits of Love and Knowledge* to investigate the psychic dynamics Huxley attempts to overcome in his theorization of *karuna* or loving compassion.

Love, for Lacan, is a fantasy that tries to compensate for the failure of the subject's pursuit of *objet a*. Love between two people is not the same thing as feminine *jouissance*, which directs itself toward the symbolic Other. Lacan makes this point as clear as possible at the very beginning of his seminar on feminine sexuality, in which he writes that "[j]ouissance of the Other,' of the Other with a capital O, 'of the body of the Other who symbolizes the Other, is not the sign of love'" (4). Indeed, two subjects can maintain a "bond of love," but only insofar as they both show "courage in bearing their intolerable relationship to the Supreme Being" (85). In other words, one's *jouissance* of the Other cannot coexist with or incorporate human others *as others*. Thus feminine or

¹⁸⁵ Bataille similarly notes in *Inner Experience* that when he returns from the limit experience, "I remain: everything escapes if I have not been able to lose myself in Nothingness; what I have glimpsed is brought back to the levels of objects known to me" (*Inner* 114).

mystical *jouissance* cannot be love, insofar as love entails the subjective desire to form a whole with a “little other.” Such an effort marks an attempt to give to the symbolic other what one does not have to begin with: that extra *a* which will complete him or her.

Mystical experience, on the other hand, entails a giving of one’s utter being to the big O Other. Initially, this move constitutes a complete submission to the symbolic order.

However, it is only when one gives oneself completely to this Other that one discovers the absence that lurks behind it. At this point, the subject might truly bypass a regulated distance between itself and a transcendent signifier, only to discover that there is an absence in the presumed place of this signifier, an absence that carries this subject toward annihilation. Lacan is correct to perceive the phallic and feminine/mystical positions in discourse as antithetical. The feminine position is to synchrony-metaphor what the phallic is to diachrony-metonymy.¹⁸⁶ But it is not unreasonable to suggest that, just as the vertical and horizontal axes of signification work together like the staves of a score, it is theoretically possible to attain a diachronic, symbolic experience that is perpetually informed by an awareness of the continuity that staves it.

To be certain, when Lacan speaks about the vertical axis of signification he speaks of forms of punctuation that confer discrete meanings on language. He never assumes in such a case that this axis will be carried to its theoretical limit – which is nonsense. Strangely enough, as clear as Lacan’s model is, one cannot be certain of whether an awareness of metaphoric dissolution can be experienced *while* taking a

¹⁸⁶ Lacan includes a rhetorical question, but essentially lays out the difference between phallic and feminine *jouissance* when he writes that “[f]or one pole, *jouissance* is marked by the hole that leaves it no other path than that of phallic *jouissance*. For the other pole, can something be attained that would tell us how that which up until now has only been a fault (*faillie*) or gap in *jouissance* could be realized?” (8). As I have mentioned, the phallic pole is based upon the sequence emerging from endless failure, while the feminine pole gestures toward something ineffable lurking behind the Other’s ultimate absence.

symbolic other into consideration. Even if this form of awareness were possible, as Huxley's *Island* passionately tries to argue, it would require an endless reminding (i.e. the mynahs that endlessly repeat the words here, now, and *karuna*, meaning compassion). According to the laws of the signifying chain, the subject would continually have to reaffirm the presence of metaphor's dissolving force without losing sight of other symbolic individuals. Within the terms of this study, I do not see how such a third space between metaphor and metonymy would be attainable (at least within the terms of modernist thought I have explored thus far). It is certainly possible to have an experience *between* the pulls of these two poles. But to encounter the experiential limit of non-difference *while* addressing social others is an impossible thing to conceive, even in this project's reading of Lacan. In the end, I argue, the modernist lives between two poles of experience, and must choose from the locations available between them.

As I mention at the close of my introduction, Terri Mester's *Modernism and Movement* claims that the act of dancing embodies the ideal of modernist experience, insofar as it immerses the individual in his or her surroundings and fulfills desire without having to renounce the diachronic principle of transformation. In spirit, Huxley's concept of compassion is similar to this ideal, suggesting that ultimately, it is not enough for individuals to dissolve into their inhuman surroundings, however much this experience might connect them to a unified plane of being. As with Cocteau's comments on friendship toward the end of his career, Huxley suggests in *Island* that inner peace does not completely fulfill its purpose unless it allows one to look at other people with compassion. In Cocteau's terms, however, compassion and friendship are possible only insofar as they unfold in a space *between* the metonymic and metaphoric poles of

experience (a space of endless negotiation). Huxley, however, desires something far more radical and far more difficult to conceive: an engagement with symbolic others that roots itself in a perpetual, *direct* awareness of something non-discursive. Huxley cannot help but apply his mystical principles on a sociological level, and yet he also realizes that one cannot make compromises with a unity that is absolute; so he tries to conceive of an experience that would give the subject access to this (essentially inhuman) absolute without destroying its awareness of human others *as others*. Neither Lacan's work, nor this project's reading of modernist experience in general, can account for how someone could confront the in-difference of total continuity without dissolving his or her recognition of symbolic others. Nonetheless, I will return to this problem at the end of my next and final chapter on Walter Benjamin; for the ideal fusion of stillness and movement, continuity and discontinuity, whether it is possible or not, remains central to the modernist conception of experience, and no less so for Benjamin.

Chapter Three

A Veil Embroidered with Constellations:

Walter Benjamin's Hashish Protocols

Only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic. Therefore the Kingdom of God is not the telos of the historical dynamic; it cannot be set as a goal. From the standpoint of history, it is not the goal, but the end.

Walter Benjamin, "Theologico-Political Fragment"

Death is not something not yet present-at-hand, nor is it that which is ultimately still outstanding but which has been reduced to a minimum. Death is something that stands before us—something impending.

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

In the previous two chapters, I explored how the work of Jean Cocteau and Aldous Huxley depicts drug use as an effective form of therapy for a chronic psychic anguish associated with twentieth-century life. Each author describes this anguish in different terms, and yet underlying these differences is a set of qualitative structures deeply entrenched in the European, modernist conception of experience. These structures behave according to the general dynamics of the metaphor/metonymy dichotomy I have theorized thus far, and they inform the thought of prominent twentieth-century thinkers like Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Georges Bataille, and Martin Heidegger.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ I have discussed Heidegger's connection to my theory of qualitative structures in the first few pages of my introduction, but it is in the latter half of this coming chapter that I will engage this connection most thoroughly. Further, I will call again upon the work of Émile Benveniste to help flesh out my theory of the body's insertion into structuralist thought, an insertion I have already theorized in my previous chapter on Huxley.

Jean Cocteau treats the drug as a palliative for the nervous pains to which he is sensitive because of his self-professed intelligence and poetic sensitivity. Huxley's treatment of the drug, however, is less insular as Cocteau's, concerning itself less with the struggle of the exceptional genius and working exhaustively to conceive of a drug that might ameliorate the experiences of all modern subjects. Ultimately, Huxley theorizes the drug as a chemical agent that can potentially break through the narcotic "shield" or "sieve" that the modern subject has built up to protect itself against excessive stimuli. In the coming chapter, I will study the writings of Walter Benjamin, and explore how Benjamin (like Cocteau and Huxley) conceptualizes drug use as an alleviatory response to what I have called the "metonymic" structuring of modern experience. As I have done with Cocteau and Huxley, I will give sustained attention to Benjamin's first-person records of drug use, which historically spanned the years from 1927 to 1934 and are collected as a set of essays and "protocols" in the edited collection *On Hashish*.¹⁸⁸

Benjamin's work bears less of an explicitly scientific inflection than Huxley's, and yet like Huxley's it contains a powerful political and sociological tone, born no doubt from Benjamin's associations with the Frankfurt School and the German sociology in which he was well-versed (he was, after all, a student of Georg Simmel).¹⁸⁹ As we have

¹⁸⁸ Trans. Howard Eiland et al. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006.

¹⁸⁹ In fact, one can find a compelling connection between Simmel and the "psychic shield" of modernity that Benjamin (like Huxley) attributes largely to Freud. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), Simmel seems to anticipate Freud's arguments about the tension-reducing aspect of *thanatos* on a sociological level, writing that modern "blaséness" stems from an experiential blunting of consciousness against excessive stimuli (122), in which "the nerves find in the refusal to react to their stimulation the last possibility of accommodating to the [excessive, chaotic] contents and forms of metropolitan life...at the price of devaluating the whole objective world" (187). What Simmel's influence adds to my arguments is that it allows Benjamin to find an explicit connection between Freud's notion of *thanatos* and an affective numbness that results from its reduction of stimuli. For more on Walter Benjamin's experience as a student of Georg Simmel, see Graeme Gilloch's *Walter Benjamin, Critical Constellations* (14).

seen in the previous chapter, Huxley's concept of a "psychic shield" appeals to Freud's concept of *thanatos* as it appears in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." For Benjamin as well, the psychic shield of modernity instills in the subject a blasé sense of everydayness that unfolds through the horizontal dimension of a "homogeneous, empty time." This axis of experience is manifestly metonymical, as it inscribes a form of serialized desire that unfolds both differentially and diachronically. As I argued in my previous chapter, the psychic shield is a conceptual linchpin for Huxley's representation of the drug as a revelatory substance, since it allows Huxley to attribute the pain of modern existence to the filtering operations of the sober mind, and therein allows him to position the drug as a revelatory agent that can cancel out these operations. As I will argue in the coming chapter, it is this same Freudian concept of a psychic shield that governs Walter Benjamin's writings on drugs, and particularly his representation of the drug as a vehicle for "profane illumination": a manifestly metaphorical experience that breaks through the walls of sober sedation and lifts the modern subject out of her constitutive dullness and into a space of ecstasy. While it is true that Benjamin speaks of the psychic shield most thoroughly in the final years of his career (1939), I argue that this later work formalizes and draws together elements of his thought that appear in his writings as early as 1919.

Ultimately, this chapter posits that Benjamin's conception of drug intoxication and psychic therapy describes the same subjective, *metaphoric* movement toward continuity that I have explored in Cocteau and Huxley.¹⁹⁰ Like Cocteau and Huxley,

¹⁹⁰ As I will show later in this chapter, Benjamin invokes the dichotomy of *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* to help explore the difference between a substantial or authentic form of experience and a superficial one, respectively. Both of the preceding German words translate into English as "experience," but Benjamin plays on the difference in connotation between them.

Benjamin suggests that the drug experience can alleviate a form of psychic pain distinct to modernity. His conception of such pain stems largely from his belief that the modern subject – displaced by the unfolding of historical time – seeks an escape from its metonymic or discontinuous existence. What distinguishes Benjamin’s writings on drugs from Cocteau and Huxley’s, however, are his concepts of the experiential “veil” and of the messianic fulfillment of history. For Benjamin, the limit of subjective experience – a form of continuity embodied by the messiah’s arrival at the end of history – is forever hidden from direct cognition by a veil of perception. To gaze directly upon continuous, finished being would annihilate the subject completely; therefore some form of veil must provide the subject an indirect or *tangential* awareness of the limit-experience that makes itself known to the subject only insofar as it remains veiled. To this extent, the encounter with the veil provides evidence of the subject’s incremental movement out of sober consciousness and toward the point of dissolution. The veil thus constitutes an intermediate phenomenon, which lies between the poles of discontinuity (metonymic experience) and continuity (metaphoric) and is structurally predicated on another of Benjamin’s concepts: that of the “constellation.” When the subject makes its incremental move toward continuous existence, she does not necessarily do so by blurring the differences between words and physical objects, but by throwing these things into a play of sensory correspondence. This form of play draws together distinct entities without collapsing them into a homogeneous whole, just as stars form a constellation without relinquishing their status as discrete objects. As the subject encounters this phenomenon, she can sense that the differential relations structuring her historical existence have become unstable, leaving her with a fleeting glimpse of continuous being (or messianic

fulfillment) that appears in the form of a profane illumination. Once the subject has received this illumination, she must attempt to bring an awareness of it back to sober existence, much like the subject Huxley attempts to conceive in his final novel, *Island*. Unlike Huxley, however, Benjamin does not attempt to articulate an experience that would fuse the subjective poles of metonymic discontinuity and metaphoric continuity.¹⁹¹ He rather conceives of continuity's arrival as something that is always *impending*, something that continues to bestow meaning upon unfolding time insofar as the end of time itself is always *just about* to happen.

In the latter half of this chapter, I theorize this notion of an impending end of history by drawing upon Martin Heidegger's concept of being-toward-death and incorporating it into my readings of Lacan, Bataille, and Merleau-Ponty. In doing so, I proceed against a certain grain in Benjamin studies, which tends to characterize Benjamin's thought within the framework of the "flâneur."¹⁹² While the flâneur figure embraces the principles of critical engagement, contingency, and endless interpretive play, I argue that these aspects of Benjamin's thought are always tempered by his messianic tendencies, which imply that any such flânerie unfolds within the horizon of a finite in-the-meantime. Critical engagement and interpretive play are without doubt

¹⁹¹ That is to say, Benjamin does not offer any model by which the subject could have it both ways, as Huxley attempts to do. For Benjamin, the subject cannot exist in the realm of unfolding time, symbolic difference, and human others while remaining fully immersed in the realm of static, eternal continuity. For Benjamin, the best one can do is to speak of experience as an unfolding temporal sequence, and to fill this form of experience with meaning by conceiving of its static, final end as something that is always impending – something that could happen at any moment.

¹⁹² Some critics emphasize the importance of the flâneur-figure throughout Benjamin's thought, and suggest that this figure is "the most serviceable guide through the passages of Benjamin's thought" (Sven Birkerts "Walter Benjamin, Flâneur: A Flanerie" 164). I do not fully disagree with these arguments, but I do believe that they often discount or ignore the importance of the messianic moment in Benjamin's work. The circulation of the flâneur always unfolds within a certain horizon which can only be given meaning by the messiah's impending arrival.

crucial elements in Benjamin's thought, but they are not hermeneutic keys through which one can make sense of all things Benjaminian. Rather, there are two registers in Benjamin's thought that resist being placed in relation to one another: those of the historical and the messianic. I argue that these registers operate within the modernist frameworks of metonymic and metaphoric experience that I have articulated throughout this project. By regarding the arrival of continuous existence as something perpetually *impending*, Benjamin works within the metonymic and metaphoric poles of modernist experience and places them in dialectical relation without trying to fuse them in the same way Huxley does. In doing so, he provides his readers with a conception of intoxication that can (within the underlying structures of modernist experience) truly alleviate the modernist pain-of-being in a somewhat reliable way.

As I have mentioned, Benjamin's conception of drug use as an alleviatory response to modern anguish stems largely from a concept he articulates relatively early in his career – that of profane illumination. The concept first appears in his essay “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia” (1928), a work that offers both political and therapeutic reasons for why modern subjects should pursue experiences that exceed the complacent boundaries of everyday perception. For Benjamin, modern spiritual malaise is an effect of historico-political¹⁹³ forces that have worked to numb the subject's reception of experience. What modern individuals lack most of all, according to Benjamin, is a once-potent ability to perceive *correspondences*: associations between diverse experiences, sensory phenomena, and events that plunge the personal and

¹⁹³ In the coming discussion, I will not forsake the political dimension of Benjamin's thought, but for the purposes of this project, I will give most of my attention to the therapeutic motives that inform his writings on drugs.

collective memory into a state of exuberant play. This experience is profane as opposed to sacred because it persists in an age where the religious object has lost its traditional authority. The profane illumination is an experience whose meaning transcends the subject's knowledge, while also providing this subject with fleeting glimpses of something more – something *other* – than his or her perception of everyday time as homogenous, empty, and ever-the-same. If modern subjects have difficulty attaining or recognizing extraordinary experiences, Benjamin contends, they can always turn to intoxicating drugs for “an introductory lesson” in them (“Surrealism” 179).

For Benjamin, there are countless contents of perception that avoid conscious absorption into “known” experience. At involuntary moments, these contents break through the subject's psychic shield and flash before her in the form of a constellation. The subject's palliative shield, in this case, is similar to that of which Huxley speaks, in that it steels perception against shock experiences and works to protect the mind from excessive stimuli. In his later “Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939) Benjamin explicitly mentions Freud's “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” to describe this strategic absorption of psychic shocks.¹⁹⁴ His corresponding concept of constellation, on the other hand, is difficult to articulate, but essential to understand if one wishes to explore the profane illumination as an experiential structure. The constellatory experience, according to Benjamin, is always provoked by a discrete material object, around which a set of personal and cultural associations have clustered and formed some sort of historico-affective residue. This object harbours a secret power to blast apart the subject's psychic

¹⁹⁴ Benjamin directly connects this notion of a “sensory shield” to Freud's death drive. He further connects the death drive to language, which he claims is a shock absorber that prevents the overstimulating contents of experience from entering the mind.

shield and to draw diverse historical and cultural moments into her awareness in a sudden, ecstatic gestalt. That said, while Benjamin's concept of constellation helps articulate the structure of the profane illumination, it does not fully encompass it, because the profane illumination does not provide the subject anything that she can intellectually *apprehend*. This experience rather appears to the subject as a constellatory veil that covers the infinite, ineffable plenitude of all being,¹⁹⁵ and the veil's constellatory play is not a final end for Benjamin, but merely a symptom of the subject's *relative movement* along the spectrum of experience, toward this plenitude.

