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1978

THE COCAINE CULTURE IN AFTER HOURS CLUBS

by

TERRY MOSES WILLIAMS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York, Graduate School and University Center.

1978

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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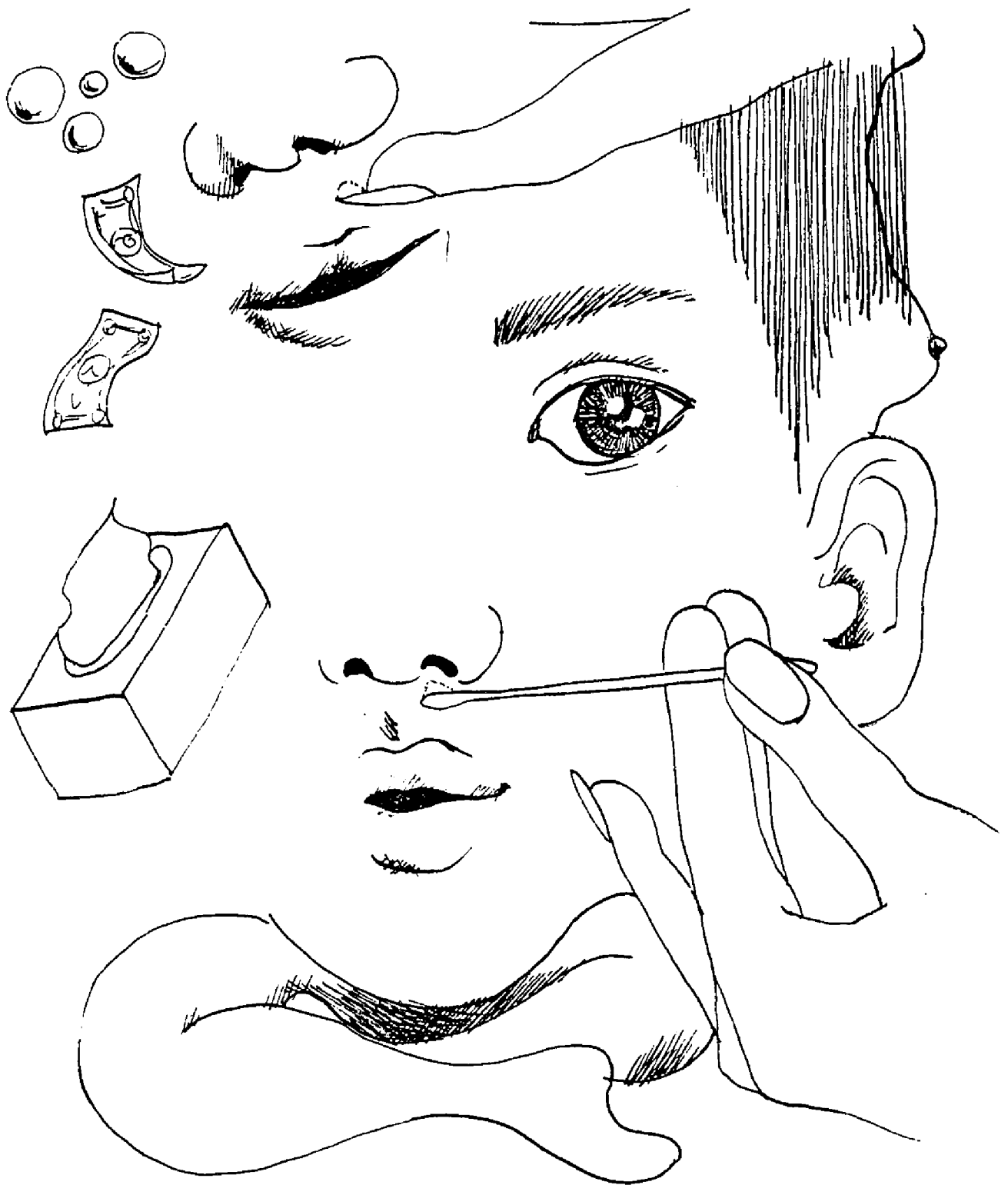
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Figure 1. Cocaine: Image, Object, Illusion



## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In Jamaica, the Rastafarians wear their hair in "dreadlocks" and smoke large amounts of "ganja" (marijuana) in defiance of the traditional values handed down from the British government since the days of slavery. The Rastafarians are the descendents of those early slaves. They wear their "natty dreads" in long, thick, matted braids. On the island of Dominica, a gang of guerillas called the Natty Dreads prey on the tourists. In the movie "The Harder They Come," Ivan, the hero, is a local ganja dealer. After he is pursued by the police and shoots government officials, he is successfully hidden by the Rastafarian community in defiance of the law. The Rastafarians detest authority. The cult of the Ganja smoke is part of the religious life along with their devotion to their god, the lion of Judah. The Rastafarians believe that as a people they are imprisoned in the gullet of authoritarianism and corrupt institutions. The music of the Rastafarian reflects their political and existential condition. Their musical themes express direct resistance to authority

and define the values and morality for their group.

Cocaine sniffers in after hours clubs are too part of a cult. Like the Rastafarians, they are part of a tradition dating back from Storyville in New Orleans that defied authority and resisted the moral and social values of the larger society. Every sniff of cocaine is an act of rebellion in defiance of the law. They live in and are connected to an underground cocaine-sniffing sub-culture. The cult of cocaine, like other drug sub-groups such as marijuana and heroin users, does not exist in a vacuum. Individuals come together in small groups where associations are formed, reputations are made and statuses established. The activities of a few draw others beyond the original coterie. Cocaine club culture is replete with complexities. It is a home to some, a working place for others and a leisure environment for most. The actions, objects and understandings that are transferred and accepted become the guiding principles for behavior in the sub-culture. Cocaine sniffers come from a wide variety of backgrounds, identities and cultures.

Cocaine sniffing is a form of popular culture reflecting the privateness of the 1970's: the low-key, individuated lifestyles as opposed to mass demonstrations, rallies, be-ins, smoke-ins and love-ins of the 1960's. The sub-culture is political only in its defiance of laws that dictate behavior that people feel should not be

regulated. It is also a sub-culture that has been celebrated and popularized by the media. Movies such as "Superfly" (1972), "The Seven Percent Solution" (1975), "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" (1972), "A Star is Born" (1976), "Annie Hall" (1977) all glorify cocaine in some way or at least make us more cognizant of its presence in the 1970's. The many books that have been published in the 1970's, including Ashley (1975), Byck (1974), Solomon and Andrews (1975), Sabbag (1977), all document cocaine's ubiquitous presence. In the recording industry with such works as Richard Pryor's "That Nigger's Crazy," he highlights the cocaine blues man ("I was into cocaine one time--almost snorted up Peru") to others like Taj Mahal and Curtis Mayfield. In addition, the cocaine paraphernalia business has been growing by leaps and bounds with the sale of silver, gold and copper straws, spoons and other instruments for cocaine use.

Cities intensify the cocaine sub-culture because larger and larger groups of people are attracted to it through the curiosity stirred by urban mass media. There is, of course, quite a debate raging between those who believe cities generate deviance and those who believe it is specific to other factors. The point here is that some people experiment with cocaine specifically because of the interest generated by the media whether they live in

cities or not. They are stimulated by movies and other media accounts of drug users' social lives, as well as by musical lyrics which are spiced with drug themes. By doing so, new interest is generated, newcomers buy paraphernalia and new members are recruited into a drug sub-culture. The sub-culture is further supported by specialized stores (head shops) that serve the group's changing tastes and needs.

This dissertation is a study of cocaine culture in after hours clubs. It provides a description of a unique, private and illegal sub-culture and the rules which regulate the conduct of cocaine users. In this setting, I particularly focus on the cocaine dealer and how he uses and is regulated by this sub-culture. The research is descriptive, based on personal observation, and makes analytical sense of this culture as it exists within the ecological and cultural networks of the city.

An after hours club is an illegal, semi-secret, drug-using institution where cocaine, marijuana, alcohol, and sex are bought, sold and used after regular bars are closed. The clubs are not licensed by city or state agencies to dispense drink or to hold any cabaret entertainment on the premises. They are found in most large cities. These clubs exist almost anywhere there are prostitutes, pimps, musicians, bartenders and others whose occupations require late-night hours and who want leisure time and

places of their own after official hours of closing.

This study investigates the hypothesis that to the degree an after hours club functions in the community as an institution, it establishes social control over cocaine users and non-users in a natural setting. Social interaction in the particular after hours club under study is largely centered around the use of cocaine. In New York City, the institutionalized after hours has developed and nurtured the cocaine user and non-user in a private and vibrant sub-culture. The boundaries of the sub-culture are not rigidly defined in terms of who is a member and who is not. It is best characterized as a flexible, adaptable social setting which allows different people from widely dispersed backgrounds to come together in a relatively secure setting to develop argot, exchange ideas and opinions as well as engage in another unconventional practice of drug use. These sub-cultures are to be discovered in poor sections of East Harlem, middle and upper middle class sections of Soho, Latin communities in the Bronx, and black communities in Bedford-Stuyvesant and Harlem.

The chapters are organized in the following manner: Chapter II is a brief history of after hours clubs traced back to the nineteenth century. Chapter III is a description of the clubs in the city. In this chapter, the reader is escorted into the club, introduced to the

types of patrons. Chapter IV is concerned with the ecology of the cocaine club, where we meet the employees, the owner, the dancer, and the snorter/habitues as they sit around the Blue Cat Cafe drinking, talking loud, rapping, talking shit, and sniffing cocaine from spoons, straws and fingernails. Chapter V concentrates on cocaine and its use. Included in this section is the economy of cocaine, and all the variations and implications of its use. Chapter VI is devoted to the socialization of cocaine users. We are introduced to various kinds of cocaine users and the cocaine club way of life. In Chapter VII, the characters of Frenchy Charleston and Alfredo Rojas are presented as prototypes of the cocaine street dealer. Some of the questions raised about the dealer are:

- (1) who becomes a dealer?
- (2) what problems are encountered?
- (3) what skills are required?
- (4) how is the dealer's work structured?
- (5) what are the signs of success or failure?
- (6) what role does the after hours club play in the dealer's life?

I conclude the thesis with Chapter VIII and some preliminary findings. Appendix 1 is on methodology; Appendix 2 contains implications for further research; and Appendix 3 is a discussion of slang in the after hours. The Glossary section follows.

Some of the initial questions this research raises are as follows:

- (1) Is there sub-culture of cocaine within cities?
- (2) What is this culture and its components?
- (3) Who are the cocaine users? Who is active in this sub-culture?
- (4) What function do after hours clubs play in this sub-culture?
- (5) What role does an after hours club play in the immediate community?
- (6) What are the special adjustments and self-definitions required to successfully join such a culture?
- (7) How do people represent to themselves and to others their reasons for using cocaine in after hours clubs?

This study takes a look at the cocaine sub-culture in after hours clubs as an anthropologist might observe people on a remote island. As an observer, he sees, hears many things happening around that is unfamiliar. In time, he learns the language, the customs and idiosyncracies of the people. Then after some meaning is derived, a record is kept of what he has seen and learned. In the same way, ethnography is a theory of how some particular human group lives.

The ethnographer must attempt to understand the people in the community he studies. The people in the community of the cocaine sub-culture live and interact in the after hours clubs. The task of the researcher is to gain the acceptance and familiarity of the members. This means **exploring** the body of information necessary to make some clear sense of how cocaine/after hours club world develops.

Several important factors emerge which must be incorporated in the analysis of any kind of drug use:

- (1) the chemistry of cocaine
- (2) the implications for society with regard to cocaine use and abuse.

These points will be expanded upon in the thesis. Some of the more specific concerns will be on the following questions:

- (1) What is the effect of cocaine on the mind and the body of the snorter/habitue as can be best described from an observer's point of view? What must be kept in mind, of course, is that in a great number of cases, the snorter/habitue is using cocaine in combination with other substances.
- (2) What are the socio-psychological aspects regarding who takes cocaine in the after hours clubs, how they take it, and why they take it?
- (3) What laws are used to suppress cocaine use?

In this way, we will be able to see in a micro-sociological way how the after hours club functions and sanctions cocaine use. On the macrosocial level, we will be able to see how the larger society responds and labels such behavior as unconventional.

People in institutions exist in time and space. In America, the idea of time connotes duration (Hall 1959), i.e., time is an entity which occurs between two points. In Western culture, a particular time is designated for play (unserious action like eating, drinking, sleeping or "time out" activity) and "time in" activity like work.

Each of these activities takes place within a

certain time zone in a particular place, in most cases, in different places and with different people. Work usually takes place in the day time, and sleep at night, with play over-lapping in both day and night time. More people are occupying spaces in the night time, however, as evident by recent trends where much of the twenty-four hours is being occupied by social, religious and political activities. A larger number of people, for example, have been employed during the night than ever before. In 1976, 12 million Americans worked at jobs ostensibly in the night time.<sup>1</sup> 2.5 million people worked a full shift beginning after midnight.<sup>2</sup> Workers have been known to use drugs during these late night shifts to cope with staying awake. Others indicate the shifts are lighter at night and thus more free time is available to enjoy the drug high.<sup>3</sup> Other people, aside from workers, are out at night. People attend movies, go to restaurants, commute on public transportation, deposit and withdraw money from all-night banks, go to parties, and do numerous other things all during the night. In New York City, for example, there are all night supermarkets, peep shows, restaurants, taxi limousine services, movie

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<sup>1</sup>The exception, of course, is in prisons, hospitals, and mental institutions, where there are no boundaries to separate sleep, work and play. Goffman defined such places as total institutions.

<sup>2</sup>Murray Melbin, "Night as Frontier," American Sociological Review 43:1 (1978) 5.

<sup>3</sup>David Caplovitz, The Working Addict (New York: the CUNY Graduate School and University Center, 1976)

houses, radio, t.v. broadcasting, rent-a-car agencies, hotels, gay pornographic films, gas stations, candy stores, banks, laundromats, film developing centers, bus and subway transportation. Melbin (1978:5) hypothesized that "the forces of expansion into the dark hours are the same as those resulting in expansion across the land. That is, a single causal explanation should account for the spread of people and their activities whether in space or in time."<sup>4</sup> This expansion into the night is viewed as a frontier phenomenon. "There was a succession of phases in settling the night-time. Each stage fills the night more densely than before and uses those hours in a different way. First came isolated wanderers on the street, then groups involved in production activities, then graveyard shift workers. Still later, those involved in consumption activities arrived, the patrons of all-night restaurants and bars and the gamblers who now cluster regularly by midnight at the gambling tables in resorts."<sup>5</sup>

In the frontier of time, defined as between 1:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., one can find in New York City, eccentric bag ladies, men and women with putrid odors (stink people), unconventional sexuality, illegal pleasure seekers, criminals, transvestites, people with physical deformities,

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<sup>4</sup>Melbin, "Night as Frontier," p.5.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

prostitutes, undercover police officers, all a part of a subterranean world with its own coherence and order. The institutions operating in the night frontier have their own morality and rules for conduct concerning the individuals who make up the night scene in the city. Not all night people share some kind of deformity or criminal association. Regular daytime people also seek adventure in the wilderness of time. The after hours clubs is a fort in the frontier of time, a settlement in the darker regions of the city.

A settlement is a stable occupation of space and time by people and their activities. The frontier is a pattern of sparse settlement in space and time located between a more densely settled and practically empty region. Below a certain density of active <sup>6</sup> people, a given space-time region is a wilderness.

Time is inevitably used with space. Space and time together make up the arena or stage for people's activity.

### The Scene

The scene within the after hours club is the entire context where interaction takes place. It is here that the symbolic significance of the acts, props, staging and other scenic components come together to influence the actors.

All social interaction is affected by the physical container within which it occurs. The various

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

elements of the container establishes a world of meaning through the arrangement of non-verbal symbolism.<sup>7</sup>

The container defines the physical and symbolic limitations on behavior. It further limits possible movement by its pre-determined size. The six dimensions of any scene are:

- (1) the container: a given space where the spatio-temporal properties exist.
- (2) the props: the objects, dress, chairs, tables, within the container
- (3) the actors: the people involved in the action
- (4) modifiers: the physical elements such as light, sound, odor, temperature
- (5) duration: the time within which the action will occur.
- (6) progression: the order of events which precede or follow the action<sup>8</sup>

The after hours club space varies from club to club. The average club (the prototype is the Blue Cat Cafe) is about fifty feet in length and thirty feet in width. The entrance way has three doors. The first has an iron front gate with a small spy hole. This hole is significant because the door guard inspects without a word people he recognizes. The second door allows the habitue into a closed space between the first, second, and third doors. Here the

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<sup>7</sup>David Bennett & Judith Bennett, "Making the Scene," Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction, ed. C. Stone and Farberman (Waltham, MA; Sinn-Blaisdell Publishing, 1970) p. 190.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

visitor is searched before being allowed into the club area through the third door. People in institutions where security measures are present usually view such measures as antagonistic to their free expression. In prison, for example, a locked door, guards, body searches are both physically and psychologically de-humanizing for the inmates. Viewed another way, these same features in a different setting may insure a certain collective sense of protection. Instead of security measures creating a diminution in the opportunities for expression and communication, it may actually heighten such expression.

Cocaine users, illegal gamblers, and many others, who in an activity where there is a chance of arrest or injury by outside forces may cling together. People often feel secure with others in order to share anxiety in a similar situation. "Schachter (1959) showed that the greater the risk people thought they were facing, the more anxious they were, the more they wanted to be with others, even strangers, facing the same risk."<sup>9</sup> Apparently, people in the same stressful or dangerous situation feel others help reduce anxiety and also "provides an opportunity to appraise one's own feelings and adjust them appropriately to the risk. With less emotional uncertainty

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<sup>9</sup>Melbin, "Night as Frontier," p. 13.

and with the knowledge that others share the circumstances, individuals feel better about confronting a stressful situation."<sup>10</sup>

In any arena or stage, the scene must be considered. The scene is a statement about the reality of the place-- its ambiance intensifies the action by allowing the scene to generate its own climax and unique applause.<sup>11</sup> The establishment by design provides the decor, music, low lights, props, tables and chairs for the actors to experience something in. This is accomplished in conjunction with what is happening to the actors themselves (snorting cocaine for instance). The proximity by which people talk, touch, sniff and dance is directly attributable to the arrangement of props (objects in the establishment). For instance, small leather stools are easily assembled so that several people can come together to share drinks, cocaine or marijuana. The tables and chairs are set up in such a way that conversation and physical contact can go smoothly. People are often seen moving chairs and tables to accommodate additional friends. The other components of the scene: elements of light, sound, odor, temperature, the cigarette machine, the juke box, the staircase, the lavatory, the mirrors, the bar, heating and time all give further order and meaning to the after hours club experience.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Brecht on Theatre, ed., trans., John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang 1964)

## Cocaine on the Drug Frontier

Since cocaine is used in the after hours club, its presence conjures up a further analogy in which the frontier can be used.<sup>12</sup> Cocaine use in the institution is on the frontier of time in that it will eventually become legal or at least licit in the future. Like the after hours clubs and the emerging use of the twenty-four hour day, it is a new sphere that offers hope as a new activity. The consumption of alcohol, after years of illegal status, became legal throughout the United States. The use of marijuana, while still illegal in most states, has spread into the lives of millions of Americans. Today the attempt to decriminalize the use of marijuana is on the rise in many of the larger cities. Thus, as old ways surrender to new ones, cocaine, while on the frontier of drug use, will tomorrow be as free as alcohol is today.

### Thrill Seekers

The actors in the frontier of time have previously been described as gamblers (Kusyszyn 1977), thrill seekers (Zuckerman 1971) and risk takers (Jackson, Hourany, Vidmar 1972). The demand for the frontier experience gives the night person an increasing sense of arousal in his/her

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<sup>12</sup>The research on cocaine has led to proposals for cocaine nose drops and coca chewing gum. Dr. Andrew Weil of Harvard Medical School has reported how coca in South America aids in stomach disorders of the native population.

attempts at free expression. Jackson, et al (1972) defined risk-taking "as a willingness to be exposed to situations with uncertain outcomes."<sup>13</sup> They placed risk taking into four dimensions:

- (1) financial gamble or monetary risk taking
- (2) taking chances in situations involving bodily harm or physical risk to the person, or physical risk-taking
- (3) taking chances in situations in which normative ethical values are involved, or ethical risk taking
- (4) social risk taking which involves situations in which the subjects esteem in the eyes of others is at stake<sup>14, 15</sup>

This form of expression has been conceptualized as part of the gambler's personality (Kusyszyn 1977). I argue that it is also part of the cocaine habitue's life style. In particular, those who come out in the night-time (1:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.), to seek adventure. There are habitues in the night-time who are not risk-takers or thrill seekers, in the sense implied here: those night people who make up the night underworld, who have skills and are not taking a "chance." In other words, the hustler/dealer, hit

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<sup>13</sup> D.N. Jackson, L. Hourany, and H.J. Vidmar, "A Four Dimensional Interpretation of Risk Taking," Journal of Personality (1972) 40: 483-501.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> see also S. Rettig, "Group Discussion and Predicated Ethical Risk Taking," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (1966) 3: 629-633.

man, transvestite, night bandit, are not "out there" with the expectations of having fun. The thrill seeker is faced with an atmosphere of true risk unlike the night-time hustler.

