

Flore Singer Aaslid

## **Facing the Dragon**

Exploring a conscious phenomenology of intoxication

Thesis for the degree philosophiae doctor

Trondheim, January 2007

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management  
Department of Social Anthropology



**NTNU**

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

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# FACING THE DRAGON



Just six hundred years ago,  
maps of the known world contained the inscription,  
"Here there be dragons," indicating  
terra incognita about which we knew  
nothing and hence feared to tread.

Today we find this viewpoint  
exceedingly quaint. What changed?

Knowledge and information was  
gathered by souls brave enough to  
challenge orthodoxy and venture into  
those uncharted realms inhabited by  
dragons. They returned with first-hand  
information that refuted "common  
knowledge" and led to a revised worldview.

Today, knowledge of our physical  
environment has expanded beyond  
belief. Regarding our inner  
environment, however, many still fear  
that "here there be dragons".



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*I only pass on to others what has been passed onto me. If there is any lack of learning in my writing, any obscurity of expression or superficial treatment, you may feel sure that it is in such places that I am most original.*

St.Bellarmino

Reflecting over how this project came to be, from a tiny hunch, a few sentences scribbled on a piece of paper and many years later, a finished product, has made me realise the true meaning of interdependence. That is to say, how people, circumstances, timing, synchronicity and small strokes of luck all have an enormous effect on how things develop and that in this respect, I have so much to be grateful for. I was very fortunate to have stumbled into an academic milieu that, as I have come to appreciate later, is actually quite unusual in terms of having both a broad and exceptionally advanced level of scientific awareness, coupled with the capacity to allow true creative expression to emerge freely, and undistorted. This is especially thanks to one man in particular, Dr. Stein E. Johansen, my advisor, who has played a major role in supporting this process and guiding my research from start to finish.

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With regards to drug research, and qualitative research in particular, the individuals participating in a study are unquestionably the most important source of knowledge and expertise, without their contribution, researchers would be fumbling hopelessly in the dark. Here also I have been extremely fortunate to have met and learned from some extraordinary people who have opened their world and shared their life stories, many of which were often exceedingly personal. It is because of them that this exploration has been possible at all, they have been crucial to this project – those with the real experience and insight – the many who I talked to and have known well who walk the path. I thank them all for being willing to share the richness and difficulty of their lives. For those who are no longer with us in a physical way, I dedicate the friendship and insight that they have shown me to alleviating the pain and suffering that others still experience on their journey.

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## Prologue

For quite some time now, I have experienced a strong and persistent feeling that there was something I wanted to say about this volatile yet intriguing subject matter that drugs and intoxication have become. If I was going to put a finger on the time when this feeling started or from where it arose I'm not sure I could. Yet, after having spent several years researching and writing about drugs, specifically addiction and the process of rehabilitation, I have been left with the distinct impression that for every documented case of drug abuse and every treatise dealing with the drug problem, there frequently lay more information and power in *what wasn't being said* than in what was actually being stated explicitly, an observation which I will explore and expand on throughout this thesis. At the time when I first started noticing this shadowy realm in drug research and conventional drug discourse in general, I was still rather young, highly inexperienced and regarded myself as being in no position to explore let alone articulate this observation. Nevertheless, this feeling, unlike most fleeting sentiments which are transient by nature, never completely disappeared. On the contrary, it has grown stronger with time, eventually compelling me to investigate some obscure yet exciting new territories that I might have otherwise conveniently avoided at the risk of breaking what appears to be some kind of unwritten code among social scientists in the drug field.

The fascination with *what wasn't being said* first became the tentative point of departure for my master's thesis and introduced me to concepts like folk models, professional models, muted discourse and hegemony, where knowledge and power meet and mingle to create a boundary between acceptable and unacceptable ways of thinking and speaking about drugs. Then, in the autumn of 2003, I was given the opportunity to further my explorations, this time based on research among primarily untreated, hidden user populations here in Trondheim, Norway. This group then became the point of departure for this study. By focusing on these largely ignored user groups in a natural, non-clinical setting I hoped to investigate the nature of different user trajectories with a strong focus on research anomalies such as recreational drug use, self-change and natural recovery. My aspiration was therefore to fill this conspicuous gap in contemporary drug research.

This gap became even more apparent during the initial exploratory phase. The more I read and investigated, the more aware I became of some serious constraints in contemporary drug research, serving as a kind of invisible straight jacket in terms of what was and wasn't

regarded as an acceptable focus, or area of investigation. I recall discussing this with an acquaintance who had spent some time examining drug publications himself, trying to find answers to his own destructive user pattern. His overall impression of current studies was that no matter how well researched or well written the findings appeared to be on the surface he just couldn't recognize himself in the actual text. His drug habit wasn't particularly unusual either; he had had a rather problematic opiate addiction before but was now doing quite well with methadone, not unlike several of the participants in my first project (Aaslid 2003). His reaction only confirmed what I had felt after numerous conferences and extensive readings on the subject over several years. It seems as if drug users, seen as living, breathing, conscious agents, somehow become transformed into ghosts in the final draft, depicted with cold detachment as if they were from another realm, then eerily transformed into faceless entities with no voice.

The limitations or implicit restrictions that prevent a more genuine, vivid and representative portrayal of drug users are closely related to a recurring tendency within the drug field for professional models to reflect what has been referred to as a hegemonic health model (Hunt & Barker 2001). This model represents a highly essentialist view of illicit substances which in turn has a tendency to reduce users into passive victims of their vice. This type of categorization both de-contextualises behavioural patterns and has an overall disempowering and dehumanising effect in terms of denying the user any kind of independent agency, while simultaneously diverting attention away from the larger social forces which influence drug taking trends. In adopting these perspectives uncritically, professionals are all too often blinded by the underlying assumptions ingrained within a problem-based public health model, which affects both the nature of the inquiry, the types of people included in an investigation, as well as the manner in which these findings are analyzed and portrayed.

Another closely related problematic area concerns the epistemological and ontological foundations upon which most research within the human sciences, and drug research in particular, is based. Despite the fact that numerous developments and discoveries in twentieth-century science seriously challenge the underlying philosophical assumptions of the positivist paradigm, it still continues to dominate scientific investigations. Paradoxically, in physics for instance, relativity theory, quantum mechanics and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle have shown increasingly that reality is not simply a single external phenomenon that can be objectively understood by a detached observer quantifying its parts. Rather, the

observer is always and unavoidably a part of what is observed since reality is filtered through one's own particular prism of perceptions, and every research process therefore reflects this interdependence to a greater or lesser degree. If this applies to the physical universe, then it certainly pertains even more to social studies, where human complexity enters the equation and values shape both one's own understanding as well as the nature of an inquiry as a whole. Qualitative approaches have been increasingly employed as a promising new alternative, but unfortunately few people seem to agree on what these methodologies actually mean, or be able to fully incorporate an alternative epistemology upon which more adequate approaches could be based.

Still, there is a desperate need for a paradigm shift that is both more attuned to recent scientific developments and is able to accurately reflect the complexity and interdependence of continually evolving dynamic systems at every level. This is especially evident within the field of drug research which, despite the fact that intoxication represents a highly situationally contingent and primarily subjective experience, is largely dominated by methods relying on objective observation, quantifiable data and verifiable truths. Perhaps because intoxication and illicit drug use is such a potentially dangerous field of inquiry, many professionals choose to approach it by employing mostly quantitative and largely disengaged scientific methodologies that minimize investigator involvement and subjectivity, while maximizing separation and objectivity. This approach can accurately reflect large-scale statistical developments related to drug taking trends, and so represents an essential piece of the puzzle in that respect. However, when it comes to individual user trajectories in particular, there are many weaknesses within quantitative approaches that prevent a deeper analysis from emerging which accurately reflects, thus failing to do justice to the many interrelated variables affecting user experiences and the process as a whole.

The present study therefore seeks to explore an alternative to the positivist paradigm currently dominating drug research by employing a highly context sensitive phenomenological approach which respects and acknowledges the perspective and interactive role of the observer, as well as the world views and values of the participants included in this inquiry. The aim is not to prove or disprove a set of theoretical assumptions or generalizations, but rather to focus on the process of discovery as it reflects the contextual findings and multiple patterns of meaning that emerge from the actual lived experiences of the participants themselves. Previous ethnographic accounts have had a major influence in the drug field in

terms of emphasizing an emic model or the “user’s point of view”, however, most of these have been based largely on the street subculture with one substance in particular, like crack or heroin, as the primary area of focus. Although I had originally intended to divide my respondents into different categories based on the extent and type of substance used, I soon discovered that most of them were “poly-users” who had often alternated between many kinds of consumption patterns, and that separate categories would therefore not adequately reflect user experiences as a whole. Here “the field” is therefore not restricted to the streets, nor is it tied to any one particular substance, subculture or type of user pattern.

Somewhat conveniently, for the past ten years I have lived in a neighbourhood where substance use and abuse (of both drugs and alcohol) seems to be proportionally larger than in many other parts of Trondheim (or perhaps just more visible). Consequently, “fieldwork” would often naturally arise from an afternoon walk to the store, a late night gathering in a respectable (or not so respectable) home, a local pub, a shopping centre or the park across the street. In short, anywhere there were people with an inclination towards some form of illicit intoxication. Nevertheless, when it comes to conducting fieldwork among any drug population, special precautions must be taken to protect those participating in the project regarding their identity in particular. In theory, informed consent should be obtained from all participants included in a study. In practice however, walking up to the average drug user, without previously having established a good foundation of trust, and asking them to sign a piece of paper which explicitly states that they are participating in a DRUG research project would most likely send even the least paranoid prospective participants fleeing swiftly in the opposite direction. To remedy this dilemma, fieldwork was supplemented with in-depth interviews based on purposive sampling of ten consenting respondents to illustrate a broad variety of different user trajectories. Their names have been changed and sensitive data either left out or disguised so that their anonymity is not compromised. Surprisingly, as this project became more and more widely known among different user populations, many expressed a strong desire to participate and tell their story. Out of respect and consideration for those with which I have conversed and interacted in more informal settings, no personal information has been included, although their experiences have inspired many of the insights which form the basis of this approach.

Consciousness is a notoriously elusive and difficult field of inquiry for many reasons, and the subject of intoxication even more so, since it has, for quite some time now, been

enshrouded in a mist of politicized morality backed, more often than not, by waves of social hysteria. Whether one chooses to condone or condemn these inner escapades of the mind, the fact of the matter is that the inclination to ingest substances for the sole purpose of altering consciousness dates back to Neolithic times. However, even though the drive itself is ancient and widespread, the extent to which this drive seems to have gained momentum in contemporary society, reaching disturbingly destructive proportions, is a relatively new development, and for this reason the discussion would be incomplete without situating the subject matter within a historical context.

The aim of this thesis is therefore twofold. On the one hand it attempts to explore and develop the foundations of what I will term a “conscious phenomenology of intoxication”, and on the other hand it suggests how certain widespread contemporary trends are influential in terms of serving as a meta-template within which this phenomenology is presently being expressed. By including a conscious user perspective, it is hoped that attention will be drawn to a voice which has been consistently muted and distorted, if included at all, in the current monopoly of politically correct drug discourse. Although the main focus here is the user’s perspective, it would be preposterous to claim that every drug user can be neatly confined into one category and given one voice. Indeed, one would have to search far and wide to discover a less homogenous group of people, whose only real affiliation is a common appreciation for and experimentation with different types of substance-induced states of consciousness. Given that intoxication is ultimately a subjective experience whose effects can only be measured and quantified objectively to a limited extent, it becomes clear why a phenomenological approach is so appropriate. In phenomenology the focus is on conscious human experience in everyday life, of *life-worlds*, that stream of every-day routines, interactions and events that serve as the source of individual experience and social relations. The experiences of time and space are significant because time structures not only everyday reality, but in many ways who we are and how we perceive ourselves and our world. Intoxication can alter these experiences fundamentally; it can create a ‘time-out’ where conventional codes are somehow less relevant or do not apply at all.

In contextualizing the discussion historically, a phenomenology of intoxication can be placed within a contemporary framework specifically related to the postmodern identity project and consumerism that in many ways epitomize our present epoch. Consumerism is based on the construction of insatiable appetites; we live in an age of “hungry ghosts”, to

borrow a term from Tibetan Buddhism. Identity mechanisms are, to a large extent, determined by patterns of consumption and acquisition although paradoxically, whether it is material or symbolic capital that is obtained, it never seems to be quite enough. There are always more appetites to be filled, and more products to be consumed. Therefore, in situating the phenomenology of intoxication within a matrix of consumerism, it is tentatively proposed that the unmentionable Other, in this context drug addicts of the most zealous variety, are perhaps not so unlike the rest of us after all. Perhaps they embody and epitomize a force which is so all-pervasive and all-encompassing that it is hardly even noticeable until it reveals its true face behind this rather unseemly and shocking disguise. In this respect we all share a common ground so to speak, both in terms of that relentless, insatiable force which so permeates our lives and our being, as well as the desire to transcend that force, to rise above it and find peace.

By directing attention towards a conscious phenomenology of intoxication, there is no intention to romanticize drugs, or belittle the unfortunate consequences that may result from reckless use. Rather, there is the conviction that it will only be through including these perspectives that researchers can hope to break the current stalemate which seems to have pervaded contemporary drug discourse. In doing this a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics and complexities that govern the drive for intoxication, and how this drive is interpreted, regulated and given meaning by those closest to its use, can be attained.

The first chapter serves as the background and point of departure for this exploration by presenting a short overview of different contributions in the field of drug research and drug literature up until the present. The problematic implications of the political climate within which most drug texts are embedded today are also examined critically in terms of how they affect drug writing and drug discourse, especially regarding the limitations of the widely accepted public health model in terms of how ingested substances are categorized and the manner in which drug users are perceived and portrayed. The second chapter examines the dominant scientific paradigm as it is reflected in the epistemology and ontology guiding contemporary drug research. It is argued that an alternative qualitative approach, when implemented correctly, is not only more flexible and productive in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics underlying many consumption patterns today, but is also essential if any significant progress is to be made at all. The methodology that provides the foundation for this exploration is presented here in addition to some clarifications regarding my own role and motivation. The third chapter presents the theoretical and analytical

framework underlying a conscious phenomenology of intoxication. In order to fully portray different user trajectories as they are experienced by the respondents themselves, a narrative approach is employed since this reflects individual journeys and personalized truth, yet can also be seen as a deeper commentary of contemporary culture and shared understandings. These are narratives reflecting long-term user trajectories where both entry and exit processes are incorporated, as well as that somewhat elusive and largely underrepresented “betwixt and between” phase.

Based on these narratives, a deep pattern emerged gradually. However, this pattern was not based exclusively on consumption practices, but on the underlying dialectics between agency and communion that reflected a system of relational exchange within which different types of consumption practices were embedded. This can be portrayed as a continual, dynamic dance involving two principal dialectics with four different seasons. Accordingly, four “gates” symbolize this dynamic to invoke a sense of process, movement and change that visually depicts the corresponding transition from one locus of identification to another. Then again, this does not imply that every drug user passes through each gate, many never venture beyond the first “exploratory” phase, so this is by no means intended to be yet another simplistic “gateway theory”. The gates, as they are employed here basically represent a useful metaphor and heuristic tool for unveiling the processual quality and transformational potential of the more lasting trajectories.

The fourth chapter initiates this journey where the first gate marks the “entry” into drug experimentation, usually around adolescence, focusing specifically on the drive towards agency and autonomy, and how this is reflected in different user narratives. The fifth chapter concerns the process where consumption patterns become more established and the focus moves towards communion and integration, expressed through an increasing identification with like-minded others. Here the second gate leads towards different personal control mechanisms where boundaries must be continually regulated to encompass changes in both drug practices and identification processes. The sixth chapter takes a closer look at rituals of consumption today and how they are strongly related to our sense of self in postmodern society, reflecting a complex system of relationships based on a holarchy of underlying needs. Often when these needs are not being fulfilled otherwise, a polarized dialectic between self and substance ensues. The third gate then marks the point at which the relationship between self and other is replaced with a dialectic between self and substance as drugs become the

primary locus of identification, resulting in problematic use, dependency and dramatic stories of dissolution and disintegration. Chapter seven expands further on this theme as it relates to the process of recovery from destructive user patterns and how this is reflected in different narratives. The fourth gate concludes this cycle and symbolizes a kind of return where intoxication may still be part of a lifestyle but not the primary locus of identification. This is especially apparent in narratives of recovery where positive change and transformation are clearly evident based on a healthy recognition and integration of the more problematic aspects of one's personality.

Chapter eight concludes by reviewing and connecting the main themes emerging from these explorations. The politics of consciousness has a major impact on how drugs are perceived in society today and the manner in which drug research is carried out. In neglecting user experiences that do not conform to conventional beliefs, vital insights are consistently overlooked, preventing a deeper understanding and the possibility of dealing effectively and humanely with the drug problem. The journey through the four gates is both an expression of individual narratives and at the same time a reflection of wider socio-cultural trends and developments. In order to fully incorporate every aspect of drug use and intoxication, an integral model for drug research is presented which embraces both individual and collective factors, and quantitative and qualitative perspectives. These are situated within four quadrants that represent interconnected and interdependent aspects of this complex and challenging field of inquiry. Chapter eight closes by investigating some of the parallels between the dynamics governing the process of transformation in individuals and similar trends manifesting on a global scale as seen in recent studies examining change in organizations and society. Chapter nine expands further on this theme in suggesting some concrete and practical measures for public policy, building on both my own research and the latest findings of the EMCDDA (the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction). These suggestions are based on the premise that any successful program must be grounded in a well-informed, complete and in-depth awareness of the social world that it seeks to improve, where human dignity and respect are essential components and alleviating suffering is the primary objective.

Ultimately, this exploration is guided by the recognition that my role as a researcher is not to judge but to understand, and that based on this understanding the potential for assisting those currently passing through the "gates" may be vastly improved. There are innumerable circumstances that lead people to walk paths perhaps very different from our own, and



although behavioral models may be useful in predicting outcomes to a certain degree, I propose that it is the inner world of human experience which is the most crucial determining factor. The road towards individuation sometimes involves dangerous, risky and perhaps even highly destructive paths through uncharted territory. The further one walks “off the map” the greater the dangers of permanent injury or even death, not unlike the explorers of the past wandering into wild and unfamiliar terrain. Although no one advocates this particular path it is still a personal choice based on unique circumstances. However, while this is first and foremost an individual choice, there are many indications that wider socio-cultural developments also have a deep impact on personal choices, as individuals struggle for firm footing in our turbulent times. In ignoring both the experiential and wider socio-cultural dimensions affecting individuals embarking on this path, we are marginalizing the very people that we seek to help, by creating a barrier of silence and distrust and thereby perpetuating a highly destructive cycle of exclusion based on fear and ignorance. This exploration seeks to break this cycle by walking through the “unknown, unremembered gate” and creating space for all those voices echoing faintly from the other side, as T.S. Eliot writes in *Four Quartets*;

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, unremembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple-tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.



# Chapter

# 1

## Background – Reassessing Contemporary Drug Research

*Science cannot increase our understanding of ourselves and our world if it is held captive by our fears.*

Stanton Peele

### 1.1 – Ethnography and drug research

Ethnography has a long tradition of attempting to understand and represent the “native’s point of view”. That there are different ways of being in the world, corresponding to a wide variety of reality constructions for fluctuating moments in time and space is an important insight that has arisen out of this approach. There is a growing awareness, especially since the advent of post-modernism, that any dialectic between individual and society must be situated and positioned in order to be rendered truly meaningful. Also, any socio-cultural constructions arising out of this dialectic need be, in light of their very nature, appraised critically. Anthropology has contributed significantly here, yet the resulting cultural critique has, for the most part, been directed towards “The Other” and to a much lesser extent our own native constructs.

One important area which has received far too little scrutiny is the phenomenology of intoxication. In the words of Stuart Walton, this may also be referred to as “ an emergent strand of cultural history that one might call *intoxicology* – the comparative study of altered states of consciousness, the social contexts in which they are practised, and their implications for public policy”(Walton 2001: 3). Despite the repressive climate initiated by the war against drugs (or perhaps even because of it), there have been significant theoretical developments during the past few decades, specifically in terms of including a user perspective in what is now referred to as ethnographic drug research and moving away from the criminal models popular during the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The literature available at that time representing an emic perspective usually followed De Quincey’s lead in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) by being shocking yet apologetic and in many respects still fitting neatly into the conventional moral paradigm of its time. The focus of the narratives

changed only slightly from depicting the downfall of upper-class members of society for whom the use of drugs was a “symptom of their preexisting depravity to an obsession with the seduction of the innocent” (Boon 2002: 63). However, what these literary works lacked in terms of scientific rigor they made up for when it came to expressing the more subjective elements of drug consciousness.

Although drug ethnography as a research method is unique in terms of recognizing and respecting the “insiders’ view”, research agendas have been and still are strongly affected by the theoretical models employed to account for user behaviour as well as the manner in which user behaviour was construed (Feldman & Aldrich 1990, Hunt & Barker 2001). Modern drug ethnography started by addressing the question of why people used drugs in the first place, mainly in order to contribute towards a scientific understanding of the meaning of addiction. Lindesmith (1947) in particular was especially critical of the criminal model of addiction, and his qualitative research was used to contrast two views of the phenomenon; drug addiction as crime versus drug addiction as disease. This research became the basis for public discussion relating to the management of drug addiction in the U.S. for the next thirty years (Feldman & Aldrich 1990: 19). During these decades the emphasis shifted away from asking principally why drug use took place towards exploring how people became involved and stayed involved in different drug scenes. Researchers began focusing on influences from the social world instead of mainly investigating the inner realm of experimenters (ibid). From this evolved a “career model” of addiction (Becker 1963), which again provided the basis for further ethnographic explorations, investigating the manner in which drug use was perceived by users within the contexts of where it took place. These studies depart drastically from a conventional pathological view of addiction, and instead point towards more pragmatic accounts of drug use as a means to acquire both self-esteem and status within a setting that valued high-risk behaviour (Feldman & Aldrich 1990: 21).

The strength and contribution of drug ethnography therefore lies specifically in its ability to capture the “natives’ point of view” and in many cases provide explanations of drug use which deeply reflect the socio-cultural context within which this behaviour takes place. Many of the ethnographic views presented directly oppose popular conceptions, and strongly challenge current disease theories of addiction in terms of presenting new concepts which are both more pragmatic and utilitarian (ibid. 25). Nevertheless, the political climate within which drug research takes place is still highly influential in terms of supporting research agendas

which to a large extent reinforce contemporary political viewpoints (Hunt & Barker 2001) and many of the categories within which one operates in the drug field carry an exceedingly “heavy political and emotional load” (Agar 2002). This applies especially to concepts like “intoxication”, “drugs”, “addiction”, and “sobriety” where the meaning inherent in each concept strongly reflects a hegemonic public health model which is in many cases incompatible with the “folk models” of those closest to the drug and its use (Agar 1985). Not only are these concepts often incompatible, but they can also be directly misleading in terms of obscuring consumption patterns and user trajectories as they are experienced by the user population in question. Most ethnographic reports directly contradict the “social/psychological failure image”, based largely on “top down positivist models, and – as the Frankfurt School showed long ago – such models make it easier for the prevailing ideology to go unchallenged” (Agar 2002: 251);

For example, positive results of using drugs were never reported. Addicts were characterized only in terms of deficits. They were stick figures in the literature, manipulated voices responding to questions that presupposed pathology and social failure, questions from a world that had little sense of who they were or how they lived. It was not that heroin addicts did not have problems; it was that they had more than just problems, and some of the problems they did have were not visible through the lens of deviance and pathology. So what happened? Ethnography painted a portrait of heroin addicts that did not fit with the prevailing literature, but it also did not generate any new paradigms for policy or intervention. In ethnographies addicts became rounded rather than flat characters. Addicts knew how to do things and took pride in that fact. They made critical and astute comments about society, about the social conditions and social services in their world, about what heroin did - or more often, had done - for them when they started, about how “the life” had its advantages and disadvantages when compared to the alternatives. The predominant social/psychological failure image was included, but it too was complicated and contradicted by ethnographic reports. This is a predictable finding of any ethnography in any field: A snapshot of a population obtained through the limited filter of a few experience-distant variables will not serve to describe or explain what their world is all about (ibid.).

In many respects, anthropology as a discipline is particularly suitable, both in terms of theory and methodology, for an exploration of intoxicology. However, the very reasons that make a subject like this so potent in terms of revealing vital insights into society’s ultimate value system are also, somewhat paradoxically, the same reasons for which most social sciences seem to have timidly shied away from this area of study. The politics of consciousness, as it is expressed through the regulation of altered states, is a potentially rich and informative field where knowledge and power mix and mingle to create a field with enormous potential. This is supported by all the knowledge that is already available relating to “layers of context that telescope out to the level of global economy and magnify in to the details of neurotransmitter firing” (Agar 2002: 255, 257). Therefore, the drug field should be one of the most “exciting transdisciplinary cutting-edge” and “challenging fields on the intellectual landscape” (ibid.) for both quantitative and qualitative researchers. This however

is unfortunately not the case mainly because of political forces that are all-pervasive, institutionally, academically, and nationally. Consequently, as anthropologist and veteran drug researcher Michael Agar concludes in an essay evaluating the role of ethnography and qualitative research over the last thirty-five years, even today;

The topic carries so much freight, everywhere I have worked, that legitimate research questions can get stomped on like fire ants. You can ask and answer them anyway - most of us have and continue to do so - but the results will not enter into the policy flow, and you will become a persona non euphoria. This contradiction has frustrated me for years, in the US and everywhere else I have worked, and unfortunately I do not see any end in sight (ibid: 257)

The convenient classification of different forms of intoxication as either legitimate and safe or forbidden and dangerous has therefore given rise to “an area that does not officially exist as a legitimate cultural practice, but only as a matter of intractable social recalcitrance” (Walton 2001: 3). As Nietzsche wrote in *The Gay Science* (1882), “Who will ever relate the whole history of narcotica? It is almost the history of ‘culture’, of our so-called higher culture” (in Walton 2001). The “whole history of narcotica” exposes a system of demarcation that has important socio-cultural implications but these can only be illuminated analytically through transcending conventionally established and accepted categories.

## **1.2 - Intoxicology today**

Lenson (1995) has identified several central contemporary genres of drug writing and presented a concise critical summary of each in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. Each “genre” can be seen as a reflection of one particular perspective and as such has a unique although partial contribution to make. The first genre is reflected in clinical studies conducted mostly by “physicians, biologists, and psychologists who investigate the biochemical and behavioural effects of psychoactive substances on the living organism” (ibid: x). One serious drawback with most clinical literature however, is that by borrowing methods from the natural sciences and applying them to human behaviour, subjective factors are completely wiped out of the equation, while the demand for duplication means restricting all variables to those which can be reproduced in a laboratory. As measures of statistical validity are applied to the collected data, “it abandons any claim to understanding the individual datum...this results in an implicit assertion of drugs as causes of fixed effects, as if the effects were inherent in the drugs instead of in the relationship of drug and user” (ibid: xii). Andrew Weil has even noticed a “curious symmetry” between drug abusers and those who study them where; “The

person who is convinced that highs come in drugs, if he is negatively oriented toward society, becomes a drug abuser; if he is positively oriented toward society, he becomes a drug researcher” (in Lenson: xii).

A second field of drug literature is based on “pharmacological accounts” that rely on biochemistry to record the physical composition of drugs and their impact on human and animal brains (ibid: x). This approach has contributed a wealth of information increasing our knowledge and understanding of brain chemistry and to some extent enabled researchers to isolate the physiological effects of certain drugs independent of behavioural conjecture. Unfortunately the majority of this literature is for the most part unintelligible to the “lay readers”; “Pharmacologists are not writers so much as engineers”, As Lenson has pointed out, they may write volumes about what characterizes a substance as serotonin re-uptake inhibitor, but little in terms of enlightening the reader as to what it actually *feels* like “to have serotonin lingering in one’s synapses” (ibid.). Although this field has enormous potential in terms of benefiting individuals with imbalanced brain chemistry, there is a danger that other relevant factors may recede even further behind the looming shadow of an exponentially expanding variety of synthetic drugs that can alter brain function “with digital exactitude”. Pharmacologists design the products and “the therapist (or drug dealer, for that matter)”, on their part become “an engineer who adapts the new technology to the needs and desires of an individual client or customer” (ibid: xiii). There is a curious parallel here between widely prescribed drugs like antidepressants, sleeping pills and tranquilizers which seem designed to “bypass the problem of subjectivity altogether”, and forbidden ones like cannabis, ecstasy and various entheogens which on the contrary tend to “disturb” subjectivity to such an extent that it is forced it into the foreground (Boon 2002) .

The next collection of drug literature represents collective reality as it is reflected in social structures, the outer environment and other external systems. In drug literature this dimension is apparent in “work by historians, social scientists, and legal scholars on the relationship of drugs to the body politic and the body of law, including histories of the use and prohibition of particular substances, and studies of users as deviant subgroups”. The texts are mainly concerned with society and their aims are therefore also primarily social, even ideological in some respects. In many cases the author begins with a “predetermined opinion: that more or less tolerance of drugs would be preferable, or that the laws ought to be upheld or altered” (ibid: xiii). The arguments are then based on evidence “drawn from surveys, from

historical records, or from statute” which are then “rearranged in a pattern that the author hopes will lead the reader to the same conclusion” (ibid.). Although there is a great deal to learn from this type of discourse, it is largely driven by “factionalism” with medicalizers and liberals on one side and prohibitionists and conservatives on the other (ibid.).

It is at any rate difficult if not impossible to be totally neutral and objective when it comes to drugs and intoxication; everyone has an opinion and is to some extent convinced that they are “right”. More often than not however disagreements are not primarily based on facts, since facts can and often are interpreted to serve one’s purpose, but simply reflect different ideologies and objectives. Therefore positioning oneself and openly acknowledging one’s point of departure might be a better alternative than disguising bias behind a veil of assumed objectivity and scientific evidence. A more inclusive approach must acknowledge and respect different even opposing views, although this doesn’t exclude a critical analysis. Recently there have also emerged important developments concerning the influence of economic systems, globalization, technology and industrialization on consumption patterns like drug and alcohol use (Alexander 2004, Boon 2002, Lalander & Salasuo 2005). Needless to say, a complete understanding of intoxication must take these historical developments and contemporary realities into account.

Subjective and intersubjective realities as they are experienced by and mediated through embodied conscious beings are the least represented areas in drug research. Most of the drug literature that does reflect these perspectives to some extent is in the genre of drug confession and fiction, although there is a large variety to choose between, there are some noticeably distinct traits. The strength of drug fiction lies specifically in communicating the subjective elements of drug consciousness; its weakness however lies in the dilemma that in most instances “exposure is the paramount danger of the drug experience”. Therefore, the “confessing voice, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, is caught in a duplicity that depends upon concealment as a precondition for revelation” (in Lenson 1995: xiv). This often leads to “pervasive ambivalence” and difficulty understanding why the narrator continues to pursue his drug of choice since “suffering and repugnance are the inevitable results”. In most cases drug confessions become somewhat predictable tales depicting a “moral turning point, where ecstasy transmutes into revulsion and horror” and this becomes “a fixation, and unfortunate consequence of the genre” (ibid.).



In the field of drug fiction there is much diversity and here it is pointless to generalize since there are simply too many different approaches. Boon (2002) however, has done an impressive job integrating a historical perspective with the relationship between writers and specific drugs, and between these drugs and different literary and philosophical traditions. Similarly Plant (1999) explores the history of drugs and drug use through the works of well known writers arguing that the use, production, and trafficking of drugs “has shaped some of the era’s most fundamental philosophies and provided much of its economic wealth”. In both drug confessions and fictions however, as in almost all scholarly works on drugs where according to Lenson “citations of male authors outnumber those of women by better than ten to one”, there is a remarkable predominance of male perspectives. Consequently, where drug confessions converge around the “parodic equation” between domination and submission, “drug fiction is shot through with cryptic, worldly moralizing of the sort men enjoy during the calm after gun play” (Lenson 1995: xvi).

This omnipresent detachment, lack of intentionality, embodied subjectivity and consciousness, amplified by the potential perils of exposure, is perhaps most perceptible in the literature of recovery which “depends upon the translation of drug experience into a self-contradictory matrix of denial and confession” (ibid.). Here “Memory is invoked in lurid detail and then erased” as recovery narratives “ritualize an amnesia in which the ex-user (excused) barter guilt for passivity and determinism. No matter which ‘addiction’ is in question... the user is exonerated from free will, and in so doing demeans her or his history of being high” (ibid.). There is in other words a strong sense of disempowerment and capitulation which pervades this type of drug writing. In “worshipping causality” ex-users are recoiled into an “obsessive metanarrative that only reinforces the supremacy of the drug itself, as opposed to the user’s experience of it” (ibid.). In this respect the majority of contemporary drug literature concerned with individual trajectories still reflects a dominant paradigm where biomedical theories converge with stories of conquest and dissolution to perpetuate a ghostly discourse conspicuously lacking intentionality, embodiment or consciousness in relation to the actual subjective experience of life on drugs.

One important exception here that Lenson mentions concerns the realm of psychedelics and the nature and potential of altered states for human development. The beatnik and hippie generations of the late fifties, sixties and seventies resulted in a large spectrum of drug literature where subjectivity and consciousness were not only embraced, but

in many ways distinguished the whole genre. Translating these experiences into a language with few commensurable reference points however, meant relying for the most part on Eastern and Western mysticism, Buddhist terminology and getting caught between “the incompatible vocabularies of rationalism and the occult” (ibid: xvii). This genre, while perhaps “failing all the tests of philosophers and theologians”, still addresses important issues concerning the nature of reality, the mind, and possible uses of psychotropic exploration. For this reason, it also represents a significant contribution in terms of seriously exploring altered states from an embodied, conscious and subjective standpoint that is neither reductionistic nor apologetic. Although not exclusively concerned with psychedelics, Lenson himself locates his own writing here, and has in many respects contributed substantially towards increasing our understanding of user consciousness “as it is specifically determined by the drug experience – before, during, and after”, in relation to contemporary realities and subjective needs and desires.

### **1.3 - Hegemony and health**

The current situation, well over three decades after the “war on drugs” was first introduced by President Nixon in the early 70’s, strongly approximates what Agar has aptly described as “Foucault in living colour” (Agar 2002). Regarding the manner in which intoxication is perceived and interpreted as a socio-cultural phenomenon in different contexts, there is a recurring tendency for the “correct” views to reflect a hegemonic public health model that has important ideological and political dimensions (Hunt & Barker 2001). These taken for granted knowledge constructions of health and “the natural” tend to represent certain forms of intoxication as both dangerous and threatening, as “public enemy number one”. The public health model has with time become a determining factor; strongly undermining any debate on the subject in terms of what is accepted discourse on intoxication and also largely influencing which interpretations or perspectives gain the status of established truth through the media, politicians or experts in the field. These perspectives, or views, represent what is referred to in ethnography as emic vs. etic interpretation, or “folk models and professional models”, where “The professional model grows from its cultural and political matrix and is implemented without attention to the folk models of those closest to the drug and its use” (Agar 1985: 181). Both models are based on socio-cultural constructions yet they differ substantially in terms of legitimacy and range.

With the shift to the Reagan era, “social research in general came under attack as a matter of public policy. This was the period that produced an official definition of ‘drug abuse’ as *any* use of *any* illicit substance, thereby rendering the term ‘abuse’ meaningless for scientific or clinical work” (Agar 2002: 252). This model of “drug abuse” then clearly applies more to some substances than it does to others. Illegal substances like cannabis, heroin and cocaine are categorically substances of abuse while legal substances like alcohol or nicotine are not, and pharmaceuticals like Valium, Methadone and Ritalin tend to change status from moderately acceptable and necessary, to dangerous and threatening as soon as they are distributed through channels other than the officially sanctioned ones. Whatever the intent behind this official definition, it completely negates the genuine real life experiences of drug users and makes it practically impossible for social scientists to initiate desperately needed research aimed at identifying specific determining factors which might in fact lead to serious drug abuse. Even more alarmingly, despite these obvious shortcomings, this definition continues to be applied today in official documents like the “Norwegian Government’s Action Plan to Combat Drug- and Alcohol-related Problems 2003-2005”<sup>1</sup>, clouding realities and imposing serious constraints in terms of what drug research can realistically achieve in terms of furthering our knowledge and understanding.

Seen from a cross-cultural perspective there exists a great variation in terms of which substances are perceived as threatening and the kinds of consumption patterns that are recognized as conventional or acceptable modes of conduct. This, it should be added, also applies historically to any civilization; that is to say, the socio-cultural construction of intoxication is situationally contingent and emergent as a phenomenon and must therefore always be placed in its proper context. Nonetheless, one may still safely contend that intoxication remains a highly sensitive subject, and in many respects seems to be one of the last major taboos in contemporary society. As with any other social phenomenon, intoxication is subject to a high degree of codification that takes place through those cultural processes that create a foundation for the symbolic order within which we find ourselves. Mary Douglas has pointed out in her classic work, *Purity and Danger* (Douglas 1984), that the concepts of pollution and taboo function as a symbolic code reflecting the underlying social structure of a society. As a code, they provide vital clues into a society’s system of values, its moral fabric

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<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian Government’s Action Plan to Combat Drug- and Alcohol-related Problems 2003-2005 pp.9 downloaded from:  
<http://www.emcdda.eu.int/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.Content&nNodeID=1360&sLanguageISO=EN>

so to speak, while simultaneously intensifying a person's awareness of their own role in the total scheme of things. Consequently, this code must be regarded as part of a larger whole and understood in relation to a culture's entire structure of classification. Primarily, symbolic codification creates a sense of unity in experience and in this manner symbolic patterns are worked out and publicly displayed. Within these patterns, disparate elements are related and disparate experience is given meaning (Douglas in Aaslid 2003).

In other words, the kinds of contacts which are thought dangerous also carry a symbolic load, they symbolize a threat to the moral order, a transcendence of boundaries and categories which unleash pollution, where the harshness of defensive procedures will usually be "directly proportional to the seriousness with which the threat is viewed" (Berger & Luckman 1991:176). Accordingly, pollution ideas and taboos cannot be regarded exclusively as problems connected to health or hygiene because, more often than not, they are largely symbolic problems that create cultural disorder whenever boundaries are crossed and categories are mixed. It is "the hair in the soup" to borrow an example from *Purity and Danger*. Not that the hair in itself is impure due to some unfortunate essentialized polluting quality within its hairish being. The hair becomes polluting within the soup because it is immersed, not only in soup, but within a system of boundaries where pollution ideas serve as markers which delineate a symbolic order based on categories of purity and pollution. As mundane and evident as this may seem to the enlightened reader, it is a crucial point which any professional ought to be aware of when engaging in an analysis of desecrated substances, or phenomena within a socio-cultural context.

#### **1.4 - A critical query**

On the whole, when it comes to drug research based on actual face-to-face investigations of user groups and trajectories, including ethnographic explorations, the symbolic, socio-cultural dimensions of intoxication seem to be ignored, overlooked or just simply missed altogether. Time and time again, substances are essentialized and researchers uncritically adopt the dominating public health model. As Hunt and Barker (2001) conclude after a thorough examination of the state of anthropological contributions in the field of alcohol and drug research;

Until anthropologists awaken to the dangers of leaving the debate 'in the hands of researchers who approach the study of psychoactive substances through reductive models, be they pharmacological, psychological or

physiological' (Goodman & Lovejoy, 1995, p.232) then it will remain the case that the anthropology of ingested substances will be, to paraphrase Dwight Heath, a (not always felicitous) 'by-product' of other disciplines (ibid: 27).

The reason for this is partly due to the fact that two intertwined perspectives have dominated the drug research agenda (especially those institutions funding drug research). On the one hand, there are the bio-medically, epidemiologically and psychologically inspired theories of the individual, combined, on the other hand, with bio-pharmacologically dominated views of substances (ibid: 9). Using this model, the individual becomes a passive victim of the dangerous addictive qualities inherent in the substance itself which then gradually transform the identity of the user into a helpless, enslaved addict. The categorization of people on the basis of their drug patterns alone results in what Wagner (1997: 69) has termed a "de-contextualisation of isolated behaviors" (in Hunt & Barker 2001). This has a very dehumanising effect through stripping the user of any kind of independent agency that is not in some way connected with pathology or theories of deviance. At the same time; "This reified emphasis on substances rather than on people results in a shift in attention away from the social forces that lie behind the consumption or prohibition of stimulants and psychoactive substances ...onto the apparent power of the substances themselves" (Hugh-Jones 1995: 47 in Hunt & Barker 2001: 20).

Therefore, by uncritically adopting research perspectives without first calling into question the underlying principles of a problem-based public health model, experts are in many respects blinded, or at best, highly constrained to begin with. This is a narrow point of departure that will influence the type of questions asked, the groups of people included in a study and the manner in which findings are subsequently analysed and portrayed. The following section will proceed with an examination of some of these points and suggest how a change of perspective might contribute substantially in developing research of considerably more depth and substance. Instead of simply adopting conventional attitudes, an alternative strategy here is to focus more explicitly on contemporary cultural discourse allowing it to emerge out of its present taken-for-grantedness so that it can be rendered more visible. Consumption patterns can then be placed within a larger context, while at the same time allowing for an actor-centred approach. Although mostly inspired by recent developments in anthropology, there is no reason why these insights cannot be incorporated into different fields, or at least serve as welcome food for thought to open, inquisitive minds.

The types of questions that are asked very often play a decisive role in terms of the quality and significance of an inquiry as a whole. These questions will always, to a certain extent, reflect the general attitude of those conducting the research (or when it comes to drug research, perhaps more frequently, the attitudes of those funding the project). Although social scientists in many cases have become highly skilled at recognizing and accounting for the subjective lens through which their analysis is filtered, this tendency has been sadly lacking in a field where it is sorely needed. As Heisenberg's uncertainty principle has "conveniently summed up", whether we are discussing quantitative or qualitative approaches the research process is an interactive one (in Rapport & Overing 2000: 304). Seen in this light then, "the observer is inevitably and inexorably a part of what he observes, so that what the researcher confronts is 'reality' as apprehended through his own particular prism of perception, and what he gathers as results are artefacts of the process of his observation" (ibid.).

Recently there has been a little more flexibility within the public health approach allowing researchers to "analyze health and illness by examining the inter-relationships among environmental factors, personal choices, and lifestyle issues" (Hunt & Barker 2001: 16). This in itself implies an increased sensitivity towards the complexity of drug and alcohol issues as a whole, while also allowing for a more holistic analysis where the individual, environment and substance all play a significant part. Yet as Hunt and Barker have pointed out, the problem based public health model still regards alcohol and illicit drugs as "inherently dangerous substances, which unless strongly controlled by enlightened social policy would create problems and entail social and physical costs for the individual and for the society as a whole" (ibid.). At the present time this model then provides the fundamental basis for many research agendas where the ultimate aim has become to discover ways of decreasing the detrimental consequences caused by these substances. Here,

Research was to: (a) understand the physiological and psychological mechanisms by which individuals become "enslaved"; (b) examine the environmental conditions which encourage individuals to use addictive substances; (c) improve treatment modalities and services; (d) introduce new ways of preventing substance use and abuse; and (e) suggest new social control policies to discourage individuals from commencing or continuing alcohol and drug use (ibid.).

Obviously, there is much to be gained from this model and the objectives themselves are important considerations. However, the crucial point is that these perspectives should not be adopted unreflectively, but rather may serve as a point of departure for deeper deliberation, inspiring researchers "to 'unpack', examine and understand the implications of the assumptive

stance of this model” (ibid.). The public health model is neither “straightforward” nor “innocent” but contains “complex formulations of different ‘scientific’ ideas, political philosophies, and social and moral assumptions” (Petersen & Lupton 1996 in Hunt & Barker 2001: 17). By and large, all research is formed by the ideology of the society in which it takes place, but within the substance use and abuse fields, themes of knowledge and power cannot be ignored because any notion of “value free research” is bound to be delusional as “the majority of organizations all have drug agendas, in one way or another” (Agar 2002: 11). Therefore, these fields might benefit substantially if at least a few researchers could incorporate a more vigilant and critically aware approach towards the underlying premises upon which their questions and projects are based.

There are several interesting themes which tend to emerge when these premises are examined. First of all, as has already been pointed out, the socio-cultural construction of intoxication is highly situationally contingent and emergent as a phenomenon. From theories of deviance, pathology and biological “disease models”, there have been numerous constructions surrounding currently forbidden acts of intoxication. Since none of these represent the whole “truth”, examining the historical and political climate within which these models have developed is essential for understanding their dynamic and the somewhat unstable quality of consumption perspectives. Strongly related to this theme is what is commonly referred to as the politics of consciousness, where the roots, motives and conditions underlying the contemporary restrictions forbidding a diversity of consciousness can be studied and investigated. This in turn leads directly to the notion of “sobriety”, a somewhat problematic concept that seems to imply “returning to a state of drug-free purity, of disintoxication as with some sort of reality antidote...an idealized state of non-involvement with which all intoxicated states may be unfavourably compared” (Walton 2001: 266). But is this really the case? As David Lenson has written in *On Drugs*;

A mind uninfluenced by drugs can think any thought; conceive, justify and execute any action (except of course, the use of drugs); suffer from pathologies and delusions; violate or enforce civil law; foment or suppress revolution. It would span the entire range of human awareness and deed, good or evil, constructive or destructive, and yet remain “sober” if the blood stream that feeds it is free of external psychoactive agents... “Sobriety” like “freedom,” is an empty concept, a null set defined only by what surrounds it, by its various negations.... a cultural construction created for the furtherance of a political and economic agenda. The fact that the legal history shows a cumulative and piecemeal process strongly suggests that the present-day notion of sobriety, far from being “natural” or intuitive, is the result of nearly a century of social engineering (Lenson 1995: 14, 6).

As may be expected, adhering to the essentialist paradigm and its contemporary manifestation in the disease-model of addiction<sup>2</sup>, despite overwhelming evidence that supports a more complex explanatory model, will eventually result in a number of inconsistencies, tautologies and paradoxes. One of them is the “Catch-22” of the disease modelist (Schaler 2000), where “addiction is a disease beyond volitional control except when it comes to treatment failure, where the addict’s stubborn ‘resistance’ comes into play” (p.46). The paradox here is that even though it is an “open secret” that much addiction treatment is far from effective, it is precisely this factor which is used to support the disease theory. Since it can’t be treated it must be a disease, “Starting from the *fact* that addiction *has not been* successfully ‘treated’, we arrive at the *conclusion* that addiction *can* be successfully treated” (ibid.).

In addition to being somewhat absurd, this approach is also highly reductionistic in the sense that it opposes a more holistic phenomenology of addiction where experiential, emotional, and environmental factors all play a significant role. Disease theories as science become tautologies which avoid the work of understanding *why* people engage in addictive behaviour by simply declaring these activities to be addictions, as in the statement ‘he drinks so much because he’s an alcoholic’ (Peele 1989). It follows then, that a successful model of addiction should integrate;

pharmacological, experiential, cultural, situational, and personality components in a fluid and seamless description of addictive motivation. It must account for why a drug is more addictive in one society than another, addictive for one individual and not another, and addictive for the same individual at one time and not another (Peele 1998: 72)... The reliance on addiction is, in other words, as much an indication of how people experience and react to their environment as it is a result of the particular addicting properties of a substance or of the environment’s objective qualities, barring the most abject environmental impoverishment (ibid: 96).

Unfortunately very few current research agendas in the drug field seem to take these factors into consideration or incorporate them into their programs. Even though there is no such thing as “value free research” within the drug field, social scientists still cling to the myth of objectivity. Perhaps it is precisely this state of affairs, the fact that drug research is so “emotionally and politically loaded”, that blinds us to our very own prejudice. It may also be feasible that many drug researchers are well aware of the moral and political shroud within which they must navigate, but choose to tread softly rather than risk detonating any bombs in this highly volatile and politically perilous field.

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<sup>2</sup> Although critical of the disease model of addiction, it is acknowledged that in many respects it has been beneficial in terms of resulting in a much more humane treatment of addicts than had previously been the case. However, this model must be examined for its short-comings so as to enable the development of more profound insights into the complexities of substance use and abuse.



## 1.5 - Towards a more inclusive user representation

Where failing to examine the underlying premises upon which research questions are based is the consequence of a deep-seated epistemological blindness (or want for necessary funding) among those engaged in the drug field, the current lack of a conscious phenomenology based on a greater variety of user populations can in many respects be due to the resulting muted discourse. The concept of mutedness (Ardener 1977) is especially fitting in this context as it applies to relations of power and knowledge and specifically the power to shape cultural discourse and mould accepted truths through manipulating public rhetoric and the collective representation of social phenomena. One side-effect of essentializing illicit substances as inherently dangerous, potential threats to both the individual and society, is that any social phenomena which might prove this assumption wrong tends to get completely left out of the picture. Consequently, inquiries into developmental trajectories among user populations often focus exclusively on exit and entry processes, whereas the connection between them has a propensity to be largely overlooked<sup>3</sup>. This means that problematic drug abusers are highly profiled in both qualitative and quantitative drug research while the more “mundane” recreational users are given far less representation (Hunt & Barker 2001, Rosenqvist et.al. 2004).

There are undoubtedly practical reasons for this, relating to, for instance, the sense of urgency connected with the need to provide immediate answers and solutions to a highly vulnerable and endangered user population, as well as the difficulty of gaining access into more recreational user communities, compared with the frequently already institutionalized substance abusers. However, by overlooking the great variety of phases or types of usage in a drug “career”, the capacity to gain in-depth knowledge into the complex realities confronting users as well as the ability to identify important factors which may determine the developmental course of their progression, remains largely obscured. In fact, the concept “drug user” as opposed to “abuser” or “addict”, in itself threatens the whole foundation of the essentialist paradigm which is why many anti-drug crusaders generally avoid the term altogether, resorting instead to bizarre oxymorons like “recreational drug-abusers” instead. The idea of regulated illicit drug use in itself threatens the image of these substances as being

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<sup>3</sup> A seminar was arranged by NAD (Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research) and the Kettil Bruun Society in Stockholm, Sweden on October 15-19th, 2002 to discuss and expand on precisely this underdeveloped area of research.

inherently addictive, because it implicitly suggests that controlled ingestion of these substances is in fact possible.

Indeed, many longitudinal studies not carried out in an institutional setting show that regulated use is quite common, even among habitual cocaine users (Grund 1993, Erickson et.al. 1987, Erickson and Weber 1994), crack cocaine users (Erickson et al.1994; Reinerman and Levine 1997), and heroin users (Grund 1993, Robins et.al. 1980). Furthermore, a twelve-year follow-up study of New York City addicts (Vaillant 1965) showed that roughly forty-six percent simply “matured out” and became “spontaneously abstinent”, and it is estimated that “in their thirties, perhaps two-thirds of all addicts become spontaneously abstinent” (in Schaler 2000: 46). Especially among heroin users, natural remission has been shown to occur quite frequently in a number of studies (Winnick 1962, Waldorf, 1983, and O’Donnel et al. 1976). In other words, “One cannot speak sensibly of...drugs without examining the selection and induction process that determines who becomes a user and under what circumstances. One cannot generalize about drug effects without differentiating such issues as types of use – is the use experimental, casual, recreational, or habitual? What stage is the user in?” (Adler 1972 in Lenson 1995:39).

The types of respondents included in a research project and the attitude taken towards them in terms of defining their behaviour as pathological and uncontrolled, as opposed to seeing it as a strategic, often temporary, adaptation to circumstances (as even rat studies have suggested)<sup>4</sup>, will profoundly effect the findings and results. There is definitely space for a more inclusive representation of consumption patterns based on the “folk models” of those closest to the drug and its use. As several researchers have already pointed out, professional theories are generally based on captive and especially clinical samples of problematic users, who are in many respects very unrepresentative of the wider population of drug users (Grund 1993, Agar 1985, Rhodes 2000). Lenson notes that clinical literature in particular seems to repeatedly fall into this trap, where the outcome inevitably develops into;

a self-generating, self-referential discourse, with an additional criterion: that the experiment or voyage must be capable of duplication, so that the reader can supposedly duplicate the results. Although this appears to tie the clinical report to an objective and external reality, in fact it insulates the findings within the boundaries of the rules that created them in the first place (Lenson 1995: xi).

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<sup>4</sup> See Alexander et al.1980 and Schenk et al. 1987

This in turn leads to intervention programs which are often grounded on a “monolithic, uniformly negative extreme-case interpretation” (Agar 1985: 181), which are not only ineffective but can in many cases even be highly counterproductive (Rhodes 2000).

Therefore, in order to avoid merely extending this “self-generating, self-referential discourse” within the substance use and abuse field, the concept of regulated drug use should at least be seriously entertained, if not explored in further depth by also including the more “mundane” user in an analysis. In addition to providing a more profound, holistic depiction of user trajectories and consumption patterns, an inclusion will also allow for the concept of agency to be incorporated into user narratives. This is a crucial step towards expanding on an underdeveloped area of research where the overall tendency has been to connect the user with a substance as passive de-contextualised victims and mindless echoes of a virtually demonic essentialized force. To combat this trend, drug users need to be represented as the active agents they are; “immersed in a complex social structure, relating to other actors in their social group...within a social setting, devising, manipulating and giving meaning to rules, strategies and desires” (Hunt & Barker 2001: 8).

The approach outlined above is in many respects attuned to recent developments in the social sciences which are highly critical towards the depiction of individuals as micro-versions of larger social entities with no consciousness of their own other than that which is modelled on the group to which they belong (Cohen 1994, Rapport 2003). Here it is argued that in order to appreciate the complexity of *social* formations (authors italics), we must also incorporate self consciousness – individuals’ awareness of themselves and their experience of social contexts and conditions. Regarding the dialectic relationship between self and society, by embracing the particular, the individual and self consciousness, a larger perspective is both informed and enhanced (Cohen 1994). This is because, “just as it is possible to tell something about an organism from examining a single cell of its body, it is often possible to see analogies between apparently isolated phenomenon like the lives and minds of addicts and the parameters of wider frameworks of action and belief” (Lenson 1995: 49). Social actors must therefore be part of an analysis “for the simple reason that meaning does not inhere in symbols but must be invested in symbols and interpreted from symbols by acting social beings” (Ortner & Whitehead 1981).

Here anthropological studies using the concept of mutedness are also relevant in terms of revealing asymmetrical relations of power between groups and explicitly identifying the

resulting difficulty in voicing marginal experiences through a set of dominant codes which completely negates these experiences. Not unlike women in many traditional societies, many drug users in non-clinical settings tend to be somewhat socially withdrawn, introverted, and sceptical towards unfamiliar investigators who have not yet gained their trust (with due cause). This again leads to under-representation, and a reinforcement of the dominant discourse, a cycle which has been repeating itself conspicuously since the advent of the “war on drugs”. In some respects, these “war tactics” can be seen to have been at least partly designed to expressly preclude any marginal drug discourse, thereby effectively rendering drugs into the unspeakable (Lenson 1995). As a metaphor, the “war on drugs” does have considerable analytical value however, because once again the relationship between power and knowledge emerges to the forefront.

In a wartime setting, it is a struggle for power and influence as each professional authority tries to bring drugs, suppliers, users, and enforcers into its exclusive jurisdiction. Beneath the smoke of technical discourse, what’s really at stake is control of vast resources: research grants, funding for interdiction and “treatment”, and potential profit for drawing the line between prescription and street drugs. Beyond these immediate materialities, there are scrambles for less tangible forms of intellectual control: redefinitions of mind, soul and body, sickness and health, madness and sanity, individual and community, freedom and restriction. At least partly because of drugs and the war against them, consciousness itself has become a battlefield (Lenson 1995: x).

Although social scientists in general may have little impact when it comes to “immediate materialities” and the “control of vast resources”, it is towards the “scrambles for less tangible forms of intellectual control” that attention should be directed. This relates directly to the widespread hegemonic public health model which is based on an essentialized view of substance and a disease model which portrays drug users as passive, de-contextualized victims of their vice. A new critical theory must question notions of authority in terms of how social behaviour is depicted and examine the power relations involved in images of healthy and acceptable behaviour as opposed to unhealthy and unacceptable modes of conduct (Hunt & Barker 2001). This approach may, not surprisingly, be met with considerable suspicion and resistance, especially in environments where traditional empirical epistemologies dominate, “precisely because of its de-stabilizing capabilities, requiring as it does an investigator to abandon assumptions about the source, nature, location or activity associated with a substance that cannot automatically be classed as causing or being a social problem”(ibid:14). Hence, although new insights gained from such an analysis may not exactly be welcomed with open arms by all professionals in the drug field, they are essential

in terms of breaking the stalemate and adding a new dimension to the currently muted drug discourse.

Obviously, the critical perspective outlined here may not easily be incorporated fully into every researcher's investigation (funding and research agendas effectively prevent this), yet expanding the scope of one's habitual way of thinking about drugs and drug users may still serve as a doorway to new and improved methods for conducting research and analyzing the results. As anthropologist Tian Sørhaug (1991) has written, "The science of epidemiology is infused in metaphors of war"<sup>5</sup>. The disease is "an enemy which threatens with invasion", requiring "strategies", "lines of defences" and "systems of intelligence and propaganda". Here collective survival is prioritised over individual rights, and the language of war, "indicates the necessities of death, violence and of absolute authority and loyalty". The enemy is "the Other", it is the Other which carries the disease, yet the threat of contagion reminds us of the fact that basically anybody can be transformed into the Other, therefore, "the history of plagues and epidemics is the history of collective projections and scapegoating" (in Aaslid 2003: 29).

Several authors have already pointed out the parallels between the general atmosphere surrounding illicit drug use, with the highly charged and somewhat paranoid political climate rampant, particularly in the US, during the Cold War (Lenson 1995, Walton 2001). Accordingly, "'Drugs' have become as much of an undifferentiated enemy as Communism once was" (Walton 2001: 15), and conformity of consciousness, which was the hallmark of the Cold War, "became the foundation for the War on Drugs" (Lenson 1995: 9). In this landscape drug users, and especially addicts, have been transformed into key metaphors; folk devils (Cohen 1972), contemporary witches and demons, who must be carefully monitored and controlled at all times. They are the perfect scapegoat and the most dangerous Other, in the sense that they can be anyone, anywhere, even in our very own homes. Yet in order for this "new enemy" to be firmly established, there must also be an end to any kind of critical discourse on the subject. According to Lenson (1995), this was achieved by Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign (or "just say nothing" campaign, as he puts it) which effectively served to prevent a variety of constructive dialogues from developing and hence any kind of discriminating awareness whatsoever. It is worth pointing out in this context that similar tactics and the same demonization process have now also been applied in the "war on terror".

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<sup>5</sup> See also Susan Sontag (1991). *Illness as metaphor and AIDS and Its metaphors*. London: Penguin Books.

The war on drugs was a necessary prerequisite for the process of demonization to be successful, and as a result, made an in-depth understanding of drugs and user patterns in this context exceedingly difficult to attain (ibid: 13). Social scientists who uncritically accept the prevailing definition of drug problems both reaffirm the legitimacy of the panic and confirm the widespread, socially accepted demonization of drug users. Accepting the societal notion of folk devils leads both to a categorization of individuals based solely on their drug using behaviour, and to the endorsement of simplistic policy solutions for highly complex issues (Hunt & Barker 2001). Since the outcome of any investigation is strongly related to the types of questions that are asked (or not asked), it is imperative that the categorical constructions upon which an inquiry is based are examined in terms of consistency and analytical value. Very often, apparently impartial, standard concepts are filled with implicit meanings which may suitably represent conventional attitudes, but are highly inadequate in terms of illuminating consumption patterns and user trajectories as they are experienced by the user population in question. Since many of the categories within which one operates in the drug field are both emotionally and politically “loaded”, they cannot and should not be taken for granted and accepted *de facto* as ultimate truths. In effect, these categorical constructions can actually be greatly misleading and prevent investigations from uncovering the deeper issues underlying substance use and abuse.

Furthermore, due to the political and ideological rhetoric used to regulate contemporary drug discourse, user perspectives which do not support the prevailing position are consistently overlooked and under-represented. Specifically, notions like recreational drug use, controlled user patterns, and natural remission all threaten the essentialist paradigm, and are therefore banished to the realm of muted discourse. War tactics became a rhetorically powerful, yet in all practical respects, completely disastrous political ploy based on the false premise that as long as tougher policies and sanctions are directed towards the suppliers there will be a corresponding decrease in demand (Peele 1998). Availability or supply obviously influences consumption patterns to a certain extent, but in the long run, demand in itself can not be done away with by policies based on such simplistic assumptions. The *why* of consumption patterns and addiction hence requires further investigation. If more time, energy and money were invested in trying to understand the underlying dynamics of both use and abuse, then quite possibly more substantial progress could also be made in terms of designing and implementing truly effective social policies and perhaps even reducing destructive user patterns on a whole.

It follows then that if new and improved analytical insights are to arise out of contemporary drug research, these conventionally established categories must be transcended and the concept of agency somehow incorporated into user narrative. The refusal to see, or the passive acceptance of, the implicit assumptions embedded within research investigations and attitudes must be replaced a critical eye, and a better informed, at times defiant, voice which refuses to serve as a mere spokesperson for politically correct moral ideologies. Perhaps this is demanding a lot from those actively engaged in this controversial field, but the rewards can far outweigh the risks in terms of finally breaking the stalemate and thus contributing a new and deeper dimension to the current discourse surrounding licit and illicit consumption patterns. This project is primarily an attempt to somehow incorporate that honest and critical approach through a contemporary and conscious phenomenology, representing an alternative and complementary method to those dominated by a hegemonic health model and its many implicit assumptions.

## Chapter

# 2

### Some Epistemological Considerations

*Consciousness is everybody's business because we all carry it about in our heads.*

Andrew Weil

#### 2.1 - Clarifying ambiguities

Not many studies can fully embrace the totality of human experience in the realm of substance use and abuse. It is filled with paradoxes and complexities that go far beyond the scope of most research agendas. Since, in most cases, “positivists still control most of the money” (Agar 2002), another difficulty with research in this field is strongly related to the manner in which social scientists perceive reality and attempt to generate knowledge from that reality. Although there is a growing demand for “qualitative” methods, many researchers find themselves in an academic environment still very much dominated by a positivist approach, where research that isn’t safely guided by the principles of objectivity within a quantitative analytical paradigm, is regarded as somehow less scientific or credible and easily dismissed. Numbers and statistics are regarded as hard facts, whereas meanings, being subject to change and therefore highly relative, are regarded as less relevant, somehow pertaining to a less “scientific” order of reality. If the main objective of a scientific endeavour is to measure, quantify and objectively describe a presumed external reality then notions like meaning creation, consciousness, subjectivity and personal narratives obviously have little relevance. If, however, the primary aim of science is to explore reality from every possible angle in an attempt to discover more and more useful ways of thinking and speaking about a specific phenomenon, then both inner and outer realities must be represented equally for the simple reason that both are essential, interdependent aspects of our world. Often the consequences of denying inner realities within the sciences or attempting to understand them using the same methodological tools that we apply to gross matter in the physical realm, are partial, extremely superficial theories at best, or at worst, a complete waste of time and thoroughly misleading.



Obviously there is a real need for quantitative approaches in many areas of research. Yet, when it comes to drug research in particular, in an attempt perhaps to meet “scientific” standards, time and time again social scientists have clung to methods borrowed from the hard sciences in an endeavour to explain highly subjective and complex phenomena such as drug abuse, addiction, intoxication, alcoholism, entry and exit processes, rehabilitation, treatment, etc. As regards this type of research in Norway, the dominating approach is almost exclusively quantitative, and there has long been a significant lack of a qualitative trend whatsoever (Skretting 1999). Also, the little qualitative research that has been carried out in this regard is almost entirely devoted to substance abuse, with a corresponding emphasis on unregulated problematic use. Admittedly, the word “qualitative” is in itself somewhat problematic, surrounded by a “semantic fog” where no one seems to agree on what it actually means (Agar 2002). Even though many researchers recognize the limitations of quantitative approaches and the need for alternative methods, the word “qualitative” can be applied to anything from grounded theory, hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, narrative techniques, phenomenology, or those who “take the term as an excuse to abandon all standards they have ever held about systematic work and just mess around and tell a story” (ibid: 253). Although there has been an increase of various methods that emphasize differences in data and methodology, the somewhat ambiguous meaning of the term “qualitative” has often resulted in a failure to fully incorporate the alternative epistemology upon which such methods rest. In this case “qualitative” can become;

a trick word that allows traditional research to acknowledge something new but then assimilate it so it is not in the end all that different...Everyone is happy about ‘qualitative’ until it starts happening. New concepts appear, questions are reformulated, codes are dumped and new ones created – the stuff obviously has to be brought under *control*, control being a key difference between positivist and qualitative epistemology in the first place. Epistemology is what counts, not the kind of data or the kind of method, yet when people talk about ‘qualitative’ research, they usually focus on the latter two. This misses the most important reason for shifting to ‘qualitative’ in the first place...The problem is, some research labeled ‘qualitative’ is much too narrowly focused, too controlled in terms of methods or analysis, too restricted in types of data gathered, or too assimilated to positivism in its epistemology...The fact that a ‘different’ style of research is part of the landscape is now established. The fact that it is useful to achieve understandings and explanations that traditional research science cannot obtain is accepted. But exactly what qualitative is and how it should be done is dangerously ambiguous, to the point where assimilation and/or discreditation are possible future outcomes for what started as a promising new trend (Agar 2002: 253).

Many contemporary thinkers are beginning to examine and challenge the implicit philosophical assumptions underlying Western science, which are increasingly being called into question by newer discoveries (in Braud 1994:17). The dominant paradigm of the social sciences has long been based on nineteenth-century conceptions of science, and attempted “to ape the reputed certainty of its methods of measurement and so borrow from its legitimacy

and status” (Rapport & Overing 2000: 304). The emergence of twentieth-century science however; “Einsteinian relativity, quantum mechanics, chaos theory”, has initiated a “new ethos...an appreciation of the contingency, situatedness and intrusiveness – alternatively, the creativeness – of the research process as such” (ibid.). Furthermore, recent work in nonlinear dynamic systems “undermines the linear causal mentality and the obsession with prediction that are so central in traditional scientific research” (Agar 2002: 252). The need for updated postulates more attune with recent scientific discoveries and a new paradigm within which to conduct research has lead to substantial methodological developments, and an increasing demand for “qualitative” approaches. These are based specifically on the way researchers perceive reality and seek to derive knowledge from that reality. The phenomenological position for this investigation differs fundamentally from the positivist position on several important points which are summarized in the table below concerning: the nature of reality, the relationship between knower and known, the possibility of generalization, the understanding of causal links, the role of values and research contributions to knowledge.