It is difficult not to approach Benjamin's concept of "profane illumination" in political terms, but this chapter attempts to emphasize the concept's significance for the modernist conception of psychic therapy. I do not wish to downplay Benjamin's obvious investment in the political efficacy of critical thought, but only to highlight a therapeutic thread in his work that is elided in studies that take political efficacy as the first term of Benjamin's work.¹⁹⁶ Theorizing Benjamin's concept of "profane illumination" in this way, I invoke Kant's theory of the beautiful, but also Lacan's revisiting of this concept to show how the profane illumination might relate to the *Das Ding/Die sache*¹⁹⁷ dichotomy

¹⁹⁵ Boon notes that "[f]or Benjamin, hashish, mescaline, and opium [open] doorways to aesthetic, philosophical, and potentially political experience; Aldous Huxley's ruminations on patterns and folds in *The Doors of Perception* are perhaps the closest analog, though there are also key differences between the two writers" (Boon Hashish 10-11). In "An Experiment by Walter Benjamin" (recounted by Jean Selz), Benjamin finds himself engrossed in the appearance of a curtain, and he speculates about the founding of a study called "curtainology" (*On Hashish* 152). However, Huxley's intoxicated interest in draperies in *Doors of Perception* comes from these fabrics' ability to synthesize the principles of movement and stasis within a single image. Benjamin's interest in curtains, however, comes much more from his interest in profane illumination as a form of experiential veil, behind which lurks the messianic fulfillment of history.

¹⁹⁶ See my discussion of Samuel Weber and Theodor Adorno in the coming section entitled "Critical Background."

¹⁹⁷ I will try to point out how Benjamin in fact historicizes Kant's ahistorical view of the beautiful. As Helga Geyer-Ryan similarly notes: "[s]trongly influenced as he was by Kant, Benjamin never lost his

that I have discussed at length in my first chapter. Also, to help articulate Benjamin's notion of a limit experience, I read Lacan's work alongside Martin Heidegger's theory of being-toward-death, and use the resulting dialogue to discuss how Benjamin's persistent messianism informs his notion of therapeutic experience. Further, I discuss how for Benjamin, the subject's successful, intoxicated connection with the messianic dimension of experience must resist the temptations of "satanic satisfaction" – that is, the satisfaction of self-affirming pride that the subject draws from its own sense of critical removal, which can compromise her ability to experience the ecstasy of self-dissolution.

Critical Background

In the Translator's Foreword to *On Hashish*, Howard Eiland correctly argues that Benjamin's conception of drugs is best understood through his notion of "profane illumination" (viii). One of the first thinkers to take up this approach is Herman Schweppenhauser, a contemporary of Benjamin's who writes in his 1971 essay "The Propadeutics of Profane Illumination" that Benjamin's personal use of drugs aims toward the same goal that his entire body of work does – to articulate a form of human experience that is not completely subject to the deadening effects of modernity. Schweppenhauser's central argument, however, is that Benjamin's personal drug use has nothing to do with a desire for affective comfort. Rather, Schweppenhauser contends that Benjamin takes drugs out of an intellectual responsibility to pursue experience to its very

inclination to analyse the components of reality as fashioned by ourselves. Because he was also a materialist, or him the modes of fashioning were shaped in turn by the times and places we occupy in history" ("Perception and Experience" 9).

limits. “The escapist narcotic practices that have recently become commonplace,” Schweppenhauser argues, “scarcely have a spokesperson in Benjamin” (35). Indeed, Schweppenhauser strongly contests any suggestion that Benjamin harbours any interest in a drug-induced “Dionysian union,” but I do not find his interpretation entirely congruent with Benjamin’s messianic spirit, and I do not agree that Benjamin’s sense of intellectual responsibility trumps his concern for psychic therapy so unequivocally. Rather, I argue that a desire for comfort informs not only Benjamin’s personal drug use, but his general conception of modern experience. To make this argument, I proceed with the conceptual framework of metaphoric and metonymic experience I have used to read both Cocteau and Huxley.

Without doubt, to speak of Benjamin in terms of general structures of experience proceeds against a certain critical grain in Benjamin studies. Critics have rightfully noted, for example, that Benjamin’s oeuvre is highly fragmentary and very difficult to gather beneath a systematic theory. Theodor Adorno writes that

His [Benjamin’s] trust in experience – experience in that particular sense that can hardly be defined but only gained through familiarity with Benjamin’s work – forbids the articulation of so-called fundamental principles and the logical deduction of all further thoughts from them.
(Adorno 1988: 10)

On a similar note, George Steiner (2002) argues that Benjamin’s thought is fundamentally “anti-systematic,” and claims that any attempt to incorporate this thought into deconstructive or Lacanian frameworks is downright “exploitative” (21). However, when Steiner tries to explain *why* this manoeuvre is so exploitative, he asserts that

“Benjamin never turns his back on the sacred Jewish tragedy” (21). In other words, he implies that deconstructive or Lacanian movements presumably do not acknowledge or allow for Benjamin’s belief in the messianic redemption of history, a belief that pervades his work from his very earliest writings to his final “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940). Howard Caygill’s *Introducing Walter Benjamin* opens with the similar claim that “Benjamin eludes classification” (3), but I do not fully agree with these wholesale foreclosures of a systematic approach to Benjamin.¹⁹⁸ In response to Steiner, more specifically, I do not believe that a systematic approach to Benjamin is incompatible with his mystical tendency to affirm the existence of non-knowledges that exist beyond the realms of language and history. My theorization of metaphoric experience, for instance, marks an attempt to legitimate mystical experience within the most linguistically-inflected movements of twentieth-century thought. Further, I believe that my rereading of Lacan helps lend Benjamin’s messianism a newfound critical legitimacy, and that it can actually help readers develop a more intimate awareness of what Benjamin means when he speaks of the messiah – a concept that is deeply implicated in his theory of profane illumination, and therefore his views on drugs.

When we find comprehensive critical accounts of the nature of experience in Benjamin, these studies tend to treat the author’s work one piece at a time and to arrange them according to the chronological “phases” of Benjamin’s thought. The *Cambridge Companion* (2004) to Walter Benjamin and Richard Lane’s *Reading Walter Benjamin*

¹⁹⁸ I align myself here with the position of Susan Buck-Morss, who points out that “Benjamin himself encouraged the discovery of [...] ‘systematic tendencies’ even when not explicitly stated by the author” (*Dialectics of Seeing* 213). In “Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption” (2005) Giorgio Agamben similarly writes that “[t]he more one analyzes Benjamin’s thought, the more it appears—contrary to a common impression—to be animated by a rigorously systematic intention” (*Potentialities* 155-156).

(2005) are both studies of this sort. Such chronological studies attempt to do justice to the subtleties and differences that mark each of Benjamin's works, while tracing the threads that run through the different phases of his career.¹⁹⁹ However, I would like to point out that few thinkers criticize the notion of chronological understanding more than Benjamin, who consistently argues that the greatest human faculty is to find similitudes in ideas that span non-contiguous historical moments. In this spirit, my project hopes to provide an account that draws broad connections across chronologically diverse elements of Benjamin's thought without collapsing into ahistoricism.

Critics who speak of the importance of an experience like profane illumination in Benjamin's work tend to emphasize the transitory, politically revolutionary aspects of this idea. Samuel Weber (2002), for example, speaks of Benjamin's interest in non-discursive "interruptions" of experience, particularly in Benjamin's writings on Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. Interruption, Weber says, arrests the subject's awareness of diachrony and punctures it with an instantaneous experience of the present. Weber continues,

If this is so, then Benjamin's concatenation of *Zustand*, gesture, citability and above all, theatre, can help us better to approach the question of what it means to be *situated* in and by a world organized by 'the media', a world that itself is increasingly being organized as *medium*. Perhaps what

¹⁹⁹ Susan Buck-Morss, in *The Dialectics of Seeing*, describes this tendency best when she writes that "[i]ntellectual biographies have commonly spoken of Benjamin's thought in terms of three developmental, quasi-dialectical stages, describing the first [...] as metaphysical and theological, the second [...] as Marxist and materialist, and the third...as an attempt to sublimate these two antithetical poles in an original synthesis" (6). Like my project, she similarly argues that "[t]o the mind that would comprehend intellectual phenomena in terms of logical or chronological development, wherein one thing leads to another," her study offers "little satisfaction" (7).

this entails is nothing more or less than acknowledging what has probably always obtained: that we only take place from place to place, from time to time, between places rather than in them, in the instant of an intervening interval – and that this is what we are all about. (44)

However, Weber claims that this puncturing of discursive experience is performed ultimately in the interest of “the instantaneous emergence of the singular, the incommensurable, the irreducibly different” (39). While I provisionally agree with this claim, I also argue that the “irreducibly different” does not describe the limit of experience for Benjamin. Rather, I suggest that it is the messianic *collapse of all difference* that redeems discursive history for Benjamin and – in the end – overrides his concern with irreducible difference. It is also this movement toward non-difference or continuity that proves to be the only thing that demonstrably provides the Benjaminian subject with a form of therapeutic experience.

Adorno also speaks of the revolutionary character of Benjamin’s thought, but like Weber, suggests that this character manifests itself through quick and transitory interruptions of thought: singularities that blast apart the calcified structures of thought in order to let humanity conceive them anew. Adorno goes so far as to say that Benjamin is “indifferent to the ahistorical” (18). As with the views I have previously mentioned, I find that Adorno neglects Benjamin’s deep-seated messianism, which is in fact an element of his thought that Adorno never manages to embrace (or even to feel comfortable mentioning). In Bram Mertens’s *Dark Images, Secret Hints* (2007), however, we find a thorough account of Talmudic mysticism in Benjamin, and a critical recognition of the unity beyond individual selfhood and historical difference that is always implicit in

Benjamin's thought. Like Mertens, I believe that "[a]s much as it may appear that he is trying to dissemble it himself, there is an overarching logic in Benjamin's intuitions regarding the concepts of tradition, knowledge and truth, or at least a certain continuity which cannot be overlooked" (195). With Mertens' approach I combine Andrew Benjamin's work on the concept of the Benjaminian "veil" contained in *Style and Time: Essays on the Politics of Appearance* (2006); for the veil, this critic argues, is what human subjects know of the world: it is the manifest symptom of our movement toward the ends of experience, since grasped "[k]nowledge rehearses the petrification of the object; the object of knowledge. Knowledge does not provide access to the secret. Knowledge is knowledge of the artwork as the secret. Knowledge maintains the secret, though as known" (13). Messianic wholeness remains behind this veil, but we can only know this wholeness in its moment of veiling. Within the terms of my Lacanian framework, I wish to speak of the non-experience of death as a moment of unifying continuity, and to trace parallels between it and the symptoms that consistently appear in Benjamin's representation of the limit experience.

In *Now-Time/Image Space: Temporalization of Politics in Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of History and Art* (1999), Kia Lindroos gives an account of Benjamin that is largely congruent with my own, particularly when she writes that "[a]s the moment of Now intensifies the singular experience of time, 'higher actuality' of time which creates another layer of the temporal experience, is reached by images" (Lindroos 14). Lindroos studies Benjamin in the same spirit as Andrew Benjamin, in that she is willing to make comprehensive claims about the former Benjamin's entire body of work. Lindroos argues explicitly that "[d]espite Benjamin's fragmentary style of writing, I claim that if his work

is approached from the temporal perspective, it appears as surprisingly systematic, as the issues of time and history are constantly present in Benjamin's thought" (14). She also notes that Benjamin's movement toward the veiled limit of experience (and the messianic redemption lying beyond it) is characterized by a movement from words to images – a key symptom of intoxication in my preceding chapters on Cocteau and Huxley, and one that I hope to interpret again in this chapter through my metonymic/metaphoric framework. Finally, Lindroos highlights the fact that in Benjamin's conception of experience "the intensification of the consciousness of time is transferred from the horizontal [diachronic] idea of ordering time" (194). These are key observations that I interpret within the qualitative structures which I have tried to establish throughout this study, and the dynamics of metaphor and metonymy that I have used to unite otherwise diverse elements of modernist experience.²⁰⁰

By reading Lacanian structures in dialogue with Bataille's notions of continuity and discontinuity, I argue that the modernist conception of experience allows for the justification of Benjamin's messianism in even the most clinical and linguistically-oriented of terms. I do not feel that such a study robs Benjamin's work of its mystery and complexity, but rather that it helps us understand how Benjamin's deep theological commitments can *thrive* in a language-centred system that has been conventionally supposed to preclude them (or at least characterize them as illusory). Further, this study asks a question of Benjamin that few (if any critics) have thought it worthwhile to ask: that is, to what extent can the drug experience or profane illumination make the subject

²⁰⁰ Lindroos could be easily speaking of Huxley when she writes of Benjamin: "The *Now-being* [*Jetztsein*] is existentially connected to the Being-in-Now. I see this as the specific 'peak' of present existence" (251).

feel better, in an affective way? This question is neither unanswerable nor facile, and asking it can provide us with new insight into Benjamin's reflections on experience in general. Bearing these things in mind, I now turn to a direct discussion of Benjamin's work. As I do so, I begin by exploring Benjamin's 1916 essay "On Language as Such and the Languages of Man." As with my discussions of Cocteau and Huxley, I wish to foreground my treatment of the drug experience in Benjamin by exploring his conception of language as a basis for both subjective experience and the distinct psychic discomfort of modernity. Further, since I ultimately wish to place Benjamin's work in conversation with the theories of Jacques Lacan, I will address the specific similarities and differences that emerge between their respective views on language.

Language (1916)

To begin, Benjamin rejects – in absolute terms – the Saussurian principle of arbitrariness in the link between signifier and signified. He lays out his own theory of language most comprehensively in "On Language as Such and the Languages of Man," in which he contends that language does not come to physical objects (or referents) from without, but is rather something that objects contain within themselves. Human knowledge exists principally in language, Benjamin admits, but we fall into an abyss if we take this proposition as a starting point for our conception of experience. Humans communicate their mental being by naming external phenomena, yet within this process of naming "the mental entity that communicates itself is *language*" (318; original emphasis). To reiterate, there are many different languages, but whatever positive content

they successfully communicate from objects themselves *is* language par excellence.²⁰¹

An object's meaning is never exhausted by language, but there is undeniably some positive value in the thing itself that is communicated through the word that names it.

That aspect of meaning which is arbitrary and which slides away will always be a part of human efforts at representation, but it does not warrant the name of "language"; for Benjamin, it is rather a residual scum that Saussure would have us take to be the substance of language.

The naming of things, Benjamin argues, provides us with a synchronic punctuation of meaning: a one-to-one connection between word and thing that does not in any way rely upon the systemic differences between words. There are many things that slip through the fingers of human knowledge, but language is by definition *that which does not* slip away. Like a translation, the word grazes signified meaning like a tangent touching a circle.²⁰² The signified is incapable of being empirically verified through a science of linguistics, but such is the nature of what language truly is, in Benjamin's terms. Language, as opposed to knowledge, is the complete crossing of the bar that someone like Lacan (applying Saussurian principles) associates only with the synchronic axis of language. But the "language of an entity," Benjamin reaffirms, "is the medium in

²⁰¹ Benjamin provides an example: "[t]he language of this lamp, for example, does not communicate the lamp (for the mental being of the lamp, insofar as it is *communicable*, is by no means the lamp itself), but: the language-lamp, the lamp in communication, the lamp in expression. For in language the situation is this: *the linguistic being of all things is their language*" (316; original emphasis).

²⁰² In this comment, I allude to a point that Benjamin makes in his later essay "The Task of the Translator" (1926), where he writes that "[j]ust as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point—establishing, with this touch rather than with the point, the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path toward infinity—a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux" (261). Thus the word grazes signified meaning only indirectly, and yet the content still exerts a palpable, albeit quasi-ineffable presence in the subject's apprehension of the world through language.

which its mental being is communicated. The uninterrupted flow of this communication runs through the whole of nature from the lowest form of existence to man and from man to God” (331). As this last comment suggests, Benjamin appeals to God when he must account for the first (Master) signifier that guarantees the signified contents of names – or in other words, that part of the thing itself the communicates its being positively in language.

Benjamin admits that there are many elements of physical things that exceed the signifying capacity of human words, but insists nonetheless that *some thing* communicates itself in language. This something comes from the sensory object, the thing itself, but even prior to the object it comes from God – who speaks in a language beyond human words.²⁰³ “The absolute relation of name to knowledge,” Benjamin asserts, “exists only in God, only there is name, because it is inwardly identical with the creative word, the pure medium of knowledge” (323). God’s language, operating according to the complete, one-to-one touching between name and thing, retains the original Truth of Adam’s language in Eden. However, when language becomes viewed as

²⁰³ Benjamin’s description of God’s language and the language of knowledge, in fact, is very similar to Lacan’s characterization of The Master’s discourse and the University’s discourse – that is except for the fact that Benjamin seems to literalize the Master as God in his theological explanation of language. As Giorgio Agamben notes,

With this mystical conception of the relationship between the ‘literal’ name of God and human language, we enter into a horizon of thought that was certainly familiar to Benjamin and that has been secularized in our time through the theory of the supremacy of the letter of *grammai* (the originary negative foundation of language), which stating with Derrida, appears in innumerable forms in contemporary French thought.
(*Potentialities* 57)

Agamben does not stop here, however, for neither does Benjamin. Benjamin’s work, rather, “excludes the possibility of such an interpretation,” because unlike Derrida, Benjamin “explicitly states that the language of redeemed humanity has ‘burst the chains of writing’ and is a language that ‘is not written, but festively celebrated’” (57-58). This notion that a language of redeemed humanity moves beyond the displacements of grammar and writing is crucial to our understanding of Benjamin, and I will continue to engage it as I enter into my coming discussion of his hashish protocols.

a mediating “means” of human knowledge, it falls into the order of the profane. Thus Benjamin writes that “God made things knowable in their names. Man, however, names them according to knowledge” (323). Human words tend to become hyper-specific (or hyper-differentiated) when they describe the world, and they create many overlapping words for the same thing; this mania for naming has been present in humans ever since the fall from Eden, but the fundamental lack that provokes it is something that continues to grow along the axis of history. The excess of over-naming, Benjamin suggests, is an ongoing historical process that renders more and more of the individual signifier worthless, as less and less of it manages to touch upon the original, complete meaning of things. Thus language tends to amass this horrible excess like an unhealthy tumour, and humanity’s reliance on the differential relations between words is not simply a fact of language, but a growing historical sickness.