### A Subculture

Social worlds, be they dark hidden dives of the night or street corners in large urban centers, are explored and made sense of by people who happen to be sociologists, novelists, or reporters in the literary tradition. These writers inform us about some hertofore unknown world. There is usually an inherited pattern of thought where such works derive. This study is no different. The research outlined here is based on works in the sociological tradition of Gans (1962), Whyte (1964), Liebow (1967), Becker (1963), Cavan (1966), Roebuck and Frese (1976) and Kornblum (1974), in that it employs observed personal events.

Social scientists and novelists have unearthed many studies in this manner. Notably, Claude Brown's Manchild in the Promised Land, Ruth Benedict's Patterns of Culture, Frederick Gearing's The Face of the Fox, Carlos Casteneda's Tales of Power, and Richard Wright's Eight Men. Other artists with vision such as photographers like Brassai and James Van Der Zee, have captured unknown worlds. Brassai in secret Paris brothels and Van Der Zee in his striking impressions of Harlem.

What most of the earlier social scientific accounts tend to stress is that these hidden enclaves are somehow deviant, alienated and insecure. It has been novelists and a few sensitive others who seem to consistently portray people with feeling and special insight.

The after hours club and cocaine use is not a fad or a contemporary happening. It has been around a long time. And what people do in after hours clubs has changed very little over the years. The illegal black market, the prostitution, and the hustlers still persist. The after hours club is an enduring phenomena which began with a jazz music tradition and since that time cocaine use has become the primary reason people continue to go there. The works of Gans, Whyte and Liebow takes sub-cultures from the point of view of official reality and the cocaine habitue as deviant individuals whose lives are out of kilter with the world. Theories of drug use usually coalesce around the notion of deviance. Individuals involved in any activity that is considered immoral and/or one which demands attention from agencies of social control are viewed as deviant. To be deviant is to be recognized as such by those who are offended by what they see. Yet people are in the after hours club in secrecy. They are not seen by outsiders as a rule. The question is - can they be deviant without a looker extending their moral judgements onto them.

The theoretical and empirical focus of these early works continue to provide models for social scientists today. Common among these constructs are notions of "sub-culture," "class," "social structure," "analytic induction." The cocaine culture fits well into Becker's theory of marijuana users and jazz musicians, Kornblum's tavern culture

typology and Cavan's ethnography of a bar. What is significant, however, is that the after hours cocaine culture has its own coherence and order, its own rules, norms, special customs and language. While it has major similarities to the larger society, it is perpetuating a lifestyle uniquely its own.

## CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE  
AFTER HOURS CLUB

The after hours club and its relationship to a private way of life, music and drugs have historical roots dating back to the late 1860's. Ragtime, the predecessor to jazz, started in the 1800's in, some say, a brothel.<sup>16</sup> New Orleans had a great number of ragtime musicians who found the brothels and other "jook joints" one of the few places they could play their music and be accepted. This was also one of the few places they could receive a constant income for their artistry. The discrimination of the time prevented many of these musicians from working in the white clubs, taverns and other establishments where a decent wage was offered. At this early juncture, blacks were not admitted to white unions and had not yet established their own. The red light district then became synonymous with ragtime or 4/4 time: rag derives from the term playing "ragged" which is music played between the beats,

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<sup>16</sup>E. Simms Campbell, "Early Jan," The Negro Caravan, Sterling A. Brown, Arthur Davis, Ulysses Lee, eds., (New York: Arno Press, 1970) pp.933 - 990.

not exactly on the beat.<sup>17</sup> Ragtime, and later jazz, became part of a "street"lifestyle. Street, in those days, meant to be low-lived and was synonymous with whores, pimps, con men and other drifters. New Orleans became the haven for these itinerant types. The steamboat workers, gamblers, hustlers and the ethnic mixture of Italians, French, Germans, Spanish, Indians and blacks made New Orleans a choice place for cultures of ethnic diversity. Musicians, whose music was appreciated by those who attended brothels, found the brothel a "home" for their music. A rapport developed between the musicians who used the brothel as a place to improvise and create new works, and the audience who appreciated the musicians' skill. The brothels employed musicians to enliven and cheer up the patrons, and so the marriage was consummated.

In 1897, Sidney Story, a New Orleans politician, was making history by complying with the will of a large portion of the population in creating a legitimate red light district. Through this legislative action, "Storyville" was born. Storyville, in New Orleans, was an area ten blocks long, contained thirty-five whore houses and 2,200 prostitutes. The houses included a potpourri of crib joints, gambling places, cabarets, cafes, opium dens, honky tonks, and dance schools.<sup>18</sup> Storyville's main source of entertainment was sex and music. The owners of these

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p.983.

<sup>18</sup>Jack V. Buerkle and Danny Barker, Bourbon Street Black (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973)

brothels, some of which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, hired musicians when they came into the city. The musicians could live at the brothels, get free liquor, food, as well as a few dollars, in exchange for their performance. They, in turn, had to play hours on end. They could play any tune they wished as long as they did not stop. They could also improvise as much as they pleased. They often played "double" because during the day they would play six to eight hours, then play in the brothel at night until early morning. The musicians would often chew calabash<sup>19</sup> to help them keep going during these long musical stretches. (One would imagine cocaine was used, since it was legal at this time).<sup>20</sup> Piano players were the most sought-after musicians for this kind of work because the piano could be tuned down during the early morning hours, although other instruments were also used. It has been said jazz music and its originators, like Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Freddie Keppard and hundreds of other musicians, started in Storyville. However, jazz did not begin in Storyville but really many years earlier, with great musicians like Buddy Bolden. But it was in Storyville that a special kind of musical tradition started. This tradition was one where musicians could freely exchange

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<sup>19</sup> a common bottle gourd

<sup>20</sup> cocaine was available legally from about 1835 to 1914; during these years it is suspected that prostitutes and musicians used cocaine during late-night parties.

musical ideas. The jam session, or after hours cutting session, became an institution where musicians gathered after work to continue to play when every other club had closed. These sessions provided opportunities for young musicians to learn from the old masters. Thus the after hours club became the institution for musical apprenticeship.

One of the cabarets, owned by Peter Lala and called Cafe Lala, may well be one of the first after hours clubs.<sup>21</sup> In an interesting book called Bourbon Street Black, the setting is described:

It was principally at Lala's that the musicians gathered after work to socialize and exchange musical ideas. Jazz had come alive. It had made the final transformation to a distinct identity. It need not have received that final catalytic boost in these surroundings. But it did. While Storyville nurtured jazz and its players, it contributed to an image that was to brand the music and the man as deviant.<sup>21</sup>

Later, during the 1920's and 30's in New York, Baltimore, Kansas City, Chicago and other cities, speakeasies and after hours clubs flourished. Here, as well, musicians of every distinction and category frequented these dives, often having to outplay the other. These sessions lasted so long into the morning that they were often called "snook's breakfasts." It was also the reason why such places were dubbed "after hours clubs."

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<sup>21</sup>

Jack V. Buerkle and Danny Barker, Bourbon Street Black (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) p. 21.

Albert Murray, in his book Stomping the Blues, tells how the emergence of Saturday night functions, honky-tonks and jook joints, became one of the secular alternatives to church and gospel music as a counter-agent or exorcist to what is referred to as "the blues."<sup>22</sup>

Unlicensed after hours clubs, which generally open at four a.m., have been around since Prohibition days. Around 1933, some of these clubs stayed open even after Prohibition expired and the sale of alcoholic beverages became legal again. Cabaret licensing is required for a social (after hours) club, selling food or drink and/or providing dancing or other entertainment if it was chartered after January 1, 1926.

Byron Hall is 29 years old. He frequents after hours clubs regularly. His father owned a New York after hours club in the 1940's. He recounts how his father's club followed in the tradition of Storyville where local singers could get their start:

My pops had a joint called "Back of the Tracks," that was located down by the railroad tracks. That's where the sho-nuff, sho-nuff was happening. People used to come in there--blues singers. People used to play music, sing. But in your big after hours joints, you had big entertainers, people like Billie (Holiday) and stuff. But you know, every area had its singers. Even Nancy Wilson. She started out in the Bronx in an after hours club under the name "Baby Doll." That's the way she started. Monk played in

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<sup>22</sup> Albert Murray, Stomping the Blues (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973)

my pop's place. Billie, too. Monk and my father grew up together. They'd get all smoked up and stuff. Yeah, you know, so that after hours had their own entertainment. Of course, you'd have to pay for all that. Like, in my pop's place, if they had a gig, a set, with dancing and stuff, then you had to pay to get in. Other nights, it was just like you had to know somebody. That kind of thing. To get in, dig? That's how it worked. If you knew so and so, then boom, you were in. Besides just the booze, the coke, the smoke and stuff, there would be gambling games going on in there. And, of course, you had the girls working there. This was like their base. They would come on down and they would get a john and go upstairs or somewhere. All of this was going on, and pops gets a percentage. Because they got protection and rooms. Plus board. All that. Every night, my pops and his brothers had to throw somebody out. Him and his brother be everything: manager, body-guard, bouncer. Somebody would shoot up the joint every Friday night. Everybody got rowdy with all the booze. Yeah, booze was for everybody, but the coke was for the pimps, you know, the people who had the bread. Coke was more expensive than smoke. Even smack (heroin) didn't come on the scene for a long time. The first thing that was on the streets was morphine. Then all the smoke, then coke, then heroin came on the streets. But coke was reserved for the so-called "upperclass" black folk. And everybody else was drinking that moonshine. They also sold clothes and had the numbers in there. See, my pops worked in the garment district. And he be swagging clothes on the side. Dig it? And they had something hooked up that if you just tell them what you want, the size, and order it, they go and cop it. Like they were running a tailor shop. So they had that going, and they had the after hours joint where they be going to booze, you know, coke, smoke, you know. And they be cooking dinner, pig-foot dinners, Southern fried chicken dinners, you know. You can just get a platter of any kind of dish you want. Dig? You remember when Billie was singing, "Give me some of that pigfeet and a bottle of beer?" That's where that comes from. From the after hours joint. Give me a pigfoot and a bottle of beer. Pigfoot platter, you dig? You get your pigfeet, black eyed peas, potato salad. You dig it? And a bottle of beer. You could eat, drink, sleep, you could stay there all night and the next day if you wanted to. Because this was the street, man. You know the cat who's running the after

hours joint is the dude with the same kind of mentality as the pimp. There's a more organized element of street culture. All the people that is would relate to would be street people. The after hours joints, I mean, served a lot of purposes. It was the best place you could get a meal and the food would be really good. I mean the pigfeet and rice was really good, you know. And it wasn't that expensive. And if you had some bread to gamble, it was one of the best places to go to. It was even better than the alley, and other gambling joints. You get a better deal, you know. If you were going to get a knife in your back, that's quick. You dig what I'm saying, you understand? All this is going down. More organized. So that the after hours was the place, everything. And especially for people that were entertainers and pimps, this was their showcase. This is where they could show off. The entertainers would come to the after hours after their gigs and they'd be up all night, playing some more. Jamming. It was a showcase. You know, the after hours was full of night-time people. And this is the kind of crowd they were pulling. If they had a little bread, they would come and spend it. For some of these cats, it was nothing to drop a thousand dollars in a gambling game. They'd think nothing of it. These cats had that kind of money, you see what I'm saying? That kind of bread would be going across the table. But you get all kinds all levels of after hours joints. I guess nay place that was either supplying booze, right, some form of food, some form of entertainment, be it music or women, would be considered, I would say, an after hours joint. Right. If it had those ingredients. You could take it from there and put in whatever you wanted to add. From the description that my father gave me, I guess he had damn near a little bit of everything. They had it set up so that if you come in and if you wanted to listen to some music, you could do that. If people wanted some action, you'd go in this room or that room. Whatever you wanted, goddamn, they had it. Understand? You just had to know how to crack.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Byron Hall, interview held in his home, New York City, February 1977.

The after hours club and jazz music both developed and expanded into separate directions. The after hours clubs remained illegal and surreptitious, maintaining a lifestyle of drugs and street people that had been nurtured historically. Jazz, on the other hand, became legitimate and moved on into the mainstream of our musical culture. Today, there are few after hours clubs where young musicians can learn through apprenticeship the artistry of older musicians. What the club lost for the musician, it maintained for the street hustler and others. What Byron described as a "showplace" for those street people with money is an important point. Where do street people who become successful through illegal means display their wealth? The after hours clubs is one such place, because it has retained that character as an institution for the "fast money players," those who may be successful for a night or a month.

Byron Hall's interesting account was that the "after hours was full of night-time people." What exactly is meant by "night-time people?" Is this a special breed of individual who inhabits the night-time? If so, what characteristics do they have? In contemporary urban America, do night-time people continue to frequent the "fort" in the frontier of time--the after hours club? The clubs remain diversified, some continuing in the cocaine, marijuana and female prostitute tradition, and others maintaining a non-cocaine, male prostitute orientation.

The musical tradition of jazz is now absent from both types of clubs.

Today the music in the after hours club is packaged music. Jazz recordings by a few artists (Monk, Turrentine, Benson) may be heard, but basically the music is contemporary rhythm and blues, disco-musak latin/soul and black and white rock.

## CHAPTER III

## AFTER HOURS CLUBS: A DESCRIPTION

Cities provide the kind of anonymity necessary for individuals who seek alternative lifestyles. One of the characteristic advantages of the city is its density as well as its capabilities as a hiding place. The after hours clubs is a social institution offering reinforcement and security in the pursuit of an illegal lifestyle of cocaine, pimps, prostitutes. It is a secure, ritualized theatre for reinforcing a "cool" view of the world. In New York, after hours clubs are hiding places for a variety of ethnic and cultural groups located in obscure sections of the city. There are no signs that indicate the nature of such establishments, and, in most cases, they are unmarked in any way except for the address numbers on the buildings. It is because of their illegal nature that after hours clubs are purposely hidden and obscure.

The after hours club is part of the social club and tavern scene in New York and other large cities. The clubs comprise a drug underground and are a secluded part of the social life of the city. They are hidden in part because of some of the activities that occur there: drug-taking, nudity,

prostitution and homosexuality. The club, as an establishment, caters to most classes and races in the city. In the cocaine after hours club, cocaine is sniffed, eaten and smoked with impunity and without regard for the laws of the larger society. Various other drugs are also used, sold or bartered on the premises. The clubs do not have cabaret or liquor licenses, yet they provide drinks and entertainment. Interestingly enough, even though hustlers make up a large portion of the clientele, there is no open bartering or "boosting" of stolen merchandise within the premises. Since the clubs are private, this suggests that it caters to an elite element of the hustling world.

The women there are hustling women--street women of one kind or another. Mavis, a 32 year old woman who is married to a dealer, said of the women in the clubs:

There are lots of women who sell there. They just deal like the men and often with better results because they offer more than a blow. I mean a man may have a woman who is just sitting home doing nothing, wearing the best clothes, eatin' the best food, and he may say, here, bitch, have a piece (of coke); go out and make your share. In this way, a lot of women get turned out to be dealers by their men. They are always around it, they have probably been taught at one time or another the skills involved. So boom. They are ready to deal whenever the man feels she's ready or when the situation calls for her help. So any way, in the club, you have a lot of hustling women. Hustling coke, pussy, or both. I would say that there weren't more men dealers than women. I would say it's about even, because every man that deals has a woman who either is a dealer ipso-facto or at least knows how to. I think the women are less visible but they are there, I'm sure. She probably deals small stuff to her friends and shit, but however small, she deals.

Clubs that are exclusively cocaine-oriented usually have a pool of available women. These women are not necessarily paid prostitutes, but are another kind of hustling women. They are usually heavy snorters and will interact with male patrons who show a willingness to give them cocaine or to "turn them on." Often, they will come to the club with one or more women friends. The other type of available woman is the actual prostitute who charges a fee for her services. The cocaine clubs have both types of women but has a preponderance of the former. There are also many female habitués, however, who are escorted by male companions or women friends who are not considered "available." The majority of women in the clubs are not of course, "hustling" women. The women make up a wide range of identities and backgrounds and their role in the after hours scenario can not be placed uniformly into a "hustling" category.

#### The After Hours Club Management

The management employs several workers. Among them are a doorman (who frisks the patrons), a money-taker, a guard, a manager, barmaids and several "housegirls." Dancers are not included among the regular employees since they are usually hired for one night only or on limited contracts. The dancer may become a regular employee if she

takes on the duties of the "house girl," that is, if she works strictly for tips rather than a flat fee (usually about \$50) for her dancing.

The management offers other entertainment for patrons, including gambling, music and prostitution. Gambling is often found in a special part of the club, away from the regular patrons who are uninterested in it. In the Blue Cat, gambling is not recommended for regular patrons by the management, nor are they informed about it unless they inquire. Even then, the owner may not give his consent. In some other clubs, however, because of limited space, the gambling table is located in the main room of the club, and anyone can participate.

Unlike the neighborhood tavern or nightclub, the after hours clubs door is closed to most people. To get in, one must be a member of the club, carry a card, or know a member's name. Some clubs protect their members and the business enterprise by providing a searching system. For the most part, all the cocaine clubs have searching systems whereas the non-cocaine clubs do not. The management of cocaine clubs are aware of trouble because of the kind of clientele they attract and the impossibility of calling the police. The system is not foolproof, because women are not searched, but it does give at least some sense of protection. Once the patrons are searched by the doorguard and found to be "clean," that is, carrying no weapons, the patrons are allowed to enter. Tape recorders, cameras and other gadgets are taken at the door and given back to the patrons as they leave the premises.

After hours clubs, especially cocaine-oriented ones, are competitors with other legal establishments for the services of their customers. In other words, the after hours club supplies a place for snorters of cocaine to congregate at the hours they prefer. The after hours club as an institution caters to a group of people for whom it discharges some function or service. They attract patrons from the same space as other institutions, namely bars and nightclubs, which perform a similar service of providing entertainment. Some competition between after hours clubs and bars exist since both bars and after hours clubs are concerned with the customer as drinker. Although, at different times, the after hours clubs are concerned as well with the customer as snorter, gambler, and "john," but they too make much of their money from alcohol sales. If the after hours clubs operated simply as an institution for snorters of cocaine, then it would cease being a profitable enterprise. An illustration of what I mean would be a shift in clientele, or a change in corresponding tastes by persons patronizing the clubs could cause them to close. Take, for instance, the following example given by a patron of the now-defunct "30th Street Club":

You know, Benny (the owner) had to pay rent, too. He wasn't getting that place for nothing. He was making a pretty penny on the bar as well as the crap game. The house was cutting the game and them cats was spending a lotta scratch back there. But he started to get a lot of young kids in there, you know sniffing that shit, coking and heroin, but

wasn't going to the bar. And he didn't have a place just for you to sniff because if he did, he wouldn't be in business. But that's the reason why he closed. You gotta make your money on the bar. And all places don't have gamblin', so you know how they gotta make it. Unless they be selling blow. But when Benny closed, it was because those kids wasn't gamblin' and wasn't going to the bar.

The competition between the after hours and the regular bars is illustrated in this typical comment by a regular bar owner:

I have to buy licenses that cost me thousands of dollars: liquor licenses, dancing licenses. Yet they (the after hours clubs) don't have to pay for any of that. Why should I have to put up with that? They should all be shut down.<sup>24</sup>

Several factors emerge as reasons for the after hours popularity. One, people simply do not wish to end their night after regular bar closing hours; two, the excitement of the illegal clubs often buttressed by events and entertainment that is exciting, uninhibited and uncensored; and three, there has been a decline in legitimate nightclubs and cabarets in various parts of the city. The drug use that is prohibited in regular clubs is allowed in after hours clubs and has become a major incentive for their popularity. A survey of the crowd at after hours clubs runs the gamut from elaborately dressed women from Westchester to teenagers snorting cocaine in sneakers. The after hours scene as a type of night experience is becoming more widespread with the increased use of cocaine.

