

CONTINUING NARRATIVES OF THE PHARMAKOS: TRANS-ETHICAL
PERSPECTIVES THROUGH THE LIMINAL PERFORMATIVITY
OF MATERIAL AGENCIES IN DRUG GENRE FILM

by

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Abstract

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In American film and television, the drug user or producer is often associated with narratives of the pharmakos, or “scapegoat,” seemingly serving to expel the contamination of American identity and ethics. By analyzing the critically acclaimed TV series *Breaking Bad* and *Nurse Jackie*, I examine how these popular culture series are influenced by, or influence, apparatuses involving drugs, New Materialist theories, and more broadly, ethical values. Specifically, I examine how these TV series deconstruct classic narratives and depict ethical relationships with the pharmakos through a New Materialist understanding of the liminal agencies between human and nonhuman matter. More specifically, I endeavor to further goals that writers such Alaimo, Ingram, and Barad enact, showing the important relationship between ethics and ontology by conceiving of ethics as the potential for material agencies to produce non-representational indeterminate configurations that do not position the ‘other’ (specifically, drug-bodies in my account) as a ground for the transcendence of the autonomous, rational, Cartesian subject and instead propose a world of integration rather than separation, rethinking culture/nature and taught/embodied binaries.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Pharmakos: Contamination and Drug-Bodies

An ancient Greek ritual that served to purify a community in times of crisis, pharmakos refers to the ritual sacrifice or expulsion of a member of the community – usually a slave, criminal, or an individual considered to have impairment. In other words, pharmakos refers to a scapegoat, or the process of scapegoating, in order to purify the within from the unwanted contaminations from the outside. Paradoxically, what is to be expelled (contamination from the outside), takes the form of what is already within (the scapegoat). Thus, what is inside already bares the outside (or “opposite”) within itself. This contamination, and our desire to expel it, privileging purity in our concepts, identities, societies, moralities, and other bodies, is a desire that often results in reductionist judgments and false binaries. In his seminal essay, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Jacques Derrida famously explicates the histories tied up with the modern term “pharmacy” by examining Plato’s writing. Plato, delineating linkages between the terms pharmakeia, pharmakon, and pharmakeus, never directly mentions the term pharmakos. Derrida posits that pharmakos, though technically absent or outside of Plato’s text, can be found within the text, and that such a discovery is a matter of deconstructing the binaries of presence/absence or inside/outside.

Following this tradition of breaking down binaries of inside/outside, I argue that recent drug genre film and TV series depict ethical relationships with the pharmakos through a liminal agential relationship between human and nonhuman matter that refuses to display the discursive and the material in binary categories and instead show how they are iteratively entangled in apparatuses of meaning making that foster an understanding

of how they exist on liminal thresholds of a common agential apparatus. More specifically, I endeavor to further goals that writers such as Ingram, Alaimo, and Barad enact, showing the important relationship between ethics and ontology by conceiving of ethics as non-representational, non-essentialist, corporeal, and discursive configurations that refuse the representational impulses that position the 'other' (specifically, drug-bodies in my account) as a ground for the transcendence of the autonomous, rational, Cartesian subject and instead propose a world of integration rather than separation.

If, as Derrida tells us in his analysis of *Phaedrus*, Socrates is concerned with how the external text can signify identity, this thesis argues that material signification (the drug-human body) and the discursive are co-agential in identity formation, just as the presentation of pharmakon in Plato's text refers to both the effects of drugs and the effects of texts. This threshold, much like the description of Derrida's threshold in the phamakos ritual, refuses the absolute expulsion of the "other" as negative or positive contamination, and fosters an understanding of language and matter as discursive-material rather than discursive/material. Such an attempt views difference or alterity as, not the opposite-binary of sameness, but the liminality of matter in relation.

In other words, I want to suggest that this liminal threshold is not simply a threshold between separation and re-assimilation, but is instead closer to Karen Barad's concept of agential realism, where ethical relationships are made in the recognition of "relata" that are acknowledged or excluded in productive entanglements. Apparatuses are 'material-discursive' in that the intra-action of phenomena produces determinate meanings and specific material configurations while simultaneously excluding the production of other configurations. Thus, the ethics of "mattering" is always about taking responsibility in our part of material-discursive entanglements (Barad).

In American film and television, the imagined body of the drug user or producer is often associated with narratives of the pharmakos, or “scapegoat,” seemingly serving to expel the contamination of American identity and ethics. Given the pervasiveness of drugs in our culture, in film or otherwise, it is surprising not to find a plethora of works attuned to the business of combining drug genre film and TV analysis with conceptual thinking. Academia may be reluctant to engage in an analysis of drug relations for fear there will be an assumption such an analysis suggests an endorsement of ‘drug’ use. However, one need not advocate for using ‘drugs’ in order to see that the act of criminalizing drug users and producers has not led to productive solutions in complex and complicated ethical problems, or to point out the historical ideologies that have contributed to unfair stereotypes and oppression. Pharmakon, part of the relational chain associated with pharmakos, is a polysemy that Derrida tells us has,

through skewing, indetermination, or overdetermination, but without mistranslation, permitted the rendering of the same word by ‘remedy,’ ‘poison,’ ‘drug,’ ‘philter,’ etc. It will be seen to what extent the malleable unity of this concept, or rather its rule and the strange logic that links it with its signifier, has been dispersed, masked, obliterated, and rendered almost unbearable not only by the imprudence or empiricism of translators, but first and foremost by the redoubtable, irreducible difficulty of translation (Dissemination, 71).

Following this relational chain to our modern concept of the word drug, one begins to see why the contamination associated with drugs is so hard to translate into either “remedy” or “poison.” Therefore, drugs are also positioned within a cultural anxiety of losing the primacy of the “self,” control of society, income from drug markets, issues of addiction, and concerns with unintended side effects. In this way they make perfect materials for a discussion on the ongoing debate over the ontological nature of the “self” and “other” that are so integral to any ethical analysis. This debate shows no signs of slowing as consciousness studies, physics theories, health sciences, technological innovations, and other complicated information emerging daily is to be made sense of.

Deconstructing the Dichotomies of Autonomous/Natures

Western philosophy's ontological and epistemological foundations have rested for many years upon the shoulders of the human subject's "cogito." Descartes's dictum, "Cogito ergo sum," has been critiqued by philosophers, such as Derrida, Heidegger, and Hacking for misdirecting perspectives in ontological, epistemological, and ethical considerations and exemplifying a large part of the underpinning for much of representational metaphysics. This legacy has led ontology and epistemology to skepticism about the existence of the external world and the subject's ability to know it; for the Cartesian subject is separated from the world, just as the Cartesian mind is separated from the materiality of the body. The separation of mind and body, and of body and environment, implies not only a denial of material agencies in meaning making, but also suggests an atomistic world of separation rather than (borrowing Barad's term) intra-action. Modern ideas surrounding the term "contamination" are examples of this atomistic separation. Western ideology has taken "contamination" or "impurity" in completely negative terms, as harmful and undesirable, rather than a polysemy that is neither inherently negative nor positive, but instead is poison and cure to human agential positions. In other words, atomistic views have harbored ideas predicated on human separation from the environment and led to reductionist views that understand such a contamination as purely negative in relation to human agential conditions, rather than co-agential.

Karen Barad points out how scholar Ian Hacking explicates the difficulties of representations as connected to the Democritean theory of the atomic and the void in his work *Representing and Intervening*, published in 1983. Hacking states that prior to

Democritus, “the word ‘real’ first meant just unqualified likeness” (142). With the creation of atomic theory and the void, a gap between representations and represented emerged. “Is the table a solid mass made of wood or an aggregate of discrete entities moving in the void? Atomism poses the question of which representation is real. The problem of realism in philosophy is a product of the atomistic worldview” (Barad, 806). Barad, concerned with representationalism as a Cartesian division between “internal” and “external,” desires to encourage,

doubt about [the] presumption that representations (that is, their meaning or content) are more accessible to us than the things they supposedly represent. If there is no magic language through which we can unerringly reach out directly to its referents, why should we think there is nevertheless a language that magically enables us to reach out directly to its sense or representational content? The presumption that we can know what we mean, or what our verbal performances say, more readily than we can know the objects those sayings are about is a Cartesian legacy, a linguistic variation on Descartes’ insistence that we have a direct and privileged access to the contents of our thoughts that we lack towards the ‘external’ world” (1996, 209).

Recent accounts, such as Karen Barad and Stacy Alaimo’s work, attempt to displace the representational framework of the self-knowing Cartesian subject by expanding an account of embodiment beyond the relation between mind and body, to consider an embodied self as embedded within the environment, rethinking nature/culture and embodied/taught binaries. The human, made up of the non-human and extended into the environment (atoms, viruses, cells, bacteria, and even drugs), exposes our wills, intentions, and bodies as our own, and yet never completely our own; in this way the “other” is always a part of our creation.

Subsequently, when considering nonhuman matter as implicated in human agencies, what form ethical decisions should take when “freedom” and “free will” are complicated by such material agencies is an important question in ethical configurations. In much of Postmodernist theories, approaches to this question of “free will” center

around the human's ability to break out of hegemonic discourses of oppression that involve static representations of race, class, gender, species, and other categories. The concern that material configurations of the "subject" might fix definitions into static identities encouraged the formation of the "linguistic turn," where solutions to the idea of material accounts as static or passive have favored the over-determination of the discursive in constituting ontological possibilities. A concern for where agency can be located is an important question for ethics in determining what possibilities we have for resisting the kind of static representations that might recognize some categories (such as white, male, or human) as transcendent of other categories in their possibilities. In order to avoid the pendulum of agential configurations that find agency in either the material or the discursive, it must be recognized that these categories are not absolute "others" or separate distinct domains of culture and nature.

For instance, Stacy Alaimo notes in her work, *Undomesticated Ground, Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*, "Feminism has long struggled with the historically tenacious entanglement of 'woman' and 'nature.' Mother earth, earth mothers, natural women, wild women, fertile fields, barren grounds, virgin lands, raped earths, 'a woman in the shape of a monster/ a monster in the shape of a woman,' the repulsively breeding alien of horror films – these creatures portray nature as female and woman as not exactly human" (2). Nature, in turn, has been seen by many generations as something to exploit, conquer, penetrate, and exert the powers of human subjectivity, rationality, and agency over. Thus, a conflation of nature and the feminine has defined woman as "passive matter" and "that which is mired in nature thrusts woman outside the domain of human subjectivity, rationality, and agency" (Alaimo, 2).

The solution to the oppression of woman, for much of postmodern feminist theory, was to disentangle "woman" from "nature," and thus separate her from the

material, instead of redefining nature and materiality. Alaimo writes that, “It is not only ironic but deeply problematic that the, aggressive, intellectual ‘flight from the feminine’ that motivated Cartesian rationalism has been followed by feminist flights from all that Descartes attempted to transcend – ‘impure’ matter, bodies, and nature” (4). Such feminists argued that “gender” is divorced from nature and materiality, and is ultimately a social construction. In such a claim, nature becomes split from culture; nature is formulated as static and culture is seen as agential. By displacing woman from all that is nature, she might become like man, placed neatly on the side of culture, transcendent of nature. Unfortunately, the false transcendence of any identity configuration from the material threatens to re-instate binary essentialism, rather than overcome it, by failing to see the material as agential. In the case of pharmakos narratives, the material body of the ‘drug user’ is often used to encourage hegemonic discourse surrounding gender, class, race, and species.

Kareed Barad asks, “How did language come to be more trust worthy than matter? Why are language and culture granted their own agency and historicity while matter is figured as passive and immutable, or at best inherits a potential for change derivatively from language and culture?” (1). In response to these kinds of concerns, New Materialist scholars are re-defining nature and materiality as a site of agency that has the power to disrupt static representations of identity. Instead of seeing materiality as a ground of static essentialism that must be transcended, nature is re-conceived as a transformative power across bodies and environments. Stacy Alaimo defines this agential movement across bodies and the environment as “trans-corporeal.” Trans-corporeality views human agencies and other bodies as ultimately inseparable and open to their “environments.” Thus, the material and the social are intra-acting sites of indeterminate possibilities for meaning and being.

Alaimo's "trans-corporeality" is a post-human environmental theory that configures an ethics "not circumscribed by the human but is instead accountable to a material world that is never merely an external place but always the very substance of ourselves and others," and thus, her theory constitutes what I term trans-ethics, an ethics where the moving across of binaries, complicating and working through them in affirmative relation rather than dispensing with or over-determining each of the terms trans-versed can overcome reductionist solutions in material-discursive entanglements and views agency produced in liminal positions rather than alternating ones (p. 158). The liminal positions that drugs hold in material-discourses offers up a unique point of view for re-evaluating the positions of 'drug users' thought compromised of their autonomous human agencies or thought complete victims of drug agencies. Their liminal position between agent and being acted upon is particularly disturbing to those who might wish to see material agencies as inert passive ground. This means, for example, in Karen Barad's diffractive terms, "...it is once again possible to acknowledge nature, the body, and materiality in the fullness of their becoming without resorting to the optics of transparency or opacity, the geometries of absolute exteriority or interiority, and the theoretization of the human as either pure cause or pure effect while at the same time remaining resolutely accountable for the role 'we' play in the intertwined practices of knowing and becoming" (Barad, Article 12).

Ingram argues in her work *The Signifying Body: Toward an Ethics of Sexual and Racial Difference*, "Reconceiving the relation between matter and representation is central to a formulation of ethical difference, for it is only by imagining matter not tied to representation that we can foresee an ontology without grounds from which multiple expressions of difference in Being can arise" (xiv). Through her close reading of Irigaray, Fanon, and Heidegger, Ingram argues that a representational economy takes for granted

a ground for that representation that is itself statically represented or forgotten. Irigaray posits that the unrepresented ground has been woman, the (maternal) material relation that allows man his ability “to be,” and yet is forgotten in a masculine language, allowing his transcendence from the ground of woman who is denied her own ontology. For Fanon, it is the racial other that is taken as the ground and forgotten, blocked from transcendence from the white man’s relegation of the racial Other as object, fixed in the white man’s gaze. Ingram, by proposing a language that is bodily, desires a formulation for an ethical relation to the Other that does not require such a grounding. Instead, she claims that bodies can signify outside of static meanings, and thus, identities are no longer composed of the agential work of a one directional composition (from the outside to the inside). Ingram writes, “Bodies are categorized from the outside- a linguistic act is performed on them by someone or something separate from the body. But if a body could create its own significations, it would not be passive inert screen upon which representations could be grafted from the outside” (19). In other words, if the Cartesian rational human subject has been thought separate from the material world, then the positioning of anything (or anyone) thought tied to materiality becomes oppressed by the image of their essentialized ‘nature,’ an assumption that positions individual differences as explained by inherent, biological characteristics that are imagined as static and unchanging. Race, gender, species, and class are often simultaneously represented as static when examined in context of those material agencies most feared for disrupting the “will” or agency thought central to the “subject.” If for many years the uses of drugs have been taken as a way to denigrate representations of race, gender, class, and ability, reevaluating the directional pulls and pushes of agential forces across the body and the environment, namely the body and drugs, show how forces are able to signify differently than hegemonic discourses through their analysis in drug genre TV and film. These

evaluations set drugs within the same parameters as 'contamination,' as neither purely negative nor positive, but rather, poison and cure. In other words, it would be a mistake to understand drug agencies in binary positions of positive/negative ethical positions given the indeterminate roles drugs play in various situations involving human agencies and identifies. Such indeterminacy breaks through hegemonic representational thinking.

Karen Barad's delineation of quantum physics, one following Neil Bohr's interpretation, positions an ethical framework in which relations in the world make onto-epistemological-ethics indeterminate rather than simply uncertain. "Relata" do not precede their relations (intra-action); they are instead co-constituted by the apparatus of "measurement" and the agency of the "particle" being measured. In other words, it is not that we cannot know (ethical) positions, but it is rather that every (ethical) configuration is emergent in the co-constituted agential cuts enacted in each emerging spatial and temporal contexts. Barad's theory of agential realism is a translation of quantum physics that requires "meeting the universe hallway," taking responsibility for one's own actions while understanding that "free will" is at least partially mediated by the non-human through material-discursive intra-actions.

One of the examples she uses is an alteration of the classic double-slit experiment by Thomas Young. This alteration is called the quantum eraser experiment and it entails taking two entangled particles and directing them into separate sections of the experimental apparatus. Any measurements taken from one side of the apparatus changes the path of the photon in the double-slit part of the apparatus, or vice-versa. By this process, scientists are able to destroy or restore interference patterns in the double-slit experiment apparatus without directly manipulating anything in that part of the apparatus. They are able to achieve these results by manipulating the partner of the double-slit photon either before or after the double slit photon has passed through the

slits. Another variation, called the delayed choice quantum eraser, delays the decision to measure or destroy the “which path” information until after the particle has gone through the slits and has either interfered with itself or not. The results were confusing, implying that an event at a specific time reaches back in time to be a causal factor. However, Barad sees this interpretation as misleading. It focuses on abstract entities rather than inseparable parts of a single phenomenon. She writes that,

If one focuses on abstract entities, the result is utter mystery, we cannot account for the seemingly impossible behavior of atoms. It's not that the experimenter changes a past that had already been present, or that atoms fall in line with a new future simply by erasing information. The point is that the past was simply never there to begin with, and the future is not simply what will unfold; the “past” and the “future” are iteratively reworked and enfolded the iterate practices of spacetime-mattering—including the which slit detection and the subsequent erasure of which-slit information – all are one phenomenon. There is no spooky-action-at-a-distance coordination between individual particles separated in space of individual events separated in time. Space and time are phenomenal, that is, they are intra-actively produced in the making of phenomena; neither space nor time exist as determinate givens outside of phenomena (315).