This last statement might seem like a recognizably modernist affirmation of the ineffable singularity inherent in physical objects, but its positioning within Benjamin’s essay is not so simple to understand. For even the ineffable, Benjamin affirms, is the means by which humanity communicates itself to God.²⁰⁴ The last and greatest remaining container of original meaning, according to Benjamin, exists in the human name, for

in his creative word, God called them into being, calling them by their proper names. In the language of men, however, they are over-named [...]

²⁰⁴ To visualize this concept properly, one must reverse the perhaps more well-known modernist ontology which places the noncommunicable or ineffable “beneath” language, and instead conceive of it as an excessive residue that builds on language as more and more of the word loses contact with original meaning.

over-naming as the deepest linguistic reason for all melancholy and (from the point of view of the thing) of all deliberate muteness. (330)

As this process unfolds, the displacing, unsettling mechanisms of language only continue to warrant the name of language insofar as their unfolding grazes the original meaning of God. The language of things, Benjamin asserts, “can pass into the language of knowledge and name only through translation” and all translation aspires toward that “paradisiac state that knew only one language.” (326).²⁰⁵ In this instance, the translation can only touch upon original, complete meaning the way a tangent touches a circle on its way to infinity, and this comparison is one Benjamin states explicitly ten years later in “The Task of the Translator” (1926). The fall of language creates a great excess in words, and this excess is what conveys to humans the knowledge of good and evil, and the impetus for moral judgment. As is the case with the Lacanian symbolic order, Benjamin’s conception of a fall from an original Master’s discourse entails a “fall” into the knowledge of good and evil, but as much as this fall seems to stem from time immemorial, Benjamin regards it as a historical process still ongoing in the twentieth century.

This fall of language is crucial for understanding Benjamin’s later writings on drugs because it profoundly informs his view of modern psychic pain, along with his

²⁰⁵ Giorgio Agamben, in “Language and History: Linguistic and Historical Categories in Benjamin’s Thought” (2005), picks up on this same aspect of Benjamin, writing that according to Benjamin’s model, “[h]istory and meaning are thus produced together, but they follow a condition of language that is, so the speak, prehistoric, in which language exists in a “pure life of feeling without meaning” (*Potentialities* 51). This function, of course, begs the question: how we are supposed to conceive of “this pure language in which all communication and all meaning are extinguished?” (53). In this instance, I agree with Agamben’s answer to his own question: that for Benjamin, “[w]hat remains unsayable and unsaid in every language is therefore precisely what every language means and wants to say: pure language, the expressionless word” (54).

view of the drug as a potential source of alleviation. As I go on to discuss these aspects of Benjamin's thought, however, I will have to make an exception to the chronological framework I have thus far applied to Cocteau and Huxley. More specifically, I will explore Benjamin's later essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939) before treating his first-person exposition of drug intoxication in his hashish protocols (1927-1934). I do so because Benjamin's later essay on Baudelaire condenses and formalizes many diverse thoughts on subjective experience that he attempts to explore throughout his earlier hashish protocols and his concept of profane illumination. It is in the Baudelaire essay, for example, that Benjamin most thoroughly links the dull suffering of modernity to the Freudian (and Simmelian) concept of a psychic shield. Further, it is only by first understanding this later work that one can conversely understand the stakes involved in Benjamin's concept of drug use and profane illumination. As I have done with Cocteau and Huxley, I thus attempt to understand how Benjamin conceives of the "pain of modernity" before exploring how he hopes to address this pain therapeutically through drugs.

The Psychic Shield, *Erfahrung*, and Involuntary Memory

In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939) Benjamin offers his most sustained exposition of the causes of modern psychic pain and the subject's insensitivity to any experience that might exceed the demands of everyday, utilitarian consciousness. By way of introduction, Benjamin attributes the decreased affective reception of poetry in the mid-nineteenth century to a change in the fundamental "structure" of experience (153). To theorize this change, Benjamin invokes Freud's concept of *thanatos*, claiming that one

of the primary functions of consciousness is the “protection against stimuli” (157). Consciousness, Benjamin asserts, palliatively protects the psyche against shocks from without, and “[t]he more readily consciousness registers these shocks, the less likely are they to have a traumatic effect” (157).²⁰⁶ The patient is methodically trained to cope with stimuli and thereby to deaden their psychic impact, and when the experiential shock “is thus cushioned, parried by consciousness,” it takes on a recognizable place in the subject’s memory as a finite event, one that has been “*lived* in the strict sense” (158; my emphasis). This absorption into the conscious memory allows an experience to be recalled at will, but at the price of precluding its ability to impact subject’s future experiences in any significant way. Says Benjamin, “[p]erhaps the special achievement of shock defence may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents” (159). When shock experiences become more frequent in modernity, the subject becomes more accustomed to absorbing their excessive contents and converting them into information, assigning them a petrified status in the chronology of one’s life.

Benjamin, however, attempts to map out an experience that is more affectively potent than that produced by the psychic shield. To do so, he draws upon Marcel Proust’s distinction between the *mémoire volontaire* and the *mémoire involontaire*. The voluntary memory, Benjamin claims, serves the domineering intellect by distilling fragmentary perceptions into finished experiences. The involuntary memory, however, has a much more profound impact (both intellectually and affectively) upon lived experience, and it

²⁰⁶ The work of Freudian psychoanalysis, he adds, is concerned with what happens when these shocks slip through the psyche’s protective shield.

is through this form of memory that the past can live on in a vital, undiminished way.

Quoting Freud, Benjamin insists that

memory fragments are ‘often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness.’ Put in Proustian terms, this means that only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject as an experience, can become a component of *mémoire involontaire*. (157; original emphasis)

However, if the involuntary memory cannot be accessed by a voluntary act of consciousness, it must then have a trigger. Benjamin thus follows Proust’s suggestion that the contents of the involuntary memory do not necessarily reside within the subject, but within a discrete object located in the material world.²⁰⁷ This is a claim that I wish to tie back to my treatment of Lacan, but before I do so, I wish to reaffirm that this trigger-object is not an object of *conscious* pursuit for Benjamin. It lies in wait for human subjects and ambushes them with a gush of powerful memories when they least expect it, just as Proust’s entire magnum opus *à la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) was allegedly provoked by a single bite from a Madeleine cookie.

In order to help define his concept of a substantial “depth-experience,” Benjamin introduces a dichotomy between the German words *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, which both translate into English as “experience,” but possess distinct connotations. *Erfahrung*

²⁰⁷ Steiner speaks of Benjamin’s “anti-systematic vision of specific objects, artefacts, grammatical tropes, [and] urban locales” (21). But with respect to the effects of hashish that Benjamin eventually describes, I agree with Lindroos’s claim that “[d]espite Benjamin’s fragmentary style of writing... if his work is approached from the temporal perspective, it appears as surprisingly systematic, as the issues of time and history are constantly present in Benjamin’s thought” (14).

connotes an experience in which stimuli enter the mind but are not consciously apprehended. *Erlebnis*, on the other hand, serves the subject's psychic shield and denotes a conceptual, biographical awareness that relegates the contents of experience to "the sphere of a certain hour in one's life" (159). The functioning of *Erlebnis* protects the subject against excessive stimuli by assigning such stimuli "the character of having been lived in the strict sense" (158). Thus the contents of *Erlebnis* reach the subject as finished products of consciousness, while in contrast, those of *Erfahrung* preserve something of their ineffable integrity by avoiding conscious absorption. It is for this reason that Benjamin suggests that "the special achievement of shock defence may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents" (159).²⁰⁸ Thus the workings of *Erlebnis* serve the voluntary memory by arranging experience into something that can be wilfully recalled. In his reading of *Erfahrung*, on the other hand, Benjamin refers to the excessive, *intoxicating* contents of modern experience – contents that enter the subject unconsciously – while affirming that only these contents are capable of erupting into the present and making possible an experience more profound and affectively fulfilling than that offered by the voluntary memory.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ In these passages, Benjamin almost quotes Simmel verbatim, for Simmel similarly argues in "The Metropolis and Mental Life," that when it comes to the self-numbing of consciousness, "[t]he self-preservation of certain personalities is bought at the price of devaluating the whole objective world" (187).

²⁰⁹ Benjamin's reading of Proust gives immense credit to Jean Cocteau, who (Benjamin argues) understands the author in a way that other writers seem to have overlooked:

[a]nd there is no telling what encounters would be in store for us if we were less inclined to give in to sleep. Proust did not give in to sleep. And yet – or, rather, precisely for this reason – Jean Cocteau was able to say in a beautiful essay that the intonation of Proust's voice obeyed the laws of night and honey. By submitting to these laws he conquered the hopeless sadness within him...and from the honeycombs of memory he built a house for the swarm of his thoughts. (199)

For Proust, it is a matter of utter chance whether a subject accesses the involuntary memory. In his Baudelaire essay, however, Benjamin argues that in the historical past of Western culture, the involuntary memory was much more accessible to the average person, and that in the twentieth century, specific historical forces have conditioned the psyche to resist stimuli in an unprecedented way. On a material level, the rise of mass culture and newspapers has marked a cultural tendency to convert experience into “information” and to sterilize it as a set of finished events, devoid of excessive or involuntary meaning.²¹⁰ Writes Benjamin, “[h]istorically, the various modes of communication have competed with one another. The replacement of the older narration by information, of information by sensation, reflects the increasing atrophy of experience” (155). What gives the involuntary memory a substantial meaning for Benjamin is the fact that it does not draw its contents only from the individual’s past, but from the cultural past as well. In this vein, Benjamin writes that “[w]here there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain moments of the individual past combine with material of the collective past” (156). Historically speaking, this cultural component of ecstatic experience was once able to produce a lived connection between the subject and the historical past more reliably than Proust’s model of chance would suggest. Writes Benjamin of social rituals and ceremonies:

The rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals [...] kept producing an amalgamation of these two elements of memory [the personal and collective] over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained handles of memory for a lifetime. In this way,

²¹⁰ Benjamin provides his most sustained critique of information in his essay “The Storyteller.”

voluntary and involuntary recollection lose their mutual exclusiveness.

(156)

In other words, the past once provided a space for the merging of voluntary and involuntary memories, but in modernity, this space has ceded influence to the sterilizing effects of utilitarian thinking and the distillation of experience into information and *Erlebnis*. In this past era, Benjamin argues, there were discrete objects that could be counted upon to draw almost *any* observer into such an immanent experience of the personal and collective past, and these were the objects of cultic and ritualistic value. They possessed a palpable affective depth and involuntarily impressed upon the observer the responses of all the other people who had encountered them, thus bringing this cultural past into direct relation to the perceiver's present. Benjamin refers to this aspect of the ritual object as its "aura," but as he suggests three years earlier in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), the power and authority of the aura has faded in modern times. Instead of a "sacred" illumination, the contemporary world requires a new, profane way of accessing the involuntary memory. With the rise of information and reproducibility, however, the modern subject must struggle with the question of how it can wilfully provoke this experience instead of leaving the matter to chance. It is this very sort of question that leads Benjamin, earlier in his career, to attempt to jump-start the profane illumination through the use of psychoactive drugs.

As he persists in articulating the affective problem of modernity, Benjamin quotes Friedrich Engels's description of the urban masses, which presents these masses as a primary cause of affective and intellectual removal: "[t]he greater the number of people that are packed into a tiny space, the more repulsive and offensive becomes the brutal

indifference, the unfeeling concentration of each person on his private affairs” (qtd in Benjamin 163). Benjamin, however, distances himself from this position. He remains dead-set against the rational conversion of experience into information and *Erlebnis*, but does not blame the modern crowd as such for this development. Picking up from his observations on Baudelaire, he suggests that Engels “came from a Germany that was still provincial; he may never have faced the temptation to lose himself in a stream of people” (163). The more authentic form of experience (*Erfahrung*) is still possible within the modern crowd, and this form of experience is inherently tied to a desire to “lose oneself.” However, there remains the possibility that such a profane illumination can itself become a shock experience if it occurs too often, as the mind will inevitably build up a resistance to it. Georges Bataille – a contemporary and friend of Benjamin²¹¹ – also admits that while “[t]here are some positive aspects of intoxication [...] ultimately it constitutes a sort of project” (*Inner* 60). The intoxicating moment always runs the risk of being absorbed by habit, for “[e]cstasy has no meaning [...] if not that it captivates; but should it remain and the subject become bored: ecstasy decidedly no longer has meaning” (*Inner* 60).²¹² Thus, as Bataille suggests, the ecstatic experience cannot do its work unless it

²¹¹ Benjamin first met Bataille in Paris in 1937, and no doubt thought highly of the man, for during his flight from Nazi occupation in France (1939-40), he would entrust to Bataille the manuscript of his cherished *Arcades Project*, along with much of his personal correspondence. Throughout this chapter, I invoke Bataille’s theory of intoxication to help bring Benjamin’s work into conversation with my general framework of metonymic and metaphoric experience.

²¹² Take, for example, the difference between a fresh metaphor and a clichéd one. A fresh metaphor creates a poetic comparison and finds similarity in two or more things where such similarity was not perceived prior. However, if the metaphor reaches consciousness as a cliché, as with the expression “love is a rose,” then the basis of the connection between signifiers is based upon *conventional juxtaposition*, rather than the vital, poetic cognizing of similarity. As poetic comparison degenerates into conventional juxtaposition, the fresh metaphor, over time, thus *degenerates into a metonymy*.

“captivates,” which is why any experience of eroticism or intoxication can provide an education into profane illumination without by any means guaranteeing it.

Perhaps Benjamin’s most sustained articulation of the difference between shock experience and revelatory perception can be found in his evaluation of film in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Film, he says, is like psychoanalysis in that it has historically “isolated and made analyzable things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception. For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the film has brought about a similar deepening of apperception” (229). The bringing together of art and science also makes film more susceptible to critique, and Benjamin claims that this feature is one of “the revolutionary functions of film.” The speed of the film defamiliarizes the objects of perception, and “filmed behaviour lends itself more readily to analysis because of its incomparably more precise statements of the situation” (229). Film shows things from new angles and thus affords new possibilities for human action; yet on the other hand, it does not necessarily encourage the mind to draw connections between the things it sees, because as quickly as an image is apprehended it is gone, and “[t]he spectator’s process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change” (231). The mind responds to shocks by developing a heightened presence of mind, but this heightened presence is always capable of being put to the service of the subject’s psychic shield. The ambivalence of Benjamin’s conclusions in this essay applies to his theory of profane illumination as well. The film puts the audience in the position of critic, but with respect to movies “this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one” (234). As Benjamin reminds us in this essay, we must not forget the

potentially sinister political effects of intoxication, especially if we begin to associate it with the sort of numb satiety we find in Huxley's *Brave New World*. The concealing possibility of narcosis is always at work. However, Benjamin's ambivalence (like Huxley's) depends largely upon the conceptual dichotomy of concealment and revelation. If the psyche cushions itself against shock, then the subject requires something that will help it break through this cushioning. However, if the subject finds such a revelatory agent and draws upon it too often, the agent might eventually lead the mind into perceptual aridity. Without doubt, this very danger would apply to the subject's use of drugs, which might at first stimulate the involuntary memory and provoke experiences of *Erfahrung*, but might over time cause the psyche to dull its reception of stimuli.

In "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin explicitly connects the cushioning, diluting effects of modernity with the structure of time and desire as an unfolding, metonymic chain. "In a film," he writes, "perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle. That which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in the film" (171). In this passage, Benjamin connects the emptiness of modern experience to principles akin to Heidegger's notion of the "everyday," as well as Lacan's metonymic model of desire. It is that which is ephemeral, yet ever-the-same in its regulated "starting over again" that induces the atrophy of modern experience. Some subjects try to meet this development by immersing themselves in games and gambling, hoping thereby to reconcile themselves to the modern principles of chance and ephemerality. But the sensitive, poetically-minded individual resents these changes, writes Benjamin, and "does not participate in the game [...] he rejects the narcotics with which the gamblers seek to submerge the consciousness that has

delivered them to the march of the second-hand" (176; my emphasis). The depth experience (*Erfahrung*) rather occurs in the instant. It skewers the unfolding of "homogeneous, empty time" and places the individual in synchronic relation to the past, thus interrupting the deadening flow of chronology which makes things ever-the-same in their unfolding ephemerality.

In many ways, Benjamin arrives at a similar conception of the depth experience eleven years prior to "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in his work on *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928).²¹³ In this text, Benjamin speaks of the difference between the experience of symbolism and that of allegory, and conceives of each in metaphoric and metonymic terms, respectively. Benjamin finds that these two experiences are distinguished by "the decisive category of time," where "in the symbol [or metaphoric experience,] destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly

²¹³ In his critical introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, George Steiner notes how Benjamin submitted a manuscript of this text as a doctoral dissertation to the university in Frankfurt in 1925. Ultimately, the text was found formally unsuitable for the field of German Studies, and it was passed on to the department of Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art, where it was rebuffed as "an incomprehensible morass," in Steiner's words (11). The completion of this book and eventual rejection, Steiner goes on to note, "mark the close of an essentially romantic-metaphysical period in Benjamin's thought. His highly ambiguous contacts with Marxism came immediately after" (15). I mention this comment to help provide some intellectual context to my quoting of Benjamin throughout this chapter, which does not always appear in a neat chronological order. For the purposes of this chapter, I agree with Steiner's general characterization of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* as a turning point in Benjamin's career, after which his thought becomes less metaphysical and more concerned with the historical materialism of the Frankfurt school – to which he turned after his rejection by the German academy. This shift over Benjamin's career can help make sense of the fact that in some of his early works, like "On Language as Such and the Languages of Man" (1916), Benjamin might speak of certain aspects of human experience as the products of an immemorial fall from Eden. In later works from the 1930's, however, like "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) or "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), one can find a clear emphasis on the historical forces of modernity that have conditioned massive changes in human experience. It is in his closing period of life, and particularly in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), that Benjamin most intimately draws together the historical and metaphysical poles of his thought – poles that appear in dialectical relation in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* as the mythical and historical poles that (for Benjamin) distinguish tragedy from the baroque play, respectively. For more on this historical/metaphysical dialectic in Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, see Steiner's introduction.

revealed in the light of redemption” (166). In the allegorical or metonymic register, however,

Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in a death’s head [...] This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of its decline. (166)

The symbolic or metaphorical experience unfolds within a temporal register that confronts the subject with silent wonder, while the allegorical register inscribes the unfolding time of history, which is tied to the experience of sorrow and the fear of impending death. This portrait of sorrowful, historical existence is something Benjamin associates with the subjective experience of “discontinuous finitude,” an experience that appeals to language and conceptual thought to grasp and control the natural world.