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<sup>24</sup> the N.Y.C. Task Force on Social Clubs concurs... that city, state and federal taxes were not being paid by after hours clubs, thus, they were defrauding these various government agencies of millions of dollars in taxes.

In general, after hours clubs comprise a unit within the larger category of illegal social clubs. They can be further classified, however, into several distinct categories which attract a specific night clientele. The first is the gay after hours clubs, which caters specifically to gay men and lesbian women.

### A Typology of After Hours Clubs

#### The Gay After Hours Club

The gay bar scene has recently evolved into "private clubs" which have been often linked to organized crime. Organized crime money, it is argued, has established the new private clubs for homosexuals in order to maintain the homosexual character and customer that gay bars once did. Gay bars have restrictions which gay after hours clubs do not have. For example, New York State makes the touching of genitals or engaging in overt sex acts by members of the same sex illegal. But the after hours club is more permissive, and the gay bar appears somewhat timid by comparison.

At present, underworld money is being reinvested in private clubs, many designed to retain their homosexual clientele. Since these clubs are private, they are immune from routine police and State Liquor Authority inspection. Most do not operate with a

liquor license and many have "orgy rooms," darkened recesses where sexual behavior takes place. The police find it difficult to move against unlicensed liquor sales and homosexual behavior since courts will not issue warrants without specific complaints, and naturally these are difficult to obtain. Even those that have been raided take advantage of the delays in court appearance and the relatively minor penalties by remaining open for business or by re-opening again in a short time. Some of these places also, of course, "buy immunity" in the form of pay-offs to the local police.<sup>25</sup>

### The Bottom Club

The Bottom Club starts its nightly operation between the hours of 12:00 and 3:00 a.m., depending on the kind of event taking place. The closing hours are about six in the morning. The club functions as a social institution for gay patrons who share similar lifestyles and security, avoiding the stigma of the gay bar. The Bottom Club also caters to the theatre groups that wish to have private cast parties. Although the club is primarily male-oriented and attracts male gays, it does not exclude women or men escorting women.

The Bottom Club is located in lower Manhattan, hidden in a section filled with warehouses and commercialized factory establishments. The streets are dark and narrow and the buildings on the outside look drab and run-down. In recent years, a surprising number of artists, writers, actors and others have moved into many of the buildings, creating a large network of alternative living space with

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<sup>25</sup> Colin Williams and Martin Weinberg, Male Homosexuals: Their Problems and Adaptations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) p. 40.

# THE BOTTOM CLUB

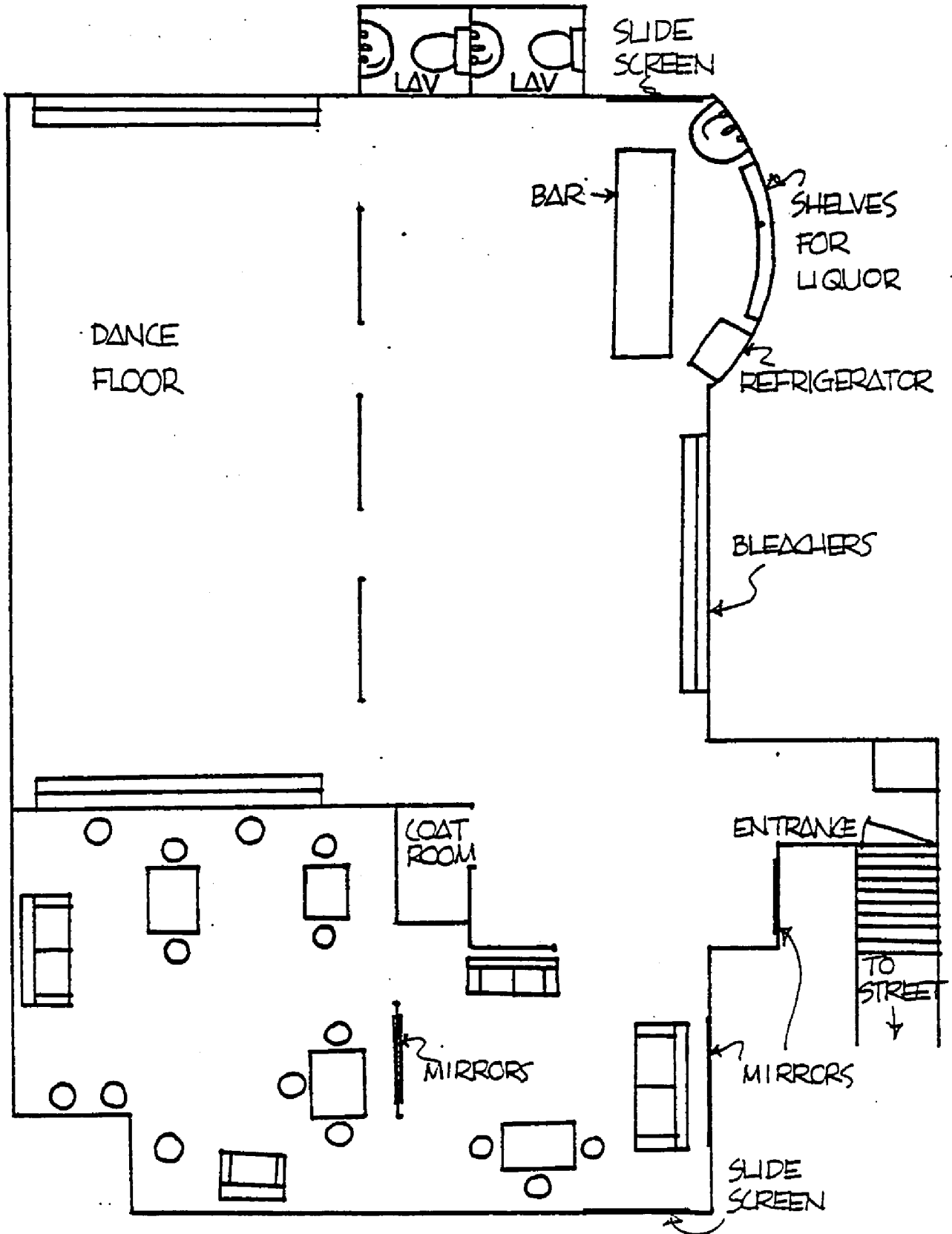


figure 2

artists' lofts and galleries. This has brought an influx of vitality to this area and has created a kind of artists' culture which is not really apparent on the surface. This change has been reflected in the sprouting of book stores servicing a mostly gay buyers market. In addition, there are many boutiques, small restaurants, a movie theatre, and night clubs which cater to the members of this gay area. There is a considerable non-gay East Indian community which exists in this section. The Indians have set up reticent and unassuming small businesses as hot dog vendors, newspaper stand owners and restaurant entrepreneurs. The Bottom Club serves to illustrate the recent gay movement into illegal after hours clubs.

The street where the Bottom Club is located typifies many of the streets in the area. During the day, artists and writers can be seen with canvasses and other equipment walking through the twisting, winding streets below the tall dingy buildings. By late night, however, the streets look deserted except for an occasional shadowy passerby. The buildings that make up the block all seem uninhabited and they are uniformly blurred and indistinguishable. The Bottom Club building has six stories, with some of the windows boarded up, adding to its abandoned appearance. The only indication that the establishment is a club is the multi-colored splotches on the big, metal entrance door that creaks shut after someone has passed.

through it. Inside, with the aid of a dim incandescent lightbulb, one can see a freight elevator off to one side and a staircase right behind it. A sign saying "Bottom Club" points up toward the stairs.

As I made my way up the steps, I could hear disco music playing in the background. I could see standing there a tall, elegantly dressed, mustachioed man whose apparent job was to receive customers like myself. He asks all customers for an invitation; if they did not have one, there was a five dollar entrance fee. After paying, he pointed to a small room through the doorway and said, "Please sign our guest book before you leave so you will be on our mailing list." I walked through the door and signed my real name.

Inside, there was a small coat check room facing me, and the young man standing inside leaned forward and asked, "Would you like to check your coat, sir?" I did, and then walked through another dull and unpainted entrance door to the club. The main section of the club was large compared to some of the popular discotheques in the city like Studio 54 or Pegasus. It held about a hundred people easily, and these were mostly men. There were only about three or four women there. One woman habitue explained why few women are seen in exclusively gay men clubs.

A few years ago it was common for a gay guy to have women friends who they hung out with. But now the men are into themselves more and shirk the feminine association. Most of the men are into super macho games. If you ever go to the "strip" (the warehouse section the lower west side of Manhattan), you'll see what I mean.

The space in the Bottom Club was divided into two rooms filled with sofa, chairs and game tables. Patrons sat here, smoking, drinking, talking and playing chess and backgammon. The lighting was dim and conducive to intimate socializing among the habitue. A few large mirrors covered the walls, and one wall was used as a large t.v. screen to show images of nude men. Some of the male habitue would stand holding hands and conversing while watching the slide show. Both of these rooms were connected to a room which was at least twice as large. Here the disco music was loud and blaring, and a clearing had been made in the center of the room where men danced. Some non-dancers stayed in the bleachers off to the side, while others stood by the well-stocked bar with drinks in their hands.

The hours between two and four in the morning are the most crowded times in the Bottom Club. Dancing is the main form of action, with "cruising" as an established part of the club's social activity. "Cruising" is an activity in which the object is to look and seek out possible sexual partners. The look or stare is important in the "cruising" act because the looker who initiates the stare can readily assess and acknowledge whether or not the other person is interested.

Second to the bar (although only as places for meeting and/or consummating a sexual contact), are those places where "cruising" takes place. Cruising refers to the pursuit and solicitation of sexual partners in public places, usually being a patterned activity in the particular places known to homosexuals as likely areas to meet other homosexuals. These would include steam baths and transportation centers. In addition to those cruising areas, there are other locales that serve as gathering places for homosexuals, for example, certain restaurants, cafes, and hotels, but none are as important as the bar.<sup>26</sup>

The gay after hours club, like the gay bar, is an institution that provides a safe place for gay patrons to congregate for the purposes of dancing, intimate sexual encounters and other forms of prohibited or illegal behavior. The labelling of gay members by heterosexuals is eliminated within the walls of the after hours club. The after hours club scene provides a few basic functions that are different from the gay bar. The first function is sheltering of gay members from outsiders, since the gay bar is an open region in the sense that anyone can come in who desires to. The second function is the open drug use allowed in the clubs, and finally that after hours clubs present no special restrictions on time as bars do.

#### The Non-Cocaine After Hours Club

Walter Reckless, writing on the distribution of commercialized vice in the city in 1926, examined the city of cheap sex and other forms of organized deviance and described it as social and personal disorganization. He argued that the commercialized vice section of the metropolitan region to be a naturally segregated component for individuals and group business-

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<sup>26</sup> Weinberg and Williams, *Male Homosexuals*, p.80.

men who exploit the newcomer, the out-of-towner, and the person who seeks sex and other forms of cheap entertainment.

Times Square is one of the many commercialized vice areas of New York City. It is centrally located in midtown Manhattan, and is easily accessible by bus, subway, cabs and private cars. Along with Bryant Park, the Port Authority Bus Terminal is a major institution in the area that attracts the transients who populate the area. There are many dingy hotels with tiny rooms and urine-stained halls that are rented out on a per hour, per day, per week or per month basis. The streets are always crowded--during the day with working people who are employed in the business districts within Times Square, and at night with an incredible mixture of people seeking late-night entertainment. Part of the theatre district is located there, and well-dressed men and women can be seen hurrying to and from Broadway shows. But among these people can also be seen transients who huddle together on street corners or in pin-ball parlours whiling away their time. Men from various economic strata are also seen going in and out of sleazy massage parlours, X-rated bookstores, peep shows and cheap pornographic movie houses. Prostitutes on the stroll are obvious, both day and night. They stand on street corners and doorways, beckoning passersby for a taste of their special form of entertainment. Although recently there have been attempts to upgrade this area, Times Square is still notorious as Manhattan's garish red light district.

Pee Wee's

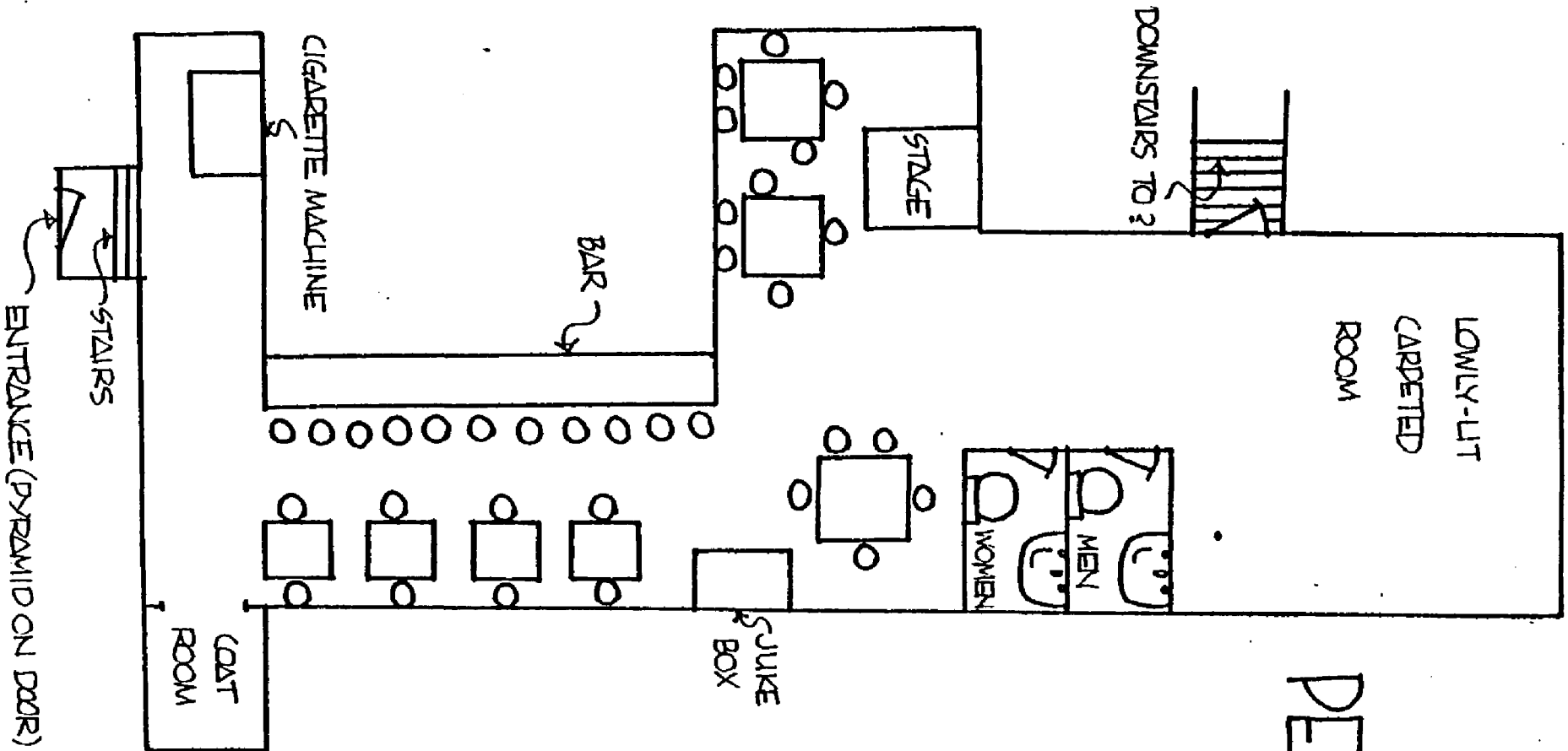
Pee Wee's is a non-cocaine snorting after hours club located in the Times Square area. It is distinctly different from cocaine after hours clubs in the sense that it has a non-cocaine snorting clientele. The club is open from four to eight a.m., and is located in the commercialized vice district of midtown Manhattan. The club functions as an appendage to the pornographic houses and massage parlors and the kind of sleazy entertainment it offers is typical of this locale. Its main attraction is a variety of street outcasts who appear anchorless. One does not see pimps here, or elegantly dressed men and women. The transvestites who frequent the club constitute its other main appeal: their sexual output seems comparable to Al Capone's infamous turnstile brothel in Chicago.<sup>27</sup> The Club itself is located on a side street, off and away from the main avenues and the hustling activity taking place there. The block is pretty much residential with shabby four and five story tenements lining both sides of the street. There are no other businesses except for the Silver Rail, a local bar situated on the far northern corner of the block. Garbage litters the street and one or two pitiful trees struggle against odds to find some sunlight filtering through the dense midtown smog.

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<sup>27</sup>In the 1930's Al Capone owned a brothel called the Speedway Inn where the number of customers was so intense that turnstiles were installed. Pee Wee's doesn't have turnstiles but the rate in which the sexual service is performed provides a parallel analogy. See Winick and Kinsie The Lively Commerce, (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1971) p. 203.

Figure 3

# PEE WEE'S



Jessie James, a friend of mine from Rikers Island, was expected to meet me there. His new job was as a doorman at this particular after hours club. He reminded me, "Any time you'd like to come, just ask for me." He had given me the address in the street one day, and not having written it down, I was relying on memory to locate the place. Walking down the block where the club was located, I saw a man standing outside -- a steerer. He seemed to be coaxing people to come inside. I paid him a three dollar entrance fee and stepped into the first door. My friend, the doorman, was not present. The first thing that struck me was the absence of security. After moving inside the first door, I was not searched as I had been at other cocaine after hours clubs where security is very strict. Moving through the second door, I decided to check my coat. The coat attendant spoke in a salesman's voice, "Got some loose joints, my man, loose joints."

The club was operated by whites--the coat man, the doorman and the barmaid. The coat attendant gave each person entering a little stub which he informed me would also buy a drink. I looked down the length of the club, where several were sitting impassively, legs crossed, hands on chins, and drinking. To the left was the bar extending midway the length of the club. Seated at the bar, I heard the barmaid say, "Tonight stinks. Tonight ain't shit. This is just a shifty crowd tonight." Sipping a beer and looking around, I caught a glimpse of the first female impersonator.

At least six feet tall s/he stood with a blue veil and a lot of other see-through veils wrapped around her body. S/he was overdressed in her late twenties and strutted with an air of exaggerated femininity. The other "transies" wore pants and dresses, stacked heels, false eyelashes, wigs and shades. This one was walking past the bar, whispering to customers, twisting her head and smiling with a heavily rouged face. S/he wore a red wig and a large Adam's apple protruded from her throat.

There were fifty or so patrons, mostly white businessmen type with three or four Latin men and several young black men selling an assortment of drugs. The ages ranged from young girls about seventeen years old to older men about fifty. Eighty percent of the habitués were male. Only four or five of the habitué, I would call "real" women. Most of the female impersonators were Puerto Rican. They sat with a few regular Latin patrons over to one side. The female impersonators numbered about thirteen, although a better description of their appearance was problematic because of the lighting. The lighting flickered on and off every two or three seconds. The female impersonators' approach as they strolled through the blinking lights stare suggestively at the male customers. If the customer returned the look, it was an invitation to the transvestite to come over to the person (customer) and begin a conversation. After the conversation, the "transie" would dance with the customer and then take them to the lavatory.

Some of the transvestites worked while others did not. By working, I mean they were in the club for the purpose of soliciting customers. Some of the men seemed fooled by the feminine appearance of the transvestites. After the interaction with the customer, the transvestites went to the lavatory and waited for the customer to follow. It seemed that oral sex was being performed because of the short length of time that elapsed between the "johns" coming and going from the room. No doubt, other forms of sex were possible. It was obvious, though, that the lavatory was the place where the wo/men took their johns. Each session lasted about three minutes. If s/he had two customers, s/he would bring them in at the same time. The lavatory was about four feet by six feet with one urinal and one sink. Because the "transie" would stay in the lavatory, when customers uninterested in sex came in, further solicitations accompanied the earlier approach. The "transie" would just stare as the men urinated. But there was no more of an overt approach to men not interested in sex than eye contact, a head nodding, or a guttural gesture. As they stood next to the person urinating they would say simply "uh-hun."