In other words, according to Barad, any ethical relationship understands that differences are diffractive, or existing within the “other” as one phenomenon. There is no atomistic separation resulting from division into unconnected or antagonistic fragments. Differences cut together and apart simultaneously. Differences exist within diffractive patterns that move toward performative alternatives and “shift the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/ doings/actions” (803). She explains that,

What often appears as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges does not actually entail a relation of absolute exteriority at all. Like the diffraction patterns illuminating the indefinite nature of boundaries—displaying shadows in “light” regions and bright spots in “dark” regions—the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of exteriority within.” This is not a static relationality but a doing—the

enactment of boundaries—that always entails constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability (803).

Her agential realist account allows ethical relationships to acknowledge differences while understanding that a world of integration means that there is no transcendence from the “other.” That is, we need an understanding of agency as “not something that someone or something has” but as a matter of co-agential enactment (826). In other words, translations are about the liminal negotiations of material-discourses that exist in diffractive positions, proclaiming a difference with the recognition that in drawing any line there is a “cutting together-apart” that leaves out parts of integrated phenomena. These inseparable parts of common phenomena, like quantum systems, are not just connected in a conceptual way, but in a material (re)configuration that understands a disruption in categorical thinking does more than create the teleological move from one category to new, as yet signified, categories. Instead, the term “categorization” is itself up for liminal translation. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman write that “attending to materiality erases the commonsensical boundaries between human and nature, body and environment, mind and matter. In short, taking matter seriously entails nothing less than a thorough rethinking of the fundamental categories of Western culture. In the process, these categories may become nearly unrecognizable” (Material Feminisms, 17). Our identities, knowledge, meaning-making endeavors, and material bodies inhabit a threshold that refuses to follow the teleological causality of a ritual undertaking (such as the pharmakos ritual)— a ritual that begins, progresses, and diverges into an absolute difference or is absorbed into sameness.

Nurse Jackie, Breaking Bad, and the Salton Sea

Chapter two functions, in an analysis of the TV drug genre series *Nurse Jackie*, as an example of how drugs and other nonhuman material agencies form co-agential positions with bodies in order to signify identity beyond representational discourses surrounding hegemonic views of women, nurses, mothers, ability narratives, and 'drug users'. I wish to follow Ingram's goal of revealing an ontological ethics of non-representational material discourse. However, I want to examine more closely, not just how the human body has meaning making signficatory potentials (although this is a crucial part), but also how non-human material agencies form liminal agential positions for human agency. In other words, I examine how signficatory potentials are never simply "inside" or "outside" the human material body; rather, the series *Nurse Jackie* shows signficatory agency as possible through liminal human and non-human material positions. This is not in opposition to, or an alternative of, Ingram's analysis; it is, instead, an extension of her material attentiveness that involves the human body, but follows Derrida's deconstruction of presence/absence by attending to what is present in any analysis of human corporeal agency, even when there is no specific presenting of it (specifically, nonhuman matter).

While Ingram's analysis presents a formulation of ethics that recognizes the relationship of an "absolute Other" as integral to realizing an individual's signficatory potential outside of hegemonic representations, Ingram also recognizes that this "Other" is already within. Her reading suggests that "because the capacity to signify beyond the sanctioned or given representations is always already within the subject, authentic Being-in-the-world can occur not only through a turn to the Other, who is thought to represent this outside, but to a turn inward to the potentiality of the self within the self. The figure of

absolute alterity need not reside outside in the physical, unknowable Other, but inside as the physical, unsymbolizable aspect of the self. The ethical relationship with the Other must begin with an awareness of the Other in the self” (67). While Barad and Ingram begin from different places (Barad rejects the absolute Other Ingram embraces) the ethical relationships they imagine break down inside/outside categories and reject representational metaphysics in an attempt to see ethics as only possible in a world of integration and liminal relation rather than transcendence.

By utilizing Ingram’s analysis of the “sensible transcendental” in relation to her understanding of the ethical relation with the Other through signifiatory potentials, I examine how the series *Nurse Jackie* signifies Jackie’s body and drugs as forming co-agential forces for signifying Jackie as “otherwise,” or outside of static hegemonic discourse (or at least in a liminal, but productive position to such discourse). The show’s presentation of the divine as immanent helps to show how Jackie’s signifiatory potential, as woman, mother, spouse, nurse, and drug user, is a potential that is not only discursive, but deeply material; a liminal negotiation with the nonhuman and human material agencies intra-acting her identity. In this way, her Christian-Catholic identity takes on liminal positions that break out of patriarchal religious configurations of the divine. Part of this analysis relies on the integration of the discursive with the material by using the poetry of T.S. Eliot, utilized in the series pilot, in relation to the material configurations of meaning throughout the show. Such juxtaposition enables the realization that her Catholic faith, though stemming from the discursive meaning of the bible, is never transcendent of, or separate from, the material agencies of the world. Chapter two also provides a closer look at how Jackie’s significations outside of hegemonic representational discourse deconstruct ideas about motherhood, especially in relation to her eldest daughter Grace, who has deep anxiety about the porous corporeal

nature of the world she exists in. Grace, also signifying outside of hegemonic representations, becomes a significant driving force for Jackie's relationship with drugs, and thus, with finding a balance between the agencies of matter and discourse.

Chapter three is an analysis of the award winning drug genre TV series *Breaking Bad*. *Breaking Bad* is helpful in understanding the problems associated with the still often pervasive medical model of the impervious or contained human body, as well as the self-reliance of Enlightenment autonomy legacies (today often still tied to gender, race, and class models). Stacy Alaimo's theory of "trans-corporeality" and Barad's theory of intra-action are extremely helpful in delineating why the main character of the show finds himself on a quest for purity in his assemblage with methamphetamine production after his cancer diagnosis. Walter White, though not directly ingesting drugs, deconstructs the idea that drug agencies are "outside" of supposedly autonomous drug free individuals by exemplifying how signifiatory potentials are unable to break with hegemonic discourses when denying contamination as a polysemy. Until Walter recognizes the world as integration rather than an atomistic world of separation, he is unable to relinquish the Cartesian position and form ethical relationships with the pharmakos. The second section of my chapter on *Breaking Bad* is an analysis of Walt Whitman's poetry eluded to within the framework of the show as helpful for understanding the material and the discursive as mutually agential in signifying drug-bodies outside of hegemonic representations. In other words, such an analysis asks what embodied ethics mean if we understood bodies to be unbound and part and particle with the human and nonhuman other.

In addition, and integral to my research, I analyze how neo-noir cinematography explicates material agencies within these films and televisions shows by nature of the disorienting and (human) decentering camera angles, and characters who are morally conflicted and trapped in making choices in difficult situations, often experiencing

complex confusion about their identity in some way (the resolution or irresolution of which expose certain ontological, ethical, and epistemological points of views within American popular culture). Material agencies are often highlighted within the films and series, though many times unintentionally, giving the films and series their own unpredictable agencies. Cinematography connecting material agencies point towards the complication of nonhuman/human and self/other, as well as complications of ethical definitions. Understanding how these films connect moral confusion and material agencies within a complex nexus of individual, social, and environmental complexities and issues will be an important focus for my thesis.

My conclusion will tie together these chapters in order to help answer what ethical positions are possible, or thought possible, given our material-discursive entanglements. Specifically, I examine the narratives of *Nurse Jackie* and *Breaking Bad* in relation to the less recent drug genre film *The Salton Sea*. Through this comparison I examine how, though more recent narratives of the pharmakos have evolved to better deconstruct the representational discourses surrounding the 'drug user' as "scapegoat," (such as in relation to gender, class, and species identities) the presentation of liminal negotiations of the human and nonhuman as intra-acting agencies that understand contamination as a polysemy and bring about new ethical relationships with the "other" have always been a part of the drug genre film tradition. Furthermore, by juxtaposing the *Salton Sea* with *Breaking Bad* and *Nurse Jackie*, a more liminal negotiation of the "pharmakos" is examined. Such an understanding explicates how nonhuman agencies have continually influenced American ideas of identity, materiality, philosophy, and ethics, whether through their specific presenting, or their intentional exclusion, and break down binaries of presence/absence and inside/outside. In other words, ethical responsibility and solutions, especially in an era where causality and effect are themselves complex

notions, are never simply good intentions or goals of peace, but are also the recognition of what we might gain through acknowledgements of the porous and complex “trans-corporeal” natures of bodies in relation.

Chapter 2

Nurse Jackie

“Saint” Jackie’s Sensible Transcendental

Penelope Ingram’s chapter “Embodying Transcendence” utilizes Irigaray’s understanding of the “sensible transcendental” to imagine how static sexual and racial representations can become dynamically resignified through an understanding of the divine in material signifiatory potentials. She tells us that, “Irigaray does not merely theorize her concept of the divine as transcendent, however; she figures the divine as immanent. Indeed, Irigaray’s divine is a paradoxical construction, which she calls the ‘sensible transcendental,’ embodying spirit and flesh” (83). For Irigaray and Ingram, such a configuration allows for the understanding of a signification of women’s bodies beyond the patriarchal traditional Judeo-Christian configurations of a divine linked to the tradition of the Cartesian cogito, where “a rejection of the body, *res extensa*, is the condition for the man’s existence and ultimate transcendence” (72). If woman as opposed to man (as scholars such as Irigaray, Ingram, Alaimo, and many others have noted) is thought tied to nature, and a patriarchal understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition steeped in the traditions of Cartesian cogito view the divine as outside of the material, woman becomes the ground by which man transcends to divine subjecthood. Ingram tells us that,

The grounding to which women are subject in metaphysical philosophy is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition in which God, rather than exemplifying difference, is an ideal projection of the masculine. God thus guarantees the becoming-subject of man. Whereas God is figured as the ideal, as the infinite in man’s horizon of identity, woman can be viewed as the negation of that ideal, through an equally necessary condition for man’s subjecthood. Woman is the base, the earth, the matter from which the form of man emerges in his quest for the infinite (73).

The Showtime series *Nurse Jackie*, a dark drama-comedy exploring the life of New York City ER nurse Jackie Peyton, carefully sets up contaminations in binary identifications of transcendent/immanent, purity/drug addict, soul/body, human agencies/nonhuman agencies, and good/evil. Nonhuman material agencies, including drugs, are central to these punctures. Jackie juggles a home life with her husband and two children, a relationship with her lover and co-worker pharmacist, her work life at All Saints hospital, and her illegal drug use. The series begins in a more neutral light, showing almost an easy co-existence of her drug use and her various relationships, but becomes increasingly critical of Jackie's ability to maintain healthy relationships with the people in her life that attempt to get in the way of her drug usage. This classic narrative is disorganized through agency punctures in hegemonic discourses involving drugs, motherhood, wives, nurses, and other static definitions of cultural identities.

The pilot opens with a scene mimicking narratives of near death experiences through an intense tunnel of bright white light. As the camera focus adjusts, the white light is clearly emanating from a ceiling lamp, disrupting the transcendent idea of a patient entering upwards into an immaterial white nirvana. Instead, deconstructing ideas of transcendent themes, the camera shifts downward towards where Jackie, in a very traditional all white nursing uniform, is sprawled out on the floor clutching and shaking an almost empty pill bottle. The viewer is allowed through this opening scene to temporarily peek into Jackie's drug induced semi-hallucination that will occur in the season finale episode. The traditional nurse uniform and makeup Jackie wears in the scene is in contrast to the wrinkled scrubs and fresh face that Jackie actually wears on a daily basis in the show, already hinting that Jackie will eventually be seen to break out of traditional identity representations. In the season finale's version of the opening scene, Jackie takes a large dose of drugs and hallucinates about family dynamics and identities.

The scene accomplishes a deconstruction of hegemonic discourses involving family dynamics by juxtaposing traditional significations of her husband, children, and her identity as a nurse in her hallucination with the way she and her family fall out of line with traditional discourses throughout the series. Her husband and children smile and wave at her next to a cookie-cutter home, bathed in dream-like whitewashed pastels and a soft camera focus. Her husband wears a pristine clean traditional suit and her girls wear traditional dresses that echo the Shirley Temple episode Jackie had been watching on the hospital TV earlier that day; a show that served to temporarily puncture the harsh material reality of the ER. Not only does the pilot episode break through representational signification of characters by juxtaposing bodies that signify “otherwise” in the episode with this unreal dream-like sequence of bodies that fall in line with hegemonic discourse, the episode portrays these transcendent themes in immanent ways by using Jackie’s drug use as a material co-agential force for the recognition of static representations of bodies. In other words, it is through the very immanent material agency of her drug hallucination that the TV audience and Jackie recognize traditional static hegemonic discourses of identity as chimerical hallucinations of false transcendence, a transcendence of the human from nonhuman matter, denying the co-agential negotiations that allow new meaning making potentials. It is Jackie’s contamination by the nonhuman material agencies of drugs in relation to her spiritual commitments that draw her out of static representations.

During her hallucination the focus of the camera moves from the white light of the overhead lamp towards, unexpectedly, the bottom of Jackie’s shoe, where a bright piece of pink bubble gum is stuck, decentering again the transcendent/immanent binary that is at first attended to in the unearthly, dreamlike, and seeming purity of the scene’s white saturation. Somewhere in this implied white pure transcendence and the decidedly

immanent contaminations of the pink bubblegum and amber pill bottle, Jackie is, despite her traditional uniform, displayed “otherwise,” almost immobile but not quite, alive but presented as a someone dying might be, and thus she appears agential, but not entirely. This is not meant to imply she is in-between the position of transcendence and immanence, good and evil, saintly purity and drug addict; or put another way, she is not in transition from one to the other as would be implied in the traditional ritual of the pharmakos. Rather, Jackie, by signifying “otherwise” throughout the series, exists in liminal spaces that do not transition teleologically as much as they produce indeterminately, deconstructing the narrative of the pharmakos ritual.

For example, during a day of battling life and death issues at the hospital by making morally ambiguous decisions that run contrary to the authoritative rules of the hospital, not to mention being frowned on by wider societal rules, Jackie takes breaks to ingest prescription pills and it is her ingestion of drugs that allow her to continue the fast pace and overtime work the hospital demands, and to shoulder the hard decisions she makes during the process. Following the surreal hallucinatory opening scene the show cuts directly to the bodily realities of the ER as Jackie attends to a bike messenger that has a serious leg injury. She informs the doctor, Fitch Cooper, a young physician who is paying more attention to his phone than his patient, "Head struck, open tib fib, pulse is weak and thready." Though the patient tells her he fine and is in little pain, his body tells a different story; he is unable to show her two fingers when she asks. After an exchange between the patient and the doctor about the latest iPhone, Dr. Cooper simply calls for orthopedics. Jackie, seeing that the man's pupils are unresponsive to light, relies on the patient's bodily reactions to assess his situation rather than focusing, as Copper does, only on the patient's discourse.

Jackie: "Blood in the ear. Let's check for glucose, rule out CSF, all right? This guy needs a scan."

Coop, laughing: " I know what I'm doing. Jesus, bossy. That leg's f---ed up."

Jackie: "Ortho, seriously? He's got a bleed, I'm telling you right now."

Coop: "He's totally lucid, 100%. (To the patient Donovan) Knock knock."

Donovan, the patient: "Who's there?"

After the doctor dismisses Jackie's insistence that he pay attention to what the man's material body is signifying to them, the show cuts to an above image of Jackie standing next to the now deceased bike messenger. Jackie's voiceover tells us the man has suffered "Acute subdural hematoma. The brain puffs up so fast it rips the blood vessels and you bleed to death inside your skull." Just within the first episode Jackie is shown to take a no nonsense roll that is very aware of material bodily reality, lecturing doctors whose egos over their perfect college scores get in the way of their ability to see the material realities of their patients. Or, she can be seen forging signatures on donor records to help save other lives, or comforting the pregnant girlfriend of a recently deceased patient with stolen money from a male patient at the hospital who almost killed a woman by slashing her repeatedly with a knife.

Additionally, her role as a mother and wife are deliberately hidden from the audience during the pilot episode in order to frame her life as a tough hard-working nurse who has a sexual relationship with her pharmacist boyfriend and uses drugs before revealing her family roles. In this way, the audience is forced to re-evaluate Jackie's daily actions with hegemonic ideas about the behavior of a wife and mother. Images surrounding motherhood circulating through media, literature, and cinema typically present a range of stereotypes from the "Madonna" to the "Whore." Jackie's

significations, as a lifesaving nurse, loving mother, drug user, and adulterer place her in a more ambiguous position. Her life does not center on her role as mother, and yet the series portrays her deep devotion to her daughters. Her sexual encounters with her pharmacist boyfriend are not over romanticized. She does not play the naughty nurse, nor does she fall under the category of "saint," though her nursing student calls her one.