In “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” the alienating effect of chronology is that of the conveyor belt, in which all discrete experiences are rendered incomplete in their unfolding, metonymic succession. Gamblers, for example, seek out only the enjoyments that modern psychic structures still afford them, and think only of “[t]he ivory ball which rolls into the *next* compartment, the *next* card which lies on top [,which] are the very antithesis of a falling star” (“Some Motifs” 175; my emphasis). The serialization of time-as-succession is antithetical to the spatialization of time in an image, as is the case when one poetically associates an unfulfilled wish with the sight of a shooting star. For Benjamin, the distinct conceptions of desire as unfolding time and as an instantaneous image mark two converse structures of experience. For the purposes of this project, I

associate the former with the metonymic pole of experience and the latter with the metaphoric.

For Baudelaire (says Benjamin), modern beauty exists in the experience of “*correspondances*.” Benjamin interprets this word within his understanding of Proust’s involuntary memory, and suggests that correspondences are the direct products of this forgotten faculty. “The *correspondances*,” he writes, “are the data of remembrance – not historical data, but data of prehistory. What makes festive days great and significant is the encounter with an earlier life” (178; original emphasis). One cannot use analytical language to articulate these overlappings of past and present, however, lest they lose their impact and crumble like sand-dollars within the grasp of conceptual thought. Some modern subjects have completely lost their ability to have such experiences, and this impotence provokes a unique form of twentieth-century frustration, in which “[t]he outbreaks of rage are timed to the ticking of the seconds to which the melancholy man is a slave” (180).²¹⁴

Toward the end of his piece on Baudelaire, Benjamin mentions many of the same points he takes up at length in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical

²¹⁴ Throughout this piece, Benjamin speaks of Henri Bergson’s theory of duration. To reinforce this particular point, he claims that duration “is a ‘sixth sense’ acquired by the departed which takes the form of an ability to derive harmony even from the empty passage of time. To be sure, it is quite easily disrupted by the rhythm of the second-hand.” (195) However, Benjamin is also highly critical of the ahistorical nature of Bergson’s *durée*, and of the manner in which it seems to be an experience that homogenizes history, rather than setting discrete correspondences into play. Bergson’s worst mistake is his eschewing of the reality of death, for “[i]f Baudelaire...holds in his hands the scattered fragments of genuine historical experience, Bergson in his conception of the *durée* has become far more estranged from history” (181). Benjamin goes on to add that “The fact that death is eliminated from Bergson’s *durée* isolates it effectively from a historical (as well as prehistorical) order” (181). The *durée* cannot have its intended therapeutic effect without a Heideggerian being-toward-death. In this claim, Benjamin suggests that there must always be a limit to experience, a limit that sets the boundaries for the play of temporal and spatial correspondences: “[t]he *durée* from which death has been eliminated has the miserable endlessness of a scroll. Tradition is excluded from it. It is the quintessence of a passing moment [*Erlebnis*] that struts about in the borrowed garb of experience. The *spleen*, on the other hand, exposes the passing moment in all its nakedness” (181).

Reproduction,” particularly reproduction and the diminishment of the aura, which according to Benjamin’s piece on Proust is a reliable, “crisis-proof” way of triggering the play of the involuntary memory. In “Some Motifs,” however, Benjamin also leaves the nature of the Baudelairean correspondences somewhat ambivalent. For example, are these correspondences derived from the historical (contiguous) juxtaposition of certain ideas and objects, or do they emerge via some other force? If we look toward Benjamin’s earlier work, we find that correspondences derive from the principle of non-sensuous similarity – a form of semblance that defies empirical verification. Non-sensuous similarity is a force that exists both in things and in the human mind, and it draws objects, emotions, and ideas together and bypasses the differences that structure everyday symbolic life. The importance of this (fundamentally metaphoric) semblance-perceiving and semblance-producing activity is present in Benjamin’s 1933 essay “On the Mimetic Faculty.” As with the involuntary memory, he associates the degeneration of the “mimetic faculty” with the effects of modernity.²¹⁵ The highest capacity for producing similarities belongs to humans, Benjamin argues, and their gift for seeing resemblances is “nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role” (333). The direction of historical change, Benjamin constantly insists, “seems definable as the increasing decay of the mimetic faculty” (334). When the perception of correspondences *is* possible, however, is always remains “limited to flashes. It flits past” (335). Direct testimony of the mimetic faculty,

²¹⁵ Marcus Boon also notes in his introductory essay in *On Hashish* that “this phenomenon of sameness—at once the precondition and manifestation of the mimetic faculty that for Benjamin informs all of man’s higher functions—gives rise to a feeling of joy” (“Hashish” 11).

Benjamin continues, is best found in imagistic forms of reading and writing, forms that depend upon direct correspondence with their signifieds rather than arbitrary relations to other words:²¹⁶

Such reading is the most ancient: reading before all languages, from the entrails, the stars, or dances. Later the mediating link of a new kind of reading, of runes and hieroglyphs, came into use. It seems fair to suppose that these were the stages by which the mimetic gift, which was once the foundation of occult practices, gained admittance to writing and language.

(336)

This mimetic faculty tends to express itself in forms of play, Benjamin adds, since semblances appear only briefly to the subject and must therefore be thrown endlessly into play. However, Benjamin only makes this claim because he takes it as a given, at this point, that any breaking-through of the mind's palliative shield can only be fleeting. He believes that the ecstatic experience is one that must always be wrested from the historical, diachronic flow of time and its displacing effects, and this supposition aligns his notion of ecstasy somewhat neatly with that of Jacques Lacan.

In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan investigates many of the same psychic principles that Benjamin invokes in his concept of "profane illumination," and does so by

²¹⁶ Giorgio Agamben, in "Language and History: Linguistic and Historical Categories in Benjamin's Thought" (2005) draws a connection between language and history in Benjamin similar to the one I try to articulate in this chapter. The forward flow of time, Agamben writes, the time of sorrow and change, unfolds under the "incurable 'shadow' of grammar, the darkness that originally inheres in language and that—in the necessary coincidence of history and grammar—founds the historical condition of human beings" (50). Thus as humans attempt to return to a previous moment in which they had direct access to God-given names, history becomes the cipher of the shadow that denies human beings, direct access to the level of names" (50-51). Thus the degeneration of language itself into a dependence on unfolding grammar marks a certain historical fall in humanity. That is to say that in Agamben's reading of Benjamin, "[t]he historical condition of human beings is inseparable from their condition as speaking beings" (51).

investigating a concept that is very familiar to Benjamin: that of Kantian beauty. The symbolic register, says Lacan, functions within the realm of the “good,” which is part of its symbolic law.²¹⁷ However, Lacan refers to the experience of beauty as a “crossing point” that opens onto the “field of the beyond-the-good principle” (237). It seems at first, Lacan says, that desire itself does not operate in the realm of the beautiful; but it would be more accurate to say that “the beautiful has the effect [...] of suspending, lowering, disarming desire. The appearance of beauty intimidates and stops desire” (238). It is important to recall here that for Lacan, desire is synonymous with lack, and to stop desire is temporarily to expel lack. Lacan also insists that it is possible to detect the experience of beauty in written texts, and in a striking correlation with Benjamin, he suggests that the symptoms of this experience manifest themselves through a play of memories and mental associations:

With the precision of a Geiger counter, you can pick [the beautiful] up by means of references to the aesthetic register that the subject will give you

²¹⁷ In this passage, Lacan is no doubt gesturing toward Kant’s argument that beauty can have nothing to do with the good, since the category of the “good” belongs to the faculty of the Understanding, and the beautiful cannot be interpreted within the categories put forward by this faculty. Benjamin explicitly engages with Kant’s thought throughout his career, particularly in his 1917 essay “On the Program of the Coming Philosophy.” I invoke Kant’s concept of beauty here, however, not only because Benjamin does, but because Lacan also draws upon it in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* seminar. When I refer to Kant’s theory of beauty in the coming pages, I refer specifically to his notion that the beautiful object exceeds the attempt of the human Understanding to cognize it according to defined “concepts.” I have discussed this aspect of Kant’s thought in my previous chapter, and invoke it again here to show just how closely it resembles Lacan’s theory of the beautiful as something that reveals to the subject a certain insufficiency in the symbolic order. This insufficiency reveals a hole in discourse that the subject approaches via the encounter with the beautiful, and the resulting “vacillation” of analysis and “intimidation” of desire denotes an intermediary state in which the subject has approached the point of dissolution, and yet stopped short of it. To encounter the point of dissolution entirely would, for Benjamin, entail the arrival of the messiah, and for Kant, it would entail an encounter with the “sublime,” which exceeds conceptual or categorical thought so radically that it blows them apart altogether, whereas the beautiful exceeds them only enough to provoke their ticklish, continued attempt to grasp the beautiful object conceptually. In Kant, the sublime thus stands to the beautiful in the way that for Benjamin, the arrival of messianic continuity stands to the profane illumination.

in his associations, in his broken, disconnected monologue, either in the form of quotations or of memories from his schooldays. (239)

Who, we might ask, is more interested than Benjamin in quotations, disconnected monologue, correspondences, and memories? In fact, all of these symptoms of an encounter with beauty can apply directly to Benjamin's descriptions of the profane illumination. Like Benjamin, Lacan also detects the element of play that Kant finds so inherent to an experience of the beautiful. What Benjamin certainly adds to Lacan here, however, is the notion that in the experience of the beautiful, the subject's personal memory intersects with a wider, cultural memory. Discrete elements come into play in disconnected form, and yet these singularities come together in a play of semblance.²¹⁸

Lacan does not speak about the intermediate experience of correspondences so much as Benjamin. Rather, he focuses on the death toward which the experience of beauty points the subject. In a reading of *Antigone*, Lacan describes the manner by which the eponymous heroine proceeds with knowledge of her impending death. This knowledge, Lacan says, allows readers to notice certain things about the beautiful that they otherwise could not: namely its collusion with death and nonbeing, as "[t]he violent illumination, the glow of beauty, coincides with the moment of transgression or of realization of *Antigone's Atē*" (281). In a passage similar in spirit to Benjamin, Lacan writes that

It is in that direction that a certain relationship to a beyond of the central field is established for us, but it is also that which prevents us from seeing

²¹⁸ Lacan's use of the term "associations" does not carry the same Baudelairean weight as Benjamin's French "*correspondances*," but nonetheless, the similarities in their views warrant further comparison.

its true nature, that which dazzles us and separates us from its true function. The moving side of beauty causes all critical judgment to vacillate, stops analysis, and plunges the different forms involved into a certain confusion or, rather, an essential blindness. (281)

For Benjamin, this vacillation of critical judgment entails a ceding of language's influence over consciousness, as the subject becomes less aware of words and concepts and finds him or herself more intimately aware of images and space. In his *Ethics* seminar, Lacan adds that when Sophocles places his heroine in the direct presence of death, the resulting relationship "suspends everything that has to do with transformation, with the cycle of generation and decay or with history itself, and it places us on a level that is more extreme than any other insofar as it is directly attached to language as such" (285). The experience of beauty paves the way toward nonbeing and therein suspends linguistic understanding. Lacan implicitly connects the experience of beauty to that of metaphoric forces when he writes that "[t]o put it in the terms of Levi-Strauss – and I am certain that I am not mistaken in invoking him here, since I was instrumental in having had him reread *Antigone* and he expressed himself to me in such terms – Antigone with relation to Creon finds herself *in the place of synchrony in opposition to diachrony* (285; my emphasis). In this claim, Lacan sets off a massive chain of associations throughout his work that make explicit the metonymy/metaphor dichotomy I have discussed throughout this project. The experience of beauty is without doubt a form of profane *intoxication*; it suspends analytical consciousness, temporarily inhibits the workings of the symbolic

order²¹⁹ and opens a hole onto the nonbeing that is the subject's death. The subject, caught up in the experience of beauty, thus "comes up against the fact that he may disappear from the [signifying] chain of what he is" (295).²²⁰ Like Benjamin, Lacan affirms that the experience of beauty is a punctuation of the signifying chain on a synchronic, vertical axis. Further, both thinkers affirm that while this experience sets off the play of semblance and correspondence, such play is also an intermediate symptom of the subject's more general movement toward death.

The experience of beauty, writes Lacan, places the subject in direct relation to his or her own death, but this relation can appear before the subject "only in a blinding flash" (295), and not in the sustained way that Jean Cocteau suggests in his descriptions of vegetable calm, or Aldous Huxley suggests in his descriptions of his psychedelic visits to the eternal present. Once again, Lacan attempts to close down the possibility of such a sustained experience within the liminal space between the symbolic order (marked by the diachronic signifying chain) and the nonbeing of death. He does, however, concede that

[i]t is doubtless possible to achieve for a single moment [...] something which enables one human being to be for another in the place that is both living and dead of the Thing. In this act and only at this moment, he may

²¹⁹ This observation accords with Rainer Rochlitz's claim that "Benjamin embraces the other side of the Kantian aesthetics, which sees in beauty part of the thing in itself, inaccessible to discursive knowledge" (180-1).

²²⁰ The subject's awareness of his or her potential for dissolution, via the "hole" in the symbolic, foreshadows the theory of "feminine *jouissance*" that Lacan articulates more than ten years later (1972-73). As I argued in my previous chapter, Lacan's model of feminine *jouissance* posits a form of satisfaction that is *other* to the sequential, differential basis of masculine (or metonymic) *jouissance*. Feminine *jouissance* marks the subject's willing encounter with that hole in discourse which breaks down the bounds of subjectivity itself as the subject moves closer toward it.

simulate with his flesh the consummation of what he is not under any circumstances. (300)

For Lacan, what the subject “is not under any circumstances” is a being beyond the field of signification and the structures of language and desire. Subjects can experience an intoxicated rush of associations and correspondences, but this rush is itself the symptom of a general movement toward death, a movement that takes place along an experiential spectrum whose poles function according to the principles of what I have called metonymic (historical, diachronic) and metaphoric (ecstatic, synchronic) experience. Thus in summation, Benjamin’s conception of experience is informed by the same qualitative structures that I take to be deeply entrenched in the thought of European modernism. What I wish to explore for the rest of this chapter, however, is what Benjamin therapeutically *does* with these structures, particularly through his first-person accounts of drug intoxication collected in *On Hashish*.

The Hashish Protocols (1927-1934)

Benjamin’s experiments with hashish, opium, and mescaline²²¹ took place between the years 1927 and 1934 in the cities of Berlin, Marseilles, and Ibiza. Other participants in these experiments included Ernst Bloch, Jean Selz, Ernst Joel, Fritz Fränkel, as well as Egon Wissing and his wife Gert. In the records of these experiments, Benjamin affirms a pleasurable relaxation in the boundaries of his mind, and in a description of opium intoxication entitled “Crock Notes,” he makes the *therapeutic*

²²¹ The fact that Benjamin explicitly engages hashish, opium, and mescaline only furthers the affinity between his work and that of the previous two chapters.

aspect of drug-taking explicit, claiming that “it is not going too far to say that a principle motive for taking the drug is, in very many cases, to augment the drug-taker’s resources in the struggle for existence” (83-84). Further, he affirms that “this [therapeutic] goal is by no means a fictive one; on the contrary, in very many cases it is actually reached” (*On Hashish* 84). Normal modern subjects, Benjamin assumes, harbour tendencies that keep them from having the type of profound experience [*Erfahrung*] he associates with the profane illumination in 1928 (his “Surrealism” essay), and later on with the involuntary memory (“Some Motifs” in 1939). Among these personal pitfalls are “[s]urliness, obstinacy, [and] self-righteousness,” character traits that are “rarely encountered among devotees of the drug” (84).²²² Truly informed drug-takers, Benjamin claims, are conversely affected by a “[b]oundless goodwill” and a “[f]alling away of neurotic-obsessive anxiety complexes” (19). To be sure, Benjamin’s drug experiences are not always so positive, but it is productive nonetheless to address the question of how drugs might provide the modern subject with an affective amelioration before delving into the possibility of a bad trip.