Walking around the club and listening to the crowd, I noticed how conversations related to drugs,

Look in there, no, no--look in the top pocket and you'll see it was lovely....the bitch brought in one whole kilo, man, and a one 'n one--that's all you need. A one 'n one of this shit cause it was bad....bad news about the duke, he was busted twice

in a week....the cop (Freddy) you know Freddy, he was selling him the shit. Every time that record plays I think about the \$5000 I hit the numbers last year....oh baby was that a mother-fucker....dig, this motherfucker drew out a wad of bread--this dude was wheelin' and dealin' to the tune of 700 thous a year and the least to expect was her to come over and pick it up.... there is the person with the right idea....pass some of that here, Joe....the back is jumpin' right now, some young chick on a winning streak; you wouldn't believe the hog this cat's ridin' now....a rolls....rollem uh huh, git it baby oh goddamn it...shit Ruben could have had twice the power had he played his cards right...on the left to the back door...but the main thing is...

None of the habitue were seen using cocaine. People were sitting around small tables, others were standing up against the wall.

In the back were three lavatories: one for ladies, one for men and an extra room, off to the side and located further back into the club. There were only two rooms available because the ladies room was out of order. I saw only a few people going to one located in the back. Some people went outside and urinated, because the congestion in the one bathroom was enormous. One incident occurred at the club when a regular customer, uninterested in sex, was standing by the door waiting to go to the lavatory. Two people had just entered: one female impersonator and her john. Meanwhile, the customer who had been standing there snatched the door open and said, "I was here first, what are you doing in there? You fucking faggots! You're monopolizing and taking over the bathroom!" So one of the wo/men said,

"What do you mean, motherfucker? I got a cunt, can't you see it?" S/he then pulled up her dress, exposing a hairy vagina. S/he cackled, "Don't you see it?motherfucker, I gotta cunt!" She was one of the few "real" women there who was "working." When they finally came out, one of the transvestites said, "I respect your right to go to the bathroom." The man replied angrily, "No, you don't, because you're monopolizing the bathroom, doing whatever you're doing." The transvestite answered by saying, "Go on, you go ahead, cocksuckers need to go to the bathroom by themselves, anyway." "Cocksucker?" he quipped, "You have some nerve calling ME a cocksucker."

The only woman prostitute was attractive enough through the haze of the light. The lights were like thick smoke, blue and green colored. When you saw her walking through the place, she was very attractive and sensual. She had on a very tight, black pair of pants, a white top with a very open bustline. Constantly in the customers' face she was talking to them, putting her tongue in their ear, biting them, tickling, touching crotches, brushing up against them, getting them into slow dances, and grinding with them on the floor. In the encounter with the regular customer in the lavatory, however, she looked transformed. The lavatory had the only regular non-blinking light and it showed her to be older, with teeth that were jagged, dark and rotting away.

There was no feeling of community among the patrons in this club except perhaps, among the transvestites who sat and talked together at a table near the end of the bar. This is another aspect which makes Pee Wee's different from other after hours clubs. "Clique affiliations" are not present except among the transvestites. Most of the time, the indications are of strangers meeting here for the first time. The transient character of the Times Square area is reflected in the club. It appears most patrons come to the club to partake in a specialized form of sex; sex not with a woman prostitute, but with a transvestite.

The Underground Cocaine Culture

Cocaine is sniffed openly in cocaine after hours clubs, whereas in other clubs it is hidden from public view if used at all. They are no more than extensions of after hours drinking clubs (Roebuck and Frese, 1976), although their activities involve considerably more than just drinking. Yet in many of these clubs, cocaine is not sniffed openly. The cocaine sniffing that goes on in these drinking after hours clubs is more or less personal. A person may bring his own personal cocaine and will take a pinch or two only in the lavatory or in a quiet corner unseen by the crowd. In the cocaine after hours clubs, however, cocaine snorting constitutes a major activity and is therefore an activity sanctioned and supported by this particular institution. Patrons come to the after hours clubs to be able to relax, drink, and snort cocaine--cocaine snorting becomes a social activity.

After hours clubs can be found in all parts of the city and are pretty evenly distributed in all the boroughs except Staten Island. The Blue Cat Cafe is located in Manhattan, surrounded by a quiet and residential neighborhood. Most of the buildings in the area are three and four story brownstones with a sprinkling of larger apartment buildings. The residents are predominantly black American except for a recent influx of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Cubans.

### The Social Setting: Blue Cat Cafe

The after hours club is exclusively designed with various accouterments--drinking, dancing, gambling, smoking, snorting--for the pleasure of its members and guests. It provides the social atmosphere in which cocaine is used, sold and sniffed. It further provides a place for intense interaction with close friends, strangers and other mutual acquaintances. The interactions of the after hours are more formal than the bar and are very much reminiscent of a large private party. Formality means one's attire and manner of interaction is more tailored than in a regular bar. Clothing is much more a status symbol in the club than at a regular bar. Moreover, the club has certain rules pertaining to the kinds of attire and behavior expected which imply an institutionalized function.

The after hours club is part of an organized system of rules, both explicit and implicit, so as to alter certain patterns of behavior between people. The rules may not be always obeyed, but they are recognized by all members and they exist to limit the social behavior of the group in some instances to a pre-determined range. The essence of the after hours club as an institution is that the rules and norms exist whether or not they are strictly adhered to. There are rough age distinctions in that no individuals can attend the place who look under fifteen years of age. The institution has other features, such as the initiation

rites of newcomers or beginners. These individuals, as described above, are taught how to "blow" or sniff cocaine in a ritualized fashion. Since the after hours club social life is one of cooperation among a widely diverse group of people, they, in turn, establish rules and norms of their own outside of the institution's rules. The club makes decisions on the enforcement of rules and establishes privileges within the club. They, in this regard, determine what is correct behavior and what is not. The after hours club management defines who will interact in the club by allowing the members to use their discretion in selecting guests. But the management has the final decision on whether to admit the selected new member. To keep the place respectable and to maintain the exclusiveness of the club, a number of employees are always present to keep order and to restrict outsiders.

Figure 4.

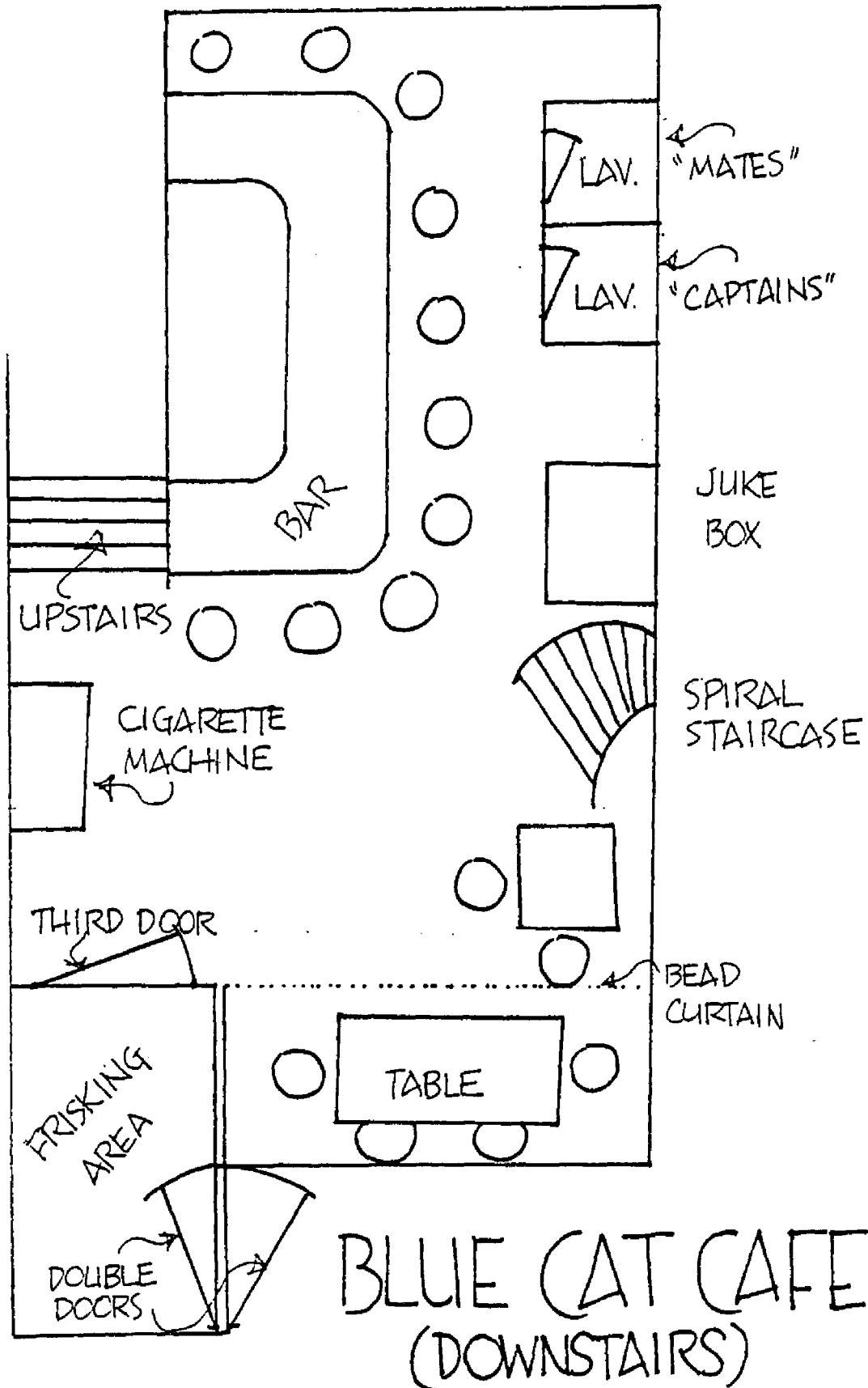
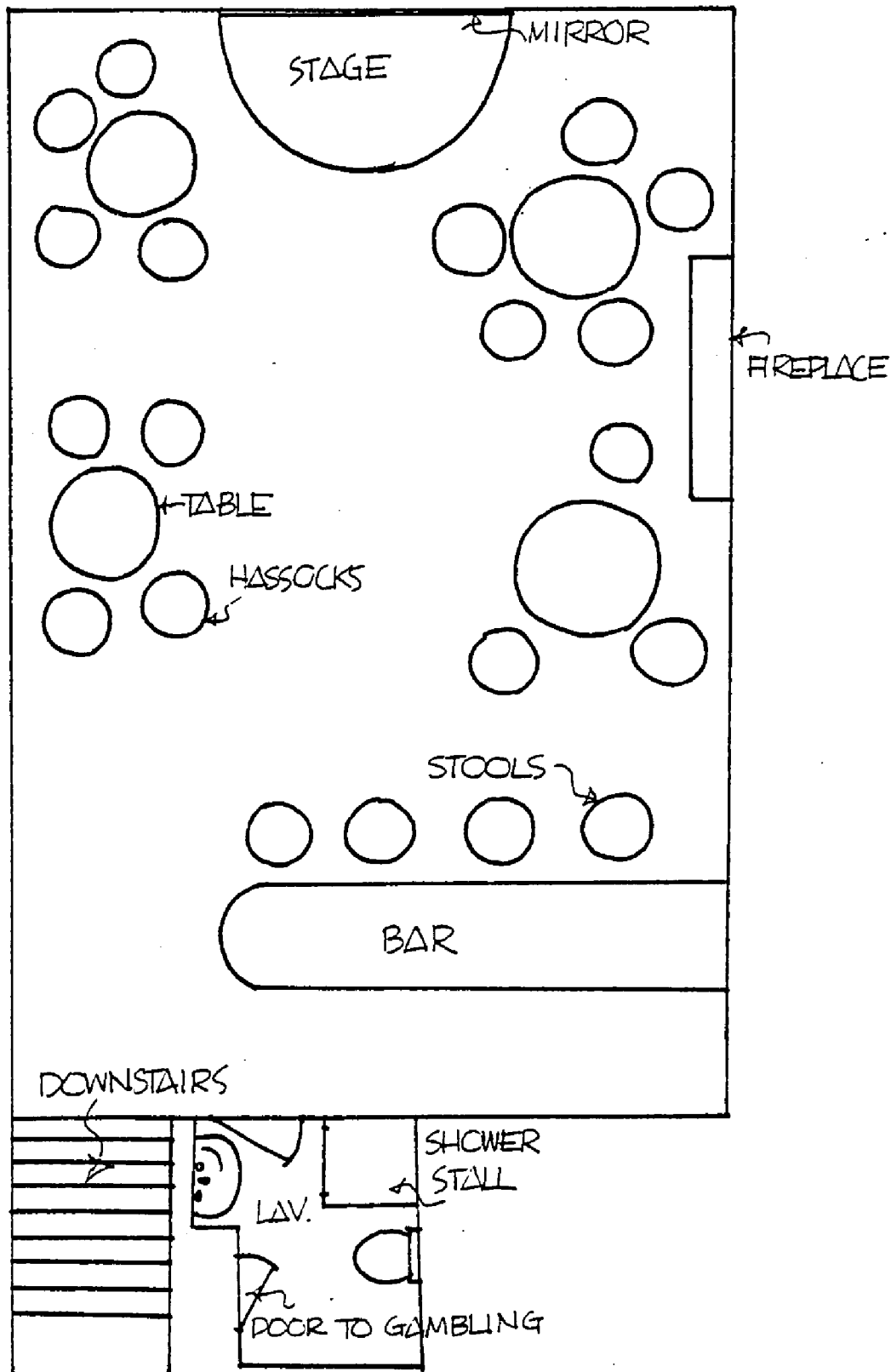


Figure 5.

# BLUE CAT CAFE (UPSTAIRS)



## CHAPTER IV

## THE ECOLOGY OF A COCAINE CLUB

The Blue Cat Cafe opens generally at 4:30 a.m. On special nights, like anniversary parties, birthday parties, holiday sets (Christmas, New Year's Eve), it may open a little earlier. A small pentecostal church sits adjacent to the club in a run-down section of upper Manhattan. Two candy stores and a burned-out tenement make up the rest of the block. Few people are seen walking in this area of the city. Desolate, garbage-filled streets follow the sidewalk to the Eighth Avenue subway. The club holds about fifty to seventy-five people comfortably, most of whom arrive either in cabs or in private late-model cars like Cadillacs and Mercedes-Benz. To enter, you ring a small bell outside the iron door. The outer part of the club has a green, red and blue canopy protecting patrons from the inclement weather. When I rang the bell, a young black male about twenty-eight years old in a grey turtle-neck and hat answered. He looked at us through the small spy hole in the door. I was then escorted in to a small

foyer. After the first door was closed, I was led into a second doorway which opened into a narrow passageway. This area serves as a middle space between the entrance and the club proper. This is the area where all the male patrons are frisked and the women's purses are checked. After being cleared, I was buzzed in. As I walked in, a sign above the juke box read, "Come to our anniversary party, Sunday, February 1. We start at 12:00. Don't miss it." A cigarette machine selling all the major brands, Kools, Trues, Hows and Winstons, rested directly in front of the two washrooms. The women's room was inscribed with "Mates," and the men's room was inscribed with "Captains." The bar seated twenty people. Mirrors lined the back of the bar, which were also stacked with an assortment of alcoholic beverages. The glasses for drinks were stacked up along the back of the bar, and a small refrigerator sat underneath the far-left counter. There was no cash register, and the money collected by the barmaid from patrons who purchased drinks was put into a box. Once full, they were periodically handed to the house manager. Five tables were positioned directly opposite the bar with seating for two and four people. All the tables had Kleenex tissue boxes on them. On the bar, tissue boxes were also strategically placed so that each patron could reach right or left and have access to them.

Picking and Blowing One's Nose

Some years ago, people made an art of blowing the nose. One insisted the sound of the trumpet, another, the screech of the cat. Perfection lay in making neither too much noise nor too little.<sup>28</sup>

Because the setting is an after hours club and therefore the behavior is not only unserious but "cool" and uninhibited, certain behavior, which ordinarily might be considered indecent, or shocking is allowed. One illustration of what this means relates to nose picking. In the daytime culture, to pick one's nose is a gross violation of tact, aplomb, "good manners." On most occasions where this behavior is noticed, the persons watching or catching such an act is often embarrassed to the point where they will look away rather than at the person. In the cocaine night culture, habitues instruct others how to pick their noses, when they should clean them, and all is accomplished in a manner that is anything but embarrassing. What the habitue is doing when he remarks to another as they are leaving, "Hey, clean your nose, or excuse me but you got a little blow up there, or you should wipe your nose," is warning the snorter that s/he may face possible trouble if s/he does not clean the cocaine powder from around the nose. This is a way of protecting the sniffer from detection by

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<sup>28</sup> Norbert Elias, The Civilization Process: The History of Manners, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizen Books, 1978) p. 143.

both everyday people "who you don't want to know your business" and by law enforcement agents.

When blowing their noses, snorters do not turn away all the time as is customary in more "genteel" settings. If a conversation is in progress, the snorters will blow while looking up at the talker. It is here more important to maintain eye contact than to lose it and appear disinterested although it only takes a few seconds to blow one's nose.

If no Kleenex is available, snorters may ask their friends for some tissue or ask the waitress for a box of Kleenex. Snorters do not ask for the other's handkerchief.<sup>29</sup> People who blow their noses in an emergency with their hands will at least wipe the "snot" with the back of the hand. The forefinger is used if there is only a small amount of mucus, but if it is more than that, the back of the hand is used and finally a move to the bathroom for toilet tissue is made as a last resort. Snorters do not like to use toilet paper for this function. When habitues are not actually blowing their noses, they may pick into their nostrils with their fingers. Whereas picking is acceptable, it is considered gross to look at the results of this action.

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<sup>29</sup>Horbert Elias noted how the handkerchief was first introduced in Italy and it held prestige value and was so expensive few people had them. Louis XIV was considered the first to have an abundance of them. It was generally acceptable practice of the rich not "to blow one's nose into one's hand or sleeve but into a handkerchief."

Looking closely at the dimensions of the cocaine club, one sees the various environmental arrangements that signify something about the culture. For example, Kleenex tissue boxes are conveniently placed so snorters, after excessive sniffing, can clean their noses. Cocaine users also need Kleenex before sniffing, in order to clear the nasal passage in preparation for the sniff. If tissues are not available, they can use personal handkerchiefs.

### Temporal Order and the Bar

In the Blue Cat Cafe, the first patrons who arrive sit at the bar or at a variety of tables set up on the first floor level. Figures(3 and 4)shows the duplex character as well as the club's spatial arrangement. The temporal order of the club is roughly as follows. The first phase of patrons arrive at about 4:30 a.m. They sit at the bar until others, who can be considered the second phase, arrive around 5:30 a.m. The dancer arrives at about 4:45, and so the second group will be told about her by the doorman and the house manager. "We got a dynamite dancer tonight! Go up and check her out." There is also a third group of patrons who come around 6:00 a.m. or later. And a fourth phase arriving between 10:00 and 12:00 a.m.. The composition of the patrons on weekdays is mostly of musicians, gamblers, dealers, bartenders, barmaids, prostitutes and only a few working people.

The patrons are black, with some Latins who come in groups and who remain together and converse in Spanish part of the time. On most nights, a few whites can be seen. On the weekends, however, the patrons are more evenly mixed, racially and occupationally, with working people like secretaries, lawyers, photographers and artists. This latter group is not considered regular, but is referred to by the employees as the "weekend junkies." In other words, they are the "lames" who like to get intoxicated with cocaine and other drugs and mingle with the exotic for a night. In general, though, patrons go and come as they like. Some come for a quick drink or sniff and leave, while others remain for hours. Other habitues switch from one club to another taking in three or more clubs in a given night. The fact that the clubs are expensive, costing at least \$2.25 for a watered-down drink in addition to the cocaine, does not deter the habitue's incessant movement at these early morning hours. Cocaine users felt that being high on anything but cocaine was "unhip." The habitue is not concerned about the expensiveness of the clubs. That is incidental. What keeps him going from one place to another is the variety and the intimacy that is different in each club.

#### The Club Bar

The bar is the first area visible as one enters the club and it is not limited to solitary sniffers but to a coterie

of both singles and couples who sniff. Men and women drink, smoke reefer, curse, kiss and do a variety of other things at the bar. The shape of the bar is not conducive to passing cocaine to very many people. It is therefore easier for a party of three or more to go upstairs if they wish to engage in the ritualized passing of cocaine.