Other episodes deconstruct representations of the "Madonna mother" at the same time it brings the divine back to material significations. For example, when Jackie sits contemplative in the hospital chapel watching the statue of the Christian Madonna, the Virgin Mary, she wears a necklace that has a representation of the Virgin Mary on it. She snorts half of a prescription pill and waits expectantly for a sign. As her eyes glaze over and the camera focuses intently on the statue's face of Mary, the expectation of a miracle, perhaps the common portrayal of a bleeding statue, comes to mind. Instead, the camera turns back toward Jackie and blood runs down Jackie's face from her nose. Much like the drug induced hallucination of the opening scene, where the camera builds viewer's expectations for divine spiritual miracles; the show offers instead a more liminal alternative; a scene that feels spiritual, emotional, and meaningful, yet arises from human and nonhuman (Jackie and drugs) intra-actions. Jackie, in these moments, is compared to some of the hegemonic representations of women, mothers, and saints. Yet, instead of the static visual representation of the statue and necklace, Jackie's body signifies her liminal identity by underscoring her drug usage as breaking through "pure" presentations of mothers, women, and saints. This re-enforces how her drug usage causes her to signify otherwise, as neither purely saint nor sinner, as deeply devoted to the divine in her religion and yet she finds the divine in the materially situated.

As Jackie enters her home and her family is revealed to the audience, her voiceover repeats a comment she makes earlier in the show; "It bears repeating," says

her voice over, "make me good, God, but not yet." The line references Saint Augustine, the saint Jackie says she would like to be if she had to pick a saint. When framed with the emphasis the show puts on nonhuman material agencies, such as drugs, the reference does more than reinforce the ambiguity of Jackie's moral choices (Saint Augustine wrote in his work *Confessions* of his battles with aligning his bodily actions with those of his moral faith). The reference serves to frame a larger theme the show revolves around, centering on Jackie's relationship to the divine and the material, and how the audience might come to see hegemonic representations of identity in relation to these important themes.

Saint Augustine's earlier Neoplatonic accounts of the ontological and ethical relationship between the body and the soul have been highly influential in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Stanford Encyclopedia). His understanding of the reliance on the rational mind as the entry to the divine relationship positions the mind as separate from, and uninfluenced by the body. His earlier writing still founds much of the belief in an immaterial soul, a soul that remains in a superior hierarchy to souls that lack the rational *cogitos*. Saint Augustine's thought, for instance, influenced Malebranche's configurations of the Cartesian dichotomy, where the nature of the soul as thinking is distinct from the extended body. A binary division between soul/matter remained predominantly unpopular before much of Augustine's introduction of Platonic conceptions within theological concerns. The Epicureans, Manicheans, Stoics, and Academic skepticism traditions, traditions of thought that Augustine eventually fell out of line with, all held materialist ontologies as unproblematic connections to divine configurations. "But I, conceiving of things corporeally only, was mainly held down, vehemently oppressed and in a manner suffocated by those "masses" ; panting under which after the breath of Thy truth, I could not breathe it pure and untainted" (cxxxix. 22). Contamination of the flesh is then

imagined to be in a purely negative relation to the polysemy contamination. In *Confessions*, his anxiety over imagining the divine God as “bounded” by a corporeal body conveys an anxiety not only of a negative relation to contamination, but also of matter as binding. This sort of specific imagining of the material has resonances with the idea of essentialism, or matter as opposed somehow to the ‘free will’ of the divine.

Much like Ingram’s analysis of Tony Morrison’s *Paradise* using Irigaray’s “sensible transcendental,” Nurse Jackie experiences the divine in relation to the material rather than by transcending it. Her significations as a mother and a woman and her comparison to a saint and to the Virgin Mary place her beyond Saint Augustine’s discourse on the ‘mother’ as negative relation to corporeal contamination through which the divine must transcend rather than find divinity. “His Nature then, being such, I thought could not be born of the Virgin Mary, without being mingled with the flesh: that which I had so figured to myself could be mingled and not defiled, I saw not. I feared, therefore, to believe Him born in the flesh, lest I should be forced to believe him defiled by the flesh” (78). Not only is Mary, the Christian Madonna, thought tied to her impure materiality, Jesus can only transcend his material relation to her by the configuration of the *cogitos* (the rational relation Augustine explicates as tied to the soul), the *cogitos* that must now be in binary opposition to the corporeal nature of the body. Here we have the hegemonic representation the series *Nurse Jackie* deconstructs. For example, the episode “Steak Knife” presents a patriarchal Cartesian delineation of Judeo-Christian discourse through the character of a delusional man that lives in the highest apartment across from the hospital and believes that he is God. God shouts down at Jackie and Jackie’s friend O’Hara and Jackie shouts back up at him, telling him to leave the nurses alone and instead to pick on criminals and white guys for a change. Recognizing O’Hara’s high heels, he asks Jackie who her friend is, adding, “Now *that’s* a woman.”

Jackie responds by telling him he needs to take his prescription drugs. In other words, patriarchal and Cartesian discourses present static representations of “woman” that fall under hegemonic discourses and foreclose other significations. This interpretation leaves Jackie as ground to man’s divine transcendence. Jackie’s suggestion, that the man take his prescription drugs to end his delusion, connects the show’s theme of nonhuman material agencies as integral to an understanding of the sensible transcendental.

Augustine credits the Platonists for teaching him “. . . to seek for a truth which was incorporeal. I came to see your invisible things, understood by those things which are made” (3, VII-20). His early reliance on Greek philosophical traditions and Neoplatonism lead him to a hierarchal understanding of rational intelligence against and contrary to the sensible and physical. Later, his writing would take a more complicated stance on “free will,” that saw human agency as more directed by the non-rational. Such a view still held the rational as the divine link, but positioned human agency as unable to attain it without the pre-determined grace of God. This turn in his writing as compared to Jackie’s narrative structure brings questions as to the direction the writers will take with the series. As of now, the series is on its last season, but has yet to air its conclusion. Given the themes attended to so far, I would hope that the show continues to redirect bodily significations outside of traditional discourse through a kind of “sensible transcendental.” Given that Jackie identifies most closely with the figure of Saint Augustine, it remains to be seen whether Jackie can connect her understanding of the divine and her potential to signify outside of hegemonic discourse through her discursive-material relations, or if static social discourses will overcome her signifiatory potentials.

What seems to be apparent is that the series, like Saint Augustine, is concerned with the category of ‘matter’ and how it relates to the ‘divine’ as well as the ‘discursive.’ Language, for Augustine, gives us equal access to the divine world of reason as well as

an uncomplicated access to the immanent corporeal world of things. The series' concern with rethinking 'matter' and what this means for deconstructing Augustine's divine incorporeal/corporeal binary is evident when Jackie's pharmacist boyfriend Eddie discusses the most recent search for the Higgs particle with her:

Eddie : "All right, there's matter and there's antimatter. When they collide, they annihilate each other, Total annihilation."

Jackie : "Depressing."

Eddie : "No no no, here's what it is. Total annihilation means we shouldn't be here, right? You, me, pencils... gone. This thing in France or wherever is gonna shoot a proton at an antiproton and smash it at the speed of light."

Jackie : "But \$8 billion, really? So what?"

Eddie : "They're looking for the particle that allows matter to connect with other matter and become actual things... You, me, pencils. It's fucking magic, Jackie. It's the God particle. That's what they're looking for. They're looking for God. I'm sorry. I get excited."

Jackie : "You had me at annihilation."

The hunt for the Higgs Boson and what it might tell scientists about the "fundamental laws" of matter incorporates a wide range of phenomena in the delineations of the definition of "matter." However, the "laws" of matter to be "discovered" must be recognized as a specific enactment of how the Higgs particle (or here we could use "god particle") and the way we come to know the Higgs particle are co-constitutive. In other words, Eddie's idea of the divine can be seen in the ontological, epistemological, and ethical co-constitution of material-discursive enactments.

An understanding of the integration of material enactments rather than an atomistic world of separation, an understanding Barad calls intra-action, recognizes that quantum physics has also complicated a stable delineation of “matter” by examining how particles exist in wave potentials and particles. As explicated in the introduction, the double slit experiment shows us that notions of ‘wave’ and ‘particle’ do not refer to inherent characteristics of objects that precedes their intra-action. In other words, there are no pre-existing objects, per se; intra-acting relations are effects. Thus, ethical relationships do not simply “correctly reflect” the “truth” of the characteristics of the “other.” Rather, ethical relationships understand that any enactment of boundaries draw different distinctions between different co-agential intra-actions and understand that until those distinctions are made there is an ontological indeterminacy. Different results mark different intra-actions. (Barad 2003: 815-6, n. 21) No intra-action can be thought of as a simple division between measuring apparatus and what is to be measured. Thus, we must take responsibility for our part in the boundaries that are materially enacted in the world, because such measurements (or enactments) give rise to and preclude ontological possibilities.

Therefore, Jackie and Eddie's discussion of how the Higgs Boson explains the integration and connection of the entire universe also foregrounds the relationship to understanding the divine as ontological potentials within the material. If we take the idea of the divine as “sensible transcendental,” then each intra-action is the very making of an ethical relationship, one that understands divine transcendence *is* dwelling in the immanent. Thus, refusals to use and oppress the “other” by foreclosing their ontological possibilities in the boundaries we enact become an ethical making of our world. This kind of ontological ethics allows the series to dynamically re-signify women's bodies beyond the patriarchal traditional Judeo-Christian configurations of a divine linked to the tradition

of the Cartesian cogito, where “a rejection of the body, *res extensa*, is the condition for the man’s existence and ultimate transcendence” (72).

(Re)presentations of ‘Bad’ Mothers

Nurse Jackie takes on the goal of destabilizing the dominant discourses of “mother” in relation to nonhuman material agencies (namely drugs) and patriarchal translations of Judeo-Christian traditions. If Saint Augustine’s discourse on the ‘mother’ forms a negative relation to corporeal contamination, a contamination that the divine must transcend rather than find divinity in, the series endeavors to show a complex presentation of the corporeal that rethinks the definition of “impure” as purely negative contamination, thus making room for the divine in relation to a positive view of matter, and subsequently, a positive view of Jackie and “mother.” In other words, instead of distancing Jackie from definitions seen as tied to the material, the show endeavors to bring the divine into matter. Rethinking matter as a “sensible transcendental,” rather than ground through which the Cartesian male subject transcends, rethinks definitions of “mothers” and “women” as also part of the divine. However, it is important not to recast that divine potential as static presentations of representational discourses positioning “mother” in binaries of good/bad, because in doing so the ontological potentials of the divine are obliterated in static discourse. Robyn Longhust writes in her work *Gender, Bodies, and Space*, “Eradicating the thinking that constructs some mothers as good and some as bad, some as having and some as lacking, is what is required. This means rethinking politics of ethnicity, age, sexuality, disability, class and so on because the terrain of the bad mother is intersected and informed by these different axes of embodied subjectivity” (121). Additionally, she notes that, “Bad mothers are often presumed to be

lacking in some way. Lesbian mothers are thought to be lacking a man. Mothers on Welfare are thought to be lacking financial resources. Drug dependent mothers are thought to be lacking willpower and self-control to quit their drug habit. Mothers who do not live in nuclear families are thought to be lacking 'proper' families. Teenage mothers are thought to be lacking in maturity and mothering skills" (118). Jackie, seen as lacking autonomy through her drug usage, is therefore seen as doubly tied to "nature" through her contamination by drugs and the definitions of "woman" and "mother."

When Jackie befriends a teenager she meets in drug rehab, she reveals to him and to the audience for the first time that her drug usage did not begin with her back pain. Rather, her use of drugs began when she gave birth to her first born child, Grace, and the difficulties of maintaining the dominant ideologies of motherhood overwhelmed her body. Therefore, the first time she reached towards the use of drugs was to help her better deal with motherhood and better fall in line with hegemonic discourses surrounding "motherhood." When Jackie goes through a detoxification of drugs, it coincides with her daughter moving in with Jackie's ex-husband and her daughter declaring that she no longer needs Jackie. When Grace returns to Jackie's home in need of help, Jackie's boyfriend begs Jackie to send Grace back to her ex-husband so that Jackie can concentrate on herself and her sobriety. However, despite the often held representation of the drug user as selfish in their bodily desires, Jackie's drug use enables her to be more selfless. She pops a pill and brings her daughter dinner, proclaiming to her boyfriend that her daughter needs her "mother." In other words, Jackie consumes drugs, at least partially, because she believes Grace needs the "mother" that fulfills social expectations of the definition of mothers, selfless. Paradoxically, the drugs that help her to fall into so many hegemonic discourses, such the supposed selflessness of

motherhood and the rational and unemotional nurse, also scripts her outside of those representations.

For example, the dream-like drug induced hallucination of Jackie's family in the series finale of season one presents her daughter Grace as the tap-dancing doppelganger of Shirley Temple. However, Grace's position in the series recognizes how her material body signifies outside of such static discourses. Jackie, upset that her eldest daughter has a hard time reconciling Jackie's position as working mother, asks Grace to join her in a tap dance class after Jackie sees Shirley Temple performing on the ER television. Jackie's desire is to better place their relationship into hegemonic discourses surrounding daughters and mothers. The series frames the mother-daughter dance routine as a performance that recapitulates hegemonic discourses determining how bodies should relate to each other in social prescriptions. However, Grace's desire to dance her own way in the routine causes a disruption in the dance line and, at the same time, echoes the way Grace's body signifies outside of social prescriptions in other ways throughout the series.

One example of Grace's nonrepresentational significations shows Jackie called to a meeting at Grace's public school because Grace's representations of her family and the environment do not match other children's representations. Her art work seems devoid of bright colors and her skies lack the bright sunshine other students draw. Her teachers are worried that, combined with Grace's deep interest with anything causing contamination (such as germs, plague, murder, and war), the representations that Grace depicts are a reflection of her need to be on some kind of drug to help her cope with anxiety. Jackie, disgusted that they would assume drugs are the first course of action, decides that it is her school that needs to be changed, not her body chemistry. Indeed, the change in schooling does help for a time. Grace is happy when her fascination with

how religious saints die is rewarded and encouraged in her new Catholic school. The divine, for Grace, is able to coincide with material permeability, a corporeal permeability she is encouraged to speak about at her new school. Eventually, however, Grace's depression over human permeability leads her to negative bodily significations, such as pulling out her own hair due to stress. Grace decides, in conjunction with her therapist and against her mother's wishes, that drugs are the answer to restore her ability to control her body.

Therefore, Jackie's desire to protect Grace's nonrepresentational corporeal significations throughout the series is exemplified in the mother-daughter dance scene. Jackie repeatedly asks the girl dancing next to her at the mother-daughter dance class to make room for Grace's dancing and the resulting commotion ends in Jackie and Grace being asked to leave the class. Jackie's almost manic defense that results in her cussing at the other girl's mother is a result of her drug use during the class. In this way, Jackie defends Grace's bodily significations, but does so in an inappropriate social manner. She tries the polite and approved discourse first, but when this fails she utilizes her ability to break out of that discourse and the drugs help her to shoulder any social disgrace that brings. This results in their expulsion from the class (or, in other words, from mother-daughter representational discourses) and Grace's disappointment bleeds over into hatred for her mother. It seems that the static nature of representational discourse, rather than simply Jackie's drug use, is the root cause of Jackie and Grace's mother-daughter relationship difficulties. Grace desires her mother to signify inside social prescriptions while Jackie desires to defend her own, and her daughter's, ontological freedoms. It is clear from this example that ethical relationships become strained when static discourses surrounding identity require relationships to perform in prescriptive ways.

While Jackie is the primary example of the narrative's pharmakos that deconstructs "mother" discourse through nonhuman material intra-actions, patients entering All Saints Hospital also do the work of signifying corporeal bodies "otherwise" to hegemonic discourse. For example, in the episode "Slow Growing Monsters," a female patient is admitted for treatment to her hand after she became drunk and disorderly. The swelling of her abdomen suggests the woman is obviously pregnant, and yet, contrary to the socially accepted discourse surrounding mothers, the woman has consumed a large amount of drugs (alcohol) and then offers one of the male nurses a blow job. Her behavior is outside what is thought acceptable for a pregnant woman and the staff is obviously shocked at the discord between her bodily significations and their ideas about what that signification should be, namely, pious, pure, and submissive. However, a quick ultrasound reveals that the woman is not pregnant (something the woman already knew), but instead is dying of invasive and inoperable tumors. If, as Ingram believes, "The symbolic identities of subjects are shored up in the imaginary stage by family and society, which constantly affirm the categories already in place, thus preventing other representations or morphological categories to arise," then it is the gaze of the "other," a gaze that attempts to fix the identification of this woman's pregnant abdomen into the formulation "mother" and all the heavy burdens of representation that term affords, and the woman's intent that it do so, that makes the misrepresentation so powerful. Ingram writes that such misrecognized materiality "bears witness to the kinds of ruptures which undergird all representations, hence the need for the repressive Law." Thus, while the woman's bodily significations are caused by the agency of her tumors, she re-signifies by intentionally using the representations the "other" might place on her in order to subvert those expectations. By doing so, the viewers are given the chance to re-think their own prejudices about the definition of "mother."