**Table 1: Postulates of the research paradigms**

Postulates about	Positivist Approach (dominant paradigm)	Phenomenological Approach (alternative paradigm)
The nature of reality	Reality is single, tangible and fragmentable, by dividing and studying parts the whole can be understood.	Realities are multiple, constructed, holistic and interconnected and can only be understood as such.
The relationship between knower and known	Knower and known are independent and dualistic, objectivity is possible.	Knower and known are interdependent, interactive and inseparable.
The possibility of generalization	Generalizations are time- and context-free, explanations from one time and place can be generalized to other times and places.	Only tentative time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible.
Causal linkages	There are real causes, temporally precedent to or simultaneous with their effects. Causality is central.	Events mutually shaped. Multidirectional relationships can be discovered. Causality not prime focus.
The role of values	Values can be suspended, inquiry is value free.	Values mediate and shape understanding, inquiry is value-bound.
Research contributions to knowledge	Verification or proof of propositions.	Discovery of propositions from emergent patterns.

*Original table from Lincoln & Guba (1985), this is adapted from Maykut & Morehouse (1994) and Braud (1994).*

The differences between these two paradigms affect both the nature of the inquiry as well as the methods of investigation. As Polanyi (1958) has clearly stated, “The avowed purpose of

the positivist sciences is to establish complete intellectual control over experience in terms of precise rules. Further, we should only have to follow the rules faithfully to understand this world” (in Maykut & Morehouse 1994). The phenomenological approach applied in this investigation focuses more on the process of discovery itself based on an examination of narratives, interaction and dialogue so that meaning may emerge from the data, which is often presented in the participants own words (ibid: 17). The goal therefore is not proof or sweeping generalizations but rather to explore contextual findings and multiple patterns of meanings.

This alternative paradigm was also a principal theme at an International Symposium on Science, Technology, and the Environment held in Athens, Greece in 1990, and the following points are adapted from a summary of that gathering (in Braud 1994: 22). First of all, since ‘truth’ is not viewed as universal or singular, but rather reflects the perspective of the observer, alternative world views, value systems and ways of knowing are respected and acknowledged as equally valid to one’s own. Where the dominant positivist paradigm regards “mechanistic, reductionistic, rationalistic analytical atomism” as the only “fully credible approach”, the alternative paradigm balances this approach with “organismic, holistic, intuitive, experimental ones”. Rather than being an objective ‘detached’ observer based on a fragmented and dichotomized world view, the role of the scientist is interactive, both as an observer and a participant, since reality is regarded as interconnected and unifying. While the ‘hard’ sciences claim “neutrality and value-free research”, strongly discouraging and excluding emotions, feelings and passions, an alternative approach “harmonizes and integrates feminine and masculine qualities; recognizes humanity as part of the natural world; ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ are equally acceptable”. Positivism is in many respects categorical and dualistic, where “opposites imply right/wrong” and this leads to conflict and antagonism. The alternative here is a “multiplex; complementary; both/and dialectical thinking; dynamic” where “the opposite of a deep truth is another deep truth”. Finally, where argument, certainty and clarity are valued and encouraged in the prevailing paradigm, this alternative paradigm suggests “co-operative dialogue; accepts uncertainty; tolerates ambiguity; fuzziness” and is “process-oriented” (ibid.).

One important point which should be clarified in this context concerns the issue of validity with which proponents of quantitative methodologies are often deeply concerned. This is in light of the fact that quantitative research is primarily aimed at “discovering general, universally applicable laws or principles” which is, “in turn in the service of motives of

explanation, prediction, and control” (ibid: 61). In order to facilitate the discovery of general laws, there is therefore a great emphasis on “procedures such as random and representative sampling”, “employing large sample sizes, minimizing investigator involvement, minimizing subjectivity, maximizing objectivity, etc. Certainty is to be privileged above all else; ambiguity is to be scrupulously avoided” (ibid.). Although generalization is not the primary aim of qualitative approaches, proponents of these methodologies “are just as alert to the possibility of error, excessive subjectivism, and delusion as are quantitative methodologists” (ibid.). Here however, instead of “internal” and “external” validity the concept of “trustworthiness” is applied to determine whether or not the findings in an inquiry are “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba 1985). For instance, the concept of credibility (as opposed to internal validity) is used to establish truth value, transferability (as opposed to external validity) to establish applicability, dependability (as opposed to reliability) to establish consistency and confirmability (as opposed to objectivity) to avoid excessive subjectivism (ibid.).

First and foremost, a qualitative study is concerned with being “true to the experiences of individual participants and true to the complexity of interacting factors that provide the dynamic context that is the individual’s lived world” (Braud 1994: 61). For this reason, an appreciation and comprehension of each individual case is regarded as just as important, “or more important than, being able to predict, or control” (ibid.). Since the aim of such an exploration is “a full and deep understanding of characteristic  $x$ ”, (in this case  $x$  = different user trajectories and patterns), “there is *purposive*, rather than random or representative, sampling of a small number of individuals most likely to possess a great density characteristic  $x$ ” (ibid.). This in turn then implies, “less concern about certainty and a greater tolerance of ambiguity” (ibid.). Last but not least, are the two interrelated goals pertaining to the development of “empathy” and the communication of “voices” (Agar 2002). Empathy means that a “good piece of qualitative work makes sense out of human differences in terms of human similarities”, while the expression of “voices” means that it “should be a vehicle for words and actions of people who were researched” (ibid: 253).

The drug field is highly complex, unique and challenging and can therefore not be fully understood without including both inner and outer realities, since drugs, like any mind altering substance or practice, strongly affects both. Behavioural patterns and trajectories among different user populations are extremely variable. Not only do they vary among users,

they also vary within individual users, both temporally as well as spatially, where it is quite common to see drastic changes in behavioural patterns at different periods of time as well as in different places, not to mention cultures. Therefore, it is very hard if not impossible to predict or generalize among different types of user populations. Quantitative approaches are both necessary and highly effective when, for example, mapping out important macro factors that involve variables on a larger scale (like national drug trends or factor affecting overdose statistics). However, trying to explain or comprehend complex individual behavioural patterns or user trajectories based primarily on formal interviews and questionnaires is like trying to sculpt a fine piece of furniture with a chainsaw, it won't work, or at best it will give very crude results. Different methodological approaches are like tools which can and should be employed in different types of explorations. Unfortunately when it comes to drug research this appears to be a large part of the problem, methods are wrongly employed, or only partially employed to achieve unrealistic results. For these reasons it is therefore felt that a qualitative anthropological investigation has a lot to offer in terms of gaining an in depth understanding of some of the more subtle subjective elements involved regarding a phenomenology of intoxication and the politics of consciousness in general.

At present, the distance between the actual lived reality experienced by drug users and abusers alike and the objective or “scientific” representation of that reality is often so great that one would think one was discussing different subjects altogether. To make matters worse, many scientific assertions about certain illicit substances are so absurd when compared to user experiences and knowledge that they have created what Andrew Weil has called an “irreparable credibility gap” between users of drugs and drug experts (Weil 1998: 46). Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, however, currently there appears to be a major overrepresentation of quantitative methodologies that obscure the main issues far more than they seem to help clarify them. Matters are further complicated by the fact that a researcher's own views and opinions often become clouded by a mist of hypothetical objectivity that by and large only serves to promote and support conventional beliefs. Unlike atoms and electrons, it is practically impossible not to have some kind of “emotionally laden” opinion about drugs and intoxication, they are not a neutral topic of discourse. As Weil has pointed out, there are no facts, or “more precisely, there are no facts uncontaminated by some degree of value judgement” (ibid: 5). This taken into consideration, it seems that instead of ignoring the elephant in the closet, one might as well acknowledge it and move on from there.

## 2.2 - The pattern which connects

Any phenomenon can be regarded from a considerable number of perspectives and in this respect there is no one “correct” approach, it all depends on what one is attempting to learn about that phenomenon. In the realm of drug research, the past few decades have been strongly dominated by either clinical studies emphasizing individual behaviour, or pharmacological accounts aimed at isolating the physiological effects of certain drugs. These approaches have yielded a wealth of information in terms of how specific substances affect the chemistry of the brain, and how individuals may react to these changes under certain circumstances. However, given that there is much to be gained from this type of research, it is still only one aspect of a multifaceted and many layered issue. Therefore, any theory derived from a single approach will inevitably be partial and incomplete in terms of a total portrayal of drug use. A key reason which accounts for the partiality of contemporary drug research may be that many of these approaches still seem to be strongly rooted in a somewhat outdated “flatland” ontology expressed here as the positivistic paradigm and scientific materialism. From this perspective, only the physical universe is regarded as “real” and therefore anything beyond that, including the actual experience of life itself, is perceived as a by-product of less significance and therefore merely subject to speculation.

Although the assumed ontological dualism of mind and matter cannot really be seen to be having a beneficial effect in contemporary society, whether it be on an individual or environmental level, contemporary science still seems to devote little consideration towards investigations that embrace a more holistic orientation including subjectivity and consciousness. Increased specialization leads to a narrowing of perception, and a restriction on our awareness in terms of seeing the patterns that connect and unify all phenomena. Several authors have remarked on the link between pathology and feelings of disconnectedness and isolation from the world at large. Bateson (1972), for example, notes that adaptation in both biological worlds and human societies has led to increasing pathology, and Bloom (2004) has also observed that;

we need to contemplate the fact that we are in the midst of increasing *disconnectedness*. In many ways, individuals are becoming increasingly disconnected with themselves... Increases in suicides, psychotherapy, psychotropic drug prescriptions, and self-mutilation all point to self-disconnects. We also are becoming increasingly disconnected with one another. Family violence, aggressive driving, failing marriages, and workplace and school violence are escalating. In many ways, technology of various sorts has been a strong contributor to disconnects. We are numbers to corporations, with little care for their clients and customers... We

can hide behind our technologies. Families have been breaking down as members move great distances. Care for elderly family members, once a responsibility for the younger members of the family, are left to strangers in strange and disconnected surroundings. The hierarchical nature of our world creates disconnects between school children, between children and adults, between employees and employers, and between politicians and citizens. We are becoming increasingly disconnected with our environment... We are losing contact. We do not see ourselves as just another part of an interconnected system. In the past, the environmental disconnect within Euro-Western societies was partly due to ignorance. However, with well-established and continually increasing knowledge, we continue to disconnect. Such disconnects are leading us in dangerous downward spirals on all fronts (Bloom 2004: 189).

The division between the search for factual, verifiable truths on the one hand and the quest for meaning and values on the other, although needed and in many ways beneficial at one time, has resulted in a dehumanized split society with an upsurge of fragmented minds. Furthermore, this has also led to a somewhat bizarre illogicality in that even though modern science relies completely on our perceptions of the world it still has little place for the study of our subjective experience, or does so with inadequate premises. Ajahn Brahm, a Buddhist monk who previously worked as a scientist exploring “the Zen-like world of theoretical physics at Cambridge University”, expresses the limitations of contemporary science quite openly in the following dialogue;

Science and religion, I have found, hold many things in common, one of which is dogma. I remember a delightfully descriptive saying from my student days: ‘The eminence of a great scientist is measured by the length of time he or she obstructs progress in their field!’

At a recent debate in Australia between science and religion, at which I was a speaker, I took a poignant question from a member of the audience: ‘When I look through a telescope at the beauty of the stars,’ said the devout Catholic woman, ‘I always feel that my religion is threatened.’

‘Madam, when a scientist looks down the other end of a telescope, from the big end to the small end,’ I replied, ‘to gaze upon the one who is looking, then *science* is threatened!’ (Brahm 2005: 177).

Paradoxically, more and more studies have shown that what is perceived as external or physical reality is primarily a mental model formed by our brains and in this regard lacks objective reality. It is a “trick of the brain” that leads us to completely misunderstand the true nature of reality as physicist Arthur Eddington has commented “Mind is the first and most direct thing in our experience, and all else is remote inference – inference either intuitive or deliberate” (in Fenwick & Lorimer 1989:55). The effect of disregarding this vital insight becomes almost comically absurd, if it were not for all the tragic consequences arising as a result. The ultimate paradox of scientific materialism is that it posits a highly reductionist external world, independent from the individual, yet uses a subjectively contaminated individually experienced mental model to assess it (ibid: 56). Furthermore, in the cognitive sciences, incredibly advanced theories are developed to explain the many transactions occurring between different components of an organism as part of a mechanical process, yet

the organism itself, as a conscious entity and not a biological machine, is completely left out of the picture. In this manner, highly subjective but very meaningful emotions like anger or love somehow become reduced to an endless variety of impulses in the neurological system. Apparently, our “Cartesian anxiety”<sup>1</sup> has evolved to the point where, although “we live in a world where love, beauty, meaning and value are part of our daily lives, indeed are the most important aspects of our world” science, in the name of objectivity, has banished these fundamental qualities to the realm of irrelevant, inferior and almost embarrassing side effects of human existence (Fenwick & Lorimer 1989: 55).

In terms of drug research, the problem is expounded since the majority of user experiences, and immediate as well as long-term effects, occur in a sphere far removed from the realm of accepted scientific discourse, that is to say, they are a part and parcel of consciousness itself. Since intoxication is far more than a predictable response to the chemical qualities and quantity of a given stimuli, in order to fully comprehend this phenomenon, it is essential that elements like subjectivity, meaning, embodiment, independent agency and personal narratives are included as part of a more realistic and complete research agenda. Following the integral vision of contemporary philosopher Ken Wilber, it is suggested that a good first step towards attaining this goal is to acknowledge the limitations of one’s own position, situate it within a more comprehensive framework and proceed from there. Wilber’s model is based on the premise that every phenomenon can ultimately be perceived from at least three different perspectives, corresponding to the three universal pronouns, I, we and it(s), which again correspond to what Wilber has called the four quadrants (in Reynolds 2004: 52) summarized here as;

- 1) Upper-Left: individual subjective (intentional) interiors or first-person “I”
- 2) Upper-Right: individual objective (behavioural) exteriors or third person “it”
- 3) Lower-Left: collective intersubjective (cultural) interiors or second person “we”
- 4) Lower-Right: collective interobjective (social) exteriors or third person “it’s”

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<sup>1</sup> A term originally employed by Richard Bernstein (1983) in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*: University of Pennsylvania Press.



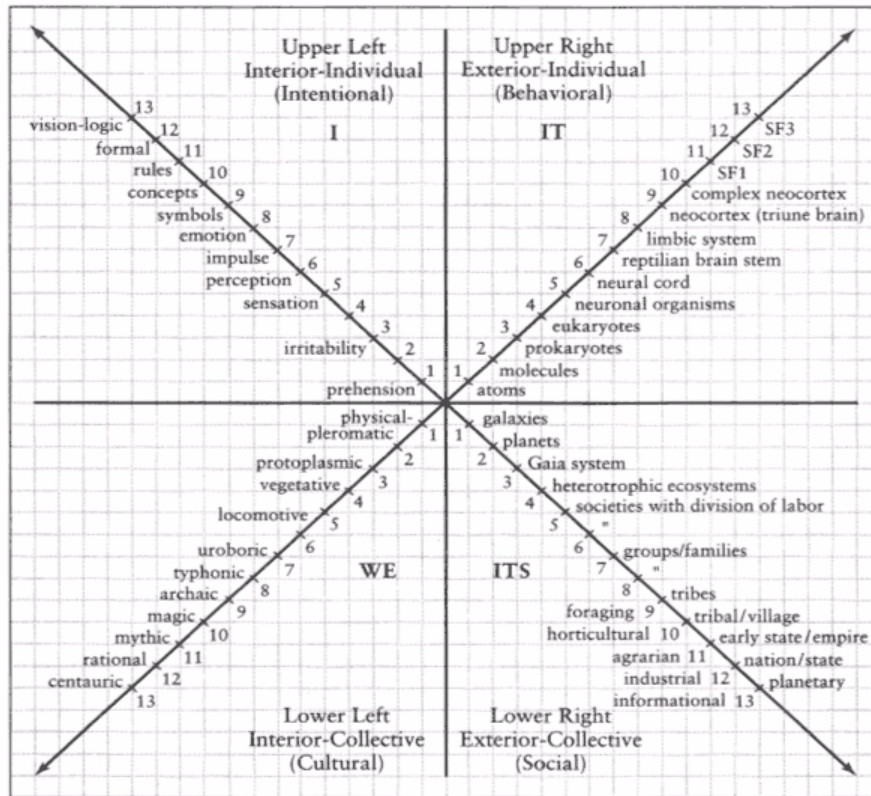


Figure 1. *Four Quadrants.*

This model was developed out of a three year comparative study of various hierarchical maps from widely different disciplines, everything from “Eastern and Western, premodern and modern and postmodern...from systems theory to the Great Chain of Being, from the Buddhist vijñanas to Piaget, Marx, Kohlberg, the Vedantic koshas, Loevinger, Maslow, Lenski, Kabbalah, and so on.” (ibid.). Instead of each map being a different version of the same hierarchy, Wilber suggests that they are actually different territories grounded in four different types of holistic sequences. Although each perspective represents a truth in its own right, the model departs fundamentally from pluralistic relativism or radical perspectivism in that it seeks to integrate each position into an overall mutual harmony while still maintaining the integrity, validity and uniqueness of each quadrant or perspective. Instead of a nihilistic deconstructive postmodernism where no perspective is final or has any advantage over the other “at which point they careen uncontrollably in their own labyrinth of ever-receding holons, lost in aperspectival space”, he posits a constructive postmodernism which involves honouring each perspective and then integrating them into an overall “integral-holism” (Wilber 1995: 188). That is to say each of the four quadrants (also seen as organism, environment, consciousness, and culture), cause and are caused by the others, they

“tetra-interact” (ibid.). This model therefore allows an equal appreciation of 1) “I” - first-person, subjective, phenomenological accounts, with 2) “We” - second-person, intersubjective backgrounds, and 3) “It” - third-person, objective/scientific, physical systems (in Reynolds 2004: 358). It is based on the premise that;

The 1) *subjective* features of consciousness (waves, streams, states) are intimately interrelated with the 3) *objective* aspects of an organism (especially the brain, neurophysiology, and various organ systems in the individual), with 2) background *cultural* contexts that allow meanings and understanding to be generated in the first place, and with the 3) *social* institutions that anchor them (ibid).

Without delving into the intricacies of this model, it is sufficient to say for the time being that these four quadrants of existence include both the internal and external of both individual and collective holons. The concept of holons, defined as parts of wholes, has previously been developed by Tyler Volk (1995) who expanded Bateson’s idea of metapatterns which sought to explore the fundamental interconnectedness of the phenomenal world. Metapatterns describe “the embedded and emergent patterns of chaotic and complex systems” and can be seen as “organizing patterns that possess general (universal) functional properties in evolving systems, including natural (biological and physical), technological, social, and cognitive systems” (Volk in Bloom 2004: 157)<sup>2</sup>.

The core meaning or meanings associated with each metapattern are common across occurrences in all disciplines or facets of experience. Because of their appearance across disciplines and across all facets of human experience (from everyday events to cultural beliefs), they also act as powerful analogical and metaphoric tools that extend the development of complex understandings. These tools allow for the identification of more specific patterns inherent in social and psychological contexts and dynamics, as well as for the description of the interactions among a variety of different patterns (ibid: 158)... In essence, this model and any model of self-sustaining social systems are based on the notion of *connection*. This notion is fundamentally related to the creation of unifying binaries and of seeing the interconnectedness within systems and of seeing the interconnectedness between systems and among systems within systems. In other words, we need to expose how patterns and events within systems affect one another, how the patterns and events in one system can affect another, and how the patterns and events in layers of embedded or hierarchically layered systems affect one another (ibid: 189).

From a perspective of interconnection, research is not aimed at seeking “generality based on an underlying absolute reality that can be progressively discovered through independent replications”, but rather “there is just as much interest and value in individual experiences and in context-dependent occurrences” (in Braud 1994: 62). There is a paradox here because based on the great variation between individuals, experimenters and contexts,

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<sup>2</sup> Bloom, J.W. “The Application of Chaos, Complexity, and Emergent (Meta)Patterns to Research in Teacher Education” from *Proceedings of the 2004 Complexity Science and Educational Research Conference* SEPTEMBER 30–OCTOBER 3, CHAFFEY’S LOCKS, ONTARIO.  
[http://www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca/conferences/2004/Documents/CSER2\\_Bloom.pdf](http://www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca/conferences/2004/Documents/CSER2_Bloom.pdf).

“one would expect a high incidence of unique experiences and outcomes and ‘non-replications’ to emerge from many repetition attempts”, while quite the opposite seems to be the case. Since there are multiple interconnections, the world could be said to display “considerable holographic properties” where; “Observations made in one domain would be expected to be mirrored by observations in other domains. The results of studying one small sample of experiences would be expected to reflect those of many other small samples” (ibid.). This strengthens the significance of a more “experience-centered approach, for it suggests that representative sampling may not be as critical as previously thought” (ibid.).

In fact, these “holographic properties” have already been investigated by Michael Agar (2005) in an essay entitled “Local discourse and global research – The role of local knowledge”. Here the concept “fractal” is applied to explain the link between local discourse and global forces in relation to the rapid increase in illicit drug use like heroin, crack cocaine and ecstasy in recent U.S. history and addresses specifically the “canonical question”; “Why these people in this place at this time?” (ibid: 1). The concept of fractals can be explained using an example from the concept’s inventor, Benoît Mandelbrot, who noticed similar fluctuations in prices on the commodities market irrespective of the time scale the graph was drawn; “Whether the chart is for a day, a month, or a year, there are some similarities in patterns” (ibid: 20). This can also be observed measuring the coastline of England, whether it is from a satellite photo, at low altitude, or “if one puts his nose on a similar stretch of shore, it looks ragged in similar ways too”. The basic idea being that “some process works over and over again”, based on the “results of its previous step as input to the next step, then the results of that step as input to the following step, and so on *ad infinitum*”;

The logic is both iterative, occurring over and over again, and recursive, in that it uses its own results to run again. The result is that a structure is built up, a structure of patterns at different levels of scale, in which the patterns are produced by repeated applications of a simple algorithm. What does this have to do with the oral histories? I can’t help but think there’s some relevance, because of anthropology’s longstanding fascination with “themes.” We’re always after patterns that replicate across domains and at different levels of scale. If *X* is true for “our people,” then we should see *X* in life stories, daily situations, religious systems, subsistence practices, and so on. We seek the “patterns that connect,” to use Bateson’s phrase. The fractal concept sets up an interesting way to think about global research with reference to local discourse. How do we show a link between distant global events and local realities? The answer: We look for fractals – patterns in those different locations generated by the same algorithm... (ibid.).

Although local transcripts may be “thick with global patterns”, implying that “if a pattern matters, it will in fact appear locally, because the same algorithm is present”, in order to locate global fractals one must include data with global coverage, and not only from a single site. The local fractals reflected global patterns but the “algorithm didn’t START

locally. It was designed and initiated at some distant center of power”, consequently, in order to be able to fully explain them, global research was necessary. The origins of global fractals can be learned from “historical, archival, media, academic, and statistical sources that carried information about those centers of power”. Therefore, while the primary goal here was “figuring out the interactions of global and local processes, together with a goal of explaining major changes that affected many different sites, local discourse lost its central position”. Both qualitative and quantitative data became valuable and necessary, “The effort remained ethnographic in its epistemology, but not ethnographic in its genres of primary data”;

The fact that a crack epidemic had some unique characteristics in Baltimore was less interesting than the fact that the crack epidemic in Baltimore had characteristics like crack epidemics all over the United States. And the fact that crack epidemics all over the United States occurred at about the same time meant that the explanation wouldn't be found in Baltimore. As our project developed, and as we looked at more and more cases of illicit drug epidemics, we realized we weren't studying Baltimore much at all any more. And when we did listen to Baltimore voices, we recognized the same algorithms we'd already identified as relevant to many other social locations (ibid: 21).

In conclusion then, fractals are a useful heuristic tool which can be applied when dealing with local/global interactions “by showing that the same process, or algorithm, is producing similar patterns in different social locations and at different levels of scale”. The algorithms however, “begin in social locations where power allows their design and forces their iteration. They end in individual lives where survival depends on adaptation. The patterns are not identical, but they are generated by the same process” (ibid.). In this respect “fractals provide a metaphor to show global/local links”, where “local/global patterns connect through the iterated algorithm”, “global data sources explain the origin of the algorithms [and] Local discourse shows their iteration and their effects on agency at the individual level” (ibid: 21). Here there is a meeting of both qualitative and quantitative methods based on patterns of interconnection that are reflected on many levels and scales.

Similarly, Wilber's model permits one to situate and relate specific expressions of interiority and exteriority, mind and matter, or consciousness and form within a network of interconnected holons which include and transcend the previous states and stages (the ascending numbers in each quadrant). Hence, just as there are levels of physical expression, from atoms to cells to organisms and so forth, there are also levels of corresponding types of conscious awareness, from prehension to irritability and sensation, respectively. Each physical or material manifestation or stage has therefore a corresponding interior or conscious manifestation, so that the within of things is consciousness and the without is form. Therefore,

contrary to scientific materialism, this approach embraces consciousness while at the same time being sensitive to the commonly overlooked fact that mind is indeed “the first and most direct thing in our experience”. Furthermore since the within of things is depth or consciousness, “all surfaces are surfaces of depth, which means, all forms are forms of consciousness.... Thus, stated as a general tenet, ‘the greater the depth of evolution, the greater the degree of consciousness’” (Reynolds 2004: 235, Wilber 1995: 111).

The fact that consciousness along with any kind of interiority has been more or less squeezed out of the picture within not only the hard sciences, but the social sciences as well is strongly related to what Wilber has called the “disaster of modernity”. Although modernity definitely played an essential role in differentiating the “Big Three” (I, We and It), this unfortunately degenerated into dissociation and led to an explosive empirical science followed by massive industrialization. Both of these emphasized “it-knowledge” and “it-technology” exclusively, at the expense of other value spheres, thereby “effectively destroying them in their own terms” (Wilber 1998:75). Subsequently, all introspective and interpretive knowledge was reduced to the exterior and empirical domain in an attempt to “erase the richness of interpretation from the script of the world”. Clarified in “postmodernese”, Wilber writes; “Modernity marginalized the multivalent epistemic modes via an aggressive hegemony of the myth of the given that hierarchically inverted hermeneutic inscriptions due to the phallogocentrism of patriarchal signifiers. Translation: it collapsed Left to Right” (ibid: 119). This “collapse of Left to Right” is;

There, in four words... the precise disaster of modernity, the disaster that was the ‘disenchantment of the world’ (Weber), the ‘colonialization of the value spheres by science’ (Habermas), the ‘dawn of the wasteland’ (T.S. Eliot), the birth of ‘one-dimensional man’ (Marcuse), the ‘desacralization of the world’ (Schuon), the ‘disqualified universe’ (Mumford). By any other name, the disaster is known as flatland (ibid).

Postmodernism arose as a reaction to this flatland disaster and can be related to three core assumptions which Wilber calls the three “partial truths” of postmodernism (ibid: 121). First of all, *constructivism* states that reality is not in all ways pre-given and is therefore a construction or interpretation as opposed to the “myth of the given” where what you see is what you get so to speak. Secondly, *contextualism* refers to the fact that all meanings are context-dependent and contexts are boundless, and finally *integral-aperspectivism* maintains that, based on the first two assumptions, cognition should not privilege one single perspective. Although these assumptions are in themselves relatively unproblematic and in many respects relevant to most investigations, they have unfortunately been blown radically out of

proportion by what Wilber refers to as the extremist wing of postmodernism. The unfortunate result then is “a totally deconstructed world that takes the deconstructionists with it” (ibid). In other words, instead of transcending the flatland disaster it was merely replaced by another (postmodern) disaster where, far from incorporating and honouring the individual subject, he/she was wiped out completely by impersonal language and linguistic structures. Here the subject (Upper Left) was drastically reduced to intersubjective structures (Lower Left); “to what Foucault famously called “this anonymous system without a subject” (ibid: 129). Language substituted the individual and became not only the inscriber, but the “*agent* of history” leaving nobody at home, and the world “still living in the grips of flatland, of surfaces, of exteriors devoid of interior anything: ‘no within, no deep’” (ibid: 139).

### **2.3 - The tacit dimension**

When it comes to inquiries concerning drugs and intoxication specifically, this lack of depth seems to be a recurring problem since most research agendas demand a rigorous scientific, objective approach which primarily gives credence to behavioural (Upper Right) and social (Lower Right) aspects of these trends. Fortunately, the postmodernist shift has had a significant positive influence on at least some drug research in terms of incorporating user perspectives and emphasizing the importance of context on drug use. Nevertheless, here there still seems to be a strong predisposition towards studying entry and exit processes with little emphasis on that which lies in between. The result is that an overwhelming majority of these contributions still represent only a partial view of what has become an exceedingly complex problem. Despite the advent of postmodernism, the bulk of these findings, more often than not, reflect a predominantly materialistic ontology which in many cases negates individual agency and intentionality altogether. The main focus in this thesis is therefore on precisely that neglected area of research. It strives towards a more inclusive conscious phenomenology which embraces intentionality and incorporates a diversity of user experiences. Hopefully this can serve as a type of “missing link” in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of different types of user trajectories and provide some clues in terms of distinguishing important elements that may or may not play a significant role towards the development of destructive user patterns.

It should be made clear that what is being conveyed here also represents a “partial truth” in the sense that it is deliberately biased towards the first person, or Upper Left

(interior-individual) and second person, or Lower Left (interior-collective) perspectives. Nonetheless, based on the fact that it is precisely these perspectives which have been most neglected in research, perhaps this is also where we may have the most to learn. When it comes to drugs and intoxication, the “whole truth” may never be told, for the simple reason that life is a process, and we live in highly unstable times. Society is changing, the market for drugs is constantly changing, not to mention the substances themselves, and last but not least, individuals as active agents in this dynamic landscape are also subject to, as well as the initiators of, change and transformation. If any kind of truth is to be conveyed, it must somehow incorporate this active, processual and multi-faceted aspect of human existence. As Michael Polanyi puts it;

Each person’s obligation to the truth is from his own particular setting, whose particular advantages and disadvantages are his own path to truth. This is what gives each person his unique contribution to make and his special responsibility, as each sees the truth from his own unique reservoir of tacit knowledge. The objects of our knowledge, being real, can be perceived from many different angles, just as a real live model sitting for a life class can be truly represented by quite different shapes drawn by students seeing her from different angles. The truth of their representations depends on the faithfulness and skill with which each draws what *he* sees, while believing that he is drawing a real person who exists in the round. There can be no true representation that is drawn from no particular place (in Scott 1985: 156-7).

Applied to the context of drugs and intoxication, a specific mind altering substance may have been shown to have the same chemical effect on the brains of individuals, independent of geographic or demographic variables. However, the manner in which individuals respond and react to that effect does vary both in terms of cultural context, set and setting not to mention according to who the individual happens to be as an independent, active agent consciously involved in the whole mind altering process.

For that reason, even though researchers will inevitably approach these issues from different theoretical perspectives, it would seem beneficial, if not essential, to at least periodically consider this diversity of experience and be open and sensitive towards the many ways in which it is expressed and given meaning by active agents. This may well challenge the manner in which professionals habitually think about drugs and intoxication. The preoccupation with and emphasis on precisely this underdeveloped area of drug research is not to “romanticize” or “belittle” the destructive aspects of intoxication in any way. On the contrary, it is only by examining every aspect of this phenomenon that one can truly hope to comprehend it in its manifold disguise. Intoxication is primarily a subjective phenomenon, and so it follows then that in order to better understand it one must take this perspective into full account. This naturally entails having an appropriate method which will, as far as

possible, facilitate and mediate the task of truly incorporating other peoples' subjective experiences without tainting them irrevocably with one's own personal bias or reducing them to impersonal linguistic structures with no depth or substance.

Invoking Polanyi again, all knowledge, whether it be within the hard sciences studying the dance of atoms and molecules, or within the social sciences scrutinizing human conduct, begins with what he has called "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi 1967), the ability to know more than we can tell. Since we always bring a person to the process of discovery, without which there would be no impetus to explore or discover in the first place, all knowledge is "personal knowledge". It is the person, our subjective, intentional, conscious self that seeks knowledge or truth, and is constantly striving to understand this space we call reality. Total objectivity in that sense is therefore a myth, since no knowledge can be accumulated without a subjective self mediating the process. However, this does not necessarily mean that there is no objective reality or absolute meaning in the universe; Polanyi was a realist in that even though he recognized the limitations of human apprehension, he still strongly believed in the presence of a real world, or higher reality. Needless to say, this reality can not be fully appreciated and known by simply reducing it to its lowest levels, by examining atoms and molecules for example, but only through discovering its deeper meanings which are revealed through the profound interrelations and patterns formed<sup>3</sup> within these multiple levels of reality<sup>3</sup>.

Not unlike Teilhard de Chardin's "law of complexity and consciousness" which relates depth with consciousness, and Wilber's four quadrant model, Polanyi also sees a hierarchy of reality. According to Wilber, it doesn't really matter how far down consciousness is being pushed since, even though the lowest and most primitive holons (quarks, for example) may have the least depth, they still (in agreement with Whitehead) possess some form of prehension (Wilber 1995: 113). Quoting Teilhard de Chardin, Wilber writes "Refracted rearwards along the course of evolution, consciousness displays itself qualitatively as a spectrum of shifting shades whose lower terms are lost in the night" (ibid.: 112). For Polanyi, this hierarchy of reality is expressed in that "whatever has more depth of meaning and thus more attractive power to our minds, is more real" (Scott 1985: 68). In this manner, he also avoids the common postmodern trap of assigning equal meaning to everything and

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<sup>3</sup> From "Life in the Real World: Our Personal Commitment to Endless Discovery in a Meaningful Universe" Richard J. Vincent, 2004 <http://www.theocentric.com/theoarchives/000277.html>



thus reducing experience to its lowest common denominator, linguistic structures, with no depth or substance.

Contrary to scientific materialism, instead of awarding primacy to matter, Polanyi “granted pre-eminence to the least tangible aspects of creation” (Vincent 2004).

What is most tangible has the least meaning, and it is perverse then to identify the tangible with the real. For to regard a meaningless substratum as the ultimate reality of all things must lead to the conclusion that all things are meaningless. We can avoid this conclusion only if we acknowledge instead that the deepest reality is possessed by higher things that are least tangible (in Scott 1985:69).

The deepest meaning is ultimately not dependent on the lower levels even though “it harnesses the lower levels in order to manifest meaning... Ultimately, the meaning that harnesses each subordinate level is the deepest and greatest reality” (Vincent 2004). This hierarchy of meaning is brilliantly illustrated by Scott and her example of a book; “would anyone maintain that the printed letters on the pages are more real than the meaning, because they are visible and tangible? Clearly the contrary is the case; the reality of the letters depends on the meaning they express. The reality of the meaning does not depend upon the printed words, for it can be expressed in many other visible or audible forms” (in Vincent 2004). Although the deepest meaning is dependent on words in the sense that language, symbols and linguistic structures provide the medium through which it is manifested and communicated, it is the meaning that initiates manifold expression that embodies the deepest reality.

Seen in this light, tacit knowledge then is the ability to connect with this greater reality, or deeper levels of meaning. It is that hunch or feeling that plants the first few seeds in a long process of discovery eventually leading to new and expanded forms of scientific knowledge. It is a deep, often even irrational dedication to the conviction that there is something vital to be discovered, a hidden truth which the researcher must uncover, based on an often inexplicable certainty that just cannot be shaken off. Following this hunch or intuition is a risky endeavour (especially when working within a fixed time schedule); it must be based on an underlying sense of trust, that this process is *real*, and not just a figment of one’s imagination. This ceaseless quest or inner yearning for truth is based on that reality, and an underlying ability and dedication to connect with deeper levels of meaning;

We can account for this capacity of ours to know more than we can tell if we believe in the presence of an external reality with which we can make contact. This I do. I declare myself committed to the belief in an external reality gradually accessible to knowing, and I regard all true understanding as an intimation of such a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to our deepened understanding in an indefinite range of

unexpected manifestations. I accept the obligation to search for the truth through my intimations of reality, knowing that there is and can be no strict rule by which my conclusions can be justified (Polanyi 1969: 133).

Here the ability to make contact is especially significant in that it points towards an element of universality in diversity. It does not negate that there are a multitude of perspectives which can be seen as “truths” in their own right yet were it not for this collective ability to *connect*, based on the reality of a higher order of truth; we would be hopelessly unable to communicate beyond a series of crude sounds and snarls. In this manner, two apparently contradictory views like universalism and perspectivism can actually be true simultaneously, depending on which level of meaning one is operating within.

This is very similar to the distinction in Buddhism between relative truth and absolute truth, expressed in particular in the Prajñāparamitā Sūtras or The Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras which is filled with paradoxes and apparent contradictions. In the Heart Sūtra for instance, one finds one of the most famous Buddhist paradoxes; “Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness”. As Jamieson has commented;

At first sight, The Perfection of Wisdom is bewildering, full of paradox and apparent irrationality. Yet once one accepts that trying to unravel these texts without experiencing the intuitions behind them is not satisfactory, it becomes clear that paradox and irrationality are the only means of conveying to the reader those underlying intuitions that would otherwise be impossible to express (Jamieson 2000: 8,9).

Emptiness is the ground of being, that naked awareness, or pure consciousness, a fundamental state of intelligence that is open, curious and unbiased, which in turn gives rise to form, relative truth, surfaces, perceptions and the multitude of perspectives which emerge out of our many ways of being in the world. These are however also inherently “empty” in that they do not exist independently as solidified objects in a concrete world “out there”, even though they appear to. This is one of the partial truths of postmodernism revealed in “the myth of the given” which states that everything is interdependent, there are no objective facts. Yet in order to be perceived at all, from whichever perspective, there must be naked awareness. This is sometimes compared to a mirror which reflects impartially everything that arises before it, even though the mirror itself is inherently “empty” of these reflections. In relying on tacit knowledge, one is therefore acknowledging that naked, open awareness, natural wisdom or “absolute truth” which connects us all on a deeper level yet simultaneously gives rise to and is open to a diversity of expression, which is “relative truth”.

Although the risk factor involved in embracing a tacit dimension in the course of one's research is definitely a force to contend with, it still appears to be one of the most honest and courageous approaches when it comes to producing knowledge with both depth and meaning. It is honest because it involves acknowledging one's own shortcomings and uncertainties as part of the research process. It requires courage because any researcher willing to navigate his or her field of investigation with not much more than an instinct coupled with a real desire and commitment towards unveiling new and expanded forms of knowledge, is bound to be in for a challenging journey. In my own particular case the "hunch" started with an unrelenting fascination with *what wasn't being said* in contemporary drug research. As to how many insights can be uncovered and whether or not these insights qualify as scientific knowledge, will be up to the reader to determine for themselves, based on the exploration in its entirety as it unfolds throughout the process of discovery.

#### **2.4 - Auto-anthropology and the human-as-instrument**

In many ways, tacit knowledge both guides research and constitutes the starting point for any process of discovery. This is even more so for those processes involving an empirical open-ended inquiry into patterns of meaning with the goal of generating an expanded appreciation of how people interpret their world and act upon those interpretations. In this regard there must be a relatively high tolerance for ambiguity since there is no pre-set methodological script to follow, and the meanings generated from this type of inquiry will also change and evolve as new data unfolds (Maykut & Morehouse 1994). This therefore entails having the ability to embrace paradoxes and contradictions and the somewhat unsettling discovery that, among humans at least, in many cases two apparently contradictory assertions may actually be true in the same context. In intimate relationships this can be observed time and time again in the "I love you/ I hate you" drama which is perhaps all too familiar to most of us. In the world of drugs, and especially among drug addicts, a similar paradox can be easily observed, in the sense that there is certainly a highly potent love/hate relationship between addicts and their drug of choice and in many cases the outcome of treatment is entirely dependent upon how this paradox is resolved (Aaslid 2003). To complicate matters even further, there is that perpetually looming incongruence between what our informants say and what they actually do. For the social scientist this may present itself as a virtual nightmare, but here also lies the possibility for transcending what at first glance appears contradictory and perhaps even gain a greater realization pertaining to a slightly

deeper order of reality or higher dimension of meaning in the Polanyian sense. Only including one aspect of this paradox or contradiction will not only present an incomplete, one-sided picture, but in many cases will also deprive the researcher of precisely that depth and profundity which is sought after and so essential in making sense out of complex human issues.

Ultimately, every social science is embedded in a fundamental paradox, in the sense that we are all unique individuals with a distinct manner of navigating and making sense of our world, while simultaneously being equal in that communication and dialogue is in fact possible and in many ways necessary for us to grow and evolve and become who we are. As Arendt (in Maykut & Morehouse 1994: 37) has put it; “if we were not equal we could not possibly understand each other, if we were not distinct we would not need communication beyond points and grunts”. These two aspects, which Wilber (1995) has called *agency* and *communion*, are in constant tension, in the sense that the more agency, or individuality, the less communion and equality and vice versa, presenting us with a continual dilemma in terms of how to manage and resolve these forces. According to Wilber, this tension;

shows up in everything from the battle between self-preservation and species-preservation, to the conflict between rights (agency) and responsibilities (communions), individuality and membership, personhood and community, coherence and correspondence, self-directed and other-directed, autonomy and heteronomy... In short, how can I be both my own wholeness and a part of something larger without sacrificing one or the other?” (ibid: 45).

This ongoing battle between agency and communion, if not successfully mediated, can easily lead to forms of pathology where too much individuality, for example, leads to repression and alienation while too much communion leads to a loss of individual integrity and autonomy (ibid). A similar case in point can perhaps be extended to the social sciences and the problem with theories that place too much emphasis on either the individual or society, when in fact it is the tension between these two forces that lies behind much human behaviour. In order to fully appreciate the significance of this dynamic a person need only to examine the mechanisms governing one’s own socialization into society, a different culture or subculture where the validity of one’s observations and understandings is very much established by the ability to interact successfully with members of a group.

This ability to understand or connect with a group is the product of an ongoing dialectic between self and other, based both on who and how you are as well as who and how “they” allow you to be in a given context. If this is true in any given culture or society in

general, then it is even more so within the field of qualitative research, where it is precisely this ability to connect and establish trust with members of a given group that in the final analysis determines the outcome of one's investigation. In this respect, perhaps even more than my academic training as an anthropologist, my experiences in the field have been strongly influenced by my personality as well as my background in general and previous familiarity with addicts and drug users. As Crick has previously pointed out (Crick 1982: 16 in Aaslid 2003), anthropological knowledge is inherently autobiographical. It arises from a state of mind not a set of procedures or from anything "done" in the field. People can not be reduced to simple facts to be registered, because all social interactions will inevitably have a strong element of symbolic, inter-subjective and inter-cultural aspects (ibid). Instead of seeing this as a weakness however, this becomes a strength and valuable analytical tool, based on the dual characteristics of equality and distinction which both permits and demands that the researcher becomes part of the research experience based on one's own personality and self-consciousness as well as the ability to relate and empathize with other participants.

This can be further elaborated using the concept of indwelling, which means "to exist as an interactive spirit, force or principle, and to exist *within* as an activating spirit, force or principle. It literally means to live between, and within" (Maykut & Morehouse 1994: 25). Knowledge of others is in many respects also based on indwelling, on an inquisitive yet empathetic ability to connect and embrace another person's being in the world. As Polanyi has written in *Knowing and Being*;

To this extent knowing is an indwelling; that is a utilization of the framework for unfolding our understanding in accordance with the indications and standards imposed by the framework ...If an act of knowing affects our choice between alternate frameworks, or modifies the framework in which we dwell, it involves a change in our way of being (in Maykut & Morehouse 1994: 25).

Knowing, in other words, arises both as a product of our intentional (and sometimes not so intentional) interactions with the world at large, our ability to empathize and connect, while at the same time reflexively changing, and modifying our very being. In fact, this posture of "human-as-instrument" approach may well be the only method flexible enough to truly be able to capture the "complexity, subtlety, and constantly changing situation which is the human experience" (Lincoln & Guba in Maykut & Morehouse 1994: 26).

Despite, or perhaps even because of the autobiographical nature of a human-as-instrument approach, one of the greatest challenges of this project has been finding a place for myself – my voice, my life experiences, my subjectivity – in this thesis. Had this been an

exploration of a more neutral topic, like the relationship between employers and employees in a Norwegian fishing factory for example, this might perhaps not be such an issue. Situating myself as author and researcher within such an acceptable and respectable topic would have been relatively unproblematic compared to the task which lies ahead (which most drug researchers seem to quite sensibly avoid altogether). Lenson (1995) is one author who has not avoided the issue and has written poignantly of precisely this dilemma and expresses these sentiments with remarkable eloquence in his book *On Drugs*;

Never has “the death of the author” been more desirable – and more advisable. The “Just Say No” campaign of the Reagan years was designed to preclude exactly this kind of talk. Drugs are the Unspeakable, and yet this is what I have to speak about. A properly dead author could endow this project with respectable necrography and uphold what Alan S. Weiss calls the “prohibition against the use of the word ‘I’ in the critical text or theoretical text”. By at least playing possum, if not actually dying, I could create an “invisible image” of myself as disinterested and disembodied philosopher taking up an unpleasant matter against my will, doing a dirty job that someone has to do, my self-effacement necessitated by an ongoing social crisis that must enlist everyone, even reluctant metaphysicians. I could have focused an objective eye, while still trying to avoid through some sort of phenomenological method the inadequacy of hard science for examining the subjective. Phenomenology, for all its soupiness, was at least willing to talk about emotions like pleasure and anxiety (ibid. : xviii).

In this case, I am still very much alive, have no intention of dying, or speaking as a “disinterested and disembodied philosopher”, and despite my familiarity with the underworld and different states of consciousness, this is by no means meant to be a confessional. As has been pointed out, contemporary drug research agendas, generally speaking, not only mute several highly prevalent types of users, especially nonproblematic users (that is to say that population of users who manage to keep some semblance of control and conventionality despite a more or less regular habit of ingesting illegal substances). It also tends to conceal the researcher, either behind a mask of “objective” politically correct assumptions, or for those with more experience, behind a veil of silence, like a haunting ghost writer, present only by their conspicuous absence. This is probably due to the possibly correct assumption made by most researchers in this field, that if one doesn’t mechanically ape the voice of the politically correct masses, one isn’t entitled to a voice at all. Reflexivity has never been more needed than within this particular area of research, yet ironically, this is almost certainly one of the last places it will be found.

In this thesis in particular, excluding the self completely from the text would mean falling precisely into the same trap as so many others before me. It would leave a gaping hole and hardly live up to what I mean by an honest yet critical phenomenology. Adopting a reflexive posture might be less challenging if I were entering the psychonautic landscape like many of my contemporaries, as a complete stranger. This not being the case however leaves

me in a somewhat awkward position in terms of what to include regarding my knowledge of the subject, without risking condemnation from those who might be predisposed to interpret my frankness as another form of promoting drugs. In this regard there is no reason to deny myself the same amount of candour and discretion that any competent researcher would award to participants of a project of this nature. Nonetheless, it is important to state my position explicitly and thereby enlighten the reader into how I know much of what I know and how I have managed to gain exceptionally good access into such a notoriously inaccessible user population.

Towards this aim a key aspect of this exploration is to revive the ghosts, both the ghost of the so called “drug fiend” as well as the ghost of the investigator entering the world of the “drug fiend”, since both are crucial to the development of an honest yet critical phenomenology of intoxication. Although drug research has been both extensive and rigorous in the past few decades, there is a prominent lack of native theory, specifically when it comes to the actual lived experiences and significance of intoxication itself. Research is mainly concerned with the medical, psychological and social causes and consequences of intoxication, while that which lies in between the causes and consequences, that which pertains to the experience itself, is largely ignored or avoided altogether. Intoxication therefore becomes a kind of “black hole” in theories and descriptions, invisible, yet somehow still making its presence felt (Sørhaug 1996:182). Lacking a more refined phenomenology of intoxication, conventional categories separating the “good” drugs from the “bad” drugs are blindly adhered to. This in turn creates a highly superficial yet politically correct depiction of intoxication in varying degrees of acceptability, based on a legal status which may or may not correspond to the potentially harmful effects of the substance itself.

In recent years, reflexivity has fortunately become an important consideration for many researchers, especially in the social sciences, and anthropology specifically where there is an increasing awareness that any piece of writing is produced through the medium of an embodied author. This holds true for any text, not only those dealing with the somewhat disconcerting topic of drugs and intoxication. Also, in assuming the posture of indwelling, every piece of ethnographic research and writing produced thereby will inevitably reflect, to some extent, the personality, background and views of the author. This in itself need not be a drawback, as long as it is acknowledged and accompanied by a critical vigilance which can carefully monitor the momentum of one’s work and is able to distinguish between different

voices, include and perhaps even transcend them. In many respects, incorporating this form of reflexivity can be quite liberating when compared to the straitjacket imposed by living up to the unrealistic standards of a value-free scientism.

This project can be regarded as a form of auto-anthropology to the extent that it also attempts to shed light on some of the dynamics through which anthropological knowledge is generated as well as focusing on some of the socio-cultural aspects within which this process takes place. This can only be achieved through adopting an inward, reflexive gaze and openness towards those “analytical givens, concepts and techniques, historical and proximate, socio-cultural and personal, which the anthropologist inevitably brings to the work of engaging with others” (Rapport & Overing 2000:19). In terms of exploring some of the more subjective elements of user trajectories as well as situating them within a larger context, an auto-anthropological, reflexive methodology seems particularly suitable. This is principally due to the fact that this approach happens to be based on the conviction that anthropology has to acknowledge both the political and epistemological forces within which it takes place, as well as the anthropologist’s conscious and in some cases subconscious self in order to explore that of the informants (ibid: 19, 28).

If the tension between self and other, agency and communion, individual and society presents us with a continual dilemma, the anthropologist certainly embodies this dilemma and in so doing has a powerful incentive for incorporating it reflectively into the ethnographic text. Adopting this stance is not designed to privilege the individual over society, but is an endeavour to achieve an increased sensitivity to human relations where consciousness is a prerequisite and necessary condition fundamental to a society composed of living, interacting individuals without whom social facts are completely devoid of meaning. It is sensitive to the discrepancies between private knowledge and public knowledge, and in acknowledging the complexities within ourselves can hopefully avoid a common mistake made by social scientists in generalizing or simplifying the Other (ibid: 27). Fortunately, there is a growing recognition among anthropologists that approaching society and culture means approaching other conscious minds;

albeit through the medium of their own. The consciousness of the anthropologist is, thus, inextricably implicated in those of his or her subjects since it is only in terms of the former that the latter come to be known. Hence, consciousness comes to be seen as not only a central plank of anthropological enquiry but also as a method which necessarily undergirds that enquiry as such (ibid: 67).



Here I strongly agree with Cohen (1994) and Rapport and Overing (2000) in that ethnography is an ethnographer-focused art and that, instead of this being perceived as a weakness or source of embarrassment to be hushed and concealed, “anthropology should now seriously begin to exploit the intrusive self as an ethnographic resource” (ibid: 27). The challenge, therefore, will be to include my subjective self consciously as an active tool through which I can access and connect with other conscious selves and mutually decode those patterns of meaning which give texture and substance to this enigma called life.

## 2.5 - The field

At this point, a closer examination of what is meant here by the term “consciousness” seems to be in order, since it should be clear by now that I am referring first and foremost to the phenomenon of being conscious, and not to all those neurological events which help make this subjective, first-person experience possible. Also, even though altered states of consciousness are a principal concern in this investigation, they are seen in relation to the individual experiencing these states, giving them meaning and incorporating them into their life worlds and not primarily as isolated events in themselves. This is because even though alcohol, opiates, stimulants and psychedelics all initiate a distinct variety of intoxication, these are still interpreted and incorporated individually within a variety of contexts. Consequently, it is the intentionality beneath these experiences that is my principal concern rather than the different types of intoxication per se. At any rate, intoxication is never an “absolute state” and to think that drugs can induce one regardless of social contextualization is according to Adler, a “pharmacological fallacy”;

We cannot speak of drugs as if the issue were merely the ingestion and incorporation of a chemical substance which invariably elicits the same predictable response. Such an approach distorts the facts, leads to pseudo issues, and creates the base for the futile polemics which have dominated the discussion so far. Such a restricted focus is based on a pharmacological fallacy. The consumption of drugs is not merely a physiological event. The drugs we use, whether as beverages, pills, injections, or smoke, exists within a matrix of psychological, cultural, and social values; and it is the roles and meanings of these that we incorporate with the drug. The pharmacological fallacy is that there is a single, specific drug effect independent of the individual’s set or the setting in which the event occurs (Adler 1972 in Lenson 1995: 62).

The primary focus is therefore that *conscious phenomenology* of intoxication (as opposed to a conscious phenomenology of *intoxication*). *Conscious* in that it seeks to include and expand on the concept of intentionality when exploring user trajectories as perceived by the users themselves and among themselves and *phenomenology* in the sense that this focus

also takes into account how these intentionalities are expressed through dynamic human experience in everyday life. In other words, there is a connection here between human consciousnesses expressed intentionally through the unique capacity we all have to create ourselves and our worlds and social life which provides the set and the setting, or the music and the stage to borrow a metaphor from Rapport, for the dance to take place. I am fully aware that this is only one of many, and not necessarily the highest or subtlest expression of consciousness. In Tibetan Buddhism there are eight divisions of consciousness and Wilber (2000) has mapped out a highly refined and inclusive model which differentiates between structures, states and stages of consciousness based on the Vedanta scriptures in Hinduism, not to mention all the different psychological theories endeavouring to explain this enigma. I will be limiting this inquiry to the intentional aspect of consciousness. This is what Nietzsche referred to as the “will to power”, what Rapport has eloquently described as the existential power of the individual to engender his or her own becoming (Rapport 2003: 36), and what I see among drug users of every variety as the power to construct, deconstruct, identify with and even transcend that vibrant bundle of dynamic complexities we humans refer to as “the self”.

Wilber in fact closely relates this intentional aspect of consciousness directly with the self, it is portrayed as the “navigator of the *waves* (and *streams*) in the great River of Life” (Wilber in Reynolds 2004: 324). This navigator has several important functions, or functional variants which include identification, the will, defences and integration (ibid). In other words, the intentional self presides over what to call ‘I’, choosing within the constraints and limitations of its developmental stage, preserving and protecting itself, converting states of consciousness into traits (metabolism), and most importantly according to Wilber, integrating. Integration is the ability and responsibility to reconcile and assimilate whatever elements are present at any given time. From this point of view, instead of a static, submissive self passively reflecting society, or merely reducing the self to a series of role playing games, we have a dynamic, processual creative force. This is the force that propels and navigates through a multitude of existential landscapes and provides the power to create, destroy or transcend those landscapes depending on our developmental needs. Wilber elaborates further on precisely this active aspect of self consciousness in stressing the importance of realizing that;

the self as navigator is a juggling act of all the elements that it will encounter on its extraordinary journey from subconscious to self-conscious to superconscious... What each of us call an ‘I’ (the proximate self) is both a *constant function* and a *developmental stream*. That is, the self has several *functional invariants* that constitute its *central activity*... and this self (with its functions) also undergoes *its own development* through the basic

waves in the Great Nest (the stages): material self to bodily self to mental self to soul self to selfless Self. Especially significant is the fact that, as the locus of integration, the self is responsible *for balancing and integrating all of the levels, lines, and states in the individual* (ibid:325).

There is a strong element of continuity here, which both seeks and embraces a diversity of experience while simultaneously acting as an ordering principle in terms of integration and continual conscious development. This therefore allows for two seemingly contradictory aspects of self, stillness and motion, to coexist simultaneously (although admittedly in many cases somewhat chaotically), each empowering and playfully challenging the other in a never ending tango of cosmic beauty and grace.

In applying this framework of unity in diversity and diversity in unity to the very real and sometimes far from graceful experiences of drug users in the small town of Trondheim, Norway, I have deliberately chosen to counter what can be regarded as a widespread tendency among social scientists in the drug field to estrange themselves from the group upon which their research is based. Whether it be methodologically, rhetorically, or semantically, there is a clear dynamic of “us” and “them” generating a psychological wall of immunity from this highly sensitive topic and the individuals with which it is associated. This tendency is not uncommon in other areas of research where a positivist model is adopted; however, when it comes to illicit drugs and their users, the distance sometimes becomes so large and so overemphasized that it almost borders on the comically absurd. My own point of departure here is specifically intended not to perpetuate and widen the existing and often highly problematic gap between social scientist and drug users, but to come as close as it is methodologically possible.

However, a certain sense of detachment is still necessary in order to be able to fully embrace that reflective quality which is so essential to the anthropological pursuit of knowledge. In this respect the act of writing itself, combined with the often challenging process of deriving and reproducing meaning with clarity from all the experiences gathered in the field has definitely provided me with a welcome amount of cognitive space. The main objective here is therefore to provide distinct and honest portrayals of user experiences while avoiding the general inclination to construct a psychological barrier between “us” and “them” based exclusively on what happens to be or not to be floating through a blood stream at any given time. Accordingly, the foundation for this project is our common humanity, not primarily the discrepancies which separate us from one another but the qualities we all share, whether we want to admit it or not. Ultimately the hypothesis is that there are far more

similarities between so called users and nonusers than there are differences, and in many cases it is the similarities, not the differences, which are crucial in terms of terms of understanding even the most destructive user patterns.

Having said this, I am still reliant on some manner of being able to distinguish between different user experiences which, although reflecting a common humanity as I have stated above, are still remarkably unique when seen on their own terms. For the time being, let me continue by stating what I will not be doing. At this point I will not be presenting a meticulously structured plan for how I propose to transliterate the everyday life worlds of my participants into an anthropological text. Originally I had intended to have carefully divided groups comprised of occasional, regular and heavy users. The first group of occasional users was to be those whose use did not exceed a maximum of four drug episodes a month. The second group was those whose use was more frequent than this but less than several times a day. The third group was defined as heavy daily usage. In addition to frequency of usage, informants were to be grouped based on their drug of choice and method of administration. This is a quite common strategy among researchers, for the sake of simplicity, presentation and analysis, but unfortunately it just does not truly reflect user experiences. Firstly, many users have gone through most of these stages of use, sometimes even several times. Secondly, excessive use is very often tempered out by longer or shorter periods of moderate use, and in some cases complete abstinence, while the opposite is also certainly true. Thirdly, most users here in Trondheim and many other places rarely use only one type of drug at any given time but tend to mix several simultaneously or at least have episodes involving other drugs than their usual drug of choice. The method of administration also varies; amphetamines for example, may be injected for a period of time and then inhaled or swallowed by the same user at different periods, depending on a combination of many relevant factors.

This variety of user patterns gives a compelling reason for studying drug users in their natural setting, as well as having a longitudinal approach. In terms of research it is vital to understand user trajectories as a whole. At the start of this project I relied on the snowball sampling technique, which has already been highly developed and widely applied in the social sciences when studying hidden drug populations and sensitive topics (Zinberg 1984, Mugford & Cohen 1989, Decorte 2000). As Kemmesies (2000) has pointed out, there are several advantages with this method. First of all, there is no need for large samples. Only a few known cases are needed from the target population to start the “snowball” effect. Successive

cases are then recruited through a process of onward referral from the primary key informants and subsequent findings examined in terms of themes and patterns. In this manner, a broader sample can be provided than that of indirect indicators like overdoses, arrests, or from primarily captive user populations which tend to reflect only the problematic aspects of illicit drug use. In terms of fieldwork and informal dialogue I have engaged with countless individuals, probably over one hundred in all, while in depth interviews were conducted with ten key informants based on purposive sampling in terms of diversity and long-term experience with illicit substances.

Many of the participants in this project, and particularly those with whom I have carried out in-depth interviews, have been part of a relatively stable group of users for several years. Some of them I have known for over ten years. Since I already had several good connections and a solid reputation as someone to be trusted due to my previous fieldwork at the methadone clinic, gaining access and finding participants was hardly a problem. Living in a relatively small town (population of about 170,000) was definitely an advantage when it came to entering the field and establishing a solid network of participants. I found that the majority of users were in most cases surprisingly cooperative and extremely positive towards this project, in many cases even initiating contact with me just to become part of it. It appeared to me that among them were many who desperately wanted their story told and were delighted at the opportunity to be able to do so freely without risking criticism, judgment or incarceration.

My credibility in this field is also established by the fact that I am not completely oblivious of this world and its many landscapes and have been fortunate enough to learn the language, codes, and many unwritten rules that govern interaction in these realms long before embarking on this project. I have therefore been able to navigate less clumsily than perhaps many of my contemporaries doing drug research, since I was already relatively “streetwise” and had acquired a fair amount of street credibility based both on my own life experiences in addition to previous research. Although many different types of users are represented here, they all have one thing in common in that they are not affiliated with any type of treatment institution, even though several have had periods of severe problematic use and some of them still do. Having been able to base my research in a natural setting, that is to say mostly in the respondents’ home, out in pubs, at parties or in parks during the summer, means that interactions have been strongly characterized by an unusually high degree of openness,

sincerity and integrity. Since these are also fairly mature users in the sense that they have all had many years of experience and experimentation with illicit substances, they also possess a fairly well developed ability to reflect and comment upon their own usage.

The closest I can come to expressing what actually took place between myself and the participants of this project during fieldwork is by expanding on David Bohm's concept of dialogue. Dialogue "comes from the Greek word *dialogos*. *Logos* means 'the word' or in our case we would think of the 'meaning of the word.' And *dia* means 'through'--it doesn't mean two" (Bohm 1989: 1). Dialogue is a continual process which allows for a "stream of meaning" to flow among, through and between participants and in many cases even encourages a new level of meaning or understanding to emerge among them. This is comparable to that process which accounts for shared or public meanings to be maintained among members of a group or society. Here also the tacit dimension is highly relevant in that the unspoken level of communication is often just as relevant as that which is expressed verbally or explicitly. For this type of dialogue to occur however, several conditions must be present. First of all assumptions must be suspended by those participating, in the sense that no one view prevails over another, so the objective is not to "win" a discussion or convince others to adopt a different point of view. Secondly, there should be no hierarchy or unequal distributions of power among those taking part, nor should there be a specific agenda or program directing the flow of communication. Finally, a "facilitator" ensures that an open and "empty place" is created so that communication may flow freely and every participant can express themselves equally, irrespective of differing opinions (ibid).<sup>4</sup>

Even though each and every one of the above conditions were not strictly met during all of the communicative events (especially regarding a complete suspension of personal views and opinions), the qualities of openness, tolerance and impartiality did indeed permeate the better part of our interactions. In particular, regarding my own function during these events, my role was more as a "facilitator" than anything else, creating a warm and open space and keeping the flow of communication going as freely as possible without judging the participants' contributions, or creating a specific schema for them to follow. This approach was implemented intentionally as an alternative to the problem based research agendas commonly assumed by social scientists studying user trajectories. This type of agenda strongly affects both the types of questions asked as well as the responses received, based on a

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<sup>4</sup> See also <http://www.soapboxorations.com/ddigest/index.htm> for a short presentation of dialogue as it is discussed here.

process not unlike what Thom Hartmann (2001) has described as the failure model in modern psychology. A failure model focuses primarily on the problematic or failure aspects of a situation, gives this problem a name which in turn exerts a powerful influence on the reality of that event and the dialogue created in this context.

The failure model is well illustrated in the connection between drugs and addiction where addiction becomes a form of serious failure and the drugs in question are perceived as the causal aspect of this problem. The task then becomes trying to discover how this failure (the addiction in this case) emerged. Whether the failure is attributed to an unhappy childhood, poor socialization, society in general or a character flaw, the primary focus becomes a person's weakness and/or limitations. In many cases, due to a similar approach prevalent in society in general (in treatment institutions, among family and friends, in the media, etc) these "traits" are gradually adopted as part of that person's identity (I am an addict). These limitations and problems then become an additional form of failure and therefore the problem becomes even more "rigidified and anchored over time" (ibid.). This in turn leads to years of therapy, or in the case of drugs, treatment and rehabilitation which in many cases has little effect at all in terms of bettering the situation. Neither does the failure model do anything to further research or enlighten the "experts".

Hartmann suggests another variation, which he calls the feedback model, where instead of viewing a person's experience as "things", one regards them as just another type of feedback, or information and instead focuses on the goals a person is trying to achieve. When drug use is described in negative terms, for example, this can then be seen as an example of how a goal is not quite working out. Hartmann has pointed out, "In this worldview, all behaviour is assumed to be both adaptive and well intentioned, everything we know how to do, even those things that seem most dysfunctional, started out as attempts to accomplish some particular goal" (ibid). Every type of behaviour has at one point or another served a useful purpose, difficulties arise when certain patterns no longer serve their purpose but are still clung to as a matter of habit. Even though these habits seem to be mostly problematic, they can also be viewed as useful pieces of information, feedback or evidence about something more fundamental which isn't functioning effectively.

Although this approach is primarily aimed towards a therapeutic context, there is no reason why it cannot be applied to other types of interaction. A similar attitude was adopted towards my respondents, although at that time I was not fully conversant with "feedback

model” approaches. This attitude struck me as the most natural, constructive and friendly way of relating to people. Based on observations in the field, and the idea of intentionality, I respected the fact that people in general are quite capable of directing their own lives and initiating change once a healthy “feedback system” has been established. Building on this line of reasoning then, my main priority has not been to ask why people engage in bad or destructive behaviour, but to examine what a person is trying to achieve through a particular behavioural pattern, and whether or not this is working for them. Whether this is the most appropriate method for dealing with drug users in a natural setting remains to be seen. However, in adopting this attitude I have been able to enter into a much more expansive and productive dialogue with my respondents than if I had assumed a more conventional problem oriented perspective.

Seen in this respect, this approach is also an attempt to present a new way of thinking about drugs and those associated with their use, since it would appear that a large part of the “problem” can be related to the outmoded and ineffective conceptual models we use to describe them. Having stated this, hopefully this thesis will inspire further research which in turn may eventually play a large part in promoting more realistic policy options and treatment solutions for those most severely afflicted by destructive user patterns. Informants have not been separated into groups, but been distinguished by different recurring themes and patterns of use that seem to be most relevant to their experiences over time. During the course of the investigation several central themes emerged which will be explored throughout this thesis. Exit and entry processes will also be a part of this inquiry, as well as the question of addiction, or more compulsive use, although this is structured more in accordance with the feedback model outlined above.