On the many occasions where the terms "ceremony" and "ritual" are used, their meaning has often been ambiguous. Both terms need further clarification and definition. The culture of cocaine use requires ritual and ceremony. The two words are separate and distinct, yet inter-related in form and activity. Again, I refer to Goffman:

The important point is that ceremonial activity, like substantive activity, is an analytical element referring to a component or function of action, not to concrete empirical action itself. While some activity that has a ceremonial component does not seem to have an appreciable substantive one, we find that all activity that is primarily substantive in significance will nevertheless carry some ceremonial meaning, provided that its performance is perceived in some way by others.<sup>30</sup>

Goffman saw ritual, however, as "informal and secular, representing a way in which the characters" watch over and outline "the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value to him."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Erving Goffman, Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior (New York; Doubleday/Anchor Press, 1967) p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.17.

The Passing Ritual

Since giving cocaine to other habitues in the culture is the most standard form of behavior, it is understandable how this ritual can be complex, serving many purposes. The giving of cocaine is not a panacea, but it is used as a tool to enhance interaction, limit and smooth out arguments, re-pay debts for drinks or marijuana offered, introduce new friends, entice sexual encounters, stimulate rapport, and in general, bind habitues together in a ceremonial rite. It standardizes and cools out social relations. When a young woman got upset at a man who accidentally stepped on her foot without apologizing, she screamed at him to a point where he looked as if he might hit her. One patron sitting opposite the table looked up and said to both of them "Hey, let's not fight here--take a blow, baby (to both of them) and forget about it," at which point the woman left and the man sat down and had a few "blows" of the offered cocaine.

Offering the cocaine is done both verbally ("have a blow," or "take a hit.") and non-verbally, where the habitue simply passes the cocaine through gesturing to the other person by holding the cocaine package toward the person. A person refusing once may be offered cocaine again in a given round of passing. But in an individual offer, i.e., person to person, s/he may not be given another chance. Rarely is a person who is offered cocaine twice asked more

than that if they have refused. A man may offer a woman a few chances to sniff, but men do not generally offer other men more than once or twice after a refusal. Near the bar area, passing cocaine is restricted to a few close snorter / habitues near the person offering, usually, no more than four or five people. It is difficult to pass cocaine to more than one person or two people at the bar because one does not want it spilled or sniffed by unauthorized noses. As the bar gets more and more crowded, fewer people around the bar are offered cocaine. The barmaid is constantly offered cocaine to sniff, and indulges continuously all night. If she does not like the taste of one person's cocaine, she may refuse to accept it. If she likes another patron's cocaine, it may be difficult to keep her away. Since all cocaine offered is not good, she may very well choose whose cocaine she will sniff. When Dena was asked if she sniffed all night her reply was:

Each night is different, it varies. Some people give me cocaine because they like me. Others because they want to impress me. When you ask me about what my man feels about all this, I say to you which one? Every man that comes in here is my man. Some men will give me coke like a tip but, listen, I prefer the money. I can always get a blow. Like I said, every night is different. Some nights you get a lotta coke offered and some nights you don't get any.

The snorters who are in the passing ritual, seated around the floor, will literally pass the cocaine to anyone present. But as the crowd gets larger, this may restrict who gets cocaine and who does not. Most times, there

are several different circles of cocaine being passed around, and men are seen giving cocaine to women and women to men, as well as men to men and women to women. When a person is in line for a sniff and is passed over, whether that action is deliberate or not, it is considered a serious breach of cocaine etiquette.

Latin salsa music was blasting from the wall-high speakers as seventeen or more male and female habitues were sniffing cocaine almost in unison. People were scattered around in all directions. Some with individual cocaine packages, others sniffing in small groups. The following scene is not typical.

"Do you believe the motherfucker did not give me the bag?" (a plastic bag of cocaine that was being passed around)

She was looking up in disbelief, speaking to no one in particular it seemed. Yet loud enough for the person next to her to hear.

"I'm sorry I didn't..." (he is interrupted by her)

"Don't tell me you didn't see me. I've only been sitting here for the past hour and a motherfucking half." (fuming)

Habitues do not, as a rule, deliberately pass over others unless it is the owner of the cocaine who of course can use his/her own discretion. In the above case, the male habitue clearly did not see her in direct line to receive the cocaine. She was sitting with her legs facing outside of the small semi-circle and conversing with a friend. It is understood however, that this action is interpreted as a grave violation of the norm. The cocaine norm is not usually expressed as a rule either officially by management

or by habitues themselves. It is more or less done in the abstract when the habitue, like the snorter illustrated above, states explicitly what is correct and/or incorrect behavior. This is a kind of historical process whereby a rule gets established. The habitues have made these decisions over time and they at some point gain moral significance. In this way, future decisions are based. If the norm is regularly used then it becomes a significant basis for future action. When an act is condemned the habitue views this censure as a violation and re-establishes where the boundaries are for the group.

On occasion, cocaine may be offered to a man who is in the company of a woman. Before the snorter offers his woman some, he will pass the cocaine back to the original giver who then will ask, "Does your old lady sniff?" If the reply is yes, he will either offer the cocaine himself to her or tell the man to "give your woman a blow."

If the snorter enters the passing ritual with no cocaine of his/her own, it is customary to offer to buy the person whose cocaine is being sniffed a drink. The snorter/habitude who offers another snorter a sniff is in some way guaranteeing or solidifying a relationship, however tenuous. Both parties know that an interaction is expected in this setting. The patron who is offered a sniff of cocaine feels obligated to at least begin an interaction, first by thanking the person and then by more established "rapping" between them. The person offering

the cocaine knows an interaction is imminent and may nurture such an encounter or repel it.

Sam, after offering another man a few sniffs, waited a few seconds. The man then said, "Thanks a lot. That's good stuff," obviously attempting a conversation. At which point, Sam said, "Oh, that's ok," and looked over toward the bar and began a conversation with the owner.

A snorter/habitue offering cocaine may be involved in the group passing for as long as he wishes. There is no obligation for him to remain in the circle and to continue to pass his cocaine. He may pass his cocaine one time around to everyone, or only to one other person and not pass it again. Snorters are a little miffed if they are passed over when in line to sniff and the cocaine is given to some other snorter. After the initial snorter finishes passing his cocaine, he may put it in his pocket and only on occasion bring it out.

Any number of situations, events or actions can make the patrons come together for a full range of behaviors. When the dancer begins to perform, interactions such as sniffing cocaine and talking stops momentarily. Then after a brief pause, the sniffing continues along with the talk, even though the major focus is on her.

Along the bar area, it is not uncommon for two or three people, strangers in some instances, to indulge in one person's cocaine. Often times, the initial snorter's gesture is simply a beginning gesture to offer the first sniff, after which the next snorter will then produce his

own cocaine (providing he has some). If he does not have any, he may continue to sniff provided they are friends. If they are not, he will either offer to buy some cocaine or refuse to take any more even when offered. In the Blue Cat Cafe, the standard pattern of behavior is routine cocaine snorting. This means cocaine snorting is done with the protection of an institution which sanctions it.

The Snorter/Habitue and  
Over-indulgence

Over-indulging in other people's cocaine breaches one of the norms of the cocaine subculture. Patrons do not snatch other people's cocaine. But there are those sniffers who will take advantage of the sharing process. This over-indulgence defines the outer limit of cocaine sub-culture. These snorters will usually continue to take "blows" until they either reach a saturation point (for which one must have either a great deal of cocaine or a very powerful product), or until the cocaine runs out, whichever occurs first. In situations where cocaine is the primary source of pleasure, there is always a person or persons whose desire for cocaine exceeds the boundaries of good taste. People in the club who snort cocaine have defined a mutual understanding that regulates its use. When a patron approaches a table at which sniffers are sitting and is offered cocaine, s/he will naturally sniff some. But when s/he takes it upon his/herself to continue sniffing, then such actions violate

the norm. Miguel, a regular at the Blue Cat Cafe, commented on those he refers to as "vacuum cleaner snorters:"

Some people come to the (after hours) club just to get free cocaine. Some of the ladies here --they snort and snort without ever asking me if they can have more. They just try and clean me out. That's why I only put out a little bit at a time. But I won't tell her she can't have any more because you just don't do that here.

It is important to note in the sniffing culture, one must either be offered the sniff every time, or at least ask for permission to snort. A patron at another club noted:

If somebody just sniffs my coke or a friend's coke without buying any or offering to buy some themselves, then it don't take long for everybody to ignore them. They just won't be offered no more coke by nobody from then on. You know, I'm funny about snorting other folk's coke. If a cat say, "Here, man, take a blow," I'll take a one and one, but that's it. Now if I ain't got no money, I won't take but a one and one. If he insists, I'll take another blow. But then I'll ask if he has any to sell. If he says no, I'll just put five or ten dollars down on the table and say, "Thanks, Man, that was beautiful," because if the shoe was on the other foot, I would want him to do the same.

It might be noted how these two patrons had different perspectives on the cocaine snorting norm. Miguel, at the Blue Cat Cafe, did not wish to inform the woman sniffer of her lack of discretion because he felt it would be improper. The other patron felt he would be taking advantage of the situation if he did not reciprocate in some way. Although we are discussing norms in general, it is the gender of the sniffer on the one hand and the variation in cocaine ethics on the other that partially explains the different attitudes toward over indulgence.

In the case of the second patron, the physical size of the club was significant. This place, the "Groove Space Club" near 115th Street in Central Harlem, is very small. It holds about twenty-five or thirty people, most of whom know each other from the same workplace--the Sanitation Department. Because the patrons there are friends, the person who violates the cocaine norm is immediately ostracized by everyone because they can see the action clearly. In Miguel's case, the Blue Cat is much larger and the rules are not quite as enforceable.

Women are allowed to indulge in distasteful actions because they are sought after in the club. Women will sit with one patron and sniff cocaine until the supply is depleted. She will then move on to another table where there is additional cocaine. Miguel would not hesitate to restrict, question, or simply withdraw if it were a man breaking the norm in this way. The second patron illustrates what would be the expected sniffing behavior among men. Also there is the differentiated behavior found in various clubs. Sniffers may strictly adhere to the cocaine norm in one club because of the kind of club it is (i.e., respectable, high class) so as not to damage the rapport and reputation they have developed in the club culture. They, of course, do not wish to endanger either their ego or status position. This aspect of the culture has a great deal to do with the respect the patron has for the club. The club

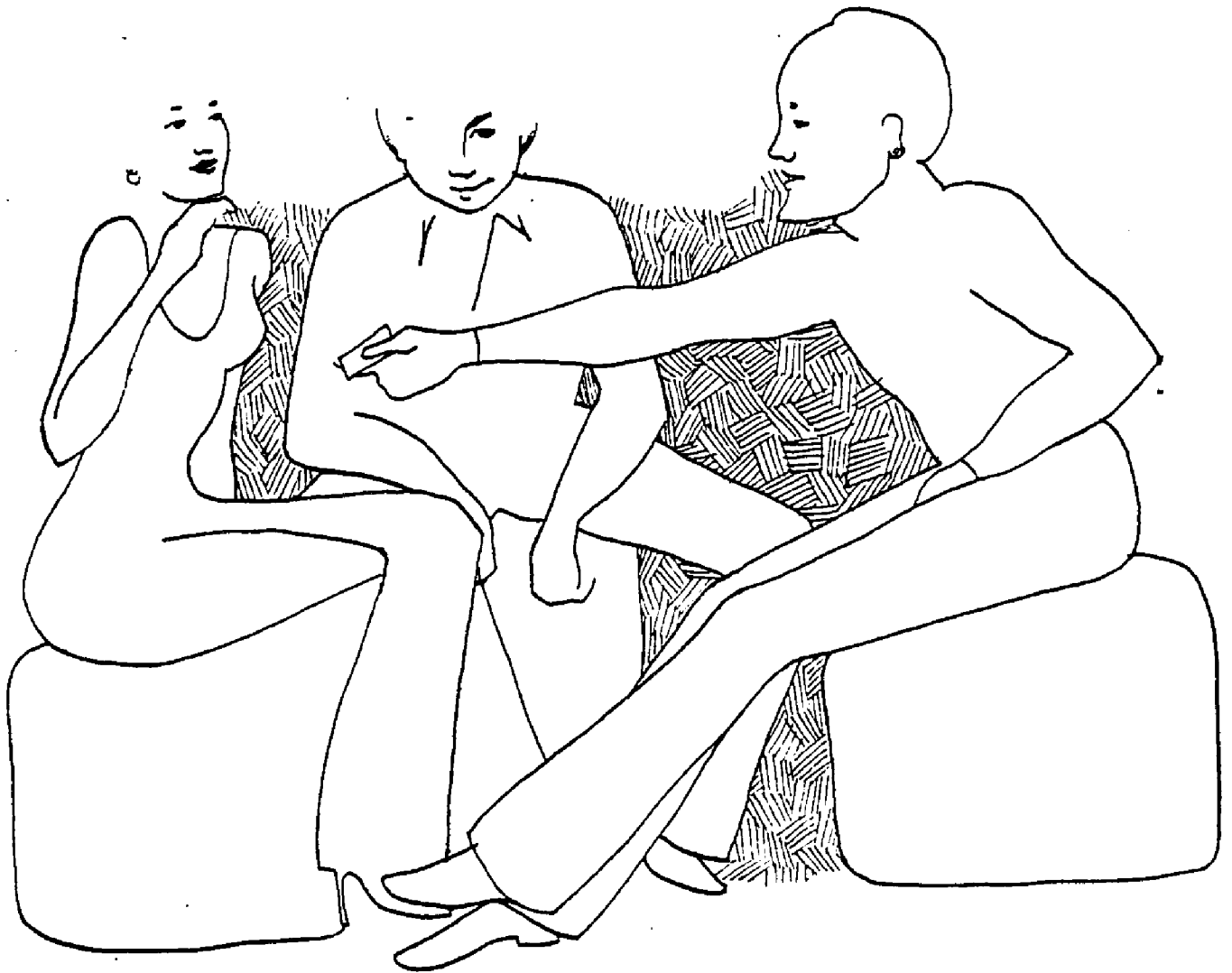


Figure 6. Three snorter/habitues sharing cocaine.

management expects this respect from its patrons. In the Blue Cat, where Miguel is a regular, it is expected that he not become upset if a woman takes too much of his cocaine. He is expected to remain "cool" and not become belligerent. On the other hand, the second patron because of the nature of his particular club, its clientele, and his own reputation, may be expected to react quite to the contrary. He may, for instance, shout at this person for over-indulging and create a scene. Thus his reputation remains intact because he has proven once again that he will not allow anyone (man or woman) to take advantage of him. These variations of the cocaine sniffing norm should not be construed as contradictory as far as the norm is concerned. They should be seen only as variations within the cocaine clubs, as well as a result of the personality of different habitues in the sub-culture.

Status in the After Hours Club

To have status is to maintain a position or rank over others in a social relationship (Mills 1953). The after hours club habitue has status by virtue of his/her presence (privilege of membership). Once a member, an habitue maintains status if s/he exhibits to others those status elements of money, cocaine and elegant attire. The excessive and/or consistent display of any or all of these elements by the habitue is considered possessing status honor (Weber 1946). As a member of the exclusive set, the habitue is expected by all other habitues to possess cocaine and share it if s/he is to remain in good standing. Status implies respect, awe, envy and jealousy.

He had on a white, wide-brimmed hat, white fur coat, white leather pants, silk shirt and white boots. The woman he escorted wore identical apparel from hat to boots. They held identical pinky diamond rings. He had a larger diamond ring on his middle finger in the shape of a heart with little diamonds on the edges and a large diamond in the center. As they walked in, all eyes focused on them. A hush fell over the place. Only the juke box seemed not to notice. Some people continued to talk as if these bejeweled "players" were not as special as everybody seemed to think they were. There were only sixteen to twenty people in the place and everybody wondered what could top the attire these two were draped in. About twenty minutes passed and things settled back into normalcy. The owner and six or so others were seated at the bar. This couple, who had remained quiet, sitting over by themselves, were drinking when the bell rang. The door opened and a young teenager with a black turban, black pants, and a cape came in, holding a small box four inches in width wrapped in a cloth. Again, the crowd hushed. As the tall man in white rose, he revealed in his own box finely chopped crystals of crushed cocaine rocks to which he offered the crowd.

Habitues need not have gold and or silver spoons in order to life the cocaine into their noses. On the contrary, it is common to see people using match book covers (scoop) and fingernails for this purpose.

Habitues may use a plastic card, or simply two fingers (the forefinger and the thumb) to carry the cocaine to their nostrils. One is more apt to see lower ranking habitues (lames), i.e., those with little money, using these latter methods. The habitue with larger access to cash are seen wearing diamond headed coke spoons or tourquois one's with a gold or silver chain placed around the neck to hold it in place. In an emergency or in a situation where the habitue may have forgotten to bring their diamond studded spoons the fingernails and or the scoop is readily implemented.

## Status Elements

One maintains status by possessing and giving away cocaine freely, by tipping heavily, and by dressing elegantly. An habitue can gain immediate status if he/she comes into the club and relinquishes a great deal of cocaine to all members present. Habitues maintain such a status if such performances can be continued. Alfredo is speaking about Juan, a member of his inner clique:

You know; Juan wants to be big shit all the time. He wants to give away an ounce of coke, have all the ladies on his arms telling him what a great man he is and leaving the barmaid a \$50 tip. But he's laying low now so you won't find him at the Blue Cat these days.

To avoid the loss of status, and a defeated ego, Juan chose to stay away from the club until his money and cocaine supply was replenished.

Once the habitue has established a role of "big spender," he is expected to continue or suffer a form of status loss. Status loss may be temporary or permanent. An habitue who is offered cocaine and has none to offer suffers status loss. Since all members are required to have cocaine in order to have status, not having it or not sharing it is a status/norm breach.

A barmaid was discussing two men who were in earshot of her conversation. Her voice was obviously pitched so the two men could hear her.

Well, they've been here all night and one doesn't drink and the other has snorted up all of Jake's (another habitue) coke. But Jake don't know it because he's so zonked out on quaaludes he don't

know his head from a hole in the ground. One of 'em had a little teeny weeny bit of coke in a well-used piece of foil (implying the foil had been opened and reopened quite a number of times), and earlier, he had given me some. So me, like a fool, gave them a little package of what I had. Well, they both sniffed and sniffed, I was expecting them to give me more of theirs, you know, but I guess they didn't have any more or else didn't wanna bring it out. But that wasn't the kisser. You know, they left without leaving me a tip? Not one Franklin Delano Roosevelt (a dime). Can you believe that? I work here, I serve them, and they don't give me nothing. That's not only gross, it's downright disrespectful.

Status does not imply a hierarchical system, however, because the musician, the owner's wife, the weekend secretary, the regular dealer, the nightly gambler all have statuses.

One of the inherent difficulties with the following analysis (see fig. 6 ) is the inconsistency in stratifying individual habitues in the club structure.

#### Status Continuum Hypothesis

The notion of a status hierarchy has yet to be proven but what is clear is a definite status situation (Weber 1946).

We understand by "status" situation the probability of certain social groups receiving positive or negative social honor. The chances of attaining social honor are primarily determined by differences in the styles of life of the group, hence chiefly by differences of education.<sup>32</sup>

Education is replaced in the club status system as means to

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<sup>32</sup> Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology ed., H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946) p. 300.

an end by street knowledge which, if used adeptly, can yield some of the same rewards as education. The habitue (as spectator) is not concerned, nor is he aware of the educational attachment of the snorter/other who reveals an ounce of cocaine along with diamond rings and a gold watch. What the habitue spectator sees is that which he cannot do at that time. But it has meaning for him as a status situation. In this way, we see the club stratification system not necessarily composed of high ranking, middle ranking and lower ranking (W.S. Landecker 1960), but instead, made up of a "continuous spectrum of statuses" devoid of a clear-cut hierarchical pattern. This ranking process is difficult to assess because habitues are constantly shifting from one club to another. Admitting that one habitue has higher status over another is made more problematic if one considers how "instant wealth" in hitting the numbers or winning in a gambling game plays a significant role in the status system. These instant "wealth" players holds the same status quality as the habitue who give away plenty of cocaine every night. Although the latter habitue receives more deference and respect, should he falter in his display, he suffers a loss of status. On the other hand, the former suffers no status loss because his instant wealth is understood in that context and in addition, he may never be seen again. We have arrived at some important considerations in this

analysis of status. One is whether or not the habitue has advantage over others if he has status. Two is that the habitue maintains status if s/he is temporarily or continuously consistent with his/her display of the status elements. Veblen (1957) argued that the rich or those who wanted to appear rich would purchase expensive goods not because they are any better quality but because they are expensive. The more frivolous the cost the better it serves to symbolize the buyers ability to afford it. In this way the habitue who can "waste" or give away freely thousands of dollars of an expensive drug to strangers is expressing the ultimate in status because "as an expression of status, waste is efficient."<sup>33</sup>

The status hierarchy as developed here contain the assumption that those habitues who either temporally (at night) or continuously (many weeks) display the status elements of money (by heavy tipping) or by cocaine opulence.