As I mentioned earlier, Benjamin suggests that the experience of drugs offers an introductory lesson into the experience of profane illumination. As he later outlines in “Some Motifs on Baudelaire,” this experience presents the subject with a play of correspondences that vertically skewers the horizontal flow of time. Consistent with his attitude in “Some Motifs,” Benjamin claims in “Main Features of My First Impression of Hashish” that a marked “[a]version to information” emerges from his drug experiences,

²²² Already, we can see Benjamin gesturing toward the authentic/inauthentic drug-taker dichotomy that is so central to Cocteau and Huxley’s opinions on drugs.

along with a “pronounced antipathy to conversing about matters of practical life, the future, dates, politics” (*On Hashish* 21). While intoxicated, Benjamin no longer cares about practical concerns or future plans, which are predicated upon the historical unfolding of time. Rather, hashish²²³ summons a series of correspondences that Benjamin experiences according to the dynamics of semblance, in a way that crosses not only diverse times, but diverse objects of sensory perception.²²⁴ He writes of his first impression on hashish: “[o]ven turns to cat. The word ‘ginger’ is uttered and suddenly in place of the desk there is a fruit stand, in which I immediately recognize the desk” (21). In the play of semblance, words exist as phonetic objects as much as linguistic signifiers. This play marks an ascendance in the pole of language that Lacan would characterize as metaphoric (and Bataille would deem erotic), and is also connected to the giving over of time to space.²²⁵ In articulating something like a series of correspondences, Benjamin speaks of the “colportage” phenomenon of space, in which correspondences overlap while allowing objects and events to remain discrete:

The connection between colportage and the profoundest theological intentions. They reflect it through a glass darkly, transpose into the space of contemplation what holds only for the space of active life. Namely, that

²²³ Like Marcus Boon, I would also like to affirm that “[a]lthough hashish, opium, and mescaline differ in their effects, this montage of texts and observations tends to blur the boundaries between these drugs—as do Benjamin’s readily apparent personality, and his gorgeous writing style” (“Walter Benjamin” 7).

²²⁴ Lindroos similarly affirms that “[i]n the pre-rational world of perception, objects are not as strongly connected through the conceptual language, as they are interconnected through their similarity” (Lindroos 197).

²²⁵ In previous chapters, I have associated the metaphoric pole of experience with a dissolution of time. Yet Benjamin, I must admit, speaks often of intoxication as a form of *Rausch* or “rush.” However, I must emphasize the fact that this rush is a *spatial* as opposed to temporal phenomenon. The rushing play of correspondences, in temporal terms, is still experienced by the individual as a crystallized, monadic instant of time.

the world always remains the same (that all events could have taken place in the same space). (29)

In this passage, Benjamin describes the play of semblance that draws together objects of perception, and suggests that it also draws together the contents of the personal and collective memory. Temporal events and sensory phenomena thus begin to overlap without completely fusing together, marking the subject's passage into an intermediate state between the metonymic and metaphoric poles of consciousness.

The movement from time to space and from symbolic difference toward the play of semblance shifts the structure of Benjamin's experience from one of spatiotemporal succession to one of a singular image. Writes Benjamin of his intoxication:

What one writes down the following day is more than an enumeration of momentary experiences [*Erlebnis*]. In the night, the trance sets itself off from everyday experience [*Erfahrung*] with fine, prismatic edges. It forms a kind of figure, and is more than usually memorable. I would say: it shrinks and thereby takes on the form of a flower. (53; emphasis in original)

That is to say, time takes on the quality of a crystallized image as Benjamin describes his psychic movement from words into image-space. This movement is not instantaneous, however, but occurs with a gradual spatializing and stretching of time as Benjamin descends (or ascends) from sobriety to intoxication. He is struck by how long it takes him to finish uttering a sentence, and can feel the phonetic substance²²⁶ of words on his lips

²²⁶ Lane helps affirm this point about Benjamin's writing by claiming that "[t]he dissolution of words into music is part of a redemptive process whereby 'feelings' are reborn 'in a suprasensuous nature'" (Lane 44).

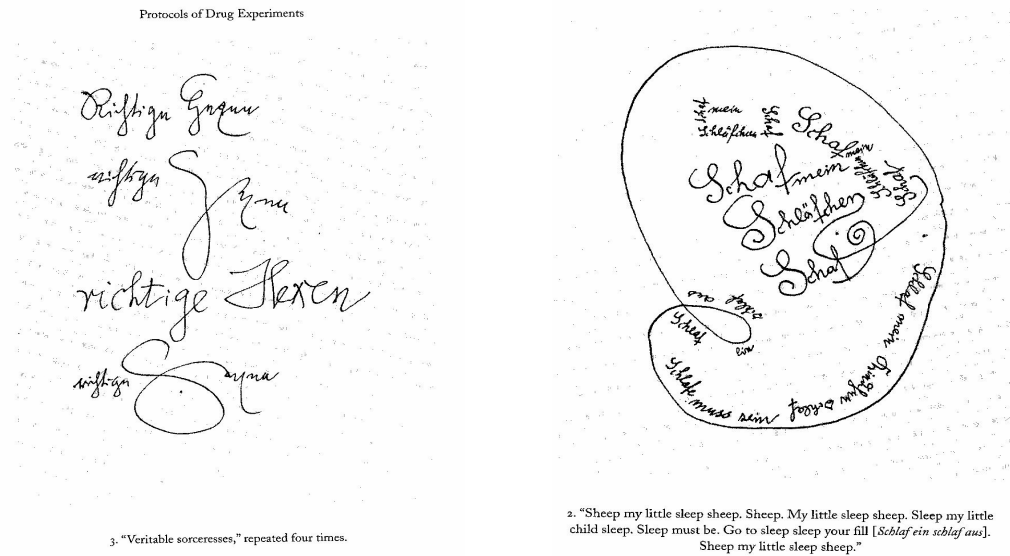
(and on the tip of his pen) as they become drawn out, materialized by their temporal slowing. In addition to this stretching of time, Benjamin remarks that the room in which he sits has begun to stretch spatially as well. He experiences synaesthesia as noises are transformed into colours (58). This reorientation of experience from word to image²²⁷ puts Benjamin in a genial mood, and he believes this mood to be visibly apparent in a newly acquired, upward slant in his handwriting. Benjamin writes of such a connection between mood and line both in his studies on graphology and in his later “Protocol of the Mescaline Experiment of May 22, 1934,”²²⁸ where he provides examples in which cursive words erotically transform into images that are expressive of mood or character.²²⁹ In the following example from this 1934 experiment, Benjamin draws a “word picture” about sorceresses in which the “character of the witches is supposed to be indicated by the individual words” (89). In the example immediately prior to this one, Benjamin writes various permutations of the phrase “Sheep my little sleep sheep. Sheep,” in which the visual and phonetic semblance of the words throws them into a play of

²²⁷ Reinhard Kuhn finds in the work of Michaux a remarkably similar movement from word to image as the intoxicated subject tries to record his drug experience in real time: “The drawings actually done under the influence of a drug are a series of seismographic lines, repeated endlessly and meaninglessly. The notes which he takes at such times are graphemes attached to nothing, resembling the scrawled transcription of the babbling associated with infancy or senility” (“The Hermeneutics of Silence 138-39). I would, however, not view this move into linguistic non-sense as pejoratively as Kuhn does.

²²⁸ In this experiment, observer Fritz Fränkel reports having administered to Benjamin “twenty milligrams of Merck mescaline subcutaneously in the upper thigh” (86).

²²⁹ From “Graphology Old and New” (1930): Benjamin shows his interest in theories that have an ideographic view of handwriting, “that interprets script in terms of the unconscious graphic elements, the unconscious image fantasies, that it contains” (399)

correspondence, a play that nearly overwhelms their symbolic content completely.



[Figs. 5,6. "Word-pictures" that Benjamin drew under the influence of mescaline (*On Hashish* 92, 91). "Veritable Sorceresses" appears on the left, and "Sheep my little sleep sheep" on the right.]

With respect to the mimetic level of "word-pictures," observer Fritz Fränkel's accompanying commentary indicates that "several embryo forms are contained within the [second] drawing" (89).

In tandem with the overlapping of sensory phenomena and diverse temporal events, Benjamin (much like Cocteau and Huxley) often describes a pleasurable relaxation in his bodily boundaries during moments of intoxication. In the completed essay "Hashish in Marseilles," he writes that, "I immersed myself in intimate contemplation of the sidewalk before me, which, through a kind of unguent (a magic unguent) which I spread over it, could have been—precisely as these very stones—also the sidewalk of Paris" (54). In addition to this aesthetic contemplation, he claims that his awareness of his place in a room is not as clear as it is at other times. He feels that the

room is perhaps full, devoid of any empty space. He speaks of himself as a pivot, or a synchronic anchoring point for the dissolution of spatial differences:

I felt flattered by the thought of sitting here in a center of dissipation, and by 'here' I meant not the town but the little, not-very-eventful spot where I sat. But events took place in such a way that the appearance of things touched me as though with a magic wand, and I sank into a dream about them. (55)

Despite the qualities of this intoxication that bear comparison to a Huxleyan "melting," however, Benjamin does not believe himself to be collapsing into the immanent One of which Huxley writes. The most important rule of Benjamin's drug experience is that opposites never fully absorb one another, but remain in dialectic suspension.²³⁰ It is not the collapse of spatial and temporal difference, but rather the play of semblance that Benjamin associates with therapeutic alleviation. Unlike Huxley, he staunchly guards his sense of reflective removal in a way that sometimes causes to him to vacillate between states of joy and paranoia. In other words, Benjamin glimpses the space of self-dissolution in the drug experience and draws back from it, hoping to achieve a profane illumination without having to give up his position as a removed critical thinker. In Lacan's terms, he desires the ecstasy afforded by a feminine form of *jouissance*, but is unwilling to engage in the self-dissolution necessary to experience it. One can in fact find

²³⁰ Buck-Morss writes of how Benjamin attempts to sustain such suspension through "dialectical images." She writes that Benjamin's "unfolding of concepts in their 'extremes' can be visualized as antithetical polarities of axes that cross each other, revealing a 'dialectical image' at the null point, with its contradictory 'moments' as axial fields" (210). I believe that her characterization of these antithetical polarities as petrified nature/transitory nature, bodily rest/bodily performance, and purposelessness/purpose overlaps comfortably with my emphasis on synchrony (petrified) versus diachronic (transitory), and ecstasy (purposelessness, bodily rest) versus project (purpose, bodily performance).

a consistent example of this attitude in Benjamin's insistence that his recorded drug experiences are neither confessions nor musings, but meticulously observed "protocols" – attempts to contribute to the general store of philosophical, political, and medical knowledge regarding various forms of intoxication. It is perhaps Benjamin's willingness to *admit* to such egocentric self-defence that distinguishes him from Huxley and makes him more similar, in this respect, to Cocteau.

At times in his drug protocols, Benjamin claims that the objects of his perception recede to a distance. But this distancing does not contradict his claim to absorb and flow over the world like an amorphous unguent.²³¹ I rather argue that in this claim for distance, Benjamin refers specifically to the aspect of his embodiment that is directed toward orthopaedic projects. Objects recede to a distance because Benjamin's perception no longer centres upon them as things to be grasped and possessed. Thus Benjamin's distance from perceived objects is an *intimate* distance, and according to Merleau-Ponty, a distance correlative to the body's releasing of its hold on practicable reality. It is the distance in which all things appear exclusively to aesthetic perception as opposed to "praktognostic" perception. Alphonso Lingis implies the possibility of such an experience when he asks of Merleau-Ponty: "[w]hat of the possibility of releasing our hold on the levels, drifting into a sensible apeiron without levels, into that nocturnal oneirotic, erotic, mythogenic second space that shows through the interstices of the daylight world of praktognostic competence?" (21). For Merleau-Ponty, only the practicable world is imperative, and yet Lingis insists that "[p]ainters find hidden laws in

²³¹ Boon also writes that "[l]ike Huxley, Benjamin is fascinated by the reconfiguration of the subject-object relationship which hashish and mescaline can trigger" (Boon Hashish 11).

the colours of the manipulable things of the world, and obey visions they find more imperative than the carpentry of practicable reality” (Lingis 23). It is these types of subjects, Lingis insists, who find something other than concrete goals in the perceived world; they realize that the sensory world itself “is set in depths, in uncharted abysses, where there are vortices in which the body that lets loose its hold on the levels of the world, the dreaming, the visionary, the hallucinating, the lascivious body, gets drawn” (Lingis 23). In “mobilizing to envision objectives,” the body takes on a discrete, finished form, but “in letting loose its hold on things, letting its gaze get caught up in the monocular images, reflections, refractions, mirages, will-o’-the-wisps, our body dematerializes itself and metamorphoses into the drifting shape of a Chinese lantern among them” (Lingis 24). This same aesthetic distance applies to Benjamin’s sensation of embodiment during intoxication, which he claims to manifest itself as a specific “style” of perception (*On Hashish* 20). Lingis uses this same word to describe the existence of distinct modes of perception, and says of embodied style that “[e]ach actual vision arises, not as a spontaneous intention, but as a variant of a schema of looking which our body has contracted” (13). Thus while Benjamin describes his intoxication as a distance from objects, it is an intimate distance, for it releases his body from its everyday, goal-oriented schema.

Benjamin further develops this notion of intimate distance when he speaks of the importance of “ornamental” contemplation in moments of hashish intoxication:

the characteristic feature of genuine aura is ornament, an ornamental halo [*Umzirkung*], in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case. Perhaps nothing gives such a clear idea of aura as Van Gogh’s late paintings, in

which one could say that the aura appears to have been painted together with the various objects. (58)

The notion of an object being “wreathed in ornament” marks an intimacy founded upon the subject’s neglect for any practical grasping – whether psychic or orthopaedic. It is precisely in giving himself over to ornamental appearances that Benjamin is able to feel more intimate with the objects around him, even while they seem to recede to a distance. In the Kantian terms I have discussed in my Huxley chapter (primarily in footnote 164), drug intoxication enhances Benjamin’s ability to encounter objects in their “purposiveness without purpose.” This phrase offers a condensed definition of Kantian beauty, and in Benjamin’s case, it marks the moment at which Benjamin can perceive the purposive “ornament” of an object removed from any rational or utilitarian purpose. The “play” that results in the Kantian model (between the beautiful object and the conceptual categories to which it is constantly referred) extends for Benjamin to a play of perception as well, drawing the contours of perceived objects (along with the times of past, present, and future) into relations of semblance.

Like Huxley, however, Benjamin faces a profound problem when he considers the presence of human others in his hashish trance. He claims that he is reluctant to consider the thoughts or feelings of those around him, and remarks specifically on the disappointment he feels in hearing the voices of others, because

[n]o sooner has the person you are talking to opened his mouth than you feel profoundly disillusioned. What he says is infinitely inferior to what we would have expected from him before he opened his mouth, and what we confidently, happily assumed him to be capable of. (28)

In this sense, Benjamin seems to treat others as subjects-presumed-to-know, but their first uttered word reveals them to be imperfect subjects of the symbolic order. Further, Benjamin's condemnation of these other subjects is fundamentally narcissistic, as he claims that the human other "painfully disappoints us through his failure to focus on that greatest object of interest: ourselves" (28).²³² Unlike the boundless goodwill of his first trance, Benjamin feels violated whenever someone speaks to or touches him. He becomes paranoid because in this particular trance, touch has taken on a sinister intentionality.²³³

Satanic Satisfaction

Benjamin's experiences of intoxication suggest that he desires a sensation of intimacy with time and space, but like the subject of Lacan's psychosis or Huxley's bad trip, he refuses to let his discrete, reflective consciousness dissolve in the experience. Benjamin speculates on the possibility of studying an object and remaining in control of himself explicitly in his earlier text, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, when he writes that,

[o]nly by approaching the subject from some distance and, initially, foregoing any view of the whole, can the mind be led, through a more or less ascetic apprenticeship, to the position of strength from which it is

²³² In the Marseilles episode, he looks at the faces of those around him and finds them ugly. But in order to beautify them, he objectifies them by subjecting them to the work of semblance: "[n]ow, too, began the game, which I played for quite a while, of recognizing someone I knew in every new face. Often I knew the name, often not [...] Under these circumstances, there was no question of loneliness" (50).

²³³ These passages from Benjamin's work should help us recall that the encounter with symbolic others is perhaps the most difficult thing for the drug-user to overcome in his movement toward undifferentiated, metaphoric consciousness, whether this user be Cocteau, Huxley, or Benjamin.

possible to take in the whole panorama and yet remain in control of oneself. (*Origin* 56)

As we have seen in earlier chapters, Huxley (and to some extent, even Cocteau) insists that we must approach the revelatory drug with a submissive, self-mortifying attitude, but the intoxicated Benjamin does not readily give in to this submission.²³⁴ Within the terms of Lacan's theory of psychosis, Benjamin's need to guard his discrete, reflective ego is precisely what makes him susceptible to paranoia and the more painful effects of drug intoxication. He claims to proceed through his intoxication with a sense of "satanic" knowing, and speaks of voluntarily playing with his surroundings as though he were controlling a room with a series of hidden levers. In this "Second Impression of Hashish," he brazenly claims that the objects and fellow human beings in his room "are only mannequins; even the great moments of world history are merely costumes beneath which they exchange understanding looks with nothingness, the base, and the commonplace. They reply to the ambiguous wink from nirvana" (24). This supposed "wink" reaches Benjamin only in a flash, but it is a limit experience that allows him to glimpse an abysmal nothingness underlying the correspondences that flash across memory, history, and perception. But again, Benjamin (unlike Huxley) "refuse[s] to be drawn into this understanding" (24). It is this refusal that provides him with a "satanic satisfaction," (24) and stems from his desire to detect the wink from nirvana without

²³⁴ In the existing criticism on Benjamin, I have not found any sustained account of the underlying causes for Benjamin's movement between positive and negative feelings in *On Hashish*. Most critics, it seems, would be content to concede that this ambivalence is merely the product of Benjamin's exceedingly dialectical mode of thought. Nonetheless, I contend that Benjamin's most positive experiences on drugs *always* correspond to his relative willingness to relax his hold over consciousness. This sort of observation, I argue, would not be available without the type of theoretical framework that I have articulated throughout this project.

dissolving into the continuity behind it. Caught in the grip of such satisfaction, Benjamin regards the experiential content of his intoxication as a form of ornamental “veil,” which conceals an infinite space of nonbeing. He connects this awareness of nonbeing to an experience of death: “[a] formula for the nearness of death came to me yesterday: death lies between me and my intoxication” (26). When he speaks of his satanic knowing, Benjamin suggests that he proceeds in “collusion” with nonbeing; yet he will very soon realize that this nonbeing can easily bleed meaning from the contents of perception, especially when Benjamin tries to confront this abysmal limit as an autonomous, self-determining ego.