The element of discovery and exploration is favoured over any attempt to maintain rigid theoretical constructions or seek final verification of propositions, so in many respects this is a continual work in progress. The primary goal is to provide an honest yet critical investigation that truly reflects user experiences, while at the same time endeavouring to bridge the gap that superficially separates “us” and “them” and conceals that common ground which connects us all. In choosing to walk through this particular doorway this is also a journey that involves paradoxes and contradictions. Including these elements in this project is based on a conviction that it is only by embracing and welcoming this aspect of humanity that we can hope to transcend it and perhaps even gain a glimpse of a greater view. Finally,



although the inspiration for this exploration has in many respects been that mysterious presence of an absence, it is a presence which is very much alive, “invisible and insistent as a fire of thorns in the wind”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Full quotation: “I haunted the city of your dreams, invisible and insistent as a fire of thorns in the wind” – St.-John Perse, *Anabasis*. In Burroughs, W.S. (1995): *My Education: a book of dreams*. London: Picador.

## Chapter

# 3

### Framework for Interpretation

*Behind every myth lies a simple story, a common theme, a set of motifs that span the world. At the root of these motifs are the trials of life, and at the heart of the story, the hero. You are that hero.*

Joseph Campbell

#### 3.1 - Navigating the terrain

The following four chapters will primarily be concerned with the lives and experiences of my respondents and how they express and articulate many different aspects and manifestations of what I have referred to as a phenomenology of intoxication.

Phenomenology is used here to emphasize the primacy of conscious user experiences and the role of intentionality as it relates to patterns of drug use and the role intoxication plays. The aim is to present these different user voices in all their complexity and uniqueness while simultaneously allowing for a processual representation that both captures and exemplifies the continual dynamic between agency and communion, self and other, as it is articulated throughout recurring themes. The voices will therefore mostly speak for themselves but are presented thematically so as to maintain a sense of continuity and movement as this is expressed through embodied intentionality, the guiding force behind many of these journeys.

Although some of the experiences and reflections may seem rather extreme, they are actually not so very different from the realities many young people today are facing as they approach adolescence, and seek to break out of the protective shell of childhood. These chapters present the voices of children from the 60's and 70's who have been to the underworld and survived to tell the tale. It should be emphasized that the majority are highly resourceful and well adjusted adults now, several with teenage children who are already embarking on their own journeys of discovery. A few of them are still struggling in the underworld but are nevertheless remarkably lucid after years of hardship and frustration. In these cases I feel that their battle only adds a sense of profundity and urgency to their message. I discovered early on in my research that there isn't always a rational correlation between destructive patterns and a user's ability to reflect over them. This is perhaps one of the most frustrating aspects of addiction. One can be highly enlightened about practically

every aspect of one's compulsive behaviour, yet do it anyway. This can be seen to apply to all addictions, whether it be sex, gambling, shopping or food, and not only those triggered by compulsively ingesting various types of mind altering substances.

We are born, we live and we die. What we do in between these stages may vary greatly, but whatever we decide to call the actions and choices made during the course of that time, they are usually aimed at creating an optimal state of being, either for ourselves and/or perhaps for significant others. Consensus reality presents us with a set of acceptable choices, the norm so to speak, for how to navigate this world in a respectable manner based on the socio-cultural context within which one finds oneself at any given time. Yet despite years of socialization into a mainstream culture, there comes a time when many of us find ourselves making choices that do not necessarily reflect conventional codes of conduct, or perhaps even directly oppose them. Not surprisingly, society may react by condemning these actions, and in many cases even attempt to implement a series of preventive measures designed to minimize similar occurrences. This is both normal and necessary seen from a collective perspective. However, if individual actions are to be truly understood and not just flatly condemned due to their perceived dubious nature, a deeper investigation entails putting conventional ethics aside for the time being, and regarding these actions as strategies reflecting personal intentionality in a complex world. These strategies are implemented by conscious human beings for many different reasons, often connected with a need to create something of value, maintain it or to regain something which might have been lost or missing for a very long time.

One important point to remember in this regard is that even the most destructive behavioural patterns often started out as useful strategies at a certain point in time. Affirming that there may at times lie a rational, even constructive strategy behind illicit consumption is perhaps treading on dangerous ground with respect to those who might view including this aspect of user perspectives as a another form of romanticizing illegal behaviour. However, it is essential to investigate this commonly overlooked dimension in order to bridge the gap between professional and folk models with regards to unconventional behaviour in general and in particular that which includes the ingestion of mind altering substances. Furthermore, considering that there is such a great diversity between user types, experiences and backgrounds, this seems like the only realistic point of departure. The use of strategies applies to every one of us, regardless of our destructive patterns. We are all navigators in our own socio-cultural landscapes, and the strategies we implement have, or at least had, a function at

some point in time. In this regard it may often be more productive to focus on the goals we are attempting to achieve before getting all hung up on our failings, to identify our strengths before magnifying our weaknesses.

Destructive user patterns will of course be included in this inquiry but they are not the main point of focus since they are regarded as part of a far deeper process as opposed to being the main process itself. Seen from this perspective, although the respondents may differ with regards to their personal narratives and the reasons given for embarking on their individual journeys, there is one theme which has emerged time and time again; one story which ties them all together and somehow embodies a common quest. If we can entertain the possibility that there may be a force or will which propels one towards further development, higher stages of realization, or an ever expanding quality of being alive, then the somewhat foolish or unconventional choices made from time to time can be seen as an attempt to accommodate that force, or will, within individual constraints. This force is what will be referred to here as intentionality, or the 'will to power' that Nietzsche spoke of, which guides and propels agency as an active, expressive and conscious life force in both inner and outer worlds.

The aim is obviously not to belittle the harsh consequences that may occur as a result of some individual choices, but to point out that there is a vital distinction between the force or will that navigates and the actual navigating itself. Put slightly differently, incorporating intentionality implies that perhaps we are more than the sum total of our choices and actions, and having said this, it can be observed that the freedom to choose is perhaps one of the greatest challenges many face in this day and age. With freedom comes responsibility and with responsibility there is fear, fear of failure, fear of criticism, fear of loss and fear of change, to name just a few. Very often, the fear associated with emerging out of the cocoon of a destructive pattern is far more terrifying than the discomfort of slowly withering away in that familiar space. Therefore, embodying freedom fearlessly, and transcending restrictive boundaries constructively, is in many ways what the personal quest is all about. For many of us however, this journey means falling flat on our faces time and time again before finally letting go of a familiar pattern of behaviour that has been synonymous with our freedom for many years. Seen in this light, every single moment consists of a continual dynamic process of creating and recreating ourselves and our world, both through the choices we make, the interactions with which we engage and the cognitive processes which tie them all together into one coherent whole.

### 3.1 - Cycles, process and emergent consciousness

Continuing this line of thought, and to reiterate a key point in this thesis, consciousness is not regarded as a substance to be quantified and measured objectively, but a process in constant change and continual emergence which can and should be included in a scientific inquiry of this nature. To be more specific, consciousness will in this context be related to that “continuous writing and rewriting, erasing and developing of a narrative of being and identity. The individual continually defines and composes the story of his or her life, and it is in the composing and in the dwelling (to themselves and to others) that consciousness arises and dwells” (Rapport & Overing 2000: 72). This in turn hints at a dynamic relationship between inner and outer realities, a continuous movement where ‘intention’ then has a primary role to play in terms of;

relating consciousness to itself and to otherness for the purpose of coming to know it, and be it, in relation to others. Consciousness is thus both inner- and outer-directed; it possesses ‘open closure’, in Ong’s words (1977:338). Moreover, being a process of becoming, something which attains knowledge via cognitive movement between ‘itself’ and what is ‘other’, consciousness offers at least potential access from outside; as a narration of otherness, consciousness is more observable than if it were unchanging substance or thing (ibid.).

Gregory Bateson is probably the first scholar to apply and develop this relationship between consciousness and movement anthropologically (ibid.). According to Bateson, all knowledge of external events is derived from the relationship between the human brain and the phenomena it perceives (Bateson 1951). In this respect, it is neither the external events themselves, nor the brain as a separate organic entity, which is of primary importance and significance but the *relationship* between the two. The interplay of mind and matter is expressed quite clearly in his cybernetic epistemology. Here the mind is portrayed as a cybernetic system, where the division between the “physical world” and the “mental world” is not categorical but based on a contrast in coding and transmission inside and outside the body. Message pathways can also be seen outside the skin, and these as well as the messages they convey, must be integrated as part of the mental system whenever relevant. In other words, even if the territory or environment as a physical entity never enters the mind, the mind is not limited by the skin, it’s not in anybody’s head – there is circuitry at all levels of existence (Bateson 1972: 454). The suggestion that the mind develops from the entire organism as a whole is also a major theme expressed in Antonio Damasio’s book *Descartes’ Error* (1994). Here the author, a professor of neurology, argues clearly and persuasively, based on several years of neuro-scientific research, for the idea that reason and emotion are closely linked and

that the mind reflects two types of interaction: between the body and the brain, and between them and the environment.

Dreams, myths and rituals, for example, as well as art, have an integrative potential because they express deep structures of relationships, through metaphoric coding, between mind and matter. They serve as bridges between the false dualism of inner and outer worlds and act as conceptual mediators between the two. Understood from this perspective, metaphors can express both structural similarity and significant relationships; they function as mediating elements and analogic codes that create a “pattern” by connecting different levels of reality in a given context, from which meaning can then be derived. The importance of these functions can hardly be underestimated, as Bateson himself writes “mere purposive rationality unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dream and the like, is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life... life depends upon interlocking *circuits* of contingency, while consciousness can see only short arcs of such circuits as human conduct may direct” (ibid: 146). They serve to reveal the interconnections between events, processes, thoughts and actions that make up the realities of our changing world and “present an overall context, a framework, within which the concrete actions of individuals can be placed, understood and judged” (Thaiss 1978: 13). In this regard, metaphoric coding is not only a peculiarity of language, but has a concrete role in everyday behaviour and experience as it plays an active part in structuring our perceptual and conceptual systems, and in many respects even influences our actions (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

In the previous chapter I introduced one of the paradoxes of the social sciences: we are dealing with separate individuals who have discrete navigational abilities and ways of making sense of their universe, while at the same time there is an element of universality in the sense that shared meanings are both possible, and in many ways necessary, in providing the foundation for our growth and development as unique individuals. This paradox has resulted in two major schools of thought regarding social life and behaviour, where on the one hand social structure and shared meanings have precedence, while on the other hand the individual as a distinct entity becomes the centre of attention. According to Bateson however, it is the relationship *between* inner and outer worlds which is primary, and a dualistic split of the two is not only misleading, but in the long run can even result in pathologies on both micro and macro levels. This applies not only to the relationship between internal and external events,

but also to the relationship between different levels of consciousness within individuals themselves.

A similar point has been made by Wilber (1995) in terms of highlighting the importance of managing and resolving the tension between what he has called agency and communion, where too much of one without the other will inevitably lead to pathology expressed as either alienation and repression or a loss of integrity and autonomy. In either case, it is the successful resolution of the frequently conflicting tension residing between these two opposing forces that is critical in life. This applies to the relationship between conscious and subconscious ways of knowing (expressed through myth, dreams and metaphor as opposed to rational thought processes) and to the relationship between self and other manifesting in the paradoxical needs for agency and communion. There is a continual dynamic movement between different levels of knowing (conscious/rational vs. subconscious/tacit) and different levels of reality (inner/self vs. outer/other) which together create the dance of life. The study and exploration of the movement of opposites, and how it affects social life and the inner workings of the mind, is hardly new but ancient and universal. It can for instance be traced all the way back to such seemingly unrelated fields as classic Taoist philosophy regarding the dialectics of the two principles of yin and yang, the philosophy of the mediaeval alchemists on the conjunction, and finally astrology, the more esoteric predecessor of astronomy, which in many ways deals with planetary cycles of opposites in motion and the foundational significance of these polarities.

Psychotherapist Philip Levine (2003) has written extensively on this principle and how it relates to the movements that flow through our lives as expressed specifically through cycles of opposites. A cycle in this context is defined as “a process over time containing a repeating sequence of observable events that allows a structure to be articulated. Though the actual contents of a given cycle may greatly vary, its structure does not” (ibid.). There are four main phases in every cycle which Levine refers to as the “The Four Gates of Initiation” – these are based on actual planetary movements in and out of different gravitational fields which he described as follows;

1. **First gate (Birth)** - where there is a fusion, a merging, a conjoining of two elements or players, a unity of identity and an arousing of potential purpose. Here sharing the same field eventually results in a chaotic release of potential energy, an impulse towards the second gate.
2. **Second gate (Breaking free)** - represents a crisis of emergence, where the impulse acts to free itself from the confines of its origin and its ties to the past and moving away from its origins. Now it finds

itself under the influence of something else, something now pulling it forward, rather than just the force it was trying to break away from.

3. **Third gate (Culmination and reversal)** - is both a climax of all that has preceded it and an enantiodromia or metanoia, a mysterious shift in direction (no longer away from its source, but now toward) which also reverses everything, a crisis of reversal in which its original outward movement *away* from its past mysteriously turns toward an inward movement *toward* the cycle's conclusion (*metanoia*)
4. **Fourth gate (Surrendering and returning)** - mirrors the second gate, but here there is a crisis of surrender as the original impulse offers itself to the ultimate and final end of this particular cycle now heading toward the mysterium of the conjunction (*ibid.*)

The term “initiation” here then refers to any critical moment of change from one state to another, amongst the most common ones for us being; birth, adolescence, graduation, marriage, divorce, midlife, retirement, death and bereavement. The term “gate” is employed specifically to evoke a sense of passage, a journey from one realm to another where there is a critical point of transition from state to state. Since this is a deep archetypal process there are also strong feelings involved with every “gate”. Breaking free may be accompanied by feelings like grief and a fear of separation. Also, returning and integration can be accompanied by a strong fear of engulfment or losing oneself in that process. There is the challenge of making sense of the universe as one finds oneself in transition between states and not yet at home and comfortable in the next. Having some knowledge of the different gates however can provide a framework or map for self understanding and development. These archetypal stages are proposed as being universal and present in any cyclic process involving the dynamic interplay of two complementary elements. Levine mentions the phases of the moon, the alternation of day and night, the changes of the season as examples, urging us to “peel away the conditioned habitual perception” of these vital aspects of existence which are completely interwoven with our lives, to such an extent that we are like “fish in the ocean, unable to perceive the water because it is everywhere - you can see that certain vital pairs of opposites are truly the very substance in which we live” (*ibid.*).

Although this archetypal process has been expressed in many ways throughout the centuries, the challenge for us today lies in accepting and recognizing its many implications. In this way pathways which have the potential for becoming more constructive and more in tune with our own personal journey become possible. There is a tendency however to embrace the upward cycle of youth, individuation, growth and expansion, while the downward cycle of middle age, introversion and death is repressed and avoided for as long as possible, despite it being a natural and equal part of the process. The consequence of living in a world which represses such a fundamental part of our natural cycle is the inevitable appearance of a shadow representing those aspects that we would rather do without. This shadow can manifest



on many levels, both individual and collective, but in either case must be recognized, integrated and transcended in order for any further growth and development to take place. Until that time it has a tendency to demand recognition, haunt and hound us as it is projected onto the world “out there” or on a more personal level as it emerges in unpleasant dreams or projection in intimate relationships. To quote Jung; “Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning...must pay for so doing with damage to his soul” (in Levine 2003). Levine specifically mentions addiction in this context, pointing out that “Ironically, what most addictive behaviors - whether drugs, alcohol, shopping- are expressly for is to ‘get high.’ It is recognized that in order to begin wanting to recover from addiction, one must sometimes ‘hit bottom’”. There seems to be a widespread propensity to grasp at the light yet fear the dark, to want to live in the first half of the cycle when the sun is rising, yet ignore the equal beauty of the sunset where darkness is “the growing rule”.

A comprehensive understanding of cycles expressed as the dynamic interplay of opposites can serve as a good point of departure for positing an analytical framework where individuals are seen as both unique entities embodying intentionality and also as part of a larger patterned universe of shared meanings and social relations. Cycles serve as the expression of that movement which emerges out of a dynamic interplay between agency and communion. Wilber (2001) calls these cycles “fulcrums” which he defines as a series of developmental streams corresponding to the locus of identification of a self-system at any given time. During a fulcrum there is a transition from a narrower to a wider identity as the self develops and “rides a new wave of consciousness” (ibid: 131) During each “wave” there is a center of gravity which the self circles around and identifies with but must “let go of” or transcend in order to progress, resulting in a three stage process of (1) fusion-merger-identification-embeddedness, (2) differentiation-disidentification-disembedding-transcendence, and (3) integration-incorporation-inclusion. During each phase, the self-system, (the self in action so to speak) has several crucial capacities and operations which include: *identification* (with the locus of identity), *organization* (creating cohesion in the psyche), *will* (the capacity to choose within given constraints at the present developmental level), *defense* (phase-appropriate defense mechanisms), *metabolism* (the “digestion” of experience), and *navigation* (developmental choices when “riding the waves”).

These processes are activated each time the self experiences new waves in the expanding spheres of consciousness, during what Wilber calls the “1-2-3 process of

fusion/differentiation/integration”. However, each fulcrum can also generate a specific level of pathology if the process is disturbed and stagnates in any way. This is not a rigidly linear process however, because the (intentional) self is always free to regress, jump ahead, spiral or “dialectically spin on its heels” (ibid.). Here Wilber cites Plotinus in pointing out that it is “precisely because the basic levels themselves have no inherent self-sense, the self can identify with any of them” (in Wilber 2001: 133). In general however, growth will always involve “the relinquishing of a narrower and shallower level of awareness in favor of an expansion into wider and deeper and higher modes” (ibid.).

### **3.2 - The mythical journey**

The dynamic of cycles and opposites in motion as we struggle for identity and an ever expanding sense of self is also a recurring theme in many myths around the world, a universal pattern which Joseph Campbell has researched in depth and explored in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1993, first published in 1949). The major contribution of this work is the fact that it exposes the basic underlying structure inherent in all myths and stories, that in reality every myth is actually the same story only retold in an infinite variation. The mythological adventure of the hero is a universal path, a common theme or set of motifs that span the world based on a “magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation-initiation-return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (Campbell 1993: 30). The book is strongly influenced by the psychologist C.G. Jung and his notion of archetypes which are recurring characters in myths and dreams and reflect the common dramas of our lives through different characters that together represent a model or map of the human journey from birth to death. Characters like the hero, the wise old man or woman, the temptress, the devil and the nemesis are all aspects of the human psyche and often appear in dreams to provide us with clues in the form of powerful visual imagery that can be read like sign posts on our inner journey.

As mentioned earlier, Bateson (1972) has written extensively on the function of art, mythology and dreams as mediums for expressing different aspects of psychic unity. They are essential in terms of integration because through them a communicative message can be seen as both itself internally patterned and as part of a larger patterned universe. Dreams for example, connect to feelings and these feelings arise out of patterns of relationships between self and other, and self and the environment whereby these patterns are expressed symbolically through metaphor. Dreams, art, myth and ritual are all forms of primary

processes where fantasy and reality merge and conscious and unconscious elements are expressed through metaphoric coding to integrate inner and outer worlds and different levels of reality thereby creating a meaningful framework for our conceptual and perceptual systems. This explains why stories based on the monomythological model have such a wide and powerful appeal that can be felt by anyone as they are based on deep psychological truths. They reflect universal concerns and are derived from the collective unconscious to provide us with keys and tools for navigating the labyrinth of trials and tribulations that compose this enigma called life.

The primary function of myth and ritual has always been “to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward” (Campbell 1993: 11). Unfortunately, they are not as prevalent today as they once were and some consider this to be one factor that contributes to “the very high incidence of neuroticism” amongst us following this decline (ibid.). Campbell, like Levine, has observed a widespread and disturbing modern tendency to cling to youth and the splendour of the rising sun, to “remain fixated to the unexorcised images of our infancy and hence disinclined to the necessary passages of our adulthood” (ibid.). He uses the United States as an example writing that here “the goal is not to grow old, but to remain young; not to mature away from Mother, but to cleave to her” as “husbands are worshipping at their boyhood shrines...still on the search for love...in our popular, vanilla-frosted temples of the venereal goddess under the make-up of the latest heroes of the screen” (ibid: 12). In addition, industrialization, globalization and fragmentation have created a situation today where mythologies no longer provide a stable set of meanings and symbols. In fact the problem today is precisely the opposite of what it was in more stable periods. “Then all meaning was in the group, in the great anonymous forms, none in the self-expressive individual; today no meaning is in the group - none in the world: all is in the individual. But there the meaning is absolutely unconscious. One does not know towards what one moves” (ibid: 388). To what extent there is no meaning whatsoever in the “self-expressive individual”, is debatable. Even among the most traditional tribal societies individuals still have self-consciousness and meaning creation as a consequence of that. Nevertheless, that there has been a major shift from more collective types of consciousness towards a more specialized individualistic type of knowing and meaning creation is quite evident. The hero today therefore has different needs and functions, the most essential being to render the modern world more “spiritually significant”, “to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the co-ordinating soul” and make it

possible “for men and women to come to full human maturity through the conditions of contemporary life” (ibid.).

### **3.3 - Narrative and the four gates**

In essence then, in many respects today we create our own myths; there is no single culturally prescribed script to follow so we have to write our own and in so doing we become both the playwright and the main character in our own dramas. Seen in this light, personal narrative has perhaps replaced myth in terms of the tool most regularly employed to make sense of our world. Although narrative has always had an important function in different cultures throughout time, it has become much more personalized and private. Instead of communicating collective truths and meaning, today narrative mediates contemporary reality and transforms “the potential discord of humanly experienced time: the experience at once of fragmentation, contingency, randomness and endlessness” (Rapport & Overing 2000:284). The crucial mystery today is not the stars or the gods nor the plants or the animals, but man himself as the centre of gravity shifts towards a modern hero who can no longer rely on the security and direction provided by the customs of his clan but must venture forth alone, for;

the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding. ‘Live,’ Nietzsche says, ‘as though the day were here.’ It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so everyone of us shares the supreme ordeal - carries the cross of the redeemer - not in the bright moments of his tribe’s great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair (Campbell 1993: 391).

The personal experiences that follow in the next four chapters are just a few examples of the many seekers in search of the light for the “lost Atlantis of the co-ordinating soul”, of embarking on a journey in search of meaning and identity, and trying to recapture some of the magic which was lost with modernization and the corresponding demystification of the world. They are different stories, unique in their own way yet beneath the variety of events there emerges a similar pattern that repeats itself, an underlying theme which speaks of a common quest and a shared vision. Although each story is unique, there is a sense of having been to the same foreign country, some travelled quite easily and had little difficulty navigating their way through, while others were plagued with obstacles from the start. Some made it back easily, others never returned, while a few still travel easily or not so easily between both worlds. Bauman (1995: 86) has employed the metaphors of “pilgrimage” and “wandering”

specifically to describe the construction of identity in today's "media and technology saturated postmodern condition" (in Ikinen 2005: 211);

The desert-like world commands life to be lived as pilgrimage. But because life has been already made into a pilgrimage, the world at the doorsteps is desert-like, featureless; its meaning is yet to be brought in through the wandering which would transform it into the track leading to the finishing line where the meaning resides. *This "bringing in" of meaning has been called "identity building."* The pilgrim and the desert-like world he walks acquire their meanings *together*, and *through each other*. Both processes can and must go on because there is a distance between the goal (the meaning of the world and the identity of the pilgrim, always not-yet-reached, always in the future) and the present moment (the station of the wandering and the identity of the wanderer) (ibid.).

Narrative is the medium through which this "pilgrimage" is expressed in terms of how the respondents, as active conscious agents "wandering" through different socio-cultural landscapes, give meaning to their experiences. Narrative can be defined as the practice of "writing" social reality, "the telling (in whatever medium, though especially language) of a series of temporal events so that a meaningful sequence is portrayed – the story or plot of the narrative" (Kerby 1991 in Rapport 2000:283). It is through narrative that individuals make sense of their world by temporally experiencing reality as it "records and recounts, defines, frames and, orders, structures, shapes, schematizes and connects events" but in so doing it also "assures human lives of direction and growth" (Rapport 2000: 284.). The aspect of consciousness as movement is especially pronounced in narrative as it relates to the process of time in human lives;

We humans are temporal beings, in short, with our perceptions, understandings and identities embedded in an ongoing story. Our conscious lives constitute dramas in which our selves, our societies and our reference groups are central characters, characters whose significance we interpret even as we live out their stories: 'Narratives are a primary embodiment of our understanding of the world, of experience, and ultimately of ourselves...It is in and through various forms of narrative employment that our lives -...our very selves – attain meaning' [Kerby 1991: 3ff]. This is a never-finished project, and our conscious lives are taken up with self-narrating, with continuously rewriting, erasing and developing the definitions of our own stories (ibid: 285).

Many postmodern interpretations of narrative conceive of meaning as creative "but only in terms of pre-existing and prescriptive categories", so that we can merely hope to "narrate ourselves in and into socio-cultural space. Even in our autobiographies, 'the ultimate function...is self-location...in the symbolic world of culture'"(Bruner & Weisser 1991 in Rapport 2000: 288). Considering the current scope of individualism in contemporary society, a far more suitable, productive and valuable approach however might be one which gives more precedence to the role of creativity, individual consciousness and movement in narrative, not unlike the theoretical stance taken by Rapport (1997 & 2003) and Cohen (1994). This analytical approach seeks to explore the relationship and interconnections between agency and structure as opposed to adopting one perspective over another. The aim

here is to hopefully avoid a common problem arising from arguments that award primacy to language *per se* which is to disregard the fact that individual experience is unique, subjectivity complex, not to mention the “rich subtleties of the relationship between form and meaning” (Rapport & Overing 2000: 288). Personal narratives will in this context therefore be regarded more as an expression of these subtleties, where the construction of meaning “exhibits an originality and artistry which places them beyond the overdetermination of the language in which they are written, the collective, [and the] public forms which they employ; they are affected by these latter, in varying measure, but in no ways effects of it” (ibid: 289).

### 3.4 - The map

Identity construction in this postmodern age of increasing globalisation, information technology and media has received increasing attention in research and debate, in many ways being “a central part of the *Zeitgeist* at the turn of the millennium” (Inkinen 2005: 209). The “postmodern nomads wander between unconnected locations...Its postmodern followers, who enjoy the networks and threads of the information society are the *stroller*, *vagabond*, *tourist*, and *player*” (ibid.). To illustrate this “nomadic journey”, the concepts of the monomyth, gates, and fulcrums are combined here to create a map that will serve as a common background for each respondent, expressing the relationship between agency and communion, yet simultaneously allowing for the “originality and artistry” that is so characteristic of personal narratives. Although the manner in which these “wanderers” have chosen to navigate this terrain varies widely, as well as the reasons for being there, they have all passed through similar territory and are in this respect also undergoing a parallel process of discovery during challenging times. The gates are passed through at different times for different reasons, and as with all journeys there will be thresholds to cross and obstacles to overcome, although these too may vary from individual to individual.

The four main gates can be assigned to two core types of movement, one outwards and away while the other is moving inwards and returning to the source, although considerably transformed by the journey itself. The outward movement can be compared to what Wilber refers to as agency, where there is an urge to break free towards autonomy and independence, sometimes accompanied by a regressive pull to stay embedded or submerged. The inward movement is similar to his concept of communion, which seeks to fuse, integrate and merge. Essentially then, the map of the gates is a visual depiction of the fundamental relationship between the two opposing forces of agency and communion (Wilber), also known as Turner’s

two “antagonistic principles” and “primordial modalities”, of structure and creativity, which in turn was inspired by Sartre’s dialectic between “freedom and inertia” (in Rapport 1997: 38). This cycle depicts the transitions that often accompany the urge to merge and the need to separate along with different styles of resolution possible along the way.

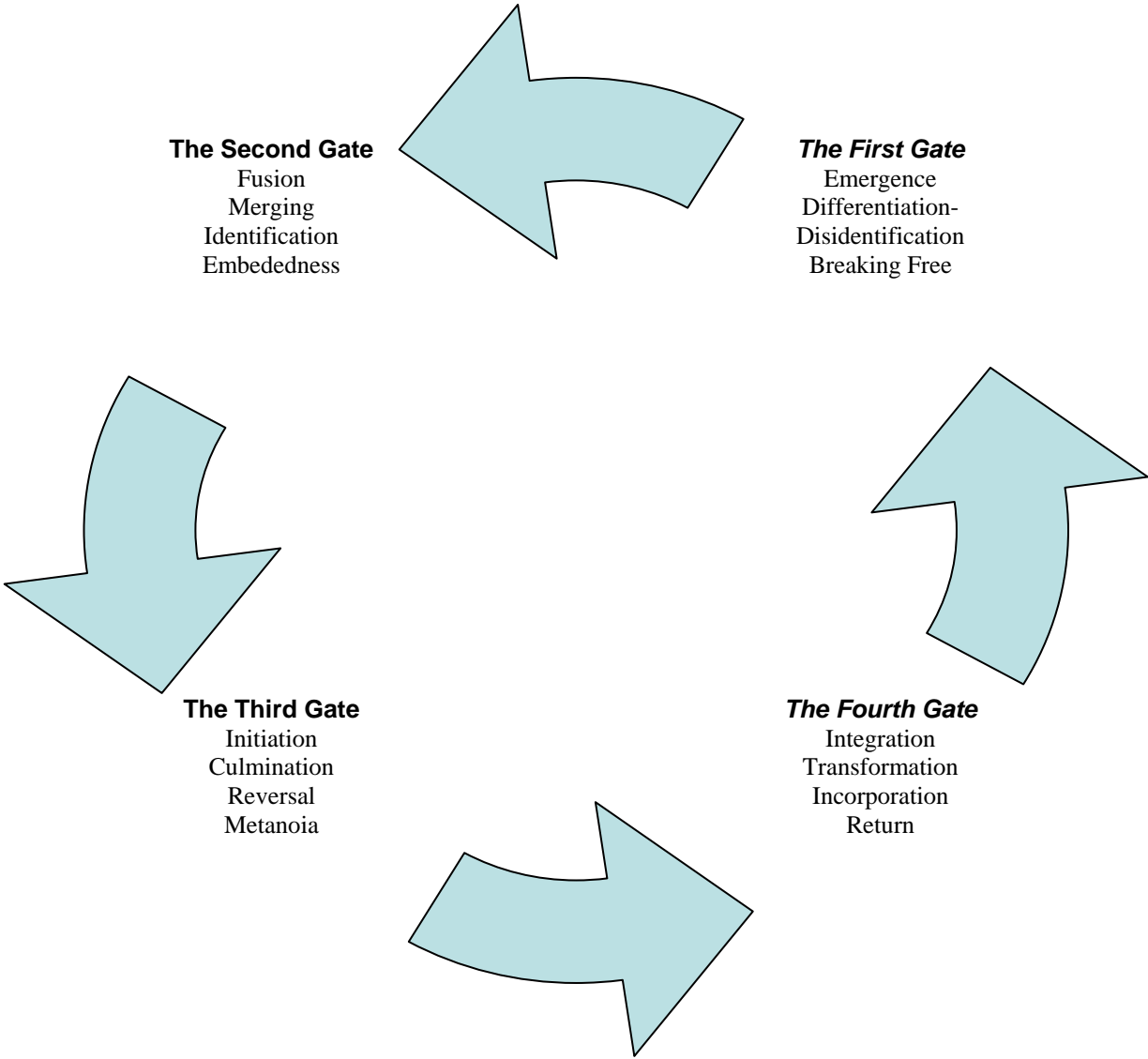


Figure 1 *The Four Gates and the Monomyth*

This journey, like most journeys, begins at home, that place of departure from which everyone must at one time or another break free. In some respects this is the womb, although not in a literal sense but more in a symbolic one, representing the foundation from which we set out into the world. There is an element of sharing and bonding, as is often the case during the first few years of ones life, of creating a sense of security, of belonging and familiarity. In

terms of the ongoing dialectic between self and other, home is a good example of how that aspect of place combined with relationships with significant others can become such an important part of who we are. Socially, culturally and existentially, home is a powerful and inseparable component of the concept of identity, a concept that is often just as inclusive as it is exclusive, creating a distinct sense of who does and doesn't belong. Home, however, is not what it once used to be in terms of providing the ultimate shelter, a sanctuary of stability and permanence. Even though there are fortunately still places that we warmly refer to as "Home Sweet Home", there seems to be a growing trend of movement and fluctuation underlying this sacred space. "Emigration, banishment, exile, labour, migrancy, tourism, urbanisation, and counter-urbanisation are the central motifs of modern culture; being rootless, displaced between worlds, living between a lost past and a fluid present, are perhaps the most fitting metaphors for the journeying modern consciousness" (Rapport 1997:69).

Modernity has accomplished many far-reaching transformations, but it has not fundamentally changed the finitude, fragility and mortality of the human condition. What it has accomplished is to seriously weaken those definitions of reality that previously made that human condition easier to bear. This has produced an anguish all its own... In their private lives individuals keep on constructing and reconstructing refuges that they experience as 'home'. But, over and over again, the cold winds of 'homelessness' threaten these fragile constructions (Berger 1974 in Feuerstein 1991: 168).

Home is not only something we move away from but also something we move towards, through continuously moving between different "habitations of reality". From this perspective, individuals are also "at home in personal narratives which move away from any notion of fixity within a common idiom, and their identities derive from telling moving stories of themselves and their world-views" (Rapport 1997: 76). Consequently, our sense of identity today also seems to reflect a similar sense of fluidity and transience, or an attempt to accommodate that force while we fumble for footing in a world gone slightly wobbly.

It becomes ever more urgent to develop a framework of thinking that makes the migrant central, not ancillary, to historical process...An authentically migrant perspective ...might begin by regarding movement, not as an awkward interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but as a mode of being in the world (Paul Carter in Rapport 1997: 64)...And that is the basic relationship between identity (knowledge, perception) and movement: the universal way in which human beings conceive of their lives in terms of a moving-between – between identities, relations, people, things, groups, societies, cultures, environments – as a dialectic between movement and fixity. It is in and through the continuity of movement that human beings continue to make themselves at home. Finally, they recount their lives to themselves and others as movement: they continually see themselves in stories, and continually tell the stories of their lives. (ibid: 77).

The "migrant perspective" outlined above is particularly suited to an exploration of a conscious phenomenology of intoxication, since it both embodies and expresses that ongoing dialectic between agency and communion, or Turner's "formal fixities of social structure and the fluid creativity of liminoidal 'communitas'" (Rapport 1997: 37). In some respects, this is



perhaps even where the essence of such a phenomenology might lie. What could be a greater act of defiance, when faced with a collective consciousness that demands conformity, than to transcend that consciousness altogether the only way many people know how, which is to “get high”?

Repeatedly seeking out forbidden states closes one gate and opens another, it’s “thank you and goodbye” as one of my respondents put it. This in itself may be one reason why it is perceived as such a dangerous and polluting act by those in positions of authority. There is always the risk that some may close the gate to the “good society” permanently, never to return. If however, as Edmund Leach wrote (1977: 19-20), the essence of being human is to resent the domination of others and the dominion of present structures (in Rapport 1997: 36), then getting high can indeed be regarded as just one expression of this natural proclivity. Seen in this light perhaps human beings are all in some ways “criminals by instinct”;

predisposed to set their creativity against current system, intent on defying and reinterpreting custom. Indeed, it is the rule-breaking of “inspired individuals” which ever leads to new social formations and on which cultural vitality depends. And yet the hostility of creativity to systems as are means that its exponents are likely to be initially categorized and labelled as criminal or insane – even if their ultimate victorious overturning of those systems’ conservative morality precipitates a redefining as heroic, prophetic or divine... (ibid.).

A Swedish documentary I saw a few years ago about Kato, a heroin addict, made a strong impression on me because Kato died while the documentary was being made. It had followed him through rehab, work training and all the way back to what appeared to be the good life. Kato did quite well for almost a year and then things went downhill again, and to cut a long story short, he went back to heroin and eventually died of an overdose. One of the last things he said in the documentary before he died was; “Life must be more than this, more than eating, sleeping and working, there must be more”. He just couldn’t come to terms with the drudgery of every day life, so he said “thank you and goodbye”, quite literally in the end. Many people perhaps have a hard time seeing anything “creative” let alone “heroic, prophetic or divine” in shooting up heroin, which is understandable because the intentional creativity does not lie in the act itself, but on a far deeper level. It lies in the refusal to accept the status quo, the “formal fixities of social structure”. It is an attempt to navigate away from that which is perceived as a stale and stagnant state and achieve “more”. Heroin has so much power precisely because it seems to provide that “something more” so completely and so effectively, so completely and effectively in fact that many find themselves left with nothing else. Here however it is very important to distinguish between intentionality or the ‘will to power’ within the navigator and the actual navigating itself, because it is only in so doing that one can hope

to truly understand the strategic allure of a drug like heroin. The only thing heroic about heroin is what it promises and perhaps even delivers all too well, total escape.

The Nobel Prize winning poet and essayist Octavio Paz wrote in *Alternating Current* that “Drugs snatch us out of everyday reality, blur our perception, alter our sensations, and, in a word, put the entire universe in a state of suspension” (In Plant 1999: 4). This may apply to all drugs, but obviously some drugs work better than others and people have personal and social preferences when it comes to choosing their particular “high”. So whether people decide on uppers or downers, hallucinogenics or pharmaceuticals, ecstasy or alcohol or perhaps even a combination of them all, it essentially amounts to the same thing – “the acquisition of states of mind” (Walton 2001: 15) . This then is the difference that makes all the difference, as Bateson might have said. Intoxication is in this respect an incarnation of anti-structure, it is anarchy ingested because it has the quality of going beyond the established normative reality by transcending it all together.

All significant highs have this potential, from falling in love to communion with nature and mystical experiences. With illegal drugs however, this potential isn't just a potential anymore, it is an actuality because in addition to offering a hurried departure from everyday ordinariness these substances are forbidden and hence so is the corresponding state of mind. Here one is both breaking the rules while simultaneously breaking away from that consciousness which formed those rules in the first place, presuming that prohibition policies were in all probability not created by authorities on drugs. In this respect forbidden forms of intoxication serve as highly suitable catalysts for what Camus described as the “essential rebellion”, the same concept that Leach drew upon when he wrote about humanity's “criminal instinct”. Being “out of it” is therefore the ultimate act of disobedience, not only does the drug fiend not want to play by the rules, he or she wants to play a different game all together. It's thank you and goodbye as agency attempts to transcend communion, yet whether or not it succeeds, to what extent and at what price, remains to be seen in the narratives that follow.

There are obviously many ways to inhabit this world, and many different styles of utilizing one's creative faculties when it comes to resolving the dilemma posed by the dual modalities of free will versus individual constraints. Whichever strategy one chooses to employ however, there will nevertheless always be an intention underlying the life choices one makes, and that intention is in itself an expression of creativity. This investigation will therefore explore these different creative strategies in terms of what they are attempting to

accomplish and to what extent they succeed or fail in achieving this aim. By relying on narratives, and situating these within a dynamic or cyclic framework for interpretation, it will be possible to tell these stories from a point of view that is both unique yet simultaneously embedded within a larger context that is familiar to most of my respondents. Hopefully this will establish a good point of departure for a conscious phenomenology of intoxication that truly reflects user experiences, while also allowing for a deeper appreciation of the wider patterns, processes or “algorithms” underlying these experiences. In this manner, the approach outlined here may provide a fruitful alternative to the more traditional perspectives and serve as a constructive supplement to the previously established knowledge in this field.

## Chapter

# 4

### The First Gate – Departure

*People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.*

Joseph Campbell

#### 4.1 – Alexis

Alexis grew up in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in Trondheim; her father was a millionaire and her mother an actress. It seemed to me that she had certainly inherited the brains and beauty of both, yet as a teenager, not unlike many other young girls on the verge of puberty, she felt plagued by loneliness and insecurities. Up until the age of thirteen she had always been a “good girl”, studious and in many ways living up to parental expectations. She had always assumed that everyone enjoyed similar standards of wealth and comfort, but then one day a friend took her to visit an extremely poor family of six children with no indoor bathroom or hot water and an alcoholic mother on top of all that. “Everything changed that day”, she told me, “the way I perceived the world, all the values and attitudes I had been taught, they just didn't fit with this reality and the injustice of it all. I became very defiant and rebellious practically over night”. This defiance was to lead her down an extremely dark valley of addictions eventually culminating in a fatal overdose not so long ago.

Just a few months before she died she told me that to her, life as a drug addict was in many ways a liberation from the superficial life of luxury that her parents had lived. “If it hadn't been for drugs”, she said, “I would probably have turned anorexic because the predisposition was definitely there”. She called her defiance a kind of survival mechanism and said that that ironically, having to struggle with an extremely challenging existence as a drug addict somehow helped her to reflect over the essentials of life, again and again, to discover a deeper reality behind the appearances. This was something which had not really been an issue growing up in a family where image, money and status were prioritized while

depth and meaning never really even entered the agenda. When I asked her if she ever regretted using drugs she said;

No, I can't say that I regret my life. What I regret are those things that involve my son, and that's quite a lot. That I must say. He has suffered a lot. My living with a psychopath didn't exactly help either. But there's no point in regretting anything, what's done is done, who am I supposed to blame anyway? I don't see my life as ruined, we make choices all the time, big choices little choices, whether we go to the bathroom now or later, or go to the store, we make choices each and every day. It's not about blaming "the others".

Drugs became an alternative to what Alexis perceived as a false world with no real substance or meaning, like Kato she refused to accept the way things were and embarked on her own journey in search of "a deeper reality". She called it a "survival mechanism", although on many occasions she knew that it might one day cost her her life. In many ways she did identify with drug addicts, although unlike many I've talked to she seemed much more open to contemplating the role that choice and intentionality played in her life. As she put it; "we make choices all the time... we make choices each and every day". Yet tragically what began as a creative and defiant impulse eventually turned into a deadly destructive force.

At first glance her story is perhaps not original or different from many other stories we hear, a good girl from a good family turns to drugs, and it's all downhill from there. However, this is only part of the whole story. Alexis was one of the liveliest, strongest most courageous women I've had the pleasure of getting to know. She had incredible wit, charm and a smile that could brighten the gloomiest days even after twenty years on drugs. She certainly didn't look or dress the part in fact nothing about her said "drug addict", except maybe when she spoke about the plight of other addicts, because if there was one thing she cared about strongly it was all the other addicts still on "death row". In many ways she appeared healthier than many well adjusted adults, and there were really no clues suggesting that this might be the last time I was to see her. In fact the only thing that seemed slightly amiss in her world was a strong sense of loneliness, although when asked about this she said that she liked to keep to herself, and after so many years as an addict it was difficult to make friends with people who didn't share the same past.

As she put it; "My goal is just to be able to have as good a life as I possibly can, which means being in touch with nature again, animals and peace of mind... anyway I like myself and have learned to care for myself because no one else is going to. I protect myself a lot more in relation to others, I can't let anybody in, I can't help everybody on this earth. I used to say yes to everyone and try to help everyone but now I just don't do it anymore, people

suck you dry”. At that point in life, making new friends might be a hassle in itself; it takes a long time to build up real trust and reveal who you are when you’ve been betrayed so many times before. She came by for a cup of tea once and we talked about relationships and different kinds of problems that can arise and I remember how much she looked forward to moving to the country again and maybe even getting another dog. Everything seemed to be going well, she wasn’t doing drugs all that much and actually enjoyed being clean. When I heard that she died a few months later I really had a hard time digesting it, and it certainly made me question many things that I might not have under different circumstances, including my own academic role and motivation. In the end I concluded that the only way I can really honour her is by telling the story behind her story so completely that hopefully some light will shine through and maybe even reflect the life that I always saw shining through her. Her personal narrative ends here, but the story continues through the lives of all those others like her, searching for a deeper reality, and a meaningful way to relate to themselves and their world.

## **4.2 - On the brink of liminality**

Childhood is in many respects a journey of discovery and exploration as we are initiated into the ways of the world. Adolescence is often characterized by a somewhat awkward and self conscious entry into the universe of sex and gender as well as a heightened sense of individuality which usually accompanies this. By adulthood most of us have developed a more stable sense of self and the world we inhabit, although, fortunately in many cases the urge to grow and evolve by no means stops there. Seen in this light it is perhaps not surprising that the very first significant encounters with different forms of intoxication usually take place during the teens and young adulthood, during those first tentative attempts at mastering the gift of freedom and becoming. Erin Sullivan (2000) has written extensively on this particular stage of development in an article entitled “Icarus and Persephone - Adolescence: a psyche in progress”<sup>1</sup>, combining insights from the latest neurological research with themes found in ancient myths. The theme of conscious individuation is emphasized in relation to how it is expressed at this critical phase of maturation and brain development.

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<sup>1</sup> From [http://www.erinsullivan.com/articles/Icarus\\_and\\_persephone.htm](http://www.erinsullivan.com/articles/Icarus_and_persephone.htm)

Citing neuroscientist Sandra Witelson, she writes; “The teenage brain is a work in progress”, and therefore “the rather unstable aspects of a teenager’s behaviour can be directly linked to his or her ‘work in progress’ ... that is, his or her literally fluctuating neuronal discharges, linkages and chemical flows” (ibid.). In many respects it is specifically this aspect of the teenage psyche that puts them into such a vulnerable position with respect to both dangers and possibilities for growth;

New technology validates the suspicion that teenagers do not have all their circuits wired, they are not fully connected. They are, indeed, transitional, liminal creatures. In ancient myth, any individual in transition was considered to be protected by the gods because they were not safe, they were without walls - between a known point of departure, and a yet-to-be achieved destination and thus, were sacred.

Liminality is a term I use to describe the status of being “in the threshold” of change; it is a state of provisional and transitional being - the word itself is derived from the Latin *limen*, threshold, and the earlier Greek, *limn* (*limne*) - sea, pond, basin, lake. Psychologically, it is a place where one is not who one used to be, but not yet who one is about to become. Sea journeys (Odyssey) are associated with Liminality (mid-life), crossings of great waters (I Ching), and so on. And adolescence is life’s first great crossing-over and thus, a state of sacredness, and one in which there is much wisdom and much madness and filled with loneliness and isolation (ibid.).

Many young people at this point find themselves in-between two states; a departure has taken place as the protected realm of childhood is left behind, but the foundations for a safe passage into adulthood have not yet been laid. Although liminality is common to anyone undergoing a major personal transition, in post industrial, postmodern societies there is a significant lack of sanctioned frameworks within which this transition can take place. This means that young people especially are left on their own to construct new identities, very often based primarily on consumption patterns and new group alliances. Furthermore, “the more a young person experiences hidden messages, fluctuating or uncertain values and double standards in the home, the more defensive and uncertain will be his response to authority... and, the more vulnerable he will be in society, where there are nothing but those questionable standards in evidence” (ibid.).

Youth cultures today are highly susceptible to the risks involved during this fragile stage of self-construction, being as they are embedded in a kind of double liminality, both in terms of their particular developmental stage biologically as well as the transient and fluid socio-cultural context which characterizes this epoch. In this context, drugs often become powerful signifiers of identity and belonging at a time when sensation seeking, risk taking and questioning authority have notoriously been the norm. As Sullivan has observed;

The most astounding aspect of adolescence is the preoccupation with mortality, while not yet taking it on board. This is the time in life when indulgence in existentialism - not as a degree course - is at its most intense. Teens are obsessed with death. This is the first time in life when the biggest questions are asked and answers sought.

Teenagers are fascinated by the dark domain of Hades. They are fearful of death, yet often seek it out consciously or unconsciously.

When we stumble across our mortality (and some teenagers have experienced the loss of a grandparent, even a parent, or family member), we are suddenly sobered. Yet it is this very fear of death that catapults the experimental adult into positions of extreme danger! The paradox! Eros and Thanatos are ensnared in a passionate grip. The life force (Eros) and the death-wish (Thanatos) are intertwined always, but the teenager has only just come upon this dialectic.

And, he or she works it overtime. Death-defying acts, the teenage wasteland, the dark night of the soul - all are the romance of the young. Give teenagers danger, give them thrills, challenges and mind-altering experiences if you can - ones which will hardwire them to perception, discrimination, emotional survival and the thrill of success. They need to find ways of aligning their wildness with their civilization - and discovering how to do that is a huge challenge to both adults and adolescents.

The neurons that link emotional centers to many other parts of the brain that produce feelings of intense pleasure are the same set of neurons that are affected by certain drugs - cocaine and methedrine and all associated compounds that are "speedy" and stimulating. Thrill-seeking is part of growing up. I call it the Stage of Immortality; when one is either walking in existential despair or leaping off tall buildings. This phenomenon is also present in the puer/puella psyche, in the psyche of adults who simply cannot get enough of the thrill of death-defying acts - either racing, hand-gliding, bungee-jumping, getting drunk or diving into myriad relationships. Dionysian acts of ecstasy are part of the religious fervour of the adolescent... and, indeed, were rituals in the ancient world geared to internalizing the gods and "standing outside oneself" - the literal meaning of ec-stacy.

The phase of immortality goes along with this "thrill-seeking" aspect of young adulthood. Pluto, the "unseen one" suddenly becomes exotic, erotic and desirable.

The release of dopamine, one of the brain chemicals, or neurotransmitters is what is responsible for these action-stimulating experiences. That shaman of all cultures employ this ecstatic method for healing and divination says much - the teenager is seeking godliness or near-godliness. This desire when over-reaching is called hubris. And, sadly, teenagers are not exempt from hubris, and as we'll see, there are mythological predecessors.

Not much has changed since Icarus flew too close to the sun and Persephone was seduced by the exotic Hades (ibid.).

Adolescence is without a doubt one of the stages in life which is most open to perilous new experiences and adventure; it seems almost as if this drive is hard-wired into our brains, although some people are obviously more prone to risk taking than others. The allure of intoxication then enters the scene more powerfully than ever, embodying the paradox of Eros and Thanatos in a "passionate grip". It is a life force in the sense that it often takes place in a life affirming setting such as parties and celebrations where everyone is meant to have lots of fun, yet the death wish lurks not far behind represented by all the warnings and potential dangers surrounding the act of intoxication itself. In many cases the fact that it is forbidden and risky makes it even more attractive for those seeking to break out of the mould of conventionality and separate from the more conservative clutch of society once and for all. Although intoxication is often associated with pleasure, the first experiences are very frequently anything but pleasant, quite the contrary. Yet time and again this is perceived as little more than an unfortunate inevitable offshoot when the call for novelty and excitement beckons with all its force. Entering this dark domain and stepping through the gates is no easy



task as it very often entails negotiating boundaries and redefining one's identity in relation to oneself and one's surroundings again and again, especially when the intoxicants are forbidden. Here is an extract from an interview with Jackie, a highly spirited and happily married mother in her thirties, successful counsellor and musician with a long history of drug use going back to her teens. This is how she recalls some of her first encounters with intoxication;

I was fourteen and it was a horrible experience, we were four girls who got a hold of some moonshine<sup>2</sup> and were home alone, I had told mum that I was going to stay over at my friends and drink alcohol, so I stayed over. I have a very open relationship with my mother, but the next day I had this terrible hangover with puking and all that. So I called my mum to come and get me. I have a very honest and open relationship with my mother, but then she made that possible.

It's like with all the other experiences, hash and alcohol, sex too, they aren't really positive the first time but we usually end up doing it again.

*(Why do you think that is?)* Excitement I guess, we seek excitement.

The first time I smoked hash I was sixteen, grew up in the suburbs and then we started hanging out more downtown, met all different kinds of people, many of whom are drug addicts now, so I guess people move in different directions. So my friend smoked hash but I didn't want to until I had asked my mum, I've always been like that, I have a really good relationship of trust with her.

So I was at this party and my friend was smoking it and I didn't then but I went home to talk to my mother about it and told her about this friend that had been smoking and that I really wanted to try it because it looked really exciting. So we talked about it for a while and she told me what she was afraid of like me getting addicted and all that, but I told her that it was very important for me to try it, I was really curious and she just said be careful that you don't get addicted to it. So we went back and forth and finally she just said well okay if it's so important to you go ahead and try it but please be careful.

So I could do it sort of with her blessings and that's always stayed with me because I always think of her and that I don't want to let her down and show her that I can get high without it affecting school and work, like I don't have to end up in the gutter just because ... well I wanted to show her that...it was the trust really.

Like when I lived in the suburbs and after I had started drinking, like all my friends would tell their parents that they were sleeping over at Mary's for example when they were really going to a party at Joe's place. I didn't want to lie to her so I always told her that, well Alice just lied to her parents and told them that they were going to Mary's place when what we are really planning to do is to go somewhere else and do this and that and I really want to go too.

So my mum thought the whole situation was really uncomfortable and told me her concerns about me going and spending the whole night with these boys, and being on my own, I was only fifteen or sixteen. So she really didn't know where I was going to be and she was afraid that I would maybe drink too much and something would happen to me. So we sat down and compromised and agreed that ok it's important for her to know where I am, so I could go to this party at Joe's place but then I had to promise to stay with Mary and my other girlfriends and at midnight I had to call home and tell her where I was, who I was with, how drunk I was and how long I was planning on staying there so that she wouldn't stay up worrying about me all night not knowing where I was.

So that was a deal I stuck to, and I really appreciated the fact that she had so much trust in me so I always told her like when I got really drunk I mean honesty is the condition on which that whole deal was based, it wouldn't have worked otherwise.

*(Did you smoke then too?)*

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<sup>2</sup> Norwegian home-made moonshine or "heimert", very strong spirits (up to 90 proof), quite common in Trondheim among both young and old.

No this was before I started smoking hash, I was about fourteen or fifteen, so it was mostly moonshine and beer, the hash came later when I was about sixteen and started hanging out in town but I continued to call her up at midnight and tell her where I was.

*(Can you tell me more about the first few times you started smoking and you were saying that it seemed exciting, why is that?)*

Well that's because it's illegal I mean that's the whole allure or force behind it, like hiding behind a shack and looking right and left and taking a big drag. Because the high itself isn't all that great especially in the beginning, you get all stressed out and a bit disoriented so it's quite simply the fact that it's illegal.

The first time I was really stupid and smoked at a party after drinking moonshine and so I got really sick and threw up and totally lost it but then at least I learned that one shouldn't mix moonshine and hash. After that we hung out around town with these boys that sold hash and visited them every day and just sat there and sat there, even though I didn't smoke every time they did but it was just the thrill of being there. Also the possibility of smoking and in the beginning we were more selective but from the age of eighteen we'd be smoking every day.

So it was mostly on weekends in the beginning, and then you tell yourself that this isn't something you do every day and we were still at school and there were all these prejudices like I'm not a drug addict and then finally that kind of wears off and you don't see the point in defending the fact that you smoke joints every other day or every day.

*(So when did the high start becoming a positive experience)*

Well at first you kind of get stressed out, disoriented and feel like you're losing control but then you start getting the giggles with friends and stuff, and the giggles are a lot of fun and it gets more like 'Wow, what a cool drug this is' but I told myself that the day I stop giggling and laughing when I smoke hash is the day I will stop...Hah, yeah right (laughs) like you make all these excuses for yourself.

*(There seems to be a bit of ambivalence here though.. like on the one hand it's ok and cool but on the other it's not ok after all)*

Well it's illegal and you always have this voice going 'I'm not a drug addict, I'm in full control', I only do it on the weekends, or as long as it's fun, always making up excuses for yourself and then you get to the point where you just say screw the excuses, I am a hash smoker.

*(So when did you arrive at that point?)*

When I was eighteen, well first there were two years of smoking only occasionally, then came two years of smoking every day but making all kinds of excuses then when I was nineteen I moved out of town and I guess that when you move to a new place you kind of take an identity with you. You arrive at a new place and are meeting new people, so you kind of have to know who you are, so I was this punk that smoked hash. It's important when you're nineteen that you kind of know who you are or broadcast who you are like in terms of how you dress, what values you have and stuff.

So I had arranged to have ten grams sent to me every other week, I didn't take any chances of being able to find anything there, I thought I was moving to this fishing village in the north of Norway. But it's got a lot to do with identity, moving to a new place and that you really need to know who you are when you're broadcasting an image, especially at that age.

Jackie's case is fairly unique regarding her close relationship with her mother, it is as if she knew she was choosing a hazardous path and didn't want to take any steps until she had received her mothers "blessings". Alternatively perhaps her mother was walking the tight rope, trying to find the difficult balance between losing her daughter and having some control or knowledge. The fact that her mother actually gave her blessings in the end is also quite

unusual, not many parents would choose to willingly release their children into the underworld like she did, but this act of trust seemed to have a major positive influence on the course of Jackie's life later on. As she put it "that's always stayed with me because I always think of her and that I don't want to let her down and show her that I can get high without it affecting school and work, like I don't have to end up in the gutter just because ... well I wanted to show her that...it was the trust really". Despite her mother's blessings she soon found herself in a dilemma regarding her own use and what she refers to as "all these prejudices" and issues of control. Although boundaries have always been a fundamental part of life, the need to become her own person and create her own identity makes them especially relevant and problematic at this stage. In this regard, staying out with her friends and later smoking hash soon developed into an essential part of that process, although not without a lot of ambivalence especially in the beginning. As she put it "Well it's illegal and you always have this voice going 'I'm not a drug addict, I'm in full control' ...then you get to the point where you just say screw the excuses, I am a hash smoker". She relates this to that aspect of herself which really needed to "know who you are when you're broadcasting an image, especially at that age", in other words, the person she was becoming and projecting out into the world.

### **4.3 - A room of one's own**

This aspect of finding out who you are and the need to become your own person are very strong among many of my respondents when they discussed their first experiences with intoxication. In light of the current lack of identity-securing systems and sanctioned frameworks for rites of passage and the corresponding postmodern project of self-construction imposed on the individual, it becomes easier to see why finding a sense of self is so important today. Intoxication in general appeals to many at this stage initially due to the danger and excitement, the fascination with Eros and Thanatos. However, choosing something that is forbidden, in addition to the inherent element of excitement, is like finding a magical sacred space, a secret delight. As Sullivan has pointed out; "One very important thing for a teenager is her own space. A temenos, if you will, a place wherein no stranger can penetrate, no enemy of the soul might pass. This is a 'room of one's own'". In this case the room created is not so much physical as it is metaphysical in the sense that it relates to finding a space for one's own

existence in a relatively crowded yet fluid postmodern landscape. Mick's debut in particular exemplifies this dual appeal of intoxication at that age;

I started to drink when I was fifteen, relatively late, that's when I started to smoke also. A friend of mine read Ingvar Anbjørnsen's "White Negroes"<sup>3</sup> and we decided to start smoking hash but it was really difficult, we didn't know anyone who smoked. We were going to a Stones concert and there I smoked for the first time and that was a good experience but it was still difficult to get more. However we had decided to smoke hash so we met this guy down by this river and mixed up the hash with this really strong tobacco and I got really sick. I was green for about an hour and walked around and felt like puking but I couldn't manage that so I drank this coke and puked that up, it was really awful.

*(Did you smoke tobacco then?)*

Yes, cigarettes, so it was the hash then, well I found out that it wasn't uncommon for that to happen and I had already made up my mind that I was going to smoke. So after that we smoked every once in a while even though we didn't get much for our money.

*(Why did you want to start to smoke hash?)*

It was this book and I don't think I would have thought about it if it wasn't for that friend, and we liked action, we went mountain climbing and climbing up on roofs in town and hiking, we liked excitement and all that. Then there was this campaign at school called 'From Trivialities to Hell'<sup>4</sup> that went something like "you steal a bar of chocolate and end up as a heroin addict", emphasizing that this is how things progressed. We had already figured out that this wasn't accurate so then you disregard pretty much everything else and you don't trust what you hear or listen to any of the warnings.

Then after a while we got to know people who smoked and that didn't fit with the picture at all. Although it wasn't all that much when we finally did get a hold of some it was a really special occasion. It was positive right away because it was exciting, not necessarily because of the effect in itself but also because you got to meet other people who smoked and there were all these stories and lots of lying and boasting, meeting people from different countries. Life is so boring when you're fifteen, there are all these things that you want to do and you aren't allowed to do anything and then finally you're part of this exciting world with people who are completely different from the family and friends you're used to. You have something that is your own too, like travelling alone.

I didn't smoke every day, but at least five times a week, depending on how much money I had. I don't think it was mainly the effect, that too, but it was mostly the social aspect and that you have friends who smoke. There was this group thing straight away. Those are the people you get to know. Partying, that was the main thing that's what I did from the age of sixteen to twenty five.

*(That didn't become problematic for you then?)*

I don't think there was any difference between who I was with my friends and at home in terms of identity. My mum found out when I was eighteen, and totally freaked out and called a shrink and my aunt and pretty much every one I knew. I found out through a friend of mine because she called the father of a friend of mine who was a shrink and this friend told me.

So she actually got reassured then because she thought I was really dropping out and everything was going to hell, but then she found out that it wasn't as dangerous as she thought. Then I was really pissed off when I got home because she had called my girlfriends parents and I wasn't allowed to stay over there anymore even though I was eighteen, so I really yelled at her when I came home. I don't think I had ever done that before I was so angry, she was crying and everything. I don't think she realised the consequences of what she had done. That was interesting though because in the end she understood that I could stand up for my self and that I also had control over what I did. I was conscious and aware of what I was doing; I didn't exactly act like this regretting sinner, so after that she never mentioned it again. I made it very clear that it was none of her business.

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<sup>3</sup> Ambjørnsen, Ingvar (1987): *Hvite niggere*. Cappelen.

<sup>4</sup> "Fra bagateller til helvete"

I also knew that I better come home with good grades and do what I had to at school, but that was no problem. After high school I worked a bit, moved to Oslo, and then decided to study again. So it never really affected my choices in terms of career or anything like that. It's not like I would walk an hour in the rain to get more hash either, it's much more of a social thing. I've always been very conscious of not letting it getting in the way, then some people are worried about meeting people after they have smoked but that's really never been a problem for me because I know that no one will see it if I don't want them to see it, so that's never been a concern.

Then I decided to try everything that I could try when I was seventeen or eighteen.

*(Why?)*

Because it's another way of perceiving reality, different states of consciousness, a different way of seeing things, the nature of intoxication is that it's another way of being and seeing, another way of existing and it's exciting. Also many of the people I knew used quite a lot of drugs but at the same time I've also seen many people who really went downhill because of that so I knew a lot about it. I didn't start using the strong stuff straight away. I saw why it really went downhill for people too, I've always been very conscious about my use. Like when I use amphetamines it's always been together with other people at parties who have used a lot of amphetamines, to stay awake and not because I have a problem, like I don't drink when I'm down either or taken ecstasy because I was sad. I use it for what it's meant to be used, to have fun.

*(So it was very explorative then? To learn more about the world and yourself)*

Yes, about my self and there was also the element of excitement, I have always had a fascination for the new and exciting, like mountain climbing or sailing in a storm but even if you climb mountains you can still use safety equipment and be careful, it doesn't mean that you're stupid.

The book that Mick refers to by Ingvar Anbjørnsen was actually a classic among the Norwegian youth culture of the eighties and early nineties, and many people I've talked to said that it played a large part in terms of the attitude they formed towards cannabis later on. It is actually about a group of outsiders, four childhood friends and their rebellion where getting high rapidly becomes both a lifestyle and means of distancing themselves from what is perceived as a hypocritical and self-righteous society. For Mick then the decision to start smoking hash is partly motivated by the need for excitement and also the desire to "have something that is your own too, like travelling alone...another way of being and seeing, another way of existing". Although his mother didn't exactly react like Jackie's in terms of sending him off with her blessings, he made it clear that "it was none of her business" still making sure that he came back with good grades so that his drug use didn't get in the way later on. Here especially one can see many levels of significant relationships at work that together form a matrix of judgment which was to have a profound impact on the development of his own personal "ontology of illegal drugs". This is a term formulated by Lalander & Salasuo (2005) referring to the meaning that young people invest in drugs, viewed from their own personal standpoints or perspectives (ibid: 6). In Mick's case as well as most of my respondents, it seems that educational programs and parental concern actually had very little

effect, even having precisely the opposite effect of that which was envisaged compared to peers and books, which played a much more influential role in terms of guidance.

One essential factor that comes up again and again in this context is the enormous discrepancy between young people's "ontology" on the one hand and the "credibility of state representations" of illegal drugs on the other. These representations are often challenged by contrary assessments among various youth cultures that are extremely critical of the arbitrary distinction created between alcohol as legal and acceptable versus other drugs classified as illegal. Therefore many reject the public messages which maintain that marijuana causes physiological and psychological difficulties, or that cannabis is a 'gateway' to heavier drugs, "a one-way road to complete failure". As a result, "Alternative definitions of illegal drugs and their consequences are constructed in and by youth cultures, which themselves are partly global products" (ibid.). Where the aim of state representations are obviously to dissuade young people from adopting such habits in the first place, the sometimes hysterical reactions of the public system (as in the "From trivialities to hell" campaign") often only widens the gap between conventional regulations and young people's own "drug ontology" further and further;

Established society (as expressed through the formal school system, newspapers, television, etc.) is keen to try and control the habits of young people. Stanley Cohen (1972/1987) coined the term "moral panic" to refer to the reaction of established society when it perceives something as presenting a major threat to social order. It responds by exaggerating the image of the threat, say a controversial style or idea, and tries to make it appear more dangerous than it really is. Echoing Zygmunt Bauman (1991), it is a matter of a "gardening society" in which the gardeners are the "rule enforcers" who will try to take away the undesirable or unacceptable by describing it as problematic, unnatural or dangerous. Established society tries to "pollute" newcomers/outside... In the early 1990's rave culture was imported from England...prompting an intense response on the part of the established society... Newspapers reported that the new youth drug was extremely dangerous ... In the 1970's and 1980's hippie and punk culture caused similar reactions. In all these cases the response to the new cultural forms and habits and the assumed cultural threat was exaggerated. But the media and the politicians failed to ask some important questions: "What kind of culture is this?"; "What does it reveal about the shortcomings of contemporary society, that is, to what is this culture a response?" Instead, established society asked: "What are the problems in this culture?" and "How do we control this culture?" (ibid: 7).

The "moral panic" approach can therefore have a very unfortunate impact on the very people it is trying to protect in terms of weakening the perceived reliability of public representations in general. As Mick put it "We had already figured out that this wasn't accurate so then you disregard pretty much everything else and you don't trust what you hear or listen to any of the warnings. Then after a while we got to know people who smoked and that didn't fit with the picture at all". This then creates the seed for one's own personal ontology to develop, often in direct opposition to what is proposed by the state. Drugs become

an alternative “identity package” with far reaching ramifications at a time when expansion is sought after on many levels, while the need for one’s own personal space, both socially and metaphysically, is acute. The publicly accepted form of intoxication, getting drunk, is often looked down upon and seen as both “primitive” and in many cases even more harmful than the alternatives available. With these new methods of exploring consciousness and different states of intoxication, the mind has become the new playground, other users are the new playmates and drugs are the keys which open the gates to this new world. Here is how Luke described this process;

My first experiences with alcohol were relatively restrained, but those that I drank with, they would drink loads until they ended up puking and shitting in the bathroom. For some reason, maybe because I grew up in a more rural environment I started to be more and more drawn to an urban lifestyle, I went to concerts and started to drink. I had a lot more freedom also after I became a student, a bit more money too, and that freedom I would use to meet and mingle with people in town.