The Players (habitues who make fast money)

The "players" are individuals who by virtue of their occupation or other advantage, were able to consistently display money. Cocaine dealers, gamblers, owners of businesses, pimps: these habitues possessed qualities which set

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<sup>33</sup>Richard Brown, A Poetic for Sociology; toward a logic of discovery for the human sciences (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 187

them apart from other habitues. They are in the "big time" as opposed to the nickle and dime (small time) dealers, i.e., the difference between the professional and the amateur.

- (1) articulateness (fast talkers)
- (2) wearing of elegant, expensive clothing and jewelry
- (3) ingenuity and intelligence
- (4) strong personal style

The Artists (habitues who make money through wit, skill, guile and personal risk)

Those in this group, although they possessed some of the same qualities as the "players," do not, as a rule, express themselves as the latter do. They possess less flamboyance. They include the professional shoplifters (boosters), pickpockets (dippers), and con artists (stuff players).

The Hawks (habitues who make money by using physical force)

The habitues in this group are, as Frenchy put it, "strong arm scum motherfuckers who never get off work," which is to say, they are constantly on the prowl. They are stick-up men, hit men, armed robbers. Their skills are to some degree, natural. Their size and weight are often assets. In addition, they are often times recent parolees or prisoners out on bail. These habitue personify the notion of the night-time frontier outlaw whose skills separate them from the night thrill seeker who are enraptured in an aura of hedonistic risk-taking.

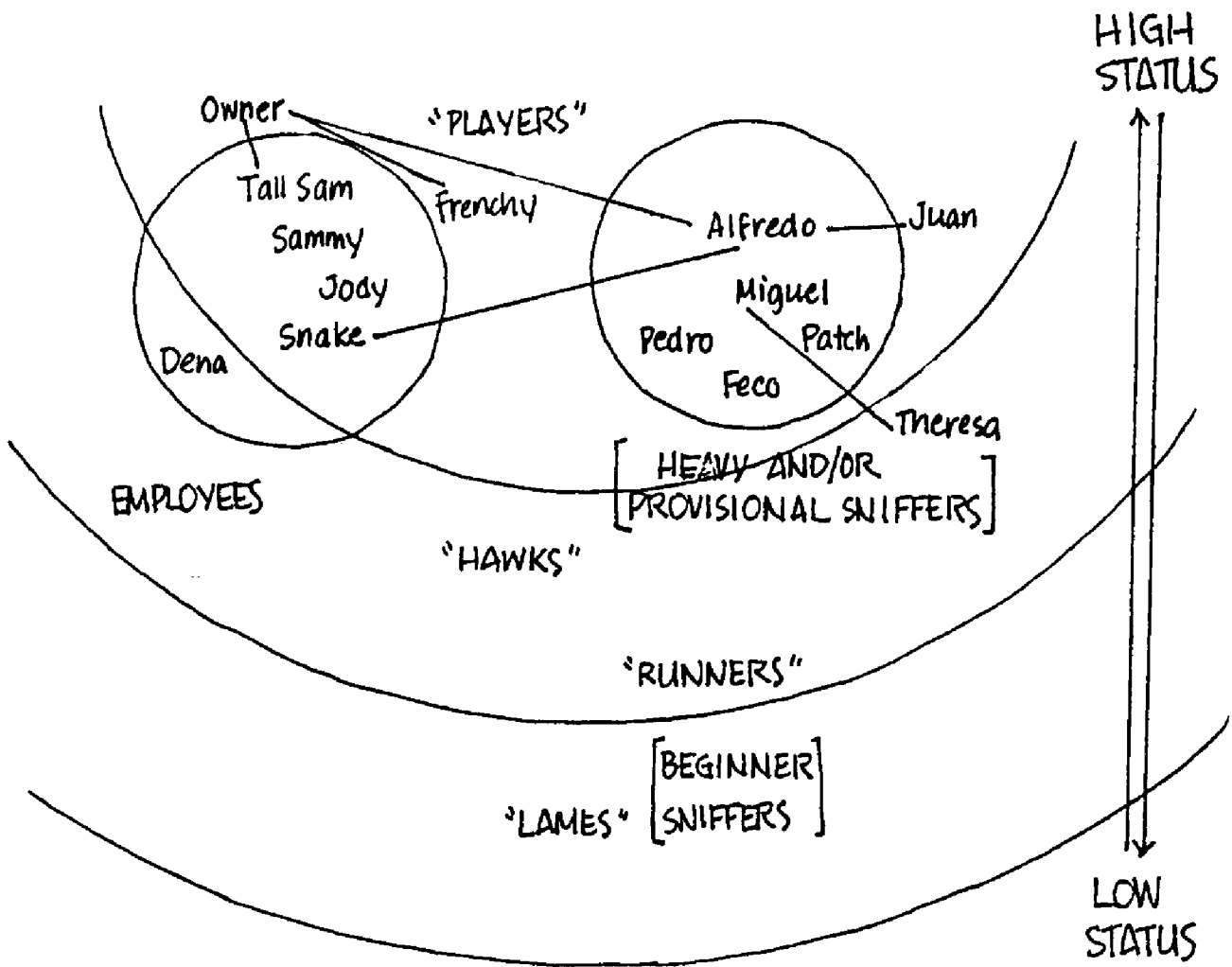
The Lames (habitues who make money through legitimate work)

The "lame" has been described as the "punk," the "weekend junkie," the "square." They are, in a word, working people. They frequent the club only a few times a month. They rarely, if ever, "turn on" (to cocaine) more than one or two people at the club.

The Runners (habitues who make money by virtue of earlier drug connections)

The young habitues called "runners" who wear "felony shoes" (sneakers) are an emerging group of young "players" and "hawks" who were once drug distributors at the ages of 12, 13 and 14. This was specifically in 1973 (when the Rockefeller Law made possession of cocaine or heroin in large amounts a major crime). Major heroin and cocaine dealers brought in younger teenagers to distribute or "run" the drugs. In the last five years, these young "runners" have become young adults and have been seen more and more at after hours clubs. In addition, they have opened their own clubs either because of some ostracism or simply because they feel more comfortable with their own particular age group. The ostracism these adolescents face is to a certain extent related to the language used by older habitues to describe them. It is no secret they are referred to as "kids," "young turks," or those who wear "felony shoes." The slang in this way defines a stigmatized categories in which they are placed. When habitues speak of "lames" or

"hawks," or "players," they are essentially describing a kind of person different from themselves.



KEY: ○ indicates a group with close ties, friendships, and who are often seen "partying" together at the after hours club

— indicates strong ties between individuals (other than between members of "partying" group)

Figure 7. Status Ranking among Habitués at the Blue Cat Café.

Norms and Rules of Behavior

The common-sense features of the after hours club provides the meaning for the habitues in such a way that snorting cocaine and sucking a dancer's nipple is condoned while shooting heroin or leaning on the dancer's platform are violations of the rules. There is, moreover, a feeling of community in that sniffing cocaine as an activity occurs as part of the habitues' everyday life. There is a clear pattern in the interaction, the act of physically coming to the club every night to snort, greet, complain and laugh with people one knows or at least with whom one feels some comraderie. One of the employees noted that "John," a regular, "comes here every night. He never misses a night. It's just like his second home." The Blue Cat Cafe has a certain moral code in which behavior is either condoned as proper or improper. The patron may snort cocaine, smoke marijuana, opium, hashish, and drink alcohol. They may also:

- (1) share cocaine with others
- (2) pay for others' drinks
- (3) eat food
- (4) seek sexual favors from the dancers, barmaids and other hustling women
- (5) buy cocaine, marijuana from management and/or dealers
- (6) pick their noses

- (7) use English or Spanish
- (8) talk loud
- (9) complain about service, the system, politicians

They may not:

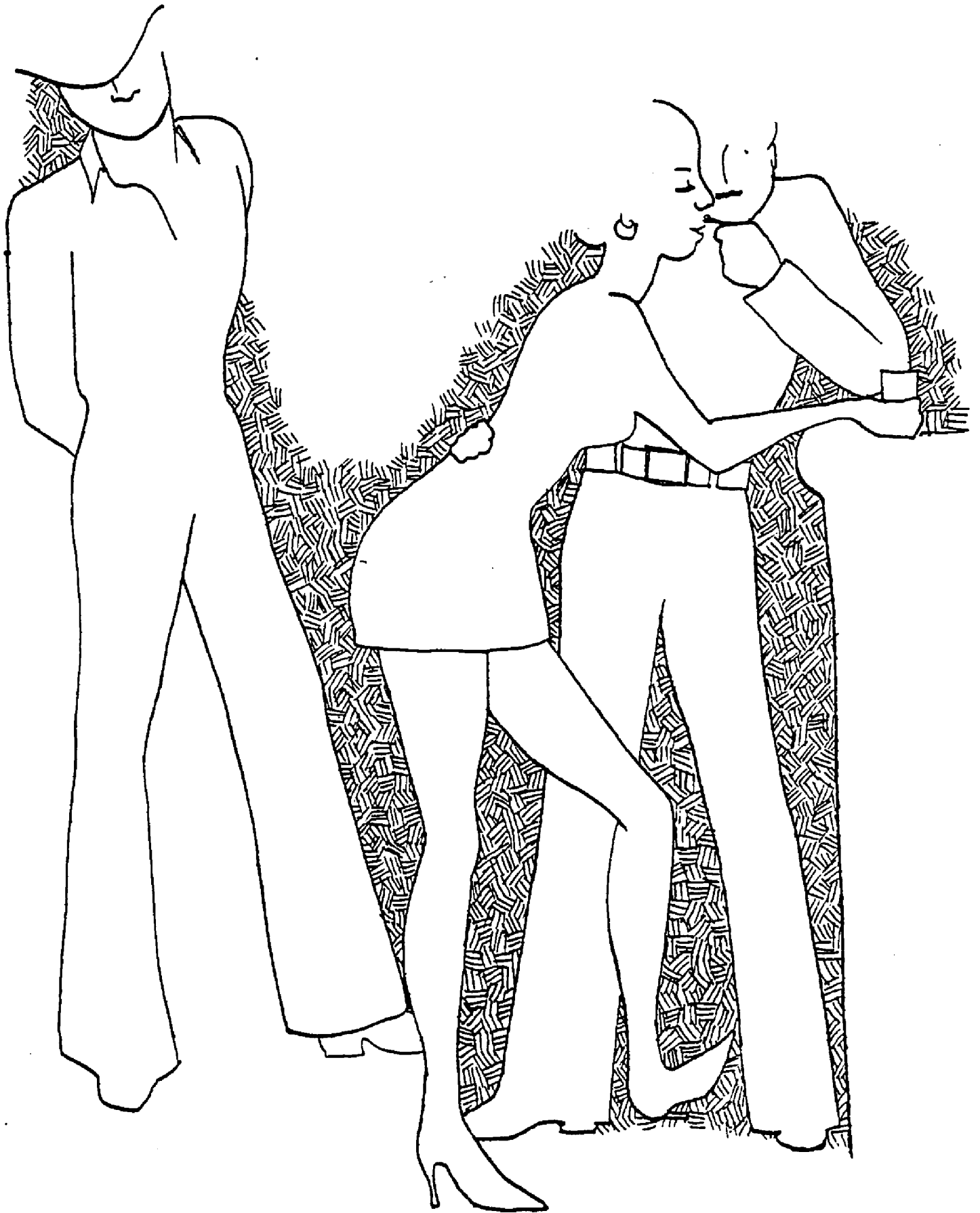
- (1) enter the premises improperly attired
- (2) carry weapons
- (3) sit on the tables
- (4) lean on the dancer's platform
- (5) be on the nod (as one does after injected heroin)
- (6) engage in sexual intercourse
- (7) engage in physical fights

Another form of behavior that is expected at the club, especially at the bar, is to look for or give "play," (an expression which means to solicit and receive certain positive responses from a member of the opposite sex through talking or gesturing). A smile or a raised eyebrow can be considered play. When a man, for example, is snorting cocaine and a woman is seated nearby, his offering her cocaine and her accepting it would be considered "play" or an affirmative gesture to begin a conversation. Single men will sit at the bar to check on single women as they enter. If a woman comes in alone, and does not stop at the bar but goes upstairs instead, men at the bar will usually follow. This maneuver is accomplished within five or ten minutes most of the time. The men want to be certain the women are seated before they go upstairs. It can be an

embarrassing situation for the man if he attempts to go up before the women are settled, as the following incident shows:

One night Tall Sam was seated at the bar when two young women came into the club. They looked over at the bar and then proceeded up the stairs. A few minutes later, Tall Sam picked up his drink and silver foil (with cocaine in it) and started to go up. When he got to the steps, the women were coming back down (the stairway is narrow and allows only one patron to go up or down at one time). To save face, he said, "Hey, baby, I was just coming up to give y'all some of dis good blow." They smiled and left. When Sam got back to the bar, the cat next to him said, "Hey sam, them chicks peeped yo' hole card, didn't they?" And they both laughed.

Figure 8. A male habitue giving a woman habitue a one 'n one.



The Owner of the After Hours Club

After hours clubs are not, as a rule, opened to entice the general public. They are established for other more specific purposes, i.e., for policy operations, gambling, drug distribution and as special meeting places. The "social time" aspect of the clubs for the general public is only a minor part of its function. The average citizen, the "everyday working person or 'square,'" who takes part in "social time," does so accidentally.

I queried the owner of one after hours club about the kind of fun and games he offers for his patrons and workers. He replied, "First of all, this is a business, man; I'm here to see that my workers do their job. If they have fun, I don't know about it. They are here to work any way you look at it. As for the folk that come here, they can do anything they wanna do as long as they don't hurt nobody, or bother other people." An employee at the Blue Cat Cafe mentioned that the "working" people (regular non-hustling worker) enhance the prestige of the place and bestow it with respectability. The employee noted how whites and middle-class blacks gave the place "class," because they got tired of them "street folk, talking loud and cursing and acting a fool." But when I asked the owner about who owns after hours clubs in this city and who supports them, he replied:

Everybody does things a little differently. I know cats who don't have nobody coming in their places except "carriers" (people who bring in drugs), and when a big deal is made, they may all party and bring a few friends along. But the place ain't for no pleasure thing(sic) like others are. There are others who have places just for gambling ("cilo joints"); sometimes they let a few outsiders in and sometimes they don't. As for who owns them, if you speaking about my personal knowledge--I know about some and heard about others. A lot of them dagos (Italians) have 'em in East Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn, all over. Puerto Ricans have a bunch of places, too. And blacks own 'em here (the Bronx) and Harlem. A lot of dudes be fronting for the mob. But basically--hustlers run 'em, and they really are for hustlers, too.

What is significant about this account is that the after hours club ownership is obviously racially diverse. Their function, moreover, is not limited to a "party" category since clubs exist for business reasons as well.

After hours clubs do not, as a rule, remain in business for a very long time. The reasons vary perhaps because of financial insolvency, lack of consistent clientele, repeated robberies, and/or police raids. All such problems notwithstanding, some clubs have survived for years. Frenchy provides both a description of one such club and why it and others continue in business:

Six years--you know that's a helluva long time for a spot to stay open because they go and come every day. The police don't always have anything to do with it. Sometimes, yeah, and sometimes, no. Anyway, if a spot is too disruptive in the community, I don't care how many cops are on the pad (taking bribes), the cops will close it down. If it's a mafia place, it may take longer to shut it (down), but it will be shut too if the noise (from the community) is loud enough and directed to the correct ears in the government. Did I tell ya 'bout "Griffin?" Everybody, everybody on the street, that is, called him "sneeze" because he would take so much coke he

would be sneezing all the time. You knew when he had too much because he would sneeze all over the place. Anyway, Griffin was a two-time loser who had a reputation of being a snake in the grass/a real scum bag at one time, mainly the years on the streets as a junkie. When he didn't have that shit in his arm, he would rob his mother's grave. Shoot, to kill. You know. Well, recently, he had fallen on hard times and he and his woman went into--Jo Jo's place (an after hours club) and robbed everybody. But the mistake he made was to shoot a dude who some say shouldn't have moved. Tried anyway to be a hero and Griffin shot 'em in his shoulder point blank with a sawed-off shot gun. Well, what Griffin didn't know was that Jo Jo's was incorporated (belong to a group of businessmen, hustlers and other associated people). Well, Griffin hid out for about a week and while he was sitting at a bar on the Lower East Side, he was hit (killed) right behind the head. The only reason his woman didn't get it was because she wasn't with him.

The longevity of the after hours clubs is certainly related to how they function collectively. Those businesses that protect each other by offering mutual support, bribing the police, and issuing violent reprisals against those who trespass and violate the club's space are apparently more likely to survive than those not utilizing such methods.

#### The Owner and the Community

If the owner fulfills any obligation to the community, it is in the very existence of the club as a social saloon, a community center for social intercourse. In order to make the club more profitable, the club owner capitalizes on the demand for a hide-out for those engaging in illicit behavior, and for the commercial interest value it generates. The club itself partially answers to the

supply and demand of the cocaine, marijuana and sex markets. It also answers to a demand for social intercourse between individuals who share similar lifestyles. How these demands are attained become clearer by suggesting what the ingredients are besides the physical structure itself that are needed to create this social expression.

Although the owner is seen as a provider of forbidden pleasures for a select group of people, he is not above criticism. The community at large, and even the patrons themselves, question, criticize and challenge the owner's ability to function as owner, and to some degree, continue in business as usual. In other words, the behavior of the owner is put under scrutiny by patrons. Just as owners have rules by which patrons and employees must abide, so do patrons have ideals and norms the owner must adhere to, or at least, that he should be aware of. Patrons, for example, feel owners should not indulge in excessive drinking or snorting in their presence. They are more likely to respect the owner if he goes about the business of checking on any problems and/or overall operations of the place. A patron who had frequented many clubs echoed this sentiment:

Latin owners are a lot more rowdy and physical in their clubs. If a dude gets out of line, the owners are more likely to try and throw him out. They also get high and drink a lot. They are generally not too cool. I know this black dude who runs a spot uptown. Even though I know he snorts and gets

high, I've never seen him take a blow in that place from nobody. He's there looking after the place, taking care of business, and if there is any trouble, he's in a position to handle it. In most of the black-owned clubs, the owners tend to be much more business-like than the Latin owners.

This attitude may be more a prejudiced account and preference for one ethnicity over another than it is about who is more or less business-oriented. There has been little evidence to support any particular ethnicity as possessing any unique business qualities over others. The use of drugs on the premises, for example, is a rather poor criteria for such judgements and is as much a matter of personal taste as it is patron pressure.

The community at large, the candy store owner, the bar owner, the residents in the apartment dwellings, have more far-reaching powers than the individual patron. Where the patron will, in most situations, tolerate club owners' drug use as a personal preference, the community may not. The Crisco Club is a Latin after hours club located in Upper Manhattan. Puerto Ricans, Colombians, Cubans, Dominicans and black Americans make up the population on this upper West part of Manhattan. Columbia Presbyterian Hospital; the George Washington Bridge, Port Authority and major historical buildings like Jumel Mansion give the area a sense of the old New York. The new migration of ethnics, mostly West Indians, Dominicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, point to the cultural diversity in this area.

The Crisco Club is situated in the basement of a mostly Latin tenant-occupied building. No more than fifty people can fit into the club comfortably, although most weekends, as many as a hundred may be in there at one time. The Crisco Club reflects some of the problems after hours clubs face in the community. During the week of the club's opening, a member of a small gang of black teenagers indicated they would close the place down because it was "one of them all-night joints that would bring drugs to the community." The club was adjacent to Thompson's Garage. This also posed problems for the manager of the garage, because the patrons' cars were always blocking the driveway. One of the workers at the garage expressed his views this way, when asked what effect the new club had on his business:

That place should be closed down right now, if you wanna know the truth about it. One night, a guy pulled a gun on me because I told him he had to move his car from the driveway. Look--there's a sign right there which says, "Please don't park in the driveway." I need to be able to get the cars out when the customers want 'em. As it turns out, the guy couldn't read English. Well, that's not my fault, he ought to go back where he came from. This is America; if you can't read English then go back to school somewhere. This place (club) has fights all the time, too. I've heard gun-shots go off in there. Sometimes, on weekends, you won't believe this, but cars are double-parked all the way down the block. This is a long block, too. I've even called the police--but they don't seem to want to do anything until something happens in the act.