Material-Discursive Translations through the Poetry of T.S. Elliot

Jackie's voice-over in the pilot episode begins by quoting the beginning of a poem by T.S. Eliot that a nun from her childhood had taught her, "Let us go then, you and I, when the evening is spread out against the sky, like a patient etherized upon a table." "T.S. Eliot," she says, "tenth grade English. Sister Jane Deshuntele. What a champ. She's the one who told me that the people with the greatest capacity for good are the ones with the greatest capacity for evil. Smart fucking nun."

J. Hillis Miller writes in his analysis of the poem that "In this time of endless repetition Prufrock cannot disturb the universe even if he should presume to try to do so. Everything that might happen is foreknown, and in a world where only one mind exists the foreknown has in effect already happened and no action is possible. Prufrock's infirmity of will is not so much a moral deficiency as a consequence of his subjectivism." However, re-reading Eliot's poem in a liminal relation to the material agential concerns the series *Nurse Jackie* attends to allows for a New Materialist interpretation that encourages us to see how traditional meanings within Eliot's poem can be undone, as well as lead to new insights in the series *Nurse Jackie*. For example, the poem's stream of consciousness theme implying the totality of subjectivism is in contrast with the invitation the poem gives for a journey between "you and I." Subjectivism, associated with Descartes's dictum, positions mental activity as the only truth of our experience.

And I have known the eyes already, known them all

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin

The above portion of the poem suggests that the static representations of Prufrock, thought to already be known, foreclose his ontological possibilities and leave him "formulated." If subjective experience, however, becomes the measure of all things, formulating representations in a one directional agency, the poem suggests, by giving agency to multiple nonhuman "objects," that subjectivism is undone through co-agencies. This undoing, suggested in the "you and I," allows for the ethical relationship with the "other," one that deconstructs the formulation of subjectivism by sharing a journey that refuses an absolute, static, one directional meaning.

That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all.

Finding meaning in the poem becomes an integrated journey between Eliot and the reader, as well as the nonhuman "objects" that form co-agential indeterminate readings. Unless, that is, the reader seeks to fix the poem's meaning too securely, having "eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase." Marshal Olds writes of Eliot's work, "The physical universe, then, is a kind of language that invites a privileged spectator to decipher it, although this does not yield a single message so much as a superior network of associations" (Literary Symbolism 155-162). The physical, the corporeal, and the nonhuman are a part of the journey, a kind of corporeal language that has resonance with Barad's intra-acting universe and Ingram's signifying matter. The poem frames

Jackie's invitation with Prufrock's invitation, "you and I," that invokes these key elements in breaking down discursive/material, self/other, and subject/object binaries in making meaning throughout Jackie's pharmakos narrative, as well as anticipates the fluidity of nonrepresentational identities within the liminal space of more than one agential force.

Scholar Bill Brown sees late nineteenth and early twentieth century American literature as a time of object proliferation through efficient production techniques, and an ambivalence towards "things" in the writing of authors during this time period who present (whether intended or not) work highlighting the way "human subjects and inanimate objects may be said to constitute one another" (25). Brown explicates, "An object's capacity to materialize identity remains contingent beyond the bounds of democracy and its consumer culture" (25). Surrounded by so many objects that "we gather" and that "gather us" in the era of modernity, Brown describes this as a "slippage between having (possessing a particular object) and being (the identification of one's self with that object)" and that such a slippage sheds light on "the indeterminate ontology where things seem slightly human and humans seem slightly thing-like (13). Whether Jackie "possesses" drugs or the drugs "possess" her is a negotiation that examines how such a slippage breaks down ontological distinctions of "Dasein" and non-Dasein agencies. In other words, Being has everything to do with nonhuman material encounters, and Jackie's relation to drugs throughout the series point towards such a slippage.

Her slightly thing-like position sprawled out on the bathroom floor in the opening scene due to her drug use is one example of such slippage. In addition, the opening credits of each episode presents objects that might typically be seen as determined by social discourse as instead pushing back through material presence by mediating and translating Jackie's identity through their material agencies. A wedding ring, a necklace of the virgin Mary, coffee, prescription pills, and a stethoscope all move through the space

around Jackie in a hyper-presentation of agency that defies any need for human manipulation. Thus, the opening credit scene attends to concerns like Brown's analysis of "things," translating material agency by showing that even as modern humans manipulate matter in mass, matter is never simply relegated to subordination or background; rather, it exerts its own force on the human, mediating our own thoughts and identities. For example, the episode "Ring Finger" Jackie is unable to remove her wedding ring from her finger as she does every day when she arrives at work so that her co-worker and lover, Eddie, will not discover she is married. The drugs she takes change her body chemistry and allow her to withstand breaking her own finger so that she can explain to her husband why she had to cut the ring from her finger. This scene works in a two-fold way by suggesting Jackie is unable to break from the cultural significance of the ring without the material agency of the pain numbing drug (mirroring the way her bodily need for drugs lead her away from hegemonic discourse of socially approved monogamous marriage and to her pharmacist lover who can supply her with drugs), and by showing the actual material of the ring to exert its own agency over Jackie's intentions.

Furthermore, given how poems are created and occupy the category of "thing" themselves, at the same time they are cultural products, it is interesting to see how such a production mediates the way we see ourselves, forming layers of meaning between the nonhuman actors the author has encountered, the ideas generated by these encounters, the text the author then produces through these mediations, and the mediation of the text itself colliding with the reader (whose identity, in turn, is shaped by the poem in relation to the reader's previous encounters with nonhuman agencies). For instance, the way I might read of a glass of wine while drinking a glass of wine that modifies my mental perspectives and capacities creates a slippage of "having" and "being" that produces layers of human-nonhuman material-discursive agencies. T.S. Eliot's poem is full of, and

mediated by, the encounters of nonhuman things as person-like and humans as thing-like. “Yellow fog” acts and shapes. Fog rubs, licks, lingers, leaps, slips by, and curls up for a sleep. “Yellow fog” slides, prepares, murders and creates through hundreds of “visions and revisions” (279). Nonhuman agencies puncture and make up human agencies. Human subject and nonhuman object are complicated when fog appears to have body parts, backs and faces, and inanimate objects like lamps are revealed to be more animate than previously acknowledged. Fog is not simply “human-like,” rather, it has the ability to create “faces,” or, in other words, mediate identity. Other “objects” in the poem cause actions and reactions. Perfume causes digression; lamplight mediates perceptions of light brown hair. Having and using coffee spoons, the fetish of habit, creates an intimacy between human and nonhuman things that mediate how the speaker of the poem measures his or her life.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;

These measurements, habits, and mediations are beyond consumption and beyond consumerism. Instead, they linger in co-constitutive being. Conversely, the speaker’s contribution in his or her own stream of consciousness (or identity) is co-created by the invitation of the reader to come along on this journey, a journey where the speaker understands that his or her own head, or “cogito,” in this journey of consciousness is not the central agency for identity. The line, “Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter, I am no prophet- and here’s no great matter” suggests that identity creation is not simply a matter of the human consciousness

severed from the environment and prophet to its own creation; it is no “great matter,” or rather, is not an all-encompassing material agency that represents other agencies. Such an understanding in relation to a translation of Jackie’s narrative deconstructs subjectivism.

Biblically, the line is an allusion to John the Baptist, whose head was delivered to Salome by Herod as a reward for her dancing. I argue here that the series takes a discursive Christian allusion and grounds it in material concerns so as to position Jackie in the series, who is thought doubly tied to matter through her drug usage and through her identity as a woman, as able to be read through the “sensible transcendental.” I do not suggest this is a rejection or acceptance of the religious doctrine the allusions references, rather I see this as the show’s recognition that immanent matter is central to any construction of the divine. For instance, in a later scene of the same episode, Jackie and her co-worker, Mo Mo, are sharing confessions from their day to each other in the hospital chapel. They both contemplate, while looking at a religious painting in which John The Baptist’s head is presented on a platter, what food would have gone best with his head, “Cole slaw. No, mac and cheese.” Similar to the scene depicting Jackie’s nose bleed discussed in section one of this chapter, these examples are typical of the scenes the show portrays when the nurses and doctors go to the chapel to talk about and escape their daily troubles at the hospital. A place that is often thought to be for communion with the immaterial transcendent is a place where the human head, or “cogito” of the religious prophet John the Baptist, goes well with regular everyday human sustaining materials.

The poem’s other biblical allusion, “I am Lazarus, come from the dead,” might then be interpreted as a proclamation of Being, “I” is made up of and constituted by supposedly un-agential nonhuman matter come to life, co-agential in human identity. Here, meaning and ontology can no longer be simply severed from the environment, from

things, from materiality, and thought of as simple subject/object dichotomies. For example, Eliot writes, “No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; Am an attendant lord, one that will do To swell a progress, start a scene or two, Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool, Deferential, glad to be of use” (281). Such an attendant is not the central maker of meaning and Being. Rather, the human consciousness only “starts a scene or two” and is “at time, the Fool.” The rest of the scene must star nonhuman agents in order to produce the play of life. Seemingly trivial interactions with brushes, (“Shall I part my hair behind?”), and consumption of peaches, (“Do I dare to eat a peach?”), become enormously important part of the poem, even daring “intra-actions” that create and destroy through encounters between the material agencies of humans and “things.”

This intra-action is an ethical place that mediates emergences within the world and the realization of such a dynamic relation saves us from “drowning” in our own anthropocentric dreams of mastery, a mastery where the nonhuman is imagined as merely background for manipulation. The ethical relation that nonrepresentational and material-discursive integration enables is nicely summarized by Ingram when she writes that,

For woman to develop her own ontology, she must celebrate the material, the matter that she has been relegated to, as well as locating and celebrating the cosmic, the divine, and the transcendental in herself. For woman this involves celebrating her sexual and spiritual body and not merely her maternal one. In doing so, she will remove herself from her position as ground. The sensible transcendental is thus integral to a nongrounded metaphysics, in which authentic Being-in-the-world can be revealed, and to the ethical relationship (83).

The divine becomes a recognition of “trans-corporeal” life, or integration, and never of the transcendence of a Cartesian patriarchal subject from a material relation to the “other.”

Reading T.S. Eliot’s poem in relation to the drug genre series *Nurse Jackie* translates Jackie’s pharmakos narrative as one that explicates ethics through the inseparable intra-

action of human and nonhuman matter, the maternal, and woman in positive relation to the divine.

Chapter 3

Breaking Bad

Drugs and Side Effects: A Brief History

Drugs have been produced and used in the name of “freedom” for many generations – freedom from sickness, freedom from physical states such as depression, pain, and anguish, and even freedom from addictions. Governments have used drugs in their fight for freedom – to fund international wars through money obtained in the “war on drugs,” and in prescribing drugs to make faster, braver, and more alert soldiers fighting in the name of freedom from a “foreign” enemy. Methamphetamines and amphetamines, the drugs most central in the TV series *Breaking Bad*, share in these narratives of “freedom,” as well as their supposed “opposites”, the narratives of addiction, of sickness, loss of freedom or free will, and of those we alienate, the *pharmakos*.

Amphetamines, the drugs methamphetamines were derived from, were first synthesized in Germany in 1887. In order to market the discovery, amphetamines were originally prescribed as a remedy for various ailments like depression and decongestion. In the 1930s they were almost exclusively used in inhaler form as a remedy for asthma and colds until 1937, when amphetamines became available in pill form. World War II saw widespread use of amphetamines to keep soldiers awake and alert during battle, as well as to improve performance in US soldiers during the Vietnam War. Readily available in the United States, college students, truck drivers, and athletes were common users. House wives were marketed the drug to make them slimmer, more sexually driven, productive wives and mothers. US presidents, including JFK, are rumored to regularly take amphetamines for energy during a grueling day of work. Until the 1960s,

amphetamines enjoyed a period of market prosperity in the legally manufactured tablet form and were used to curb additions to food and help individuals lose weight, boost mood, or to treat narcolepsy. Post-war, the Japanese government distributed US produced Dexedrine wholesale to its population in order to reduce hunger symptoms and increase the work production of its citizens, and by 1954 it was estimated that around two to ten percent of the Japanese people used the drug on a regular basis.

In 1919, Japan discovered how to make the drug methamphetamine from amphetamine. Methamphetamines, more potent and easier to make than amphetamines, were fairly inexpensive, contributing to their popularity. The US still legally prescribes methamphetamine hydrochloride use under the name Desoxyn to treat ADHD and to aid in weight loss. The primary users of Desoxyn are children over the age of 12 who are considered to have undesirable and abnormal attention and learning behaviors. In the 1960s methamphetamines became very popular due to their ease in use as an injectable that is said to produce a stronger high. It was not until 1970, many years after being hailed as a widespread remedy, that the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) was put in place to curb the widespread use of the legal production of injectable methamphetamine. Jack Stevenson writes, "There were no laws against narcotic use and possession at the turn of the century, and drug addiction via use of pain killers and "energizers" carried no moral stigma and was certainly not considered to be the mark of depraved criminality that it soon would be" (13).

When examining the histories of these drugs it is apparent that drugs have been used to encourage, as well as to deconstruct, hegemonic representations of what individuals should or should not be. In other words, the social representations of privileged "norms" of identity: what a wife, mother, student, soldier, child, or state of "health" are thought to productively entail, are also tied up with the same substances that

also produce ideas of sickness, immorality, and loss of self. Such a realization points, not only towards the unpredictable agencies of drugs where their contamination is both remedy and poison, but also culturally driven ideas about drugs and 'drug users' or producers. Overlapping the positive and negative narratives of contamination might help deconstruct how definitions of health/toxicity, free-will/addiction, and self/other are both culturally and materially situated.

Rather than ignoring the narratives of the *pharmakos*, which, unfortunately, would not satiate an American audience's desire to radically alienate the "other," and would, more importantly, set a false "outside" to which we can place our "new" narratives of inclusion, *Breaking Bad* lives somewhere on the radical medium, re-creating the narratives of the *pharmakos* while also changing them from the inside. The show's protagonist, Walter White, is sacrificed and alienated from society through his sensuous relation with drugs. It is, however, a relation of production rather than ingestion, skewing classic narratives of addiction. *Breaking Bad* is, in some ways, a classic *pharmakos* narrative. The show tells the story a middle class American family whose lives spiral out of control due to an association with drugs. Walter White, a loving husband and father, finds himself producing and selling methamphetamines in order to support his wife, son, and new daughter after Walter is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Walter, having seen a drug bust on TV that his DEA brother-in-law Hank had led, became impressed by the amount of money that one drug bust was able to confiscate and was inspired to secretly produce and sell meth to support his family and pay for his cancer treatments. Walter White is an award winning chemist, but after leaving the very successful company he helped found after a failed relationship with one of the co-founders, Walter began teaching high school chemistry and barely making ends meet. His brother-in-law, Hank, agrees to take Walter for a drug bust ride along at Walter's request. It is through this ride

along that Walter recognizes a former student of his escaping the drug bust. This student, Jesse Pinkman, will serve as Walter's introduction into the drug world.

However, Jesse also serves a more important role for the series, one that the show did not plan on continuing past the first season; Jesse serves as the pharmakos that disorganizes traditional representations of drug users through his moral compass and compassion. It is through a relationship between these two men: Walter, who desires to control material agencies at all costs through an obsession with purity in his drug products, and Jesse, the 'drug user' Walter seeks to control as well, that the show disorganizes classic hegemonic representations of drug contamination that have plagued American film and TV for generations. In other words, though Walter never ingests the meth he produces, Walter has a very strong "addiction," a compulsion that I argue plagues Western identities more than any other, for the nature of this compulsion lies in something more familiar to those that deny material agencies as having any part in their identities; Walter's compulsion is that of expelling contamination.

Vince Gilligan, the director of the series, explains in an interview that the title "Breaking Bad" comes from a southern colloquialism that generally means "raising hell," and refers to the terrible breaking down of moral actions of people who begin to make unethical choices. While I do not stand in opposition to this translation of the show, I endeavor to highlight the moral choices Walter White must make as complicated, not only by culturally situated difficulties, but also non-human material agencies. In fact, intentional or not, the agency of the series insists on this realization. For example, "Breaking Bad" is visually presented at the start of each episode with the beginning two letters in each of the title's words, "Breaking" and "Bad," boxed into squares as elements that appear in the periodic table. Thus, I mean to suggest that the title points toward the show's most pressing theme, "breaking" down what constitutes being "bad" in a world

where material-discursive agencies place free will in question around every ethical turn. Therefore, the show presents opportunities to ask what ethical agencies look like that are our own, but never completely our own.