It might be because of the music I listened to but after a while I wanted to try smoking hash, so the first time I took a drag was after a night on the town, I had moved to Oslo by then. The first thing I did after I moved to Oslo was to go to this place where I thought I could find some. It was like, now I’m definitely going to try hash it was a very conscious choice. No doubt about it, this was something I just had to try.

So then it was simple curiosity, because I felt like I was finished with one stage of my life and was ready for new experiences. Then I started reading things about it, a lot of positive things so I believed that it made me more intelligent.

*(In what way?)*

I felt like it gave me immediate insight.

*(Into what?)*

How things are connected, how people work. I remember trying LSD and that turned my head completely, there was this PC screen that was flashing and suddenly I was looking into it and thinking, ‘that’s how the world works, that’s how everything fits together’.

I didn’t know that many people who used at the time, but the people I did know were laid back open-minded people I really looked up to even before I knew they were using anything. Afterwards I started buying from this guy I was working with, I worked at this huge industrial factory, with a very industrial work ethic, it was really hard work and people had to be tough and this guy was like the only one who really looked out for me there. He took me under his wings, watched out for me and asked me how I was doing, stuff like that. Then later I found out that he smoked hash. So I saw something in these people that I couldn’t quite put my finger on, I couldn’t understand why they had these qualities which set them apart from other people but it boosted my wanting to try it.

So then I experimented a bit with acid, and I remember us thinking how extremely stupid alcohol was, we would go out pretty much completely sober with just very small amounts of acid in our system and just look at people drinking and think how incredibly stupid and foolish they were behaving. It was monkey-water<sup>5</sup>, alcohol was monkey-water. I saw that already then, without knowing what I know today about the human mind, not that I know all that much today but some things I do know and we thought that people who drank were really primitive, seriously, really primitive people. They didn’t get what it was all about. So I don’t know if it was some kind of self fulfilling prophecy or internal suggestion mechanism in our group maybe but it boosted my development in that direction

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<sup>5</sup> ”Ape-vann” in Norwegian.

*(So you developed a kind of aversion for alcohol then and started to seek out other types of intoxication?)*

Yes, because I felt that they gave me something completely different, as if there were two completely different directions. Alcohol made me dumber and LSD made me smarter, I was convinced of that at the time.

In Luke's description, expansion and exploration are emphasized as well as the discovery of individuals who had qualities that really "set them apart from other people". In this context drugs like LSD were perceived as making him "more intelligent" compared to other people who "didn't get what it was all about", drank "monkey-water" and looked "incredibly foolish and stupid". We see a complete reversal here of the legitimate or conventional approach in that alcohol is perceived as the threat, a highly unsophisticated means of stupefying and dulling the senses, compared to LSD and cannabis which are experienced as far more productive and useful. In the narrative above it is quite clear how Luke creates his own alternative ontology through a combination of reading about different substances, actively seeking out people who take them and also trying them himself. This newly developed ontology then becomes the fabric or texture which creates the foundation for his own personal "temenos", a room that he shares only with like-minded others who have developed a compatible ontology and need to create a similar space. He relates this turn of events with being finished with one stage of his life and now being ready for new experiences. There is evidently a great deal of sustained reflection behind his actions. As he says; "It was like now I'm definitely going to try hash, it was a very conscious choice. No doubt about it, this was something I just had to try".

This aspect of pre-meditated decision making came up on many occasions during my interviews. Jackie wanted to try out of curiosity but waited until she had talked to her mother about it, Mick had said quite clearly that he was "conscious and aware" of what he was doing and Luke had made "a very conscious choice" after moving to Oslo. There is already a strong element of what has been referred to as intentionality from the start of these journeys, expressed here as the intent to explore, blast boundaries and discover a new sense of being. There are obviously many ways of achieving these aims, and the inclination to alter consciousness is certainly not reserved for teenagers alone. However, it is during this phase of development that the often overwhelming fascination with the forces of Eros and Thanatos, combined with the need for "a room of one's own" and knowing who you are, create highly fertile conditions for drug experimentation to take place. Also, contrary to what one might be



expected to believe, these are frequently well thought out and planned decisions. Trying illicit substances may seem to reflect the behaviour of reckless, foolhardy, irrational and uninformed young adults, and it may be on certain occasions, but certainly not all.

Not surprisingly in this context, one of the most perused, fastest expanding, continually updated but as of yet least researched collection of drug texts is to be found not in books but in that elusive and highly liminal realm of cyberspace. Timothy Leary was actually quite the visionary in this respect as he foresaw the parallel between internet metaphysics and altered states long before most people had taken their first “trip” through the World Wide Web (Sant 2001). The last fifteen years of his life were mostly devoted to showing the impact that cyberspace would have on the future of humanity. In his book, *Chaos and Cyberculture* (1994), Leary expands on the analogy between psychedelic experiences and travelling through the constantly metamorphosing realities in cyberspace. The novel *Neoromancer* by William Gibson popularized the term as it related to the role hackers and computers would have in the coming age (in Sant 2001);

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts. [...] A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity (Gibson 1984:51).

For liminal nomads in a postmodern, high-tech, rapidly transmuted information society, cyberspace is the perfect setting for digital rites of passage to be staged. The new generation of users seeking guidance and solidarity will therefore increasingly frequent this arena because it is one of the few places where drug consciousness can be discussed and described freely. Whereas the majority of drug texts distributed to young people through official channels are aimed at warning not informing, cyberspace has innumerable sites created by and for users. The forbidden focus; “drug consciousness as it is specifically determined by the drug experience – before, during and after” (Lenson 1995), is therefore documented in great detail and discussion rooms are packed with psychonauts in cyberspace more than willing to share their explorations. Where established drug discourse for the most part seems to disempower the drug user, the fact that the internet can operate independently from the overwhelming hegemony of knowledge professionals makes it “not simply another mass medium. It is a medium that can empower individuals” (Sant 2001). In this respect these sites can be seen as concrete manifestations of the extent to which users are not simply “passive recipients of global popular culture producing copies of what has already been said

and done”, but rather active agents, “who are collectively using global attitudes, texts and rhythms to deal with their specific local problems” (Lalander & Salasyuo 2005: 11).

Cyberspace therefore provides a powerful medium whereby “one reshapes the socially and economically constructed limitations and creates something else, something meaningful” (ibid.). Both drugs and global popular culture include “forms of transgression from ‘objective’ reality, the intersubjective creation of a reality in which one is released from the constraints of everyday life” (ibid.). Here also there is an overwhelming majority of pro-drug sites that are devoted to psychedelics and entheogens, although stimulants or depressants are sometimes added to the equation as users attempt to create the best possible “psychedelic cocktail”. Research into this domain has considerable potential in terms of including recreational users and focusing on native perspectives. Gaining access is relatively easy and the enormous range of sites allows for both in-depth studies and large scale analysis in delineating trends and patterns. Drug users in cyberspace are in many respects the liminal tribal units of the future, re-enacting rites of passage through global information systems that create an intersubjective “consensus hallucination” at the touch of a button. They are at any rate a good case study for how people “when they feel alienated from the ‘objective culture’ in which they live, start to oppose that culture by constructing their own subjective culture in which they do not feel alienated and controlled by external power” (ibid.).

#### **4.4 – The voices**

The first transitional phase of this particular journey reflects a kind of awakening to what Campbell has so appropriately identified as “the call to adventure”. It is the beginning of a new cycle or “fulcrum” marked by an outward pull, a pronounced urge to break free from the narrower societal straightjacket towards a wider personal identity and new wave of consciousness, to use Wilber’s terminology. As with all beginnings there is a strong element of curiosity and excitement as well as a fascination with danger and possible risks. The movement here is very much one away from a safe and secure place towards that which is dark and unknown, and there is a kind of farewell to loved ones as the individual embarks on a new and treacherous journey. Jackie’s long talk with her mother and Mick’s fight with his both signify important transitional events which mark the beginning of a separation and shift towards a new “locus of identification”. At this point the “locus of identification” is swinging away from the establishment with its “formal fixities of social structure” and towards its anti-

thesis, represented by an introduction to these forbidden states. Here the “high” itself isn’t necessarily what appeals the most, but the fact that it is forbidden, “secret” and unknown.

In many cases, despite numerous negative experiences these states are still eagerly sought after, almost as if one is hypnotized by the “passionate grip” of Eros and Thanatos while under the full sway of one’s “essential rebellion” and the need to transcend one’s previous condition. As Campbell has written;

This first stage of the mythological journey – which we have designated the “call to adventure” – signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground... The hero can go forth of his own volition to accomplish the adventure, as did Theseus when he arrived at his father’s city... or he may be carried or sent abroad by some benign or malignant agent, as was Odysseus, driven about the Mediterranean by the winds of the angered god, Poseidon. The adventure may begin as a mere blunder, as did that of the princess of the fairy tale; or still again, one may be only casually strolling, when some passing phenomenon catches the wandering eye and lures one away from the frequented paths of man (Campbell 1993: 58).

Whatever the reasons given for one’s departure, whether it be the need to create a “new image”, experience different states of consciousness or move in a different direction there is a deep underlying fascination with this “zone unknown” and a focus away from “the frequented paths of man”. Drugs at this stage are simply a means to that end, of attempting to move beyond the established normative reality by transcending it and identifying with an altered reality and illicit state of being. Towards this aim they are an essential part of the process but have not become a substitute for the process itself.

Fundamentally, the instinct for this “essential rebellion” is not new; “Whether courtesy of (Aborigine) Men of High Degree, (Cuna) shamans, (Nuer) Leopard-Skin chiefs, (Hindu) Sanyasi, or (American) hippies, new intellectualizations were always being proffered by way of the agency of new individuals” (Rapport & Overing 2000: 6). In other words, there have always been outsiders or “singletons”, individuals determined “to interact with others and with established rationalizations in non-predefined ways, to escape from the burden of given cultural prescriptions and discriminations, and so usher in the unstructured and as yet unknown” (ibid.). The drive towards agency is practically woven into the very fabric of the cosmos, and this drive has little to do with drugs. Illicit substances are perhaps a catalyst or medium for expressing that drive, but this distinction, which is often overlooked, is crucial to keep in mind.

Paradoxically, one important factor that often draws people further into a “drug scene”, especially young people, has far more to do with the need for belonging and being part of a group than the initial drive towards agency or an irresistible craving for intoxication itself. For instance, Jim has an interesting theory about drug subcultures which I call the “cult theory” based on what he experienced as a teenager growing up in the seventies. I chose to interview Jim because in all the years that I have known him he has always been somewhat of an outsider, despite the fact that he has never really been into drugs. When I asked him about this he replied that he was an individualist, and that the reason he avoided the cannabis scene for example was not because he didn’t like getting stoned but because he was sceptical towards the sectarian aspects that he felt pervaded those groups at that time. He didn’t want to “lose himself” as he put it, and therefore chose to avoid that crowd because they reminded him of a group of religious fanatics who were trying to convert people;

Well one thing I’ve noticed is that people who use a lot of drugs often try to justify their own drug consumption and form a dogmatic attitude, a religious dogmatic relationship towards their own use by trying to convince others of the excellence of their own drug of choice by praising it and saying it’s really great each and every time. Because if you can convince others then you can also justify it to yourself and then you have created a new reality surrounding your drug of choice and it functions socially by becoming socially acceptable in your own little group. You seek out people who also accept your drug use and then sub groups are created who accept it under sect-like conditions ‘we know the truth, we have created it ourselves so we are quite proud of it’. Even more so than Jehova’s Witnesses because they haven’t created it themselves, they have only been taught it even though they defend it just as righteously, their truth.

*(Is that how you see drug users then?)*

Yes, very often I have to say. Especially from my younger days when I was involved with this hash crowd and it was as if these kids had found Jesus. I mean hash was Jesus. I experienced the propaganda surrounding that substance very similar to the zeal and enthusiasm that you see among newly born-again Christians, they were both just as eager to get you into their ‘congregation’ but at the same time you had to accept a lot of postulates or articles of faith, if not you weren’t really a full-fledged member. So I never became a full-fledged member of these cool hash smokers.

*(So what kind of things did you have to accept then?)*

Well I could never really swallow their truth. For example, you had to see hash as really good, and agree with that and of course spread the good news, become a preacher or else you wouldn’t become totally accepted. I use these words because that’s how I actually experienced it. But because I was critical and didn’t have that born-again glow or become a preacher proclaiming the good news I never became accepted into their crowd. They saw me with mistrust since I didn’t believe in the same things that they did.

There was also the terminology, all the words like ‘gala’, ‘rev’ and ‘kjall’ (*Norwegian slang for hash*). You had to have the terminology down and to do that you had to smoke a lot, be a regular part of that crowd so that you could pick up the right terminology. But I didn’t do that so I never became a part of it

*(Why didn’t you? Did you just not think it was all that cool or did it make you uncomfortable?)*

No, I liked the stuff but I preferred doing it on my own, not on a social basis because the sectarian aspects of it made me sceptical. It’s the same with alcohol; I have the same attitude towards alcohol. Here there are also a great deal of principles which have to be learned, you have to follow the same rituals if you are going to enjoy alcohol in the same manner as people in your crowd. Like then it was getting drunk, and we kids drank to get drunk, and I did that. It was expected and I had many negative experiences with it, but I still haven’t stopped

doing it until relatively recently, the past two years actually, probably because I can't handle it anymore. I'm getting older. Also I don't buy the ritual any longer. It's a ritual

*(Have you grown out of it then or does it not give you anything positive anymore?)*

I don't like getting drunk.

*(Anymore?)*

No, I've never liked getting drunk really.

*(So why did you?)*

Because it was expected, it was an accepted truth that getting drunk was fun. It was 'true' that getting drunk was fun and then amusing to puke and wake up the next day with a hangover, it was all great fun and that was a truth. Like a religious tenet surrounding the ritual even though I've always known that I didn't enjoy it, it was just something you did because it was expected. But now I have become an outsider and that helped me.

*(Have you become one or have you always been one?)*

Well I've always been an outsider; in every social group I've ever been a part of I've been an outsider.

*(Why is that?)*

Because I'm an individualist, well I've just had myself and if I give up myself then I just become a tiny ant and I've always known that if I'm going to be worth anything then I have to be worth something to myself. If you give yourself up then you become a prisoner of somebody else and then your soul is consumed by someone else. I have just been in a relationship where I felt that I was being totally consumed, subordinating myself completely to the other and I am too old and too wise even though I like her sexually, I have to say no to that because the price is too high.

You can become a slave to anything, drugs or people. I mentioned substitutes recently and that's because I feel that many intoxicants are actually a substitute for something that you are missing in your life, whether it's self love, or love for someone else, a sense of belonging, or security in your surroundings. Intoxicants can play a helping role here because they can sedate you or numb the pain while at the same time maybe even help you belong because you don't hear those voices anymore telling you that you don't belong when you are stoned.

So many people gather together to avoid hearing those voices, especially in an urban setting. So here many people are drawn together out of the same need to drown out the voices, the lack of belonging or feeling insignificant. Here you gain significance you seem to mean something to each other for a short while, and that we call a party. You meet people you will never meet again and real friends are practically nonexistent.

*(Well there are parties where the same people meet again and again...)*

Yes, luckily, and there are real friends every once in a while and that's nice but very often that camaraderie is based on the premise that you have to be intoxicated together because then you don't hear the voices .

*(What voices?)*

Those voices that shout at you that you don't belong, that you don't exist in a sober.... I think the genuine things in life are only found in a sober state of mind.

*(What do you mean by genuine?)*

Real genuine human relations that you will only find if you can feel loved for who you are without being sedated or stoned, one of the most amazing experiences I've had, even though there were some major drawbacks, was having a relationship with a Muslim girl, because we were sober the whole time. Her religion required it, so you could say that all religions have a grain of truth in them, the problem is that they become imperatives like "thou shalt" and then it becomes a lie.

*(Why is that?)*

Because imperatives make them so

*(Could you say more on that?)*

Because when you have an authority that tells you to do something just because they are in authority and tell you to, then it becomes a truth that you have found through someone else, not because it comes from within you. This becomes substantiated by saying that submission is necessary in order to find truth and freedom. That is a lie and a rotten part of the system that most people just accept because there is some good in it.

France is a good example of the opposite case. Statistically they are supposed to have one of the highest consumption rates in the whole world per capita, but the French people said to one another that consumption rates are making us sick, not the state deciding to raise the prices because you drink too much, but ordinary men and women said to themselves and one another that now we will lower our consumption rates. So now they have the same consumption rates as Olav the Norwegian while their prices have remained just as low. That's what I've heard anyway. Then they have found a truth within themselves, alcohol is good, intoxication is good but in the right balance with the rest of your life. If you have too much or too little perhaps also then you can go mad or become sick.

Alcohol has been a part of our culture for centuries, and Iran ironically enough was actually from where it originated, Iran was an alcohol nation in ancient times and then it spread to the Middle East.

*(So in general you are an advocate of moderation then?)*

I also have a thing for getting totally wasted. A drunken moment of bliss can definitely have its place when the mood is right or on a nice day in spring, but it's not something to strive for in itself, on its own. I mean it needs to be in the right context to be good. Everyone knows that if you get yourself drunk in the middle of winter and you've got loads of problems then it becomes more like sedation and you will feel pretty empty inside. Whereas if it's spring one day in May and the weather is fantastic and everything is green and you meet a lady and fall in love, get drunk and fool around in the streets then it's ecstasy, something that really stays with you for the rest of your life as an amazing experience. I've had experiences like that and I am really happy for those alcohol memories that fit together with other bits that are really good, but if you do that every single day then you can get sick and die.

Jim has certainly made some interesting observations from the perspective of extreme individualism, as an "outsider of outsiders" almost. Here there are some very important points being made concerning the dialectic between self and other, or agency and communion, which may help clarify and understand further developments in user trajectories. As mentioned before, the need for belonging is very pronounced during adolescence specifically, and in many ways intoxication can be seen as one way to "drown out the voices" and "lose yourself" in something else by adopting similar "rituals" and "beliefs", which in turn creates a new form of communion or togetherness. Intoxication has its place, but once it has become an every day thing, or primarily "sedation", "you can get sick and die". This is particularly relevant in terms of future developmental patterns where the drugs themselves often play a much larger role, even replacing the dialectic between self and other altogether. This process is poignantly illustrated in Lea's narrative when at the age of thirteen she went from drinking to smoking heroin in the course of one summer. Lea was also an outsider, or "loner" who didn't quite fit in, but unlike Jim, she was propelled by a powerful inner "quest" and was

desperately searching for deeper relations. Here she refers specifically to these underlying “conscious processes in motion”;

We had just moved to Oslo and I was really searching, looking for people like me..., I was kind of a loner and didn't really fit in the usual organised activities like sports and stuff, but I was really interested in street theatre, things like that.

So I went to this youth club and they had activities for junior and senior members where I got to know a lot of the older kids or the senior members. They helped out with lighting on stage and I became more and more included in their group where that kind of stuff was going on.

*(When you say ‘people like me’ what do you mean by that?)*

More spiritual people.

*(So you already saw yourself as spiritual at the age of thirteen then?)*

Yes, I was searching for deeper relations, something I had missed throughout my early childhood. I always felt that real parents were wise and learned and not shallow, so I feel that I was on a deep spiritual quest in a way and because, well intoxication was maybe a part of it but it quickly became the main component because of the people I was hanging out with.

I met these older kids and was introduced to this whole bunch of people at a place called the veggie-camp<sup>6</sup>, older hippies and people like that, and I quickly saw what went on there, like here people get stoned.

*(So they took on the role of the wise ones then?)*

Yes, yes definitely.

*(So what happened after that?)*

Well that summer I really took off, it was from one thing to the next.

*(You're still thirteen then?)*

Yes, so it all happened really fast, in the course of one summer I sped through many things, I really took off. It's strange that in one year I went from childhood and my first experience with intoxication, still living in a world of fantasy and fairytales...

*(What kinds of drugs did you use that summer then?)*

It started with hash but then after one month, I was with this youth club... again (laughing...this creates a very bad image of municipal youth clubs as recruiting places for kids on drugs). Anyway, then we were going to Gothenburg as a group trip, and I met this one person, but already then there were these conscious processes in motion that were really focused. On that bus there was just this one girl who was really into pills...

*(What kind of pills?)*

Valium, Rohipnol, stuff like that. So we were pretty much glued together, I didn't know her that well, we didn't even go to the same school I just new that she lived somewhere around the same district where I came from. So there was this really strong attraction and we became really close friends.

*(Why do you think people who do drugs always seem to find each other, like a magnet almost?)*

It's all about focus, you aren't necessarily conscious of your focus but on a much deeper level you are very focused. You don't see that when you're young and inexperienced but you learn that with experience... and I said that two years later when they found out what was going on at home and decided to move me back to Trondheim and I was thinking; you can move me all the way to Greenland, or wherever, I will find that one person, even if there is only one person I will find them. So my focus was there no matter what.

*(So you were conscious in a way, a part of you...)*

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<sup>6</sup> An alternative hang out in Oslo for artists, musicians, vegetarians (hence the name ‘veggie-camp’), hippies, etc.

The year before that I was really seeking, I was reading all kinds of religious texts and poetry, I had this really deep soul longing but it wasn't being answered so I started getting into street theatre and dance and that led to the youth club and gradually a lot of drugs.

*(So what happened in Gothenburg?)*

I tried Valium for the first time, and Rohipnol for the first time and crashed with this go-cart then came home with this huge concussion and couldn't take my mid-terms because of that, it was just bizarre the whole thing, but then we were young and free. So that whole winter I started living this double life in many ways, and I had this strong urge to keep going to this veggie-camp, at that time I had become a vegetarian also and I finally felt like I had found home and could talk about all kinds of bizarre things and be understood, so it was like 'Yes! Yes! This is it!'.

Lea describes this process as a "deep spiritual quest" and refers to her "focus" several times, a force which she experienced as so strong that even if her parents had moved her to Greenland she would find "that one person" who shared a similar quest. Since her "soul longing" wasn't being answered she then resorted to the next best thing, which happened to be a group of old hippies who somehow embodied at least some of the qualities she imagined that "wise" elders should have. Then gradually these relationships were replaced by the drugs themselves. For a thirteen year old seeker living in an urban jungle, a vegetarian hippy camp is the closest she got to finding "home", a place where people gathered, got stoned and left the old world far behind. The concept of home here is similar to what has previously been described here as a "room of one's own" and refers to the same need for a sacred space, a sanctuary for all those liminal creatures who haven't quite figured out who they are or where they belong. Home in this context then becomes a kind of fleeting, transcendental refuge for all those outsiders, drifters and nomads of a fragmented, industrialized and disenchanting postmodern landscape. Not everyone here is on a deep spiritual quest, there may be many different reasons for leaving one's previous habitat, some are seeking, others are hiding, or drowning out "the voices", and then there are always those who are simply there to "feel the rapture of being alive".

#### **4.5 – Summary of the first gate**

The first gate represents a core type of movement, away from one's source or previous "home", towards the unknown, represented by a shift in one's "spiritual centre of gravity", "locus of identification" or "focus". There is a strong drive away from what has been, towards something else, although what this "something else" is may still be rather unclear. Here lies part of the fascination and excitement. It is as if a dark and mysterious force beckons and calls one outward, away from the safe confines of one's former being in the world, towards



something altogether new and different. This is coupled with a strong need for autonomy, of finding a separate identity and ontology, a personal space or room of one's own that can both protect and connect in terms of serving as a basis for new alliances. There are close parallels between the first gate and adolescence in terms of becoming one's own person with a strong emphasis on the construction of personal identity and the need for freedom and excitement. This may also account for why the majority of people who experiment with intoxication start doing so during adolescence and young adulthood. The "midlife crisis" that many people experience somewhere between thirty five and fifty is also an aspect of this gate. A "second adolescence", where once again the call to adventure beckons, and many people find themselves making drastic changes to accompany this drive for freedom and individuation. This is the gate of "emergence", "differentiation-disidentification" or "breaking free", and represents the urge to modify and reconstruct outer life patterns that no longer satisfactorily reflect the inner perception of personal life experiences.

## Chapter

# 5

### The Second Gate - Crossing the Threshold

*It is by the boundaries in life that we define our movement beyond them.*

Erin Sullivan

#### 5.1 - Approaching the landscape

The subjective nature of intoxication makes the classification of all mind altering substances into the two rather broad categories of “good” (legal) and “bad” (illegal) drugs highly problematic. The intention behind this official demarcation is perhaps first and foremost that most people will choose to stick to the “good” ones, intoxicate themselves sensibly and stay out of trouble. What those who nevertheless intoxicate themselves illegally soon discover however is, as mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, that not uncommonly, the “good” substances (alcohol in particular) lead to far more reckless and foolish behaviour than many of the “bad” substances, like cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine. Moreover, many highly resourceful and intelligent people actually manage to intoxicate themselves “sensibly” for years with the “bad” substances without ever dying, getting sick or generally making a nuisance out of themselves. These realizations then, together with a great deal of further experimentation, lead to the creation of a fairly distinctive and iconoclastic “ontology of illegal drugs”.

Most user ontologies differ quite markedly from the widely established societal attitudes towards drugs and are for this reason either frequently ignored or silenced all together. From a researcher’s perspective, this is unfortunate to say the least, because as classic studies like Becker (1963) and Zinberg (1984) have firmly established, in order to gain real insights into the reasons behind drug use, the actual context and setting within which it takes place must be taken into account. Furthermore, when it comes to issues of control and the development of different user patterns, here also context is highly relevant in terms of the rules and rituals regulating drug use among different types of users ( Lalander & Salasuo: 2005). In failing to distinguish experimental, recreational and moderate user patterns from excessive and problematic use, researchers are also incapable of identifying the

different variables or patterns that may have a significant impact in terms of which developmental course a user trajectory might take.

The primary stage of experimentation for many is simply just that; a passing phase which never develops into more than an occasional joint at a party and perhaps a line of coke on New Years Eve. For others however, this stage develops further into different patterns of intoxication, usually with a drug of choice, and in many cases surprisingly firm guidelines in terms of how to regulate one's own use so that it doesn't "get in the way", or conflict with one's personal ontology. It is also during this second stage of development that one is able to observe a great deal of variation among both patterns of use and also user ontology. To complicate matters further, one may also observe different patterns of use in the same user at different points in time as well as a corresponding shift in ontology in terms of how these behavioural patterns are understood and regulated. This subsequent phase is often the least represented within the field of drug research because it is neither an entry nor an exit process, but represents that elusive and mysterious liminal phase in between. This is where the majority of drug users are situated, although as we shall see in the next chapter, the turning point at which recreational use sometimes becomes noticeably problematic use is not always so easy to determine, and is also somewhat subjective.

All of the respondents I interviewed are part of this "hidden user population", although only two of them suffered from severe problematic use<sup>1</sup> directly associated with their consumption patterns at the time of the interview, one of whom was Alexis who died over one year ago. Although two other respondents were former heroin addicts they, and the majority of respondents whom I interviewed and spoke with during fieldwork, saw themselves as neither simply experimenting, nor dangerously addicted. In some cases their use did have some problematic aspects, but this was mostly related to how that use was perceived by others who didn't share a compatible "drug ontology", or due to other factors which will be discussed in the next chapter. The key words here are negotiation and boundaries. This is what many users manage and maintain for years, negotiating their own identity in relation to their patterns of use, stretching and tightening boundaries, and creating an ontology to encompass all this.

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<sup>1</sup> Experienced subjectively and also according to the standard definition formulated by the EMCDDA which is: "addiction by injection or regular long-term use of opiates, cocaine and/or amphetamines. This definition excludes consumption of ecstasy and cannabis or occasional use of opiates, cocaine or amphetamines" (see Afterword).

Contrary to what some people believe, there are actually a wide range of significant control mechanisms at work here, both in terms of personal preferences and limits, and also in relation to the “drug culture” one is a part of, although this is a somewhat problematic term since it implies a standardized set of beliefs and values, which is not always the case. To illustrate just some of the complexities and paradoxes involved during this liminal phase here is an extract, again from Jackie, now as a young adult, discussing the development of different patterns of use from the age of nineteen;

*(So that's when you started smoking every day then? In the mornings also?)*

Every day yes, but not in the mornings, I found out pretty quickly that being stoned at school isn't such a good idea, I mean people say that you get so creative but that's bullshit, you spend half an hour just looking for your pencil. Then I would think of my mother and the deal we had made that I wasn't going to let hash become something destructive, it was going to be something I could really relish and enjoy that wasn't going to affect school or work so then I would wait until after school and after dinner. I would come home, eat then smoke after that.

*(So that worked out fine all these years then? I mean you never had to have more and more then, some people think that...)*

Well it's a mental thing; it's in the mind, I mean you get just as dependent on hash as you do lip balm or chocolate, if you use lip balm every day then you get used to having it every day, same with chocolate if you're used to eating it every day. So it's not like I got anymore dependent but if I had been smoking a lot and was running out and there were like two days until I was supposed to get more then I would get a bit stressed out. Like what am I supposed to do now? I can't watch TV without smoking first, that's boring.

*(You didn't try anything else at that time then?)*

Well I was very rigid in terms of boundaries I had a strong need at that time to have those limits, like when I went to junior high and was telling myself that I wasn't really a hash smoker and then when I finally realised that I was one and kind of based my identity around that but I decided nothing else as a general principal. It became my own personal crusade in a way, I was definitely not going to get involved with people who did other drugs, I wasn't going to sink that low!

So moving to Bergen was really quite a shock because I realised that there weren't any people who only smoked hash there, I searched high and low for pure hash smokers but no, I couldn't find any.

*(So it was because of the drug scene in Bergen that you expanded your boundaries then?)*

Yes, I was very firm in terms of boundaries for a long time, wouldn't even go near a Valium. I mean I kept my principles for a long time. In Bergen also, but after a while you get to know people that smoked hash and visited me and they did speed and acid on the weekends, so that was just what they did the whole time. Then at the age of twenty one or twenty two I tried speed for the first time, that's ten years ago now.

So you come to a point where... well I was always really judgemental about 'those kinds of people' and then gradually discovered that 'those kinds of people' were my friends and they were just like me. The whole time I guess I realised that I can't just put them in a box, I might be wrong, so then after a while, six months to a year, I tried speed and LSD for the first time. But very carefully at first, I waited almost half a year until I did it again.

*(Can you tell me about your first experiences, when you finally broke the boundaries, was this a very conscious choice on your part?)*

Yes, definitely a conscious choice, I had really thought through it both when I did it and the setting where it took place.

*(So you didn't just get drunk then and it just happened...)*

No, I really thought through it, wondered whether or not to tell my mother even and decided against it since not saying anything isn't really a lie and she never asked so... it was unnecessary. But I was definitely not going to get addicted because then I would be disappointing her totally, so I held my part of the deal by not letting her down. After a while though I kind of told her about my friends in Bergen and that it was possible to have these different lifestyles and get high in all these different ways without ending up in the gutter. So I guess in a way she got the message that I did experiment a bit. She has enough respect for me though not to pry too much.

So when I got involved with this boyfriend who was pretty strung out on heroin I really didn't want to tell her about it and she kind of figured it out but respected my boundaries and the fact that I would tell her in my own time and was old enough to take care of myself. I was about twenty four or twenty five by then.

*(So when you did finally cross your own boundaries, did you see that as a defeat? How did that make you feel?)*

It was just a boundary and after a while I asked myself, what are you really trying to hold on to here anyway? It's just a boundary; it's just an illusion in a way, especially with speed. It's not like you're in a dull drugged-out state, I mean you just feel really good like being in love and on the top of the world so then you kind of develop another relationship with drugs. Like wow! Are there drugs like that too? How very useful.

I also discovered that acid was a lot stronger than I thought so you learn to take precautions like taking it under the right circumstances with the right people

*(How many times have you tried that?)*

Oh about eight or ten times, mushrooms about eight to ten times

*(And how was that?)*

Well it's pretty strong stuff, and I have taken it around people I'm not so comfortable with and then you get really insecure, and everything gets uncomfortable and I have breathing problems, I have asthma too so it gets really psychosomatic in a way.

*(Doesn't sound like much fun)*

No I never liked acid that much because I really don't like losing control.

*(But you still did it about sixteen times?)*

Well there was this rave culture in Bergen at the time, this was before ecstasy so this was something everyone took when they went to rave parties but I was very careful because I quickly realised that this was really strong stuff and I lost total control and when you are with people that you don't really know or trust you just have to be really careful.

*(Do you feel like it gave you anything else, better insight into people or something or was it just the kick, or that it was different?)*

I don't really know, I guess it was just a combination of different things, it was there. Like this one time I was with this friend of mine and he had lots of acid and we were really bored. We stayed home for three days during Easter and dropped acid and watched movies, I mean we watched these really twisted movies, I don't really know why we did it. I guess it was a combination of the fact that we were bored and then there was the rave parties but then many times I said no thank you like we would get this punch spiked with acid when we went to these parties. You paid 200 kroners and then you got the punch at the door, and you would be at the rave the whole night. So several times I said no to the acid because there were people there that I didn't know or feel comfortable with and I would take speed instead.

So many times I actually said no, everything in its own time you know, like if friends were visiting we might go out and pick mushrooms and stay at my place so... there was some ecstasy at that time too, I remember taking it once at a rave but I really don't like losing control so I never take more than one half at a time.

*(I thought ecstasy was milder than acid though?)*

Well it is but like you can't really dance or I don't know, I just feel like I have more control when I take a half because then you get this fluffy, pink cloud feeling and can still maintain a conversation with someone that you meet while you're out of it. You don't just totally lose it, so many times I didn't take any acid, when the timing wasn't right or whatever, but if it was like a beautiful tropical night out and some really good friends just happened to have some then I would, then we might share a trip.

That's just not something you mess around with, I remember one time this guy kept trying to give me acid and I said no thank you, no thank you, no thank you over and over and then finally I was like ok give me half then, and half an hour later he was trying to feel me up. It's like... I mean what an asshole, a really rotten thing to do. Things like that can happen, you don't expose yourself to situations like that, I would never take acid with people I didn't trust because things like that can happen.

*(How long did it take before taking speed became a regular thing?)*

Well it was like with the hash and everything else, I tried it once and then waited four to six months, tried it again and then two to three months went by, tried it the next time and then one month went by. I was very careful in the beginning because you have respect for the fact that these are drugs, and you're always hearing about drug addicts ending up in the gutter and everyone says well, this isn't going to happen to me, everyone says that, but how do I know I'm any different, you shouldn't assume that you're better than everyone else. Then after a while though you realise that it's really not such a big deal, I mean if you take it once or twice a month, it doesn't necessarily lead to addiction, but I was really careful to always go to school and go to all the lectures and do all my projects.

*(So then that pretty much held you in check then?)*

Yeah, I went to these parties where I had to go home at 10pm because I had a lecture the next day and people were like screw the lectures but I didn't because there will always be another rave party but not necessarily another lecture so I was pretty careful about things like that. This probably goes back to the deal I made with my mum I think.

So when I was studying at the university I would go to school at 1pm and then work until 9pm and then come home and smoke a joint, the other stuff I reserved for the weekends. No point going to school and being creative when you're coming down on speed and everything is just half hearted, then you might as well not bother. So I always said no to speed if it didn't fit in with what I was working on, because it was really all over the place, no problem getting a hold of any and it's easy to get it for free. So if it was on a Wednesday, then nope.

*(You really didn't have any problem regulating it then?)*

It's just the same with people who only drink alcohol, if you drink every day you start neglecting other things so you have to find out what's important, if it's important to party or to complete your education.

*(So you always felt in control?)*

Yea, I always had a plan, from the age of fifteen I always knew what I wanted to do, that I wanted to get my masters degree and become something. I'm dyslexic and have always heard that 'she won't amount to much because she can hardly read or write' so it was a kind of defiance on my part.

At primary school my mum was the only one who backed me up, I would always get Ds or below average grades on all my essays, and no one bothered to teach me what I needed to do to get better grades and I would feel just as gloomy every time I came home with my report card. Then she would tell me, 'oh don't worry about those stupid grades, we'll try again, don't give up, we'll manage this' and 'don't take it so hard'. So she backed me up and always believed that I would manage and amount to something. So I guess I wanted to prove to everyone that I wasn't a loser, I was going to make something of myself, I've got lot's of potential even though I can't read or write...So there was this defiant force, no way that I was going to end up in the gutter!

*(So what stopped you from trying heroin or pills then?)*

Well you know that heroin is dangerous, and the whole time it took a long while before I crossed any boundaries and then I got to know these people who were using it and at first I wasn't going to try it... and also you see that things can go downhill really quickly for people using it, like after just six months they become totally powerless to the stuff so I thought what I thought and then I got involved with this guy who really had problems with it and I really saw the darker side of using. So I decided not to and I also wanted him to stop using so then I couldn't really use any, I mean when you want someone to stop, using the stuff yourself doesn't really help. It's a bit like bringing up a child you have to be consistent; you can't expect something from someone that you can't live up to yourself. So I had really decided not to get into that.

*(So you've never tried it then)*

Well I did later on, smoked it... it was a very good high and all that but I have a lot of respect for that drug because I have seen people struggle their whole lives because of it so I have a lot of respect. I have tried it maybe two or three times in my whole life and I've never told anyone, I keep that a big secret, it's not something I'm very proud of.

*(So what made you finally try it?)*

Then I had lived with the stuff around me for about two years and things were going better for my boyfriend so then I could allow myself to try it without it having too many negative consequences.

There are several important dynamics at work here which jointly form a pattern of decision making and exploration that Jackie uses consciously to navigate through the drug jungle with minimal damage and maximum benefits. In some ways she might seem to be a remarkable exception to the common image many have of young people on drugs. However, numerous social scientists who have conducted context sensitive drug research have also discovered that; "it is indeed rare that young people just use drugs without reflecting on the risks and without having mentors teaching them how to use the drugs, how to get high and how to avoid unnecessary consequences" (Lalander & Salasuo 2005: 9). Even though on the surface her development might appear to fit right into the "from hash to heroin" "gateway" hypothesis, there is a great deal taking place behind the scenes which in fact demonstrates that Jackie is actually an undeniably conscientious and restrained explorer. In this case, attributing her development and drug patterns to addiction and pathological personality traits would be missing the point entirely, and would also be overlooking some crucial factors which may help determine whether or not serious (life threatening) problematic use might in fact develop later on.

## **5.2 A cybernetic field**

According to Wilber, during a transitional phase, there are a series of at least six fundamental capacities and operations which the "self system" employs in an attempt to navigate these developmental streams (Wilber 2001: 130). The self system is "the locus of several crucial capacities and operations", which are also highly relevant in this context.

These are, *identification* (with the locus of identity), *will* (the capacity to choose within given constraints at the present developmental level), *defence* (phase appropriate defence mechanisms) and *navigation* (developmental choices). The digestion of experience (what Wilber refers to as *metabolism*) and *organization* (creating cohesion in the psyche) although occurring at every moment, are especially significant during later stages and will be dealt with in more detail further on. Every developmental cycle represents a dynamic interplay of conflicting forces in motion, where there is communion on the one hand and agency seeking individuation and transcendence on the other. In Jackie's case there is a dynamic movement towards expansion, while at the same time there is also a strong defence mechanism at work, protecting her every step of the way. The choices she makes are largely influenced by how she resolves these two relational forces, in that on the one hand she is very conscious of her pact with her mother (and herself) while on the other she strongly identifies with her friends.

To resolve this tension she applies various conscious defence mechanisms such as the creation of personal boundaries and different ways of regulating her use. These defence mechanisms can be observed consistently throughout her life. Although she does stretch and modify her boundaries to encompass a wider identity, they still play a vital role in terms of her overall ability to hold things in check. It's also interesting to see how her drug ontology expands along the way in terms of how she sees other users with different patterns from her own and how she then views herself. As she recalls, "I was very rigid in terms of boundaries. I had a strong need at that time to have those limits", first she tells herself that she "wasn't really a hash smoker", then realising that she was one she "based her identity around that" but decides "nothing else as a general principle". She even called this her own "personal crusade", in that even though she was now a "hash smoker" she was "definitely not going to get involved with people who did other drugs, I wasn't going to sink that low!".

This is actually quite common and has resulted in the designation of several distinct "youth cultures" by researchers who have studied different drug trends and observed that the rules and rituals relating to how drugs are used and controlled vary widely depending on the nature of the drug youth culture (Lalander & Salasuo 2005). "In hippie culture, for example, stimulants were stigmatised, and drug use concentrated mostly on cannabis and LSD. On the other hand heroin is not used in the context of club culture, because it is seen as an 'addict drug', and heroin users do not use LSD, which has no symbolic value in their group" (ibid:9). It is important to note that here there are also many exceptions and modifications. For instance, my own research suggests that in Trondheim what was once the "hippie culture"



seems to have become much more open and tolerant towards the use of stimulants in the past few years. However, these overall trends still indicate the importance of context and social environment when it comes to drug patterns in general.

Ample drug research has made it very clear that drug trends do not develop in an empty void. In many cases group relationships are actually far more powerful than the actual effects of the drug itself, especially during the initial stages of experimentation. Other than being “altered”, the actual induced state itself seems to be almost irrelevant. It is therefore often a combination of a fascination with the qualities of the people using different substances, and an identification with them that seems to have the greatest influence in terms of whether or not one decides to cross certain limits. As Jackie put it; “So you come to a point where... well I was always really judgemental about ‘those kinds of people’ and then gradually discovered that ‘those kinds of people’ were my friends and they were just like me... I guess I realised that I can’t just put them in a box, I might be wrong, so then after a while... I tried speed and LSD for the first time”.

Identification always involves interplay between the human organism and the “world out there”; it is a “phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society” (Berger & Luckman 1991 in Aaslid: 2003), a meeting point between cultural processes and personal learning. Identities are therefore dynamic, unstable and emergent within the framework of an interaction process, where they are continually negotiated through an exchange of symbols and relations. It follows then that identities are not passively fixed, but must be continually and actively “maintained” or “held together” through time. “Identity is ultimately legitimated by placing it within the context of a symbolic universe”, in order to “know who I am” my identity must be anchored “in a cosmic reality protected from both the contingencies of socializations and the malevolent self-transformations of marginal experiences” (Berger & Luckman 1991:118). For example, Goffman (1990) has written extensively on the processes involved in stigmatisation and its management. A stigma is some aspect or characteristic of a person that differs negatively from the norm, and an important element in the process of labelling deviants. Stigma is closely related to stereotype, the social, often unconscious, expectations and norms attributed to a category of persons, which function as unseen arbiters in all social encounters. The means for categorizing attributes is established by society, “for ordinarily, before a difference can matter much, it must be conceptualised by the society as a whole” (ibid: 149).

The dilemma that arises once one has crossed the first threshold and begins regularly experimenting with chemically induced states is that the self system must continually manage an identity that is highly vulnerable to stigmatization. Self defence mechanisms are engaged to create boundaries separating oneself from “those kinds of people” and “sinking that low”, yet for many there comes a point sooner or later when one realises that these boundaries are actually not based on reality. That is to say, they are based on perspectives, not actual concrete traits. As Goffman has also emphasized, the stigmatised are not persons but perspectives involving interaction roles. These perspectives are often generated in social situations during mixed contacts where unrealised norms or expectations play upon an encounter. They do not involve a set of concrete individuals who can be separated into two piles, but “a pervasive two-role social process in which every individual participates in both roles, at least in some connexions and in some phases of life”(ibid: 163). As Jackie pointed out “It was just a boundary and after a while I asked myself, what are you really trying to hold on to here anyway? It’s just a boundary; it’s just an illusion in a way”.

However, along with this change in perspective there is also a parallel, growing identification with other like minded individuals who share a compatible ontology. Grund (1993) has investigated how the result of these processes may lead a person to become more and more actively involved in the subculture that has been formed around the stigma or deviant activity. He relates this to the human drive for solidarity, the need to belong to a group, and how a stigma or deviant label can affect participation in conventional roles and groups, thereby affecting the flow of everyday life considerably. There are advantages to this “switch in alliance”; on the one hand there is the whole identification process and issue of “focus” which relates to the need to expand, explore and transcend ones previous state, while on the other there is the security provided by being among “one’s own”;

Among his own, he can “withdraw for moral support and for the comfort of feeling at home, at ease, accepted as a person who really is like any other person” (Goffman 1963); feelings that are otherwise denied. “It gives them a sense of common fate, of being in the same boat”, (Becker 1973) where he can talk freely with people who, because they are in the same position, will generally understand, if not agree, about all the subjects related to the particular stigma. In the subculture people meet who “Knowing from their own experience what it is like to have this particular stigma ,...can provide the individual with instruction in the tricks of the trade”, (Goffman 1963) so that “he learns how to carry on his deviant activity with a minimum of trouble. Every deviant group has a great stock of lore on such subjects, and the new recruit learns it quickly” (Becker 1973)...It is evident that deviant subcultures unites individuals that share a common fate, having to deal with common problems. It offers a “set of perspectives and understandings about what the world is like and how to deal with it, and a set of routine activities based on those perspectives” (in Grund 1993: 13).

As Bateson has written, “you are the company you keep”, dependency is not learned in solitude, but in social relationships. “Therefore in writing sensible anthropological or psychological descriptions of these phenomena you have to assume that the relationship comes first and if there be individual learning it is a spin-off from the relationship”(Bateson 1982:14). In Jackie’s case, the lack of “pure hash smokers” in Bergen had a major impact on her lifestyle and the development of her drug patterns, but her defence mechanisms, although modified along the way, were strong enough to allow her to explore reasonably cautiously. The underlying will or “defiant force” to make something of herself, combined with the continuous regulation of her own use then actually created a reasonably secure environment for her to expand her boundaries and sample different states. Intentionality and deliberated decision making are at the core of her individual development, this was very clear when I asked her about whether she was afraid of getting hooked and she replied matter of factly; “Well it’s a mental thing; it’s in the mind”.

Paradoxically, Jackie’s drug patterns are actually more shaped by the need for “control” than the desire to be out of control. This became even more apparent when later on during the interview I asked her if she had tried cocaine at all and she said;

Not much, it’s boring, it doesn’t give me anything and it seems to me that it’s mostly a drug for people who lack confidence. I’ve tried both weak and good cocaine, bad quality cocaine I didn’t really feel the effect of and the other stuff I took when I was on speed so it’s hard to say what’s what, I don’t really know, it just isn’t for me, doesn’t really do it for me or whatever. But speed on the other hand is more my thing, like before I got pregnant I would take speed whenever I went out because I really don’t like alcohol all that much, I really don’t like getting drunk when I go out, so then I just drink to get slightly tipsy. It’s related to losing control, I just don’t like losing control, like taking a whole acid or ecstasy. When you get drunk you wobble around and slur your words and basically come across like a total idiot to be honest. So that doesn’t really tempt me, there is nothing less appealing than a girl wobbling about town drunk in high heeled shoes and a miniskirt, not very elegant. I don’t want people to see me like that. I don’t like being drunk or people seeing me drunk so when I go out I prefer one line of speed and then I sit and maybe sip two or three beers the whole evening, no more than that.

In many ways then, Jackie has a pragmatic approach towards her own drug use. Although there is a part of her that is slowly expanding and becoming more involved with different types of users, she nevertheless negotiates these territories without getting lost in the process. Identification with other users then, although highly significant, is only part of this dynamic and while she has to some extent “switched alliances” her ability to regulate her own use and create boundaries allows her to descend into the underworld yet resurface smoothly time and time again. In other words, it is the relationship between her inner and outer environment which is crucial in terms of how she navigates these realms although ultimately it is her will

expressed as the capacity to choose within given constraints that decides which path she will take.

### 5.3 - The mind made manifest

Among the users who form the basis for this project, each had a distinctive set of personal preferences when it came to her or his drug use and some sort of system regulating their own behaviour. As Erin Sullivan has written “It is by the boundaries in life that we define our movement beyond them. Without such boundaries there would be no ‘beyond’ nor would we achieve success within our limitations” (Sullivan 2000: 6). Crossing one boundary is often accompanied by the creation of another as the self system continues to try and secure its position in a new landscape. For some people like Lea however, the urge to blast boundaries is so strong that instead of being a means to an end it becomes an end in itself, with dramatic consequences as we shall see in the next chapter. Part of the peril of this particular journey is the fact that there is always the possibility of getting lost and never returning. The further one moves and the greater the intensity of involvement, the greater the chances are of not finding a way back. Campbell speaks of the “threshold guardians” who “bound the world in four directions – also up and down – standing for the limits of the hero’s present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger” (Campbell 1993: 77). Throughout the ages there have existed folk mythologies which “populate with deceitful and dangerous presences every desert place outside the normal traffic of the village desert” (ibid: 78), yet to the great dismay of the tribe there are always those who disregard the warnings and venture out nonetheless. The motivation for one’s departure may vary, but as June Singer writes in *Boundaries of the Soul*;

I do not think it is fame, or fortune, or the need to sublimate a neurosis that leads people to undertake perilous journeys either outward into space or inward into the depths of the psyche. That ‘man must explore’ is reason enough for the archetypal journey. It has been sung of old as the hero’s quest and though all who undertake it are not heroes there is a touch of the heroic in all of us, else we could not live in this dangerous and desperate world (In Sullivan 2000:94).

Still, not everyone ventures beyond the guardians, most individuals are content “even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored” (ibid:78). Today, stepping out into the unexplored can take many forms; moving to a different location, entering a new relationship, having children, switching jobs or perhaps even starting therapy, wherever there is a distinct

severance between one state of being and another. In this respect there is far more exploration today than there was in the not-so-remote past. With modernization there came specialization, and an endless variety of roles to explore, while increased mobility has resulted in the nomadic tendencies that have almost become a trademark of the urban lifestyle. In today's globalised and media-saturated world, as more and more people roam the earth and different socio-cultural landscapes in pursuit of their own personal aspirations there are actually not that many places left unexplored. Perhaps as a consequence or peculiar side-effect of this, altered states have in many respects become the final frontier and one of the last taboos in contemporary society.

In his book *The Taboo of Subjectivity* (2001) Alan Wallace refers to the “no man's land of consciousness” which has developed as a result of the widespread dominance of scientific materialism. This materialist ideology “assumes that when the environment and the body, and specifically the brain, are brought under control, the mind is brought under control”. When techniques for controlling the outer environment and maintaining physical health fail;

...chemists have produced a stunning array of drugs to control the mind, such as those to enable people to relax, to become mentally aroused and alert, to sleep, to relieve anxiety, to overcome depression, to counteract attentional disorders, to improve the memory, and to experience euphoria, bliss, and even alleged mystical states of consciousness. But the vast majority of such drugs cure nothing, and their desired affects on the mind last only as long as one continues to digest them – a point which is not lost on the pharmaceutical industry which profits enormously from this fact. With the mainstream acceptance of legal drugs for coping with psychological problems, it should hardly come as a surprise that a sizable portion of the population in the industrially developed world avails itself of illegal drugs in its pursuit of happiness and even spiritual enlightenment (Wallace 2001: 163).

From this perspective then, the excessive pursuit of intoxication can actually be seen as an extension of scientific materialism in today's desacralized consumer society. Just as the industrialized world modifies the outer environment in a relentless pursuit of material gain and a seemingly endless array of creature comforts, the use of drugs becomes an attempt to engage and expand the inner environment of the mind. Still this is a “no man's land”, a relatively uncharted territory in terms of what these subjective inner states really are. The curious consequence of this is that neuroscientists have made enormous progress when it comes to exploring the brain in relation to the mind, but when it comes to investigating the nature of consciousness itself “their research is inhibited by ideological taboos” (ibid: 132).

Wallace has suggested that “the ‘terror’ of subjectivity displayed by modern scientists and scholars may be due largely to a fear of religion” (ibid: 174), a fear which has created a

veritable dark age when it comes to our knowledge of the inner reality of consciousness. While the scientific ideology emerging in the nineteenth century was “originally intended as an ‘enlightened’ reaction to the ‘blind faith’ of medieval humanity”... ”scientific materialism offers itself as a total philosophy of life, in which the homeless mind can find a resting place” (Feuerstein 1991: 168).

Like the religious tradition it deposed, it asks to be taken seriously as a basis for faith. Because of the apparent success of science and technology, the scientific priesthood has attracted countless believers. But belief is not tantamount to faith; the pseudofaith proffered by scientism engages only the head, not the heart, which remains restless. Therefore it cannot remedy the psychic and spiritual malaise of our time. It is, in fact a great obstruction to the further evolution of humanity, which is directed toward an awareness that includes transcendence (ibid.).

Conversely, many drug subcultures have been particularly fascinated with consciousness and one of the reasons why intoxication is so difficult to control is precisely because “it is lustrously coloured with the deepest dyes of subjectivity” (Walton 2001: 271). So where “strictly speaking, at present there is no scientific evidence even for the existence of consciousness” (Wallace 2000: 3), intoxication “reminds you gloriously that you exist, that you are capable of quite different forms of consciousness than the one you wake up with in the morning, and that your serotonin reserves are after all your own to manage. The proof is – that you’ve seen it” (Walton 2001: 271). Consequently, when it comes to altered states, there are those who greet the threshold guardians with joyful anticipation, where ominous warnings are construed as an invitation to enter a new frontier that beckons from afar.

The “taboo of subjectivity” appears to have resulted in a new generation of “psychonauts”, defined by Jonathan Ott as “one who ‘trips’ or embarks on shamanic odysseys of discovery in the universe of the mind; a mental voyager”<sup>2</sup>. These psychonauts do not in any way regard themselves as “drug addicts”; they usually prefer psychedelics for philosophical or spiritual reasons, and otherwise have a highly pragmatic attitude towards their use. They are often exceptionally learned and in many ways regard their explorations of consciousness as simply a convenient means for supplementing their education where other formal learning institutions fail to do so. Mick for example decided already at the age of eighteen to try everything that he could because; “it’s another way of perceiving reality, different states of consciousness, a different way of seeing things, the nature of intoxication is that it’s another way of being and seeing, another way of existing and it’s exciting”. This is how he describes his ensuing relationship with drugs;

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<sup>2</sup> See also [http://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/ott\\_jonathan/ott\\_jonathan.shtml](http://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/ott_jonathan/ott_jonathan.shtml) and

Heroin was the last thing I tried and I was very sceptical but that was because I knew that it was very risky. So I was in a different town and tried it there for three to four days together with these junkies who would inject themselves then fall over with the needle still hanging in their arm and when they woke up it was straight to town to get more. But I smoked it then and that was also very conscious. It really didn't appeal much to me though, it was more like an absence of a high, everything was flat and there you are watching the world's worst TV series when it would really be much more fun being outside in the sun walking a dog. There was nothing really, not at all like LSD or mushrooms where you see the world totally differently. I only planned to do it once, so that I knew what it was like and how it worked. I just wanted to know what it was like, it was actually pretty disappointing, I thought it would be a lot more intense.

*(What about amphetamines then?)*

You don't get so physically addicted to it, you don't lie and sweat and all that. As I see it, if you use drugs to regulate your feelings, like if you're upset to compensate for that feeling, then I think it can get dangerous and you can get psychologically dependent on it because it becomes a way to escape. However, if you use it at parties and in that context it will have a different effect on you psychologically.

*(So you only use it at parties then?)*

Not only at parties, if I'm going to paint a house for example then it's very good because it makes boring work a lot more fun.

*(How much do you use then?)*

It varies a lot, I hardly ever buy it, usually I just get it at a party where someone has some and I get it from them, so as I see it the worst thing I know is being at a party where people have been using speed and not using any yourself because then they will talk a hole in your head so you might as well join them. I have been to a lot more parties where other people are using and I'm not though, it depends on what I am doing the next day. If they start at 6pm then I might but at 11pm then I often won't. It depends if it's practical or not. Some people really fall in love with a drug but it's never been like that for me.

*(When did LSD, mushrooms and ecstasy come into the picture then?)*

That was in high school. I tried LSD first. We had heard a lot about it but we were completely unprepared, the experience was totally beyond everything. I've never used a lot though, maybe ten times total during twelve years, mushrooms about the same. It was really fascinating and exciting but it's really difficult to describe because it's a way of seeing the world that I don't think we have concepts for in our language. You need poetry or paintings to describe it because it's a totally different way of perceiving the world, you see different things and notice different things and suddenly you get telepathic, it's just really difficult to describe but I had a goal of using mushrooms once every fall.

*(Why is that?)*

The associations, thoughts or ways of thinking do something to your head so that you think differently afterwards. You get ideas and inspirations that are really fascinating and also with creativity, things like that. Due to practical reasons though I never got to use it that much so in reality it's only been once every two or three years.

*(Are you very critical in terms of context and setting, who you use it with, things like that?)*

Yes, very. I'm strict about that, although I know I can use it anywhere without freaking out. But I have my own recipe for LSD and mushrooms; that you should be in the woods somewhere and you need a plan, going from A to B for example, because it's very hard to decide when you're tripping. At least I can't decide much, decisions become difficult. Also you need to be together with people you like, there's no point in being with people you don't like. I took some mushrooms last year together with my girlfriend and that was really nice, I also wanted to do it this fall but I couldn't find any so I'll have to wait until next fall.

*(So you don't feel like you're finished with it then, or that you've learned what you can learn from it?)*

I don't know if I've learned so much in terms of finding truths but I have thoughts that I would never have thought otherwise and it has been a gateway to new perspectives that I can reflect upon afterwards, a different way to see the world.

I have a philosophy where I don't want to sell myself to one perspective alone but to be open, like whether or not there is life after death. When you don't have a fixed opinion you are also interested in more things and you can appreciate more things and also come into contact with many different types of people. Also the trip in itself is worth it, it's like being on vacation. Like have you learned anything from being in the Canary Islands? Maybe not but it was nice with a little sunshine and a positive experience, a vacation in your head.

Mick uses a series of striking metaphors to invoke this quality of exploration; "it's like being on vacation... a vacation in your head", where he describes his experiences with LSD for example as a "gateway to new perspectives... a different way to see the world". In many cases the phenomenology of intoxication begins with an urge to explore and expand, and this is perhaps one of the most underestimated drives in human nature, lying at the root of a many bizarre and sometimes hazardous pursuits. In this context, as Andrew Weil has astutely observed; "the issue is consciousness", "the most obvious, immediate, powerful example is nonmaterial reality as well as something all of us carry around in our heads" (Weil 1998: 202). Even though different types of drug subcultures have in one form or another long existed, "never before has it included so many intelligent 'rational' ordinary, middle-class people. It is this shift of membership that has made us (that is, the thinking, rational middle class – the people who formulate conceptions of society) suddenly aware of drugs and, through them, of consciousness" (ibid). There may be several reasons contributing to this trend, but suffice to say for the time being that mind altering substances have unquestionably become a force to contend with and it is highly unlikely that they will simply vanish into thin air. While intoxication in some shape or form has always been a part of every culture it seems that altered states play an especially significant role today in terms of providing a different or alternative inner landscape.

Pharmaceutical companies have throughout the years, either wittingly or unwittingly, provided society with a wide range of chemical substances to decorate our inner environments with. Yet despite increasing pharmaceutical developments, the most widely used substance among subcultures is still cannabis, a mild psychedelic (derived from the Greek words for "mind," ψυχη psyche, and "manifest," δηλειν delein)<sup>3</sup>. This has been the

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<sup>3</sup> Grinspoon and Bakalar (1979) have defined a psychedelic drug as : one which, without causing physical addiction, craving, major physiological disturbances, delirium, disorientation, or amnesia, more or less reliably produces thought, mood, and perceptual changes otherwise rarely experienced except in dreams, contemplative



case for several decades. As novelist Norman Mailer put it;

One's condition on marijuana is always existential...One can feel the importance of each moment and how it is changing one. One feels one's being, one becomes aware of the enormous apparatus of nothingness – the hum of a high fi set, the emptiness of a pointless interruption, one becomes aware of the war between each of us, how the nothingness in each of us seeks to attack the being of others, how our being in turn is attacked by the nothingness in others (In Brownlee 2002: 11).

Whether mingling with junkies, hippies or clubbers, cannabis always seems to make an appearance at one point or another, even if only peripherally compared to other substances. This is undoubtedly due to a combination of factors, but one noteworthy point that kept recurring in my interviews was specifically related to the almost meditative, laid back, introspective qualities associated with the high and subsequently many of the users. Billy described this in some detail when I asked him about his experiences;

When I was seventeen I smoked my first real joint, I didn't notice anything at first and then I felt really unwell, and my friend thought I got kind of strange. Then I puked so I think I smoked too much. It was just like my first intro to snuff and alcohol, I got sick.

*(Had you already decided to do it then?)*

Yes, I guess I thought it seemed really cool, those who smoked would never tell anyone though, like when the teacher asked at school if anyone had smoked there was only this one guy who said that he had. The rest wanted to seem straight, but I don't mind being a freak. I didn't smoke much in the beginning at high school though because I couldn't get any of my buddies to smoke with me, and the girls in class thought it was stupid.

*(So when did it become more regular?)*

Me and my brother started hanging out with some guys who smoked a lot of hash, and I really liked them, especially this one guy who I thought was really wise and cool.

*(What do you mean by wise and cool?)*

Well he was very disinterested in worldly material things and more into cultivating a real sense of well being, and having a good time, just different values, doing things and not being scared and worried about everything but being at ease and this is one of the most important things I've learned from smoking hash, that I have learned to appreciate that sense of well being and I don't need... well I get a certain sense of inner peace and I think I see things very clearly actually when I smoke as opposed to when I'm clean because then I get stressed out, well not stressed out but I have a different focus, well obviously I have a different focus but well I guess that it just has a very positive effect on me.

Here also there is a progression closely linked to social context and relationships. Although he had decided to use hash at the age of seventeen, not finding anyone to use with delayed his involvement by a few years until he met up with this one guy who he thought was “really wise and cool” and had “different values”. As the New Columbia Encyclopaedia has suggested; “Much of the prevailing public apprehension about marijuana may stem from the

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and religious exaltation, flashes of vivid involuntary memory and acute psychoses. From;

drug's effect of inducing introspection and bodily passivity, which are antipathetic to a culture that values aggressiveness, achievement and activity" (ibid.). Therefore, it is specifically these qualities of "inner peace" and the tendency to create a "disinterest in worldly material things" that Terrence McKenna has suggested may be the underlying cause for which cannabis is regarded as an "anathema to the denominator culture" (In Lalander & Salasuo 2005: 5). He calls this the "subliminally psychedelic effect" of cannabis stating that when it is pursued as a lifestyle it "deconditions or decouples users from accepted values" and "places them in intuitive contact with less goal-oriented and less competitive behaviour patterns". This is considered to be one rationale behind the fact that marijuana isn't exactly promoted at the office while coffee "which reinforces the values of industrial culture, is both welcomed and encouraged" (ibid).

Almost all of the respondents who regularly smoked cannabis mentioned these countercultural aspects as being one of the main reasons for doing so. Besides often having an overall relaxing effect, there was a shift in values, a sense of "inner peace" and positive change of "focus" which was usually juxtaposed against "worldly material things", and being generally anxious, "stressed out" or "worried". Where the current ideology of the denominator culture is scientific materialism, with a strong focus on controlling the physical environment and a corresponding emphasis on achievement, aggressiveness and consumerism as the implicit value system of this world view (Wallace: 2000: 164), then cannabis is its antithesis. Because of this, cannabis has become a key symbol of the counterculture; it is anti-structure rolled up in a joint, celebrating simply being, subjectivity and the veneration of inner landscapes. Consequently, despite being relatively non-toxic compared to many other acceptable alternatives on the market (Hall, Room & Bondy 1995)<sup>4</sup>, this is probably one of the main reasons for which it is still perceived as threatening and hazardous by mainstream culture.

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychedelics>

<sup>4</sup> WHO Project on Health Implications of Cannabis Use: A Comparative Appraisal of the Health and Psychological Consequences of Alcohol, Cannabis, Nicotine and Opiate Use, August 28, 1995 National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales .  
<http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/general/who-index.htm> .See also Afterword for a further discussion of cannabis.

## 5.4 - Betwixt and between

The hero's quest is one of ongoing individuation and becoming where the journey symbolizes a major transitional phase initiated by an entry into an unknown landscape. In this respect, everyone embarks on their own quest at one point or another, although the form that this quest or journey takes will vary from person to person. The beginning of this journey is often accompanied by a drive to expand and embrace a wider identity, accompanied by a corresponding change in the locus of identification. Van Gennep (1965) has written extensively on the "numerous strange rituals" of primitive tribes and great civilizations that were specifically aimed at conducting life travellers across these "difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but also subconscious life" (in Campbell 1993: 10). These rites of passage typically accompanied transitional events like birth, puberty, marriage and death, and often include "formal, usually very severe, exercises of severance, where by the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage left behind" (ibid.). One of the first major transitional phases is adolescence, a highly vulnerable stage filled with potentiality, insecurities and not very infrequently, a strong urge to explore.

Needless to say, tribal rites of passage, although not all together lacking, have diminished considerably in western culture and today each hero and heroine must venture forth very much alone, without the ritual support of their clan's customs. Furthermore, the basis of a world view for a "postmodern subject" very much involves "understanding and accepting the movement, flow, chaos, change and uncertainty in the postmodern world and meeting it in different situations of everyday life" (Bauman 1995 in Inkinen 2005: 209). In this "postmodern identity paradigm", identities are constantly under construction and negotiation, which "in turn; has lead to the new 'tribalism' that has interested social scientists and cultural researchers" (ibid.). Where contemporary society fails to provide the necessary rituals and cohesion, it seems that, in many respects, the postmodern nomad, through a series of perhaps both conscious and subconscious processes, seeks them out on his or her own.

Drug subcultures are just one manifestation of this new "tribalism". This is where many contemporary drifters meet and find a transcendental refuge under the all-embracing umbrella of their drug of choice or preferred "high". As Turner has strongly emphasized; "If

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everyday life was a matter of social-structural positions and identities, then the creativity of the ritual process opened up an anti-structural recognition of life beyond such arbitrary distinctions” (Turner 1982 in Rapport & Overing 2000: 233). For those seeking to “radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage left behind”, cannabis in particular provides the perfect vessel for transporting the postmodern nomad into a psychedelic, liminoidal landscape that in many respects embodies the quintessence of the countercultural ethos. For a while then, depending on the traveller, this becomes the new “habitation of reality”, and with it there is a distinct sense of *communitas*, “a sense of heightened togetherness which people might feel with one another once the superficial clothing of age, status, occupation, gender and other differences have been removed” (ibid.).