In Benjamin’s own terms, satanic satisfaction shares many traits with the profane illumination and the encounter with beauty, for all three experiences mark the subject’s perception of a flash or wink that interrupts the flow of sober or symbolic existence. However, Benjamin’s satanic pride as a discrete, reflecting consciousness leads to affective problems in his experience of drug intoxication. His model of satanic knowing is, in fact, something that Georges Bataille explicitly associates with a failure in the subjective move toward continuity. The latter speaks of his own intoxication when he writes that “I allowed myself to become intoxicated by a feeling of conquest, and the nuptured world stretched out before me like an open realm” (*Inner* 93). “It was a prolonged pleasure,” he later adds, “a pleasant possession of a slightly insipid sweetness” (114).²³⁵ In the previous chapter, I invoked Lacan’s theory of psychosis in order to help

²³⁵ Giorgio Agamben, in “Walter Benjamin and the Demonic,” associates Benjamin’s mention of Satan in most cases with a form of “Satanic illusion” (*Potentialities* 148), a correlation that undermines Benjamin’s professed satanic knowledge. What contrasts with this form of satisfaction, Agamben goes on to write, is the angelic in Benjamin, and the angelic stands in relation to the messianic fulfillment of history. Agamben

explain the phenomenon of the bad trip in drug use. The experience of psychosis, as I mentioned, derives from the ego's inability to accept castration in tandem with its refusal to relinquish its fantasmatic ego. According to Lacan, the experience of psychosis is inaugurated with a sense of euphoria, but after a short time the contents of experience fall into abysmal chaos, and the constant awareness of this chaos causes the subject great psychic distress. In other words, the inability to let go of one's discrete selfhood, for someone like Aldous Huxley, for example, causes the limit-experience to signify an infinite emptiness instead of an infinite plenitude. The same mechanism, I argue, is at work when Benjamin's profession of satanic satisfaction turns sour, and this satanic experience marks a distinct failure in the profane illumination. When Benjamin's attempt to look beyond the veil of correspondences-at-play comes from a removed, reflective position, the space behind this veil can only confront him with disappointing absence.

As one might imagine, Benjamin's desire to remain in control of himself as a reflecting, critical subject eventually leads to a marked discomfort in periods of intoxication. Friend and observer Egon Wissing notes of Benjamin in one of his trances: "*A depressive and a euphoric element were continually struggling against each other*" (65). Benjamin (like Cocteau and Uncle Eustace of Huxley's *Time Must Have a Stop*) feels the extreme tension between subjective autonomy and dissolution when he enters the state of intoxication. At all times he wishes to preserve his philosophical, reflective

also notes that in contrast to the fallen angel and its self-stealing, "Satanic illusion or melancholic allegory," Benjamin insists that "the angel is the originary image in the likeness of which man is created and, at the same time, the consummation of the historical totality of existence that is accomplished on the last day, such that in its figure origin and end coincide" (*Potentialities* 148/157).

mind, but his willing plunge into intoxication also works to bypass the regulated distance between himself and continuity. Merleau-Ponty, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, speaks similarly about the reciprocal relationship between individuals and the objects of their perception. The relation, he adds, is constituted by a mutual looking and being-looked-at, but it sustains a tension that protects the discrete individual. Otherwise, writes Merleau-Ponty,

if I express this experience by saying that the things are in their place and that we fuse with them, I immediately make the experience itself impossible: for in the measure that the thing is approached, I cease to be; in the measure that I am, there is no thing, but only a double of it in my 'camera obscura.' The moment my perception is to become pure perception, thing, Being, it is extinguished; the moment it lights up, already I am no longer the thing. (122)

Shortly after he proudly affirms his sense of satanic satisfaction, Benjamin ceases to revel in his intoxication “as it is,” and begins to feel that he is “wrapped up, enclosed in a dense spider’s web in which the events of the world are scattered around, suspended there like the bodies of dead insects sucked dry” (*On Hashish* 24). Resistance to dissolution provides him a critically reflexive satisfaction, but it also makes him suspicious of outside forces and threatens to drain events of their meaning altogether.²³⁶ By refusing the move toward continuity that intoxication precipitates, Benjamin sustains an act of foreclosure and forces this limit out of his awareness and into the fabric of reality itself,

²³⁶ As he begins to come out of the intoxication in his “First Impression,” Benjamin signals this departure by saying a goodbye to the “spirit world.” In his transition back to sober consciousness, he suffers from a mistrust of food, and can feel a sense of paranoia creeping back into his psyche.

as is the case in Lacanian psychosis.²³⁷ Benjamin claims that his satanic satisfaction has a “basically depressive nature,” but still affirms that it has a certain charm that a more dissolving, immersed experience does not offer. The “collusion with nonbeing,” he adds, is achieved by increasing his dose of hashish, yet he always seems to meet this increase in the dose with a heightened attempt to preserve his reflective autonomy.

Benjamin’s inability and/or unwillingness to let go of his discrete selfhood invariably corresponds to his moments of doubt and anxiety within the hashish trance. One can see side-effects of this satanic satisfaction in the “dual structure of this depression: on the one hand, anxiety; on the other, an inability to make up one’s mind on a related practical matter” (*On Hashish* 25). Benjamin approaches his intoxication through an attempt to “master” his indecision “with the prospect of eliminating it” (25), but is never able to do so. At another point in his hashish trance, Benjamin worries about being near a woman because their sexual chemistry conflicts with his desire to reflect intellectually on his trance. Here he speaks of an attempt to domesticate experience intellectually, the very sort of attempt that he describes in a piece like “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire.” Ultimately though, he admits to the failure of satanic satisfaction to produce what he sought: “[t]he great hope, desire, yearning to reach—in a state of intoxication—the new, the untouched, scarcely takes wing on this occasion; instead they are attained only in a weary, submerged, indolent, inert stroll downhill” (25). He becomes paranoid that other people are secretly experimenting on him, and physical objects around him begin to appear “dubious,” as opposed to the way they once danced in the play of

²³⁷ Objects participate in his depression and the “annulment of their matter. They become mannequins” (31).

semblance in Benjamin's first, more pleasing hashish trance. In a final claim, Benjamin admits that this first impression of hashish was perhaps superior to the second: "the first trance loosened objects, and lured them from their accustomed world; the second inserted them quite quickly into a new one—far inferior to this intermediate realm" (27). It is, in fact, only when exhaustion creates in him a "certain weakening of the will" that Benjamin's satanic sense of reflective removal seems to fade, and this surrender once again allows the "sense of elation to gain the upper hand" (27).

In his meditations on hashish, Benjamin explicitly connects the failure of metonymic desire²³⁸ with the act of apprehending, both physically with the hands and conceptually with language. He suggests that subjects reach out to grasp and embrace something "infinitely alluring," but

[s]carcely have we touched it, however, than it disillusions us completely. The object of our attention suddenly fades at the touch of language. It puts on years; our love wholly exhausts it in a single moment. So it pauses for a rest until it again appears attractive enough to lead us back to it once more. (28)

This disinterest in objects is antithetical to Benjamin's perception of these same objects at an intimate distance, in which they restore the play of semblance or correspondences across time: "[t]he room winks at us: What do you think may have happened here?" (28)

This wink that creates the play of correspondences is a less potent form of the wink from

²³⁸ Carol Jacobs, in a commentary on Benjamin's "Myslowitz—Braunschweig—Marseille," implies the same connection between sober thought and the metonymic commitment to projects, along with *the anxiety of diachrony* that I have hoped to convey throughout this project: "[u]nder the circumstances how can one keep in sight what it is one wishes to achieve, where one wishes to go, and the limited period of time in which one has to do it, all the while maintaining that 'wonderful sense of humor' that questions 'all that exists'?" (65).

nirvana, which throws the subject into proximity with nonbeing. The difference between the play of correspondences and the infinite, continuous being concealed behind them is akin to the difference between the beautiful and sublime object, in Kant's terms. The play of correspondences constitutes the veil that the subject can symbolically know, but it is nonetheless a veil that conceals something that exists beyond symbolic experience. It is the subject's desire not to die, in fact, her desire to retain some trace of its individual consciousness that binds her to the veil; for as long as she wishes to remain a discrete individual, the veil is all she can know of nonbeing and of the nirvana that lies beneath the wink of intoxication.

The structure of Benjamin's intoxication is shaped by his approach toward nonbeing and his antithetical (one could say egotistical) retention of reflective consciousness in the face of this nonbeing. As I have mentioned, his retention of selfhood also keeps him invested in the symbolic concerns that are inextricable from the metonymic pole of subjectivity. In the hashish trance, Benjamin senses his "inability to deal with future time" and worries that this inability is "the first serious sign of damage" to his brain (27). Benjamin (much like Cocteau on this point) is anxious about betraying his intellect, and fears that he is doing damage to his ability to function within sober consciousness, which requires one to consider prudently the future from a practical standpoint. "I am definitely feeling the effects now," he writes of hashish, "[c]hiefly negative, in that it's become difficult for me to read or write" (47). His ability to engage in reading and writing (fields of the symbolic order) fades as he hears someone coming up the stairs outside his room and fears their arrival; or in other words, he does not welcome the arrival of an impending presence, as do the participants of solidarity

services in *Brave New World*. He is fully aware of the reciprocity between himself and objects, but cannot seem to stabilize the resulting dialectic between them. He picks up a book by Kafka and feels his body-image absorbing it: “[i]t immediately became integrated into the sculptural form of my own body, hence far more absolutely and brutally subject to me than could have been achieved by the most derogatory criticism” (29). “You have the feeling of needing to be alone,” he adds, “so as to give yourself over in deeper peace of mind to this ambiguous wink from nirvana.” But in tandem with this experiential limit, he retains his need to be affirmed by the gazes of unreal others: “and at the same time, you need the presence of others, like gently shifting relief-figures on the plinth of your own throne” (25). He associates this absorption not with intimacy, but alienation. He feels the gaze of the object upon him, and feels himself “transformed into stone” in the face of this gaze. Now his consciousness seems to be at play *within* symbolic structures, and this play tosses him between feelings of narcissism and hysteria – the dual need to affirm his discrete, ideal self and the reliance upon the symbolic Other to affirm it.

The Flâneur and the Messiah

One must not forget that in spite of the negative features of drug intoxication, the transformations of space and time (via the play of semblance) continue to hold out the possibility of intoxicated pleasure for Benjamin. On several occasions, Benjamin mentions the therapeutic recoveries he makes from unpleasant episodes of intoxication.

For example, whenever he shows more willingness to let go of his discontinuous self,²³⁹

Benjamin feels the return of an alleviatory sensation:

The feeling of loneliness is very quickly lost. My walking stick begins to give me a special pleasure. The handle of a coffeepot used here suddenly looks very large and moreover remains so. (One becomes so tender, fears that a shadow falling on the paper might hurt it. The nausea disappears.

(48)

In the essay “Hashish in Marseilles” (1932), Benjamin speaks of looking around a restaurant and finding the faces of the people around him very ugly. However, he then tries to find in each one of them a resemblance to some other person he knows, and through this search for correspondence manages to improve his mood. This movement from word to image does not in any way mean that Benjamin has escaped the structures of language. Rather, if we try to locate his experience on a spectrum between metaphoric continuity and metonymic discontinuity, we see only an incremental movement away from the symbolic differences of sober, discursive thought. To reiterate, intoxication provides Benjamin with a movement away from the displacing effects of metonymic experience, but Benjamin never stops feeling the pull of the pleasure principle and its fantasy of discrete, reflective individuality. As in the case of Jean Cocteau, it is Benjamin’s lingering commitment to the symbolic demand of egocentric self-possession that consistently undermines the therapeutic potential of his drug experiences.

²³⁹ “In this epistemology,” writes Bram Mertens, “the subject does not remain a discreet entity, but voluntarily immerses himself within truth, and appears even to become part of its sphere.” (*Dark Images* 181).

At one point in his drug records, however, Benjamin does attempt to reconcile the metaphoric interruption of discourse with a metonymic unfolding. In other words, he looks for an intimate experience of diachrony as such, and imagines this experience in the form of Ariadne's thread:

To begin to solve the riddle of the ecstasy of trance [*Rauschgluck*], one ought to meditate once again on Ariadne's thread. What joy in the mere act of unrolling a ball of thread. And this joy is very deeply related to the joy of intoxication, just as it is to the joy of creation. We go forward; but in so doing, we not only discover the twists and turns of the cave into which we're venturing, but also enjoy this pleasure of discovery against the background of the other, rhythmic bliss of unwinding the thread. (53)

This progressive unfolding is bolstered by a rhythmic bliss that "homogeneous, empty time" usually lacks; it constitutes a dialectical image, which holds what is unfolding and what is instantaneous in dual suspension. Benjamin associates the particular pleasure of this image with his subjective movement from poetic to prosaic enjoyment: it is a form of wandering that seeks no discrete object, but takes pleasure in the play of difference as it unfolds through time, somewhat like the flâneur's enjoyment: "[a] deeply submerged feeling of happiness that came over me afterward [...] is more difficult to recall than everything that went before. Fortunately I find in my newspaper the sentence, 'One should scoop sameness from reality with a spoon'" (53). In other words, Benjamin spends these moments of intoxication encountering the veil of experience (the play of semblance) without worrying so much about what lies behind it.

The image of Ariadne's thread by no means marks Benjamin's sole attempt to articulate the experience that finds fulfillment in both ex-stasis *and* an ongoing movement through time. Without doubt, this dual suspension of ecstasy and diachrony challenges many of my preceding observations, which have often treated ecstatic and unfolding time as opposing categories under the headings of metaphoric and metonymic experience, respectively. Yet Benjamin's dialectical thinking seems to bring these poles together, and Hermann Schweppenhauser's "Propadeutics of Profane Illumination" provides perhaps a better description of what this combination produces: "[t]he subterranean scheme" linking Benjamin's claims, he argues, "proves to be the Ariadne motif of the purposeful Theseus, who finds his way through the Minoan labyrinth" (39). Subjects proceed with a sense of moving forward, Schweppenhauser adds, "but in doing so we not only discover the twists and turns of the cave, but we also enjoy this pleasure of discovery against the background of the other, rhythmical bliss of unravelling the ball" (39). In this passage, Schweppenhauser nearly repeats verbatim Benjamin's description of drug intoxication in his essay "Hashish in Marseilles" (see quotation on page 276). One can find this same labyrinthine dynamic perpetually implied in Benjamin's figure of the flâneur, who performs the same "toe dance of reason" that Benjamin alludes to in his "Main Features of My First Impression of Hashish" (20).

The flâneur is someone who moves through public space and lets his attention pass from object to object. He embraces the contingent, transformative pole of existence and does not experience the same alienated displacement amidst a modern crowd that a man like Friedrich Engels does. In fact, throughout the fragmented notes contained in *On Hashish*, Benjamin's intoxicated peripetia often bear strong resemblance to the

meanderings of the flâneur. But for Benjamin, even the flâneur lives in a world in which the messiah's arrival (marking the end of history) is always impending. There is always a sense in which the "profane illumination" is to beauty what the messianic moment is to the sublime. The one sets correspondences and overlappings into play, while the other dissolves them into a complete state of continuity, a fulfillment of being that can only appear to the jealous, discontinuous self as an abysmal absence.²⁴⁰ Living with a sense of the messiah's coming, Benjamin claims, subjects feel as though they live inside a boat's cabin, and can feel the presence of a vast ocean outside the walls and beyond the veiling curtains. In the following passage, he connects the relationship between intoxication and death to that of love:

And when I recall this state [of amorous joy dispensed by the contemplation of some fringes blowing in the wind], I would like to believe that hashish possesses the power to persuade nature to repeat the great squandering of our own existence that we enjoy when we're in love.

(56)

The limit of total continuity (encountered in death) is what produces an immanent value in experience, and it is correlative in principle to the experience of love – insofar as the latter (at least in Benjamin's sense of the term) involves a subjective sacrifice of the (fantasmatic) self-determining ego.

Ultimately, the correspondences – the overlappings of body, perceived objects, and diverse historical times – that make up the constellatory experience are the elaborate

²⁴⁰ In this observation, I draw from Rochlitz's claim that "deliverance can intervene, according to Benjamin, only if the historical process comes to a *standstill*. To the dynamic of history, Benjamin opposes a constellation" (245; original emphasis).

embroideries that ornament the veil covering continuous being. Further, Benjamin believes that this underlying continuity encompasses not only the individual's death,²⁴¹ (as it does for Lacan) but the end of history itself. The drug for Benjamin is thus a form of "veil-iative" rather than palliative. The veil-iative is a revelatory agent insofar as it shows what is concealed *as concealed*,²⁴² and therein hints toward what can only be glimpsed in a wink from nirvana. Bataille makes a similar claim about the concealing side of mystical experience when he writes that "ecstasy only remains possible in the anguish of ecstasy, in this sense, that it cannot be satisfaction, grasped knowledge" (*Inner* 52). The play of semblance provides evidence of mystical forces at work, in that it is *what the subject can know* of continuous being. As Benjamin notes in his earlier essay "On Semblance" (1919-20), "'veils embellish all they conceal and all they reveal: women, horizons, and monuments!'" (223). He further claims that "[t]he semblance in which nothing appears is the more potent one, the authentic one. This is conceivable only in the visual realm" (223). In another early piece on "Goethe's Elective Affinities" (1924-25), Benjamin similarly asserts that "semblance belongs to the essentially beautiful as the veil and as the essential law of beauty, shows itself thus, that beauty appears as such only in what is veiled" (350). As is the case with both Cocteau and Huxley, the moment of intoxication comes about with an increase in the subject's (metaphoric) perception of semblance, relative to what is available in sober states of consciousness. With Benjamin,

²⁴¹ On a similar note, Carol Jacobs asserts that "as Benjamin sets forth the example of the constellation [...] perception is no longer a question of possession – a possession that can now only be spoken of in a narrative fiction" ("Benjamin's Tessera 44). Instead of apprehending and possessing the constellation of experience, "the reader-astrologer completes and is assimilated into the constellation in a flash" (44).