Brett Martin believes that, "Walt's journey to darkness was not the only way in which *Breaking Bad* would come to seem like both an echo of and an answer to *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, and other shows that had ushered in the Third Golden Age. Walter's wife, Skyler, played by Anna Gunn, would end up as a distant sister-wife to Carmela Soprano, grappling with her husband's crimes and their implications, especially for her children, to a degree that her predecessor never did. More important, whereas the antiheroes of those earlier series were at least arguably the victims of their circumstances— family, society, addiction, and so on— Walter White was insistently, unambiguously, an agent with free will. His journey became a grotesque magnification of the American ethos of self-actualization, Oprah Winfrey's exhortation that all must find and "live your best life" (Kindle Locations 4350-4356). Of course, no one would dispute that Walter is increasingly controlling throughout the series, leaving moral ambiguity behind as he places his family in danger, poisons children, and resorts to other numerous violent measures. However, I argue that while the show presents Walter as insistently, unambiguously, in a quest for autonomy and free-will, he never actually possesses such purity. It is, in fact, his misunderstanding of, and desire to expel these contaminations that drive him into such violent situations.

Whether intentional or not, noir cinematography aids in such interpretations. Objects like gas masks find their way from one episode (first, as an aid for Walter to cook meth and kill violent drug dealers) into another (evidence used to track meth production by the DEA), and organize or disorganize various human material-discursive intentions. The magnetic machine Walter uses to destroy electronic evidence also breaks a picture

frame in the evidence locker that conceals a Swiss bank account number. Jane, Jesse's girlfriend that dies, is remembered by Jesse through her lingering lipstick print on a cigarette and her cell phone voice recording that survives her extinction and drives Jesse deeper into depression until they are no longer available to him. Ted Beneke, Walter's wife Skylar's employer and lover, attempts to flee from Goodman's men, trips on a rug, and crashes headfirst into a piece of furniture. The rug, rather than the intentions of Goodman's men, is Beneke's downfall. Nonhuman things matter. The cinematography of the show also suggests this by framing close shots that either focus first on nonhuman "things" before panning out to view the human, or presenting the angle of the camera gaze from the view of the nonhuman and back again. This reversal disorients the viewer and causes us to decenter the human throughout the series. In addition, the majority of the shots involving dramatic acts of human agency, violence for example, pan out away from the action to engulf the human within the environment, putting the agency of the human in a smaller perspective than the agency of the environment and then reversing this. In this way, "background" is put into question. Neither the human nor the non-human is truly background in their intra-active becoming.

Contamination in the Perspectives of Walter/Jane

Walter's diagnosis of late stage inoperable lung cancer and subsequent obsession with purity and control (both in his meth product, his family relationships, and his other surroundings) expose his difficulty with accepting his body as, what scholar Stacy Alaimo calls, "trans-corporeal." Through his production of nearly pure methamphetamines Walter attempts to provide himself a legacy, an extension beyond the vulnerable existence of his "trans-corporeal" body. Therefore, matter organizes him in

both his vulnerability to it (his cancer diagnosis), and his desire to control it (his obsession with drug purity). Stacy Alaimo's ethical perspective in her work *Bodily Natures* considers the scientific, political, and personal struggles that occur when "human" and "environment" are thought as separate and dismissed. She writes that, "By emphasizing the movement across bodies, trans-corporeality reveals interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures. But by underscoring that *trans* indicates movement across different sites, trans-corporeality also opens up a mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (Kindle Loc 124). When utilizing the "trans-corporeal" perspectives of contamination that break down simplified ethical perspectives, there is one episode in *Breaking Bad* that I argue points toward the important theme of contamination guiding Walter's quest for purity. This episode, "The Fly," will provide a more nuanced examination of the polysemy "contamination."

In "The Fly," Walter obsesses over his meth production calculations. Deep into methamphetamine production, he produces drugs in a super-lab hidden in the basement of a laundry business. Attempting to perfect the methamphetamine he produces, Walter clings to his belief that purity is possible and that matter can be completely controlled. It is Walter's deep vulnerability from his cancer diagnosis, a vulnerability that exposes to him the agential forces of matter against human intentions, which drives Walter's obsession to produce such purity and control over matter in his obsession with methamphetamines. Indeed, in terms of his meth product he comes close to purity, but the boundaries between things and his meth product continue to breakdown. Walter's calculations for the product output of his and Jesse's efforts show that .114% of the product is missing. As he holds out the paper with his calculations of missing product, a fly lands on the paper and

the camera shot focuses on the fly, relating the contamination inherent in the missing product with the fly as contamination.

Contamination, even with the energy Walter puts into the precision of chemical production, eludes those that seek to completely expel it. Indeed, Walter spends the totality of the episode with a great many mishaps and failures, attempting to remove the contamination of a single fly from the underground facility. The fly invades not only the environment of the lab, but also the anthropocentrism of human endeavors. The fly is, of course, meant to serve as a representational role for contamination. But, pushing this a bit further we can see that the materiality of the fly's being is perhaps the most powerful agential force in the episode, for the entirety of the episode revolves around its presence. Camera shots throughout the episode decenter the human by taking the perspective of the fly, the human, and even the equipment – multiple camera perspectives insisting on multiple agencies.

Jesse, unlike many of the characters in the show, feels joy and empathy towards beings in the world. He has a particular “weakness” for wanting to protect children (one that Walter and others exploit to manipulate him), but also he sees value in his fellow drug dealers and drug users, as well as value in insects. In order to frame “The Fly” episode, it is important to note that Jesse is the kind of person that “wouldn't hurt a fly,” as the saying goes. For example, the episode “Peekaboo” shows Jesse pick up a beetle, find joy in it and then carefully place it safely on the ground. Shortly thereafter, his fellow drug dealer steps on and kills the beetle without giving it a second thought. Hank's proclamation in the episode “Breakage” that everyone kills cockroaches (an insect that he compares to drug users) – “I mean, you don't think about it, you stomp them down” he says – is proved wrong in the episode “Blood Money,” when Jesse watches a cockroach make its way across his coffee table unharmed. Jesse is one of the only characters that

see worth in the stereotyped human and the nonhuman. However, seeing Walter's despair during his quest to de-contaminate the lab from the fly becomes too much for Jesse and Jesse kills the fly for Walter. The death is dramatic. The camera shows the fly's fall to the ground in terrible slow motion, pointing towards the significance of its death. The episode also shows how Walter's violence spreads to those who intra-act with him, a cancerous contamination of the inability to see how his own choices change emergent ethical possibilities for others.

As noted in earlier in Barad's delineation of ethics and ontology, our parts in the co-agential intra-actions of phenomena not only help guide future ethical possibilities, but simultaneously exclude the production of other ethical possibilities. Therefore, every part that Walter has in trans-ethical apparatuses becomes the shaping of our world. Ethics, according to Barad, are a "doing" and a "becoming in the world" that helps determine future ethical possibilities. Despite Jesse's ability to kill the fly, Walter is proven correct, "It's all contaminated," and when Walter awakens the next day he will stare at his ceiling where the black outline of a fly again contaminates his environment. The act of Jesse killing the fly foreshadows the human lives Jesse will eventually take for Walter, but also that this particular death, the death of this particular fly, is important. It is not simply a symbol of contamination, nor a symbol for the beginning of Jesse's future ethical falters, but the real death and loss of a fly.

Transcendentalist perspectives are good examples of the ambiguity surrounding the way humans have often viewed their relations to nonhuman animals. Neil Matheson's analysis of "Animal Sympathies in Walden," critiques Thoreau as presenting "animal nature" as an abject nature within the human that exists as an interloper whose expulsion is like a "tail that cannot be extracted from our vitals." Drug users are often seen to embody abject or "animalistic" natures that position them between the folds of animal and

human existences in the eyes of society. Matheson tells us that Thoreau complicates a perspective of a “separate” animal nature contaminating the human by Thoreau’s suggestion of close proximity with nonhuman animals and “nature” as healing serum for humans from the “contamination” of the body by civilization. This “cultural incoherence,” one that sees proximity to material “Nature” and animals as healing, at the same time it composes natures *of* animals as abject and contaminating, is the product of nature/culture binaries that set up “real” human nature as pure, transcendent, and distinct from “Nature,” a nature that then contains whatever the human is seen not to be. It is only through the episode’s close examination of the fly’s materiality that the audience is able to see how Walter’s desire for transcendence from nonhuman material agencies manipulates Jesse into killing the fly. Its death is an example of how denying the polysemy “contamination” results in using the nonhuman animal as a ground for a false transcendence from matter.

Writer and Professor William Cronon examines in his piece “The Trouble With Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” how for Thoreau the experience *wildness*, not wilderness, is the healing serum for contamination of the body by civilization. “Wildness,” Cronon says, is already inside, portable. Though not stated as such by Cronon, though certainly imagined by recent new materialism scholarship, this sort of wildness could be imagined as nonhuman material agency, evasive of human mastery and manipulation. In other words, what needs to be healed is a belief in the total mastery of nonhuman agencies, a state of mind that can be seen to be part of the “illness” of current thought that might precisely be the arrogance needing to be “cured.” Humans fear accepting a “contaminant” as an integral part of their identity. This fear points to more than fear of toxic contamination, it moves towards a fear of the agencies of nonhuman material forces. And yet, as other scholars before me have pointed out, we

are made up by the intra-action of “others” that literally construct us; cells, bacteria, viruses, and other organisms that are part of us and others simultaneously. “Proximity and mutually negotiated spaces” between human and nonhuman animals become part of understanding intra-active becoming and mutually negotiated agencies that involve “wildness,” or the material agency of “trans-corporeality” within, outside, and across the human animal and nonhuman animal as a part of the environment. By analyzing the episode, “The Fly,” the use of the “animal” as a static representational symbol for contamination of “transcendent” human ethical behavior is challenged in this episode; it instead points to the importance of ethical concern and value for the nonhuman (the fly) and human (specifically, the human ‘drug user’) at the same time.

The opening scene of the episode starts with an extreme close-up of a fly, bringing the fly to the size of the screen so that the viewer is able to see the fleshy details of its body. This perspective forces the viewer to see more than a pesky dot engulfed by the environment, but rather the specific material of its being. The close shot, filling the screen with moving insect legs, eyes, mouth, and wings, forces the viewer to look at and confront the feeling of the abject. A lullaby plays simultaneously, adding to a disjuncting affect that conjures up images of the tender care of an infant, replacing it with the body of the fly, one of the non-human animals least thought of by humans as something to care for. Flies are sought out and exterminated, thought of as pests, or tools in scientific knowledge; images of their sticky hairy feet carrying the contamination of diseases to plates of picnic food might come to mind. Images of infant flies, or maggots - as the lullaby urges us towards - might herald ideas of death and rot, and when thought of as such, flies are discriminated against. But there is beauty and value in the amazing perspectives of flies who utilize what humans find abject. Julia Kristeva tells us in her work, “The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,” abjection is “the place where I am

not. The abject threatens life; it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self" (1). Flies covet and inhabit places the human might consider putrid contamination; warm moist places like feces and decaying flesh become life giving havens. They vomit and then, rather than finding the excretion as something "foreign" and abject, they utilize it, softening their food and then ingesting the mixture. Flies decenter, flies exist in liminal spaces. Flies are amazing creatures. Flies matter.

Also discriminated against, drug users are thought of as harbingers of negative contamination; contamination of the will, the bounded body, and the supposed purity in moral perspectives of our communities. The lullaby and the abject fly serve to entice viewers to also make a connection to Walter's discrimination against Jesse's drug using girlfriend Jane by allowing her death; the responsibility for which Walter hovers over the edge of confessing in his state of intoxication throughout the episode when Jesse slips Walter sleeping pills. The dialogue between Walter and Jesse revolves around Walter's regret that he had not already died, thus preventing those he cares about from realizing the man he has become. Walter's frustration might seem noble at first inspection, but it signals the same old story he has been circling since his cancer diagnosis, that he feels he is not in control of his own life, or even his death, and that contamination of body and will is forever present in material reality.

It is actually Jesse who has taken the missing methamphetamine product. His respirator sits just so atop his head that he resembles a fly. This comparison is, however, more significant than the implication that Jesse is the real contamination. It serves to highlight that Jesse, as a drug user, is also discriminated against. Throughout the series Walter increasingly manipulates and uses Jesse to exert his will. It is, much like the

extremist drug reformer position, Walter's manipulation of Jesse that serves to further his feeling that Walter has mastery over his own will-body. Other drug users have value to Walter through their purchase of his methamphetamines, but Jesse's girlfriend Jane holds no such place. In fact, her influence on Jesse threatens to undo (contaminate) Walter's control.

The lullaby and the fly, and the contrasting of Walter watching Jane die, instead of helping her when she vomits in her sleep after ingesting drugs, to the careful way Walter positions his own baby girl in the crib at the beginning of that episode in order to avoid such a fate, delivers a striking ethical relation. Jane, drug "addict," matters, and not just because she exists in the liminal spaces between human and nonhuman agencies that many might find abject, but because she is a living being with her own virtues and perspectives. Just as Walter fails to see that there is value in the lives and perspectives of flies, he also fails to see, beyond capital, the valuable perspectives and lives of those who ingest drugs. Whereas Eve Sedgwick delineates an anxiety of contamination of free will and the problems of stereotyped identities through drug usage, Derrida explicates the social anxiety that "whatever we do, say, or feel must be truthful. It must not be fanciful, deluded, or the product of chemical intoxication" (12). Conversely, Walter's state of intoxication produces some of his most honest moments. It is through his intoxicated state, through his contamination with the sleeping pills Jesse slips him (drawing a metaphorical and material relation to Jesse as contamination to Walter's Cartesian quest), that he is finally able to admit in a state of distress, "It's all contaminated." But for Walter, contamination is never remedy - only poison.

In contrast, for Jane, contamination can be remedy. Much like how Walt Whitman places stories-within-stories to make his thesis known in his *pharmakos* narrative *Franklin Evans*, *Breaking Bad* positions a conversation between Jane and Jesse as a flashback, I

argue, to highlight its immense importance as a valuable perspective. Discussing the work of Georgia O’Keeffe, Jesse asks Jane why someone would paint the same scene over and over again. Jane explains that each time O’Keeffe painted the same scene something changed in her mood, or the lighting, or other material changes that, subsequently, produced a change in her perception and made repainting the scene different and worthwhile. In other words, without contamination there is no change, no reason to go about doing anything unless that something is constantly re-worked, re-organized, and re-examined through contamination. In other words, representational metaphysics is only combated through an understanding that agency does not simply occur within unchanging, impermeable, bodies. It is through the “intra-action” or the liminal negotiations of “trans-corporeal” natures that the dynamic agencies of the world are formed. Though some of these agencies, such as drugs, are able to bring about our dissolutions, they are also able to permeate what would be otherwise closed systems, just as the very material-discursive agencies of our own bodies also permeate “the environment.” Taking responsibility for our part of the agential process means understanding that any relationship with the “other” is a relationship that produces or denies ontological possibilities for ourselves and for others.

O’Keeffe’s paintings, composed of the beauty and agency of landscapes, give added authority to the idea that “environment” is never background, but “trans-corporeal” in human agency and meaning making endeavors. O’Keeffe’s paintings of the nonhuman, such as her beautifully detailed paintings of flowers, frame the flower in a close perspective, filling the canvas frame. One wonders if her art informs some of the shots in *Breaking Bad* or if film and photography inform O’Keeffe. The close shots of the fly in the episode “The Fly,” work in a similar way to O’Keeffe’s paintings, drawing the viewer’s attention to the agencies that humans give little attention to. In the case of

Breaking Bad, the close framing in this episode also draws us to the importance of Jane, so that we might pay attention to her perspective of positive contamination. In this way, the positive perspective of contamination as remedy for Jane and the negative perspective of contamination for Walter can be taken together to help reveal to the audience the polysemy of contamination.

Subsequently, it is through the death of Jane by her overdose that the dangers of only conceiving of drugs (or contamination of material agencies) as cure are revealed. It is by following the downward spiral of Walter White, as well as his disregard for the lives of 'drug users' and nonhuman animals on his quest for de-contamination and control that the dangers of seeing the contamination of material agencies as purely poison are disclosed. It follows that trans-ethics is an ethics that recognizes that humans, made up of "non-human" agencies, must recognize those agencies as not only poison to our human anthropocentric perspectives and endeavors, but also our remedy; the very agencies that threaten to unhinge our very being also give us our agency. Thus, "The Fly" stands out as an important framing episode for the reading of *Breaking Bad* as a whole by deconstructing the hegemonic representations of the nonhuman (the fly) and drug users (Jesse and Jane) as purely negative contaminations which the rational, autonomous Cartesian subject (Walter White) must manipulate, master, and transcend.