Originally the concept of liminality was specifically devised to describe the ritual activity of the Ndembu as they moved from one social status to another “by way of ritual periods which were themselves asocial, amoral, out of time, out of sight and out of mind” (ibid.). This “liminoidal” condition appeared in stark contrast to their everyday life which was strongly characterized by structural situations, rights and duties. Turner subsequently expanded this concept further to incorporate anything which included “something of the anti-structural, the transitional and the processual, the creative, the re-formative, the reversing, resistant and rebellious, the communal and communing”;

From being a transitional passage between social states, then, the liminal developed in Turner’s work and appreciation to being an ongoing (asocial) state itself. Not only was this always and everywhere present, in some shape or form, in human socio-cultural milieux, but for Turner, it represented the best of those milieux. It was where people related to one another as full human beings over and above their socio-cultural exclusivities, and it was where they distilled the creativity and energy with which they created and re-created society and culture, and returned to them reinvigorated, preparing to keep giving them another try. Refusing social-structural distinction, classification and hierarchy, fragmentation and compartmentalization, the limin(oid)al was always a threat, always polluting and undercutting, always presenting a view upon the global and cosmopolitan, the universal and eternal. Hence, the guardians of social structure always attempted to police the liminoidal, if not out of existence then out of sight (time, mind) and seriousness in terms of everyday life. The power of the liminoidal might be recognized as of periodic use by these policemen, but it was also something whose application and provenance had to be carefully controlled, whose representatives were to be co-opted, wherever possible, into (marginal) positions within the social structure (ibid: 234).

This is a significant observation because it indicates that although modernization has in many respects resulted in the eradication of the traditional tribal society with its rites of passage and ritual liminality, the liminoidal itself still remains as a potent social force mediating structure and anti-structure in a post-modern landscape. Significantly, drug subcultures usually begin to form during adolescence and young adulthood, around that time when the tribal initiate would have been carefully segregated from the rest of the clan. This included a period of;

“extended retirement, during which are enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new state, so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn” (Campbell 1993: 10). In many respects then, cannabis can perhaps symbolize a “gateway”, but not to heroin hell, it is instead a gateway towards the anti-structural, away from the collective materialism and mechanistic consciousness of the mainstream clan.

Also, as many of my respondents have pointed out, it is very often the fact that cannabis is illegal in the first place that initially makes it so appealing. This may well be related to the differentiation psychoanalytical theorist Slavoj Žižek has made between “a simple love affair without risk” which “concerns mere *pleasure*”, and “an affair which is experienced as ‘a challenge to the gallows’ – as an act of transgression”, this “procures *enjoyment*” (in Walton 2001: xxiii). Enjoyment in this context is defined as “the ‘surplus’ that comes from our knowledge that our pleasure involves the thrill of entering a forbidden domain – that is to say, that our pleasure involves a certain *displeasure*” (ibid.). To those inclined towards this form of “essential rebellion” using illicit substances then carries an “innervating thrill all [of] its own”. Walton relates this to “the conflict between external and internal laws”, which at its core is really “the same conflict that is the essence of all human drama” (ibid). That is, the primordial conflict between self and society, agency and communion, freedom and inertia, creativity and structure and the different sets of “laws” which attempt to regulate and negotiate this dynamic tension.

The second gate then entails a further retreat but at the same time involves the gravitation towards a new or different locus of identification. This is the *communitas* (Turner 1982), the heightened togetherness that arises when initiates merge and engage in similar rites and very often form new tribes or subcultures expressing their changed affiliation. Erin Sullivan calls this “the gathering of tribes” writing that tribal affiliation is extremely important in adolescence specifically;

Because teenagers are transitional beings, they are sacred to Zeus and to Hermes, guides of the liminal soul and the travelling person; and, by the by, to Hekate the goddess of the underworld. Adolescence is when we identify not only our philosophical affiliations, but our individuality in relation to the collective.

Tribes are identified in indigenous cultures by their markings: jewellery/adornment; hair style; clothing or lack thereof; marking - tattoos, piercing, scarification; mobility - cars/bikes/skateboards; social hierarchies - techie, goth, hippie, nerd, jock, druggie, punk and so on; ideologies: orthodox; heterodox; atheistic; pantheistic; naturalist; intellectual and so on.

At the time in life when individualism is so important, kids seem to be most attached to labelling themselves in accord with an uncanny implicit “call to adventure” - even those who stand outside the status quo of their ranking peers, have an aura of their own - the outsider, the misfit, the geek, the fat boy, the retard, and so on. All

the things we don't like to admit to when we are limbically sophisticated. All these rituals of ordering should help us realize that the adolescent is expressing his or her most core Self, not the refined, semi-civilized "self" (Sullivan 2000).

Traditionally the initiates would be strictly managed by their "officiant-keepers" who would oversee that their "rebirth took the apposite and required directions; as far as possible, their reflections and fantasies were manipulated and directed (their bodies coerced, even humiliated), so that their new world-views were as appropriate to their statuses as their old ones" (Rapport & Overing 2000: 233). Not infrequently, these ceremonies would be accompanied by the use of some form of very potent but ritually regulated psychedelic. Stuart (2004) mentions the ayahuasca ceremonies of the northwest Amazon, among the Machiguenga people of Peru, the mestizo congregations of Brazil, peyote among the Huichol Indians of Mexico as well as many West African tribes like the Bwiti who use Tabernanthe iboga regularly in initiation rites, to name just a few examples<sup>5</sup>. According to Stuart, these rituals provide an important portal towards helping young people; "solidify their identities, to develop allegiance to wholesome core values, and to aspire toward becoming productive citizens upon reaching maturity" (ibid.).

Today on the other hand, our "industrialized technocracy" postpones adult responsibilities in favour of further education as preparation for employment in a complex economy. Therefore, in Stuart's words, modern teenagers are often "living in limbo", "unable to achieve fulfilment through part-time after-school retail or food-industry jobs and obeying church-sponsored vows of sexual abstinence". Lacking "adult responsibilities, privileges, or experience" the youth of contemporary society "still find ways, not necessarily good ones, to assert the autonomy of adulthood... Substance abuse is one of many problematic responses to the confusing world with which adolescents are faced" (ibid.). Seen from a cross-cultural and historical perspective then, young people nowadays are in some ways enacting an ancient ritual or personal performance of transformation, actively seeking a threshold retreat during this highly susceptible period of potentiality. The liminal period is often "likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (Turner 1969:95). It is a "no-man's-land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future" (Turner 1990:11). As many people in contemporary Western

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.maps.org/ritesofpassage/youngpeople.html>

society have substantially increased their consumable income and often choose to delay parenthood into their mid to late thirties, this liminal phase can also be prolonged.

In today's disenchanted postmodern society, there are no guides, no "officiant-keepers" regulating liminality and assuring that it proceeds as smoothly as possible. The hero and heroine are therefore left largely on their own to explore the shadowy realms beyond the threshold and tragically, but not surprisingly, there are those who never return. As Campbell has written;

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend into death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers) (Campbell 1993: 245).

Anthropologist Colin Turnbull (1990) has described the liminal state as an "other" condition of being "that is coexistent with the state of being of which we are normally conscious (the material state of being susceptible to rational awareness and sensory perception)". This state, however, contrasts so drastically with "normality" that even if we can approximate its existence "we cannot find clear cut borders to differentiate it from reality because it is not a foreign component of our consciousness". In other words "we can not be aware of [the condition of alterity], know it or understand it as long as we restrict ourselves to the rational, objective, analytical approach of contemporary anthropology". In order to truly appreciate the liminal experience, "what is needed is a technique of participation that demands the *total involvement* of our whole being" (in Sant 2001). Zoja (1989) has also suggested that the "innate archetypal need for initiation" is something all humans possess, but that this type of ritual integration is currently being denied in modern life (in Stuart 2004). Therefore many people find other, often less fortunate, means of "solidifying their identities", as we shall see in the next chapter. These are in many ways tales from the dark side, accounts of just how difficult a nomadic existence can be when one finds oneself roaming the anti-structural underworld with no more than a handful of luck and a vague, half-forgotten ancestral intuition to guide the way.

## 5.5 - Summary of the second gate

The second gate represents the drive towards communion, integration and identification where the locus of identification is not only directed outwards and away, but seeks to integrate with like-minded “others”. Where the emphasis of the first gate was “I” and the urge to break free, here the emphasis is primarily on “we” and the need to merge and become part of something else. This dynamic is often highly significant in terms of the user patterns one will continue to develop, both regarding the types of substances used and to some extent the frequency with which they are used. There are complex control mechanisms at work, as with Jackie for example, who started experimenting with other drugs only after she moved to a different city, but despite expanding her repertoire, she never developed a destructive pattern of use. Also, these are not “static” alliances, but are continually being managed and maintained as individuals expand their networks, new drugs (like ecstasy) enter the market, and old drugs (like amphetamines in Trondheim) change their status from being taboo to becoming increasingly acceptable within certain circles. There is movement between alliances, connected with frequency and type of drug(s) used, where a person may develop different networks based around their own user “needs”. For example, the need to decrease usage (because one has for example fallen in love with someone who doesn’t approve), can result in seeking out a different “straight” network. While the need to use more often (without getting hassled by worried friends), may result in switching alliances where daily usage is the norm. In other words, the creation and management of boundaries, regulation strategies and identification mechanisms in user trajectories are embedded within a highly complex cybernetic landscape where *communitas* connects and liminality prevails.



## Chapter

# 6

### The Third Gate - Chasing the Dragon

*No creature can attain a higher grade of nature without ceasing to exist.*

Ananda Coomaraswamy

#### 6.1 - Contemporary consumption

In traditional societies the liminal stage represented a period of gestation while the initiate underwent a profound process of transformation and prepared to re-enter society anew. Today on the other hand, since many lack proper guidance throughout this transition and are unable to find firm footing on the other side, there is a very real danger of remaining in a kind of liminoidal stalemate. Victor Turner has also pointed out how the lack of culturally prescribed rites of passage makes the transition through separation, liminality and incorporation very difficult, causing many to linger in a liminal state (Turner 1982). Margaret Mead believed that the increase in various forms of social pathology today could be directly related to the loss of sanctioned rites of passage. Her cross-cultural studies lead her to conclude that if the stronger feelings and impulses in our personality structure are not dealt with internally, they will be projected into our everyday life (in Grof 1996).

At the present time, many former structures and ideological guidelines are no longer manifest due to rapid social transformations and as a result “individuals must construct essential aspects of self without traditional moorings” (Quintero & Nichter 1996: 225). In wealthy, materialistic or commercial societies, individuals often mark their passage by consumption patterns, developing new roles by “acts of disposition and acquisition” (Schouten in Teather 1999: 14). Giddens has even argued that the meaning of addiction may actually lie in the escape it provides from this cumbersome project;

Where large areas of a person's life are no longer set by pre-existing patterns and habits, the individual is continually obligated to negotiate life-style options. Moreover – and this is crucial - such choices are not just “external” or marginal aspects of the individual's attitudes, but define who the individual “is”. In other words, lifestyle choices are constitutive of the reflexive narrative of self. Obligated to find themselves in statuses that accrue to actions and habits, some individuals develop compulsive behaviour patterns (in Quintero & Nichter 1996:225).

In many ways, compulsive behaviour (in its many forms and varieties) can be seen as an expression of this aspect of modernity, suggesting that the foundation for potentially destructive relationships with mind altering substances might even be formed long before the actual substances are introduced. This theory also emerged in the middle of an interview with one of my first respondents, Mia, a single mother in her thirties with a long history of daily, not completely unproblematic, cannabis smoking. Having just mentioned the “gateway theory” of addiction, where cannabis is seen as an entrance or “gateway” into harder drug use, Mia interrupted me and came up with one of her characteristically original and witty replies. Her answer struck me at the time, both for its commonsensical flavour as well as the humour mixed with depth that so often flavoured her responses, but it wasn't until much later that I realized the underlying analytical significance of her response;

*(You've tried other drugs though haven't you? There is this theory where hash<sup>1</sup> leads to other, harder drugs, like heroin eventually...)*

*(interrupting): that's bull, I've heard another story, or theory, that intoxication starts with food (pause) it starts with food, putting something in your mouth, (mimicking mother to child dialogue) 'oh, that's yummy yes, mmmm, we feel very good now, yes'. It's a kind of kick; food is good you know, good instantly. Take that put it in your mouth and feel good right away, find satisfaction now... and then one day we might find ourselves feeling a bit cranky, and it doesn't help to stuff chocolate down our throats because we still feel grumpy so then we chain-smoke two Marlborough and you notice that you become totally indifferent, 'hah, who cares', and then the next time we feel grumpy, experience something unpleasant or have a bad day at work and want to give ourselves a little extra, get a kick, something that works now, straight away, feel good now (her own emphasis)... okay, so now I've eaten three pieces of bread with salami and lots of mayonnaise but it didn't help, it takes more now because we've become accustomed to it you see; we increase the threshold all the time, it's from salami to heroin... via chocolate, tobacco and alcohol of course, but the path is there, and if they say that it all starts with hash, then I have to say that, I'm sorry, it starts way before that, it starts with food.*

On closer inspection, there is actually a lot of vital information in this apparently unpretentious line of reasoning. As Nils Christie and Kjetil Bruun have written in their classic critique of the drug war and Nordic drug politics, *A Suitable Enemy*<sup>2</sup>, food is the first thing a human being encounters upon entering the world, and

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<sup>1</sup> Hash is the cannabis form most frequent in Norway, although marijuana is sometimes available (usually home-grown and of poor quality although recently highly potent weed has also become available in Oslo).

<sup>2</sup> *Den Gode Fienden* (third revised edition).

food indoctrination is therefore fundamental to our development (Christie & Bruun 2003: 41). This is the first stage in a long process of social initiation into the regulation of pleasure, through which the human biological organism gradually gains the culinary skills necessary to pass as a “civilized” body within a given socio-cultural context. Although Freud has presented a theoretical framework encompassing a gradual development away from the primary oral phase through which infants explore their new world, it seems as if certain aspects of this developmental stage stick with us to the very end.

We need food to survive, yet food is much more than fuel for our biological organism. Food and eating practices provide a vital sense of security, of belonging through the social rites accompanying these practices and of identity, especially today when consumption patterns to a very large extent define who we are. Falk (1994) regards modern societies as having a primarily “oral character”, due to increasing individualization and the resulting sense of separateness. In this context, the modern self seeks out food stimulation to fill the looming void felt within; “the ‘oral urge’ of the modern individual self is not a manifestation of oral ‘security’ but on the contrary, a symptom of its absence” (Falk 1994 in Lupton 1996: 23). In this regard, the appetites are not merely an expression of physiological hunger, but also a need for sensual stimulation, a tendency which is expressed through the increasing appeal of non-foods like chewing gum, candy, snacks, soft drinks, etc. as well as ingested substances like alcohol, tobacco and some variety of illegal substances. These ‘oral side-involvements’ seem to be gaining ground in terms of popularity and acceptance, especially when compared to the decline of the traditional meal in western society, and their symbolic function is definitely worth exploring (ibid.).

There are many different ways in which these “oral side-involvements” can develop and make their presence felt through diverse patterns of expression, some obviously more problematic than others. Wilber (2000) speaks of four “levels of food”, either conscious or unconscious, that can arise as a result of the fact that every structure “is a *system of relational exchange* with the same level of organization in the world at large, resulting in a hierarchy of ‘food’ – physical food, emotional food, mental food, soul food” (ibid: 118).

Physical needs reflect our physical relationships and exchanges with the material universe: food, water, shelter, and so on. Emotional needs reflect our relationships with other emotional beings, and consist in an exchange of emotional warmth, sexual intimacy, and caring. Mental needs reflect our exchanges with other mental creatures: in every act of verbal communication, we exchange a set of symbols with

others...And spiritual needs reflect our need to be in a relationship with a Source and Ground that gives sanction, meaning, and deliverance to our separate selves (the unsatisfaction of those needs is described, one way or another, as hell) ...Although we may discern many different types and levels of needs, all genuine needs simply reflect the interrelationships necessary for the life of any holon (at any level) (ibid.).

This manifestation of consumption patterns, seen as a system of relational exchange expressing different levels of needs, applies no less to the consumption of other inedibles. In Mia's case, a tragic love affair seemed to be the catalyst for a somewhat destructive alliance with these other "oral side-involvements", when at the age of thirteen she found out that her boyfriend was cheating on her. As she recalls;

I was thirteen and called this contact telephone and ended up talking to someone who knew my boyfriend, or who I thought was my boyfriend, the guy who took my virginity and got me pregnant the same night. So I thought everything was fine between us but it turns out that he had been seen by this guy I was talking to walking down the street holding hands with another girl. So then I found out that I didn't have a boyfriend after all and ended up with this huge broken heart.

So first I thought I would bicycle straight in front of a bus, I was so angry and sad but then my friend was there and she had these two Marlboro and I smoked them both one after the other that evening. Until then I had been extremely against everything; alcohol, smoking, drugs in general. I used to hang up posters at school with these skulls smoking a cigarette. Things like that. So two Marlboro did the trick, I got very suitably indifferent, like 'Ha, screw it all! Now I can't give a shit about anything anymore, not give a shit about myself even since nobody else seems to be giving a shit about me. See, look at me not giving a shit about myself, ha ha ha!'

Then, the next day I bicycled in front of a bus but not quite close enough because I was too cowardly for that and I didn't want to shoot holes in myself so I went into the store and got two packets of cigarettes on credit on my mothers account and smoked them up without having eaten anything and that made me nice and light green and dizzy and very indifferent because then at least I got something else to think about than my broken heart. Like not falling down and not puking but then that was no problem since I didn't have anything in my stomach to begin with. So that was my first experience with intoxication. It worked well for me so I continued with that, smoking cigarettes.

Unlike eating three pieces of bread with salami and lots of mayonnaise, her first experiences were perhaps far from pleasurable, but following through on the holarchy of food hypothesis, it is still possible to see how the act of "consuming" a cigarette here reflects several essential relational components and motivational needs. Mia had a broken heart which desperately needed mending, her emotional needs had been cut short and she compensated for this lack by smoking herself "light green and dizzy". Although this act certainly had a strong destructive component, it still accomplished a strategic goal in the sense that it made her "suitably indifferent" and managed to give her "something else to think about" other than her broken heart. This was the difference that made the difference, and as we shall see later, it set the stage and became the catalyst for a pattern that was to stay with her for many years to come.

A consumption pattern fundamentally affects both the experience of ourselves, our life-worlds and the stream of consciousness connecting it all together. An apparently simple and commonplace act such as eating, drinking or smoking a cigarette may contain a wealth of information in terms of not only who we are but where we are in the total scheme of things. Food, according to Morse (1994:95), is ‘the symbolic medium par excellence’ (in Lupton 1996: 1) a statement which may well apply to all ingested substances, including the non-foods mentioned above. Furthermore, consumption patterns are strongly related to our subjectivity, our sense of self and experiences of embodiment, that is to say, the manner in which we live in and through our bodies and the extent to which these experiences are constructed or mediated within a socio-cultural context (Lupton 1996). Consumption habits are not merely expressions of biological needs; they are extremely effective boundary markers in terms of social class, geographic region, nations, gender, occupation, religions, seasons and times of day (ibid.). They establish and symbolize control over one’s body and in many respects “structure what counts as a person in our culture” (Curtin 1992: 4 in Lupton 1996:1).

Seen as isolated phenomena in themselves, drug patterns are extremely difficult to understand and can (and often do) easily turn into an analytical can of worms when taking all the variables and exceptions into account. However, based on Lupton’s insightful exposition of consumption patterns, it soon becomes apparent that there are two primary relationships at work here. The first one concerns subjectivity as an expression of our sense of self, experiences of embodiment, and how we live in and through our bodies, or what is commonly referred to as “I”. The second theme relates to our relation to the world “out there”, as boundary markers which establish and symbolize control (or lack of control) over one’s body and in many respects organizes our being in the world. This can be related to the “we” dimension in everyday discourse and accounts for how consumption patterns are constructed and/or mediated within a socio-cultural context.

These in turn appear analogous to Ken Wilber’s subjective and intersubjective left quadrant which can be broadly related to mind and culture where the “hierarchy of food” then represents a continuum along different levels of relational exchange within this quadrant. Together, these dialectics offer a foundation for understanding the different types of strategies and goals underlying individual journeys in a postmodern

landscape. Although individual stories differ, these primary relationships can be seen operating at some level in every narrative. The needs may vary, yet many contemporary consumption patterns (from eating practices to shopping and getting high) reflect different styles of interrelationships that are fundamental to each person at certain stages of their life. Seen in this light, unhealthy patterns are in many ways outdated adaptive strategies which have to some extent served a purpose but only temporarily and on a rather superficial level since the underlying need often remains unaddressed.

## **6.2 - Out of it**

I've known Mia for many years, I think I was still a teenager the first time I met her and we hit it off straight away, it almost felt like I had bumped into a long-lost twin sister. She had the same twisted sense of humour that I had and an almost diabolical innate ability to see through people and the many masks they hide behind to cover up the deep insecurities underneath. Despite little formal education, she had a way with words that could make even the most learned and eloquent among us squirm, getting to the crux of a matter in lightening speed while leaving her characteristic signature of irony and sarcasm without blinking an eye. Needless to say, she certainly made her presence felt, in addition to the fact that she could smoke most everyone under the table. I've known a few cannabis smokers in my life but Mia smoked with a vengeance. Starting with a "mornings"<sup>3</sup> and then before lunch, then after lunch and between dinner then before dinner and so on and so forth finally topping it off with a few before bedtime just to be sure she was suitably comatosed before going to sleep. She was probably as close as one gets to personifying what could be termed a "hash junky" despite the fact that cannabis isn't especially physically addictive. That is to say, there was undeniably something rather manic about her smoking habits.

It is not uncommon for some young people to go through a phase of frenzied cannabis smoking, usually combined with the whole "party" scene around the age of eighteen and upwards. I have observed however that the majority seem to grow out of this phase, mainly because it gets boring and leaves most people feeling drained and

frazzled after a while. Mia just never seemed to grow out of it, despite the fact that paradoxically she was fairly health-conscious and even quite skilled in the healing arts. She had a wise counsel for almost every complaint, could blend me herbal teas from the great variety in her cupboard and prescribed me oatmeal porridge in the mornings whenever my nerves were acting up (surprisingly effective). She just hardly ever applied the same remedies to herself, almost as if a part of her didn't think she was worth it. I asked for a formal interview partly because of her remarkable ability to express herself, and also because she was somewhat of a mystery, full of paradoxes and contradictions. This excerpt picks up from her first encounter with cannabis and goes on from there, progressing onwards to where she was at the time of the interview;

Then a few months later I was with friends at a party and I took a drag... And that was really enjoyable, first I got kind of out of it and started getting the giggles because this guy next to me had drawn a smiley face on his fingers and was wiggling it and making me laugh so hard that it wasn't even funny anymore. Then we went out and smoked one more and ended up at this MC party and then it felt like I was in the Mediterranean even though I knew I wasn't, that's how it felt. Really nice, lot's of action and a lot of fun, lot's of stuff that went on there... A very positive experience, really nice, everyone was having a really good time and there was nothing bad whatsoever.

*(But you had already started drinking by then?)*

I had tried it but alcohol isn't really for me, it's okay in the right setting but either you drink too little and you just get tired or you drink too much and you start feeling ill, and if you drink just a little too much then you get all weird and sentimental and start saying all this stuff. You get loud and think you're the greatest and feel embarrassed the next day, then you're nerves are all frazzled and you feel ill and, no, there's just too much nonsense.

*(So how did the hash affect you then?)*

Well besides getting a terribly dry throat and red eyes, everything got a bit different, even though it was the same but there was more atmosphere in everything, everything becomes warmer, you feel more somehow, in another way than you ordinarily do but it's very difficult to explain. To put it this way, I became more patient, kinder and have more love for everyone, that's the red thread that goes through the experience, at least for me, and in the beginning I got very creative, I got out a lot of creativity that I had in me.

*(Did you smoke a lot then?)*

No because I got so stoned and looked so out of it that I couldn't go out among people but then I moved to town and started working at a mall when I was fifteen and then I was still really anti-drugs even though I was pretty liberal I was at least not going to buy anything myself, that was my aim. It was fine if someone offered me some and it was suitable, then I could always take a drag but I was not going to buy any myself. But that didn't work because I got so totally bombed out every time I smoked because I smoked so rarely, so I kind of had to smoke myself in.

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<sup>3</sup> In Norwegian "mornings" is slang for the first cannabis fix of the day (usually hash), typically first thing in the morning.

*(How old were you then and what was your motivation?)*

I was fifteen and a half, and I was... well I wasn't going to smoke myself in maybe but I was going to get used to it in a way so I could function with other people (*Why is that?*) I don't know, maybe I just wanted to be totally out of it, a lot... maybe I just really wanted to retreat into my own little bubble because that's what I do now too when I'm depressed, I sit on the couch and smoke myself out of it. Then I was pretty ok because I remember thinking ok, I don't have any debts and I don't have any problems I'm healthy, I have a job and a place to live, the only thing that bugs me is that right now I need a good dentist, and that was probably the happiest moment of my life.

*(When did it become a pattern then?)*

Well that was after I moved to Belgium and met my boyfriend who smoked all the time and I moved in with him and he smoked every evening and then I did too because I do the same things my boyfriends do for some neurotic reason or another. I was sixteen, and then I left him when I was nineteen when I stopped smoking more or less for three months or so. But then I moved to Trondheim and started smoking again. My goal wasn't to stop smoking then it just happened because of the tiny community I was living in at the time, and I just couldn't be bothered. Then when I moved to town I smoked all the time until I got pregnant and then started again afterwards, every day once my kid had gone to bed. Then after I met my second husband I started smoking more again because he smoked during the day so I did too, I started the day with a mornings.

*(Why did you decide to start the day like that?)*

To calm down, at least for me it calmed me down

*(So it never made you anxious or paranoid then?)*

No, well it did but then I bought myself some stash and locked myself in my own place, because I lived alone when I was fifteen to sixteen, I lived alone in the city and worked. I did that because I wanted to learn to use it and deal with nerves and anxiety and all that because I didn't want to smoke if it wasn't going to be any fun. Now I get mostly calm and patient but I'm not as young as I was then so I don't get quite as creative anymore and can't do as much as I could then, now it sinks me down, I need that energy.

*(Now you're thirty two, but didn't you stop for a while again, why was that?)*

Yes I stopped for six months at least three years ago, I had had enough, first you spend a lot of money on it and I got sick of that and then I noticed that it really wore me out and I didn't want that anymore because I was working all the time and I didn't have time for it. That was my way and my advice to anyone who wants to stop doing anything, just make sure that you don't have the time, make sure you have enough other things to do that gives you something and that you don't have time for that. So the little time you do have to sit on the couch isn't enough to smoke anything because you're soon going to bed. Maybe you have someone there you want to talk to as well, or have energy for sex instead, nice things like that instead of smoking until you're worn out and end up worrying over something instead of falling asleep when your head hits the pillow.

*(So in the beginning it was positive then, it made you creative and gave you energy)*

Yes and it strengthened that warm loving feeling...

*(When did you notice that it had become destructive?)*

Destructive in the sense that you spend time on it and the older you get the less time you have, so when you're fourteen or twenty years old it feels perfectly alright to waste a few weeks on that but then weeks turn into months and months turn into years and even though you don't necessarily waste all your time you are a lot more worn out doing all the things you're supposed to do when you smoke at the same time. But that happens so slowly that you don't even notice it, just like with tobacco, you don't notice any big difference and then when you finally stop it really isn't such a big deal, there is no major difference from when you were smoking, it's like 'is that it?'. So you might as well start again.



For me the difference depends on what you have to do, because you have more energy, that's the only difference I've noticed, I can do more and it's easier for me to do things. So when you have things to do and you're satisfied with your life then you don't need to be sedated that's what it is for me anyway, sedation. It was more than sedation in the beginning but now it has become primarily sedation.

*(So when did it become sedation?)*

After I had children I think, maybe a bit before actually... it had become a habit and it's a very easy way to turn off. When you have too much to think about for example then you have to do that, at least I do, I need a time-out and then you have a good reason not to think logically or whatever, that's the mental aspect of it. Like 'screw it, don't bother me, I'm sitting here completely stoned out of my head so don't expect anything from me', if I say or do anything smart then it's a bonus. You become a lot sharper when you don't smoke and that's a good thing if you have some way of using your brain but if you're like me and just wander around with idiot chores like washing the dishes and doing the laundry then please give me a kilo.

*(But you smoked quite a lot when you were working too, was it because your job wasn't really fulfilling or?)*

That was a habit, and it was a luxury to get up and smoke before you went to work and actually being able to do that, and afford that. It was power, never going empty on hash gives you a sense of power, because when you were fourteen the people who had hash all the time they had full control. They had it all worked out and that sense I get too, I have control. Actually, I always have hash in the house just like I always have food in the house, it's the same thing, I'm a good provider, see, I'm the boss, I have no needs.

*(Looking back today then would you describe your experiences as positive or negative?)*

Both I think, although I can't really decide whether it's both or not. I can't really decide. I was fanatically against drugs and had in a way felt that you could be high on life and all that but then since things turned out the way they did, then I feel that there is a meaning behind that too, and I had already become pretty angry with life way before I started smoking dope. So I don't know how angry I would have got if I hadn't sedated myself with dope every now and again.

There is only one really negative thing that has happened to me because of smoking dope and that's when a family member called the child protection agency after I had welcomed him into my home and thought everything was fine and dandy. I was honest and didn't even hide it from him. So he told his mother who happened to be studying to become a child welfare officer, and they called the child protection services and I had to fight them off for months afterwards. I took that really personally, that felt like a personal attack, I mean my home was so neat and tidy that people would turn around at the door because they thought some old granny lived there and I had no criminal record from before so they really had no reason to be there. The furniture was polished, the carpet was clean, my fridge was full and my child was perfectly happy so what was the point of them being there really. I talked to a lawyer and he told me that as long as the child wasn't bothered then they didn't have anything on me, and my child was fine.

It's actually only during the past four or five years that I've considered stopping if only to know for certain that that's not what's keeping me from achieving anything in my life. Things like that; could I really have accomplished something if I didn't smoke? So that's why I've stopped a few times before and then I find out that there really is no big difference.

*(So how long did you stop and what was that like?)*

Six months maybe more, and wonderful! I should have never started again, waste of money (laughs)  
*(So why did you?)* I have no idea, it kind of crept up on me, it's nice to be out of it and when you first have that kind of fanatic attitude it's important to hold on to it, then you allow yourself a little smoke every now and again and before you know it you're on a roll, mornings and the whole package.

*(So do you feel like you're dependent then? A lot of people say that cannabis isn't addictive...)*

It's psychologically addictive anyway that's for sure. You get addicted to that feeling of being smacked on the couch and not having a choice because now we're sitting on the couch.

*(Enforced rest in a way then?)* Enforced rest yes, if you're mentally exhausted then you smack you're body into a stable lateral position, I can't be bothered anymore so ok, here we go...

*(Do you feel like you have a choice in the matter?)*

I really don't know, it's so very sneaky this whole business, before you know it you've been continually stoned for fifteen years, and that in itself is a frightening thought. That you've been substantially reduced because you can't deny the fact that you've been sedated, and when you smoke mornings and evenings and afternoons and after lunch and before dinner and between evenings and after evenings and night time three times then obviously that's going to do your head in a bit.

When I think about it it's pretty unbelievable that I've managed as well as I have. If I had been drinking all those times, if I had been drinking alcohol all those times the way I've been smoking, I would have been dead many times over. In that sense hash isn't dangerous at all because I should have been dead, dead, dead but it's dangerous in the sense that it's very pleasant to sit in a sofa and not give a shit about anything and besides it steals your memories and that's a creepy thing. Makes me think about the book Momo, you have to read that book by the way, it's about these men in grey suits that walk about and steal time. I can't remember if it is Never Ending Story or if it's Momo...

*(I'm pretty sure it's Momo because I saw Never Ending Story and it wasn't about that)*

You lose your memories gradually, I don't remember how or why but the memories disappear and then I think about intoxication, I associate that with intoxication because it takes your memories and makes you forget to appreciate the little things in life, that it's the small things that really count and then you forget that and finally you've lost the whole picture so you have to watch out. There is something to all these fairy tales.

*(So to what extent would you say that you're hooked as opposed to saying that you choose to get high)*

It's a choice, but you know that I have a problem with choices, you know what it's like when we go out to eat, and choices are scary, but it's worked so far so then we continue like that. Although the only thing now is that I want to be free, I don't want to spend money on that, but I never think about the police, I can't say that that bothers me, so if they turn up and find forty grams I'll just laugh at them and say; 'Christ that's what I smoke in one week. Is there anything else you've got on me? I can sit here and smoke ten bongs in front of you and then go and make dinner, so is there anything else? What do you want from me? You should be glad that I'm using this and not tons of pain killers, Valium or Stesolid and God knows what other kinds of goodies they've got out there for half-witted housewives like me'. At least like this I know what I'm doing and I don't end up in detox with deadly cramps for fourteen days because then I'll just run down and buy even more on the black market and never be finished with it, because that's the alternative for people like me.

*(What do you mean by "people like me"?)*

People who couldn't quite tolerate life as well as they should, we know or see how it's supposed to be but we don't like it, as if we fell down from Mars or something, either we're brain damaged or we are Martians, it's one of those two.

*(Do you see that as a bad thing then?)*

I still have my beliefs from childhood that one should be sharp and calm without any supporting assistance, that's for cowards. Only cowards get high, so you all know, stupid cowardly swine, just like me.

*(So you still think that?)* Evidently.

*(Do you see yourself as addicted then?)*

To a certain extent, as I said, if I don't have anything better to do than I smoke and then it maybe turns into a destructive cycle because I do less things that might give me something better to do.

*(So it's not the substance in itself that is addictive but the circumstances you're in?)*

Yes, very much the circumstances, we are all victims of circumstances you know

*(But you've also said that you have a choice?)*

Well you know people can get addicted to their own compulsive thoughts, like me and my fear of bacteria. Walking around, wiping off everything. It gets manic, like manic hash smoking and people who smoke forty cigarettes a day, there's something bothering them too. People who eat all the time, there's something bothering them and people who don't eat at all there's something bothering them too. There's something bothering everybody more or less.

*(So what's bothering you then?)*

I don't like my life, I've never liked it. I wonder if I should change my name and maybe that will help. My holistic therapist told me that. If you don't like your name you should change it straight away. I don't feel like what I'm called at all, so maybe I'll do that, there's something I haven't tried, see if that changes things, because in my life things usually go straight down the toilet.

*(What would it take in order for you to like your life then?)*

Economic security, a meaningful job and of course now I don't mention a boyfriend because I'm trying to avoid that subject but that's always been an important thing and I'm trying not to make it into an important thing now because it's so hard to get it to work.

*(Would you say that you've been as dependent on having a boyfriend as you have on dope?)*

Yes, you could put it like that yes. I have a suspicion that there might be a connection there; it fills a void.

*(Where do you think that void comes from?)*

I don't know maybe it's because I have a hole in my head, maybe I'm just stupid, I don't know, blame my childhood maybe? But there are many people who have been worse off than me. I had food and clothes. I wasn't beaten that much.

*(What do you long after then?)*

I long after love, because I've always felt that love was so big and great and I'm hung up on the idea that you're supposed to be two that cooperate to make things work and turn them into something big and beautiful and magical so that you hardly need food anymore. That's the most wonderful thing I could imagine in life but it's totally impossible so therefore I just feel like sitting down and sulking and giving up. That was the most important thing for me.

I've seen too much Cinderella and Snow White so it's maybe not so strange. The happiest moments in my life were children's television. I still remember how tragic it was when it was cancelled because of sports or because the electricity went at exactly that time. That seemed to happen very often in my perception of reality, once a year was too often for me. Snow White and Cinderella that was real entertainment, I identified myself very strongly with them. I had an 'evil stepmother' but not half as evil as she could have been, things like that. Love was supposed to save you from everything. So I blame Disney, I've seen too many Disney films, love was supposed to save you from everything. There we have it. I'm going to shoot Disney that's what I'll do. I'm going to hunt him down and shoot him.

Blaming Disney is always one alternative, but I have a feeling that the need for intimacy and emotional warmth may have already been present way before he entered the scene. As she put it, “I wasn’t beaten that much”, but then it really doesn’t take “much” beating for a child to feel unlovable and worthless. The movies she saw when young were something which expressed that underlying need in a way that Mia as a child could understand and relate to. Still, without going into a full psychoanalysis here, it’s worth noting how the whole pattern of smoking herself out of it to avoid dealing with a wounded heart, had already started at the age of thirteen with two cigarettes. It “worked” as she put it. Once one has established a habit of smoking every day, the effect tends to wear off however and that would be around the same time that cannabis entered the picture, although not problematically to start with. Here her debut is not unlike many of the other respondents in that there is a strong sense of exploration and negotiating boundaries in the beginning.

In some ways there are several “levels of food” operating almost simultaneously in terms of the needs and relationships underlying her smoking patterns. Physically there is the sense of being “calmed down”, and the only motive she gives for smoking as much as she did in the beginning was because she did the same thing her boyfriends did “for some neurotic reason or another”. After a while the high becomes primarily sedation and gradually it becomes clear that this pattern is also related to a deep dissatisfaction with her life and circumstances. She “smokes herself out of it” because “it’s an easy way to turn off when you have too much to think about”, this she calls the “mental aspect of it”. A “time-out” and “good reason not to think”, where being completely stoned out of her head almost seems like a voluntary lobotomy, so nobody would “expect anything” from her.

Several periods of abstinence also proved to be somewhat futile because as she discovered, “you become a lot sharper” and get more energy which is good if you have something to do with your brains but “if you just wander around with idiot chores... then please give me a kilo”. The few times she had stopped was only to make sure that her smoking habits weren’t keeping her from achieving anything with her life, but when she discovered that things remained basically the same she couldn’t quite see the point in quitting. Then there was also the element of feeling “in control” as she put it, because people who always had hash “they had it all worked out”.

Therefore, “I always have hash in the house just like I always have food in the house it’s the same thing, ‘I’m a good provider, see I’m the boss’, I have no needs”.

In other words, the benefits seemed to outweigh the disadvantages. The whole boyfriend theme (or wounded heart theme) only turns up at the beginning and towards the end, but it seems to be an underlying relational component in addition to “not having anything better to do” as she puts it. Although some might be tempted to call her destructive tendencies an “addiction” and leave it at that, it is far more informative to see them as an “outdated adaptive strategy” and try to understand the mechanisms behind this strategy. Her tactic was obviously effective at one point in a time, but in the long run will hardly serve to heal the deep wound beneath as long as it remains hidden behind a thick cloud of smoke. This approach is almost like covering a bullet wound with a very big band-aid: it does partially cover it up. Paradoxically, underneath all the cannabis smoke there also lies a strong conviction that actually “only cowards get high” and that love was all you needed to turn everything into “something big and beautiful and magical so that you hardly need food anymore”. In other words, there is also a strong urge or desire to transcend her current state altogether. In not being able to live up to her ideals however, there arises a great sense of sadness and loss. As she put it “therefore I just feel like sitting down and sulking and giving up”. Her story is somewhat reminiscent of that overplayed love song from the 80’s, “I want a new drug”, by Huey Lewis and the News;

I want a new drug  
One that won't make me  
sick  
One that won't make me  
crash my car  
Or make me feel three feet  
thick

I want a new drug  
One that won't spill  
One that don't cost too  
much

Or come in a pill  
I want a new drug  
One that won't go away  
One that won't keep me up  
all night  
One that won't make me  
sleep all day  
One that won't make me  
nervous

I want a new drug  
One that won't hurt my  
head  
One that won't make my  
mouth too dry  
Or make my eyes too red  
Wondering what to do  
One that makes me feel like  
I feel when I'm with you  
When I'm alone with you  
I'm alone with you baby

I want a new drug  
One that does what it should  
One that won't make me  
feel too bad  
One that won't make me  
feel too good

One that won't make me  
nervous  
Wondering what to do  
One that makes me feel like  
I feel when I'm with you  
When I'm alone with you  
I want a new drug  
One with no doubt  
One that won't make me  
talk too much  
Or make my face break out

One that won't make me  
nervous  
Wondering what to do  
One that makes me feel like  
I feel when I'm with you  
When I'm alone with you

### 6.3 - Nothing left to lose

In many ways there are actually some interesting similarities between Mia's pattern of consumption and what Sørhaug has called the "junky paradox". This is when the dialectic between self and other is replaced with a dialectic between self and substance. In this respect, addiction becomes a "pursuit of identity where the existence and the value of the self is confirmed by the introjection of a substance...The substance becomes a substitute for a human other" (Sørhaug 1991:15). In one sense, there is a great sense of freedom here which lies in the ability to maintain an identity almost completely liberated from the dialectic or interdependence between self and other. This is clearly expressed in Mia's description of her own situation; "Screw it, leave me alone, I'm sitting here completely stoned out of my head so don't expect anything from me". There is some comfort in closing all the doors and shutting out the world but then at the same time this results in a rather lonely and dark cocoon, something which she also hints at when she says "maybe I just really wanted to retreat into my own little bubble".

In this respect, the more she disappears in the high the more she closes herself off from others, thereby attaining full autonomy in relation to others but losing it during the process in relation to herself. Therefore the choice to use is simultaneously a "non-choice", or as Mia put it, "you get addicted to not having a choice". The more this pattern is repeated, the more she widens the gap between self and others, almost like a form of self-protection, although this form of protection ultimately leads nowhere and includes nobody. This is the secret of the junky paradox, trapped between the two states of autonomy and dependence: on the one hand Mia frees herself from personal ties and obligations, while on the other hand she becomes more and more dependent on the substance itself. Consequently, substance induced autonomy simultaneously becomes a form of slavery, and one's identity becomes more and more rooted in that slavery, as in Mia's observation: "it's worked so far so then we continue like that. Although the only thing now is that I want to be free".

There are ultimately two types of freedom, writes Erich Fromm (2001 first published 1942), positive freedom and negative freedom. Positive freedom is "freedom to", the freedom to realize oneself, by being that self which consists in the "spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality" (ibid: 222). This kind of

activity is “free activity of the self”, rooted in the Latin word *sponte*, which literally means “of one’s free will”. Negative freedom on the other hand, is “freedom from”, primarily freedom from external bonds that once gave meaning and security or prevented one from doing as one wished. Trying to escape “from” leads to feelings of isolation, insecurity and powerlessness and often new bondage as one seeks security at the expense of sacrificing personal integrity. One chooses to “lose” oneself since one cannot bear to be alone (ibid: 221). Freedom reaches a critical point where “driven by the logic of its own dynamism, it threatens to change into its opposite” (ibid: 232). A powerful example of this is in Lea’s case, where an attempt to escape from the strict authoritarian regime of her parents and embark on her own spiritual quest lead her down an extremely dark valley of heroin addiction. Here she begins by commenting on some of the problematic aspects of what she calls the duality of living two lives, and the difference between various drug scenes;

At the same time, when you have that duality you start to see how the drugs kind of take over at the expense of school, there is more lying and then it’s not all fun and games anymore you start to see the drawbacks of that situation. It’s not like wow, when you were young and free like it was in the beginning. You start to see the gravity of your own situation, you realise that you are more and more worn out and start to enter a new phase that was unknown before. Then you start having problems more and more because there is an imbalance there. Suddenly the dope starts to chase after you. It’s not something you flee into as a kind of romantic or innocent escape. Suddenly it flips over and it becomes a problem and then you have the money issue to deal with also. By that time I had moved back to Trondheim and met lots of people and started to see the difference between drug scenes too. Like the difference between the laid back veggie-camp out on the streets of Oslo, and I noticed that the scene in Trondheim was very different.

*(Do you think there was anything your parents could have done at the time to help you?)*

Maybe if I had more alternative parents who had backed me up already when I was five or six because I loved dance and the theatre. Like when we moved back to Trondheim I wanted to go to this drama school and there was this place in another town that had that as an option but I would have had to take the train early every morning, which I was more than willing to do, but they were like no, no, no, everything was supposed to be totally academic. From college and then further on, all planned out in a straight line. They were so strict about things like that and I just felt like I couldn’t do it, I was totally sick of school already in the ninth grade and had no idea... *(pause)*

I came from a very resourceful family in Oslo; where we lived there were all these boys with cabins in the mountain and sailboats and there at least I had the street theatre, while in Trondheim the drugs became more and more dominant and that was a big transition. That’s what’s so tragic in a way, you become part of this really closed group and are dragged down more and more without thinking about other things. In creative environments there is painting and dancing and a network around you which is more than just the drugs, because that’s when you get really strung out, when it’s all about the drugs.

*(So you didn’t have any other possibility for escape then, it was that or nothing, suddenly there was no other alternative and the drugs meant freedom for you...)*

Yes, yes and I had a lot that I wanted to express, and I could have maybe expressed it in a more creative, positive and natural manner if I had been given more freedom but then everything became tied to the drugs.

*(Your parents were strict then?)*

Yes, very authoritarian and conservative, they were younger than everyone else's parents but totally Victorian, only in their early twenties I remember thinking that was really strange when I saw all these alternative fifty year old ladies that were the mother of my friends...

*(So you didn't think that things were getting a bit risky?)*

Yes of course, towards the end, from seventeen or eighteen, after I had left home and then I saw the gravity of my situation because I had no one to help me economically and had started dealing as a necessity. Then the last year there were all these overdoses and then you realise that this is serious and there is a sense of loss because you have to acknowledge that you had walked a path and had all these experiences but that was just part of a larger process, you saw that it wasn't an absolute solution, it was a solution for a while but it was important to move on and there were many things that reinforced that and made that clear towards the end. It's like you step on the gas and you know that you are about to hit the wall but you keep pushing and give everything you have so that you can really smash yourself up, again and again and again, it gets that destructive.

*(Why did it get like that do you think?)*

That's where transformation comes in, it's not innocent anymore, it wakes you up in a way, shifts and flips over and then you're not on your way up every time anymore but become more aware of the depths of your own reality, and then you realise that this isn't a good solution anymore.

Today I can say that I don't regret anything from the past, it has taught me tremendously but there are many things that I experienced then that I could never go through again; you get physically sick just thinking about it. Then when you are in the middle of it all it becomes so absolute, you can't have fear or be concerned about death because you are immortal and in that youthful force you give everything and you risk everything and you stake everything. That's why it can go so completely to hell, because you mobilise your whole self and believe in it too and in some ways see the transformation but aren't completely conscious of it, but you see that you are sinking faster and faster. There are more difficulties with money, the dark side, problems. You see problems with other people too who have freaked out and then suddenly it dawns on you that it isn't flirting anymore, that the dope has taken over. It sneaks up on you so it's not so easy to see suddenly.

*(Most people would say okay, now you're addicted.)*

It's a lot more than that, because your focus changes more and more, everything becomes more and more connected to the dope, as opposed to more creative environments where the joint or trip is a small part of it. But when you become part of this hardcore group where dope is your god then there is that split between someone who can enjoy a glass of red wine on occasions and an alcoholic. You can't predict that but its part of a context.

*(What about the whole business with needles and all that, it didn't bother you?)*

No, a fix was a fix but already when I was thirteen or fourteen I discovered that there was a difference between different groups, like the speed crowd and the standard flirting with cannabis crowd, I could quickly see the negative aspects of it but you think that it won't happen to you because you're invulnerable. You can overdose time and time again but you think, well I didn't die, I'm not going to die because I'm immortal. Because in you're head you're immortal and fast on your way to finding that out.

*(How old were you during that time?)*

It was pretty tough moving to Trondheim, before then I had just flirted with it (*heroin*) a bit and was maybe mentally seduced by it and noticed that if I thought about it I would start to sweat and get very psychologically tense but it wasn't until after I moved to Trondheim that it became a physical thing, it really took off.

*(Was it an act of defiance then, hooking up with that crowd?)*

It became unbearable to have those two sides, that duality, keep going to school being home, and then dinner at 4pm, so I chose to run away from home. Then suddenly I didn't have to go to school, and nobody expected anything from me and that was a real boost, like wow, now I'm really free, finally free, now I can do what I want. But somehow it all became tied to this extreme drug culture and unfortunately not an alternative drug culture where other things still mattered, and then there is only one way to go. When you arrive there and mingle with people who only talk about dope, and the next



fix and then it's not enough to get the dope and enjoy it before you're already planning the next time. Then things quickly become really destructive and quickly deteriorate.

Intoxication can be a good thing, just like a glass of wine with good food but when it becomes everything then you suddenly see that it has transformed from being something you just flirted with to becoming the most important thing in your daily routine.

There are several important aspects in Lea's narrative which all revolve around the primary dialectic between self and other, agency and structure or "autonomy and dependence". The issue is freedom, or more specifically in this case the "negative" aspect of freedom, freedom "from". Here it becomes quite clear how freedom, when "driven by the logic of its own dynamism", and pursued to the extreme, leads to a new form of "submission and bondage". As Lea put it; "the dope starts to chase after you", "suddenly it flips over and it becomes a problem". The importance of context, or set and setting is also particularly relevant here, specifically having to move to Trondheim where there was no real alternative scene, or "creative environments" with "painting and dancing and a network around you which is more than just the drugs". This eventually resulted in what she refers to as a "split" which became unbearable to her, having to play two roles, and so she runs away. Finally she is "free", but because it all became tied to this "extreme drug culture" and not an "alternative drug culture where other things still mattered". Having nothing else to hold her back, "then there is only one way to go".

It's interesting to see how both Mia and Lea use very significant relational metaphors when describing their patterns of use. First there is "flirting" with a drug and then gradually you get "seduced" by it until finally "dope is your god". This is often a slow process that "sneaks up on you" until finally it starts to "chase after you". A similar use of metaphors was also employed by the clients at the methadone clinic where I had conducted fieldwork previously. As one client said, when you're an addict "the needle is your best friend" and another commented, "heroin is like a lover which never lets you down" (in Aaslid 2003: 31). These metaphors demonstrate first and foremost that in every case of addiction there is also a highly relevant "system of relational exchange" based on different "needs". For Mia that need was primarily emotional, based on an underlying deep "void" that wasn't being filled so she chose to smoke herself into oblivion, because it "worked", for a while anyway. Lea was on a "deep spiritual quest" but due to a series of critical cybernetic events, ended up in an environment where "dope is your god". Where Mia turned to manic cannabis smoking

in an attempt to fulfil her need for “emotional food”, Lea did the same with heroin in her pursuit of “soul food”.

In both cases there is a conscious intentional strategy underlying these events, or a “larger process” as Lea put it, which in itself is not only healthy, but is actually striving towards a higher state of balance and integration in the “self system”. This is why it is so important to distinguish between the actual navigation and the course, intention or “goal” behind the navigating, which in most cases is based on a deep, underlying basic “need”. Remarkably, despite her extremely destructive behaviour, there was a part of Lea that was still conscious of this process, enough to ultimately help her “acknowledge that you had walked a path and had all these experiences but that was just part of a larger process, you saw that it wasn’t an absolute solution, it was a solution for a while but it was important to move on”. In Lea’s case the fact that she was aware of this process was also what helped further her development and growth so that she didn’t remain stuck in that pattern. There is a marked transition towards integration or what she calls “transformation”, especially towards the end when things started deteriorating drastically. Instead of resigning however, she said that this turn of events actually woke her up in a way, things shifted and flipped over, when “you’re not on your way up every time anymore but become more aware of the depths of your own reality”.

#### **6.4 -The dark sun**

Sullivan (2000) writes extensively on the phenomenon of rapid reversal that the Greek dramatists call *peripeteia* which psychologically can symbolize the process when a depression for example turns into illumination. This occurrence can also be compared to the experience of *enantiodromia*, “where a condition is so severely polarized that it spontaneously flips to become its opposite” (ibid: 25). In ancient alchemy this is similar to a blackening process called *nigredo* which actually precedes the *albedo* or “white” purifying stage. Here there is a period of “putrefaction” with a corresponding phase of decay and degeneration into “a dark mass out of which arises a renewal of spirit”. This can be compared to a “psychological eclipse”, where the sun is darkened in midday symbolizing that even in the midst of life “we are in death”. In alchemical engravings there is a skeleton standing above some sort of conjunction,

either of the Sun and the Moon or a King and a Queen (see Figure 1), “symbolizing the union of opposites resulting in the death of dualism and the birth of a new individuality” (ibid.) This is called the *sol niger*, the “dark sun” or the *spiritus niger* and serves as a reminder of the shadow which emerges every so often in different manifestations. Specifically it is connected to various forms of aversion and “self-limiting devices, which remain wholly unconscious until we assume responsibility for them and realize that we perpetrate our own failings”. Fortunately, this event “is the beginning of awareness”, “the liberation of a particle of our shadow from its hiding place, bringing it into the full light of day, where it stands always beside us, imitating our shape in the light of the sun” (ibid.). As Williams has commented;

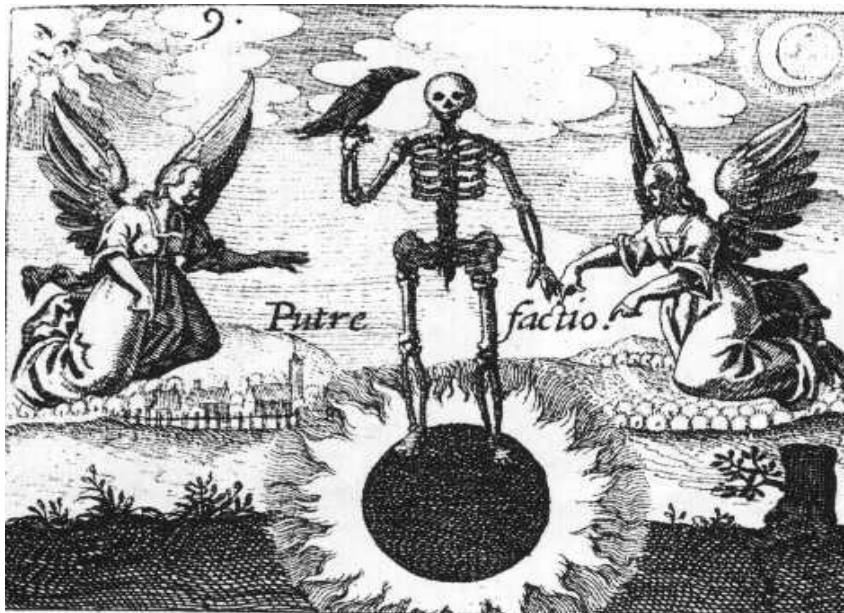


Figure 1 “Nigredo”

The *opus* of alchemy was essentially concerned with the *union of opposites* of the most extreme kinds, which in the deadly *prima materia* were perceived to be caught in a black (ie unconscious) state of corruption. This coincided with the dark and confused mental state of the alchemist in the initial stage of the *negredo*. The general procedure of the *opus* involved the separation and sublimation of the warring elements contained in the *prima materia* or *massa confusa*, typically described in the sixteenth century *Gloria Mundi* as "familiar to all men...yet despised by all," so that they could be "melted into a unity purified of all opposition and therefore incorruptible," which was itself the gold, or the transformative Elixir or Medicine capable of producing it from imperfect bodies. The stone, the *lumen novum*, arising from the *coniunctio* of the reconciled opposites *Sol et Luna* was personified as the rounded, bisexual Anthropos and proclaimed as the *filius macrocosmi*, the saviour of the macrocosm and counterpart to Christ.(Williams: 2000).

Joseph Campbell writes of a similar process where the hero in passing through this threshold is actually entering a phase of death and rebirth, symbolized by the “worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale”. Here, “instead of conquering or

conciliating the power of the threshold”, the hero is “swallowed into the unknown and would appear to have died” (Campbell 1993: 90). The central message is that the passage through the threshold can become a form of self-annihilation and metamorphosis. There are many kinds of psychological dangers at this point corresponding to different types of travellers and the kinds of journeys they are on. Although previously, “where earlier generations were guided by the symbols and spiritual exercises of their mythological and religious inheritance, we today... must face alone, or, at best, with only tentative, impromptu, and not very effective guidance” (ibid: 104). This, writes Campbell, is part of the problem with modern “enlightened” individuals, “for whom all gods and devils have been rationalized out of existence” (ibid: 105).

In many ways this phase of a journey is a “wake up call”, where things get so extreme that change is not only profitable but it becomes an absolute necessity in order to survive. This often entails a simultaneous “death” or letting go of outmoded habits, patterns and relationships. “To hear and profit, however, one may have to submit somehow to purgation and surrender. And that is part of our problem: just how to do that” (ibid.). Despite the considerable decline of our “mythological and religious inheritance” many of the themes expressed in ancient rites and symbolism often reappear today in the form of dreams and sometimes even in narratives when people undergo profound transformations. Lea especially touches upon this archetypal process of death, rebirth and surrender in a powerful account of the last phase of her life as a heroin addict;

*(Can you tell me about that then, how you got out of it all?)*

There were many things at the time which started to indicate that I was running on overtime, that I had actually been very lucky. Many people had died around me, there were many tragic fates among us, and there I was. I had been depressed the last two or three years in that environment and felt that it was very hard to be understood and that I was so far down. I felt that I had the same need, the same need strangely enough that I had had ten to fifteen years ago which caused me to seek out that scene in the first place. Now I suddenly felt that it had given me what it could give me and that now it was time to find a new focus and that I was really living on borrowed time, and that I could have died not only once but two, three, four and five times over.

So there was a ‘Hey Lea’ like an inner voice asking ‘What do you want now? What are you going to do?’ and there were so many extreme situations, so many dope parties and individual events that caused me to reflect over what on earth I was doing. Because it’s pretty awful when people around you start dying and hanging themselves and in and out of jail, there were so many brutal things happening the last two years that it made me extremely depressed. I was like, ‘what am I going to do with my life, this can’t be happening!’, then I remember I started to say, ‘It’s not fun anymore!’. We could light candles and play music and get together, five or six of us, and there wasn’t one damn person among us who sat and smiled! Then I started to say like maybe we should go for a hike in the woods, do something else...

Then there was this AIDS story that came up and I really felt more and more like I was on the edge, I had dreams about it too, that I was standing on the knives edge and it was swaying this way and that and I had to make a choice. I had this spiritual experience where I saw an axe that appeared from out of space and bang! Chopped my head in two and then there were these two balls like two oranges hanging out and that was my brain and I was like "Come back!" That was about six months before I got pregnant so there were many things that happened before I became pregnant, like a deep, deep process.

Then there was that episode where I voluntarily slept with this guy I knew had AIDS. You have to be pretty spaced out in your head to do that but he was the source of a lot of pills and morphine who turned up once a month on his way back from Oslo. Every month he would fetch his quota then he would come by our place and we would sell it in Trondheim, and then he would go back to the rural area where he was from. I was really, really, really depressed around then and one day he just said, why don't you come back with me and it was like 'Why not?' We don't work, we don't do anything, and my boyfriend was like, 'Yea, yea! We'll come, we'll come!' And I was so looking forward to it, finally something positive was going to happen, for the first time in one and a half years! So I went out to buy loads of food and then the day we were going to go, my boyfriend was like 'No, I have an appointment', and I was like 'That appointment can wait until we get back on Wednesday and then you can make as many appointments as you like' then he said 'No, the trip will have to wait'. That was the last straw for me and I decided that no matter what, I was going on this trip. And I went.

The whole week was a morphine trip and one thing led to the other and suddenly I'm lying in his bed thinking, how insane can you get Lea, what have you done now? Having all these crazy dialogues with myself, like 'What are you doing?' 'How far can you go?' ... and there I was lying there, tears streaming down my face, thinking dear god, there's no hope for me, might as well just beam me up, I don't understand anything anymore, it can't get any worse, it can't get any crazier.

Then there were all these discussions when I came back. We were just sitting around when I don't remember who but somebody asked, 'Well did you do it with this guy?' And I was like, 'Well actually yes'. Then there was this big silence, and the next day five guys turned up that were going to beat him to a pulp for kidnapping me and polluting me and I was totally out of it. Then there was all this drama with my family and my sister because my boyfriend had told everyone. His whole world fell apart, 'Lea has cheated on me with this guy who has AIDS' It's like, how self-destructive can you get, there must be a million guys to choose from, but you have to pick the one guy with AIDS.

Then I said that it had nothing to do with sex and it had nothing to do with being unfaithful it's about something else altogether that you really can't explain. It was very obvious that there were deeper aspects to the whole ordeal.

*(What kind of deeper aspects?)*

Spiritual processes, like how hard can you push yourself, can you risk finding yourself again, that's what happens when you enter into those kinds of really sick, perverted settings. It's a kind of testing really, how much can you risk, can you lose yourself? Maybe you can't really lose yourself. You can set yourself on fire, that's what extreme sports and extreme intoxication, extreme sex, extreme whatever; you've broken all the barriers and you think you're limitless so it's a kind of sick, sick, seduction of yourself in a way. You're like 'And what about that? And THAT? Can you take THIS?' It's a totally sick situation but that's what happens, it's totally mad.

*(So what happened afterwards then?)*

Well I came back to Trondheim and my family. I remember I was totally doped out on all these pills lying on my bed when I suddenly see my dad standing over me and he's crying and I was thinking I haven't seen my dad cry in twenty years. And he was standing there, this big guy, the tears were streaming and he just cried and cried while he looked at me. And I was probably lying there half naked, totally out of it, strung out and the house was a mess, full of people. Then I looked at him and I was like 'Dad, is that you?' Then he sat down and just started sobbing, and said we've got to get you to the hospital. I said that they can't do anything there, we'll just have to take some blood samples and see. Then in walks my boyfriend Tim and goes, 'Here, take a drag' squeezing between me and my dad with this hash pipe, and I'm like 'Thanks' I mean, how sick are we going to get?

They got me to the hospital, I think Tim followed behind on his bike and my grandmother turned up, it was a total family drama. My dad explained what the situation was and I got introduced to these different public services for AIDS related issues. I took a blood test and had to wait three months, which I spent back home but already then I was on my way out already, I felt that really strongly. Then

what was odd was that I totally surrendered to god because there was a lot of hate around me. Tim wanted to beat the shit out of this guy and kill him and everyone was really worried. Worry, worry, worry from all sides, and I had this strength within me and was saying, 'Don't hate him, it's going to affect me' If I start to hate him I will be pressing a button and the AIDS might emerge. I can't hate anyone, if I'm going to hate anyone I might as well hate myself but what's the point in that? Then I was like 'If you're going to hate anyone then hate me, because I'm here with you now, don't start hating him, he's got nothing to do with it'.

After that there developed all these intrigues with my parents, it became pretty extreme, and I knew that I just had to leave Trondheim, I had to leave. So this AIDS guy came by on his way to Oslo and I just tagged along, we went there and he was going to get his quota and after that we really didn't know what we were going to do. There I became a little clean for the first time in three or four months because we were visiting his parents or something and suddenly I realised that it was fourteen days to Christmas. I see all these Christmas people and Christmas lights and suddenly there is this connection to my childhood. I also suddenly realised what had happened, and that's when I had that vision of the axe, and it became crystal clear, what now? Then I thought, Christ, I can't stay here, I can't stay here, what the hell are you doing Lea? Then I started to get scared because I couldn't see myself anywhere anymore, I had cut all the bonds I had had in life, with my boyfriend Tim, the cats, with Trondheim, I had suddenly cut myself off from everything and I just thought like, 'What now? What now? This can't be happening'.

So when I came back I really felt in a way that I left everything in God's hands, I can't hate anyone, what am I doing? What am I doing in my extremity because there was this intense period of extremities that lasted several months and at the same time I got more and more depressed. I sank so far down that I finally recognized the predicament I had sunk down into and there was no path anymore, there was no more path and I was back in myself. Then there was seeing the link to that which had drawn me to the whole drug scene in the first place, it's like I realised that I had gone a whole round and now I was back to where I had started, a kind of zero point where I was fifteen years ago, before the drugs, that was still seeking, and now after ten to fifteen years of the drug scene I started asking questions and found out that that wasn't a solution anymore. It had become suffering and a limitation and there were so many other factors around it that I saw the cage and the network I had created and knew that I just didn't want that anymore. Then I developed a different focus altogether and just waited the last three months for the results and then they finally arrived, the last phone call, and no, I didn't have AIDS and that was like wow!!!

So we all went up to celebrate at this cottage in the mountains, like 'Hurrah! Lea is well!' with lots of dope and you name it, a really wild bunch and then also I had this really spiritual experience I remember. I was watching the moon; it was a full moon, and just a year before that I had told my mother that I was never going to have children. Never going to have children in this horrible world, I never want to bring children into this world, save them for the heavens, never any children. But I remember saying to Tim my boyfriend that night, tonight is a really good night to be conceived on. There was this magic feeling in the air, in the sky and just something really bizarre, almost like ha, ha, ha, and I had stopped going on the pill because I had to live in celibacy the past three months so I just didn't take them anymore. That was the first time in three months that we could even sleep together and then fourteen days after I got home, no period and I was in shock for like two or three days. I couldn't think through it, I just kept thinking, this isn't possible, this isn't possible. I had just seen death and destruction, I had no ties or anything, it was like 'Beam me up' and then suddenly you get this reply that just smacks you down and roots you in a way, and that was the pregnancy. And I was thinking that it just isn't possible, we didn't have jobs, we didn't have anything and there was the whole drug situation, it just isn't possible.

So I was like, I told my boyfriend that I was pregnant and then prepared another fix, and just kept thinking 'This can't be happening, this can't be happening', and I didn't tell anyone, just some really close friends. Not my parents because I was sure that they thought I was so totally crazy at the time that they would have had me committed and made me have an abortion, because I couldn't even take care of myself. Then if I had the baby they would just have taken it away, so there was just no way. Strangely enough at the time it was Timmy my boyfriend who kept saying, 'It's all going to turn out all right, we'll get through this together' then we went up north just to get away from the whole scene and there I spent two months that were more or less normalised compared to how it had been. There was still a lot of use going on but I had started to scale down, I had a book where I wrote down everything. Then I told my mother 'This will probably come as a shock, but I'm six months pregnant', I had been hiding it the whole summer behind dresses, I think I gained like three kilos just the first month. Then

she called my dad and told him to stop the car, he thought something horrible had happened but she was like, you're going to become a grandfather, and not in a year but in three months time!

Then after the baby was born I became pretty straight very quickly, I had already scaled down during my pregnancy but then it was so intense where I lived, there were raids and trouble all the time and lot's of people about thirty to forty every day that would come by. So I was in this symbiosis but the problem was that the person who had been backing me up the whole time, saying it's all going to turn out all right, just eat well, read some books and take care of yourself, he then totally flipped out and continued to deal and do what he was doing before. That became really apparent in the hospital where I saw all these straight couples with helpful husbands while he was standing there impatiently while I was trying to give birth going 'Come on then! Hurry up! I've got an appointment waiting!' So then I thought to myself, we just don't belong here. What's going to happen next?