²⁴² Notes David Ferris, "[t]he image does not coincide with what it promises but rather with what it is, a stocking. This deeper similarity emerges as a relation that frees the image from a predetermined meaning, its dowry, its promise of a reality that it cannot fulfill" (*Cambridge* 83).

however, semblance does not simply blur the contents of experience together, but achieves an active play which itself marks a dynamic, intermediate state between reflective individuality and inorganic continuity. In a remarkably similar passage, Jacques Lacan writes that the organism, should it bypass the regulated limit of pleasure, will put a defence mechanism into effect. Or in other words, if the subject's proximity to the point of dissolution threatens to overwhelm its regulated boundaries,

[i]t is scattered and diffused within the psychic organism; the quantity is transformed into complexity. In a kind of expansion of the lighted zone of the neuronic organism, here and there in the distance, it lights up according to the laws of associative facilitation, or constellations of *Vorstellungen* which regulate the association of ideas, unconscious *Gedanken*, according to the pleasure principle. (59)

Benjamin agrees that this effect is precipitated when the subject transgresses a certain limit toward the ineffable. But one can *only* encounter the ineffable as a meaningful thing, he affirms, when the ineffable remains behind this veil. Further, this very veil is the primary symptom of the subject's psychic passage toward continuity, for "in veilless nakedness the essentially beautiful has withdrawn, and in the naked body of the human being are attained a being beyond all beauty—the sublime—and a work beyond all creations—that of the creator" ("Goethe's" 351). The constellatory veil, embroidered with correspondences, is given its meaning by the immense, sublime continuity that lies behind it,²⁴³ as one finds in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, where Benjamin writes

²⁴³ Marcus Boon makes this point much more eloquently when he writes that "[t]he notion that objects or environments radiate a secret, invisible meaning and that one's perception of time and space can be altered

that this is “the very nature of truth, in the face of which even the purest fire of the spirit of inquiry is quenched” (*Origin* 36).

To think that one can apprehend complete continuity as an object of knowledge marks the downfall of satanic satisfaction, which can only encounter the limit of subjective experience as a meaningless abyss. Once again, continuous being can only be redemptive or recuperative from behind its experiential veil. Humanity’s great comfort, for Benjamin, is therefore the beauty it can perceive *within* this veil,²⁴⁴ which punctures the numbing effects of modern consciousness and provides a glimpse of the force that will one day redeem history. As Benjamin writes of the messianic event in his “Theologico-Political Fragment” of 1922:

Only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic.²⁴⁵ Therefore the Kingdom of God is not the *telos* of the

are commonplace in drug literature, but Benjamin’s unique contribution was that he saw this perception as being both the revelation of an object’s historical being (its aura) and, beneath all the ‘veils’ and ‘masks’ which everyday objects wear, the apprehension of a ‘sameness’ indicating the presence within history of secret transcendental forces” (11).

²⁴⁴ I agree in this regard with Andrew Benjamin’s contention that “Benjamin is clear: the veil is known. It is an object of knowledge” (13).

²⁴⁵ Agamben writes in “Walter Benjamin and the Demonic” that happiness in Benjamin’s “Theologico-Political Fragment” is the guiding force of historical movement, the movement of desire; “hence too the statement that the profane order must be founded on the idea of happiness (this, Benjamin writes, is why the relation of the order of happiness to the messianic order is one of the essential theoretical problems of the philosophy of history)” (*Potentialities* 144-145). Happiness seems incompatible with the messianic order for reasons structurally similar to why Huxley’s concept of *karuna* cannot merge the poles of metonymic and metaphoric experience. In “The Messiah and the Sovereign: The Problem of Law in Walter Benjamin,” Agamben attempts to work through this problem:

One of the paradoxes of the messianic kingdom is, indeed, that another world and another time must make themselves present in this world and time. This means that historical

historical dynamic; it cannot be set as a goal. From the standpoint of history, it is not the goal, but the end. (312).

The issue of drugs and therapy for Benjamin, like Huxley, does not end at the level of the individual. The drug's stated purpose is to provide profane illumination, which possesses a distinct political and philosophical imperative that one cannot separate from the desire to alleviate psychic pain. The dynamic of Benjamin's preferred experience thus varies between that of the flâneur, who finds pleasure in a critical engagement with ephemerality, and the mystic who knows reality only through its constellatory veil, but who in recognizing the veil as such intuits the impending arrival of history's messianic end. The messiah's arrival is always impending,²⁴⁶ and as such it confers a meaning upon life similar to Martin Heidegger's²⁴⁷ concept of being-toward-death.²⁴⁸

time cannot simply be cancelled and that messianic time, moreover, cannot be perfectly homogenous with history: the two times must instead accompany each other according to modalities that cannot be reduced to a dual logic (this world/the other world)" (*Potentialities* 168).

It is only through this sort of paradigm, Agamben adds, that "one can conceive something like an *eskhaton*—that is, something that belongs to historical time and its law and, at the same time, puts an end to it" (174). On this note I agree with him, and I will attempt to articulate his observations within my own model of understanding in my closing discussion of Benjamin's messianic moment and Heidegger's concept of being-towards-death.

²⁴⁶ In *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (2000), Agamben similarly notes how Benjamin speaks about a contradictory form of happiness in which history is always about to pass away: "while, for Paul, creation is unwillingly subjected to caducity and destruction and for this reason groans and suffers while awaiting redemption, for Benjamin, who reverses this in an ingenious way, nature is messianic precisely because of its eternal and complete caducity, and the rhythm of this messianic caducity is happiness itself" (141). In this model then, happiness itself comes from the fact that at any moment, human history might end.

²⁴⁷ "Heidegger's philosophy," writes Lane, "is a rejection of the suprasensuous, and a working out of the possibility of an authentic mode of being-in-the-world; Benjamin's conception of youth is one that remains open to a multiplicity of forms that signal and transform themselves at the end of time" (Lane 44).

²⁴⁸ Writes Juliel César: "Benjamin's theism is almost synonymous with the famous formula – 'Deus ex-machina.' God, for him, really created the world. But he was not intending to intervene in human history. The Messiah would come to put an end to the historical order, not to intervene in it. Therefore, there remains the only possible alternative – to rescue the profane order. This meant to build up the profane order

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger offers his conception of being-towards-death as a proposed remedy to the inauthentic *Dasein* that afflicts modernity. The modern individual, Heidegger suggests, lives within a sense of everydayness, in which all of life's events are rendered empty by their invariable sameness. For Heidegger, the modern subject can only achieve a more satisfying form of *Dasein* by internalizing the knowledge that her death could happen at any moment – that it is impending. Within the terms of my structural framework, I suggest that the subject's perpetual *awareness* that her death could come at any moment is something that vertically staves the flow of metonymic displacement, because it renders this subject perpetually present to the possibility that time will cease. "Death is not something not yet present-at-hand," argues Heidegger, "nor is it that which is ultimately still outstanding but which has been reduced to a minimum. *Death is something that stands before us—something impending*" (294; original emphasis). As potentiality-for-Being, *Dasein* cannot outstrip the possibility of death. The subject's perpetual effort to ignore or conceal the possibility of her impending death is precisely the dynamic that "dominates everydayness" as a diachronic chain of events which the subject mistakenly presumes will go on forever (297). This conception of lived time is very similar to Benjamin's notion of homogeneous, empty time, and Heidegger comes even closer to Benjamin's thought when he writes that death is "what everydayness for the most part veils from itself" (302). Being-towards-death is "essentially anxiety," yet this anxiety is like an exquisite pain, in that while it is painful it

according to the idea of happiness" (*Experience and History* 32). In this instance, I relate what Cesar calls "happiness" to what I have thus far called Benjamin's commitment to psychic therapy.

is still preferable to the pain of the everyday, which operates upon the principles of metonymic displacement (310). It thus is only by taking its own annihilation as something veiled-yet-impending that the subject can truly bestow a sense of profound meaning on the unfolding of its historical life.²⁴⁹

One aspect in which Benjamin differs from Heidegger, however, is the *scope* that he attributes to the impending end of time. For Heidegger, being-towards-death confirms the absolute sovereignty of the individual's *Dasein*, because it is a fact (for Heidegger) that no human subject can die in the place of another. Only we, as individuals, can die our own deaths. For Benjamin, however, this principle of an impending end – in order to have its full impact upon experience – must extend across all of human history.²⁵⁰ In other words, the messiah is to all of human history what being-towards-death is to the individual's biographical being. But as I have also pointed out, Benjamin does not suggest that the subject can ever meet the messiah directly, for this would prove to be the

²⁴⁹ This perpetual awareness of our own dissolution into continuous being is exactly the sort of thing that Huxley wants us to bring to our interactions with human others. However, while it might be possible to imagine such an awareness in Heidegger's language of that-which-is-*impending*, it is still difficult to articulate exactly how this awareness might be applied to an *immanent* model of interpersonal compassion, as Huxley seems to desire.

²⁵⁰ This argument acknowledges both the diachronic and synchronic aspects of Benjamin's conception of time, but it gives a representational emphasis that is opposed to Lacan, who admits to the synchronic power of metaphor, but always says it is trumped by metonymy and diachrony. One can find this sort of representational emphasis throughout the criticism on Benjamin, but one particular instance appears in Richard Wolin's *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*, where the author writes: "[i]ndeed, Benjamin's conception of the mission of literary criticism is intimately related with his vision of the realm of redemption. However, access to this realm must always be circuitous in the context of the profane world of history in which man finds himself at present" (48). As I have tried to show here, the realm of redemption is that of metaphor, synchrony, and their correlative experiential phenomena; the profane world of history is that of the metonymic/diachronic pole of experience and its correlates. The two poles of the *pharmakon* (in this case, the metaphoric and metonymic) will always jockey for representational emphasis in a given instance of experience.

fulfillment of history and desire, and would plunge all being into total continuity.²⁵¹ Thus I argue that this Benjaminian awareness of the *impending arrival* of continuity, which can inform the subject's everyday awareness, marks the point at which modernist thought can come *no closer* to fulfilling the terms of Huxley's ideal of *karuna*. Huxley demands that the subject's sense of continuous being be immanent rather than impending, but within the terms of this project (and as I argue, the terms of modernist thought), it is impossible to conceive of how such an awareness would be possible. Benjamin, on this note, offers a more satisfying answer in that he acknowledges that subjects can "know" the messianic, but only as something *impending*, through its intermediary – the constellatory veil, the play of semblance – in moments of profane illumination. That said, Benjamin would also be the first to acknowledge that in everyday experience, all human subjects exist on a spectrum that can carry them (in relative terms) toward or away from this unity of messianic being. Further, he suggests that if one moves toward the veil of experience in the proper spirit, she can successfully alleviate the alienating effects of modernity.

The Messiah's Arrival (1940)

In "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940) Benjamin takes his framework for profane illumination and tries one final time to conceive a relationship between the realm of the messianic and that of historico-political action, using the constellatory

²⁵¹ In somewhat Lacanian terms, Agamben writes in "The Messiah and the Sovereign: The Problem of Law in Walter Benjamin," that "[t]he thesis I would like to advance is that the messianic kingdom is not one category among others within religious experience but it, rather, its limit concept. *The Messiah is, in other words, the figure through which religion confronts the problem of the Law, decisively reckoning with it*" (*Potentialities* 163; original emphasis). This is the precise reason, Agamben argues, "why the three great monotheistic religions always tried in every possible way to control and reduce the essential messianic properties of religion and philosophy, without ever fully succeeding" (163).

experience to mediate between them. In this attempt, he affirms that there is no arrival into true continuity in the event of an *individual* subject's death; for the future is always working to dominate the past, and until it stops doing so the past will never be laid to rest. Once again, Benjamin borrows concepts that one might apply to Heidegger's phenomenological individual, and assigns them a politico-historical value. It is true that people die, but the fact of death does not necessarily consign these people to continuous existence, for in death they might still become – through the manipulation of historical discourse – “a tool for the ruling classes” (247). Even the dead are not safe from the narratives of history's victors, Benjamin affirms.

Regular historiography tells “the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary” (255), but Benjamin rebels against this linear, diachronic view of time. He wishes to speak of vertical punctuations, events that overlap across vast spans of history and are experienced in flashes. He further works to establish “a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time” (255). Messianic time holds out the possibility that history itself will be redeemed, for it is only the end of known time that will free all subjects from the threat of becoming tools for history's victors.²⁵² Humanity cannot experience time as an empty unfolding when it perceives time from a messianic standpoint, for “every second of time [is] the strait gate through which the Messiah *might* enter” (255; my emphasis). The Messiah's arrival is always impending, as is the end of human history, the symbolic order, metonymic/discontinuous

²⁵² Yet while Benjamin's work may seem to combine the diachronic and synchronic in a new, synthesized immanence, one must remain skeptical of such a possibility. Julian Roberts, for example, writes that “[t]he two worlds, of transient nature and immortal spirit, can never be part of the same teleological progression; indeed the ‘dynamic’ of the ‘profane’ points in a direction diametrically opposed to that of ‘messianic intensity’” (*Walter Benjamin* 203-04).

existence, and speaking beings.²⁵³ The constellatory veil is the only means by which subjects can know this impending presence as a source of psychic comfort, for its infinitude exceeds the human subject's ability to look upon it directly, so long as that subject wishes to go on living. To attempt to draw back the veil without resigning oneself to dissolution is a profoundly self-centred act – an act that will only succeed in making existence appear meaningless.

In studying Benjamin, it can be tempting to emphasize the importance of the flâneur figure, which is predictably the case with critics who, in my opinion, overrate the principles of playfulness and heterogeneity in Benjamin's work, as well as modernism's embrace of the endless circulation and slippage of meaning.²⁵⁴ However, it can also be tempting to rebel against this tendency and to insist that Benjamin's ultimate loyalties lie exclusively with the promise of the messiah's impending arrival. That said, I affirm that Benjamin's concept of the experiential veil is the most concrete articulation, within the boundaries of this project, of the modernist subject's ability to reach an intermediate passage from metonymic to metaphoric experience, from discontinuity to continuity. *The veil, I conclude, is the symptom of a subjective passage toward total, self-dissolving plenitude, and it is by perceiving the beauty of this symptom that one is able to gain a lived awareness of the eternal fulfillment that winks from behind it.* We can find these symptoms in Benjamin's therapeutically successful encounters with hashish, which

²⁵³ Agamben writes: "Insofar as it has reached perfect transparency to itself, insofar as it now says and understands only itself, speech restored to the Idea is immediately dispersed; it is 'pure history'—history without grammar or transmission, which knows neither past nor repetition, resting solely in its own *never having been*" (*Potentialities* 60; original emphasis).

²⁵⁴ I refer here specifically to Ayers's and Malamud's claims about modernism, which I explored in-depth in my introduction.

include the perception of semblances between body and world, personal and cultural memory, and the objects of perception, along with a profound sedation of time's diachronic unfolding. In unison, these manifestations of semblance make up the constellation-embroidered veil of experience. Should modern subjects choose to resist the incremental self-dissolution that comes with a move toward continuity, however, this veil will only appear to conceal an irredeemable absence at the heart of experience.

Benjamin's notion of the veil is thus consonant with my reading of the metaphoric and metonymic poles of experience throughout this project, as it marks the stage at which the subject recognizes her movement toward dissolution and infer from its symptoms what sort of continuity lies at its end. This model of the limit experience, I believe, does not demand the leap of logic that Huxley's ideal of compassion does, for it does not ask the subject to fuse her awareness of eternity with her everyday, social being in *immanent* relation. The veil of experience will thus always separate the continuous from the discontinuous, insofar as any of us desires to go on living as a human subjects. However, if we truly forsake this desire and try to encounter the limits of experience in a spirit of self-sacrifice, we can incrementally approach the complete, continuous fulfillment of messianic being. The drug experience can educate us on how to make this approach, and therein can provide us therapeutic relief from the dull pain of modernity. For Benjamin, however, it is not the experience of intoxication that ultimately matters, but what it points us towards: the Unity that will one day release us from the flow of history and language, a Unity whose arrival could...come...at...any...moment...