The American Myth of Autonomy/Foreign Compulsions

Contrary to a "foreign" influence, Walter *White* is situated within many positions wrongly privileged in American identity; he is a white, well-educated, middle-class, male with a nuclear family. As a de-construction of the "foreign" nature of compulsions, Walter

serves up for the viewers an intimate look at the transformation of an individual dismayed with the American discourse of autonomy and progress, but whose dissolving belief in such a system then confuses a desire for newfound autonomy with the decontamination of his will through the complete control of others. The compulsion Walter displays is, thus, closer to the desire of patriarchal capitalist ideals juxtaposed with the failed autonomy of the “self” through the American dream. In the opening of the first episode Walter has, indeed, achieved great work. He has won the Nobel Prize for proton radiography, signaling his immense contribution to the world in the name of progress, success, and knowledge. Yet it is clear that despite these achievements Walter is slave to two low income jobs (a high-school chemistry teacher and a cashier for a car wash), jobs that cannot cover his medical expenses when suddenly diagnosed with terminal cancer. He is steeped in the discourses of the American dream and the ideologies of an autonomous “self” that continue to be, in many ways, tied to gender norms.

Subsequently, his confusion perpetuates a cyclic American narrative that is often critiqued in capitalist systems: the suppressed individual can only rise to the position of power and agency through the suppression and control of surrounding agencies. Thus, one of the key components of his transcendence from the contamination of material agencies (including the drug-user) becomes the control over (expulsion from his own identity) of what he sees as a “feminine nature” represented through his wife, Skylar. When reading the internet chat boards, it is clear that at least some instances de-centering thoughts on stable binaries such as gender, race, and drug agencies are lost on a few of the viewers. However, the sometimes subtle hinting at de-centering of binaries, rather than outright ignoring them, seems to be intentional, changing the narratives of the *pharmakos* from within, slowly drawing the viewer into having static discourses surrounding these categories confirmed, and then placing within the show

pieces of narrative that destabilize expectations. One could question, of course, if in the name of enticing viewers and entertaining them, whether *Breaking Bad* goes far enough in breaking through prescriptions.

For example, in the series pilot Walter figuratively “brings home the bacon,” supporting his pregnant wife and his son. Walter’s wife, Skyler, literally “fries it up in the pan” and decorates his eggs with bacon in the shape of the number fifty, a tradition celebrating Walter’s birthday. However, according to Walter’s son, Walt Junior, there is something about the bacon that makes it undesirable in its “fakeness.” The bacon his mother insists on is “fake” veggie bacon, and Walt Junior refuses it, signaling at least his partial acceptance of male gender “norm” scripts where supposed “real,” “un-feminized” men eat meat, not veggie bacon. Of course, at first, Walter Senior is more accepting of the “falsity” of his veggie bacon, and more accepting of his place outside gender norms related to “bringing home the bacon.” It is also clear he is not the only one providing for the family, as the pilot stresses when Skylar is shown selling nick-knacks on e-bay in bed with Walter. The positioning of Skylar’s halfhearted interest in Walter’s sexual desires, while paying more attention to the status of her items being sold online, in conjunction with the positioning of Walter’s inability to become fully erect and, hence, take control of his “masculine” sexual prowess, signals Walter’s inability to inhabit the patriarchal male capitalist ideal, and positions his slow moral collapse in connection to his eventual desire to fully inhabit the place of “real bacon.”

Walter-Heisenberg, as a drug producer, but also as a traditionally male capitalist ideal as a successful and wealthy product producer, complicates hegemonic representations of capitalist -male norms of “health” with illegal drug production. It is only at the end of the pilot, when Walter begins his transformation into Walter-Heisenberg, saturated in male capitalist ideal, that he can be seen taking control of his sexual

proWess. The pilot episode closes by reaffirming Walter's changing identity when Skyler, taken by surprise at Walter's new found sexual agency, aptly asks him during intercourse, "Is that you, Walter?" Here he begins his transformation into his drug producing identity Heisenberg, a nickname he gives himself to try and separate his life as Walter from his life involving illegal drug production. Walter's nickname for his drug-being identity, "Heisenberg," refers, of course, to quantum physics and the uncertainty principle, and more broadly, Walter's immersion in the anxieties of modern minds subjected to information that complicates linear understanding. "Quantum," after all, asks "how much?" Drug genre films and series have been influenced by these ever growing anxieties, and academic debates are not immune to them.

I want to suggest, however, that moral uncertainty might be more like Karen Barad's critique of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, rejecting the epistemological quandary of the "Heisenberg uncertainty principle" implied in Walter White's drug world nickname. The uncertainty principle states that while it is possible to know the position and momentum of a particle (because these positions do exist previous to measurement), it is not possible to determine with certainty these measurements at the same time. Alternatively, Karen Barad's delineation of quantum physics, one following Neil Bohr's interpretation, positions an ethical framework in which relations in the world make onto-epistemological-ethics *indeterminate* rather than simply uncertain. Thus, ethical relationships with the "other" are intimately tied to ontological possibilities, making them indeterminate and thus combating the static representations of identity thought more closely tied to nature as something to transcend. In other words, hegemonic discourse surrounding race, gender, and class (especially as it is tied to drug usage) must be disorganized through the recognition of co-agential relationships between human and nonhuman material discursive agencies.

It is only at the end of the series, as Walter begins to realize that the patriarchal and Cartesian ideologies have helped to script his decent into violent power struggles, that he can be seen at a Denny's diner placing "real" bacon into the shape of his birthday age. He gives the waitress a fake name, Lambert, as she tries to make small talk with him. Eventually he leaves her a \$100 tip and leaves the bacon uneaten. After the episode aired, there were blogs and chat forums filled with speculation that Skylar would be Walter's next victim. The way the show highlighted the scene through a flash-forward and showed Walter mimicking Skylar's habit for celebrating his birthday seemed to point towards the way Walter had acquired the habits of other characters he had killed throughout the show. Surprisingly, many of the viewers welcomed and cheered for Skylar's demise.

It is well documented that there is a particular venomous hate for Skylar by some of the fans of *Breaking Bad*. Anna Gunn wrote an article for *The New York Times* discussing the threats and hate mail she had received for playing the part of Skylar on the show. She writes, "My character, to judge from the popularity of Web sites and Facebook pages devoted to hating her, has become a flash point for many people's feelings about strong, nonsubmissive, ill-treated women. As the hatred of Skyler blurred into loathing for me as a person, I saw glimpses of an anger that, at first, simply bewildered me." Recent television productions, hailed by some as "The Golden Age of Television", have mainly been comprised of the male anti-hero who blurs moral positions, leaving the wives to often oppose many of their decisions. Gunn writes that she, "finally realized that most people's hatred of Skyler had little to do with me and a lot to do with their own perception of women and wives. Because Skyler didn't conform to a comfortable ideal of the archetypical female, she had become a kind of Rorschach test for society, a measure of our attitudes toward gender."

In his book *The Revolution Was Televised: The Cops, Crooks, Slingers, and Slayers Who Changed TV Drama Forever*, Alan Sepinwall writes that,

Because the revolutionary dramas were mostly about men, and male anti-heroes at that, and because viewers tend to bond most with the main character of a show, there was a side effect to the era, where characters who on paper should be the sympathetic ones become hated by viewers for opposing the protagonist. And the greatest vitriol has been unfortunately saved for wives like Skyler White, Corrine Mackey, Carmela Soprano, and Betty Draper, who are viewed by some viewers as irredeemable bitches, no matter how poorly they're treated by their husbands. (Male antagonists get more of a pass from these viewers, because 'they're just doing their job.')

None of the wives are entirely uncompromised (of these four, Corrine comes the closest), but it can be disheartening to see these great shows encourage some of their fans' sexist impulses (359).

What Skyler's position in the series explicates in relation to material agencies and hegemonic representations is the way in which Skyler's position as antagonist to Walter's quest for material control and purity places her in anti-capitalist and anti-Cartesian roles. However, if Skyler becomes a symbol for the emasculation of Walter, as well as the contamination in his transcendent quest for purity, those cheering for the death of Skyler were to be sorely disappointed. Indeed, the scene they so hoped would depict the downfall of Skyler and her supposed emasculating nagging is, I argue, the very scene that brings Walter back into line with a less patriarchal script. After all, if Walt desired, in his transformation to Heisenberg, to inhabit the place of "real" bacon, it is in this scene that he not only rejects the consumption of it, but identifies himself to the waitress using Skyler's maiden name. Subsequently, if the agency of the series in combination with the other anti-hero dramas of "The Golden Age" helped, at first, to further "sexist impulses," *Breaking Bad* works within that script to re-write static representations of patriarchal autonomy ideologies in relation to contamination narratives and work against expectations in those viewers.

Furthering the presentation of patriarchal autonomy values, Walter's brother-in-law Hank, positioned in the "ideal" male role, backed by the power provided him through government authority as a drug enforcement officer, presents the patriarchal power authority sure of "self," specifically his male white non-drug using identity. Of course, Hank is introduced drinking alcohol, and as seen later, even produces his own alcohol in his garage. Hank is, in fact, a drug user and producer, just a legally sanctioned one. If the speciousness of Hank's position is not clear enough, *Breaking Bad* highlights Hank's use of illegal drugs through his use of Cuban cigars. "Sometimes the forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest," he tells Walter. Therefore, if Hank fights violently against the contamination of America by "foreign" drugs, he also promotes them.

In addition, much of the series presents Hank's objectification of drug users, producers, and dealers. For example, Hank takes Walter's son to a motel where he forces Wendy, a woman who engages in prostitution and methamphetamine use, to parade her body and decayed teeth in front of Walt Junior. It is meant to serve as a warning to Walt Jr, but what this really serves to teach him is that Wendy is no longer a person deserving of any real sympathy or value beyond a lesson of what not to do. He uses her body as a representational symbol for negative contamination, foreclosing her ontological possibilities within his formulating gaze. The show, always affirming social representations before breaking them down, reaffirms Wendy's value by depicting her to be a loyal friend to Jesse. When he needs her most, she puts herself at risk in order to save him from the DEA and the drug cartel. Her treatment by Hank as less than a person, devalued and treated as mere damaged meat, is disheartening.

Other ethical considerations are blurred by Hank when he conflates race, drug users, drug dealers, and species by referring to squishing drug dealers like cockroaches and to "junkies," addicts, and Hispanics as insects, implying that neither the lives of

insects nor Hispanics and “junkies” are important to him. In other words, though Hank is positioned as a potential foil to Walter’s quest for Cartesian transcendence from the agency of matter, Hank is merely the other side of the same coin; he is steeped in hegemonic gender, race, and class discourses in his desire to transcend what Hank sees as corporeal, feminine, animal, and foreign “natures.” Such a realization also understands that discourses involving drugs users are deeply connected to discourses of race, class, species, and gender. Thus, deconstructing nature/culture binaries involving material agencies helps to battle the hegemonic discourses surrounding other binaries. Of course, Hank is arguably one of the most likable characters in *Breaking Bad*. He is a loving and caring family man, making his position more familiar to American audiences. In other words, the racism, sexism, and speciesism that Hank represents are presented in an everyday man, friendly and loving. These kinds of presentations are, after all, what makes combating such views so difficult; they are often situated in the everyday spaces least likely to be exposed and confronted.

For example, it would be apposite to note that Walter begins by being “feminized” by Hank, already mimicking ideas of “feminization” as inferior and “other.” Hank’s belittlement of Walter as lacking patriarchal identity is evident from the very first episode when Hank shows off his Glock-22, and Walt Junior, lover of “real” bacon, insists his father hold the gun. “It’s just heavy” Walter says, his obvious reluctance and discomfort in holding the gun translating into his uneasiness with patriarchal positions. Hank replies, “That’s why they hire men” as he and his FBI buddies laugh. However, even as Walt Junior relies more on Hank’s version of male authority than Walter’s, Walt Jr. is at least willing to accept charity to pay for his father’s cancer treatments. When Walter transitions into his Walter-Heisenberg identity, it is Walter that becomes more steeped in patriarchal autonomy values, rejecting charity to pay for his cancer bills. Walter refuses the financial

help his friends offer him for his treatment because, as the drug-lord Gus tells him, "And a man? A man provides. And he does it even when he's not appreciated, or respected, or even loved. He bears up and he does it...because he's a man." With this belief, and little left to him within the American system besides "charity," he chooses methamphetamine production.

In episode two of season two, "Grilled," Hank is involved in an unexpected gun fight with a drug dealer named Tuco, in which Hank shoots and kills him. Hank's DEA agent co-workers celebrate Hank's victory by presenting Hank with a mouth grill that Tuco wore before his death. The episode serves as an example of how corporeal agencies of the body are able to sometimes break out of representational roles prescribed by society. Hank's corporeal response to the death of Tuco (manifested in his extreme anxiety and panic attacks), exemplifies how the body can signify against the supposed will of the "rational and masculine" mind. Hank's fellow agents have Tuco's grill encased in plastic for Hank's desk. Hank's anxiety at looking at the encased grill every day does not simply originate from "inside," rather, the material agency of Tuco's grill helps to re-organizes Hank's thoughts about killing Tuco. In this way, material objects in the show do more than represent things; material objects evoke emotional responses and connect scenes.

For example, Tuco's grill insists on its significance, not as a representation of the man that was killed, but as a part of the man's body that now influences and evokes emotional reactions from Hank. By the end of episode five, season two, Hank throws the encased grill into the El Paso River. For Hank, Tuco's grill is not only a corporeal reminder of the violence inflicted upon Hank, but also the violence that he has inflicted on Tuco. His disgust at the grill shows that Hank cannot subscribe to the idea of being rewarded for the death of a man. The idea that those around him would congratulate

Hank for this and, indeed, objectify the man (due to his association with drugs) by encasing a part of the dead man as a gift, does not sit well with Hank. The only way to dispense of the distress is to part with the influence of the object, but as the episodes following show, the influence is a lasting one.

Trying to suppress his fearful emotion, or corporeal response, Hank continues to experience panic attacks when the DEA promotes him to working with the DEA in New Mexico. Suppressing his emotions shows his struggle with an ideology of, not only masculine gender scripts, but also an autonomy ideology that regards emotional compulsions as opposed to rational self-regulation through the control of one's will. Such a lack of self-regulation is also the reason for the alienation of the pharmakos. Subsequently, when masculine gender roles merge with autonomy ideologies, they bring "feminization" into alignment with "irrational" and "compulsive" and "corporeal" emotional natures. Through the examples of Walter and Hank, *Breaking Bad* shows that this alignment is not only hurtful to women, but just as detrimental to the lives of men.

It is, in fact, Hank's embodied discursive-material knowledge, as he temporarily breaks through roles that prescribe identity as macho, rational, and transcendent of corporeal natures, that ultimately saves Hank's life in season two. The fear his "rational mind" tries to deny comes through in the corporeal signification of his panic attacks, signifying him outside the hegemonic representations he tries so hard to project to his fellow DEA agents. Other DEA agents mock Hank for his inability to control his body and his emotions when they discover the disembodied head of a drug dealer that has been placed on a living turtle. While mocking Hank, an agent pulls the head from the turtle, triggering a hidden explosive that kills or injures several of the DEA agents that joined in the mocking. The name of the drug dealer who was beheaded is called Tortuga, meaning turtle in Spanish, and the conflation of the disembodied head of the drug dealer with a

turtle positions Hank's racial and species devaluation into one explosive example. It is only Hank's severe disgust at the objectification of both that results in Hank fleeing before the explosion. The blood, limbs, and severe emotional distress dominating the scene disorganizes a discourse that was once focused on the mocking of uncontrollable, corporeal, and supposedly "feminine" bodily agencies.

Unfortunately, Hank never completely escapes autonomy scripts. His obsession with Heisenberg and "the war on drugs" leads to his eventual death in the last season at the hands of none other than a group magnified in their racial and gender discriminations, a group of white male supremacists. Regardless of Hank's eventual failure, it is through this episode that the combination of the corporeal reality of the disembodied head (or the corporeal reality of the Cartesian cogito), nonhuman agencies involving drug-bodies, gender scripts, and conflation of human and nonhuman animal natures are combined into this single powerful explosion (an explosion that brings each and every DEA agent into touch with their own corporeal realities) and discloses to the viewer that the deconstruction of Cartesian autonomy scripts by accepting material agencies can open up signficatory potentials that deconstruct representations of race, class, species, gender, and ability (as in the example of Hanks' survival of the explosion through his bodily manifestations of fear). Subsequently, it is through this realization that the powerful agential nonrepresentational potentials of the viewer's own corporeal body can be realized and static representations of the "other" can be seen as open to new ontological potentials.

Gliding O'er All: Walt Whitman and Walter White

Having covered some of the representational binaries that the discourses of autonomy erect, a discussion of how the show utilizes Walt Whitman's work to further the disorganization of these binaries should inevitably follow. Through this comparison the material/discursive binary is broken down to reveal an ethical point of view taken from the integration of discursive and material agencies in play throughout the series. Walt Whitman's discursive work and Walter White's chemical work provide tensions and blur lines between independence/dependence binaries and (re)organize situations in a rippling effect. Much like Whitman's work in "Song of Myself," the tension between the independence of the individual and the individual as "part and particle" of the animal, vegetable, and mineral is a tension that amplifies Walter's position throughout the show.