Actually, the sentiments expressed above do not cover the range of problems associated with after hours clubs and their impact on the community. Among the most common

loud noise, boistrous behavior, arguments, illegal parking, honking horns and open drug use.

Frenchy owned a "spot" (club) as he called it on 116th Street in 1970. He had six employees and an owner-manager partner:

If I wasn't there, he was, or somebody we trusted if neither of us were there. We later knew we could only make so much off the game (gambling) in the back. So there was no contention to cheat each other.<sup>34</sup>

#### Employees of the After Hours

Frenchy had six employees including a barmaid, a waitress, a doorman, a guard, a manager and a man to cut the crap game. The owner oversees the gambling game, which is a private part of the club within the club. In this club, a patron may join the game if he wishes. It does not matter whether he is known to any of the other

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<sup>34</sup>The game in the back is cilo. Cilo is played with three dice. The house collects a 10% share of the money won in every particular game. The object of the game is similar to regular dice, with the exception of the third dice which becomes the thrower's (point) or number s/he has to continuously throw to win. The thrower can also throw 3,4,5 (which is like 7 and 11 in regular dice, winning numbers automatically) or 18, which is three sixes (6,6,6) to win. The game is established with a banker and other players. The banker is the person who puts the money up to begin the game. The banker changes as any player may assume the position of the banker. There is no limit. The banker may start with \$100 in the bank. And at that point, he holds the dice and will usually throw first. Before which the players will place their bets as to whether or not he will throw either 3,4,5, or 6,6,6, or crap out. If the banker throws 3,4,5, he picks up all the money from the table because these three numbers are instant winners. He may also place bets with the same players. A player may place a side bet on the banker for any amount.

members. Special games may be set up where the stakes are so high a newcomer may be warned in advance that the game is not a "chump's game" (i.e., petty, with low stakes). At this point, a person may still wish to gamble but only if he is recommended can he join. Other clubs' patrons have indicated a policy of \$500 needed before entry into certain games. At any rate, gambling seems to be among fellow hustlers and their friends, although the owner will readily admit any person with enough desire and money.

Blue Bell had a gambling habit, not a gambling jones, because she loved to gamble. She would have her coke to sell--she had a little compact case filled with \$50 spoons and her money for gambling. She would blow hundreds and more than likely lost more than she ever won. But she had a natural gift for selling coke. First of all, she is very attractive; I mean a very stunning woman; fair skin, real nice body. She had one of them dreamland-in-Chicago bodies. Duplex. You know. So most cats would love to buy anything she had to sell. Most of 'em also thought they could hit on her. So that added to her ability to get over. When Wild Man got out of the joint, he and Bo Peep started a little place in the Bronx. And for a while they had to close down, because they weren't making no money. You see, when the hustlers don't make no money, there ain't no money out there. When the economy is bad the hustler suffers because the more they spend the more he's (owner) gonna get. Well, let me tell you something. The after hours is tailor-made for the hustler. And as you can see, if the hustler ain't got no money, the "joint" ain't gonna survive. You see, unlike the regular clubs and bars, the "joint" thrives and survives on the illegal. Whatever has been taboo in the society, the "joint" sells it, let's it happen, for a price, of course. But the average man and/or woman, I mean working man and woman, they ain't gonna be in the after hours every day or night, or whatnot. They can't afford it. I don't mean people who got a hustle to work there in the "spot." You know, selling shit; I'm talking about the regular worker who makes \$90 to \$100 a week. They ain't gonna be there every day. Well, that's true of most people except maybe the professionals who may go there but can afford to go there.

The people that come there every day is hustlers. The other people are weekenders or one or two-nighters. They ain't there every day, but the hustler is. He is there every day and night. Gambling, drinking, snorting. When the drought hit (in heroin around 1973 - 1974), a number of clubs closed, mainly because the money hustler were making off heroin sales declined, and so did their attendance at the clubs.

The revealing aspects of these conversations was not so much the information about the various functions of the clubs, but about who supports them. It was stated clearly that the "average citizen" was not and is not the main reason for the success, failure, or for the mere operation of the club. This is mainly because the average citizen does not frequent the clubs every night. He only does so on a whim--on a Friday or Saturday every now and then. It is the hustler, both men and women, who come consistently, spending substantial sums of money nightly on cocaine, gambling and alcohol, who support the clubs.

After hours clubs vary in size from the small Blue Cat Cafe (about fifty square feet) to the spacious Bottom Club. The number of people each club can hold also varies. Pee Wee's holds about seventy-five people, the Blue Cat about fifty to seventy-five, and the Bottom Club over two hundred. What remains fixed is the minimum number of employees needed at each establishment. This seems to be about four.

#### The Door Guard

The door guard is responsible for inspecting those individuals who frequent the club and is acquainted with

every member and their guests. After people enter the club, he further inspects the clothing and general appearance of the patrons. His role is to answer the door each time a bell rings, indicating a new arrival. He sniffs cocaine discreetly and is not seen taking other intoxicating agents, like alcohol. Door guards are often armed and unfriendly. They interact very little with the patrons. Inside, they act as reinforcement to the manager, owner and frisker in case of trouble.

#### The Frisker

The frisker assists the door guard in screening patrons entering the club. His encounter with patrons is usually brief and he maintains a friendly but stern attitude toward patrons. He is usually armed and only frisks the men. He searches the women's purse and bags, but not their person. He informs patrons if any special events are taking place: "Gambling in the back, drinks at the bar, topless dancing in an hour."

#### The Barmaid

The barmaid's role is a multiple one in that she is often an overseer of the club's activity. She maintains a smooth rapport with snorter/habitues at the bar, in addition to selling a variety of alcohol and drugs for getting "high" (i.e., cocaine, marijuana, hashish). The barmaid is friendly and cooperative some of the time, but at others, is cool, reserved and curt. She indulges in

snorting, drinking and smoking along with the other habits, both strangers and friends.

Dorrine is a Latin barmaid in a Lower East Side club called the Tortoise. When I asked her how she feels being around so many men who flirt with her and find her attractive, she said:

Well, it's okay, because most of them are cokeheads anyway, and I know it's the coke talking most of the time. They say little things like asking me out, but the owner he don't like me to go out with the customers. Because if I go out with a guy and I'm in here talking to another guy, he might get mad and start something. So as a rule, I don't go out with them. But if I find a guy who's real nice to me I might go out with him, but that depends on the guy.

Barmaids wear provocative clothing, like low-cut blouses that sometimes expose their breasts when they bend over, and extremely tight pants or short mini-skirts. The physical appearance of the barmaid i.e., her attractiveness, is a crucial part of the criteria for the job.

Barmaids are also known to often "con" or short-change patrons and ask for cocaine from the customers and other favors. Most patrons object to this type of treatment.

I went to the Crisco and somebody, I think it was that damned barmaid, stole my purse out of my bag. And I thought that was a pretty low-lived thing to do. So I haven't gone back there since.

From another point of view, a barmaid talks about her hustling the "joint":

We don't have no cash register here so all I got to do is give the money to Barry (the houseman). But when I need a little something, I just don't give it all to him, and I put some in my pocket as my tip. It looks like I should be making a whole lotta money here but I don't. People don't be giving away money like they used to. They give away a lotta coke, but not money. If Frankie (the owner) catches any of us stealing, it's all over; you might never be able to find another job in these joints, cause he knows everybody and every joint in town. The best hustle you can make is to be nice to people who be nice to you and don't take no shit. People respect that. Sometimes, when a group orders drinks, I may shortchange them an extra dollar or so, and unless they bring it to my attention, I get away clean. Often people are high and I might shortchange them more.

#### The House Man

The house man is the individual in the setting responsible for making people feel comfortable. He may offer, in some instances, to buy people drinks or cocaine as a form of social etiquette, and is generally responsible for keeping a close watch on things. He is most often affiliated with the owner of the club. He patrols the club, making sure that the customers have no complaints, and that everything is going smoothly.

#### The Dancer

The nude dancer as entertainer in the club is a natural offshoot of the go-go girl craze of the 1960's, when after hours club owners found it profitable to provide such entertainment. Owners were cognizant that patrons stayed longer, purchased more drinks, cocaine and marijuana when a nude dancer was performing.

The dancer is one employee whose breach of the sniffing norm (over indulgence) is tolerated. The dancer is one of the main attractions in the cocaine club. She attracts the men and is considered a "prize" if a man is able to "pull" her. She is important to management in regard to the amount of time and money habitues will expend while she is there.

The interaction between the dancer and habitue is usually sexual one, since the dancer is literally enticing the patron. The following description took place at the Blue Cat:

Four Latin men sat in the corner. One asks the dancer to pose (with her breasts in her hands). She sashays from one side to the other, and one said, "No...like this. Like this (he gestures)." Every time she would move one way, he would point or gesture the other way, until she got tired of the game and sat low with her legs wide open. The man sitting directly in front of her shouted, in a shrill voice, "Coooooh weee! Goolly Gee!" The music started and she got up to dance again. The song echoed through the sound system, repeating the phrase, "Boogie down, boogie down, baby," and others in the room sang along. Alfredo gestured and threw the cocaine over to the table across from him. It was wrapped in a dollar bill. As the dancer finally started to dance, people were snorting cocaine with McDonald's spoons, which had a long, white stem with a small tip. One man was snorting from a straw with the edge cut out of it; he was snorting from it not through it. Three women were sniffing with a lone male, also from a dollar bill. The dancer is young, twenty-four or twenty-five years old at the most. Five feet one or two, about ninety pounds. Her body is draped in black leotards, with a black scarf wrapped around her head with the edges drooping off to the side. Her feet are covered with black flat Chinese slippers. The fingers carry two rings, one on the pinky and one on the index finger of the right hand. She has a small silver bracelet on her left arm.

Acrobatic and exciting, she lifts her legs, puts matches in her nipples (after abandoning the leotards) and lights them while singing "Happy birthday to y'all, happy birthday to y'all!" After dancing exotically and sensually, she decides to come off the stage platform and dance near the customers. One man, in an overcoat, reached up to grab the dancer's breast. She stopped as if in disbelief and immediately slapped him. One habitue said, "I don't see why you had to do that, baby. You see you got the man all hot and shit." Her dancing carried her off the stage several times, she would dance around the floor on the chairs, extending her body like a contortionist. She would come off the stage near the chairs, spreading her legs and buttocks to fit the size of the chair. She later felt it necessary to retaliate or get back at the "starer" she slapped earlier (who by now was very high on alcohol, cocaine and marijuana). She waited until he had sat down and then proceeded to come off the stage. He, at this time, had his head tilted to the side, with his coat still on. And he was what appeared to be quite dazed, or at least engulfed in his stupor. She was dancing and noticed his behavior was at a low ebb. She proceeded to go over towards him, dancing, wriggling and shimmying her body all the time. Once she got near him she quietly removed her G-string and started a grinding pelvic movement around his shoulders, making his body tremble and jerk with a tremor. She carefully, methodically and rhythmically placed her legs around his left shoulder. She now sat straddled on him with her abdomen against his ear. Her vagina pressed gently downward against the fur on his shoulder. She did what might be characterized as the "bump," "grind," and "hoochie coochie" all at once. His body was now shaking the chair, moving almost out from under him. And either from the impact of her body, the amount of drug intake or the shock of being so close, he appeared mesmerized by what he had earlier wanted so much to touch. He was in a state of shock during the whole episodic dance. He never really tried to touch her or move away. She twisted and grinded her vagina against every possible area of his neck and the side of his face. When she removed herself, the people in the club applauded and laughed, all the time urging her on. The starer never got up to touch or stare again.

The dancer gets short (twenty minutes) breaks during the night, and she will, during her break, sit and sniff cocaine with a patron of her choice. Snorter/habitues sitting next to the dance stage offer her cocaine during her performance. When she finishes for a break, she may sit down to sniff more cocaine. This encounter may lead to a further engagement by the patron with the dancer and sometimes sexual favors outside the club are granted and sometimes not. Eddie tells of one encounter he had at a local after hours spot in Manhattan:

This real fine dancer was doing her number at the El Greco Club, and after she got down (from the stage), I offered her some blow. She hadn't really tried it before, but was willing to try and we talked for a while after she tried some. One thing led to another and she said she was working out of the Tip Top in the Bronx and asked me if I wanted to meet her there the next night. We did meet, but she was so full of shit--I left for home early and never saw her again.

The mores and changes in values and attitudes toward sex in America since the 1960's has led many women to marginal occupations like stripteasing, go-go dancing and other forms of nude or semi-nude dancing.<sup>35</sup>

#### The Pimp and the Dancer

It is not clear to what extent the dancer plays the house prostitute. The possibility exists, and the interaction between the pimp and the dancer is listed here as an example of two individuals who are not giving up anything. The dancer wants money and the pimp wants the

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<sup>35</sup> James K. Skipper, Jr. & Charles H. McCaghy, "Strip-teasers: the Anatomy and Career Contingencies of a Deviant Occupation," Social Problems (1970) 17:3 391-405.

dancer to make him money. The following observation took place at the Blue Cat Cafe between a dancer and a pimp:

After arriving this particular night, I immediately went upstairs, and there were about eight people sitting in two semi-circles. The most striking aspect about the upstairs at this time was, I had not been to the club in about a month or so, and the most immediate thing about the place was the change in the arrangement of the room. The dance stage had been moved to the center more or less, adjacent to or opposite the fireplace. It was now in the middle of the room, and there was a certain amount of congestion as a result. It was closer to the bar, and to me it affected something in the room. The dancer I had seen there a month or so earlier was there. She was conversing with a man who I was told by one of my informants, was a pimp. He had his hair sort of semi-processed, and was wearing a whitish green suit with a tie and a sharp stick pin. His fingernails were well-manicured. He revealed a large pinky diamond ring on his right hand. He had a machine gun rap. There was constant word play between him and the dancer, who at one point said, "Will you buy me a drink?" And he replied, "Of course, I'll buy the little things like the drinks, if that's all you want. I'll buy the little things if you buy the big things, like the house, the apartment, the car. The little things are on me." At that point, she stopped talking. But after a while, she said, "Let me show you my legs. You're my man, and I want to show you my legs." And that's when he backed up and said, "Wait a minute, baby, I'm not your man." Then she said, "But I thought you wanted me to sit here." He said, "Yeah, I want you to sit there, but I'm not your man." She proceeded to say something else to him, which I could not hear. She pulled her chair back up a bit. She was wearing black stockings, a semi-long black dress, and almost formal type of affair, and what looked like a gold neckpiece, a Vuitton bag, in which she kept her clothes next to the stage. Her hair was wrapped up in a black scarf and her shoes were high-heeled. She proceeded to show him her legs. The talk between the two of them was very noticeable, again, because the stage was in the middle of the room now, and you don't have the kind of intimacy that was present before between the dancer

and the patrons. "Starers" often sit right next to the stage, constantly eyeing the dancer. The starers usually have cocaine, which they offer her and she plays with them, plays on that notion that they have cocaine. Anyway, this ingredient was missing from the brief talk between the dancer and the pimp, because he did not have any cocaine for her.

Owners have been known to use cocaine and marijuana to barter in exchange for services rendered by the dancer. Margo, a dancer at topless legal clubs and after hours clubs, talks about "Sugar," another dancer who is paid by the owner with cocaine:

She (Sugar) dances for coke. It's not that she don't want the money. It's just that she prefers cocaine. She's got her (coke) spoon around her neck and shit. We both danced at the Bango Club uptown. The owner asked me if I wanted some reefer instead of my \$50, and I told him I wanted my money. But Sugar, she wanted coke. They "pay" in coke if you want it. All of them chicks be snorting, especially the ones who be doing doubles and shit (working double shifts-- dancing from 1:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. in a regular club, then 4:00a.m. to 8:00 a.m. in an after hours club). That's why I won't be no house girl, because you get no respect. If you a house girl, you gotta take the coke or whatever else they offer you. But you see, I ain't gonna do that, because I wanna get hooked up with respect, win, lose or draw.

### The House Girl

The house girl is a dancer who also performs duties as a waitress. Her role is to serve customers after dancing. She is seductive and is used by the owner as a sexual object attracting patrons who might be interested in her enough to buy more drinks. Her salary is based on the tips she receives from patrons, and is not a flat fee.

Jean, a house girl at the Top Cat Club in East Harlem had this to say about her work:

I'm the only brown skin thang in there (the club). But as a house girl, you get the tips. You work, they give you tips. You go there so they can work your ass off. But they want you to kiss ass. In Manhattan you can make money. Chicks be giving blow jobs on the side. I just wanna make my fifty dollars and go home. See that blow job thang ain't me. See, I don't do that, cause I'm funny about germs. I ain't gonna kiss ass but to a certain extent. I told Scotty (the owner) it's a trip but not for me. I ain't gonna kiss no ass. All I'm gonna do is smile. A house girl is when you jes live off the tips and it depends on the amount of drinks you hustle from your customers.

Jean explained that she did not take a "house girl" position in the club because a house girl has to double as both a dancer and a waitress. While she is given no guarantee that she will get the \$50 normal fee for dancing when she decides to become a house girl, it is more likely she will receive twice as much on any given night.

At another instance, I asked Jean about drugs, money and prostitution, and her role as dancer and other women's roles as house girls:

I don't know 'bout a whole lotta dancer, but for me and a few of my friends money is the joint (the thing, the key). Cause ya see, in Manhattan you can make a fortune. But you gotta sell your soul to the devil. I have seen allkinds of things; chicks be into all kinds of shit. I swear it's the truth. Girls be gettin' paid in drugs, ya know. Some girls will do anything, dey be uptight for money, you know, you understand? But I can't dig it. As long as I get mine I don't give a fuck. Cause I'm not the greedy type. Otherwise, I would be treacherous. I jes wanna do what I wanna do and go on about my business.

The dancer in the clubs have the same aspiration as others in society, although she is in an unconventional occupation at the moment. She looks for security and a new way of life. For Margo, it is school and a new life.

I met this old witch, a dancer for twenty years. She was really attractive. She had a scar (emphasizing the "rr) about my complexion, ya know. And ah, she had been doing it for year, ya know. She had a little mink on and shit. But, I mean, I can't see it as a way of life. You know. I'm doing it to get over for d'time being, ya know. As a way of life? (in an incredulous tone). Now I don't knock it for those who do it, ya know, don't get me wrong. But I just couldn't. My granma always said, "don't say what you'll never do." But uh, I know I won't. Uh, that's why dis school trip got me like this (showing a nervously shaking hand, gesturing with it in my face for emphasis). But I'm sticking wid this thang. Ya know, to get grants and things. Ya know, every three years I work. Then I wanna get this new car. Because they stole mine right off Riverside Drive. Ya know, it's hard, canavin' and jivin'. I just don't enjoy it, even though I'm good at it. Ya know, I like the money in it and all, and--I'm afraid if I don't get over now I may be doing this the next year, but I doubt it, ya know. I don't particularly care for it, really. Because ya gotta learn tricks, ya gotta stand on your head, spread your legs, smoke cigarettes (in the vagina) and all that old shit, and there is only so much of that I'll go for. You gotta be a, uhh, I don't know, a rubber band, the rubber band man.

## CHAPTER V

## COCAINE

For more than a thousand years, the leaves of Erythroxyton coca have been eaten, chewed and smoked by the various Indian peoples of Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and other South American countries. Coca has been used in a variety of ways: to increase work potential in laborers, as well as in ceremonial and recreational functions. The evergreen plant supports the general physical and psychological well-being of its users. When various European adventurers brought the coca plant back to Europe in order to demonstrate its euphoric and "magical" effects, it proved useless. Mainly because of the long journey, the plant's properties had diminished. But successive trips to South American countries by other Europeans (Tschudi, Markham, Poeppig) led to a successful isolation of the active principles in coca.<sup>36</sup> Albert Heimann, a German scientist, isolated cocaine in 1830, and Europeans were genuinely interested in its medicinal properties. Sigmund Freud experimented with cocaine and received world-wide

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Byck, Cocaine Papers (London: Stonehill Publishing Co., 1974), p.77

publicity. His early writings and assumptions about cocaine as a cure for morphine addiction created an international controversy. This immediate interest was tempered somewhat by the attacks on Freud begun by A. Erlenmeyer who accused Freud of advocating a dangerous habit-forming drug.