Then the first few months there was this intense bonding between me and my baby while I kept thinking, what am I going to do, what am I going to do? I didn't want to go back home because I knew that the house would be filled with addicts who didn't even care enough to look at the baby. Then my dad came by and said why don't you move into the flat below our house, just for a few months and we will help and support you and all that. So I said yes to that, I was really worried that someone was just going to take my child so I moved up there. Then there were several people who came forth and told me that 'It's much worse than you think'. So while I had been scaling down, Tim had been increasing his intake gradually and they were like 'Do you know about his running about at night?' and I'm like 'No'. Then they told me that he would wait until I'd fallen asleep and then run about all night, and that he had all these drug debts several places that I didn't even know about so he was also feeling a lot of pressure from all sides.

Then this guy came into the picture and found him a job in Denmark, and I thought maybe that could be his solution but then Tim still had that focus and quickly met like-minded people, other addicts. So after two or three months he came back and was completely strung out. Then I thought what are we going to do, should we give the baby away to some friendly couple who lived on a farm and can give him a healthy and happy childhood or should we get straight and move somewhere together, because something had to be done. Then I started with my process and I just had to let go, so then it just went in that direction.

*(So it wasn't difficult for you to straighten up then?)*

No, not after my child was born, then it just became a choice that had to be made.

*(Do you think having a baby made it easier or somehow filled some of that space you tried to fill with drugs?)*

No not really, it was all part of a process that had started about one year ago, before I got pregnant and the whole AIDS story and all that before were important pieces. The baby was an important piece to getting more grounding, because I wasn't grounded at all, I was up there all the time and when I came down then the first thing I would do was to get something that would shoot me up there again. So he was something that gave me roots.

There are many aspects in Lea's story that point to what she calls a "deeper process" which started many years ago with the "same need" that caused her to "seek out that scene" in the first place. In some respects it's like Lea is dancing with her own shadow, but in throwing herself so completely into the dance it's as if she almost disappears into the shadow. However, as she put it "That's where transformation comes in...it wakes you up in a way, shifts and flips over". Her life became what Sullivan called "so severely polarized that it spontaneously flips to become its opposite". This is very well illustrated in her dream of "standing on the knife's edge" which is "swaying this way and that" and having to "make a choice", as well as her vision of the axe coming from outer space and chopping her head in two. This process

culminates with her voluntarily sleeping with someone who she knew had AIDS. Although a highly reckless act to put it mildly it is hard to overlook the deep symbolism behind this turn of events. The alchemical depiction of *nigredo* is a skeleton standing above “some sort of conjunction”, which symbolizes “the union of opposites resulting in the death of dualism and the birth of a new individuality”. A drug addict with AIDS is probably as close as you get to an incarnated depiction of Lea’s shadow at that point in her life, and choosing to “voluntarily” sleep with him is both quite literally and symbolically a “conjunction”. Although this was on a deep subconscious level, it was highly significant and became a major turning point in her life. As she said herself “it had nothing to do with sex and it had nothing to do with being unfaithful it’s about something else altogether that you really can’t explain. It was very obvious that there were deeper aspects to the whole ordeal”.

When I asked her to be more specific in terms of what these “deeper aspects” might be she said quite openly “Spiritual processes, like how hard can you push yourself, can you risk finding yourself again... It’s a kind of testing really, how much can you risk, can you lose yourself? Maybe you can’t really lose yourself...it’s a kind of sick, sick, seduction of yourself in a way”. Obviously there are two aspects here, one unconscious that is doing the “seducing” and another more conscious which is “being seduced”. As Williams (2000) has written “The *opus* of alchemy was essentially concerned with the *union of opposites* of the most extreme kinds, which in the deadly *prima materia* were perceived to be caught in a black (ie unconscious) state of corruption”. The process of *nigredo* represents explicitly that process of “putrefaction”, decay and degeneration into “a dark mass out of which arises a renewal of spirit”;

Once an unconscious content is constellated, it tends to [create], through projection, an atmosphere of illusion...The situation is enveloped in a kind of fog, and this fully accords with the nature of the unconscious content: It is a "black blacker than black" (*nigrum, nigrius nigro*), as the alchemists rightly say, and in addition is charged with dangerous polar tensions, with the *inimicitia elementorum*. One finds oneself in an impenetrable chaos, which is indeed one of the synonyms for the mysterious *prima materia*. The latter corresponds to the nature of the unconscious content in every respect, with one exception: this time it does not appear in the alchemical substance but in man himself...Hunted for centuries and never found, the *prima materia* or *lapis philosophorum* is, as a few alchemists rightly suspected, to be discovered in man himself. But it seems that this content can never be found and integrated directly, but only by the circuitous route of projection. For as a rule the unconscious first appears in projected form (Williams 2000).

The whole process of *nigredo* demonstrates the need for the assimilation and integration of opposites because rebirth can not occur before this has been achieved.



The ancient Sumerian myth of the goddess Inanna and her “descent into the nether world” is the oldest recorded account of “the passage through the gates of metamorphosis”, and aptly illustrates the need to confront this darkness, surrender and let go of ones former self (Campbell 1993: 105);

*From the “great above” she set her mind  
toward the “great below,”  
The goddess, from the “great above” she set  
her mind toward the “great below,”  
Inanna, from the “great above” she set her  
mind toward the “great below”.*

*My lady abandoned heaven, abandoned earth,  
To the nether world she descended,  
Abandoned lordship, abandoned ladyship,  
To the nether world she descended.*

After “adorning herself with her queenly robes and jewels” she enters “the land of no return”, “the nether world of death and darkness, governed by her enemy and sister goddess, Ereshkigal” (ibid.). The gatekeeper is then instructed by Ereshkigal “to abide by the custom and remove at each portal one article of clothing”, from this point on the Sumerian myth goes as follows;

*To the pure Inanna he says:  
“Come, Inanna, enter.”  
Upon her entering the first  
gate,  
The shugurra, the “crown of  
the plain” of her  
head, was removed.  
“What pray is this?”*

*“Extraordinarily, O Inanna,  
have the decrees of  
the netherworld been  
perfected,  
O Inanna, do not question  
the rites of the nether  
world.”  
Upon her entering the  
second gate,*

*The rod of lapis lazuli was  
removed.  
“What pray is this?”  
“Extraordinarily, O Inanna,  
have the decrees of  
the netherworld been  
perfected,  
O Inanna, do not question  
the rites of the nether world*

After passing seven gates, Inanna now stands naked before the throne, whereupon she “bowed low” as the “seven judges of the nether world” ... “fastened their eyes upon Inanna – the eyes of death.”

*At their word, the word which tortures the spirit,  
The sick woman was turned into a corpse,  
The corpse was hung from a stake<sup>4</sup>.*

The two sisters, according to Campbell, are light and dark aspects of the same goddess, “and their confrontation epitomizes the whole sense of the difficult road of trials” (ibid: 108). Therefore the hero, “whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure in a myth or the dreamer of a dream, discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspecting self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed” (ibid.). Seen

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<sup>4</sup> Campbell has noted that Sumerian mythology is especially significant in the West because it was the source of the Babylonian, Assyrian, Phoenician, and Biblical traditions as well as influencing the pagan religions of the Celts, Greeks, Romans, Slavs, and Germans (Campbell 1993: 108).

in this light Lea is almost like a modern Inanna, descending further and further, until she had no more ties; “Then I started to get scared because I couldn’t see myself anywhere anymore, I had cut all the bonds I had had in life”. At this point it’s as if she dies, surrenders and is reborn again; “when I came back I really felt in a way that I left everything in gods hands”... Or as Campbell writes; “One by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty, and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh” (ibid.) In Lea’s own words; “I sank so far down that I finally recognized the predicament I had sunk down into and there was no path anymore, there was no more path and I was back in myself”.

## **6.5 - Autopoiesis**

While the first two gates are mainly “outward” oriented and there is a strong urge for separation and individuation, the last two represent a reversal, re-integration and return in one way or another. The cycle is beginning to close in on itself; there is disintegration and dissolution followed by a union of subconscious and conscious elements ultimately resulting in a transformation and synthesis of the personality, a rebirth. For Lea, this meant “seeing the link to that which had drawn me to the drug scene in the first place, it’s like I realised that I had gone a whole round and now I was back to where I had started, a kind of zero point where I was fifteen years ago”. At this stage she realised that this “wasn’t a solution anymore. It had become suffering and a limitation and there were so many other factors that I saw the cage and the network I had created and knew that I just didn’t want that anymore. Then I developed a different focus altogether”. As she becomes more and more aware of her predicament and how she has perpetuated her own “cage” her “focus” also changes, or in Wilber’s terminology, her “locus of identification” expands to include and transcend her limiting former self.

It’s quite striking how her pregnancy coincides so closely with her own rebirth; “I had just seen death and destruction, I had no ties or anything, it was like ‘Beam me up!’ and then suddenly you get this reply that just smacks you down and roots you in a way, and that was the pregnancy”. But then as she said herself; “There was this magic feeling in the air...” Obviously there were many things occurring

simultaneously that had a major impact on her development and the pregnancy was undoubtedly decisive in that respect, but as she pointed out, “this was all part of a process”. One of the most ancient symbols depicting the self-creating cyclic nature of existence through the union of opposites is the ouroboros serpent swallowing its own tail. In many illustrations this symbol is both half light and half dark, not unlike the yin yang symbol, representing both duality as well as the merging of the unconscious and conscious mind in act of eternal self-creation. Jung describes the significance of the ouroboros in alchemy as follows;



The Ouroboros Serpent.  
From the *Chrysopoeia* of  
Cleopatra.

The alchemists, who in their own way knew more about the nature of the individuation process than we moderns do, expressed this paradox through the symbol of the uroboros, the snake that eats its own tail. In the age-old image of the uroboros lies the thought of devouring oneself and turning oneself into a circulatory process, for it was clear to the more astute alchemists that the *prima materia* of the art was man himself. The uroboros is a dramatic symbol for the integration and assimilation of the opposite, i.e. of the shadow. This 'feed-back' process is at the same time a symbol of immortality, since it is said of the uroboros that he slays himself and brings himself to life, fertilises himself and gives birth to himself. He symbolises the One, who proceeds from the clash of opposites, and he therefore constitutes the secret of the *prima materia* which [...] unquestionably stems from man's unconscious'. (*Collected Works*, Vol. 14 para.513)<sup>5</sup>

Melanie Purcell also writes extensively on this symbolism comparing the ouroboros to a kind of “feedback loop”, where two opposites; “the infinitude of the rising logos and the zero point from which it sprang are attracted to each other and realise their neutral central axis which as the third aspect of the self, signifies the conjunction of opposites, creating the individuated whole” (Purcell 1998). In this respect then this can also be seen as the ultimate creative act, the “desire or potential for emergence to come into existence itself”, which can be observed on both micro and macro levels and once again points to the relevance of a dynamic, cyclic framework within this context. In order for this process to continue smoothly however there must be an awareness, integration and transformation of ones own shadow. While many addicts might be aware of their own “dark side”, and in some respects

<sup>5</sup> From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouroboros>

take responsibility for it, not many are capable of integration and fewer still are able to let go altogether.

In fact, what is so striking about Lea's narrative is her level of consciousness throughout the whole ordeal and her willingness to surrender and trust in her own "deeper process", which continues to this day. It's been over ten years since Lea gave birth to her child and her new self. Today she is settled with a partner and several children in one of the cosiest homes I've ever had the pleasure of visiting. Those who know Lea well are always touched by her deep sense of inner strength and contentment, almost as if she radiates a profound well-being to all she meets. One friend I know even compared her to a living Valium, you almost can't help but feel calm and good in her presence. Some might call it fate, others coincidence, but for me she is a living example of the power of intentionality and autopoiesis. Although many might be critical of her past, the person she has become today speaks for itself.

It is not always easy to identify let alone integrate the deeper mechanisms behind one's own or another's destructive habits, but further progress often requires that some sort of acknowledgement takes place. In fact everyone is continually perpetuating their own patterns in one form or another. This is called life, although fortunately not everyone chooses to focus so completely and so intensely on a pattern as destructive as heroin addiction. In this regard it seems that in many cases the greater the need underlying some of the more obviously destructive patterns, the greater the risk of "losing" oneself in that pattern, as with Mia and Lea, who were attempting to fill deep emotional and spiritual voids respectively. This applies not only to illicit substances but can just as easily apply to any other type of compulsive behaviour. Curiously, one of the most common expressions for referring to smoking heroin is "chasing the dragon" and Sadie Plant uses this metaphor eloquently in a prelude to *Writing on Drugs*;

It kept running. Dragons never tire. It blazed its trails across your darkness, etching its tracks onto that black mountain-side. It kept running through your mind, tempting, escaping, daring you to chase it just a little more. You kept running through the story, running its story through your mind. It danced ahead, it laughed at you, it knew you would fail. You heard it all, and still became the dragon's tail.

Consumption patterns in particular seem to be one of the more widespread alternatives for those of us "without traditional moorings" and are not only tolerated but actively promoted in many varieties. The "hierarchy of food" can be seen as one approach towards a deeper understanding of addictive motivation, and a plausible account for why one drug may be "more addictive in one society than another,

addictive for one individual and not another, and addictive for the same individual at one time and not another” (Peele 1998: 72). Suffice to say for now that since “all addictions accomplish something for the addict” (ibid.) it is only in identifying and owning up to that “something” that one can ultimately hope to transcend it. This is what is symbolized by the “psychological eclipse” of the *nigredo* and in the ouroboros biting its own tail. Whichever form our shadow takes it must be consciously recognized before it can be reintegrated. For it is in seeing and accepting our failings that we can ultimately hope to rise above them, or in the language of the alchemists “melt and remould mixed metal into gold”.

## **6.6 Summary of the third gate**

The third gate is closely associated with the darker forces of death and destruction that often appear in the lives of individuals who have developed extremely destructive addictive tendencies. As we have seen, consumption patterns express two fundamental relationships based on the essential dialectic between self and other, the experience of “I”, a sense of self, embodiment and subjectivity, and the experience of “We”, which are relational and intersubjective. These primary relationships operate at some level in every narrative, however, when they become polarized and the dialectic between self and other is replaced with a dialect between self and substance, then extreme autonomy “flips over” and through its own inherent dynamic changes into its opposite. Autonomy has transmuted into slavery and developed into dependence and addiction. The “junky paradox” and the “negative” form of freedom are rooted in an excessive emphasis on the drive to escape. The result is isolation, depression and loneliness, and an increasingly weak and unstable sense of self. Naturally this is based on a deep-seated “need” (or needs) which may be physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. These needs have perhaps been partially met through drugs which served a strategic function at one point, but when intoxication becomes the primary locus of identification, the end in itself as opposed to a means to an end, there inevitably arises a dangerous polarity.

## Chapter

# 7

### The Fourth Gate - The Alchemy of Transformation

*The continuing evolutionary process of within-and-beyond brings new within... and new beyonds.*

Ken Wilber

#### 7.1 - On addiction and recovery

At some point during the journey, there may be a significant shift in focus which marks the time at which the passage outwards begins to lose its momentum and the return can begin. As Sullivan has aptly remarked, “The paradox of the hero is that he is only a hero if he returns! Otherwise, none would know of the feats accomplished or of the renewed energy that has been a product of the search or of the acquisition of new vision” (Sullivan 2000: 230). The nature of the return is different for every person depending on the nature of their journey and the underlying motivational need or needs. The journey is towards expansion and individuation, the maturation of the personality and the fusion of that unified totality. The shift delineating the return is primarily *perceptual* in nature (ibid.), although this can be problematic as it involves a “threshold difficulty”. That is, “the bringing back of something which has been found in the Beyond ... The general difficulty is between the realms of consciousness and the unconscious, in bringing over contents from one to the other” (von Franz in Sullivan 2000: 231).

If the pursuit of the “negative” form of freedom has become an end in itself, then it will become more and more apparent that this form of freedom has the same basic limitations and constraints as that which one was attempting to escape from in the first place. Suddenly one discovers that “it’s not fun anymore” and that pursuing this to the extreme merely results in a new form of slavery, a different “cage”. In many cases this shift involves clearly recognizing the impulse which drew one in a particular direction to begin with. In that recognition there is a kind of “return” to where one started but there is also a transformation resulting from the absorption of the experiences accumulated on the journey itself, and this process is crucial.

In many rehabilitation programs a similar process takes place and in some respects the whole period of treatment can be seen as a rite of passage (Aaslid 2003). This implies a “second birth” where an individual “dies” or completes one phase of their life and the roles associated with that period, leaving it behind, and then enters a new stage with a new identity (Grof 1996). During a rite of passage “the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage are left behind” so that those in transition are not only accorded a new position within their community, “but also a firm and clear definition of their identity, their social roles, and their personal boundaries” (Grof 1996: 5). Throughout rehabilitation it is often issues of identity and social position which pose the most conflict for many addicts, finding themselves in a kind of limbo between two realms, the world of the addict and the conventional world of “straight people”.

Facilitating the transition between these two worlds is one of the greatest challenges that treatment institutions have to deal with. Once the first stage of separation is underway many clients get stuck in a liminal “between and betwixt” stage, finding it impossible to adapt and assimilate into mainstream society. In this context relapse becomes a way of resorting to their former identity and dealing with the mounting anxiety of not “fitting in” anywhere. Relapse therefore has a highly significant existential dimension which becomes quite apparent in methadone assisted rehabilitation. Here the physiological needs are obviously being met by assuring a sufficiently high dosage, yet a considerable number of clients still have difficulties with recurring relapse (Aaslid 2003). As one of the clients remarked, “sometimes I’m just so afraid of losing myself, I mean, what happens to ME in all of this, do I disappear completely?” (ibid: 62).

According to Varela, the essential quality of life is the capacity to produce oneself (in Sørhaug 1996: 155). This capacity can be observed on many levels, especially when the “self” feels threatened in one way or another and therefore resorts to different adaptive strategies as a way to regulate that threat. Thus addiction may on occasion serve a vital adaptive function when an individual is faced with “the torment of dislocation” in providing a “substitute form of psychosocial integration” (Alexander 2004: 16). Originally the term “addicted” meant that one had either been “legally given over to somebody as a bond-slave, or, more broadly, to have given oneself over, devoted oneself, to somebody or something” (ibid: 11). The traditional

meaning of addiction has gained far more acceptance in the last few decades as more people recognize the similarities between their own addictive behaviour and that of the junky and alcoholic. Likewise, “a few landmark studies showed compellingly that overwhelming involvements with gambling or love relationships had the same qualities as alcohol and drug addiction, could be every bit as intractable and tragic, and could be treated in the same way” (ibid.). Some examples of the many ways in which different types of addiction, interpreted here as the act of “giving oneself over to somebody or something”, can serve as adaptive strategies in contemporary society are;

...the barren pleasures of a street junkie – membership in an exotic subculture, transient relief from pain, the excitement of petty crime – are more sustaining than the unrelenting torment of social exclusion and aimlessness (Chein et al. 1964). Devotion to a violent youth gang, harmful as it is to society and, often to the gang member’s own values, is more endurable than no identity at all (Bourgois 1997). Amassing expensive merchandise and endlessly organizing it for display and wasteful consumption can fill anxious moments for affluent people bereft of richer, culturally based purposes (McInnis 2003). Political/religious/ideological fanaticism provides social support and a sense of universal truths that fills part of the gap left by the destruction of family, cultural, and spiritual traditions (Roy 2002) (ibid: 16).

Nevertheless, as Anderson points out, “to say that an addictive lifestyle is ‘adaptive’ is not to say that it is desirable either for the addicted person or for society” (ibid: 17). In the long run these lifestyles can very often become more destructive and threatening than the original dilemma they were intended to resolve. The importance of recognizing this aspect of addiction, however, is that it allows for the possibility of a deeper integration to take place. Research examining the process of recovery from dependency has increasingly shown that “exiting an addiction is a matter of the individual concerned applying some higher mental process which enables behavioural change to take place” (Orford 2004: 212). Here also, this is based on a model of addictions which “sees conflict between opposing motives as constituting the core of addiction, and construes change as a form of decision making” (ibid.). Like the previous phases in a user trajectory, the process of exiting destructive consumption patterns does not occur in a vacuum, but always takes place in a wider cybernetic context where significant relationships and events often have a decisive impact in terms of the developmental course of a particular lifestyle.

The increasing positive appeal of the disease model for treatment professionals and policy makers is most likely related to its overall beneficial impact in terms of



improving the situation for many addicts, both in terms of how they are perceived by society at large, as well as improving the accessibility of support networks and increasing treatment alternatives. In the current socio-political climate the chances of getting help are much higher when you are perceived as clinically “sick” and suffering from an identifiable “disease”, rather than simply being “bad” or stubbornly making the “wrong” decision time and time again. Still, one serious drawback with the increasing spread of reductive disease models of addiction is that the implicit assumption of powerlessness is often mirrored in the addicts’ self-referential system. Many therefore experience a corresponding sense of disempowerment, resorting to the “I drink because I’m an alcoholic” or “I do drugs because I’m a junky” justification and leave it at that. Reductive ideologies ultimately result in what Granfield has called an “addiction fetishism”, isolating the behaviour of the addict as though it was completely separate from the “social, cultural, and historical circumstances that produced it. Not unlike Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism ... so too addiction fetishism is a mode of thought that alienates the personal experience of addiction from the broader social forces that contributes to its development” (Granfield 2004: 29).

There are many aspects of addiction, most importantly the fact that it can dramatically deteriorate health and life quality, which meet the criteria of a disease model. In the final analysis however, although treatment systems can and do benefit and support addicts in some cases, no doctor or magic medicine will ever provide the final “cure” for this disease. As long as the underlying socio-cultural foundations of addiction are ignored, and addicts are unable to consciously examine and understand the roots of their own adaptive strategies, the “disease” of addiction will continue to flourish. Regardless of the type of treatment program that is made available, healing is highly unlikely in a context where individuals are expected to let go and renounce their former identity and lifestyle completely, without acknowledging the significance of the deeper journey that they have been on, nor the fact that at the end of the day, they are the final authority when it comes to their own transformation process. This process lies at the heart of the development of a new, healthier and stronger identity.

The importance of conducting context sensitive, qualitative research in a natural setting is especially relevant here because in many cases treatment based studies merely reflect the ideologies of the institutions in which the respondents are

treated (Hilte & Laanemets in Hanninen & Koski-Jannes 2004). These findings also concur with my own experiences at a methadone clinic where I conducted my first fieldwork. For instance, there was a marked difference between the type of information I received from clients within the clinic as opposed to when I was in a more neutral setting like at a café or in their homes. Towards the end of my research I stopped frequenting the clinic altogether as it became clear that being too closely associated with it actually proved detrimental to my project (Aaslid 2003). This chapter will therefore take one last look at the dynamic process of change and transformation as it is reflected in the lives of individuals who are not currently associated with a treatment institution and do not see themselves as victims of any particular disease.

## **7.2 - Master of the two worlds**

The following excerpts, beginning with Luke and his encounter with the underground club culture and rave scene in Oslo, serve as especially good illustrations of the extent to which individuals are often acutely aware of their own underlying process. Even though every journey is fairly complex and involves many levels of relationships, there is still a conscious process where choice and strategy are vital components. In Luke's case there is a noticeable cycle where the pursuit of freedom gradually becomes an end in itself, and constructive experimentation or "seeking visions" turns into a destructive pattern which is finally recognized, integrated and transcended. As he says; "in the beginning it was important to separate from conventions, break out, trying new things, expand and blast boundaries and all that. Then finally breaking boundaries became conventional, a habit in itself". There are many factors which together had an impact in terms of how he navigated this terrain, but when combined they can be placed within a continuum of two primary relationships based on Lupton's (1996) analysis of consumption patterns. Subjectivity as an expression of embodiment and sense of self or "I" is crucial, as well as the "we" dimension or "socialization process" as he described it. This excerpt begins when I asked him to recount how occasional experimentation with ecstasy and cocaine gradually developed into a far more inordinate appetite for drugs;

It became too important, that's when the show really started, the high became the main thing, being out of it, we got high we didn't seek visions anymore. Luckily I could still see the difference between

hallucinogens, ecstasy and dope, which were something else altogether. Dope was alcohol, cocaine, and speed, ecstasy was ecstasy and hallucinogens were hallucinogens

*(What was cannabis then?)*

Cannabis was a hallucinogen, mild hallucinogen, euphoric.

*(When and how did you start using the other substances?)*

Well I've never liked speed, it just keeps me awake so I would just use it so I didn't black out on ecstasy. I don't know much about amphetamines really, I've used them for a while and they didn't really give me anything. So then I discovered cocaine but I think that was because we were starting to get tired of ecstasy.

I don't really get the fright propaganda because pure ecstasy really is a pretty harmless substance, I still believe that. If you use too much of course you will have problems coming down but if you're clean otherwise and don't mix it, and use it to seek visions then after a while it will limit itself because it will stop working. So I started making some money, it was fun going out to drink, that was where we met people, and having a large contact network was more important for me than the drinking so then we started using cocaine just to stay awake.

*(Would you say that it became a destructive or constructive pattern? How would you describe it?)*

Constructive in the beginning because it was an experiment then it became destructive towards the end because it became a pattern. In the beginning it was important to separate from conventions, break out, try new thing, expand and blast boundaries and all that. Then finally breaking boundaries became conventional, a habit in itself.

*(Why did it become a habit?)*

I don't know, it just did, I liked doing it. I had loads of fun, was out dancing, meeting people, being popular and having loads of friends around me all the time without having to be anything special. Just being part of a group and that was enough. But then I see a difference between substances, like the fact that I'm a hash junky today, that's something I'm really glad about today, cannabis was the substance we were on, the other stuff we just used, so it was easy to cut those out as long as I had enough hash. When I think about coming down all those times when we had been out all night using cocaine and ecstasy and drinking on top of that, I mean say what you want about the stuff being dangerous and all that but after nights like that the only sensible thing to do is sit down and smoke hash. We were hash smokers; we were hippies or techno hippies. I identified strongly with being that, being the new generation, the new generation which would teach humanity to use mobile telephones and computers and that was a big part of the package.

Now in hindsight I see why I liked hash so much and that was because I stopped working out abruptly, and I was completely dependent on that high, then later I started to have chronic pains in my body and that was the only thing that could sedate my body enough so that I could sleep. So after a while hash or cannabis became a kind of self-medication because of the pain in my body, mental, emotional and physical pain. Because before I started exploring the world on my own I knew very little about it. I lived in an extremely protected environment and was stuck in a lot of traumatic experiences from my childhood and so cannabis helped me go into a mental state where I could see those experiences while being sedated enough to see them directly yet understand them and therefore solve them and get rid of them. So for me cannabis was therapy and so was ecstasy, not cocaine though.

What I learned from ecstasy has been invaluable, and maybe I have become brain damaged in the process but it was still worth it. In retrospect I might have cut the dosages a bit and stopped using earlier but the knowledge I gained from it has been invaluable, not necessarily just from the substance itself but the whole culture, the whole groove that came with it. I was quite a character, I still am maybe but because I was in an altered state I could experience many things that I had been afraid of earlier. When I was a teenager I couldn't even talk to people, I had so much anxiety, and while all the others would go out dancing I would have to work out and train so I was totally naive in that department, especially regarding the opposite sex. So what I saw the first time I was at a rave party,

and that was without even doing ecstasy that time, was that there was a completely different tone between people, they were backing each other up, they didn't care about what kind of clothes I was wearing, it was just good that I came and was dancing with them. So it was because I had had these experiences that I wanted to try ecstasy.

*(So it was to be accepted then?)*

I was already accepted, but I wanted to be on the same level as those who accepted me, those who took me in and cared for me even though I came from a completely different world. I was very competitive at that time and I had to try it. Then having tried that and having gone beyond that boundary I wanted to try everything. So I experimented, but I've managed to put almost everything behind me today, I don't have any problems with anything except maybe being a bit more hooked on cannabis than I would like to be.

My relationship with cigarettes illustrates my relationship with the other drugs but maybe not on such a conscious level. I was going to become dependent because I was very concerned with testing my own will power at that time. And remember that I was very fit and used to overcoming physical limitations so when I didn't have those challenges anymore and school didn't give me the necessary challenges I had to find challenges on another level. It was also related to a socialization process among other things. Cigarettes I smoked... like I remember saying to myself, like an inner dialogue, 'what a fool you are, here you sit smoking cigarettes when you know that you're going to get hooked', like in cartoons when you have an angel and a devil arguing. So I said 'ok, fine maybe I'll get hooked but I'm going to prove that I'm strong enough to overcome that addiction'. So for certain time periods I wanted to know what it was like to be hooked, I wanted to know what it was like, that was an experience I wanted to have. So therefore I overused cocaine and I noticed during that period that when I woke up and the urge to use was a bit too strong I would tell myself, 'ok snort a line go all the way, and then when you get sick from not using, then you stop. You can manage that'. Same with cigarettes, I would increase my intake from two to four a day until I had reached forty a day and then I would scale down again.

I remember meeting this guy at some point in my life in a bar, I was drunk so I don't remember when or where, but we were talking about drugs and he told me 'You have to master the dope, don't become a slave to it'. And that stuck in my mind to this day and I'm so glad he said that to me. I kept repeating it to myself 'I have to master the dope'. I was going to manage going to parties with friends, doing what they did and quitting when I wanted to. I could use high doses, low doses or no doses at all; I would function no matter what. After a while I would sit in bars drinking, and there was this endless inner fascination because I would meet artists, musicians, intellectuals, lots of creative people, social people who had many of those qualities that I wanted to develop. But after a while I got older and they thinned out, because those who really were creative they did something. So there we sat, a bunch of us, 'eh, what the fuck do we do now, he he he... All the other people are gone'. So I started to really look at the situation and at those who were a bit older than me, and those that were older than me when I was twenty and started to flip out. They weren't much older than those who were a bit older than me when I was twenty eight, and the people that were just a bit older than me now, they looked really worn out.

So then suddenly it wasn't so cool to imitate them anymore, like you see the clown sitting on the other side of the table who has been to rehab for cocaine addiction four times, is forty years old and is still dealing hash. You become like that too if you don't start doing something else soon. That really made me think that maybe I started this whole thing to change, to get a larger perspective on things to see how 'people like that', 'people *like* that', lived but now I've become one of them.

I don't know but I feel very lucky that I started to think those thoughts again and was aware of my intentions with the whole thing and that was to expand my model of the world and to see more, so I didn't get stuck in that pattern... Because if you exchange one reality for another then you really haven't got all that far it's only when you can alternate between realities that you have really learned something I think.

I've become a lot less certain about things after using drugs, maybe people will disagree but I'm less dogmatic about my views, more humble. They have taught me a lot, the drugs have taught me enormously and I remember that was something we were conscious about, that they taught us a lot. I remember how easy it was for me to be part of a group and just be open to how other people were

doing, making sure that they were well and how easy it was for me to be receptive when other people did the same for me. And those states, it's always been important for me to take those states with me back into every day life, to implement the visions that I sought back into every day life. Especially with ecstasy, I wanted to learn to be more like that, through sheer will power, not necessarily the ecstasy trip in itself but that path in my consciousness and I feel that I've achieved that. I can get my mind to think ecstasy thoughts afterwards even though it's been years since I've used it. It has changed me radically.

*(As a person?)*

It's changed me into a better person, for my fellow human beings, I believe that.

*(How so?)*

I'm less opinionated, more humble with regards to other people's views, well maybe not views but feelings; I have more humility when it comes to dealing with other people's feelings. More empathy, that's what I call it.

*(So how do you regard ecstasy today, do you feel like it still has something to teach you or are you finished with it?)*

I don't feel that it has much more to teach me, I feel like well, maybe if I take bigger doses twice a year, if I hold cannabis out of it, which I admit is a touchy subject because I use it to self-medicate, but regarding the rest of the drugs I have the same attitude, that it's recreational. I'm not a professional athlete anymore either but I can always work out every now and then and enjoy that, a couple times a week is ok but fourteen times a week is too much. Same with cocaine and stuff, I don't have to use it every day but in the right setting I can always do a line with no problem.

It's about the need for spiritual sustenance and because I've fortunately learned from powerful individuals other ways of seeking spiritual sustenance I have also become less dependent on substances. But for people who have not been so fortunate, I can easily understand that for them it fills the emptiness, a need for spiritual experiences, a need to nourish the soul, a need to accept ourselves less judgementally.

*(You don't feel the need to be clean then?)*

Well I do, clean in terms of substances or drugs but not in terms of the states or experiences they engender, not completely clean but more than I am now maybe.

*(Why is that important for you if you're happy with the way things are now?)*

Well everything has its limits, it's about doing things for certain periods of time, I can't work out twelve times a week for the rest of my life either. When I feel satisfied or fulfilled, when there isn't any novelty in the experiences then I can say that I know what it's about. I might not know everything but I know what it's about, then it's time to find something else to do. It's about phases. I reckon that this will come as a natural consequence of harmonious growth. I hope for gods sake that when I'm seventy I can still smoke a joint every now and again or drink a glass of wine with my Christmas dinner, or that I can get high from sugar, and that I can put sugar in my tea or enjoy a black Italian coffee, I really hope so.

As Luke has himself observed "everything has its limits, it's about doing things for certain periods of time... It's about phases". In this excerpt in particular it is relatively easy to see how his consumption pattern connects with several underlying needs and in this respect serves as an effective adaptive strategy on many levels. As he recollects, Luke was somewhat of a loner in his teens, sports and working out were

the only social activities he engaged in and this in addition to a rather traumatic and overprotected childhood made him “quite a character” who was extremely introverted and somewhat socially inept. On a physical level, the fact that he stopped working out as abruptly as he did, from exercising seven times a week to nothing at all, resulted in what he calls a predisposition towards cannabis as an alternative “high” when physical exercise no longer served as an option. He described it as a kind of “self-medication” for the “mental, emotional and physical pain” in his body as well as a medium for “exploring the world”. In this regard, he considered both cannabis and ecstasy as a kind of “therapy” helping him experience and relate to his anxiety and traumas and also understand, solve and “get rid of them”. Here he makes a clear distinction between what he calls “dope” (alcohol, cocaine and speed), and ecstasy and hallucinogens, where “cannabis was the substance we were on, the other stuff we just used”. Still, on the whole he sees his experiences as an “invaluable” learning process even going so far as to say that “maybe I have become brain damaged in the process but it was still worth it”.

The club scene also provided a social network, although as he points out, the goal wasn't to be accepted, he was “already accepted”, but wanted to be “on the same level” as those who accepted him and cared for him, even though he “came from a completely different world”. Suddenly he was popular, had loads friends around him “without having to be anything special”, and there is a strong element of identification with an alternative scene. “We were hash smokers, we were hippies or techno hippies and I identified strongly with being that, being the new generation... and that was a big part of the package”. Sitting around in bars, meeting “artists, musicians, intellectuals, lot's of creative people...who had many of those qualities that I wanted to develop” became a way to connect and also recreate himself based on what he calls an “endless inner fascination”. This can be related to the intersubjective “we” dimension reflecting his need for mental and emotional “food” on an interrelational level. The subjective “I” dimension reflected through intentionality becomes apparent particularly when he describes his dependency on cigarettes and cocaine as a conscious testing of his own willpower and having to “find challenges on another level”. This is definitely not the passive voice of a victim but on the contrary, here there is a clear expression of choice and volition; “I wanted to know what it was like to be hooked, I wanted to know what it was like, that was an experience I wanted to

have”. The meeting at the bar also had a profound impact on his attitude towards his own use where learning to “master the dope” became a priority as opposed to being “a slave” to it.

Towards the end of this narrative there is a clear shift in terms of his locus of identification, when he realises that the “clown on the other side of the table who has been to rehab for cocaine addiction four times, is forty years old and is still dealing hash” could be him if he continues along the same track. Fortunately, as he pointed out, he was aware of his intentions and the fact that he “started this whole thing to change, to get a larger perspective on things to see how ‘people *like* that’ lived” but now he had “become one of them”. Here we can clearly see a movement from the initial drive for autonomy and expansion towards an urge for communion, integration and identification. However, because he was conscious of his own process “he didn’t get stuck in that pattern”, and instead realised that “if you exchange one reality for another then you really haven’t got all that far, it’s only when you can alternate between realities that you have really learned something I think”. This insight prevented the situation from becoming severely polarized, and resulted in a synthesis or resolution between two opposing forces or “realities” by choosing to “alternate between them” instead of exchanging one for another. This is actually very significant in that it shows a high level of integration where his previous life experiences are not negated but incorporated as part of his overall developmental process. Campbell’s insights regarding the “Master of the Two Worlds” are quite applicable here;

Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back – not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other – is the talent of the master. The Cosmic Dancer, declares Nietzsche, does not rest heavily in a single spot, but gaily, lightly turns and leaps from one position to another. It is possible to speak from only one point at a time, but that does not invalidate the insights of the rest (Campbell 1993: 229).

Luke describes his whole journey as a learning process, saying that drugs have actually helped him become a lot less “dogmatic”, “less opinionated” and much more “humble” and that he has developed “more humility when it comes to dealing with other people’s feelings”. In other words, they have played a significant role in his life in terms of how he relates to himself, others and the world in general although now it was time to move on, “I don’t feel that it has much more to teach me”. One of his primary underlying needs was for “spiritual sustenance” and as he pointed out, he was

fortunate enough to learn from “powerful individuals other ways of seeking spiritual sustenance”, and recognizes this as one main reason for which he has become “less dependent on substances”. In this regard he also distinguishes between what he calls being “clean in terms of substances or drugs” and “the states or experiences they engender”.

This distinction is an important point that Andrew Weil has also emphasized again and again in his classic *The Natural Mind* (1998). Weil argues that everyone is born with an “innate drive to experience altered states of consciousness periodically - in particular to learn how to get away from ordinary ego-centered consciousness”, and that “drugs are merely means to achieve states of nonordinary awareness and must not be confused with the states themselves” (ibid: 194). Like Luke, he also sees the beneficial potential of drugs, “intelligently used as tools”, writing that “I and many of my friends would never have thought about meditation, higher levels of consciousness, or spiritual matters if we had not been through phases of meaningful use of marijuana and hallucinogens” (ibid: 195). However, as long as society continues to instil “fear and guilt about altered states into our children, we force this drive underground, guaranteeing that it will be expressed in antisocial ways” (ibid: 195). Having learned to induce nonordinary states of awareness by other means than those induced by drugs, Luke became a “Master of the Two Worlds” both metaphorically and quite literally.

### **7.3 - Returning with the boon**

Just like the journey began with an impulse towards freedom, if the pursuit of the “negative” form of freedom has become an end in itself, the return is very much characterized by a shift in perspective where there is a dawning realisation that one cannot continue along the same path without becoming “stuck” in one way or another. Integration is necessary to move on and the self seeks balance at all levels of development, depending on one’s needs which also tend to change with time and experience. The transition from one direction to another may be quite dramatic or hardly even noticeable. The dynamic of the change will depend on the degree to which one has identified with a particular pattern and the extent of the underlying needs. Often what characterizes this period is a gradual awakening and recognition of the fundamental needs that lie behind one’s behavioural patterns and not uncommonly



a strong desire to share the fruits of one's passage with others. In Campbell's terminology "The boon that he brings restores the world" (Campbell 1993: 246). A "boon" can be interpreted loosely as something beneficial that makes life better or easier for oneself and others. In this context it is closely related to the process of bringing contents of the often unconscious initial spark that instigated the journey into the conscious arena so that they may be integrated and ideally be of benefit to both oneself and others.

Although very few of my respondents expressed any particular desire towards becoming drug free altogether, most of them did show a distinct switch in terms of their direction or focus towards the end of their narratives. The pursuit of intoxication became far less significant and the identification with other users less pronounced. The need for separation and individuation was often replaced by a drive for reconciliation, and in many cases a strong desire to share the fruits of their journey with others. It is interesting to note that over half of the respondents interviewed had chosen some kind of healing or helping profession as their occupation of choice, and almost all of them felt that the "boon" of their experiences helped them relate and empathize more with other's pain. Many felt that they benefited substantially in one way or another from their past (mis-)adventures. This differs drastically from the feedback that I received at the methadone clinic where almost all of the clients said something to the effect of "drugs ruined my life".

William for example, who had even spent two years in jail in his early twenties due to a tragic history of heavy heroin addiction, felt that he had become a far better human being as a result of everything he had learned from his past. Few people have managed to "clean up their act" as completely and successfully as he has. No one seeing him today would ever guess that he would go anywhere near a substance like heroin, in fact he looks and acts like every mother's dream. Looking back himself however, he once told me that if someone had described how his life would turn out back then, he would never have believed them. His ultimate low was stealing a wallet from an alcoholic passed out in the park, and doing time didn't exactly boost his self-image either. A combination of factors like meeting his girlfriend who always saw his potential and never gave up on him, as well as moving to a different town helped him switch focus and slowly begin cultivating new relationships. A year or so after moving he was admitted into an exceptionally

restricted field of study, and then he felt that he could do anything; “It was like a stairway to mastery, one thing lead to another and that built up incredible positive momentum and helped me get where I am now”. Today he is in the final stage of completing an advanced academic degree, has recently become a father and bought an apartment with his wife. Even though he still uses occasionally, here also there is obviously a major transition in terms of his overall focus;

*(Has your past changed you as a person do you think?)*

I believe so; I mean what if I hadn't gone there... I feel that I am a pretty smart person and that if I had done what was expected of me, like studied law or got a Masters of Business Administration, and been really successful, I think I would have been an inferior person. At least emotionally because now I am very preoccupied with being kind and doing charity work, something I really enjoy. I actually discussed this with my ex-girlfriend earlier today. Like maybe now I am making up for all those years but she thinks that I just like being like that, giving to other people gives me a much greater kick than getting something from them...

*(How is that related to your past drug use?)*

I think that I've become a better person because I really hit rock bottom myself. I mean if I had just sailed through life and everything had been easy and I became successful with a top job and loads of money then I think it would have been very difficult for me to understand why things go to hell for other people but since it did for me then...

*(Why do you think some people can use recreationally without getting hooked while others can't?)*

That's the big question; I wish I had the answer to that one then I could get famous.

*(Well I'm sure you have some thoughts on the matter)*

I think there are many factors, not just one simple answer to that one, like I said before, I think that the people you hang out with influences you a lot, if I hadn't got involved in that crowd then I might not have tried speed for example.

*(But your girlfriend was a part of that same crowd and she never got as involved as you did)*

True and she saw me using heroin for years, at least a long time. I don't know, I was much more of a drug abuser than she was, she had other things she had to do and she took responsibility and had to go to school and things worked out for her. With me, I could have two thousand kroner and not be getting money in a long while but still use up everything that same night. My girlfriend always had control and managed, but that's changed a lot in the past seven years. I've become super economical now, I'm the one who controls the economy now and pays the bills and makes sure we have everything we need.

*(When you say that you've always been a drug addict, do you think that's genetic then?)*

That's something I've definitely thought a lot about and discussed with my little brother. It's possible that we are predisposed towards substance abuse, the experiences I've had were so painful that well you have the old cliché about escapism... Also at eighteen I thought the adult world was so stupid, going to work at nine and coming home at four doing something really boring, that didn't appeal to me at all. I wanted freedom, to wake up when I felt like it and do whatever I felt like doing. Maybe I was also influenced by the literature I was into at that time, not being part of the flock, not being a sheep, and now I have become a well-adjusted sheep, but that doesn't get me down. But when it comes to why, I would really like to know the answer to that one, genetic predisposition is too simple, although I've always liked intoxication, getting high and all that.

There's also the need to rebel, being fourteen years old and needing to be grown up, you feel like you're grown up when in reality you're just a little shit. I've always hung out with people who were older than me, until now, now I'm the oldest.

*(Do you feel like intoxication is something you control or does it control you?)*

Now I control it but before it controlled me for many years, I used it every day, but now I can easily refrain from it. I think being an alcoholic must be one of the hardest things to recover from, because if I was going to go into the stores and see signs like 'offer of the week - one gram heroin for 250 kroner', then I don't know if I would be able to quit.

Even when I walk around town now, and it's been so many years since my life was a mess, I still get a slight yearning every time I see a worn out junky on the street. I see his eyes and I see that he's really stoned and even though I wouldn't trade my life for his, I still want that feeling too. The last ten times I've taken it after I've stopped have actually been very disappointing though.

*(Do you feel that you want to be completely drug free, is that a goal for you at all or how do you feel about that?)*

Well it's irritating a little now that we have a child and are good parents. I mean we give ourselves totally to this little child and if the child protection agency found out that we smoke hash on the weekends then that could turn into a real problem. We wouldn't lose our child but it would mean a lot of stress and that really provokes me when there are so many so-called successful people who are so busy that they don't even have time to be at home with their kids, that really provokes me.

I guess the whole thing with being drug free is really about personal freedom, and when it comes to norms, and rules and laws I like to think for myself. So if I smoke hash, well it's my choice and it's been scientifically proven after forty years of research that it's not especially harmful but still it's still frowned upon. Things are moving forward though, that much can be said and I'm actually quite surprised that they haven't found anymore harmful effects than they have. I've seen people who look like they've been pretty affected from sitting and smoking ten grams every day.

I like myself a lot more when I'm clean though; I feel more strongly, I'm a lot kinder, I like myself a lot better to be perfectly honest. I like being nice and kind, especially when I'm in a relationship with someone who is so kind, it really brings out the best in me, I have to really strain myself to live up to her level. I care a lot about other people, I care about my friends and really get upset when I hear that they have problems, not that I'm a complete wreck for days but I really care about them and wish them as much happiness as I have.

If any friends call and ask me to help them with something, then I do it straight away, it feels valuable being asked, whether it's related to my studies or my past. Maybe if they called all the time it would get tiring but as it is it feels really good to be able to help out.

*(So the fact that you still use today, do you think it's because of something you're missing or is it to add something extra?)*

That's actually a very good question. I have spoken very negatively about smoking hash but if it had only been negative then I wouldn't have smoked. It's a lot more fun to sit at home and watch Seinfeld or whatever after I've smoked something but I think that when I add it all up, there are more negative things than positive things. But I get tired of being clean all the time, I miss messing with my head, there are all these processes. The threshold for doing things several times is so low with me so, well ok, at least now I can still have these long breaks when I don't use anything at all. I could never do that before, there are always a thousand reasons to get high.

Still, my conclusion then is that the life I've lived has definitely made me a wiser man, much more empathic, not so concerned with material wealth, as long as you have enough to get by, like the past few years I've always had a bit too little. But we know what we have and how we can make it go round, so if you need to know where they have cheap steaks in town let me know.

Also when it comes to making new friends and moving, I mean it's always easier or safer in a way to continue with where you're at, even if you're really strung out, the hardest and most frightening thing is always choosing something new. But whether or not I'll be completely drug free one day, maybe but I don't think so, its part of my personal freedom I want that choice or freedom, but it's never going to affect my work or my relationship with my son, that I swear.

*(Some people say 'once a junky always a junky' and that as long as you're not completely clean you still have a problem, what do you think about that?)*

For me that kind of mentality is totally wrong, when I go to Oslo I can easily visit one of my friends who are still strung out and we can sit there and smoke heroin one night, that's decided before hand, or maybe two days in a row, but then I stop. Then the next day I might get these flashbacks of being sick, heroin sick, but it's totally out of the question for me to run around town and try to get more or do it a third and fourth time, so maybe other people have that kind of relationship with it but I don't.

Most of the research conducted within the field of addiction focuses on illness rather than health, and has provided a wealth of information aimed primarily at understanding disease and vulnerability and very little about well-being and coping (Hewitt 2004: 219). This is continuing despite the fact that it has been shown repeatedly that "reliance on problem users' own understanding of their predicament is conducive to a successful outcome of interventions" (Hanninen & Koski-Jannes 1999; Hubble et al. 1999 in Blomqvist 2004: 139). Although many schools within psychology generally view suffering like addictions in a negative light there are others which also consider the positive potential painful experiences may have in terms of furthering growth in the long run (in Hewitt 2004). Regardless of this development;

There has been relatively little formal, academic or scientific examination of the potentially growth-promoting aspects of life crises, either of the types of positive outcomes that may occur following crises, or how the characteristic factors of the crisis and associated personal and environmental factors affect the likelihood that any individual will experience psychological growth as a result. The emphases of practitioners and researchers have generally been on the problems associated with life crises and transitions, with a good outcome being equated with the absence of physical symptoms and psychopathology. The possibility of a new and better level of adaptation in response to unusual life events is rarely considered (Hewitt 2004: 219)

The "boon" that Campbell refers to in many respects symbolizes specifically this "growth-promoting" aspect of the journey; that which has been brought back from the "nether world" to benefit the hero and heroine and his or her people. With William for example this is closely related to how he sees and relates to other individuals, where being concerned with other's well-being and doing charity work is obviously one way that he can directly benefit others. The fact that life has made him "a wiser man, much more empathetic and not so concerned with material wealth" is how he himself has gained from his past. Here also there is a clear transition away from his mindset at

eighteen when he “thought the adult world was so stupid, going to work at nine and coming home at four”, where it was important not to be “part of the flock, not being a sheep”. Now he describes himself as a “well-adjusted sheep”, but it doesn’t bother him since he has been able to adjust in a way that he finds both fulfilling and meaningful. In many ways he actually prefers being “clean”, although when it comes to complete abstinence it seems to be more a matter of principle, to have that “personal freedom” as he calls it. He wants that “choice” because he gets “tired of being clean all the time” and misses “messing” with his head.

Although most recovery programs focus largely on the issue of maintaining sobriety, here it is quite apparent that the process is far deeper and revolves not so much around whether or not one chooses to ingest illegal substances but is more related to one’s underlying needs, perspective and focus. William still continues to use even heroin occasionally but this is strictly regulated and part of a very different context compared to when he was really strung out and often using several times a day. In this respect he has developed a pattern much more similar to Mick, Billy and Jackie, for whom intoxication was always secondary to other more creative pursuits and for this reason never developed into an extremely polarized consumption pattern. In these cases, breaking boundaries and getting “high” was always embedded within a larger context and therefore never became a primary goal or life project in itself. Jackie for instance expressed this quite clearly in an interview where she talks about the role that ambitions played in her life in relationship to her patterns of use, and how her current pregnancy is affecting this lifestyle;

I’ve more or less admitted to myself that I am kind of addicted to hash but it was my thing, part of my identity and what I use to chill out, I’m addicted to chocolate also in that sense. I mean I’m okay with that, it’s not the worst thing you can get hooked on, the fact that I need to have a chocolate in the fridge. You’ve got to have some things in life.

If I wanted to quit I would probably quit but I don’t want to quit, I have never wanted to quit either. But now I know that I can quit if I want, once I got pregnant I decided that. My boyfriend and I agreed that I wasn’t going to smoke hash once I got pregnant; we wanted to give our child the best possible starting point. So then I stopped

*(Alcohol and cigarettes too?)*

Everything, every once in a while I might drink one glass of wine with a meal though but not more than that.

*(So you quit all at once then?)*

It’s all about making a choice really; I managed to stop eating chocolate on the same day that I decided to also. I remember having a fight with my mom about me eating too much chocolate. She was going on and on about my chocolate eating, that I was hooked and couldn’t control myself and I was like ‘no

I'm not'. Then there were these two packets of Smarties lying in the fridge and she said 'well what about those then?' I think those two packets of Smarties stayed in the fridge for about one and a half years after that. So it's all about making up your mind really.

*(You must have extremely strong will power)*

You quit or you don't quit, I mean you don't just quit half way because then you haven't quit. It's about deciding, the same with tobacco also, I've been cutting down gradually both because I have asthma and really should quit and also because I'm thirty five years old and I'm having a baby so I have to quit now. The last four years I've been smoking less and less, maybe four cigarettes a day, so when I got pregnant, it wasn't easy but since I had decided to quit I just had to quit.

If you start out very early and then build up your whole identity around being a speed freak for example, that you dig speed, then I think it's more difficult to complete an education and keep your goals in sight. There was also the fact that I was lucky in that I always had a goal. Not all young people or adults for that matter know what they want to become, in addition to being depressed or not really finding meaning in anything maybe... And here I want to point out that alcohol is just as much a drug, so you can develop just as many difficulties with alcohol under the right conditions if you are self destructive and decide to hell with it all.

Like my neighbour across the hall who is a speed freak, I mean he lives across the hall so we have access to it all the time but it doesn't become more tempting for that reason. A lot of people just don't have any ambitions for anything else in life. I don't think he has any other ambition than being a speed freak, simple as that, and is content with being one. So ambitions and belief in yourself and that you have found something in yourself that gives you meaning, because a lot of people who are twenty or thirty years old still don't know what they want to become and I think that's essential, having goals and something that you want to become.

I know what I want and I've always had a ten year goal which I've striven towards. Like now I'm going to be a full time mom for a few years, then I will get a job and work as a teacher and in ten years time I hope to have my own workshop and a part time job as a teacher. So once I've given birth to my daughter, of course there will be less smoking because before when I wasn't pregnant we would often sit at home and enjoy a smoke while now there will probably be less of that and I might scale down while I'm breast feeding. So I'm going to adapt to the situation. I don't let drugs rule my life; rather I let my life rule my drug use. I see how much I can allow myself to get high, but it's a pleasure I don't want to be without. So now that I've been good I'm definitely going to get high again.

*(Do you think that it's changed you as a person, the fact that you get high and all that?)*

Yes, it's made me more tolerant compared to people who don't use and have that boundary and look down on people who use drugs. I don't think like that when I meet a junky in town, or people I hung out with when I was fifteen, especially one person I remember from back then. I'm not judgemental, I can easily give them some change because I know that they need their dope and I have sympathy for them. I remember when I was working in a store too; I'm a bit more open and not so judgemental.

*(How about your world view, do you think that's been affected by your habits?)*

It's hard to say, I don't know what I would have been like if I didn't get high but I often think that straight people are pretty uptight. Take my sisters for example, they often have a black and white attitude towards the world and if they only knew, it's not that simple, but there's no point in discussing anything with them. I can't be bothered to discuss it with them because they just don't have insight into that subject. So I think that it's easy to be swept away by all the propaganda which states that if you use drugs you become like this and like that but it's not black and white.

I remember working as a teacher. Teachers often see their pupils in a certain way and I remember them saying 'half the class is hooked on drugs', there was quite a lot of drug use among pupils of that school. But I see these pupils differently, I mean I started to use when I was fifteen. But teachers have a tendency of classifying them under 'drug users'; thinking that it's going to go downhill with them and that there's no point in giving them encouragement or trying to reach them because they are doomed, you can see it on them, that they are using and that's what happens to people like that.

I see things slightly differently; I mean I could smell pot on someone in my class but that's no reason to judge him or her. I can see through that and that they can still do what I ask of them and be really good at it. So I think that the fact that I've had my own troubles at school and been a real loser in that area and was sick of school myself really helps me to relate to kids on drugs that maybe aren't all that interested and are also sick of school. I don't take it personally, but rather say, 'well okay, I can understand that you are sick of it now but you have still decided to be here so let's try and make the best of it and if you do this and that I will try to help you'. I talk to them like my mother talked to me and then compromise.

*(You never regret ever having started using then, wondering what things might have been like?)*

No, oh god no, jeez I don't even want to imagine how uptight I would have been then, things would definitely have gone downhill, I wouldn't have managed very much that's for sure (*laughing*). No, but it definitely adds some colours to my life, the way I am around people and the way I teach. It adds more nuances in a way. Things aren't as categorically black and white... So it's absolutely a positive thing for me, I don't regret it at all and I don't intend to quit.

Although Jackie, like Luke, admits to being “addicted” to hash she also points out again and again that this is a conscious choice, strongly related to her identity, and that if she wanted to quit she would. In her case this is substantiated by her pregnancy during which time she stopped using pretty much everything the day she found out she was expecting. Jackie always had set goals and ambitions, another “focus” and this seems to have had a major impact on the course of her development and the fact that, in her own words; “I don't let drugs rule my life; rather I let my life rule my drug use. I see how much I can allow myself to get high”. Her cannabis habit can be seen as a conscious strategy which provides a sense of identity as well as pleasure but can also be regulated and controlled when necessary. Here also there are both subjective and intersubjective qualities related to the needs being met by her patterns, how she integrates those as well as her outlook on life in general, and the way she relates to others. Her past experience “adds colours” so that she doesn't see things as “categorically black and white”. Like William, she has also developed a very different attitude towards people who are obviously struggling, in contrast to many of her peers, and she applies this non-judgemental attitude in her work and daily life.

A similar pattern of positive findings also emerged in a qualitative study exploring the phenomenon of enhanced growth in the management and recovery from dependency and addiction among twenty one respondents who had overcome problems with alcohol and drugs (mostly heroin), the majority without any specialist help (Hewitt 2004). Besides the obvious reduction of negative consequences from not having to cope with a destructive lifestyle, Hewitt identified “four closely interlinked

areas of Maturation, Increased Perspective and Experience, Liberation and Fulfilment” (ibid: 221). A greater sense of maturation was related to the overall process of growth and development that the participants saw within themselves upon recovery, and also in terms of how they were perceived by others on both an emotional level and within a more “practical/domestic arena”. Increased perspective encompassed “a number of interconnecting themes affecting the person, their beliefs and attitudes, and their relationships, including an increased range of life experience, being less judgemental, increased self-awareness, possessing the benefits of contrast, and having had the experience of success”. This includes greater insights into both themselves and others compared to the “general population” and also a greater acceptance and ability to integrate “less desirable elements of the personality” (ibid:222).

The aspect of liberation was closely related to what Hewitt has also identified as a core type of movement. Here the “need to escape from some kind of unpleasantness for many gave a very clear focus and direction”, although this wasn’t always a “straightforward process” and it wasn’t always clear towards what they were moving. What was clear however, was that “the move away often gave rise to a forward momentum that subsequently became more focussed on the *drive to develop*. It is the momentum and degree of this that often appeared to take them to the particular levels of growth and development that so many reported” (ibid: 223). This “push/pull” could be “consciously worked with and fostered” although it didn’t appear to be a conscious strategy in itself, “but something much deeper, like a drive or instinct” (ibid.).

Finally there was the subject of fulfilment which related more concretely to how Hewitt’s respondents applied and integrated their past experiences into their work and daily life. Many felt “generally fulfilled, particularly in relation to their work, which was often experienced as both satisfying and meaningful”, even though work wasn’t perceived as being the focal point of their lives. Those that had started to work within the field of drugs and alcohol were especially satisfied and even “grateful for their addictive experiences”, which also allowed them to feel “that they were giving something back” (ibid: 224). Like almost all of the respondents in this study, here also there was a recurring tendency to view their past as highly meaningful with “no regrets” and that it had in fact “contributed significantly to the person they were



today” (ibid.). Not only did they not have any regrets, but many felt that had it not been for these experiences “they would not have developed as a person to the degree to which they had. As such, the period of problematic substance use was not a ‘detour’ from the life-journey, but was in fact an integral part of it” (ibid.).

In fact, out of all the people interviewed and talked with less formally during the course of this project, only one person said that she regretted her past and that drugs had ruined her life completely. Katie was an attractive woman in her thirties with a strong Christian faith and pleasant character. When she came by for an interview I had assumed that she was just a recreational drug user with no major problems. She seemed so “together”, both in her appearance and also the fact that she was relatively settled down with a husband and studying at the time. I quickly became puzzled because uncharacteristically for this group of respondents, she spoke very negatively about drugs right from the start, and much of what she said was somewhat self-contradictory. However, as it turned out she had, and was still suffering from, a severe opiate addiction that had dragged out for over ten years and was currently on the waiting list for methadone. In fact the only positive thing that her experiences had given her was as she put it “a confirmation of her beliefs”;

that what I believe is true... That Satan is out to hassle me, when I'm doing something that is wrong for me that destroys my body and isn't good for my soul, when I do things that are wrong, a mistake for me, then I am hassled, but when I don't I feel at peace, so it reinforces my beliefs.

Paradoxically, the only “good” aspect of her past was the fact that all her negative experiences confirmed that she was being “bad”, in accordance with her Christian beliefs. This was partly related to another problematic inconsistency throughout her narrative where she strongly emphasized how happy she was when she wasn't using anything but then for some unknown reason she always started using again. When I asked her about this she replied by saying “I don't know, I don't understand it, there are so many unresolved drug issues in my life so...”

According to another study of drug abusers and the process of recovery (Blomqvist 2002), “the narratives of those who had not yet been able to recover were more fragmentary and contradictory than those of recovered persons, and...they lacked the perspective of an ending” (in Hanninen & Koski-Jannes 2004: 233). These stories were characterised as “stories in search of their own meaning” (following Lars Hyden 1997). Hanninen & Koski-Jannes have also uncovered a four phase process

specifically underlying narratives of recovery (2004). These are “becoming addicted”; second, “recognising addiction as a problem”; third, “finding a key to recovery”, and fourth, “establishing a new, addiction-free life” (ibid: 233). They suggest that the people referred to by Blomqvist had not yet reached the third phase “in which narrative reorientation takes place, and an anticipatory recovery narrative starts to emerge” (ibid.). This is certainly an important observation which also applies to my findings and clearly one that merits further research.

## 7.4 - The problem of the fourth

In many ways, what these respondents seem to be enacting strongly resembles a contemporary manifestation of what in alchemy is referred to as the “problem of the fourth”. The number four here refers to a totality that unifies man with creation, an “archetype of fourfold order” encompassing four seasons, four directions, four elements, four qualities, and four temperaments; fourfold symbols “enjoy universal significance as the natural schema for unified images of heaven, paradise and the godhead” (Williams 2000). However, this fourfold order also “shows a tendency to dissociate into three and one”, so that as human consciousness progressed “by the Middle Ages the nature of the ‘fourth’ had become a complex religious problem...which in contrast to the spiritual and paternal Trinity is physical and feminine” (ibid.);

Jung showed that the problem of the fourth and of the body in general developed in Western alchemy as a compensatory undercurrent to the Christian conflict between the opposites, particularly the moral opposites of good and evil, which ever since the first day of Creation had been rent apart into upper and lower worlds. While the divine Trinity illuminated three quarters of human consciousness, divided darkness covered the lower realm. Alchemy represented the search for the divine spark of God's reflection in the darkness of the lower world, under the motto ascribed in antiquity to Hermes Trismegistus; 'as Above, so Below', a search motivated by the light that shone in Nature, the *lumen naturae*.

As this search lead ultimately to the dawn of science and technology rather than the unconscious source of its motivating projections, it opened up the heretical split between faith and knowledge and engendered the sickness of spiritual alienation and inflated consciousness so characteristic of our age, which afflicts both individual and nation alike with pseudoreligious factional 'isms' and the evil of blind possession. As the power of faith upheld by the Church waned, it was left to psychology to uncover the source of this sickness in modern man, a sickness and distress which Jung argued can only be cured through greater knowledge and *individual experience* of the hidden *numen* in our own nature, the *numen* that, as the uniting medicant, 'heals and makes whole'.

It is significant that many of the most gifted alchemists, like Paracelsus for example, were also prominent physicians of their day, who could not ignore the problem of the fourth and sought to bring about health and longevity through an all-embracing wholeness of mind and body. This approach was fundamentally at odds with the Christian treatment of the body, which attempted to make a perfect thing of one to the damnation of the other. The alchemists by contrast sought to salvage the body and make peace with it. But the body with which the alchemist worked included far more than what we today understand by the term (ibid.).

Since the purity of the body, and thereby the self, is connected to and regulated by what goes in and out of its system (Douglas 1984), even food becomes a great source of ambivalence. It is both unclean and unstable, “intruding” on the cleanliness and nobility of rational thought with its organic nature which is subject to rot and decay. Although food is necessary for survival and an indisputable source of pleasure and gratification with the capacity to “civilize” any human animal, it always poses a potential threat in terms of “contamination and bodily impurity” (Lupton 1996: 3). Where consumption patterns are ultimately expressions of containment and embodiment, the manner in which we “control” these patterns is closely related to the “exertion of will over the flesh, the mind over the emotions, the striving towards the idealized ‘civilized’ body” (ibid: 152). Consumption therefore also reflects how we manage and sustain subjectivity, our sense of self and experiences of embodiment, or the manner in which we live in and through our bodies and the extent to which these experiences are constructed or mediated within a socio-cultural context (Lupton 1996). The conflict between the “rational imperatives” around eating certain ‘good’ foods with the urge to sometimes ‘sin’ and devour “bad” foods is an expression of the “continual dialectic between the pleasures of consumption and the ethic of ascetism as means of constructing the self” (ibid.).

The fact that subjectivity and embodiment have only recently gained ground as legitimate fields of investigation can also be traced back to the early Greek philosophers who frowned upon all things corporal because they threatened and contaminated the search for pure truth and absolute knowledge;

Plato argued, ‘the true philosopher’ despises such topics as bodily pleasures and adornments, for ‘we are slaves’ in the service of the body: ‘if we do obtain any leisure from the body’s claims and turn to some line of inquiry, the body intrudes once more into our investigations, interrupting, disturbing, distracting, and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth’ (1992:26) According to Plato, the ‘follies’ of the body ‘contaminate’ the pure search for truth and knowledge. Hence the philosopher’s soul must stringently try to ignore the body, ‘becom[ing] as far as possible independent, avoiding all physical contacts and associations as much as it can in it’s search for reality’ (in Lupton 1996: 2).

As Alfred North Whitehead has remarked; “The safest characterization of the whole Western philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (in Wilber 1995: 319). Not surprisingly then, philosophy has become a primarily “masculine” and disembodied endeavour in direct opposition to the “feminine” and always embodied realms of consumption and subjectivity. Therefore, Lupton concludes, “Devoting attention to embodiment indeed confounds the entire logocentric project of philosophy; the drive to rationalize, the emphatic separation of the mind from the body, the elevation of thought over embodiment” (ibid.).

Like food, intoxicants are also consumed, or ingested, however their potential to wreak havoc with the systemic metaphysics of the body lies not in the organic pollution that ordinarily follows a digestive sequence, but pollution of a much more subtle and in many respects hazardous nature. Intoxication threatens not only the purity of the individual body, but also the body politic as well as the ‘purity’ of the mind or consciousness, our sense of subjectivity and perception of the world, and these latter areas constitute a crucial difference. Not surprisingly, the subjective “fourth dimension” of the psyche is “as a rule completely overlooked, even though it conditions all our perception and comprehension. Only when it is disturbed do we notice anything at all” (William 2000). It is noteworthy in this context that antidepressants, sleeping pills, tranquilizers and many others, “seem designed to bypass the problem of subjectivity altogether...dispensed by psychiatrists or other physicians without any accompanying psychotherapy” (Boon 2002: 276). On the other hand, psychedelics, the translation of which is literally “mind made manifest”, have been consistently banned and berated by the establishment.