Gale Boetticher, a vegan, well mannered, non-violent MA graduate in chemistry with libertarian views on drug production, presents Walter with a copy of Whitman's work, *Leaves of Grass* as a gift. Walter White meets Gale, a fellow well educated chemist who is also disillusioned by the American dream, when Walter begins working for the drug lord Gustavo in an underground methamphetamine lab. Gale's deep admiration of the poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" delineates Gale's preference for embodied knowledge over the categories and calculations of institutional knowledge. Like the poem, Gale describes the weariness he felt while going through the motions in obtaining his PhD and jumping through institutional hoops. In doing so he lost his love for the "magical" part of chemistry. He felt working for the drug cartel leader Gustavo Fringe as a methamphetamine producer was a way to escape the institutionalization that crushed his joy for chemistry. He is the all-around good natured kind of guy that *Breaking Bad* presents as an alternative to the ideologies of patriarchy the show presents through Walter and Hank.

Much like how Walter describes himself as now “awake,” aware of the strictures of the system that have not served him or his family, Gale also believes in bucking the system and going his own way. Having positioned himself against the law’s dictums on drug production, Gale Boetticher believes that, “Consenting adults want what they want. At least with me they’re getting exactly what they pay for.” Gale’s autonomy narratives are closer to the Transcendentalists, where the “magic” and the “soul” of their work are thought to transcend the strictures of Enlightenment autonomies. However, many of the Transcendentalist writers presented autonomies that, while rejecting the strictures of rationalism, predicated the idea that society and its institutions ultimately corrupted the supposed purity and autonomy of the individual. Thus, ideas about autonomy, while no longer reliant on rationalism, still severed individual embodied knowledge from cultural discourse.

Whitman’s work, as a bridge between Transcendentalism and Realism, often negotiated the liminal spaces of the embodied knowledge of the individual and social discourse. Whitman’s poem, “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer,” positions the individual and knowledge away from institutions. Other work, such as “Beat! Beat! Drums!,” were of a patriotic character, and sang the praises of American institutions. “Song of Myself” is a pinnacle in Whitman’s work; placed at the beginning of *Leaves of Grass*, it foregrounds the unity of opposites between self/other, meaning in the reader/writer, man/woman inequalities, taught/embodied binaries, Cartesian mind/body dualities, and, of course, free will/law. Vince Gilligan’s *Breaking Bad* does its own disorganizing of these dualities, but the show, whether intended or not, insists upon not just the disorganization of free-will/cultural laws, but also the disorganization of free-will/material agencies. Walter’s struggle to decontaminate begins, after all, with the realization of his cancer diagnosis, or rather, his encounter with material agencies not

under rational control. That he endeavor's to produce purity in a 'drug' is a nod to the autonomy discourses surrounding drugs.

For Eve Sedgwick, Western liberal societies' reliance upon Enlightenment notions of autonomy, rationality, and freedom have produced a central dualism: free will and compulsion. She argues, "for as long as we have idealized and worshipped the idea of free will, we have also generated its opposite: the denigrated, devalued idea of compulsion. In this model, we must strive for the only good: a pure freedom. Dependence or reliance on, or compulsion to do, anything becomes defined here as a contamination of free will" (11). Western autonomy ideologies in laws are designed for those thought, in their consumption of drugs, to contaminate their self-governing "authentic" and "autonomous" natures; those who are at worst, criminalized and jailed, and at best, thought to be forever contaminated with the disease of addiction. In Sedgwick's examination of compulsion/free-will, it becomes apparent that the idea of an uncontaminated and "authentic" will is not only a false binary, but a construction that can be contaminated with categories other than the material agencies of 'drugs.' Of course, even if we were to contain such contamination of the will to 'drugs,' it is still apparent that a 'drug' can be thought to restore the autonomy of will in one instance, while also thought to destroy it in another. For example, as noted in the introduction to *Breaking Bad*, prescription methamphetamines are often used as a "remedy" to the lack of "appropriate" control children have over attention and learning behaviors. This contrasts the view that illegal methamphetamines cause a lack of will. Subsequently, it can be seen that the view of contamination of will is one of contradictory views of "inside" and "outside" influences. For those that do ingest drugs illegally, the negative influence is seen to come from the outside; methamphetamines corrupt their will and are negative contamination. For children who are prescribed methamphetamines in order to correct their behaviors to

appropriate social standards, the drugs are instead correcting their will, and subsequently, drugs are seen as positive contamination. Yet, in both instances the will is never truly an “authentic” or “autonomous” one.

Suzanne Fraser and David Moore use Barad’s theory of agential realism in order to work through key issues of drug use and addiction in *The Drug Effect*. They ask “What happens when we recognize that material objects- such as those physicists try to measure, or those the police try to control, or those people decide to smoke, swallow, or inject- are neither purely the product of discourse, social practices, or entirely determined by their supposed intrinsic material attributes? What are the effects of treating drugs as phenomena; that is, continually made and remade in their intra-actions with other entities?” (6). Fraser and Moore find it useful to treat drug usage as events, rather than static definitions. This kind of ethical analysis is, of course, not a pure one, but dealing with drug interactions as events might force us to make ethical decisions in wider contexts and consider more variable solutions. It also allows for drug-human intra-actions to be taken as indeterminate ethical positions that might decrease static representational discourse surround drug-bodies. Given the wide range of results from “intra-actions” between bodies and drugs, Fraser and Moore call for a dissolution of ‘drugs’ as a “single undifferentiated category” and instead posit that the category of drugs is a political one, “it contains all the substances society disapproves of at a given time, and that normal people should avoid, and should want to avoid” (15). I see such an attempt as a way, not to deny drugs as materially agential by seeing them as social constructions, but rather as a way to avoid the hegemonic representations of “drugs” as a static category that fails to understand the wide range of material substances that alter and inform our human minds. If ‘drugs’ are never easily marked into categories of beneficial/harmful, or fall into simple

binaries that exist as containable determined tools, then a partial opening to redefinitions of 'drugs' might lead to positive application.

Subsequently, drugs have their own agencies in the series and are integral to the disorganization of the binaries the show presents. If the moral choices Walter White must make are complicated, not only by culturally situated difficulties, but also non-human material agencies, Walter's state of "sobriety" in relation to drugs becomes less clear. The realization that drugs need not penetrate the human body through ingestion in order to be, not just culturally, but also materially, situated within Walter's physical reality, refuses to deny the cartography of drugs in human relations, and affirms non-ingested drug agencies as more than representations of drugs in affecting Walter's being. In this way, scholars might speak about drugs without ingesting, as long as perspectives of those that have ingested drugs are taken into account seriously.

Stacy Alaimo discusses the politics of xenobiotic chemicals in her book *Bodily Natures; Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. She writes that, "If the direction of genetic research is simultaneously inward and outward or, in my terms, trans-corporeal, scientists may be able to capture the ways in which the agencies of the body always interact with the substances and agencies of particular places" (128). Seeing possibilities for scientific knowledge, she also positions knowledge within and of an "individual's" body, placing them within a position to use their own bodies as tools for knowledge. The balance then between the need for scientific knowledge and the ability of individuals to use their own corporeal body as tools for 'knowing' the damages incurred by xenobiotic materials can be intra-utilized. Karen Barad explains in her book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and The Entanglement of Meaning and Matter*,

...in contrast to the spectator theory of knowledge, what is at issue is not knowledge *of* the world from above or outside, but *knowing as a part of being*. Indeed, the agential realist formulation brings to the fore questions of the ontology of knowing. In traditional epistemology, the knowing

subject is a conscious self-aware self-contained independent rational agent that comes to a knowledge project full formed. But if knowing is to be understood naturalistically, that is, in terms of our best scientific theories, then it should be clear at this point that the relationship between the knower and the known does not follow the traditional philosophical model. The knower cannot be assumed to be a self-contained rational human subject. Rather, subject (like objects) are constituted through specific intra-actions (341-42).

What *Breaking Bad* conveys is a perspective that values thinking through taught/embodied binaries in terms of “side effects,” unpredictable agencies that assert contamination as twofold, both making up and disorganizing human intentions. The show demands the recognition that if the value of embodied knowledge of drugs is paired with an understanding of the body as part and particle with the extended world, the knowledge of drugs through taught experiences produces translations that never quite “get at” a stable truth, but evolve discursive perspectives with embodied perspectives, refusing to let one perspective over-determine the other. Thus, just as the show requires viewers to examine the material agencies within the show through a reading of Walt Whitman’s discourse, so too do everyday perspectives in ethical decisions require the thinking together of the discursive and the material.

It’s apposite that Walter, just as he comes to feel his free-will and autonomy the most, is disorganized by the copy of *Leaves of Grass* given to him by Gale. In the episode, “Gliding O’er All” (a nod to Whitman’s poem by that name), Hank searches for reading material in the bathroom at Walter’s house and finds the copy of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. As he flips through the pages of the book, Hank finds a handwritten dedication: “To my other favorite W.W. It’s an honor working with you. Fondly, G.B.” Hank then recalls a much earlier conversation, in which Walter jokingly admitted to being the “W.W.” found in a handwritten dedication in Gale’s lab notebook. By reading the inscription in the book, Hank finally realizes that Walter is Heisenberg. It’s a kind of sweet poetic revenge for Gale, who was killed in his idealistic vulnerability. Gale’s nonviolent

trusting ideologies placed him in the middle of a battle of wills between Walter and the drug lord Gustavo Fringe. Gustavo, requiring only the steps needed to produce the near pure quality of meth Walter could produce, desired to rid himself of Walter's need for control. Gustavo hired Gale to learn from Walter so that Gustavo could have Walter killed. Walter felt his only defense required him to get rid of Gale so that Gustavo would still need him and be unwilling to kill him. Gale, unaware of the reason he was hired, genuinely cares for and respects Walter. However, Walter uses Jesse's loyalty in order to convince him to shoot Gale before Gustavo has a chance to kill Walter.

The death of Gale poses individual against individual, both vying for their place in an institution built on Gustavo's patriarchal autonomy ideologies. It's either Gale or Walter, and Jesse is forced to choose. Hank's discovery of the copy of *Leaves of Grass* as a catalyst for Walter's undoing, forces the viewer to see Whitman's discourse as not only discursive agency, but material-discursive agency. It is, in itself, an object that unravels Walter's material empire and helps to inform the material-discursive agency of the show as a whole. One might think this a strange contradiction, remembering that Whitman wrote the famous temperance novel, *Franklin Evans*. However, there is much in common with director Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* and Walt Whitman's tale of the inebriate. Both are positioned within the traditional *pharmakos* narratives of their time and there was no greater evil to combat for the temperance activists than the "devil" drink. In the current era, there are few drugs thought by the public to be more damaging than methamphetamines.

Alcohol, thought by the upper class to be tied to the plights of the working class in the 19th century, becomes a conflation of the drug with the "lower" class. Similarly, methamphetamines have been hailed, "the poor man's cocaine," and thought to be the vice of the poor and the foreign. It is in fact this representational discourse tying together

“foreign,” “poor,” and “drug addict” into virtually the same symbol that has yielded the unfair targeting of specific class, gender, and racial categories. The Sentencing Project indicates that the US has a significant number of arrests for black and Latino men, as well as a significant number of black and Latino women (though not as high a rate as men). However, statistics show that minorities do not use, sell, or produce more drugs than other races within the US. Thus, it seems that male minorities are often targeted in drug related arrests (Mekonnen).

The authors of *Dorm Room Dealers: Drugs and the Privileges of Race and Class* describe how drug enforcement targets poor people, the foreign, and racial minorities in their pursuit to arrest drug user and producers. Meanwhile, white privileged users, producers, and dealers go unnoticed. Those that do not fit into privileged norms are under constant suspicion and observation. Memes circle the internet in favor of drug testing minorities on welfare assistance while the wealthy born evade punishment and suspicion. The researchers of the project write, “Given the well-documented tendency of the criminal justice system to closely monitor the illegal activities of the poor while simultaneously turning a blind eye to similar activities carried out by the non-poor—we were still taken aback by the lack of criminal justice and university administration attention paid these dealers, despite the brazenness, incompetence, and general dearth of street smarts that tended to characterize the dealers’ daily practices” (11).

Both *Breaking Bad* and *Franklin Evans* look at changing policies in relation to the American economy and drug narratives that examine gender, race, class, investment capital, reform policies, and many other concerns. *Breaking Bad* uses Whitman’s work to disorganize representational metaphysics and oppose narratives of Cartesian transcendence from material agencies. Aligned with one of America’s first mass-mediated social movements involving temperance reform, *Franklin Evans* seems, at first

glance, to be a predecessor for America's tumultuous relationship with films and drug narratives, warning the populations of the horror associated with losing one's free-will to drugs. Instead, I argue that Whitman's work does something very similar to the classic pharmakos narrative *Breaking Bad* presents us with.

For example, scholar Anne Dalke finds that Whitman's temperance novel, while following the typical drug narrative of the time, serves to break value judgments and simple solutions from within classic narratives. She suggests in her article, "Whitman's Literary Intemperance: *Franklin Evans*, or The Power of Love" that the protagonist Franklin, "demonstrated, of course, by his behavior in Virginia, that he had not learned too well the lesson first offered to him in New York. A similar dictum could well have been observed by commentators on the novel, who have mistaken the showy appearance of a temperance novel for the real thing. The structure of Whitman's story clearly shows that it functions as a parody of the judgmental nature of the typical temperance tract, for which Whitman substitutes instead a call for compassion. He has used the format of the temperance novel to show its limitations, and has shown thereby, per-haps, those of his readers as well." Thus, critics like Emery Hollow who dislike the novel for its "wooden stereotypes" and declare it "too subjective, too sentimental, too preachy" were correct, but not in the way they had supposed. Dalke explicates, "The narrative structure of *Franklin Evans* is didactic, to be sure: the novel moves inexorably from one lesson to the next. But the primary lesson Whitman has to teach is not the lesson of abstinence from drink, but rather the necessity of love and sympathy for other" (11). Dalke writes that the three stories within the main story, those critics have taken as haphazard and hasty fillers for the newspaper publication, are really at the heart of the lesson. For, she says, these three stories are about the illustration of the terrible effects of America's attempt to ostracize the drug user. She writes that through the novel it is shown that Whitman's

“ardent belief in democracy qualified his enthusiasm for the temperance cause which spoke of denunciation, ostracism and judgment against the erring” (20-21). *Breaking Bad* does something similar with the episodes that have also seemed by some viewers to be out of place, such as “The Fly” and the flashback of Jane’s dialogue about Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings.

Of course, there are some qualifications to Dalke’s praise of *Franklin Evans*. There is little in Dalke’s analysis that examines modern “addiction” discourse and how the novel might continue such a tradition and how Whitman relates this concern to race, gender, and class. There have been, however, many done since Dalke’s publication. Regardless, one can see that through a comparison with Dalke’s analysis, *Breaking Bad* can also be taken to break down the *pharmakos* tradition from within the classic narratives of the drug genre by suggesting that ethical actions are qualified by, not just the need for compassion and love for those that might lack free-will, as Dalke suggests of Whitman’s qualified view of temperance, but that pursuing the purification of one’s will by denying material agencies and “contamination” as a polysemy will also lead to a failing of love and compassion, just as Walter White’s quest leads to the harm of almost everyone around him.

Subsequently, I argue that Walter, though alienated from society at the end of the series through his close relation to drug production, is not the *pharmakos*, but a position closer to the drug reformer that criminalizes and sacrifices the drug user. At first, this might seem like an odd comparison, but let’s evaluate such an accusation more closely. First, Walter demands Jesse’s rehabilitation, not for Jesse’s own value, but for Jesse’s value to Walter as a producer of product. Such an endeavor echoes the class relations that often involve the reform of working class intoxication. Second, and more importantly, for Walter purification of will comes at all costs to the “other.” Walter, seeing

contamination as only poison, poisons his relationships; he contaminates others to purify his own will, attempting to oppress the *pharmakos* to expel contamination that was already “within.”

Despite Gilligan’s claim that Jesse was meant to be killed off in the first episode to serve as an example of how far Walter had spiraled down, the agency of the series insisted that such a narrative might serve to re-enforce the narratives of the *pharmakos* rather than disorganize them. As a consequence, after re-watching the already recorded episodes, the writers realized Jesse was an integral character to the show (The Paley Center for Media). There was no Walter White without the dynamic between the two men. Jesse, the character who literally and directly ingests drugs, after all he has been put through in Walter’s quest for the purity of free-will and body, is finally saved by Walter in the season finale.

Taking this perspective, it can be seen that it was Walter’s own alienation from society, when he is seen hiding in a cabin cut off from the world after he is discovered by the DEA, that he finally realizes he has “done it all for himself.” In other words, *Breaking Bad* disorganizes the classic *pharmakos* narrative by showing that it is only when Walter (exemplifying society’s larger obsession with denying material agencies) is alienated that he can admit he has also alienated, and accept that his quest for decontamination is a false transcendence that uses the *pharmakos* (Jesse) as ground. Therefore, regardless of the intentions of Vince Gilligan and the other *Breaking Bad* writers when they began the journey of Walter’s narrative, it was always also Jesse’s narrative.