Conclusion

“A Certain Dance”

In this dissertation, I have sought to highlight and explore the qualitative structures through which modernist thought broadly interprets everyday subjective experience. Further, I have investigated these structures primarily through Lacan's dichotomy of metaphor and metonymy and Bataille's dichotomy of continuity and discontinuity, while stressing the parallels I find between these thinkers. By using their dichotomies to read the first-person accounts of Jean Cocteau, Aldous Huxley, and Walter Benjamin, I have demonstrated how the modernist drug experience both reveals and indulges a therapeutic impulse by manipulating the human subject's proximity to the limit-experience of death. For all three of my studied authors, the drug experience offers relief from a form of chronic psychic discomfort that is rooted in the fundamental structures of everyday experience, structures that metonymically imprison the subject within language, alienate her from her phenomenal surroundings, and cast her endlessly into the future while sweeping away any sense of meaning she might try to give to either her own existence or that of the ephemeral world. Drugs can offer therapeutic relief from this experience insofar as they draw the subject incrementally toward the static, undifferentiated being of death. As I pointed out in my introduction, this reading of modernism and drug-induced comfort, by taking undifferentiated stasis as a governing aim of subjective experience, runs counter to studies of modernism that posit the transformative play of language, irreducible heterogeneity and difference, endless critical questioning, and progressive political change as primary modernist ideals. In arguing for my position, I have drawn upon not only the works of Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin,

but also those of Lacan, Bataille, Merleau-Ponty, Blanchot, and Benveniste, to name a few. That said, I have without doubt carried out this project from a determinate position, a position whose sympathies (as I remarked in my introduction) lie with the lotus-eater. I have proceeded upon the assumption that the modernist subject's impulse toward personal comfort warrants just as much respect and attention as his intellectual obligations, his participation in an endless questioning, or his contribution to progressive political change. Again, I admit that this assumption roots me in a determinate position, but as I will suggest in the closing pages of this conclusion, the privilege critics have often assigned to any critico-progressive aspects of modernism stems from a determinate position as well. Before I move into this closing discussion, however, I would like to take a moment to highlight and address some of the issues my project has raised, but perhaps not sufficiently addressed.

Qualifying Discussion

To begin, my readings of Cocteau, Huxley, and Benjamin might suggest that in the choice between the metaphoric and metonymic poles of consciousness, modernists invariably imply that the metaphoric pole is the more desirable. In his early writings on cocaine (1885), however, Sigmund Freud demonstrates that not all modernist thinkers favour the metaphoric as much as my project might imply. A stimulant like cocaine, Freud argues, is beneficial not because it provides a sensation of relaxed stasis, but because it motivates people to work harder than usual, and curbs their irksome need for sleep. "One senses an increase of self-control," Freud adds, "and feels more vigorous and more capable of work [...] One is simply normal, and finds it difficult to believe that one

is under the influence of any drug at all” (44). What is perhaps most remarkable about Freud’s endorsement of cocaine is that it employs the same basic logic as Huxley’s argument for mescaline in *Doors*, as when Freud claims that cocaine’s euphoria “is due not so much to direct stimulation as to the disappearance of elements in one’s general state of well-being which cause depression” (44). Thus, cocaine does not *add* anything to the body from “outside”; its high is simply the “euphoria of good health,” according to the normal condition of the body. “Work can be performed without fatigue,” Freud gushes, adding that if cocaine is “used protractedly in moderation,” it appears to be “not detrimental to the body” (45). In this endorsement, we find a celebration of the metonymic forces of experience through Freud’s commitment to work-based projects and minimal rest. Indeed, the fantasy of project-oriented, self-determining ego appears particularly strong in this experience as well, as the individual feels a pleasurable sense of “self-control.” In this case, then, the drug’s therapeutic potential lies not in its ability to draw the subject toward static dissolution, but in its ability to bolster the subject’s investment in the metonymic, project-oriented structure of everyday life. That said, while Freud’s writings might suggest the very opposite of the privilege I have assigned to the metaphoric pole of consciousness throughout this project, I find far greater significance in the way his writings confirm both the durability and conceptual currency of my metaphor/metonymy reading of modernist experience. As I suggested in my chapters on Cocteau and Huxley, there are certain elements of this dichotomy that stretch historically back to Baudelaire and De Quincey, and conversely, there are also elements that reach forward into contemporary literature.

In Ann Marlowe's *How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z* (1999), we find a memoir of heroin use that would have been ideal for one of this project's chapters, had the text not fallen so far out of its period of interest. When Marlow speaks of her turn to heroin, for example, she speaks in palliative terms very similar to Cocteau's. Her desire for heroin comes from a need to palliate certain nervous pains that have afflicted her since childhood, and she speaks of these pains in recognizably metonymic terms, attributing such pain to anxiety about passing time and the need to legitimate one's life through tangible accomplishments. "From childhood on," she writes, "I never had free-floating anxieties about physical harm, only about achievement and the passage of time [...] I was afraid of missing the bus home" (98). But heroin, she adds, in a language also similar to Huxley's, "provides that all-absorbing, anxiety-deflecting presentness" (16). As with all three primary writers in this study, Marlow speaks of her need to overcome the fundamental, anxiety-producing displacement of experience through time, and suggests that the drug allows her to overcome this anxiety by rooting her more deeply in the present moment. Time equally slows down, she adds, as "heroin does slow the metabolism. Or it might be psychological, an arrest of life experience. Think about those commercials for skin care products that point out that laughing or frowning ages your skin" (10). However, when Marlow speaks of her move into sobriety, she begins to interpret heroin from a more metonymic perspective. Ultimately, she concludes, the drug is morally abhorrent because it keeps you from "getting on with your life." *But what does this phrase mean*, one could ask Marlow. What does getting on with one's life entail, other than the endless deferral of fulfillment into some goal-oriented future? With these thoughts in mind, I would like to turn to the final segment of my conclusion, in which I

will highlight what I believe to be my project's contribution, not only to an understanding of modernist literature, but to an ongoing discussion of twentieth-century approaches to reading in general.

Final Thoughts and Theoretical Implications

I make no secret of the fact that throughout this project, I have emphasized a structure-oriented approach to reading modernism, and that from within this approach, I have generally privileged the principles of stasis and continuity over those of transformation, play, and irreducible difference. I have done so, however, because of how much emphasis I believe the slippage, deferral, and play of experiential meaning (and its incorporation into politically progressive readings) has received in the latter half of twentieth-century modernist criticism, particularly in Patricia Rae's *Modernism and Mourning*, Terri Mester's *Modernism and Movement*, Madelyn Detloff's *The Persistence of Modernism*, and Jonathan Flatley's *Affective Mappings*. Also, I believe that the celebration of these phenomena has often created a post-Derridean bias in contemporary readings of modernism, and in some cases, a brute glorification of intellectual discomfort. Indeed, I have never attempted to deny that the significance of contingent, unstable, and resistant meaning in modernism has been convincingly argued. However, I contend that on a theoretical level, the effects of linguistic displacement and deferral cannot always be felt equally in lived experience, and that modernist literature can provide excellent evidence to help demonstrate this point. As I suggested in my introduction, I believe that my reading of the linguistic subject in Lacan extends to certain ideas in Derrida's work as well, ideas that critics like Patricia Rae have used to exaggerate modernism's embrace of

an endless, unsettling questioning. Further, I affirm – in principle – that if we are going to accept that meaning is always deferred and subject to endless play, we need not accept that the degree of such play is invariable throughout human experience. Rather, theoretically speaking, one can manipulate the function of such temporal deferral by altering one's relationship to the limit of self-dissolution. From a Huxleyan viewpoint, such manipulation carries us toward a supreme unity of Being, a Divine Ground that unites all things. For Benjamin, it throws discrete signifiers into a play of similarity, and therein points the subject toward the messianic end of language and history. The Derridean approach, however, denies any such appeal to a reality prior or exterior to language. Instead, Derrida invites us to reconcile ourselves to the transformative play of meaning and to find fulfillment therein. His project of deconstruction, it is important to note, does not work by logically compelling readers to agree with it. Rather, it works through a language of seduction and initiation. The very syntax of Derrida's sentences in *Speech and Phenomena* or *Writing and Difference* often embodies the beauty and immanent fulfillment of play, and Derrida very much understands that if people are going to accept his model, they will have to find some sort of emotional fulfillment therein. In the essay "Différance," for example, Derrida cites Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* when saying that deconstruction "must be conceived without *nostalgia* [...] On the contrary, we must *affirm* it – in the sense that Nietzsche brings affirmations into play – with a certain laughter and with a certain dance" (*Speech* 159; original emphasis). The influence of this sort of practice can be readily found in David Ayers's reading of modernism, which claims that any moment of subjective experience is "a moment in an endless and open process, in which the reciprocal subject and object of love combine not in unity but

in endless slippage” (*Modernism* 134).²⁵⁵ Derrida in no way advocates a position of critical nay-saying, and it is unfair for critics to suggest otherwise. Rather, he wishes to affirm *positively* the value of an endless, transformative play in meaning. His reference to Nietzsche in “Différance” is crucial, for in *Birth*, Nietzsche introduces two models of being: the Apollonian and Dionysian. His study takes ancient Greece as its explicit point of reference, but the Apollonian is in fact a stand-in for the Victorian sensibility that starts to perish in the modernist era, with its “logical schematism” and corresponding love of clearly set forms and systems (78). This sensibility exists in opposition to the Dionysian, which takes pleasure in contingency, transformation, and movement. The image of Dionysian fulfillment is that of a music and dance in which “the spell” or “delusion” of such logical schematism is “burst apart” through an erotic and immanent enjoyment of movement through time (86). In fact, the Dionysian is the very same image of fulfillment that Terri Mester draws upon to posit dancing (like Derrida’s “a certain dance”) as the ideal of modernist consciousness.

As I said in my introduction, I do not necessarily disagree with Mester’s comment about dance being a modernist ideal, but I do believe that a fundamental characteristic of modernism is the failure to find pleasure in play and the endless transformation of meaning. This is why Eliot’s “mythical method” is profoundly Apollonian, aiming toward symbolic stability. His search for a “still point of the turning world” (179) gestures toward a realm of Vedantic peacefulness, as does Huxley’s final invocation of

²⁵⁵ Shortly after this claim, Ayers writes that in modernist experience, the “purpose of the journey lies in the pleasure of merely circulating” (*Modernism* 134). With the emphasis he places on a language of endless slippage and subjective circulation, Ayers without doubt helps reveal the influence that Derrida’s work has had, upon not only readings of modernism, but the very notion of reading itself in the latter twentieth century.

karuna in *Island*. Even though Eliot invokes the image of a dance at the end of “Four Quartets,” it is still a dance that unfolds within the deictic punctuation of “quick now, here, now, always –/ A condition of complete simplicity” and attempts to crystallize the opposing forces of human history in a single image, in which “the fire and the rose are one” (“Quartets” 209). Jean Cocteau ultimately decides to give up his own opium experience, but only because he finds himself too much a coward to give himself to the drug completely. Huxley, on the other hand, seems willing to sacrifice his selfhood in order to glimpse the divine Oneness beneath language, even though he never overcomes his temptation to apply his beliefs in a broadly sociological way. Even Walter Benjamin, whom it is easy to peg as some sort of proto-postmodern flâneur, remains true to his messianic tendencies from his earliest writings to his final “Theses” – and yes, even in his last, suicidal overdose of morphine.²⁵⁶ The play of correspondences is indeed an important phenomenon for Benjamin, but this play is something that occurs in the “meantime” of our lives, while we remain aware that the unfolding of history and language, in light of the messiah’s coming, might have already ended. It seems that the subject’s only alternative to the deferrals and disappointments of linguistic being is to move away from language itself, at the cost (or perhaps the benefit) of dissolving her very sense of selfhood. This dilemma in the modernist sensibility finds one of its clearest iterations in the dilemma of the drug experience, particularly when this experience serves palliative ends, as it clearly does for someone like Cocteau (and implicitly for Huxley and

²⁵⁶ Marcus Boon agrees that it is by no means out of line to draw parallels between Benjamin’s conception of drugs and the fact that he himself ultimately took a fatal overdose of drugs to elude capture by the Nazis, and therein to elude capture by the consequences of historical being. As Boon notes in his introductory essay to *On Hashish*, “[d]eath looms in the labyrinth in which the hashish user ecstatically unravels Ariadne’s thread—and it cannot be regarded as entirely coincidental that Benjamin killed himself using drugs” (11-12).

Benjamin). Further, this movement away from language and its systemic deferrals, even according to the terms of twentieth-century thought, is not illusory. In this regard, I hope that my project has helped to defend the possibility of transcendental experience in the face of twentieth-century critical thought; or to repeat Marcus Boon, who puts the point so well in *The Road of Excess*, I want to affirm “an inclusive, polyvalent movement around the boundaries that modernity has built for itself that would integrate transcendental experience within the realm of the possible” (12). I have attempted to contribute to this affirmation by using first-person accounts of drug writing to show how even the most linguistically oriented theories of subjective experience (in the twentieth century) still leave open the possibility for transcendental experience.

The work of Jacques Derrida (like Lacan’s or anyone else’s) can never conclusively deny a unity of being that exists prior to language, and yet it is true that as speaking beings, we cannot even begin to *conceive* of this unity until we have already learned language. Such is the double bind, the chicken-and-egg dilemma of language. But in considering this dilemma, we must also remember that Derrida’s arguments are subject to the operations of the *pharmakon* as much as anyone else’s, even though he might succeed more than most in his attempts to unleash language’s more playful and transformative forces. In “Différance” for example, Derrida claims that there are forces in language that both stabilize and destabilize meaning. When it comes to instability, he claims that the work of différance is “always already” happening, but when it comes time for him to account for the stability of meaning, he assigns this phenomenon to the “metaphysics of presence.” Derrida is not necessarily ontologizing here, but he is representatively privileging forces of instability over those of stability, and thus

emphasizing one side of a polarity over the other. In “The Rhetoric of Drugs,” he makes this emphasis explicit when he claims:

[t]he only attitude (the only politics – judicial, medical, pedagogical, and so forth) I would *absolutely* condemn is one which, directly or indirectly, cuts off the possibility of an essentially interminable questioning, that is, an effective and transforming questioning. (239; my emphasis)

In this quotation, Derrida positions himself – in absolute terms – against a view like Huxley’s, whose search for mystical union shows no interest in sustaining an endless or transforming questioning. Benjamin’s belief in the messiah’s arrival equally points toward the cessation of such a questioning, an *end of language* that has always-already happened. In “The Rhetoric of Drugs,” at least, Derrida invokes a polarity between the static-finite and the transformative-ongoing relations of meaning, and by emphasizing one pole over the other, he engages in the same form of representational privileging that he highlights for critique in the opening passages of his *pharmakon* discussion. In the case of finite answers versus a transformative questioning, Derrida ultimately emphasizes what he finds to be the more reassuring of two poles.²⁵⁷ Roman Jakobson similarly claims in “Two Aspects of Language” that metaphor has received too much historical

²⁵⁷ I would like to say here that I am by no means familiar with Derrida’s entire body of work, and I do not wish to be unfair or reductive in my reading of him. Thus I would like to make the following qualification: I do not believe that Derrida’s *entire body of work* simply inscribes a stasis/play binary for the purpose of privileging the latter side over the former. However, I believe that deconstruction’s representational emphasis on the endless, transformative questioning of writing has resulted in some cases (like that of Patricia Rae) in a post-Derridean *valorization of discomfort*. It is this valorization of discomfort, I argue, that does not always do justice to modernist literature – or for that matter, contemporary experience. Derrida, for that matter, might not always create as stark an opposition between interpretive shut-down and endless questioning as he does in “The Rhetoric of Drugs.” Yet we must still acknowledge the fact that in this piece, he qualifies his endorsement of endless questioning with the word “absolutely.” Further, I see no evidence to suggest that he is being ironic in this choice of words.

attention, and Lacan's work endlessly attempts to address this oversight by privileging the metonymic chain of signifiers as the first principle of linguistic being. However, none of these thinkers can decide this polarity in favour of one side or the other.

Language, I accept, creates an endless slippage which prevents it from ever attaining a *signified* final meaning. However, the purview of this principle does not necessarily extend to those individuals who claim to have experiences beyond language, and therefore beyond discursive oppositions. The Lacanian frameworks of experience show us how one can travel toward this point of dissolution, but they cannot tell us about what happens beyond it. Not even our most explosive metaphors can do that. Metaphoric language is but an intermediary symptom, an embroidered veil that hides something else, something we may or may not be able to glimpse as we dissolve the boundaries of our subjectivity and enter a space of profound absence and/or infinite presence. The resolution to this dilemma depends on how we signify this limit point, and the choice of signification relies on a turn of mind that I can only call faith. One either has faith in the blessed unity prior to language, or supports Derrida's claim that no such unity exists prior to language. Indeed, spiritual faith cannot resolve this dilemma, but neither can any act of critical thinking.

But what if something like play, music, or a pleasure of the text *can* combine (or put into harmony) those poles of experience that I have called by the names of metaphor and metonymy? What of the possibility that the play of meaning could produce in us a sense of something immanent, and reconnect us vitally to our material surroundings the same way that dance does, without renouncing the principles of movement and change? As I have said throughout this project, the notion that subjective experience plays itself

out between two fundamental poles of signification is a historically inflected phenomenon. That said, however, it is a phenomenon that still governs not only contemporary readings of modernist literature, but contemporary experience in general. Thus the ideal of finding immanent fulfillment in the endless transformation of meaning might still exist for thought today, but I personally believe that for many people, the models of play, dance, and laughter – however balanced they try to become – cannot provide lasting fulfillment. As Patricia Rae implies, perhaps we are supposed to err on the side of play in this dilemma, lest our thought mistakenly look for an unchanging referent and calcify into something politically monstrous and totalizing. But I can only continue to affirm that modernists, like many people today, are largely defined by their persistent inability to find lasting fulfillment in transformative questioning, no matter how hard they might try to reconcile themselves to it. Thus I believe we should continue to look for other avenues of experience, even if they might lead us toward utter self-annihilation. This project has made a provisional effort to walk down one of these other avenues, and here at the end of this effort, I can only affirm that an endless, transformative questioning cannot and will not be our only model for engaging the world of experience. Ultimately, I cannot affirm this point with either a certain laughter or a certain dance, but only a dead-certain silence –

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MIT, 2003. Print.

---. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 2008. Print.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Philip Glennie

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Saint Francis Xavier University
Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada
2002-2006 B.A.

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2006-2007 M.A.

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2007-2011 Ph.D.

Honours and Awards: Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010

Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
Doctoral Fellowship
2010-2011

Related Work Experience Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2006-2011