The assumed dualism of mind and matter and the related opposition of faith and knowledge gave rise to a widespread “terror” of subjectivity. Historically, this coincided with a growing interest in mind altering substances as “socially, naturally, or spiritually potentiated substances that contain in them the promise of the reunion of mind and matter, the transcendental and material realms” (ibid: 12). A similar trend is repeatedly articulated in drug literature. Despite the modern myth that man has “successfully separated a domain of culture from one of nature, while dispensing with the religious dimension altogether”, the history of writers on drugs is saturated with this “transcendental impulse” (ibid: 11). In fact, it is specifically this “feeling of being trapped...of emptiness (and) craving for an outside” which together “constitute what

we call modernity”. The boundaries erected to prevent transcendental indulgence, actually exist in an “ambiguous and often parasitical relationship to the excess that they ‘prevent’. Often they give rise to particularly violent new forms of excess” (ibid. 13). Foucault (1979) has argued in his *History of Sexuality*, that this is closely connected to the productive nature of power relations, and as Lupton has pointed out, these “power relations” also apply to consumption patterns since;

power serves to constitute bodies, behaviours, thoughts and feelings at the same time as it seeks to control and shape them. So too, the increasing web of strategies around the prohibition of eating ‘bad’ foods in consumer culture tends to have the effect of heightening and valorizing their pleasures through incitement...Our ‘rational’ knowledge that they are ‘bad’ constructs our sensual and emotional experience of them as ‘good’ (Lupton 1996: 152).

The significance of the problem of the fourth, interpreted here as embodied subjectivity, is no more obvious than in its overwhelming exclusion and absence. It is the muted voice and silent story of many a psychonaut who wandered into this forbidden realm and was forever coloured by “the deepest dyes of subjectivity”. There is a continual dialectic here between the existential impulse towards transcendence and the materialist ethic of sobriety and restraint. Not unlike the dialectic between the “pleasure of consumption and the ethic of ascetism”, they are “means of constructing self: each would have no meaning without the other” (ibid: 153). These dialectics constitute contemporary manifestations of that age old, universal war between “internal and external law”. Since our being and cultural identity today is to such a large extent structured by and mediated through consumption patterns, it should come as no surprise that the impulse towards transcendence is correspondingly expressed through consumables that promise to “disturb” subjectivity enough to force it into the foreground.

The opus in alchemy is specifically concerned with the “union of opposites” and the “separation and sublimation of the warring elements contained in the *prima materia* or *massa confusa* described in the sixteenth century *Gloria Mundis* as ‘familiar to all men...yet despised by all’” (in William 2000). The widespread drive for forbidden forms of intoxication today can also be seen as a natural consequence of several centuries of suppressing the “feminine” qualities of embodied subjectivity, and is in some ways also grounded in a quest for the integration and transcendence of opposing “good” and “evil” socio-cultural forces. The “good” in this context is related to the so-called purity of the disembodied and strictly controlled mind, while “evil” is

its antithesis, “disturbed” subjectivity and embodiment expressed through anti-structural decadence. Seen in this light, a realistic solution to the “drug problem” is neither in “negating or affirming drugs”, but must involve; “learning to discriminate between different drugs through unbiased studies of how human beings interact with them, and, at a deeper level, opening up new realms of excess so that drugs no longer carry the whole weight of our legitimate desire to be high” (Boon 2002: 13).

For many, the “desire to be high” therefore represents the need to escape from a disembodied, mechanical and materialistic denominator culture where achievement, aggressiveness and consumerism are promoted as “good” and only the external, physical reality is acknowledged as valid and “real”. This is why drugs and forbidden forms of intoxication are so closely related to the concept of freedom. Lea for instance expresses the claustrophobic sensation of growing up in this kind of atmosphere quite lucidly in the following excerpt;

Today I function in a way but I also feel that if the straight life overtakes you too much, and I think that’s what happened to me when I got sick, that I chose to push the arthritis button to get... well now I can’t turn to dope as a way to escape anymore because it doesn’t harmonise with family life but I have seen illness as a way out. As a possibility for continual escape from that straight, mechanical affair that makes you suffer, you feel like you’re suffering when you aren’t free. So then illness becomes a solution for protecting your freedom, because then you don’t have to work, you don’t have to run you don’t have to do all these things, the way society is as a whole. I thought about that a lot when I was little. If I grew up in Tibet they would have put me into a monastery for ten to twelve years because I had a spiritual orientation. So I would have been put there and cared for and I would have got what I needed. But since I grew up here and don’t come from an alternative or artistic family who could have provided me with an alternative lifestyle in that manner, then that was the only option for me.

*(So do you see the straight life as somewhat destructive then?)*

Yes, the straight life is the box or the mould that you are supposed to be inside, although you know that you just can’t do it. You are like a wild animal that’s supposed to go willingly into a cage, and you just know that you can’t do that, it’s not possible. This is something that I’ve felt very early on, already in primary school and before. I would observe how people lived ruled by the clock. I remember that from when I was tiny, just knowing that you had to be somewhere, you had to do this and that. It was like having the walls come in on you because you weren’t supposed to have any plans; you were supposed to be open for miracles where anything could happen. Then if you started to get squeezed into boxes with schedules and things like that, then you lost the opportunity for the magical and the wonderful and all of that which was so hard to find in ordinary every day life. But this again was because of my family situation and what my parents taught me, like you have to work and do this and that and everything in my being was like, no, I can’t do that.

So that was an escape also, but simultaneously there was another part of me and my world that was seeking and all that, many essential factors that have been there all along. Also when things get really extreme, and you start to test yourself through the madness like, how much can you take, it’s kind of like flirting with yourself in a way, strange.

In alchemy, the search for wholeness was motivated by a “divine spark of God’s reflection in the darkness of the lower world”, and this applies to many if not all of those who descend into the darker realms of drugs, and in some cases years of

addiction. Even though the outcome can be tragic, their search is in many ways also motivated by a light, an inner hunch whispering of the “magical and the wonderful and all of that which was so hard to find in ordinary life”. For people like Lea, the prospect of being “squeezed into boxes” is so unbearable that she would even prefer to “make herself sick” with arthritis just to escape when drugs are no longer an option due to her domestic situation. As Weil concluded in his classic investigation of drugs and higher consciousness;

The eruption of drugs into the rational, middle-class world is a social analog of the breaking through of nonordinary experience into an individual’s ordinary awareness. It represents, above all, the tendency of the universe to reach equilibrium and harmony by balancing forces against their opposites. In *The King and the Corpse*, Heinrich Zimmer writes: ‘... every lack of integration in the human sphere simply asks for the appearance, somewhere in space and time, of the missing opposite. And the personification, the embodiment, of that predestined antagonist will inevitably show its face.’ The antagonistic outward appearance of drugs... conceals a force, which is, for us, the missing opposite. It is nothing other than the reality and power of the nonmaterial, the nonrational, and the nonordinary, which we have denied for so long, and by wearing the mask it does, it compels us to take it into account, to integrate it into our conscious conceptions (ibid: 203).

This “tendency of the universe to reach equilibrium” is perhaps also what the alchemists were referring to in the renowned proverb “as Above so Below”, which “signifies the union of the macrocosmic and microcosmic through the identity of self and all that is above as anchored to all others through that which extends into the depths of the earth itself” (Purcell 1998: 22). The uroboros is a visual depiction of this eternal cycle of renewal as it represents a “continuum that is the union of internal and external polarities” (ibid.). It symbolizes the *opus* “which proceeds from the one and leads back to the one”, an individuation process which is not linear but cyclic, containing four stages or four “parts”; “turning back on itself as a cyclic integration of all that lies buried in the unconscious. For the unconscious contains not only the undigested problems of the past but also the dormant seeds of the future, all that languishes undeveloped and unrealized, all that longs (in a feminine way) for the light of day” (Williams 2000). Or in Lea’s words, this is also “kind of like flirting with yourself”.

The relationship between the uroboros and the “problem of the fourth” can also be visually depicted using the Klein bottle which is a mathematical model “for understanding the paradox, the reconciliation of opposites and the nature of a structural metaphor that a cyclic universe might require” (Purcell 1998: 2). This can be constructed using a diagonally woven thread of copper wire “that meets beginning

to end after negotiating a repeated motif that completes the construction...It is a single sided four dimensional modality which means that locally a differentiation of sides is discernible, but globally the surface is a continuum". Specifically, the "singularity located where the neck passes through the body of the bottle which is the reason it has been considered an impossible construction to make, as the singularity signifies an absolute zero point" (ibid.). This therefore makes it ideal for revealing "a complex process of transformation and change which relies on an exchange of oppositional intensities" (ibid.). Steven Rosen identifies this as "a process of self-containment enacted through the dimension of depth";



Figure 1. The Klein bottle

In the depth dimension, while the hole in the Klein bottle is no mere breach in an object in space, neither is it simply a rupture in space per se that corresponds to the subject. Rather, the Kleinian "hole" is in fact a *dialectical (w)hole* resulting from an act of self-intersection wherein the purported object does the "impossible": it passes unbrokenly through itself, and, in so doing, flows backward into its own subjective ground (in Merleau-Ponty's terms, it is "autofigurative"). Elsewhere, I noted the resemblance of the Klein bottle to the hermetic vessel of old alchemy (Rosen 1995). The design of the enigmatic vessel is essentially that of the *uroboros*, the serpent that consumes itself by swallowing its own tail. To contain itself, the serpent must intersect itself, an operation requiring a hole (corresponding to the opening that is its mouth). The hole in the Klein bottle is of this sort. It is neither solely a hole in a container, nor a hole in that which it contains, but the hole produced by the recursive act of *self*-containment that integrates the container with its contents in this way giving (w)holeness.

The Kleinian process of self-containment enacted through the dimension of depth is surely no *trivial* recursion, no regression of meaning to simple self-identity. The Klein bottle refers to itself, but it also makes reference to what is other and a boundary is crossed. Of course, the boundary in question is not of the exterior sort so familiar to us; instead it is paradoxical, a boundary that is *not* a boundary (see Neuman, this issue of SEED, and Rosen 1997, 2004a). In passing through Kleinian depths from self to other (subject to object, the discontinuous to the continuum), we cross over the boundary to the "far side," yet at once remain on the "near side." In this way, while the self-other distinction is not just abrogated, the *supremacy* of this distinction is overcome and we realize a harmony of self and other so intimate that the prior meanings of these terms are transmuted. The erstwhile categorical purity of self and other is supplanted by an odd uroboric hybrid, a "hermaphroditic" fusion wherein self and other, though assuredly different, are one and the same. This profoundly paradoxical manner of self-reference is what I mean by *radical recursion*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rosen, S. M.: "What is Radical Recursion". Retrieved from The University of Toronto Library at: <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/see/SEED/Vol4-1/Rosen.htm> .



In fact the Klein bottle is a Moebius strip “with an added dimension” that is used to “explore the recursive interplay of terms that are classically regarded as binary opposites: identity and difference, object and subject, continuity and discontinuity, etc.” (ibid.). Rosen builds on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and his concept of *depth* which is regarded not only as an added dimension but as an “originary dimension” of “*unbroken flow*”. Here it is specifically postulated that this “primal dimension engages embodied subjectivity”, the dimension of depth “goes toward things from, as starting point, this body to which I myself am fastened” (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 173 in Rosen). Furthermore, not only does the Klein bottle “*make use of the dimension of depth to realize its dialectic of continuity and discontinuity*”, according to Rosen “the Klein bottle *is the depth dimension*”; “For, rather than being a model contained as object-in-space, the Klein bottle-grasped in terms of depth-is the inseparability of object, space, and subject, the unbroken circulation of these intimated by Merleau-Ponty” (ibid.). The “problem of the fourth” is therefore resolved in the Klein bottle, specifically through the hole “which plays a pivotal role”, because in order for it to be brought to completion, “an added dimension is required”, “the dimension to be engaged is that of Merleau-Pontean depth” (ibid.).

Our mistake, writes Huston Smith, was “expecting science to provide us with a world view, when we now see that it shows us only half the world – its physical, calculable, testable, significantly controllable, half. And even that half is now unpicturable; it can’t be visualized” (Smith 1992: vi). Something has gone wrong in our postmodern Western world “and gone wrong in a sense far more radical than, say, the evils of industrial England which engaged Dickens...now it seems that whatever has gone wrong strikes to the very heart and core of meaning itself, the very way [in which] people see and understand themselves” (Percy in Smith 1992: vii). As Purcell has also observed;

Our technologies have replaced the transcendent object of humanities collective desire. We are groping in the darkness of our separateness to see reason for this material nightmare that we have created. The Universalism that we have transcended into is a technological fabrication. Humanities project has been aborted for the very physical manifestation of human potential realised in our global communications networks, a poor excuse for the unlimited infinite and universal hyperreality of the humanity that we have hoped to realise.

The stage has been prepared for a final catastrophe. As we have wagered our existence for the proof of

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the first cause, and while we are arguing about which world view we base our assumptions on, our view of the world and its future gets bleaker.

Consider this - If science can be seen as knowledge and art as being then the art of science is the being of knowledge: technology and the science of art is the knowledge of being: ontology, therefore our art of science is enabling us to realise our science of art. The critical problem is however whether humanity can realise this dilemma and alchemically use the material of technology to realise our ontology before the destruction that technology has caused obliterates our potential to reside in the material form that we are currently accustomed to (Purcell 1998: 24).

The conclusion “is one of those things that one knows yet never learns”, although our “conversion to the scientific outlook is understandable psychologically, logically it involves a clean mistake” (Smith 1998: 8). Ultimately, living within the scientific view of reality alone and subjecting the mind to the totalitarian regime of pure reason without depth is like “living in a house’s scaffolding, and to love it like embracing one’s spouse’s skeleton” (ibid.). Essentially then, the deeper rationale conveyed through the contemporary pursuit of intoxication is one desperate attempt to transcend that “house’s scaffolding” through radical immanence. This is not necessarily the best way, nor is it the only way, but for many it is the quickest available path to occasional moments of relief from flatland claustrophobia. And, as Alexis told me in a final touch of paradox logic just before she died, it is a matter of survival.

Positive freedom, according to Fromm (2001: 223) “consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality”. However, an important “premise” for this spontaneity;

is the acceptance of the total personality and the elimination of the split between ‘reason’ and ‘nature’; for only if man does not repress essential parts of his self, only if he has become transparent to himself, and only if the different spheres of life have reached a fundamental integration, is spontaneous activity possible (ibid.).

The pursuit of freedom is perhaps the primary drive behind the many narratives of those who have embarked on their own individual journeys through the underworld. In some cases, this develops into the “negative” form of freedom, where a compulsive consumption pattern results in a new kind of bondage. This is hardly surprising in light of the fact that the idea of “freedom” is so strongly associated with intoxication and “time-out”, while consumption patterns today play such a crucial role in terms of structuring and mediating identity. For many, stolen moments of illicit consumption represent the only chance of escape from the “straight life”, the stifling “cage” of what is perceived as an empty, meaningless and mechanical existence.

Although the drive to rise above or beyond that which we perceive as everyday concrete normality is in itself ancient and widespread, the current dominance of industrialism, consumerism and materialism in much of the developed and developing world has made the yearning for transcendence greater than ever before. As a good friend who eventually died of an overdose used to tell me when I asked him what he found so appealing about getting high and shooting up; “it brings me closer to home... I just want to come home”. In many ways, this is the “story behind the story”. Its message is all-pervasive yet invisible, like a living ghost haunting our intoxicated cities and echoing with Kato and every junky who never awoke; “there must be more than this”. Therefore, “the needed return – a kind of homecoming – is in outlook only; it is in worldview and sense of reality, and even here phrases such as ‘going back’ are imprecise. For the issue does not really concern time at all; it concerns truth, truth of the kind that is *timeless*” (ibid: 146).

Many among us suspect that there is more to life than meets the eye, that a part of us connects with the stars and mother earth, although we can't quite put our finger on it and traditional belief systems don't seem to do justice to what many intuitively feel lies beyond our immediate sensory world. Explorers of intoxication, specifically those venturing beyond the accepted realms of alcohol, prescribed medication and tobacco fixes, are in some ways inhabiting multiple realities. They are psychonauts who willingly shed the secure foundations of mundane existence in exchange for a small, chemically induced slice of freedom, and are often prepared to pay a very high price. This may account for the “uncanny ability of the habituated to recognize strangers in the same subgroup [that] is reminiscent of the vampires’ mutual recognition in an Anne Rice novel” (Lenson 1995: 46). Distinguishing one another almost telepathically, like seasoned travellers sitting on the same bus, one can always tell who has “been there”. Although most never manage to escape completely and many tragically become slaves to the very drive that urged them to break free in the first place, there are those who do gain vital insights into the mind and that invisible prison that surrounds us all. For them conventional reality is never quite the same, in the words of a graffiti proverb scrawled on a local prison wall, it becomes “just another illusion which appears in the absence of drugs”.

For this reason perhaps, most of the respondents I interviewed did not aspire towards a completely “drug-free existence”, even when they had previously suffered

from extremely problematic use. Although many of their narratives involved dramatic twists and turns, they often developed into a surprisingly positive story of growth and maturation. Lea for example, who embarked on her quest for transcendence long before she started using drugs, continues to grow and transform many years after she had initially changed course, even seriously contemplating the idea of being “clean” for the first time in twenty years;

But it's first now that I have really begun to understand the point in being clean and see the value of that, so that's taken even longer, twenty years it's taken me. This is something that has started to appear just recently this summer and autumn, that I want to cut out the little joints as well. I'm starting to see that the little tail that is hanging after me can also be left behind. That there is something else that is even clearer, being completely clean, and understanding what that really means.

*(What does it mean?)*

It means being clear and sharp, in the natural state you're meant to be in that you have been escaping and pushing away the whole time because that's what you thought you were meant to do, but then you see that it wasn't. You start to see that the imbalances are imbalances no matter what, and that there is something deeper which lies behind that, which isn't always conscious. But over time you see that there was something, deeper connections which had been there for years before they manifested more concretely.

I see now that I am still undergoing a process, even though today I would say that I'm straight, I've been straight for the past fifteen years in many ways, although it's still a part of my life in a way. I haven't really stopped one hundred percent. I have somewhat this autumn for the first time, and I see that I am still undergoing a process.

*(So where do the joints fit in then?)*

It's just something I do to relax, like a glass of red wine on Fridays, but here also I see that there are these invisible transitions, it quickly becomes an every day thing. So now I'm more concerned with... I realise that ok, I've let hash become an everyday thing now over several years, even though sometimes it's been more and sometimes it's been less but I see that it's been there all a long. It's only now, this summer that I've started to wonder 'do I really need this?' So it took fifteen years to move away from the harder drugs and fifteen more for the others. So now I think to myself that maybe it is possible to be totally clean for weeks at a time and rather use drugs as a ritual thing once in a rare while. That's what I've done with magic mushrooms for many years, tripped out once a year as a spiritual thing, to be inspired and to shake up my psyche, use it therapeutically almost.

*(Do you feel that it's changed you as a person?)*

Yes, it does, it definitely affects you and it's impossible to say how I would have turned out if it hadn't been for twenty years of drug abuse behind me. Not necessarily on a deep spiritual level, I think it affects you more in terms of how you are and finding a focus, whether it's dope, shopping, sex or whatever, everyone has their focus. There is always something or another; it's not possible to be completely without focus, then you have to be beamed up or whatever.

The journey continues, “there is always something or another”, it doesn't stop just because one type of pattern is replaced by another, and even though ones “focus” may change many people still have a “little tail” hanging behind. This once again conjures up an image of the uroboros; “eating its tail” while continually recreating

itself. The high prevalence of natural remission, as well as the widespread ability to maintain appetites that do not necessarily entail overwhelming involvements, even when one has previously suffered from severe addictions as in the case of William and Lea for example, all point to the fundamental role that choice and intentionality play during this process. Furthermore, in the majority of cases where a moderate pattern of use had replaced a predominantly destructive one, a high level of integration was also apparent. This was especially noticeable in terms of being able to understand and incorporate the underlying needs or motives behind one's destructive behaviour, and channel these into a more constructive direction. Since these needs were neither suppressed nor indulged, previously problematic substance use could then become "an integral part" of the life-journey. From this perspective then, recovery and transformation is ultimately not about what substances may or may not be floating about one's blood stream at any given moment, but rather lies in the ability to mediate and integrate conflicting "oppositional intensities", so that the quest for positive freedom can begin.

## **7.5 - Summary of the fourth gate**

The fourth gate concludes the cycle but not the journey. Movement is no longer directed outwards and away, but seeks re-integration as the traveller returns, often with a strong desire to share the fruits of their journey. Intoxication has become far less significant, although perhaps still part of a lifestyle and identification with "like-minded others". The journey through the last two gates need not be painful and dramatic however, many people simply outgrow certain habits or consumption patterns. The intensity associated with these gates is closely related to the nature of the relationship between self and substance. Where this relationship is part of a wider context including spontaneity, creativity and individual expansion it will be far less problematic than where it has become compulsive and the primary relationship and locus of identification. In the latter case, "leaving the relationship" will be just as painful as leaving a life-partner to whom one has become very attached, even though the relationship itself has become extremely unhealthy or destructive. Many may never leave because of a deeply entrenched fear that the resulting change and loneliness will be far worse than the consequences of living in a destructive but "secure" relationship.

The boon is a symbol for the growth promoting aspects of the journey as a whole, even and perhaps especially when the journey has been extremely painful and difficult. Transformation entails not repressing, but recognizing and including the darker aspects of oneself in a “fundamental integration”, and here a strong parallel can be seen in the recovery and healing of society as a whole. Most likely this involves acknowledging, not suppressing, our common “transcendental impulse”, recognizing the crucial role of embodied subjectivity and promoting less potentially destructive means of accessing different states of consciousness. Eventually we may then reach a point where drugs “no longer carry the whole weight”.

## Chapter

# 8

### Conclusion - A New Beginning

*All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.*

Karl Marx, on modernity

#### 8.1 – The politics of consciousness

The fear of “dragons” today has shifted from the physical environment to the unexplored regions of the inner world, a fear which is embodied in the taboo of subjectivity and the largely neglected consciousness of the everyday “user”. Consciousness is in this context primarily related to the *experience* of being conscious and *intentionally* partaking in that experience. The starting point for this exploration was the aspiration to investigate “what wasn’t being said” in contemporary drug research. This led to the insight that a conscious phenomenology of intoxication might provide a good point of departure and valuable method for exploring this uncharted territory, and map out these inner regions in relation to how they connect with the rest of the landscape. Drug research is, and has been, for many decades strongly immersed and affected by what Kate McCoy (1999) has identified as “the politics of knowing and being known”. This is based on the fact that most critical drug research which dares to challenge the status quo is “at best quietly ignored, loudly discredited, or condemned...as ‘intellectually and morally scandalous’” (ibid.). Not only is critical research ignored and condemned however, but findings that fail to support prevailing notions of drug abusers and addiction are continually “censored by academic disciplines and misread and misapplied by policy makers who refuse to acknowledge the complexity, difficulty, and partial perspectives that the sciences have to offer” (ibid.). Moral ideology still prevails, and as Alex Wodak, a veteran of the Australian harm reduction movement, pointed out “no matter how rigorous the science, it is nearly impossible to challenge prevailing views in a climate where rationality and logic do not reign, where decision-making is done based on fantasy and

denial, [and] where it is almost mandatory to imagine drug use and drug users as pathologically monstrous” (ibid.).

A recent doctoral dissertation examining Norwegian drug politics, Fjær (2005) specifically discusses this tendency. Despite the complexity of user trajectories, public policy has and still continues to demand an over-simplistic, unambiguous approach to the drug problem, accentuating a need for consistency and clear signals in terms of reflecting the norms accepted by society at large. This need for “clear signals” and the corresponding intolerance of complexity creates a dilemma for the drug researcher who is persistently “sucked into” the politically correct approach to the drug problem which demands straightforward solutions. In this setting, it is very difficult for the researcher to find a role other than becoming a “little helper” for the politicians. Failure to comply with these conditions creates suspicion and scrutiny as to the professional standards and moral constitution of the researcher. This most probably accounts for why there has hardly been any research addressing the “recreational use” of drugs; how widespread this type of use is, how people manage and maintain such use and what might be considered a “good” user pattern. Similarly, there exists little knowledge concerning issues related to alternative regulation strategies and how these might be implemented. Thus current policies are not rational but rather tend to serve the opinions of the moral majority, where the primary goal for politicians seems to be not to “get blamed” for anything. Consequently, alternative and potentially far-reaching measures to solve the “drug problem”, other than those guaranteed to get public support, are continually avoided and drug politics as a whole remain basically unaffected<sup>1</sup>.

The preoccupation with not “sending the wrong message” and catering to public opinion, creates a “mutually reinforcing relationship between what most people generally think about drug users and what assumptions guide research and policy regarding drug use” (McCoy 1999). This is a pattern which is repeated and perpetuated by the “generation of drug hysteria, the propagation of misinformation in drug education in schools, and the shaping of public opinion – all this in close relationship with the processes and authority of the sciences” (ibid.). On a similar note, Boon (2002) has also observed that the current discourse surrounding existing drug literature that has been written from a more experiential, subjective or embodied perspective is practically saturated with an undeniable aura of “obscenity”;

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Norwegian online article by Kveim, K. (2005): “Narkotikapolitikk og folkelig fornuft”. Retrieved from forskning.no; <http://www.forskning.no/Artikler/2005/desember/1134052702.35>



Although books about drugs have only very rarely been prosecuted under obscenity laws, the discourse of the obscene lingers around drug books: a discourse of voyeurism, of pleasure taken in other people's experiences, leading to inevitable moral corruption; of exhibitionism, of narcissistic displays of transgression, flaunted before the general public, so as to exploit its cravings for sensation... To read a book about drugs, to write about books about drugs, is evidently a sign that one has been exposed to something and possibly contaminated by it (Boon 2002: 2).

Illicit substances in particular are “desecrated substances” the categorization of which reflects political forces where knowledge and power combine to create a complex system of demarcation with far reaching socio-cultural implications. This hegemonic system is, at least partially, rooted in the suppression of the “feminine” qualities of subjectivity, embodiment, and transcendence “familiar to all men ...yet despised by all”. Consequently, the languages used to portray these stories in the social sciences are also principally “masculine” written almost exclusively in the “father tongue”;

the dialect of the father tongue that you and I learned best in college is a written one...many believe this dialect – the expository and particularly the scientific discourse – is the *highest* form of language, the true language, of which all other uses of words are primitive vestiges...It is the language of thought that seeks objectivity. I do not say it is the language of rational thought. Reason is a faculty far larger than mere objective thought. When it claims a privileged relationship to reality, [the father tongue] becomes dangerous and potentially destructive (Le Guin in Bolker 1997: 189).

This further perpetuates a “self-referential discourse” where user trajectories are only partially revealed and the descriptions of drug users themselves are sorely lacking in both depth and substance when it comes to how they are officially portrayed in the final text. Therefore, improvement and progress within the drug field also requires that the very language used to express these qualities must be adapted to truly reflect the experiences of those closest to their use. This means encouraging the “mother tongue” to emerge, “the other...the vulgar tongue, common, ...spoken or written...It is conversation, a word the root of which means “turning together.” The mother tongue is language not as mere communication but as relation, relationship. It connects” (ibid.). The consequences of this widespread denial and deep-rooted contempt for the “mother tongue” is an essentially analytic and objective quest for knowledge that has “violence built into it”;

For to know analytically is to reduce the object of knowledge, however vital, however complex, to precisely this: an object. This being so, the Western hunt for knowledge, anthropology not excepted, is in a tragic sense the final exploitation and, as George Steiner has observed, *Tristes Tropiques* the first classic of our ecological anguish (Smith 1992: 126).

For the drug researcher then, presenting findings in manners that even remotely reflect the subjective, embodied and relational experiences of the recreational drug user is often a mission impossible, due to two very subtle but extremely powerful political and

epistemological mechanisms embedded within the system as a whole. First of all, in drug research and social policy the subjective, conscious experience of the drug users themselves is generally avoided if not suppressed altogether. Even the word “drug user” itself is rarely employed, so that the only way to speak openly about one, without appearing “unscientific”, is within the context of inevitably ensuing “drug abuse”. Secondly, if drug researchers or policy makers are so fortunate as to find themselves among a slightly more sympathetic or enlightened community, it is still as a matter of principle expected that these experiences will be presented in the “father tongue”. This is perhaps first and foremost to create the necessary distance and objectivity needed to reassure fellow colleagues that one is morally sound, professionally qualified and has not in any way, shape or form been corrupted or contaminated by the “obscene” or “vulgar” facets of the field. However, as this exploration has hopefully demonstrated, the nature of “the field” is such that not being able to resort to the “mother tongue”, where the realms of subjectivity, embodiment and communion are equally valued and respected, is actually highly problematic. As Bolker has observed, the inability to deeply engage in and express embodied, subjective and relational modes of being creates “profound difficulties”;

choosing to use the mother tongue, which is not our society’s dominant language, how does one speak in and to that society? Or, turning to the father tongue, how can we avoid feeling, to borrow Eva Hoffman’s phrase, “lost in translation,” out of touch with the words that make up our affective core? We are at home with our voices nowhere, involuntary subversives (Bolker 1997: 190).

As the “War on Drugs” effectively eliminated marginal drug discourse altogether and rendered “Drugs into the Unspeakable” (Lenson 1995), it is no wonder that the accounts of both drug users and drug researchers alike sometimes get “lost in translation”. Beneath this development however lies an even deeper and far more established imbalance related to the taboo of subjectivity and the muted “mother tongue”. Therefore any attempt at voicing the “unspeakable” necessarily involves a process of translation and sometimes clumsy attempts at expressing marginal experiences in a “second language” which fails to acknowledge their relevance and value. The power and potential of a conscious phenomenology of intoxication could therefore paradoxically also prove to be its greatest weakness, depending on how this dilemma is confronted and resolved. This is unquestionably an area which can greatly benefit from further research and development, although this cannot be achieved in a climate saturated with moralistic ideology and a refusal to recognize the complexity of user trajectories. The fact that this project has been “state funded” does give grounds for optimism

however, that gradually this climate is beginning to change as an increasing number of professionals realize the importance of openness and dialogue.

One of the most challenging aspects of developing this exploration has been finding a “voice” that can be fully incorporated into a conscious phenomenology of intoxication, expressing this perspective in the original “mother tongue”, while still somehow living up to the criteria that contemporary scientific discourse demands. Whether or not I have succeeded in this endeavour remains to be seen, and there are undoubtedly some things which could perhaps have been done differently. At the very least, I hope that this effort will contribute one small but significant step towards that aim. As Le Guin has observed, “People crave objectivity because to be subjective is to be embodied, to be a body, vulnerable, violable” (in Bolker 1997: 189). This applies no doubt to all fields of research and writing, but within the drug field this is especially pronounced and pertains equally to writers and researchers of both sexes. There are subsequently strong parallels between feminist and other critical scholars’ analysis of male hegemony and the current climate within the drug field. Both analyses are concerned with examining the mechanisms by which accepted truths are moulded through manipulating public rhetoric and the collective representation of social phenomena, as well as the difficulties of voicing experiences that challenge the dominant discourse. The crucial question then becomes: “Is it possible for social science to be different, that is, to forget itself and to become something else...or must it remain as a partner in domination and hegemony?” (Said in McCoy 1998).

In terms of developing the foundations for a conscious phenomenology of intoxication, this exploration has been an attempt to do just that: to present an alternative approach that could “forget itself and become something else”. In this context what is required is integrating conscious, subjective experiences and exploring different user trajectories as they are perceived and produced by the users themselves. A variety of narratives and personal journeys have therefore been depicted in a way that could both include and integrate the capacities for agency and communion, and these have been portrayed as far as possible using both the “mother” and “father” tongue. To achieve this aim, I have relied largely on the words of the respondents themselves and deliberately emphasized subjectivity and connection as opposed to objectivity and distance. Drugs are indeed “hybrids” of nature, culture and transcendence, embedded in a “complicated matrix of historical, cultural, and scientific developments” (Boon 2002: 6). It follows then that this “complicated matrix” can ultimately

only be revealed by identifying and surpassing widely accepted categories and assumptions, even if “just writing” about drugs within established circles is often both highly problematic and dangerous.

A comprehensive understanding of the drug problem requires a willingness to acknowledge the great diversity of user experiences, of replacing the silence with “many, many, words”, not just from the “usual experts”, but from those who have actually been there, in both body and mind (Lenson 1995: 200). By including a larger variety of user perspectives and experiences in research, hopefully the “lost subject” can gradually reappear as a vibrant quality infused in the text itself, reflected in the lives of individuals, through their narratives and journeys, and giving them depth, power and substance. The most striking and significant insight that this approach has revealed to me at this point is that, far from being an irrelevant and elusive figment of the imagination, this hidden yet all pervasive conscious dimension is actually a fundamental and indispensable part of the puzzle. The lives and minds of drug users always exist in relation to a wider framework of actions and beliefs, based on the continual dialectic and interdependence between self and society. Therefore, in tuning into the self conscious awareness of individuals as they experience and mediate social contexts and conditions, the “larger picture” can be both informed and enhanced (Cohen 1994).

## **8.2 – The journey through the four gates**

The four gates specifically illustrate the dynamic cycle of movement that underlies many if not most user trajectories. The gates are not rigidly defined territories however; there is overlap as the traveller moves in and out of the modus operandi of the preceding situational context and personal framework. The four gates highlight different points on a continuum. Some gate transitions may well be more pronounced than others depending on the individual, the nature of the relationship between self and substance, and where they are in terms of their own cycle of growth. The journey is a metaphor for the process of individuation that we all undergo during the course of our lives. For those portrayed here, ingesting illegal substances has been and sometimes continues to be a part of that journey, although for different reasons that become apparent as one passes through the gates. The gates then represent a specific type of dynamic and focus that has emerged during the course of their journey, where entry and exit processes are significant points, but more in relation to the journey as a whole rather than as separate clear-cut stages.

The gates are also a deep symbol of transition emphasizing that the consumption of illegal substances is a small part of a complex whole, and may serve different functions for different people at different stages of their lives. In many ways, prolonged destructive use is a symptom of having become “stuck”, unable to move through to the next gate, where focus becomes more and more narrow to the point where one may lose perspective altogether. In these cases it is important to recognize where one is stuck and how and why one has become stuck. Finding new ways of addressing the underlying needs and changing focus are essential before one can progress through the next gate. The hero or heroine in this context is the navigator, the conscious, active force mediating between the need for autonomy and the drive for communion; it is intentionality expressed as the capacity to choose, even if that choice seems foolish or even pointless to others. The respondents’ narratives are therefore first and foremost narratives of growth, of change and adaptation. They are individual accounts of life history and reflection and are in this respect, like all personal life-stories, subjective and experiential. Nevertheless, since they are also situated within an interdependent socio-cultural context, they simultaneously reflect a deeper and wider reality that touches us all in different ways, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not.

Consuming illegal drugs, like any other form of consumption today, is embedded within an intersubjective matrix of personal, group and societal relationships which together create a subjective and intersubjective dynamic reality that may have both positive and negative implications for the individual. In order to understand how destructive patterns develop, it is therefore equally important to see how other, more restrained patterns of use are maintained. Every local pattern is embedded within a wider global matrix, even though there are important differences in terms of the extent to which one has identified with an excessive appetite and the reasons for doing so. A fundamental premise for this thesis has been that there is a deeper personal strategy (although not always conscious) underlying even the most problematic types of drug abuse, and that it is often through a recognition and integration of the impulse underlying that strategy that transcendence and change is made possible. Several of the respondents interviewed had overcome severely dilapidating addictions in their past, and their narratives are especially relevant in terms of mapping out how the process of change and choice has evolved throughout their lives.

Nonetheless, “the process of exiting addiction, recovering from dependence, or leaving off excessive appetitive behaviour, is intriguing and mysterious” (Orford 2004: 203). There

has already been a substantial amount of research conducted attempting to map out and demystify this process, yet despite these efforts, it is still unclear how and why some people manage to exit addictions and others do not (ibid.). What has become more and more evident however is that most people, some even estimate up to 80%, recover from addictions without expert treatment or specialist help and support (Cunningham 1999 in Hewitt 2004). Also, where treatment has been applied there seems to be no one “best” treatment but rather, “a strong case can be made for concluding that all credible treatments are effective to more or less equal degree” (ibid.). As an alternative to the “best treatment” hypothesis there is the natural healing and non-specific hypothesis which is linked to cognitive processes like “resolving”, “decision making”, “strategic”, etc., where “some higher mental process is necessary to override the ingrained, habitual, at least partly automatic nature of addictive behaviour” (Hunt & Matarazzo 1973 in Orford 2004: 204). Although these approaches have an advantage in that they can be applied to many different forms of addictions and not just those that are substance related, they have also been strongly criticised for ignoring the social and cultural context within which addictions are embedded and in many respects even endorsed. From this it becomes clear that both internal and external variables must be accounted for when mapping out the process of regulation, change and transition in user trajectories. And here, rather than awarding primacy to one at the expense of the other, it is often the relationship between them that is decisive in terms of understanding this “intriguing and mysterious” process.

Although the journeys mapped out in the present investigation differ substantially in many ways there are several key elements that tie them together so that a greater story may be told. The underlying theme of this story has been the core dialectic between agency and communion and how this is resolved and expressed through intentionality and embodied subjectivity. In this regard, every narrative can be seen as a strategy reflecting intentionality in a complex world where conscious human beings attempt to fulfil a hierarchy of “needs”, although it is not always obvious at first glance what those needs may be or to what extent they are being gratified. In many cases, the act of habitually ingesting illegal substances over a lengthy period of time is part of a far deeper process, an underlying force or will within, which seeks further development, higher stages of realization and an ever expanding quality of being alive. Therefore, it is essential to be able to separate this impulse from the acts of consumption themselves, or the navigator from the navigating, since an initially positive impulse can in some cases unfortunately lead to highly destructive behaviour.

The concepts of the four gates and the monomyth have been specifically employed here to supplement the “psycho-bio-social model of drug dependence that excludes the essence of human existence – options, freedom to choose and the centrality of value systems” (Drew 1990 in Orford 2004: 205). As Kirkegaard once wrote, “Good health generally means the ability to resolve contradictions” (Kirkegaard 1980: 40), and seen in this regard, the roots of human existence often revolve around the challenge of having a free will in a world filled with various constraints, of negotiating freedom and limitations. This is a point that is also emphasized by May and Schneider in the summary of their book *The Psychology of Human Existence*;

In this book, we have proposed that psychology needs a new scale – beyond physiology, environment, cognition, psychosexuality and even interpersonal relations; and toward existence (in all its brute forms)...The core existential-integrative position is that human experience (or consciousness, in the full sense of that term) is both free – willful, creative, expressive - and limited - environmentally and socially constrained, mortal. To the extent that we deny or ignore this dialectic, we become polarized and dysfunctional; to the extent that we confront (or integrate) it, we become invigorated and enriched (Schneider & May 1995 in Aaslid: 76)

Paradoxically perhaps, the choice to use drugs is so closely connected with the idea of personal freedom that even when the drugs themselves have lost their appeal, many still continue to consume them. This is not necessarily because they are addicted in the physiological sense, but because the symbolic representation of freedom is so strongly embodied in their drug of choice. As William put it, “I guess the whole thing with being drug free is really about personal freedom, and when it comes to norms and rules and laws I like to think for myself. So if I smoke hash, well it’s my choice”. It takes a long time to unravel these elements from one another, and lacking a better alternative; old habits sometimes become “the little tail that hangs behind”.

If good health “generally means the ability to resolve contradictions”, then conflict between opposing motives, as Orford (2004) has also suggested, can in many respects be seen as “constituting the core of addiction”. These opposing motives or “contradictions” are typically expressed in the dynamic tension between the dual forces or “primordial modalities” of agency and communion, portrayed here in the passage through the four gates. The first two gates represent a separation from the original source and a movement towards a new locus of identification, while the last two gates represent dissolution and/or transformation in terms of a realignment of one’s overall perspective and focus, depending on how the conflicting drives for agency and communion are resolved. Correspondingly, the four areas of growth that Hewitt (2004) identified as emerging upon recovery from addictions can also be plotted along this passage. Here “maturation” and “increased perspective and experience” can be seen as

arising primarily out of the impulse towards agency, separation, and adapting to new forms of communion, the first two gates. While “liberation” and “fulfilment” on the other hand, can be seen as emerging out of the experience of dissolution and transformation, the “return”, which marks the juncture where many feel motivated to switch course, as illustrated in the last two gates. Here the “fulfilment” aspect for instance becomes the actual re-integration of the drive for communion in daily life. This then marks a positive transition away from the unbalanced relationship between self and substance, and can in many cases develop into the “boon” in action so to speak.

Hewitt also differentiates between the *drive to escape* which gives “clear focus and direction” and the “*drive to develop*”, where it was “the momentum and degree of this that often appeared to take them to the particular levels of growth and development that so many reported” (ibid: 223). Furthermore, he has additionally observed that this “push/pull” could be “consciously worked with and fostered”, even though this did not appear to be a conscious strategy in itself, “but something much deeper, like a drive or instinct” (ibid.). Likewise, the “four main phases” of addiction identified by Hanninen & Koski-Jannes (2004); “becoming addicted”, “recognising addiction as a problem”, “finding a key to recovery” and “establishing a new, addiction-free life”, also relate to a similar dynamic of two core types of movement and four main phases of growth. In this context however, the four gates represent a wider symbolic framework of momentum and change that can be observed on many levels and not only with regards to substance-related addiction.

In many respects, this dynamic can be seen as essentially the same developmental movement that underlies all cycles of growth and decay in the universe, it is “*creativity*, by any other name, [and it] is built into the very fabric of the Kosmos” (Wilber 2000: 117)<sup>2</sup>. This almost instinctual drive or momentum manifests most clearly in the “interior domains, as an *expansion of identity* (and morals and consciousness) from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. And the proof of *that* sequence is found, not by staring at the physical organism and its environment, but by looking into the subjective and intersubjective domains” (Wilber 2000: 117). This is because fundamentally, subjectivity is “an *inherent* feature of the universe”, and subjective domains are “as real as DNA and even more significant. The expansion of moral

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<sup>2</sup> *Kosmos* is an ancient Pythagorean term which Wilber reintroduces in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* in order to revive the original meaning of “the patterned nature or process of all domains of existence, from matter to math to theos, and not merely the physical universe, which is usually what both “cosmos” and “universe” mean today” (Wilber 1995: 38).



identity is simply one of the more obvious manifestations of these profound waves of consciousness unfolding” (ibid.). As Immanuel Kant has written, even matter “which appears to be merely passive and without form and arrangement, has even in its simplest state an urge to fashion itself by a natural evolution into a more perfect constitution” (in Wilber 1995: 32).

According to Wilber, this developmental urge or drive can be expressed as four fundamental capacities; self-preservation, self-adaptation, self-dissolution, and self-transcendence (ibid: 40). Self-preservation is related to individuality and the capacity to preserve autonomy, while self-adaptation is related to the ability to connect with and accommodate others. In other words, another expression for the primordial polarity between agency and communion “which runs through all domains of manifest existence, and was archetypally expressed in the Taoist principles of yin (communion) and yang (agency). Self-dissolution on the other hand, can be compared to either a literal or symbolic “death” during the course of a cycle, arising as we have seen when there is imbalance or extreme polarity in the dialectic between agency and communion. Finally, self-transcendence (also called self-transformation), results in something completely new altogether. Like the phoenix emerging from the ashes, this also involves some sort of “creative twist on what has gone before” (ibid.). For Whitehead this is the essence of creativity “‘the ultimate category’ – the category necessary to understand *any* other category” (in Wilber 1995: 42). Here the capacities for self-transcendence and self-dissolution introduce “a *vertical* dimension that cuts at right angles, so to speak, to the horizontal agency and communion” (ibid: 43). At this stage however, agency and communion do not just interact with self-transcendence, “rather, *new forms* of agency and communion emerge through symmetry breaks, through the introduction of new and creative twists in the evolutionary stream. There is not only *continuity* in evolution, there are important *discontinuities* as well” (ibid.).

Together then, these four capacities can be plotted on a cross with two horizontal “opposites” and two vertical “opposites” representing four “forces” (ibid: 45). These creative forces are in constant symbiotic tension. That is, the more agency for example, the less communion and vice versa and this tension shows up in everything;

from the battle between self-preservation and species-preservation, to the conflict between rights (agency) and responsibilities (communities), individuality and membership, personhood and community, coherence and correspondence, self-directed and other-directed, autonomy and heteronomy... In short, how can I be both my own wholeness and a part of something larger without sacrificing one or the other? (ibid.).

Consequently, a major part of the answer at all stages of evolution, including human evolution, “involves self-transcendence to new forms of agency and communion that integrate and incorporate both partners in a supersession: not just a *wider* whole – a horizontal expansion – but a *deeper* or *higher* whole – a vertical emergence” (ibid.). This then obviously involves a “fourth dimension”, the added dimension of depth, embodiment and subjectivity and what has been described here as transcendence through radical immanence, inspired in part by Steven Rosen’s concept of “radical recursion”. The metaphors of depth and height are in this context intimately related. As Huston Smith has observed, “the traditions usually refer to greater levels of reality as *higher*, and greater levels of the self as *deeper*, so that the higher you go on the Great Nest of Being, the deeper you go into your own selfhood” (in Wilber 2000: 110). This “vertical” dimension of growth and transformation is especially relevant for understanding user trajectories and specifically the process of recovery, where problematic substance abuse is not simply perceived as a regrettable “‘detour’ from the life-journey”, but is in fact “an integral part of it” (Hewitt 2004: 224).

This pattern can perhaps best be described as a dynamic dance involving two principal dialectics with four different “seasons”. By incorporating an added dimension of depth, this seasonal dance is reflected in the four fundamental capacities of self-preservation and self-adaptation, self-dissolution, and self-transcendence, and a corresponding “locus of identification” emphasizing autonomy (agency), integration (communion), dissolution (Thanatos) and transformation (Eros) respectively. These are the four gates representing various portals into two interrelated cycles of movement and change. Understandably integration and self-transformation will be exceedingly difficult in an environment which cannot or will not support the necessary space for this type of creative emergence. Quite noticeably, in drug research there is often a far greater emphasis on the principles of agency and dissolution in user trajectories than there is on the perhaps far more subtle dynamics of communion and transformation. That is to say, drug users are repeatedly seen and portrayed as isolated *individual* entities gratifying their own needs which inevitably leads to death and destruction, rather than embedded within a system of *relational* exchange which can, and often does, involve a deep process of transformation. Likewise, in treatment institutions and society at large, there is often a polarized emphasis on the destructive mechanisms of addiction and a corresponding demand for self-dissolution (the death of the “addict” identity). This then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy where also on a larger scale, stories of individual

destruction are empowered and re-enacted while the processes involving communion and transformation are either suppressed or ignored altogether.

The battle is between self-transcendence and self-dissolution, “the tendency to build up or to break down”, although these forces “complexly interact with agency and communion on any given level”; both too much agency and too much communion for example can lead to break down” (Wilber 1995: 46). Self-transformation necessitates the ability to consciously recognize and integrate the underlying forces, to incorporate, not repress, the “addict” identity so that transformation and transcendence can occur. Successfully “building up” something new involves honouring and appreciating the whole journey, so that essential pieces are not overlooked or left behind. Quite often the repressive polarization arising out of too much emphasis on “self-dissolution”, or “breaking down” the addict and his or her lifestyle, is often experienced as unbearable for clients in rehabilitation, with relapse and even more destructive behaviour manifesting as the inevitable result (Aaslid 2003).

Hewitt has articulated a similar sentiment concerning the need for a more transpersonal context within the field of addictions, of “working in a way that recognises and allows positive possibilities and is able to support and encourage them where necessary” (ibid: 227). In terms of recovery, this approach can serve a vital function by empowering individuals to “reframe the negative into something positive” and thereby make the changes necessary for growth. If the success of treatment is determined first and foremost by the extent to which individuals are able to remain “clean” or “sober”, despite an obvious change of focus and significant improvements in life quality, there is a great danger that instead of supporting change and transformation, treatment for many simply becomes yet another doorway to “failure”. As Lea and many of my informants have shown, “recovery” can take years and goes much deeper than simply being a matter of whether or not one chooses to ingest illicit substances. Healing is ultimately about self acceptance, recognition, understanding and integration, about seeing who you are without judgement and finding the strength, self-love and wisdom to rise above painful limitations.

Seen in this light, illness in almost every variety can be an opportunity to reorient oneself, for transformation and growth, and to reconnect with dissociated aspects of oneself. However, the process of finding meaning in pain, of seeing the good in the bad and thereby bringing new and deeper dimensions to one’s life is an exceptional skill and privilege that not everyone has had the opportunity to develop (Mindell 1984). Accordingly, the greatest service

that treatment professionals can provide is to fully understand and support this process by creating a positive environment where past life experiences are not judged, suppressed or negated but used creatively as steppingstones towards further healing and transformation. Considering the widespread problem-based focus on addiction however, “we may miss the opportunities to foster and support growth and well being”. Consequently, “if we do not consider or ‘allow’ for such positive outcomes, we reduce their likelihood “by limiting the variety of alternatives the person feels exist” (ibid.). Lea also expressed what she regards as the damaging consequences of our polarized “anti-culture” quite clearly at the end of our interview, when I asked her if she had any final comments;

It would have to be that I think that each individual has a quest, I think so, and everyone is seeking. And we seek in so many different ways, and a great deal of people seek through intoxication or escape through intoxication or use it in one way or another, everyone does that. And the greater the taboo, the more destructive it becomes and the more honesty and openness there is surrounding it, the less problematic it becomes. So it’s the opposite, the preventive effect or the conservative approach and the whole anti-culture excludes even more those that are already excluded to begin with, and it creates even greater barriers between the straights and the outsiders. So the way forward is to be understanding, and create a dialogue around it, to be honest and not so judgmental and punitive.

### **8.3 – The four quadrants and a unified model**

As Andrew Weil has argued in his classic *The Natural Mind*, a large part of the drug problem can be related to the conceptual models and limited paradigms of reality that we use to perceive, understand and respond to them with (Weil 1998: xii). As an alternative to the reductionistic view where consciousness is seen as secondary and peripheral to material reality, his model “postulates that consciousness is central and primary”. Furthermore, his alternative model attempts to substitute the “either/or” formulations of the old model with “both/and” formulations, “opening more possibilities for personal freedom, reducing the discomfort of existence, and making life much more creative” (idid.: xiii). There is no doubt that a paradigm shift is desperately needed when it comes to the subject of drugs and intoxication, and this involves recognizing and incorporating that “emergent strand of cultural history” called “*intoxicology*– the comparative study of altered states of consciousness, the social contexts in which they are practiced, and their implications for public policy” (Walton 2001: 3).

Besides focusing on and developing a conscious phenomenology of intoxication, there are at least five major contributions or “suggestions” that anthropology in particular has to

offer in terms of insights and possible points of departure for an alternative “unified model of ingested substances” (Hunt & Barker 2001);

1. All ingested substances should be studied under one framework. This enables the comparison of substances with each other, a new understanding of their categorization as legal or illegal substances, and an ability to comprehend change as substances cross societal boundaries
2. Consumption of ingested substances is inherently social and revealing of cultural processes, concerns, and symbols. This permits exploration of user behavior and social identity in a very broad context, avoids reification of substances, and places any "problem focus" into a perspective of power.
3. Specific spheres of consumption are differently valued by diverse groups in different eras. This emphasizes how value judgements change as substances circulate in society, and juxtaposes key actors with their behaviors and decisions, both actual and symbolic.
4. Production, distribution and consumption must be examined jointly. This allows a more extensive and fertile understanding of the intersection of micro- and macro-issues.
5. It is crucially important to examine power in relations of substance. This clarifies how elite groups manage the moral economy of substances in society, and how they fashion and control the acceptability of ingestive behaviors and desires (ibid: 18)

This model is particularly useful when it comes to extracting the anthropology of substances, and drug research in general, from the hegemonic public health model which has dominated the field so far. Specifically, by enabling a “fundamental re-conceptualization” of ingested substances, these five points can vastly facilitate and improve further exploration and analysis (ibid.).

The problem today is not that the more traditional approaches are “wrong”, in fact there is a continually expanding wealth of drug expertise and knowledge from practically every perspective, but they are still partial and many are incapable of seeing the whole picture and taking into account factors that lie outside their own specialized field of research or paradigm. This is largely because politically, hegemonic public health models dominate research agendas, while epistemologically scientific materialism assures that embodied subjectivity and consciousness are continually squeezed out of the picture. As this exploration has hopefully demonstrated, intoxication is first and foremost a *subjective* experience among *conscious* human agents embedded within a specific socio-cultural context. Consequently, “drugs have no meaning outside of the set of moments and situations in which they are used or referred to by particular groups of beings...beliefs about drugs emerge from these tiny but concrete moments of experience and expressivity” (Boon 2002: 10).

Although modern society cultivates the myth of culture and science as two separate spheres and more or less denies the sacred all together, individual user narratives point

towards a different reality, that it is in fact “permeated by the very hybrids of nature-culture-transcendence that it officially claims it has eradicated” (ibid:11). The “disaster of modernity” was defined by the “colonization and commodification of the I and the WE by the rampant IT”;

The interior domains altogether – consciousness, soul, spirit, mind, values, virtue, meaning – were all reduced to frisky dust, to order-out-of-chaos process ITS. And so, in this fractured fairy tale, the modern West became the first major culture in history to deny the Great Hierarchy of Being – and in its place, omnipotent matter, atomistic or systemic or informational Its, the reign of the unending surface (Wilber 2001: 188).

This development however, is “an *irreversible* part of the evolutionary process of differentiation-and-integration” that cannot be undone. What is required instead “is their *integration*, or the inclusion of all three value spheres (or all four quadrants) in a more encompassing embrace” (ibid: 189). In the field of drugs and intoxication this means acknowledging and integrating subjective and intersubjective truths (left quadrants), with objective and interobjective facts (right quadrants). All four quadrants “mutually interact (they are embedded in each other) and thus *all* of them are required in order to understand pathologies in *any* of them” (Wilber 2000: 112).

Every mind has a body and every body is nestled in a complex web of socio-cultural networks that also have a profound impact on the knowing and being of individuals themselves. These four quadrants then represent the four indivisible dimensions of every individual’s “being-in-the-world”, they cause and are caused by the others (Wilber 2000). Today, even within the scientific community there is widespread agreement that “empirical science depends for its operation upon subjective and intersubjective structures that allow objective knowledge to emerge and stabilize in the first place” (Wilber 2001: 150). Therefore, even though “sensory-oriented” science may not be equipped to explore and examine these realms, “it nonetheless cannot deny their existence without denying its own operations. It can no longer claim that the exteriors alone are real” (ibid.). When it comes to intoxication for instance, the significance of these “interior” domains is particularly evident in light of the fact that, although certain substances have similar chemical effects on the brains of individuals’, independent of geographic or demographic variables, the way individuals respond to that effect varies. As the study here has strongly emphasized, this is mainly because every response is embedded within a specific historical and socio-cultural context, highly influenced by set and setting, as well as who the individual happens to be as an independent, active agent consciously involved in the whole mind altering process. Consequently, since these quadrants

are relational and interdependent, an imbalance on any one level will also be reflected in some way or another on all other levels in each quadrant.

<b>ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM</b>	<b>DOMINANT PARADIGM</b>
<b>Upper Left (I) - intentional Interior- individual subjective interiors first-person -“I”</b>	<b>Upper Right (IT) - behavioural Exterior-individual objective exteriors third person - “IT”</b>
Introspective Phenomenology: Embodiment Subjectivity, narratives Psychoanalysis Individual consciousness, “altered states” “I” language Depth , “fourth dimension”	Empirical behaviour of individual entities: Brain and organism Neurosciences Biological psychiatry Pharmacology “It” language Surface
<b>Lower Left (WE) – cultural world space Interior-collective, intersubjective interiors second person - “WE”</b>	<b>Lower Right (ITS) – social systems Exterior-collective, interobjective exteriors third person - “ITS”</b>
Shared worldspace: Qualitative analysis Cultural analysis, hermeneutics Anthropology Structuralism Critical theory Context created Mutual understanding Explanation based on meaning, symbolism, language, discourse “we” language: must be interpreted What does it mean? WHY	Empirical behaviour of systems: Quantitative analysis Social action systems Sociology External social structures Systems theory Surfaces “given” Detached function Explanation based on naturalistic, empirical, observable variables “its” language: can be seen (observed) What does it do? HOW

*Figure 1. Four quadrants and four perspectives*

Drug addiction, for example, obviously has an important neurological aspect (Upper Right quadrant) which cannot and should not be ignored, and some people are undoubtedly more genetically predisposed towards addiction than others. These are the facts of biological psychiatry, or “disease” models of addiction, where the focus is often on individual pharmacology and medicinal treatments of pathology. Although this approach is certainly one step forward from the “criminal” and “psychiatric” model it replaced, where addicts were seen primarily as having either a moral problem, pathological personalities or both, it frequently overlooks and minimizes three vital components. The drugs we use, “whether as beverages, pills, injections, or smoke, exist within a matrix of psychological, cultural, and social values; and it is the roles and meanings of these that we incorporate with the drug” (Adler 1972 in Lenson 1995: 62). Consequently, the first oversight of the “pharmacological fallacy” is that it ignores the fact that addiction is always embedded within a cultural context (Lower Left quadrant) which not only influences how “addiction” is constructed as a conceptual model, but also how addiction is generated (or not) within a specific context. As a

cultural, intersubjective phenomenon, addiction is closely related to how people seek out meaning and construct identity in a progressively more fragmented and commodified world (Granfield 2004). As Roseneil & Seymour (1999) have observed;

[q]uestions of identity, individual and collective, confront us at every turn at the end of the twentieth century. We are interpellated and interrogated by a multiplicity of voices to consider and reconsider our identities. How we think of ourselves and how we perform ourselves in terms of gender, nationality, ethnicity, race, sexuality and embodiment is up for grabs, open to negotiation, subject to choice to an unprecedented extent. Or so the story goes. In the powerful discourses of consumer culture, in advertising, magazines, self-help manuals, pop songs, we are told that we can seize control of our 'selves' to 'be who we want to be.' Contemporary culture offers up a 'smorgasbord' [...] of identity options, encouraging us to explore and harness difference in the construction of our identities (in Inkinen 2004: 210).

The self has increasingly become a "reflexive project" that is "no longer found within the constellation of social institutions, but rather must be actively explored, cultivated and constructed as a narrative without the clarity of pre-existing traditions. In such a condition personal problems like addiction become common place" (ibid: 31).

Secondly, this trend is closely connected to the predominance of social and historical developments like industrialization, globalization and the rise of the free-market society (Lower Right quadrant), which has severely weakened psychosocial integration, and caused mass-produced dislocation (Alexander 2004). In the past, the transition to a free market society resulted in massive forced migration and dislocation of the rural poor into urban slums and foreign colonies. In Europe for instance, mass alcoholism "spread like 'a pestilence of hard liquor'", and was "an invariable companion of headlong and uncontrolled industrialization and urbanization" (Hobsbawn 1962 in Alexander: 21). In China, opium had been used relatively moderately since at least the Ming Dynasty (1280-1326), until "an epidemic of opium addiction occurred in the midst of the mass dislocation that attended the disintegration Qing dynasty, the forced imposition of free trade after the Opium Wars of 1839 and 1858 and undermining of traditional culture by capitalist and Christian ideology "(Alexander 2004: 21). Also, the native Canadian Indians, who are often thought to have a "genetic inability to drink civilly", could in fact drink moderately until a period of "cultural disintegration and assimilation", where "alcoholism emerged as a universal, crippling problem for native people, along with suicide, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other consequences of dislocation" (ibid.).

At present, dislocation is all pervasive, irrespective of socio-economic status and geographical location. Contemporary free market societies "create ever-more-powerful



management, advertising, and surveillance techniques that keep people buying, selling, working, borrowing, lending, moving, and consuming in ways that are optimal for ‘the economy’” (ibid: 20). As a result, this type of “human engineering inevitably undermines what remains of traditional culture as well as new social structures that might otherwise arise” (ibid.). Kaza (2005) mentions the film *Affluenza* from 1997, which makes a powerful statement in directing attention towards a disturbing trend that nobody wants to acknowledge because it affects us all. *Affluenza* is defined by the producer John de Graaf as “a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more”. It is a diagnosis for what ails the planet, “threatening our wallets, our friendships, our families, our communities, and our environment” (in Kaza 2005: 1). Essentially, the film “pointed out the obvious: the current rates of consumption are not sustainable. Life –support systems are giving out” (ibid:2). Lenson also identifies “consumer metaphysics” as the underlying force spawning a totalitarian culture of addiction (Lenson 1995). The catch here is that although this system thrives on an “engine of desire” to perpetuate the act of conscious purchasing, these desires must never be completely gratified, there must always be a missing something, “something that must be *owned* to bring about positive feelings. But once the next object is bought and possessed, giving a brief moment of satisfaction, hunger must be stimulated again. It is a losing battle” (ibid:198).

Thirdly, the actual embodied experience of living in a world which persistently negates consciousness, scorns subjectivity and denies transcendence (Upper Left quadrant), creates highly fertile grounds for a free-market society which relies on the myth that improving the outer environment will bring inner comfort and well being. In this manner, consumer metaphysics prosper through the underlying discontent that these conditions perpetuate. Consequently, lacking any knowledge of or belief in other alternatives, the chances that a considerable portion of the population will seek to transcend this iron cage altogether by consuming substances that do in fact seem to provide a quick, albeit temporary, escape is not only feasible, it is guaranteed (Wallace 2000). Since subjectivity is always embedded within a larger socio-cultural context, personal narratives are also a “narrative of social critique”, where addiction for example “reveals a kind of ‘felt truth of the culture of our times’ ” (Granfield 2004: 32). “Paradoxically, while modernity and free-market society may be the source of addiction, addictions to all sorts of practices may provide the seeds of personal meaningfulness for many” (ibid: 31).

Intoxication has many facets which require investigation and exploration on their own terms, and towards this aim specialization is both necessary and if applied skilfully can be highly effective. The problem is not that there exist different research approaches, but that instead of recognizing the unique contribution of each, there is an overwhelming bias towards “objective facts” guided by the assumptions of a materialistic worldview and a moralistic ideology. It follows then that in order to develop the foundations for a truly integral theory of intoxication, these issues must be confronted and resolved. The primary aim of this exploration has been to demonstrate both the relevance and value of subjectivity in terms of developing this conscious phenomenology, and also to reveal the limitations and weaknesses of biomedical materialism and scientific reductionism. Here a large part of the problem centres around how the “mind” is defined in relation to the body, especially since most definitions are themselves products of scientific materialism (Wilber 2000). As long as the mind is categorically reduced to the physical brain and all interior states are simply seen as by-products without any genuine reality or scientific value, theories of intoxication can achieve little more than perpetuate the one-sided bio-pharmacological perspective and essentialized view of substances. They can produce volumes accounting for “how” intoxication works in terms of brain chemistry, but say little explaining “why” certain forms of intoxication can have devastating consequences at one time and not another, for one person but not another, or be experienced differently by the same person at various stages of their life.

Obviously, a phenomenological approach cannot address the “how” of intoxication, and is also in this respect partial and limited, as it is based primarily on the vastly underrepresented subjective and intersubjective modes of knowing. A conscious phenomenology of intoxication does not negate the findings of biomedical research. It is a concerted attempt at adding a more profound dimension to what we already know, supplementing objective findings with how they are actually experienced by conscious living agents embedded within a socio-cultural environment. Recent developments in anthropology have already established a potentially powerful means of bridging the apparent impasse between biological theories and socio-cultural perspectives of intoxication (Hunt & Barker 2001: 16). Specifically theories like those developed by Marshall (1999) and Csordas (1994) where embodiment is seen as “the existential ground of culture and self, the confluence of experiences that happen to a person with their physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural dispositions and resources” (in Hunt & Barker 2001:16.). Accordingly, the body is regarded as being simultaneously a biological and cultural construct where embodiment actually

“illuminates and mediates between the inextricably intertwined bio-physical processes of the body and the socio-cultural phenomenological experiences of the lived body, the person – such as that of being an alcoholic or drug addict” (ibid.). Instead of reducing the mind to the brain and regarding consciousness as a somewhat perplexing yet insignificant by-product, embodiment as part of an integral view actually “plugs the mind back into its own body and intimately relates the mind to its own body” (Wilber 2000: 183).

All four “quadrants” are interdependent and mutually interact, they cause and are caused by the others, and consequently they also “coevolve” according to Wilber. An objective organism for example (Upper-Right quadrant) “with its DNA, its neuronal pathways, its brain systems, and its behavioural patterns mutually interacts with the objective environment, ecosystems, and social realities (the Lower Right)”. In a similar manner, “individual consciousness (Upper Left), with its intentionality, structures, and states, arises within, and mutually interacts with, the intersubjective culture (Lower Left) in which it finds itself, and which it in turn helps to create, so that these, too, coevolve”. Finally, not only do left and right quadrants interact as individual and collective units, but not any less importantly, “subjective intentionality and objective behaviour mutually interact (e.g., through will and response), and cultural worldviews mutually interact with social structures” (ibid.). Applied to the field of intoxication then, since every drug user is a reflection of these realities, in order to understand individual trajectories the organism (brain chemistry), the outer environment (social system), individual consciousness (phenomenal accounts) and culture (the intersubjective background) must be taken into account.

Fortunately there already exists a great wealth of knowledge from some of these perspectives, especially regarding theories of addiction as illustrated previously. The challenge then lies in integrating this knowledge and gaining a greater understanding of how each perspective interacts with the other, so that a four dimensional model of intoxication with both precision and depth can begin to emerge. Based on this model it will be possible to categorize and delineate the main approaches as they are expressed in contemporary drug writing and see where they fit, what they add and also where they are lacking, and then rely on other approaches to “fill in the gaps”. Ultimately, whether or not this will happen depends more than anything else on the epistemological and political factors examined here.

Agar (2002:255) makes a similar point in discussing the future potential of a “grand theory” of substance use which has the capacity to integrate explanations from “dozens of

drug expertise”. The reason that this is not happening is due to “politics at several levels”, where knowledge and power converge to obstruct further progress in achieving this aim. First, since “disciplinary politics are alive and well, in the university, in the journals, in the funding agencies, in the vested interests of professional organization”, any “junior” hoping for a successful career in this field “would have to be suicidal” to attempt this type of research. There are “few incentives, and many punishments for those who do”, a regrettable “academic pathology” which is desperately “in need of treatment now” (ibid.). Second, “the amount of knowledge that a person must learn to approach a grand theory is mind numbing”, and although teamwork is one option here, in many cases unfortunately, “the majority of teams are more trouble than they are worth”. Here also, “traditional structures of research punish rather than nourish”. Third, given that all research is to some extent “shaped by the ideology in which it takes place”, and that this applies especially to the substance use field, there is no escaping the fact that any organization offering financial support will have “a strong vested interest in a particular drug policy”. In conclusion then, although a “grand theory” is both feasible and necessary, very few are financially, academically or mentally equipped for the challenge that lies ahead;

Developing a grand theory of substance use in a positivist-dominated world where disciplines still reign supreme, in a field dominated by biomedicine and law enforcement, in a society with a strong ideological agenda – this is a job for a good science writer with a healthy advance, not a disciplinocentric academic writing a grant application (ibid: 256).