Subsequently, *Breaking Bad* attempts to do as Walt Whitman did in *Leaves of Grass*, find some liminality between binaries of free-will and dependence; but also, it pushes further, and insists that material agencies be thought through in relation to the polysemy contamination. It is only in the last episode, when Walter refuses to sacrifice

Jesse (the pharmakos) in his Cartesian quest that Walter looks at his own distorted image shown in the drug production equipment and accepts the cartography and agency of nonhuman 'drugs' by embracing contamination as both his poison and his remedy, and it's through Walter's realization that we, the viewers, can also embrace and celebrate the ethical possibilities in such a perspective. In other words, it is the agency of the nonhuman material equipment that distorts the imagined whole, impermeable, autonomous image Walter had clung to and reveals his identity as intra-acting agencies of a corporeal body made up of and extended into the "more-than-human-world." Previous to the conclusion, the show consistently shows Walter's reflection in various mirror images as a crystal clear and whole presentation of his identity that is, non-the-less, seen as split into binaries representing Walter/Heisenberg.

For example, in the pilot episode, during Walter's fixation on the spot of mustard contaminating the doctor's coat that delivers his cancer diagnosis, Walter's reflection can be seen upside down on the Dr.'s desk in front of him, suggestive of the disruption in the wholeness of Walter's identity, but also of his corporeal body now subject to cancer. Shows like *Breaking Bad*, as part of the neo noir genre, traditionally show characters in moral conflict gazing into mirrors, seemingly trying to reaffirm to themselves their unfractured identities. Karen Barad writes that, "The physical phenomenon of reflection is a common metaphor for thinking" (29). However, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad prefer to think through "diffraction" rather than "reflection." Barad explains that "both are optical phenomena, but whereas reflection is about mirroring and sameness, diffraction attends to patterns of difference" (29). Haraway writes that "[reflexivity or reflection] invites the illusion of essential, fixed position, while [diffraction] trains us to more subtle vision" (1992). Contrary to the division in the previous scenes involving Walter/Heisenberg's binary mirror reflection, the final scene refuses an easy division of Walter/Heisenberg

and, instead, affirms his excess of identity beyond static representations by introducing the drug equipment as a nonhuman material interloper that diffracts an un-representable identity. Thus, by recognizing and accepting such a view we can, as viewers, refuse a quest for false transcendence that uses the “other” as ground by destabilizing static representational discourses that fix identities and hold nature and culture as binary opposites.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

(Re)presentations of the Pharmakos

Keeping in mind the traditional narrative constructions involving the *pharmakos*, I conclude with an overview of how these narratives, specifically how the TV series *Breaking Bad* and *Nurse Jackie*, in relation to an older drug genre film, *The Salton Sea*, might bring about an even more liminal negotiation of the “pharmakos.” If much of drug genre film and television series have been preoccupied with the alienation of the “other” as foreign, this preoccupation is distended and misplaced due to deep concerns over where borders should be positioned, not just discursively, but discursive-materially. Such negotiations should indeed exclaim as Walter does, that “It’s all contaminated.” However, this should never be mistaken for an accepted resignation that “all is self,” as if campaigning for the dissolution of the term “contamination” altogether. Borders are not fixedly established and liminal negotiations between overlapping agencies of “self” and “other” allow for conditions of persistence and survival, to find a general value in persistence, and in particular, a continuation of societies, individuals, and ethical perspectives, at the same time they allow for their dissolutions.

For example, the drug genre film *The Salton Sea* examines how the narratives surrounding the formation of an actual body of water located in California, called the Salton Sea, have been composed of many different contaminations. Much like the human identity, California’s Salton Sea was never a “pure” autonomous entity to begin with; its composition is a complex nexus of material contaminants that evade human intentions and somehow, paradoxically, led to the Salton Sea being hailed as one of the greatest

human engineering endeavors. It was formed through agricultural runoff and an engineering mistake that led to the flooding of a low region in the dry southern areas of California. The Salton Sea, at one point, brought in as many visitors as Yellowstone Park and it represented for many the symbol of the great American dream of health, prosperity, and success (Metzler).

Paradoxically, what had maintained the sea and allowed its image of health to flourish eventually began to destroy that image. Agricultural runoff began to cause drastic rises in the water level, flooding construction efforts. The lack of an outlet in the sea, combined with the unpredictability of weather in the form of two tropical storms, continued to thwart human efforts to maintain control of its borders. Sandbagging efforts failed to save much of the marinas and communities close to the sea, and home buyers and tourists began to look for the American dream elsewhere. The political debates surrounding the desire for the sea to persist become a difficult negotiation as to what kinds of contaminations should be rendered remedy or poison; but more importantly, if they can be seen as both of these simultaneously, then the question to be answered remains – what ethical decisions will ultimately provide a desirable continuation of the sea and its constituents? These same questions surround drug policies, drug use and production, and drug genre popular culture production.

All three narratives, *Nurse Jackie*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Salton Sea* position such anxieties around the pharmakos in order to better understand the contamination of human matter by the nonhuman as a polysemy, and thus allow for the indeterminate material possibilities for bodily significations. *The Salton Sea* depicts this “trans-corporeality” through a tattoo of the Salton Sea that the pharmakos protagonist bears on his body: a cartography that understands the “environment” as always part of the corporeal body.

Interestingly, *The Salton Sea* has many aspects of *Breaking Bad*, from the green hues infiltrating the protagonist, to the neo noir cinematography, and even the dialogue surrounding Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. It seems plausible that the writers of *Breaking Bad* informed parts of their own narrative from the film. However, the ending of the film differs from *Breaking Bad* and from the majority of the series *Nurse Jackie* in a key way. The protagonist redeems himself, not just by recognizing the polysemy contamination, but by allowing himself forgiveness for not being able to put aside his own desire for persistence and survival when he failed to sacrifice himself and join his wife in death. When two gunmen shoot her in the next room there was nothing he could have done to save her. His actions are driven throughout the film by his deep despair that sometimes there is no easy prescription for surviving in a world where contamination is both remedy and cure. He accepts this and it restores his ability to act by accepting that he must make a choice to act because all actions are uncertain. Or rather, looking at it from an agential realist view, his very ability *to act* relies on the inherent indeterminacy of material-discursive phenomena.

This ethical configuration in drug genre narratives is echoed throughout film and TV series if we are willing to re-examine and re-read them in new contexts, as Derrida does with *Phaedrus*. This opens these narratives up to a repetition that, even if never completely deciding the truth of their histories regarding contamination and the *pharmakos*, refuse repetition as a prescribed cure/poison to our ethical relationships towards the "other." This sort of ethical perspective, as I stated in the beginning of my analysis, is as much an ethical perspective as placing the "other" first. It is, in fact, what allows us the ability to do so.

In *Breaking Bad*, Walter's realization that contamination is a polysemy when he is alienated, granted him the presence of mind to complete his redemptive task of saving

Jesse; but we must not forget the conditions that led him in his quest for purity to begin with. Through his narrative we can conceive that anyone or any conditions are in danger of becoming scapegoated. Walter, as a drug producer, should be thought, not just in relation to social prescriptions of drugs (as he manufactures them illegally), but also in his vulnerability to the hegemonic prescriptions of race, gender, and class that are inseparable from the issue of drugs. Thus, just as we must judge Walter for allowing Jane to die, we are implicated in the alienation of Walter White. Walter and his narrative become a remedy, in that we are able to tease out key issues surrounding the rendering of “contamination” and the material agencies that complicate linear ethics. Yet, his narrative is also a poison in that he is still sacrificed and alienated in order to see that he is not so alien. Thus, my formulation that Jesse is the “true” *pharmakos* is a hasty one. Even the identity of the *pharmakos* must be re-thought in context rather than attempting to peel away layers to discover the “truth.”

For example, the main antagonist in *The Salton Sea* is a drug dealer and user whose nose is missing and has been replaced with a prosthetic nose due to the rhinal ingestion of drugs. Dave Boothroyd writes that the “use of the *pharmakoi* as a cultural prosthesis appears to have a direct connection with the representation of narcotics in general today, as personal, chemical prosthesis (40). Indeed, “pooh bear,” as the drug dealer is called, is at once seen to embody the drug as a personal chemical prosthesis through the replacement of his nose with a prosthetic one, at the same time such a prosthesis conflates his status, as seen through society, with the non-human animal they nickname him after. As examined in Neil Matheson’s analysis of Thoreau’s *Walden*, this is a positioning of animals within lower moral grounds while also positioning those compromised in their wholeness alongside them, both alienated. Such a configuration of the antagonist, one that shows “contamination of falsification of society as a whole”

through “breaches in prescriptive control,” renders even the most irredeemable of antagonists in these narratives in danger of falling into the narratives of the *pharmakos* (Boothroyd).

Subsequently, we must make decisions and take action, but we should never be so sure of a teleological progress in such decisions. They must constantly be liminally re-assessed and repeatedly, or compulsively, be re-read in changing contexts. In a monist reading of contamination, multiple re-examinations of multiple contexts matter, much like how Mel Chen’s work understands that static nouns in binary categories are reanimated through agential processes that often displace attempts to “fix” understandings of dynamic processes as easily manageable and definable. At the same time, I argue that though ethical decisions actuated in an emergent world will never be stable, this instability can be seen as revisions and “(re)worldings” that never abandons an ethical relation to the “other”, even when transformed by the very animacies that enable differences and affinities. Ethics, in other words, is like Barad’s configuration of “intra-action,” a “verb-oriented onto-epistemological-ethics,” and a “doing” and a way of “being in the world” that is *translated* in each emergent “intra-action.”

In *The Salton Sea*, the protagonist resolves his own value through the eyes of his drug using friend who tells him he is something “pure and whole.” The protagonist, though also a drug user, cannot see that he has scripted himself and other drug users into representations that deny any ability for loyalty between those contaminated by drugs until his friend proves him wrong, saving him from a fire in the last scene. While being rescued, the protagonist sees a tattoo of himself on the arm of his friend. The tattoo is smiling and appears the way he would wish to see himself. Thus, while his friend’s discourse might seem to resurrect the old narrative of resolving liminal positions with a new mirrored “whole and smooth” identity, an identity that might negate the kind of

affirmations his liminal negotiations had made, perhaps we can look at it a different way. Perhaps what the protagonist gains is not a sense of permanent self, but rather who he is through a relation to the “other.” In other words, it is through the relationship with an “other” signifying outside of hegemonic discourse that we can recognize our own abilities to signify “otherwise,” and it is through this ethical configuration that Ingram says we must also recognize that the “other” is also within. Thus it is only through the cartography of his “self” on his friend’s body that he can realize his potential for less static significations “within.” Yet, even as *The Salton Sea* re-affirms a philosophy of multiple perspectives, the parting line, none-the-less, also re-establishes the protagonist’s renewed anthropocentric agency and his masculine un-fractured identity, saying, “I think it’s like the man said, ‘*Man* is the measure of all things” (*The Salton Sea*).

While Jane Bennett, in her essay *Powers of the Hoard: Further Notes on Material Agencies*, eagerly admits that her pursuits involve the human aspect when pondering these *things*, she also acknowledges that humanity is not the “measure of all things” (263). Shows like *Breaking Bad* and *Nurse Jackie* pose questions about “the extent to which humans collectively can be said to exercise free will at all in a world whose physical constraints not only limit human choices but actively shape what choices are available in the first place” (106). Whatever these choices look like, they ultimately never escape being grounded in the material world. Perhaps there is no stable inside and no outside (of atoms, elements, trans-corporeal bodies, worlds, universes, ethics, or otherwise), as Eileen Joy and Timothy Morton believe. Yet, we cannot accept everything as “self” unless we invite our own destruction.

Perhaps then, trans-ethics is not a complete openness, nor is it a closing off. Such an ethics allows for new emerging possibilities within our world and suggests that at the very core of matter there is a place for ethical agency. While we must recognize that

the material-discursive agency of the nonhuman has the capacity to organize the human and mediate possibilities, so does the “human,” for the human is of and by the material discursive agencies that make up our world. A material interpretation of the world need not lead to deterministic realities, void of any ethical choices. Trans-ethics are never only stable principles that govern behavior; neither should they be purely competing pluralistic views.

Finally, how do we decide what ethical actions should be translated from emerging ethical possibilities? Perhaps when posing questions of our own ethical abilities and actions we might simply leave an open space for the indeterminate ethical possibilities that are formulated in the intra-action of animal, vegetable, and mineral apparatuses. This might be a recognition of a post-humanist ethics where “Intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world’s vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us flourish” (Barad, 396). Understanding and recognizing what flourish means to the beings in that world then, is part of this ethical perspective, one that insists on the striving for ethical action towards humans and nonhumans, even if never coming to rest in a utopic ideal. Flourishing, according to Ingram, requires us to pay attention to the way physical signification can create nonrepresentational meanings outside hegemonic discourse and provides an ethical framework in the very materiality of Being, refusing to use the “other” as ground for a false transcendence from the material.

Liminal Ontologies in Drug Genre Film

While older TV and film narratives such as the *Salton Sea* often times succeed in relaying an ethical relationship with the pharmakos, more recent narratives like *Nurse*

Jackie and *Breaking Bad* better connect the racial, class, species, and gender representations that are bound up with representations of drug-bodies. Significantly, *Nurse Jackie* and *Breaking Bad* examine how the Cartesian rational human subject has been thought separate from the material world. Thus, the shows reject a positioning of anything (or anyone) thought tied to materiality as fixed in their 'natures,' an assumption that positions individual differences as explained by inherent, biological characteristics that are imagined as static and unchanging. If for many years the uses of drugs have been taken as a way to denigrate representations of race, gender, class, species, and ability, reevaluating human agencies through nonhuman forces in these TV narratives allow us to re-think material agencies as "trans-corporeal," across the body and the environment, and examine how these liminal intra-actions are able to signify differently than hegemonic discourses. These evaluations set drugs within the same parameters as 'contamination,' as neither purely negative nor positive, but rather, poison and cure. Subsequently, the indeterminate role drugs play in various situations involving human agencies and identifications can cut through hegemonic representational thinking by opening up ontological possibilities that refuse to be fixed into unchanging definitions.

Thus, while writer Harry Shapiro tells us that "In tackling drugs as a social issue as opposed to simple Victorian morality tales of individual decline and redemption-and even simpler 'goodies v. baddies' – Hollywood has made little progress," Shapiro's book *Shooting Starts: Drugs, Hollywood and the Movies*, published in 2003, obviously lacks the 11 years of film genre history that follow. He concludes that "if these films are about anything, they are about the alienation of those times. Crowded on the floor in a stick fug tripping to the Stones was never really a communal experience; everybody was surfing their own inner space" (280). Subsequently, for Shapiro, the social significance of these films begins when those who engage in their intoxication feel *more* "othered." What I find

intriguing in his thesis is that he believes that a feeling of the “they” is produced by them. He sees these films as an opening for viewers to dwell in what he calls “alternative states.” These “altered states” then cause viewers to hold people, agencies, and businesses in the public and private sector as untrustworthy. This deep distrust is then a way of recognizing the difficulties of rejecting a transcendental truth. He credits this battle for truth with the uncertainty viewers feel when recognizing multiple perspectives and suggests that “truths” are perhaps now thought to be won by this new generation full of “fear and loathing” (a reference to the film *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*), much like the war on drugs (281).

However, for my own analysis, 11 years after Shapiro’s, I find themes of uncertainty (or rather, as I see it, indeterminacy), the “other,” and the *pharmakos* still widely present in TV and film. However, in the current era where the theories of quantum mechanics are gaining wide spread knowledge, climate change is complicating our ideas of cause and effect, and environmental crisis forces us to rethink “contamination” in a new light, modern films and series still engage with the narratives of the *pharmakos*, but have begun to complicate these narratives. Or, perhaps they were always complicated, and we can find what we thought was left out, as Derrida puts it, already within. In other words, human and nonhuman material intra-actions were always part of the creation of the narratives of the *pharmakos*, refusing simple hegemonic definitions of subject/object, health/toxicity, self/other, inside/outside, and culture/nature binaries.

Narratives like *Nurse Jackie* allows us to discover the divine within the material, providing ontological possibilities within a sensible transcendental that deconstructs hegemonic representations of mothers, daughters, wives, nurses, saints, and women . Similarly, *Breaking Bad* recognizes the need for an ethical relation with the *pharmakos* by refusing the quest of false transcendence of the Cartesian subject; but also, critically, it

insists on an addictive re-reading of any narrative so that the “pharmakos” is never statically defined and overlooked. These narratives allow us to recognize the ontological possibilities in a world opened up by liminal negotiations, providing an ethical ontology that insists we take responsibility for our part in material-discursive enactments by refusing to foreclose those possibilities for the “other,” and by recognizing the “other” is already within. Thus, While Shapiro sees the ritual of the pharmakos in drug genre films as a kind of alienation of the outside by a preoccupation with inner space, I find their narratives to show that what was outside of that inner space was already within, and such rituals in drug films become less of an “altered state” than a liminal one.

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