In terms of epistemology, this theory seeks primarily to provide an “*alternative* approach, one that is less about testing hypotheses and measuring things and more about modelling discovered patterns at multiple levels and showing their interconnections” (ibid.). One principal aim is to arrive at an understanding of how “reasonable humans find themselves dependent on particular drugs, and this calls for a profound understanding of them and their worlds, as well as the other worlds – some distant, some nearby – that are part of the system that brings the situation about then tries to correct it” (ibid.). Qualitative approaches in a particular have “specific roles to play in the substance use field”, and this involves first and foremost “creative use of available material as well as if not more about newly gathered data from particular individuals” (ibid: 257). Here it is not primarily the need for new data that is most urgent, but “new ideas to tackle the great unanswered question of the drug field – why and how does dependency happen among the people that it does, and what kinds of policies and interventions make sense that are both humane and effective?” (ibid.). Since intoxication always occurs in a relational context, it is essential that we are capable of seeing different

aspects of this context while setting aside categories and assumptions or at least acknowledging that they exist.

## 8.4 – Collective transformation

Fortunately, positive change can also occur on many levels, and many of the same processes that take place in individuals also emerge on a collective level, since collective systems are after all composed of living individuals. Recent studies exploring profound change and learning in people, organizations and societies strongly indicate that global change is actually possible and that we can all learn to “access, individually and collectively, our deepest capacity to sense and shape the future”;

The changes in which we will be called upon to participate in the future will be both deeply personal and inherently systemic. Yet, the deeper dimensions of transformational change represent a largely unexplored territory both in current management research and in our understanding of leadership in general... This blind spot concerns not the what and how – not what leaders do and how they do it – but the who: who we are and the inner place or source from which we operate, both individually and collectively (Senge et al. 2005: 5).

These “deeper dimensions” of change relate to the core of one’s being and how it connects with the greater whole. The individual and society are interrelated not as separate parts of a machine but as a highly interdependent, evolving system. The whole is in other words “something dynamic and living that continually comes into being ‘in concrete manifestations’”. A part, in turn, was a manifestation of the whole, rather than just a component of it. Neither exists without the other” (ibid: 6). Specifically at this point in time, when global technology, corporations and institutions affect more people and life forms than ever before, threatening the global climate, the balance of the atmosphere, as well as traditional family, religious and social structures, the need for integral seeing and thinking has never been greater. These forces do not have to be overwhelming, but can actually be empowering if instead of regarding these global developments as the result of “a few all powerful individuals or faceless ‘systems’, we can view them as the consequences of a life-form that, like any life form has the potential to grow, learn, and evolve” (ibid: 8).

As of now, industrial “machine-age” thinking and habits still dominate business organizations, school systems and government planning. The assembly line “producing a uniform, standardized product as efficiently as possible” inspired this industrial age design (ibid.) and still continues to inform the vision of our age. Although today, “the need to encourage thoughtful, knowledgeable, compassionate global citizens in the twenty-first

century differs profoundly from the need to train factory workers in the nineteenth century, the industrial age school continues to expand, largely unaffected by the realities within which children are growing up in the present day” (ibid: 9). Living, dynamic systems continually recreate themselves, but “how this occurs in social systems such as global institutions depends on both our individual and collective level of awareness”. As long as this awareness is obscured by outmoded habits and ways of thinking, “concepts such as control, predictability, standardization, and ‘faster is better’ – we will continue to re-create institutions as they have been”. Subsequently, “industrial age institutions will continue to expand blindly, unaware of their part in a larger whole or of the consequences of their growth, like cells that have lost their social identity and reverted to growth for its own sake” (ibid.).

For positive change to occur on any level, individual or collective, integral seeing must be cultivated and this entails an ability to “penetrate more deeply to see the larger wholes that generate ‘what is’ and our own connection to this wholeness”. When this is developed “the source and effectiveness of our actions can change dramatically” (ibid: 12). Underlying this skill however lies an even more subtle ability that researchers have identified as “presence”; “the core capacity needed to access the field of the future”. This is not simply a matter of being consciously aware in each present moment but actually entails “deep listening, of being open beyond one’s preconceptions and historical ways of making sense”, which in turn implies “letting go of old identities and the need to control” (ibid. 13). When this happens, a state of “letting come” arises where one is “consciously participating in a larger field for change”. As a result, “the field shifts, and the forces shaping a situation can move from re-creating the past to manifesting or realizing an emerging future” (ibid.). This is once again related to creativity, the courage to “suspend judgement” and “see freshly” so that new patterns may emerge. Suspending judgement doesn’t imply destroying existing mental models of reality, but rather becoming more aware of them, to “see our seeing” and the “continual, albeit often subtle censoring of honesty and authenticity” (ibid: 31). This collective “Voice of Judgement” is not inherently “bad”, in fact societies depend on shared norms, perceptions and mental models to function at all. However, “like our individual internal judge, problems arise when the collective censor goes unrecognized” (ibid: 32).

To illustrate this process of open dialogue and social transformation, a metaphor from alchemy emerges once again; “Just as the cauldron contains the energies of molten steel, dialogue involves creating a container that can hold human energy, so that it can be

transformative rather than destructive” (ibid: 34). This process for the alchemists involved “the interaction of elements within a closed, transparent container in relation to a carefully tended fire”. The “container” is necessary to protect the great work emerging because “established systems are naturally hostile to the ‘other’, the ‘outsider’, the ‘alien’”, and this explains why simply “suspending” can sometimes be both dangerous and risky when facing “living systems’ natural ‘prejudice’ against otherness”. Just like “the normal chemistry of an adult body would be toxic to an embryo...the mainstream culture of an organization is often toxic to the innovators it spawns” (ibid: 35). Nevertheless, the “capacity to suspend established ways of seeing is important for all scientific discoveries. It is also why the discoverers, like innovators in established organizations, often find that their lives become more difficult as a consequence” (ibid: 35). Still this is a risk with enormous potential, for it is precisely during those moments, when normal thought streams are interrupted, that one may discern the beginning of a journey with great meaning, “the journey of learning to see”. “Embarking on and continuing on this journey requires the willingness to accept many such moments of ‘profound disorientation’, in which our most taken-for-granted ways of seeing and making sense of the world can come unglued” (ibid:38).

This journey therefore passes through embodied subjectivity and incorporates intentionality by a movement into profound self-awareness and “presence”, yet also includes intersubjectivity, the awareness of how everything connects. It means moving from an “I-it” to an “I-thou” relationship; “In the former everything appears to us as an ‘it’, an external object separate from us. It actually makes no difference if the ‘it’ is a table or a person. In the ‘I-thou’ relationship what appears in our awareness is whole and exists in an intimate relationship with us” (ibid:42). The key to integral seeing or “seeing from the whole” lies in “developing the capacity not only to suspend our assumptions but to ‘redirect’ our awareness toward the generative process that lies behind it” (ibid.). Suspension can then lead to perceiving and recognizing “emerging events, contents, patterns, whatever. Then you can actually redirect your attention to them. That’s where the new is” (ibid: 43). This redirecting “toward the source” includes empathy, but evolves further because ultimately, transcending the boundaries between seer and seen “leads not only to a deep sense of connection but also to a heightened sense of change. What first appeared as fixed or even rigid begins to appear more dynamic because we’re sensing the reality as it is being created, and we sense our part in creating it” (ibid.).

From an integral perspective, drug addiction is also an important indication and profound reflection of deeply embedded globalised destructive forces ravaging our planet each and every day. A compulsive, relentless production and consumption of human, animal and environmental resources arising out of a reductive awareness based on alienation and separation. The relationship between each other and with all of nature has been replaced by a polarized relationship between self and substance, where “substance” here includes not only illicit substances but any consumable product. As long as these destructive forces continue to grow and expand, driven by the market logic of desire, the promise of increasing “profit” and material wealth, we are all headed for a collective overdose. Therefore the junky on the corner may actually end up saving lives if we are willing to wake up to what Joseph Campbell has described as the “metaphysical realization that you and the other are two forms of the same life”. Seen in this light, we are all touched by the same underlying addiction; it fuels our economy, increases our material wealth and teaches our children the art of consumption. Therefore it is only in owning up to that realization and taking responsibility for it that transformation on a deeper and wider level can occur. Ultimately this means closing the gap between “self” and “other”, seeing our interrelatedness clearly and intentionally creating an integral society and culture that honours the whole and not just selective parts of that whole.

Paradoxically, in physics and biology for example, empirical science is revealing time and again in stunning clarity the simple yet profound truth that “the interdependency of the universe extends from the micro to the macro, from the visible to the invisible” (Senge et al. 2005: 245)<sup>3</sup>. Applied to living conscious beings, this empowering awareness of the whole however requires a “fundamental shift in the relationship between ‘seer’ and ‘seen’”. “When the subject-object duality that is basic to our habitual awareness begins to dissolve, we shift from looking ‘out at the world’ from the viewpoint of a detached observer to looking from ‘inside’ what is being observed”. Consequently, “Learning to see begins when we stop projecting our habitual assumptions and start to see reality freshly. It continues when we can see our connection to that reality more clearly” (ibid: 41). As long as old concepts and worldviews are adhered to blindly, there is more than enough evidence already indicating that our lack of appreciation for the whole will ultimately lead to unparalleled destruction for both the planet and those life forms currently inhabiting it.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example the work of Dr. Lee H. Lorenzen and M. Emoto (1999) *Messages from Water*.



Confronting the real danger involves an ability and willingness to dig beneath the surfaces and acknowledge some highly disturbing truths that are embedded within a far deeper and wider socio-cultural context. “It is as if we talk about substance ‘addicts’ *in order* not to talk about far graver addictions that are normalized. In *focusing* our attention on ‘addicts’ and various chemical ‘substances’ we are *directing* our attention *away from* cultural psycho-dynamics that are an inherent part of the problem of addiction” (Stein 1990 in Aaslid 2003: 91). Therefore, it is very unlikely that we will ever be able to “treat” others if we don’t recognize that we also “share their *underlying* affliction (not necessarily their symptom) and require their affliction to sustain ourselves and our social order” (ibid). As long as these underlying trends are repeatedly overlooked and denied, addicts in every variety will simply continue to multiply and serve as not so subtle reminders that somewhere along the line, things have gone slightly amiss.

The collective imbalances in society that have arisen due to a combination of interrelated factors like scientific materialism, industrialisation and the free market society, can be seen as an embedded and emergent “metapattern” that is reflected at every level since they are closely interconnected. In terms of gaining a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics affecting consumption patterns in society today, each level or quadrant must be explored and included in an integral analysis based on the notions of connection and interdependence. Building on Agar’s metaphor of fractals for example, “affluenza” can be seen as one significant global pattern which has initiated a similar process or algorithm that is discernible in many different social locations and in varying degrees. In many respects “affluenza” is the junky paradox on a global scale, based on an overemphasis on the dialectic between self and substance in the name of so-called “freedom”. This negative form of freedom, propelled by its own inherent dynamic, inevitably leads to a new form of bondage, evident in the relentless cycle of “debt, anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more”. As with the junky paradox, if this cycle continues unabated the inevitable result is also death, dissolution and destruction. In fact, “Species extinction, dying lakes, contaminated oceans, nuclear accidents, oil spills – the degradation of virtually every aspect of life” is already happening on a massive scale, for those willing to see (Kaza 2005: 2).

Algorithms “begin in social locations where power allows their design and forces their iteration. They end in individual lives where survival depends on adaptation” (Agar 2003: 21). Today, increasing disconnectedness from both ourselves and the environment is “leading us in

dangerous downward spirals on all fronts” (Bloom 2004), and “consumer identity is crowding out or displacing ecological identity” (Kaza 2005: 3). It is naïve to believe that this cycle will simply stop on its own accord, and extremely risky, disempowering and reckless to imagine that there is simply nothing we can do about it, or that it doesn’t concern each and every one of us. Perhaps one of the most optimistic and empowering messages of the individual “micro” narratives recounted in this thesis is the fact that truly positive change and transformation is indeed possible.

Switching course on a global scale cannot be achieved without deliberate *conscious* and *intentional* human intervention however, and a genuine examination of our own consumption patterns; “Just as the market depends on the biosphere to regenerate natural capital, it also depends on the human community to regenerate moral capital. To confront the impact of consumerism is to confront this moral deterioration” (ibid.). This does not mean initiating a fanatical, anti-consumer resistance movement, obviously we must consume sensibly to survive, but rather openly and honestly investigating the current situation so that more effective solutions may be implemented that benefit both the planet and its many inhabitants. As Marshall Sahlins has pointed out in “The Original Affluent Society”, modern consumer dynamics, the perpetuation of insatiable appetites and the relentless pursuit of more has actually made us poorer than many hunter-gatherer communities;

Hunter-gatherers consume less energy per capita per year than any other group of human beings. Yet when you come to examine it the original affluent society was none other than the hunter's - in which all the people's material wants were easily satisfied. To accept that hunters are affluent is therefore to recognise that the present human condition of man slaving to bridge the gap between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means is a tragedy of modern times.

There are two possible courses to affluence. Wants may be "easily satisfied" either by producing much or desiring little. The familiar conception, the Galbraithian way- based on the concept of market economies- states that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although they can be improved. Thus, the gap between means and ends can be narrowed by industrial productivity, at least to the point that "urgent goods" become plentiful. But there is also a Zen road to affluence, which states that human material wants are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty - with a low standard of living. That, I think, describes the hunters. And it helps explain some of their more curious economic behaviour: their "prodigality" for example- the inclination to consume at once all stocks on hand, as if they had it made. Free from market obsessions of scarcity, hunters' economic propensities may be more consistently predicated on abundance than our own.

Destutt de Tracy, "fish-blooded bourgeois doctrinaire" though he might have been, at least forced Marx to agree that "in poor nations the people are comfortable", whereas in rich nations, "they are generally poor"<sup>4</sup>.

Viewed from an integral perspective, there is more than enough evidence already indicating that drug addiction is an interdependent symptom of collective imbalance, and not

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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.primitivism.com/original-affluent.htm>

the primary cause. Individual life-stories do reflect this imbalance on many levels, but to explain and fully understand its origin, both global and historical data is needed (Agar 2005). Since most economists and global corporations do not seem to be giving the necessity and potential of the “Zen road to affluence” much thought, studies of compulsive consumption and the excessive pursuit of intoxication can be another route to revealing the somewhat less industrious and counter-productive side-effects of “influenza”. Unaddressed, the repercussions will nevertheless manifest in increasingly unpleasant variations on every level, including the physical environment, our cultural world space, various social systems and individual lives. A “grand theory of substance use” (Agar 2002), “unified model of ingested substances” (Hunt & Barker 2001), or “intoxicology” (Walton 2001) has the potential to illuminate both subjectively experienced user trajectories and collective trends. Consequently, based on the principle of interdependence, this approach can also direct attention towards critical global factors like the shadow of extreme scientific materialism and consumerism that presently darkens our perceptions, strongly influences our actions and endangers our world.

*Nigredo*, the age of the dark sun, is here now. Just one honest look at our planet today shows that we are rapidly approximating what in complexity theory is aptly called a “critical state”. Blindly and recklessly perpetuating outdated systems has resulted in “a situation that resembles driving a vehicle at night over unknown terrain that is rough, full of gullies, with precipices not far off. Some kind of headlight, even a feeble and flickering one, may help to avoid some of the worst disasters ”(Gell-Mann 1994: 366). This “flickering headlight” can in fact be generated through the application of integral conscious awareness and “presence”. Given that science plays an essential role in our culture, by both shaping and being deeply embedded in culture, it must also take responsibility and an active part in providing that headlight. In order to arrive at something even remotely resembling this type of conscientious science however, our minds must also become conscious and this means bridging the gap between subjective experience and objective reality. As John Seed (2005) has observed, “Every intact indigenous culture has sacred ceremonies that acknowledge their interconnectedness with the Earth. We ‘moderns’ are the first culture to dismiss these rituals as mumbo jumbo and then, in our enlightenment, proceed to dismember the Earth”.

We are, collectively, oscillating dangerously between the last two gates, one leading towards death and destruction and the other leading towards transformation and transcendence. Global awareness is now crucial, but at this time most of us are simply re-enacting the junky

paradox and “chasing the dragon” on a grand scale by perpetuating a dangerously destructive cycle of dependency in the name of personal freedom and the demand for immediate gratification. Consumer metaphysics relies on this dynamic and is itself both a cause and consequence of it, so the cycle repeats itself relentlessly like a junky trapped in the never-ending quest for the next fix, ignoring every warning, blasting every boundary, testing every limit to see just how far they can go. Our whole world economy is currently based on a global community of “users”. Positive change must therefore come from deep within; by suspending and transcending limiting assumptions, taking responsibility for our actions and recognizing our own power and potential to co-create reality, a new capacity to generate truly beneficial results can emerge.

This is our collective journey, and like each individual journey consciousness is crucial in terms of understanding and realizing the potential for global awareness and transformation. Currently our disenchanting one-dimensional worldview leaves little room for the presence of mystery and magic, “with the demise of the divine and the numinous realm, with the denial of sentient experiences and our dreaming nature, all our inner experiences, which follow alternative values to those of objective materialism, are marginalized” (Morin 2003). This denies and estranges us from the very life force that “animates our bodies and selves” and connects us to “the therapeutic powers within” (ibid.), creating a looming void and perfect conditions for perpetuating the addictive illusion of consumer metaphysics. Therefore, the next step in our journey together will have to involve integral seeing and “presence”, and the “next great opening of an ecological worldview will have to be an *internal one*” (Senge et al. 2005: 45). The time has come to face the dragon, and stop chasing its tail.

## Chapter

# 9

## Implications for Public Policy

### 9.1 - Towards an integrated society and a positive future

As Michael Agar has pointed out, drug reform, although not generally mainstream, can at least offer a “reasonable policy alternative”, based on the principle of “re-thinking policy to bring it into a closer relationship with the world that is its referent” (Agar 2002: 254). Although qualitative research has not as of yet been especially influential in terms of initiating drug policy reform, there are “many *potential* connections” between the two, specifically in terms of intervention, since qualitative research “takes as its basic data actual practices, unlike any other form of social research. And any intervenor worth his or her salt attends to context and meaning and variations on those themes as important contingencies to formulate humane and effective practice for their clients” (ibid.). This probably also accounts for the relatively low impact that qualitative research has had so far on public policy, since “politics usually consists of mythic discourse serving political-symbolic functions. Such discourse does not like to have its reference – usually distorted – challenged, except when that discourse collapses...” (ibid.). Considering the increasingly obvious limitations of the strong ideological agenda within which most social policy is frequently submerged, in addition to the epistemological weaknesses of positivism, “paradigm crashes have shifted from special case to the normal state of affairs” (ibid: 252). In this respect, qualitative research actually “generates its own demand. Confusing worlds become a daily event rather than an infrequent problem” (ibid.). This present exploration has been primarily aimed at exploring different variations and connecting patterns between user trajectories, building on some of these insights as a point of departure, the following section will examine some promising policy alternatives that are not only practical, but also humane and effective.

Addiction has four essential components which are intimately interrelated; the subjective embodied experience of addiction, the cultural construction of addiction, the social transformations perpetuating addiction and the physiological dynamics of addiction. It follows

then, that instead of focusing exclusively on a “small slice of a dysfunctional (not yet integral) world” (Wilber 2000: 113), public policy, treatment institutions and drug research must be able to integrate these four aspects into an inclusive program and agenda that is able to recognize and differentiate between “self-stages, cultural worldviews, social structures, and spiritual access to depth” (ibid.). While individual narratives clearly provide a fruitful point of departure in terms of understanding how subjective experiences both reflect and consciously mediate wider socio-cultural trends, these trends themselves will not disappear as long as the underlying causes are left unaddressed. Drug addiction today can be seen as the visible tip of a huge iceberg considering the profundity and extent of the underlying roots of addiction in society. In ignoring this somewhat hidden, wider dynamic, our society could be steering a course similar to that of the Titanic - full speed ahead in the dark - oblivious to the scale and degree of the critical dangers lying directly on our path because they are not visible to the naked eye, and therefore do not exist according to the laws of a mechanical flatland universe. Besides professionals having increasingly extensive knowledge and insight into the complexity of the problem, significant changes require a well developed capacity for integral seeing and what has been termed here as “presence” as well as the courage and vision to swim against the political current when necessary. While this is clearly no simple undertaking, it can be highly rewarding to be part of the “right historical current, even if it is an eddy trying to flow upstream” (Agar 2002: 257).

There are four main “pillars” of policy that have been applied to the problem of addiction in the twentieth century. These are prevention, treatment, policing and harm reduction. Even though they are aimed primarily at the visible tip of the iceberg of addiction it is possible to adapt each pillar using some of the insights gained from seeing the drug problem with “integral vision”, empathy and awareness. This last chapter will therefore present some practical suggestions on how future policy could evolve based on both my own research findings and the latest findings of the EMCDDA<sup>1</sup>, one of the most rigorous, updated and advanced drug monitoring centres in Europe. Hopefully these suggestions will inspire others to expand and improve on some of these ideas. There are many concrete positive changes that can be implemented by qualified professionals and policy makers, but these measures cannot be based on a moralistic ideology or outdated scientific paradigms. Genuine enlightened action must be guided by wisdom as opposed to narrow intellectual expertise, and

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<sup>1</sup> EMCDDA: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction at <http://www.emcdda.eu.int/>

motivated by true compassion as opposed to pity or duty. This entails an ability to see value and positive potential in even the most dilapidated substance abuser.

## 9.2 - Prevention

There is widespread agreement that prevention is the best way to avert the problem of addiction at an early stage, and a growing number of institutions and organizations have directed their efforts specifically towards this aim. The majority of young people in most countries are not using illegal drugs, nor have they ever tried them, although this situation may well change. Recent international surveys indicate that there is a slow but gradual increase in the number of young people using illegal drugs, especially cannabis in Europe, while cocaine and ecstasy seem to be gaining ground as the second drug of choice<sup>2</sup>. If this trend continues despite current restrictive measures, there might be grounds to re-evaluate current strategies of prevention in terms of whether or not they are effective or beneficial in the long run. The most widespread and problematic intoxicant, in terms of individual harm caused, general public nuisance and collective damage, is unquestionably alcohol, and some young people deliberately seek alternative highs to avoid many of the negative side-effects associated with drinking too much. Consequently, while preventive measures are usually aimed at warning potential users about the dangers associated with illegal drugs, those who still choose to use them often regard the dangers associated with the culturally accepted binge drinking as being far greater. The rise of stimulants and ecstasy for example can be directly associated with a preference for communication, control and clarity, as opposed to a drunken stupor which for many, especially women, often has extremely unpleasant consequences. It is therefore imperative that lifestyle issues, personal preferences and contemporary trends are understood well before attempting to prevent or control illicit drug use.

Substance abuse problems can be seen as one aspect of wider socio-cultural consumption patterns, although most strategies applied to regulate this problem have been aimed at urging young people to avoid drugs altogether. If implemented in the right way, these preventive measures can be valuable to some extent, especially since in many cases, the earlier the onset of drug use the more challenging it becomes to set limits and regulate that use. There are several specific prevention programmes that the EMCDDA has identified as being

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<sup>2</sup> <http://stats05.emcdda.eu.int/en/page004-en.html>

both comprehensive and highly effective based on recent studies where different approaches have been closely evaluated. Their findings show that the best prevention strategy would combine universal programmes aimed at larger populations like schools with selective interventions focusing on high risk groups, settings (like party settings) and individual risk factors like ADHD or children of alcoholics (EMCDDA 2002)<sup>3</sup>. Universal programmes like classroom prevention can be effective in either reducing or delaying drug use initiation, but success rates are highly dependent on the quality and structure of the measures applied. Rather than frightening potential users with somewhat implausible theories of addiction, it has been shown that successful school programs are aimed at strengthening personal skills like decision-making, coping and goal-setting and social skills like assertiveness and the ability to resist peer pressure. Knowledge about drugs and the consequences of taking them is important as well as working directly with attitudes and misconceptions about peer drug use. Here interactive teaching and regular intensive programs among small groups involving the family has often proved more effective than preaching, and both legal and illegal substances should be addressed.

If done poorly however, these activities can actually prove counterproductive and might even “stimulate young people’s interest in drugs” (ibid: 2). Specifically sporadic short-term events like lectures by specialists, the police or ‘Say no to drugs’ days have proved to be mostly ineffective. Unbalanced information exaggerating the risks of illegal drugs must be avoided at all costs. Young people, when sensing that they have been misled, “will subsequently reject any information on drugs from ‘official’ channels...Any prevention action that does not take account of social and peer group influences, lacks interaction or structure and relies heavily on judgmental assertions about drugs is likely to fail” (ibid.). Although most countries don’t implement these programmes until secondary school, there are other ways of preventing destructive habits from developing by influencing and targeting problematic or antisocial behaviour already in primary schools that could lead to drug problems later on. Generally, universal school-based prevention has proved effective primarily with non-consuming (low risk) youth, although it is important to keep in mind that despite popular belief and media hype, most experimental users do not become problematic users, “the majority stopping drug use after adolescence” (Burkhart 2004: 9 ,2). The concept

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<sup>3</sup> From ‘Drug prevention in EU schools’ can be downloaded at :  
<http://www.emcdda.eu.int/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.Content&nNodeID=525>  
ISSN: 1681-5157 (English version - original language)  
Catalogue number: TD-AD-02-005-EN-D



of “vulnerability” is therefore fundamental in terms of targeting preventive measures and here research has clearly identified several factors both among groups and in geographical areas relating to the “transition to risky drug use patterns and to social exclusion” (ibid: 2).

Selective intervention focuses primarily on “vulnerable” groups like young offenders, ethnic minorities, school drop-outs, areas like high risk settings or zones, and families at risk and aims at preventing heavier problematic use before the need for treatment arises. It is important to differentiate selective intervention from early treatment because from a “public health perspective it means prematurely pathologising problematic adolescent behaviour as to be treated and remedied by drug care services, which is not an adequate response to adolescents’ dysfunctional behaviour patterns” (ibid.). The vulnerability factors do not imply a “linear and obligatory” progression into problematic substance abuse nor should they be reduced to concepts for stigmatisation or “simplistic gateway theories”. They are merely intended for effective and constructive application in intervention practice (ibid: 12). There are too many concrete approaches and measures mentioned to be accounted for fully here so for a detailed analysis and specific recommendations the original document should be consulted<sup>4</sup>. The general message behind these approaches however is that each area is context specific and measures must therefore be sensitively integrated based on the individual needs of the particular group or setting, without being “imposed” from well meaning but uninformed professionals. For selective intervention to be effective therefore, young people, families and communities must be included when designing potential initiatives based on an equal dialogue, respect, tolerance and understanding so as to strengthen integration and prevent social exclusion.

As of today most prevention is not selective but universally applied through schools, communities or mass media programs and therefore “absorbs most of the resources” (ibid:10). While contemporary preventive measures are aimed at keeping the majority from experimenting with illicit substances, vulnerable populations which are at high risk for developing destructive user patterns are not prioritized and often further excluded by anti-

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<sup>4</sup> Burkhart (2004): *European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). Selective prevention: First overview on the European situation. Lisbon: EMCDDA, 2003.* Can be downloaded at: <http://www.emcdda.eu.int/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.Content&nNodeID=1569&sLanguageISO=EN>

drug campaigns and measures. Moreover, “If drug use of youngsters alone is [to] be used for decision-making, the danger is very high that youngsters with physiological (for that age) and transitory drug experimenting are wrongly classified (and stigmatized) as [a] high-risk group” (Schmidt 2001 in Burkhart 2004: 13). Although there is already a danger of stigmatisation “inherent to the vulnerability factor and risk-group approaches”, the “actual reality” in many countries today “either to consider all experimenting youth as high-risk groups or to intervene only when youngsters get (very late in fact) in touch with treatment or judicial services, brings about even more risks of stigmatisation and exclusion” (Sloboda 1999 in Burkhart 2004: 13). Therefore, according to the EMCDDA;

Given the fact that... prevention services allegedly offer to a large extent psychosocial counselling based on local and individual needs...and that some... face the challenge of vulnerable youth almost exclusively through treatment services (and approaches), findings like these raise concerns about the adequacy of policies for youth at risk (Burkhart 2004: 13).

Some more suitable and constructive initiatives in this respect would be specifically aimed at integrating vulnerable groups through a variety of alternative programs both inside and outside schools before they develop problematic user patterns. A more refined strategy might, for example, aim towards strengthening optional academic programmes involving more lateral areas such as creative expression, counselling which also includes outreach methods, establishing more proactive leisure time, regular youth work intervention and a greater diversity of recreational activity. The main goal should be to provide suitable alternatives and different types of protective environments and activities, both inside and outside school, in order to keep high risk groups “on the track of social inclusion” (ibid: 32).

In terms of individual vulnerability where for instance children with symptoms of ADD or ADHD have a far greater risk of developing substance abuse problems, it is also important to be able to respond to their needs before serious problems arise. Sensation seekers in general are often at a far greater risk of increased drug use but only in the presence of peer drug use (ibid: 38). Therefore, implementing programs that can address or channel the need for “sensation” through physical recreational activities like snowboarding, diving, or martial arts for instance is a measure which could effectively avert potential substance abuse. Another area which merits attention in this context is the possibly innate, yet today equally “risky”, need many people have to explore altered states. In most countries there is not much of a possibility for young people in particular to explore these states, other than through the use of drugs, in often highly unstable surroundings. Many indigenous groups and eastern

contemplative traditions on the other hand have centuries of experience with understanding states of consciousness and highly developed methods for accessing them “naturally”. There is no reason why they shouldn’t work in more contemporary environments and although social workers obviously can’t be expected to guide teenagers through these transcendental realms at a moment’s notice, they could serve as mediators directing inquisitive youths to qualified teachers. Where there are no such teachers available it might be feasible to invite qualified guests from other parts of the country, or possibly abroad, for weekend courses catering specifically for young people with this interest before drugs become the primary locus of identification. The main idea behind effective prevention is therefore to combine quality programs that are universal, selective and individually adapted to prevent social exclusion and promote awareness and integration in ways that young people with different needs can relate to. The cost of good prevention programs is obviously a lot less than the cost of treating individuals with complex addictions and would therefore be a wise investment for the future in any society.

### **9.3 - Treatment**

Unfortunately at the present moment there is still a general lack of clarity regarding the concept of addiction and treatment objectives. In order to avoid further ambiguity and support the constructive evaluation and comparison of results the EMCDDA has adopted various definitions. The term “drug addict” is not used and instead “problem drug use” is applied to refer to “addiction by injection or regular long-term use of opiates, cocaine and/or amphetamines. This definition excludes consumption of ecstasy and cannabis or occasional use of opiates, cocaine or amphetamines” (EMCDDA 2004: 6). Treatment is here defined as “the use of specific medical and/or psychosocial techniques with the goal of reducing or abstaining from illegal drug use thereby improving the general health of the client” (ibid.). However, there is also little agreement as to what is meant by successful treatment since in some cases this implies complete recovery, while others regard people in substitution treatment who live a “complete and socially integrated life” as being successfully treated. Partly due to the diversity of opinions regarding the dynamics of addiction, how “successful” treatment is understood and the relatively unstable and highly complex nature of the “drug problem”, treatment options today leave much to be desired in terms of effectively addressing the actual needs of problem users.

Although medically assisted substitution treatment has expanded and proven effective in terms of preventing drug related harm, there are major problems with accessibility and the capacity of treatment services to meet individual needs and public demands. Furthermore, there is an increasing prevalence of non-opiate problem drug use with substances like cannabis and cocaine as well as poly drug use involving several substances simultaneously, including alcohol, which requires specialized treatment. The issue of psychiatric co-morbidity is also a growing concern which requires integrating mental health care providers into treatment programs and educating professionals on how to match patients with different types of treatment services. Generally treatment services have become much more aware of the need to avert social exclusion and aim towards reintegration of problem users into society, but the overall challenge is to provide measures which are “accessible, flexible and sustainable, oriented towards the needs of the patients’ individual characteristics , in other words, featuring a multi-dimensional diversification” (EMCDDA 2004b: 4).

The situation in Norway is no exception, and despite major structural reforms in terms of social policy, a recent report by the national medical association clearly reveals many weaknesses in addressing the individual needs of problem users (Høle & Sletnes 2006). The need for increased capacity to meet rising overall demands and raise the quality of services already available is especially pronounced as well as the need for a radical change of attitude in terms of how problem users are viewed and cared for. Even though problem users have now been accorded patient rights, many professionals still consider drug problems to be primarily self-inflicted. Consequently this group of users is consistently overlooked, ignored and allocated onto endless waiting lists for random treatment based on availability and location instead of individual requirements. Many places provide services on paper only, treatment is not based on scientifically documented evaluation, and multidisciplinary specialized drug treatment is greatly lacking in qualified health professionals. According to the Norwegian medical association, in order to ensure that problem users are accorded individually adapted services, specific measures must be taken to secure more health professionals with competence, strengthen the interaction and cooperation between service providers and the accessibility of treatment services must be improved (ibid:3).

Most definitions of addiction and dependency describe a wide spectrum of criteria for addiction, but there is little agreement on how addiction actually develops among individual users, not to mention what good treatment is in practice. The causality theory that regular use

eventually leads to problematic use due to changes in brain chemistry is too simplistic, and it does not adequately account for addictive behaviour which is not substance related, yet still involves similar dynamics. In most cases recreational use does not lead to problematic use, and even problematic users can develop more recreational patterns over time. In order to treat addiction, it is essential that individual users are regarded as the ultimate authority of their own process, and that treatment can integrate these individual processes into a case sensitive program. Most of the time treatment is based more on professional assumptions and priorities than individual case histories and this is experienced as both problematic and extremely disempowering for individuals. When addiction is regarded as being primarily substance induced, objectives are aimed at reducing the intake of that substance as much as possible, while success is measured by the extent to which problem users can abstain from their drug of choice altogether. This model might to some extent prove effective in substitution treatment where there are obviously strong physiological dynamics involved, like with opiates, sedatives or nicotine. However, problem use is also becoming more and more evident with substances like cannabis, amphetamines and cocaine, while addictive behaviour is increasingly emerging in other non-substance related areas. There is therefore a growing need to expand this model to encompass a more refined theory of addiction that empowers clients, respects each individual journey and acknowledges collective patterns which perpetuate addictive tendencies.

One new and promising approach in this area is a method called processwork developed by Dr. Arnold Mindell that has roots in Jungian Psychology, Taoism and physics<sup>5</sup>. It is cross-disciplinary and addresses both individual and collective transformation by discovering potential patterns for change in disturbing experiences. Here "... addictions, family and relationship problems, group conflicts and social tensions: all these experiences, even the most chaotic-seeming processes, when approached with curiosity and respect, reveal an inner order and coherence that can bring new information vital for our personal and collective growth". The role of a process worker is based on the understanding that they are "participants and co-creators as well as observers or facilitators of any process. They know that the whole process, the familiar parts and the unknown, the manifest and the non-manifest, can be found in the inner as well as the outer situation". Therefore, according to Mindell, a processworker can "let things transform as they want to and not try to organize them herself",

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<sup>5</sup> The following citations and extracts are retrieved from the website:  
<http://www.rspopuk.com/processwork/index.html#onepage>

but this requires an ability to “discover the pattern behind the process of a given individual situation and base her work upon this pattern and its flow”. Furthermore, since “only the total process is truly healing”, supporting a client means “not only following the part which a client identifies with in the moment, but following the whole process” (ibid.).

There are a wide range of methods which can be applied here, and rather than control outcomes or analyze events they are primarily aimed towards “unfolding meaning, not as techniques, but as a practical means through which to connect with life, wholeness, themselves and others with greater awareness and creativity”. Process work is “descriptive, rather than prescriptive”, by accurately perceiving a client’s “psychological, behaviourally manifest processes” a client can be connected with “the incipient changes which are trying to take place and which, since they are usually blocked, tend to cause the client trouble”. This approach therefore empowers clients in the sense that the “unique structure of each process is accurately discovered and supported while carefully following the goals and needs of those involved”. Processes can therefore “unfold in their own way” and have many appearances because the “method” is first and foremost “to bring awareness to what is happening and this method is its only goal”. Consequently, processwork is extraordinarily versatile and can move far beyond traditional psychotherapy. Being based on an “ethical belief in connecting individual work to political, environmental and group work”, it can extend “into such areas as conflict resolution with groups, institutions and communities, addressing social issues and ethnic and national conflict; organisational developments in business; educational work with children in schools; creativity and the arts, (theatre, music, visual/tactile arts, writing); the environment and spirituality” (ibid.).

Applied more specifically to problem drug use for example, destructive user patterns are regarded primarily as information about a person who is both unique yet simultaneously connected with larger patterns that can be relevant to their own process. Respect is essential since many substance abusers struggle with issues like shame and low self-esteem which in themselves can often be more psychologically damaging than the effects of the substances they are taking. Acknowledging the impulse behind addiction instead of focusing exclusively on the behaviour itself allows for deeper meanings to unfold and helps unblock pathways leading towards transformation. The recurring need for altered states is an indication that there is a genuine drive towards transformation present. Addictive behaviour therefore communicates important information about this deep, although often unconscious, impulse

towards further growth and wholeness. In many cases addiction can be seen “as an effort to relate to parts of one’s personality which the sober lifestyle excludes, which one cannot access and use deliberately” (Hauser 1995)<sup>6</sup>. The focus is not directed exclusively towards individual processes however; in applying the concept of the “city shadow” for example wider social and political dimensions can also be addressed. Here “the so-called identified patient often mirrors disowned aspects of the family and society at large” and altered states of consciousness “may offer alternative possibilities to mainstream culture”. In conclusion then, Hauser also emphasizes that “the psychological, political and spiritual aspects of addictions cannot be separated and that they all need to be addressed for an effective treatment of substance abuse” (ibid.).

There is great potential in processwork to help mediate and “process” problematic drug use because it is one of the few methods that acknowledges both the wider and deeper aspects of this phenomenon, while at the same time enabling individuals to connect with their own underlying journey. The approach is both highly versatile and adaptable, and can therefore be applied in many fields, not only in psychotherapy, since it enables and assists both individual and collective transformation. Even simply acquainting oneself with some of the basic principles and methods upon which it is based can have a major impact in terms of facilitating the desperately needed change of attitude that we have towards drug users in society today. Instead of being a victim of circumstance or a docile observer of pain and suffering, these methods can empower and release individuals in every walk of life. In the words of Dr. Arnold Mindell, processwork encourages us to “...get off the wheel for a moment, discover where you are, and make a conscious wakeful decision about whether you want to get back on that wheel or not. Using our awareness, we can process the events that are happening to us. Otherwise, we are passive, unconscious witnesses of our fates”<sup>7</sup>.

It is clear today that there is little chance for success with treatment programs that impose demands and attempt to control behaviour based on a moralistic ideology and simplistic assumptions while completely overlooking the individual needs of clients, the underlying process and the collective patterns connected to that process. It is therefore essential that treatment is individually adapted, based on equality and respect and allows clients to actively participate in their own healing process. Relapse in this context can

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<sup>6</sup> Following citations retrieved from abstract at <http://www.efn.org/~rhauser/RLAbstracts.htm#bottle>

<sup>7</sup> Citation retrieved from <http://www.rspopuk.com/index.php>

therefore be integrated as a useful piece of information which communicates important “messages” about a client’s needs and process as opposed to a sign of weakness or failure. Successful treatment is therefore measured not primarily by the number of clean urine samples but by the extent to which clients are able to consciously connect with and process their own patterns, integrate them into a lifestyle that works for them and allow transformation to emerge at its own sustainable pace and rhythm.

## **9.4 - Social policy**

Social policies reflect a society’s collective beliefs and attitudes towards different types of behaviour and socio-cultural trends while at the same time attempting to influence how these trends and behavioural traits are to be perceived by individuals (especially young people) in that society. There is widespread agreement in most European countries that the main target for drug policy should be to reduce the prevalence of drug use, the incidence of drug-related harm, and the availability of illicit drugs while increasing the availability of treatment and the number of successfully treated addicts (EMCDDA 2005). Until recently it has been very difficult to compare and evaluate social policies on an international basis due to the lack of precise and quantifiable operational objectives. With the launching of an international EU drug strategy and evaluation criteria this has fortunately started to change, making comparison between countries less problematic and much more reliable. According to current studies, the transition away from zero tolerance policies and criminalization towards more humane strategies which emphasize harm reduction and an increased acceptance of disease models has resulted in a significant decline of drug-related health problems including HIV, hepatitis and drug-related deaths (ibid.). Regarding the reduction of drug use and the availability of drugs however, no significant progress has been observed, and in most countries the situation is either relatively stable or gradually increasing (ibid:20).

Many researchers today have verified that “individuals’ value and behaviour are influenced by what they perceive to be normality in their social environment, and this is especially true of young people” (ibid: 29). Subsequently, low levels of perceived risk combined with easy availability are frequently seen as decisive in terms of increasing the occurrence of drug use. Statistically however, it is interesting to note that countries with low tolerance and harsh regulation strategies do not necessarily have lower prevalence figures. The USA for example, despite having a notoriously restrictive drug policy and promoting



scores of costly national campaigns strongly emphasizing the dangers of illegal drugs, has for the past few decades still had levels of drug use that have been considerably higher than most European countries (ibid: 14)<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, a recent survey estimating the prevalence of last year cannabis use among adults between 15-34 years old showed that the USA has over a 5% higher prevalence rate than the European average and that the Netherlands, despite having a notoriously liberal and pragmatic drug policy, actually has a national average that is approximately 2% below the European average (ibid.)<sup>9</sup>. The occurrence of problem drug use is also significantly lower in the Netherlands (3.1%) compared to most European countries, including Norway and Sweden<sup>10</sup>. Despite these findings, in the majority of cases a “restrictive” drug policy is almost unanimously favoured by government legislations over a more pragmatic or liberal policy because it is argued that decriminalization would increase consumption and drug related harm. As this quote from a recent official government document in Norway proclaims;

The Norwegian Government disagrees with liberalisation and legalisation because making drugs legal does not change their harmful properties. Experience shows that consumption increases with legalisation, because legal drugs are taken in addition to illegal ones. Liberalisation means increased use and more health-related and social problems for individuals and for society as a whole<sup>11</sup>.

It is fairly evident that in many cases social policies to a large extent still reflect the general public opinion, rather than being informed by hard facts, and that political expediency often appears to be more important than the actual welfare of the population at large. The statistical reality that most experimental drug users do not become problem users is usually ignored altogether and preventive measures for the most part endorse universal programs like publicity campaigns designed principally to warn young people and keep them off illegal drugs. For example, in the same government document cited above it is plainly stated that “there is no clear dividing line between the use and misuse of intoxicating substances” and that “these terms will vary according to the type of substance, amount, culture, time, place and

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<sup>8</sup> See also online chart: “Identifying drug trends in Europe” at <http://ar2005.emcdda.eu.int/en/page004-en.html>

<sup>9</sup> USA average: 21.9%, European average: 14.1%, Netherlands average: 11.8% Europe table GPS-11 in the 2005 EMCDDA statistical bulletin board, USA: SAMHSA, National survey on Drugs and Health, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> EMCDDA “Studies of the problematic drug use population” <http://stats05.emcdda.eu.int/en/page014-en.html> European estimates range somewhere between 2% and 10%, Norway has somewhere between 3.7 and 5.1 IDU’s (Intravenous Drug Users) and Sweden has approximately 4.8 problem users (cases per 1000 of the adult population aged 15 to 64).

<sup>11</sup> Sosialdepartementet (Ministry of Social Affairs): *The Norwegian Government’s Action Plan to Combat Drug- and Alcohol-related Problems 2003-2005* pp.6. Downloaded from:

<http://www.emcdda.eu.int/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.Content&nNodeID=1360&sLanguageISO=EN>

consequence”. When it comes to illegal drugs however, “all use is by definition misuse”, and “The same applies to medicines acquired illegally and to medicines given to a third party” (pp.9). This type of categorization, although obviously intended to increase risk perceptions and prevent experimentation with illegal drugs, is both highly problematic and shockingly unscientific. Like many drug policies today, this definition is based on moral ideology and “professional” assumptions that have little basis in the actual reality that young people are facing in every day life, and therefore in all probability causes far more difficulties than it actually resolves.

When it comes to actually monitoring problematic drug use, the EMCDDA (2005: 30) clearly asserts that it is “not realistic to assess the effectiveness of prevention policies using data on drug use by young people, particularly not estimates of experimental use, as they reflect societal norms and not genuine problem behaviour”. Therefore, in order to be able to map existing (not imagined) problem drug use in a society, effectively address these needs and also deepen our understanding of how user trajectories and patterns evolve over time, it is imperative that definitions like the one cited above are refined to reflect concrete realities and not ideological agendas. In Norway for instance, the “Government’s Action Plan” claims to base its policies on “important values, such as protection of human life, respect for human dignity, social and personal responsibility, freedom for the individual, and protection of families” (pp.7). Nevertheless, in aggressively promoting this sharp division between acceptable and unacceptable forms of intoxication (where acceptable doesn’t necessarily mean less dangerous), it effectively perpetuates an exceedingly detrimental division which arbitrarily segregates the population. This separation leads to conditions resembling a kind of apartheid, in this case not based on outer appearance but on a preference for different inner subjective landscapes where drug users can find themselves lumped together into one faction, a minority criminalized by law, pathologized by social policies and scorned by society at large.

There is substantial evidence showing that problem drug use is closely related to social exclusion and alienation, and that vulnerable groups like young offenders, ethnic minorities, school drop-outs, high risk settings and families are already excluded to a far greater degree when compared to other groups (Burkhart 2004). Moreover, universal preventive measures which are directed towards the majority have practically no effect on these vulnerable populations, and often exclude them even further (ibid.). Essentially then, these policies may to some extent prevent the majority of young people from experimenting with illegal drugs,

nevertheless, the “vulnerable” minority who actually stand a far greater risk of developing problem drug use is continually overlooked, becomes even more ostracized and is therefore greatly endangered. Drug policies which are aimed primarily at maintaining this sharp division between legal and illegal drugs, focusing exclusively on the dangers associated with illegal drug use and categorically defining all illegal drug use as misuse, are in other words a large part of the “drug problem”, and not an effective, informed or humanitarian solution to it.

Another consequence of criminalization is a corresponding increase in drug related crime, imprisonment and further social exclusion. Although differences between information systems on drug law offences vary considerably from country to country making comparison between them difficult, the number of ‘reports’ of drug law offences has increased in most European countries between 1998 and 2003 (EMCDDA 2005: 80). Drug users are unquestionably “strongly overrepresented among the prison population”, although there is still a shortage of reliable routine information concerning patterns of drug use among prisoners in Europe. Serving time in most cases leads to a temporary cessation or reduction of drugs use, but many continue to use upon release and some even start using and/or injecting in prison (ibid: 81). Since prison is a “particularly detrimental environment for problem drug users”, in addition to the fact that they are generally overcrowded, “economic reasons for promoting alternatives to prison should not be underestimated because they are generally less expensive than incarceration” (ibid.). Fortunately, measures towards alternatives to prison have been gaining ground in recent decades in many European countries, a development which is “consistent with the evolution of more humanitarian paradigms in legislation and criminal justice systems as well as with more advanced psychosocial and medical models of addiction” (ibid.).

Nonetheless, contemporary drug policies are still heavily influenced by simplistic and largely uninformed views of illicit substances and drug users. These policies are aimed at “protecting” the majority from the alleged harm that any illegal drug use causes, yet when it comes to those truly at risk, policies often exasperate the problem even further rather than providing plausible solutions. Moreover, the damaging role that society plays in terms of perpetuating dislocation, promoting consumer dynamics that rely on addictive tendencies, and neglecting the importance of alternative methods for accessing different states of consciousness, is hardly ever considered in official documents. Consumerism, writes Lenson (1995: 198), “has replaced transcendental values by monetary ones”, and consumerist metaphysics “relies on dissatisfaction to keep its parishioners conscious and purchasing”

(ibid.). Consumerism itself is therefore highly addictive “because it seems to offer a this-worldly, commodified solution to what is basically a spiritual problem” (Loy & Goodhew 2005: 178). Drug use can therefore also be seen as the reflection of a “spiritual disease”, resulting from “living too long in a world ruled by desire” (Lenson 1995: 200);

Seeing no opportunity for political dissent, a certain percentage of the population is seeking change through dissent of consciousness. America’s three hundred thousand drug inmates are *prisoners of consciousness*. Whatever solution is found to “the drug problem” must offer reconciliation and reintegration to these dissenters. Diversities, including diversity of consciousness, are valuable only if the diverse parties are eventually to be included in the same community. Otherwise the celebration of difference becomes a new segregation. . . . The silence wrought by the “Just Say No” campaign must be replaced by words, many, many words. And these words must come not only from police, doctors, sociologists, criminologists, and the usual experts, but from gang members, drug users, drug dealers, and underground manufacturers (ibid.).

Although this “spiritual disease” goes by many names; the “disaster of modernity”, “dislocation”, “fragmentation”, or the “disenchantment of the spirit” to name just a few, one salient point has been emphasized again and again - that in the long run, little can be gained from adjusting or integrating the self “in a culture that is itself sick” (Wilber 2000: 112).

Society is sending conflicting messages to young people today. Compulsive consumption is regarded as both normal and acceptable as long as it isn’t of “illegal drugs”. Alcohol, tobacco and prescribed medication are condoned even though they are in many cases just as, if not more, harmful than illicit intoxicants, and although substance abusers supposedly have patient rights the majority either end up dead, in jail or on long waiting lists for haphazard treatment. Since “individuals’ value and behaviour are influenced by what they perceive to be normality in their social environment”, it should come as no surprise that current social policies are hardly improving the situation, adding to the pain and confusion rather than offering practical solutions based on updated science, human dignity and respect. There is unquestionably a desperate need for unbiased, well-informed and evidence-based policing grounded in actual scientific findings that is aimed specifically at vulnerable groups and individuals, and not on moral hysteria and a naïve, utopian vision of a “drug free society”. As of now it is perhaps too soon to come to any definitive conclusions concerning what concrete policy should be implemented by which country. This is mainly because international evaluation criteria have only recently been adopted by most member states and Norway, and each country is unique in terms of social structure, cultural norms and values as well as geographic location. However, there is much to be gained from analyzing international trends, and studying alternative drug reform strategies that have already been implemented with considerable success.

## 9.5 - Harm reduction

In light of the fact that an alarming number of contemporary measures aimed at eliminating drug use and drug-related problems only help a minority of problem users and in many cases actually lead to further social exclusion, there is a growing need for realistic strategies aimed primarily at reducing drug-related harm and supporting those who are actually at risk. In most cases, the deep-rooted collective patterns that are persistently promoting and perpetuating a culture of compulsive consumption are either completely overlooked by policy makers or just hidden behind simplistic causality theories of drug addiction. For this reason, among others, it is highly probable that the demand for both licit and illicit drugs will persist, and either increase or remain relatively unaffected by current political thought and social policy. Since the illegal drug market is one of the most profitable today, and for many people living in poverty provides the only real source of income, it is unlikely that there will be any significant shortage of supply in the near future. So at best, the drug situation may stabilize, at worst it could increase quite rapidly and become even more destructive during the next few decades. A rational and informed overview of the real situation is therefore essential, as is the adoption of evidence based and cost effective prevention, policing and treatment strategies based on facts and user feedback in addition to balanced professional opinion.

Harm reduction has already proven to be one of the most humane, compassionate and practical ground-level approaches in terms of actually saving lives and helping those most in need. Where this strategy has been systematically applied, there has been a noticeable decrease in drug-related health problems, resulting in a growing acceptance by policy makers of treatment as a both less detrimental and more economic alternative to incarceration of drug offenders (EMCDDA 2005: 20). Instead of punishment and social exclusion, harm reduction seeks primarily to reduce drug-related harm among individuals and communities by promoting education, intervention and community organizing. It encourages alternatives to conventional health models and treatment services by challenging the traditional “client/provider” relationship and meeting drug users “where they’re at” in addressing both the conditions of use as well as the use itself<sup>12</sup>. This is based in the understanding that drug use is a “complex, multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviours

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<sup>12</sup> Current and following citations retrieved from <http://www.harmreduction.org/>

from severe abuse to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others”. The quality of individual and community life is seen as the criteria for successful interventions and policies, as opposed to the cessation of all drug use.

Contrary to most policy programs, prevention strategies and health services, harm reduction actively incorporates and integrates user needs and perspectives. This is achieved by emphasizing the “non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services to people who use drugs”, and ensuring that “drug users and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them”. Here the drug users themselves are seen as the “primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use”, and the aim of service providers is therefore to “empower users to share information and support each other in strategies which meet their actual conditions of use”. Harm reduction does not disregard or belittle the dangers and tragic consequences associated with either licit or illicit drug use, but attempts to meet the needs of consumers (rather than the priorities of treatment providers), and believes in promoting accurate information about drugs as opposed to ineffective campaigns aimed at frightening potential users. Instead of simply relegating the harmful effects of habitual drug use to the inherent qualities within a substance and/or the pathological traits of a drug user, this approach also “recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex based discrimination and other social inequalities affect both people’s vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harm” (ibid.).

The harm reduction strategy offers a comprehensive approach to both drug abuse and policy, based on an appreciation for the complexity of these issues and should not in any way be misconstrued as a simplistic “drug legalization tool”<sup>13</sup>. It is based on the insight that “there is no ultimate solution to the problem of drugs in a free society, and that many different interventions may work. Those interventions should be based on science, compassion, health and human rights”. Consequently, rather than measuring the success of current policies based for the most part on the fluctuation of user rates, a harm reduction strategy is deemed successful when decreasing “rates of death, disease, crime and suffering”. This approach also recognizes that some drugs are less harmful than others and therefore emphasizes an intervention which is “based on the relative harmfulness of the drug to society” (ibid.). Most drugs, both licit and illicit, have both negative and positive potential, depending on the quality

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<sup>13</sup>Current and following citations from <http://www.drugpolicy.org/reducingharm/>

and quantity of a substance, the context of use and the method of administration. Findings concerning the relative harmfulness or harmlessness of a drug must therefore be accurately communicated based on facts and not moral hysteria or political ideology. This applies to both conservative and liberal factions.

Typically the tendency of each side of the political debate has been to either embrace or dismiss research evidence based on the extent to which it supports the corresponding political or ideological agenda. Cannabis for instance has become somewhat controversial as of late due to recent findings establishing a strong correlation between specific genes and an increased risk for developing severe mental illness like psychosis or schizophrenia. Two major medical journals reviewed all the research up to date and published the findings in the Australian magazine PLOS Medicine, concluding that there was indeed a probable connection (Hall 2006). This genetic risk factor could then possibly account for the great variation between heavy smokers, where the majority never develop persistent symptoms of severe mental illness, and those who do. For the “genetically vulnerable”, adolescence is an especially hazardous phase, particularly for those who smoke more than once a week, although according to Dr. Robin Murray only two percent of all marijuana smokers had a real risk of developing schizophrenia<sup>14</sup>. It is also possible to develop dependency on cannabis, and an increasing number of adults seek treatment for help to stop using (Hall 2006). The risk of this development however (around 10%), “is lower than that for alcohol, nicotine, and opiates, but the earlier the age a young person begins to use cannabis, the higher the risk” (ibid.). The challenge with “providing credible health education to young people about the risks of cannabis use”, therefore lies in “presenting the information in a persuasive way that accurately reflects the remaining uncertainties about these risks” (ibid.).

On the other hand, cannabis has long proven to be extremely beneficial for those suffering from severely debilitating medical conditions like cancer, HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis and epilepsy (Joy et al. 1999). It has fewer side effects than other heavy pain and nausea medication, significantly improves quality of life and has not been shown to increase recreational uses in areas that do allow medical marijuana<sup>15</sup>. Despite these finding, and in

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<sup>14</sup> In Goldberg (2006): “Studies Link Psychosis, Teenage Marijuana Use” Retrieved from: <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v06/n108/a08.html?277880> (copyright Globe Newspaper Company).

<sup>15</sup> “Medical Marijuana” - Prepared by the Drug Policy Alliance of New Mexico. Retrieved from: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/docUploads/NewMexicoMedicalMarijuanaFactSheet.pdf>

addition to the fact that it is considerably less addictive than opiates, cocaine and amphetamines (all of which are prescribed for medical purposes), cannabis is consistently devalued, underrepresented in research and defined as having a high potential for abuse and no medicinal value (ibid.). A harm reduction strategy therefore, “not only seeks to reduce the harm that drugs cause, but also to maximize their potential benefits”<sup>16</sup>. Drug related harm and policies which have an “over-emphasis” on interdiction and prohibition are often closely related. Not only do these policies suppress the potential therapeutic benefits of certain illegal drugs, but in many cases they actually aggravate an already critical situation. Specifically, there is an alarming amount of harm caused by punitive tactics such as incarceration, criminal records, lack of treatment and/or adequate information about drugs, military intervention in producer countries, not to mention the spread of black market sales and associated crime as well as invasion of personal freedom (ibid.). Alternatively, the harm reduction approach advocates lessening drug related harm among young people through “education, prevention, and treatment”. Prevention is achieved through “factual, science-based drug education and eliminating youth’s black market exposure to drugs”, while treatment “seeks to restore basic human dignity to dealing with the disease of addiction” (ibid.). Fortunately, the reduction of drug related harms to health and society has increasingly become an objective addressed by a growing number of national drug strategies, and when these objectives are based on “science, compassion, health and human rights”, there is a very good possibility that they will continue to make a positive difference.

## **9.6 - Creating an integral space for constructive dialogue**

The four main “pillars” are all potentially reasonable responses to the problem of substance abuse, but seeing that a large part of the problem is closely related to how we think about drugs, the measures applied will be of little benefit if they are based on partial, uninformed and inadequate principles or attitudes. It is therefore essential that in the future more “space” is created for new and improved ways of thinking and responding to drug related harm. This means opening up to the possibility that there might be a better way of dealing with the problem that simultaneously acknowledges its complexity and tries to

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<sup>16</sup> Current and following citations from: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/reducingharm/>



integrate multiple perspectives, including the users', so that a more constructive dialogue may unfold. Although most policies are implemented with good intentions, in some cases the measures used to protect people from drug related harm are actually more harmful than the substances themselves. In pursuing the unrealistic utopian vision of a drug-free society and waging a war on drugs, drug users have become "the enemy" where those who are most at risk suffer the worst casualties.

This is not simply a matter of legalization versus criminalization; both legal and illegal drugs can obviously cause harm. When it comes to illegal drugs however, there is a widely recognized and established correlation between social exclusion and vulnerability. Drug policies must therefore minimize further social exclusion and be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they meet the needs of the most critical and susceptible cases by averting problem drug use. Likewise, prevention strategies that are able to provide factual and impartial education about drug related risk, while implementing programs aimed at including and protecting vulnerable groups, are much more likely to reduce drug related harm than biased scare tactics and severe punitive measures. Treatment also needs to include clients in their own process, be more flexible, and adapted to the needs of individual users, rather than forcing them to comply with counterproductive standardized programs which are insensitive to the actual needs of vulnerable groups.

Today there is a great division between drug users and professionals in the drug field. An abyss of silence and distrust separates the two, while policies are implemented based largely on presumed and unsubstantiated claims, public opinion and the fear of sending "the wrong message" to our youth. Instead of resolving the drug problem and reaching out to those most in need of our help and support, these conditions actually widen an already perilous gap, breed even more mistrust and therefore perpetuate highly unfavourable mechanisms of social exclusion. To remedy this situation, social exclusion must stop, the silence must be broken, and an open dialogue established to replace the many muted voices that drug users have been reduced to. Historically one need not look far in the past to see evidence of the grave injustices inflicted on a grand scale by unfairly stigmatizing groups of people with unconventional lifestyles or nonconformist behaviour. From homosexuals, unwed mothers, ethnic minorities, and the mentally ill, to name just a few, millions have suffered tremendously and unfairly because society refused to acknowledge their common humanity and chose instead to demonize their differences. Drug addicts are progressively starting to be

treated more humanely in many countries, but there is still a long way to go, and as far as including active user groups in research, prevention, treatment or policy making the system leaves much to be desired in most countries. Time and time again, “the experts” implement costly programs, projects and conferences with little consideration or appreciation for the first-hand knowledge that drug users have regarding their own situation.

This pattern of segregation and lack of dialogue has entailed severe polarization with proponents of legalization on the one hand and conservative advocates of criminalization on the other. There is an unhealthy stalemate. Each party is often more concerned with “winning” the debate rather than creatively exploring different ideas and opinions to achieve maximum benefits. The conclusion has already been reached before the evidence has been fully examined. According to Edward de Bono, a leading authority on the physiology of creative thinking, this is typical for the Western tradition of argument which “insists that we try to move forward by means of position taking and argument” (1992: 81). His methods for increasing communication and breaking free from destructive systems of thought have already been applied with great success for management training in large corporations like IBM and in the planning of Olympic Games. They can be applied equally in any organization or institution where dialogue is lacking, thinking has become stuck and creativity is wanting. These methods are based largely on the concept of lateral thinking and the logic of self-organizing patterning systems which involves consciously and systematically evoking “creative leaps” in the way we think about things instead of passively moving along our habitual mental tracks. They are tools based directly on the self-organizing behaviour of the neural networks in the human brain designed to create a “New Renaissance in human thought that encourages originality and creativity” (De Bono: 1991). In his book, *I Am Right You Are Wrong*, he demonstrates in particular why a system with absolutes and rigid insistence on facts might work for winning arguments, but is largely inappropriate in terms of resolving the most critical issues facing our world today. “Drug addiction, poverty, global debt, and ecological catastrophe will always be with us...unless we change our old system of thought” (ibid.).

Although every valuable creative idea “must always be logical in hindsight” the brain is not “inherently logical; it is rather a pattern-recognizing machine that moves from one state to the next in an unpredictable fashion” (ibid.). As an example, he mentions scientific papers which are written and presented in a “wonderfully logical way,” but the process and “progress

of real science that precedes the papers depends on hunches, accidents, imagination and luck” (ibid: x). Furthermore, the language used to communicate ideas and opinions is full of words which “polarize and categorize situations: you are either guilty or innocent, right or wrong, happy or sad”, and the traditional system of logic “both relishes and depends on this dichotomy” (ibid: xi). This system of logic is referred to as “rock logic” in contrast to “water logic”, which is not absolute, but changes with circumstances and contexts. Perceptions, memories and life experiences play a much larger role in human communication and expression than people realise” (ibid.). Where “rock logic” is largely based on the thinking habits of logic, reason, argument - the “truth” of ancient Greece, Nobel physicist Sheldon Lee Glashow questions the extent to which these patterns are “still applicable in today’s changing world”. According to him, “The old habits seem confining, inadequate and perhaps even dangerous, since our social conflicts are as primitive as ever while our technical ability to pursue them is unconstrained” (ibid: xv). Therefore, the “New Renaissance” requires changing our thinking habits, instead of basing them on “word-play or belief systems”, they “must be attuned to the latest developments in neuroscience and matched to ‘the way the human brain creates perception’” (ibid.).

As a more constructive alternative to the “aggressive and repressive tendencies inherent in conventional thought”, this shift involves seeking a “gentler paradigm based on perception rather than a questionable ‘objective reality’” (ibid.). Glashow mentions Alfred Korzybski, another scientist studying the brain who already in 1933 saw the urgent need for “a new logical system”. In *Science and Sanity* Korzybski wrote that “present-day theories of meaning are extremely confused, ultimately hopeless, and probably harmful to the sanity of the human race... We face a complete and methodological departure from two-valued “objective” orientation to general infinite-valued “process” orientation...The problem is whether we deal with methods of 350 BC or AD 1933” (ibid.). Dr. de Bono is on a similar quest, but has fortunately also devised several simple, concrete, yet highly effective methods to facilitate the process of actively employing a new logical system based on the brain’s natural patterns. These methods might at first glance appear esoteric, however, they have already been successfully applied by some of the largest and most noted corporations in the world.

Although there are far too many thinking tools to be adequately presented here, for purposes of illustration, one striking example is the “six thinking hats” which is an especially useful alternative to the traditional Western system of argument and debate where proving the

“rightness” or “wrongness” of opinions is often more common than actually finding a constructive and creative way to explore different ideas and solutions. The six hats method is used as a general framework for discussion by encouraging movement away from the argument so that more productive discussions may arise; “Instead of adversarial thinking there is cooperative exploration” (De Bono 1992: 81). The essence of this method then is to consciously investigate different positions on a given subject which are distinguished by a specific colour of a hat. The “white hat” is neutral and carries information, facts and data only, the “red hat” is concerned with feelings, intuitions, hunches, and emotions, the “black hat” is critical judgement and negative feedback, the “yellow hat” is optimistic and calls for a “logical positive view of things”, the “green hat” encourages creative thinking and finally, the “blue hat” is the overview and organization of the process, the “thinking about thinking” (De Bono 1992: 78-81). Here both sides of an argument are encouraged to wear for example the black hat and discover the dangers, the yellow hat to explore benefits, or the green hat to open up possibilities (ibid: 81). In doing so, this creates a practical way of “breaking free from the traditional argument system” by challenging the thinker “to use the different hats and actually experience a sense of freedom because the thinker is no longer limited to one position” (ibid: 81, 82).

Like the “six hats”, the methods devised to incorporate “lateral thinking” are deceptively simple yet in order for them to be effective their application must be handled skilfully. “Creativity” writes de Bono “is of serious importance and this importance can only grow in the future. There is a need for serious creativity. There is a need for the serious application of serious creativity” (ibid: 238). If these methods can be successfully applied at a seminar of Nobel laureates then there is no reason why they should not qualify or be applied by professionals, treatment providers and experts grappling with the drug problem. Who knows, they might just make the difference which makes a real difference. Certainly, it will not hurt to implement new conceptual models and practical tools with proven results that are specifically designed to change and revitalize our outmoded patterns of thinking and “lead us towards the sane and benevolent society” (Glashow in de Bono 1991: xvii). As an additional benefit, implementing such methods would also be sending a very positive message to the young people of today: the message that knowledge is not simply a matter of adopting conventional views, memorizing facts, learning to win an argument or write an impressive paper, but involves the capacity to use and respect several models of reality simultaneously, and integrate them creatively. Positive change is possible; it begins by taking ourselves, and our inherent creative potential, seriously.

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