The use of cocaine by Americans had begun after their interest was stirred by the Europeans. A medical doctor, writing in the Detroit Therapeutic Gazette, recommended coca to patients as a cure for opium addiction.<sup>37</sup> Although these uses proved erroneous over time, by 1887, coca and cocaine mixtures proliferated as commercial products. John Pembleton, in 1886, an Atlanta pharmacist, developed a drink made of cola and cocaine called "Coca-cola." The popularity for it and other such mixtures after that grew enormously. Later, in 1892, Asa Candler purchased the patent rights for the cocaine cola drinks and sold it in drug stores. In addition to Coca-cola, sixty-nine cocaine -cola drinks were being manufactured.<sup>38</sup> Some of the other cola-cocaine beverages were, "Koca Nola," "Kola-ade," "Kos-nola," and "Wise-ola."<sup>39</sup> Prior to 1914, cocaine was legally prescribed by doctors, sold in alcohol, cigarettes, elixirs, medicines, tonics, cordials, and as tablets.

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<sup>37</sup> Byck, Cocaine Papers, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Ashley, Cocaine: Its History, Uses and Effects (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975) p. 49

By 1898, writers and medical doctors began a pattern of racist stereotyping by associating cocaine use to blacks. W. Schepppegrell's article on the "Abuse and Dangers of Cocaine" in 1898 casually mentioned how boot blacks and newsboys were selling cocaine for 10¢ a sniff, and larger amount for 25¢, which amounted to a full day's supply of cocaine. The larger amounts were sold in paper pill boxes. Although cocaine was used by most everybody at this time, during the turn of the century, racial myths began circulating about "cocanized blacks" who were part of a crime wave, including an excessive number of rapes of white women. One article mentioned how blacks could not be harmed if shot by a certain caliber bullet. As a result local law enforcement agencies were equipped with larger caliber guns to deal with blacks. These myths understandably generated a strong reaction against cocaine use, and against blacks in general. The patent medicine industry suffered as a result of the misleading evidence about cocaine and its use because it was the supplier of many of the drug products sold to the public.<sup>40</sup>

Cocaine became less available to the general public after 1914 because of the Harrison Act, which restricted its distribution, and because forty-six states initiated some form of legislation restricting its use. After these

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<sup>40</sup> David Musto, The American Disease: Origins of Narcotics Control (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973)

legal restrictions forced cocaine underground, only those who were priveleged could order it legally through their doctors. The Harrison Act was the first federal law to prohibit the dispensation of cocaine and other dangerous substances by persons without a license and/or a demonstrated medical reason. A \$2,000 fine and five year prison sentence were handed out to those convicted. The Harrison Act was amended in 1919 in order to make for more stringent control on both opium and cocaine. By 1922, cocaine was classified as a narcotic drug. The ban on the importation of cocaine and coca leaves was an amended stricter version of the narcotic drugs importation act that was also passed in 1914.

These various legislative restrictions made cocaine an expensive yet much desired drug. In the underground honky-tonks, speakeasies and cafes, it became associated and defined as a status "high" mainly because of its illegality, expensiveness and the myths surrounding it. The wealthy upper classes and the lowly-paid artists, musicians and beat-poet/writers of the 1920's all found cocaine available, delightful and part of an emerging symbol of their lifestyles. The Depression era quieted cocaine use somewhat, but in the late 1940's and 1950's, the spirit and enthusiasm for cocaine re-emerged.<sup>41</sup> Once again, one of the

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<sup>41</sup> Ashley, Cocaine.

first places cocaine was seen was the speakeasies and after hours clubs. Sammy is an older habitue who remembers his first encounter with cocaine in such a setting, about 1944:

I was going to a spot with a ho (whore) named Chickie. She was black, cold, and built like a marble shithouse. This spot (club) was around St. Nicholas and 45th (145) Street, if I remember right. Smooth Tate (a pimp) and a friend of mine owned this ho. I say owned because in them days, a pimp was a ruthless, dangerous mother-fucker who would shoot and cut somebody in a minute. And them bitches knew it, so they stayed in line. Chickie took me to this spot which was about 50/50: fifty black and fifty white. We sat in that joint and I didn't know what this cocaine stuff was all about. I was sniffing, and sniffing, smoking reefer and drinking that booze. Well before I knew it I'm getting sick, you know, so I asked the owner of the joint if I could lay down somewhere. She took me to another room and I slept until later on that day. When I got up and went back out in the room, the crowd was still there just like I hadn't left. But that was my first time sniffing coke. And Chickie--I was with Chickie last, about six years ago--no, maybe five years ago. And you know, she'll still make a hound dog break away from his chain.

After the Second World War, cocaine use was sporadic. It continued to be used by a small coterie of artists, musicians and stars, but its use was not widespread until about the 1960's. During the 1960's, the re-emergence of cocaine came about because of a new affluence in America and a youth culture that experimented with new ideas, fashions, drugs, religion and other divergent lifestyles. Movies like "Superfly," "The Seven Percent Solution," "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie," "Easy Rider" and others were a few of the many movies in which cocaine and other drugs were part of the theme. Cocaine found its way into the homes of millions of Americans through books, television and music. The media

has sold cocaine to more buyers than all the dealers in the U.S. could every possibly hope to sell. The dealers' clientele has already been programmed to seek cocaine because of media-provoked curiosity.<sup>42</sup>

In Woody Allen's film, "Annie Hall," Allen and Diane Keaton attend a friend's get-together and are offered cocaine. The cocaine is served in a jeweled container. After the host explains to Allen that the cocaine is pure flake, costing \$2,000 an ounce, Allen picks it up to observe the drug more closely and sneezes, thereby scattering the cocaine all over the room. The host and others look on in disbelief. I was struck by the audience response to this scene: it was clear that the entire theatre, full of people, acknowledged the preciousness and high price of cocaine.

Cocaine is known as the "champagne" of drugs in today's culture. Street people refer to cocaine as "my best girl," saying "I'll do anything for some good blow," or "Ain't nothing I dig better than some mellow coke." Other names for the drug are, "snow," "corraine," "lady," "the pimp's high," "nose blues," and "white girl." It is one of fourteen alkaloids found in the leaves of the Erythroxylon coca plant. The plant is an evergreen, which makes it available for harvest all year round. It is

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<sup>42</sup>Charles Winick, "Mass Communication and Drug Dependence," Sociological Aspects of Drug Dependence, ed. Charles Winick, (New York:CRP Press, 1974)

indigenous to the South American countries of Bolivia, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, and Colombia. It can also be found in Java and Madagascar. In Peru, ten million kilograms of coca is produced every year. In Bolivia, annually, seven thousand metric tons of coca is consumed. Coca leaves contain about one-half to one percent of cocaine. Coca is chewed but cocaine, a powder, is sniffed and/or injected intravenously.

Coca leaves are processed into cocaine in illegal laboratories, and is between 85 to 95% pure after reaching the United States through various organized crime networks. Street cocaine is further mixed with other white powders in order to dilute it. The most common of these "cutting" substances are lactose, dextrose and mannitol. Once the cocaine is mixed, it is then sold for prices ranging from ten dollars for very small amounts to two thousand dollars for a pure ounce. It has gone through several chemical cutting changes by the time it gets to the buyer.

Cocaine, because of its popularity, is no longer the drug of the elite. It is used by various segments of society. The proliferation of cocaine and its price structure allow people with very little income to purchase small amounts (\$10, \$20, \$50) with little financial strain. One young woman, when asked how she could afford cocaine, replied:

Part of my welfare check goes to the pool where several of my friends put in \$20 a piece to buy something nice like two spoons (\$100) of coke. I used to do that with my brothers all the time but they moved so my friends and I chip in to cop. I get a lot more if I chip in ~~than~~ I do if I try and cop a twenty by myself.

Because people enjoy cocaine, many ways are found to purchase it.

#### Methods of Cocaine Use

Cocaine is generally sniffed through the nose, and at times mixed together to form a "speedball" which is taken intravenously. "Speedballers" often admit that cocaine overpowers the heroin in this mixture and this is why it is so often preferred. Cocaine users also smoke and eat the drug. Smoking cocaine is accomplished by sprinkling a small amount of the drug into a "joint" of marijuana, or by simply rolling cocaine alone into some paper and smoking it. The eating of cocaine is called "taking a freeze," and it refers to a sequence of actions in which the user applies cocaine to the back of the hand or spoon so it can be licked off by the tongue or rubbed into the gums. The result is a "freezing" or numbing of the inside of the mouth, the lips and the gums. These effects are well-documented by the medical use of cocaine as a local anaesthetic. Cocaine users take a "freeze" sometimes to rest their noses from sniffing. The freeze is not really taken to achieve a "high" but rather to get the sensation of cocaine.

When cocaine is snorted, the residue rests on the mucous lining of the nostrils and is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream.<sup>43</sup> Snorting too much cocaine can result in visual hallucinations, runny or bloody noses, nasal congestion, excessive sneezing, sores in the nose and other problems. The most serious is perforation of the septum and ulceration of the nasal cavity.<sup>44</sup>

Cocaine is a preferred stimulant by most drug takers and only those individuals who have had negative experiences from cocaine reject it. It gives users a feeling of well-being, happiness, euphoria and relief from anxiety. This is often accompanied by garrulousness, thirst and a desire for physical contact like dancing and sex.

Cocaine is essentially a social drug. Users will frequently find themselves engaged in social intercourse without inhibition. Cocaine is not believed to be a "dangerous" drug, mainly because users have only experienced small amounts and have not seen its undesirable effects. The effects of cocaine differ according to the situations under which it is taken. This means that the "scene," the "place," "set," or rather the physical surroundings in

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Byck & Craig Van Dyke, "What are the Effects of Cocaine in Man," Cocaine 1977, NIDA Research Monograph, Series 13, eds., Robert C. Petersen and Richard C. Stillman (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977) p. 113.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

which cocaine is used make a great deal of difference in the overall experience the user may receive. The snorter/habitue at after hours clubs will frequent many different clubs a night in order to avoid what he calls "bad vibes" or "feeling paranoid." They change from club to club because of what they detect as negative surroundings, i.e., arguments, indifference from waitresses, stares from other patrons--events which can be both real or imagined. These factors must take into account the personality of the user, the experiences of the user with other drugs, his attitude and predisposition before entering the club. Since the clubs are made up mostly of snorters, the effects of cocaine with other drugs (including alcohol and marijuana) may be important in regard to his behavior.

In the after hours clubs, a sharing behavior is established where sniffers pass around cocaine to each other in a reciprocal fashion.<sup>45</sup> If one sniffer passes cocaine to another sniffer, the person being offered the first sniff must reciprocate by offering his own cocaine. This does not necessarily take place in sequence all the time. It may happen that one or the other person does not have cocaine to reciprocate, so there is no binding

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<sup>45</sup> This ritual is akin to the sniffing of a powder by Yanomamo Indians in South America and the passing of the Ganja weed by the Rastafarians in Jamaica. A feeling is established between sniffers as between Ganja smokers.

obligation in this instance. But one may still feel an obligation to reciprocate at some point in time when one has some cocaine. This ritual of feeling reciprocity, closeness and community is key to the development of the success of the after hours cocaine users' culture.

Two essential elements involving cocaine ritual are:

(1) directly, as obligations, establishing how he is morally constrained to conduct himself; and (2) indirectly, as expectations, establishing how others are morally bound to act in regard to him.<sup>46</sup>

#### Patterns or Type of Drug Use

Cocaine users may be considered one large group of individuals who indulge in the stimulating effects of the drug. Users vary, however, in the amount and frequency of their use and consequently, several types of snorters emerge.

#### The "Lame" as Experimental or Beginner User

In the after hours clubs, a member who is out on the town may come with a "lame" to the after hours clubs. These individuals usually have never tried cocaine, or at the most, only a few times. This "square" or "lame" engages

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<sup>46</sup> Erving Goffman, Interaction Ritual (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967) p. 49.



Figure 9. Beginner sniffer.

in cocaine snorting in a non-patterned manner with small amounts. The amount may be less than a "two and two" or the amount one could put on a fingernail, about 5 milligrams. The cocaine they snort is usually given to them by someone in the club, and in this way, they participate in the passing ritual. Because they feel cocaine is a highly desirable and pleasurable drug, their praise for cocaine is usually overly enthusiastic. One young snorter offered this comment: "I feel up, and more alert, stimulated. I seem to have more energy, yet mellow. It makes me feel like rapping or getting into writing."

#### Habitues as Provisional Users

The habitue is more a regular user of cocaine than his "square" counterpart. He is more likely to purchase or "cop" his own cocaine and will use cocaine in social situations. Habitues are familiar with drug paraphernalia, i.e., spoons, straws, other gadgets for snorting, and they usually carry them. Jackie is not a regular to the cocaine club, but frequents it on weekends. Although she would not consider herself a beginner sniffer, her praise for cocaine after many years is still positive:

When I sniff, my mind becomes clear. I am able to do more, I have more energy, less appetite. It is exhilarating. When I first started, I felt numb, my face felt frozen. I felt good, and I was a little hyperactive at first. But now I just get a little horny.

### Employees as Compulsive Users

The employee user takes cocaine consistently. They are long-term users (depending on the duration of the job), because their use is an occupational necessity, and perhaps an occupational bonus. They use cocaine on a daily basis, and when a saturation point has been reached, might utter something to the effect of "No, man, I don't want any, I'm all coked up," or if they have over-indulged, "My nose is out," or "I'm re-grouping," or, as in many cases, will defer until "later." Employees like the barmaids and the dancer are constantly involved in the cocaine passing ritual. They are offered cocaine continuously by habitues and they are often given cocaine as tips. The other employees do not receive cocaine from habitues as much, mainly because they are on the periphery of the action.<sup>47</sup>

### Dealers as Compulsive Users

The dealer may be characterized as a compulsive, chronic, dependent user of cocaine. His use is incessant and intense over long periods of time. This produces, after a while, a psychological dependence. Street dealers, as opposed to importers or stash carriers (who deliver

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<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that all employees are not compulsive users, nor are all habitues provisional sniffers

drugs for profit), must "sniff" or test their product before they buy it and before they sell it. In addition, there is much sniffing along the way, between friends, parties, small social gatherings, and with other dealers. Every dealer may make twenty-five sales of cocaine a night or more. In the after hours club, the dealer, after the day's selling is over, is still engaged in sniffing. Sniffing in the after hours club is predominantly social/recreational, however, and not business-oriented.

#### Multiple Drug Use

Users of cocaine in the clubs rarely do so without the accompanying use of marijuana and alcohol. As a result most habitues are multiple drug users. Sammy, a regular at the Blue Cat Cafe was speaking about the "goodness" of marijuana when this side comment emerged:

The best reefer I ever had was in the Nam (Vietnam). The shit was so good I seen motherfuckers bend over backwards, stick their headsup their ass and swear they was watching a cartoon (laughter). The shit was powerful--boy. I don't like to snort no coke without my smoke (marijuana). Coke make you break wind and that smoke will catch it for ya. Reefer make you eat, coke make you drink and TV make me fall asleep.

#### The Economy of Cocaine

People use cocaine in a variety of ways. The most common is to sniff it, but it is also used intravenously, smoked in cigarettes, and sipped in tea, among others. The street word for cocaine is "blow," or more commonly, "coke."

In large metropolitan regions, cocaine can be purchased in many parts of the city. Of the many places to buy cocaine, a few public places become open markets for the selling. An example would be the 116th Street Eighth Avenue drug market place in New York City, or along Cottage Grove in Chicago. While cocaine is available in ghettos, it is also available in more luxury areas like Beverly Hills in Los Angeles, Hyde Park in Chicago and the Upper East Side in New York City. These places are arbitrary designations in one sense, but they have also been definitely signaled out as places where cocaine can be found.

In order to purchase cocaine, first of all, a "connection" is necessary. And because it seems many more people are buying cocaine these days, "the connection" has become a ubiquitous entity. The drug is available, in much rarer instances, by other illicit means, through druggists and doctors. Counterfeit cocaine has even been advertised in Rolling Stone magazine along with sniffing spoons, straws, scales and various mixing compounds.

There are several ways in which cocaine culture can be seen as part of the American way of life in the 1970's. One of the most glaring is the number and amount of cocaine seizures by law enforcement personnel. The other is the media impact of new books, records, movies, novels, plays and television programs where cocaine is a major theme. Taking the first example to illustrate the point, during the years 1972 to 1976, United States customs

officials confiscated 5,754 pounds of cocaine. The average is about 925 pounds a year.<sup>48</sup> Ashley (1975) argues, however, that the volume of seizures is not an accurate indicator of how much cocaine is actually coming into the country. He states that the figures did not indicate the total amount of cocaine entering the country. More specifically, it did not represent 10% of the total number of pounds seized by any means. Indeed, the cocaine confiscated may not represent ten percent of the total flow, but the seizures, beginning around 1968, do reflect the re-emergence of cocaine as a popular drug, a fact attested to by users, law enforcement agents and medical authorities. An illustration is in order. The Department of Justice seizures grew from 370 pounds in 1969 to 751 pounds in 1971. Arrests for cocaine rose from 936 in 1969 to 1,234 in 1971. Prior to 1968, almost no deaths were reported nationally that were attributed to cocaine alone. But during the years 1971 to 1975, twenty-six deaths were reported where cocaine was the primary cause.<sup>49</sup> Although this is not considered a high figure for a five year period, it does reflect a

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<sup>48</sup> Ashley, Cocaine, p. 113.

<sup>49</sup> Bryan S. Finkle and Kevin L. McCloskey, "The Forensic Toxicology of Cocaine," Cocaine 1977 NIDA monograph #13 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977) pp. 153.- 193.

trend of increasing cocaine use and abuse. The second example refers to the tremendous popularity of cocaine as a media topic. There has been a flood of literature on or about cocaine in the last few years, among them, Woodley (1972), Musto (1975), Byck (1974), Ashley (1975), Andrews and Solomon (1975), Grinspoon and Bakalar (1976) and Sabbag (1977). Movies and recordings about cocaine have also proliferated.

#### Recent Reports on Cocaine Users

The National Institute on Drug Abuse recently (1977) completed a monograph on cocaine. One of the interesting results is the profile of the cocaine user in the United States today. Historically, the users of cocaine have been just about everyone: men, women, children, young and old, rich and poor, black and white. According to Dr. Robert Petersen, the following profile emerges in the 1970's. The data from national interview surveys taken in 1972, 1974, 1975 and 1976 show among adults (18 years and older) and young people (12 to 17 years old), 3% to 4% had tried cocaine.<sup>50</sup> The 1974 national study of adult men chosen randomly between the ages of twenty and thirty, shows 14% having previous cocaine use. In yet another national survey, this one of high school seniors, 9% of the 1975 senior class indicated they had used cocaine. The following year (1976), 9.8% of this same sample said they had used

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Petersen, "Cocaine: an Overview" Cocaine 1977, p. 7.

cocaine. Other indicators of cocaine and other drug use has been carried out by the federal government. One specific system, DAWN(Drug Abuse Warning Network) was established to guide the location of emergency treatment. It receives information from twenty-four major cities in the United States. This information, retrieved from emergency rooms of hospitals, crisis centers and medical personnel, shows that during 1975- 1976, cocaine-related emergencies accounted for less than 1% (953 of 113,311) of overall total of cases.<sup>51</sup> Deaths attributed to cocaine in the United States and Canada in 1971-1973 totaled twenty-six, with eighty-six cases involving cocaine in combination with other drugs for a total of 111.<sup>52</sup> The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) reported in 1975-1976 57 deaths involving cocaine and twenty-four urban areas with populations of 50,000 or more. The total number of cases was 4,363 in which death was related to drug use. But cocaine was directly responsible for only six cases.<sup>53</sup> One of the important statistical results of an earlier NIDA study (1971 - 1976) was that two deaths resulted from "snorting" cocaine.<sup>54</sup> This point is significant because it will alert people who snort cocaine to the possible hazards of snorting. It is not, however, new information to street users

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Finkle & McCloskey, "Forensic Toxicology."

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

who are aware of the harm too much snorting can bring. But deaths related to cocaine, like deaths related to heroin, does not stop people from using the drug.

### Cocaine and its Effects

Physical addiction to cocaine is a rare occurrence. Psychological addiction, however, is mentioned as not only plausible but highly possible. It is a fact that cocaine has been found to be a local anaesthetic. Its properties affect the pupillary size in controlled animal experiments. And the central nervous system exhibits alertness while sleep and appetite are decreased. The heart rate increases in animals, as does blood pressure, respiratory rate, and muscle tension.<sup>55</sup> Users of cocaine have a high creativity level, and moods both normal and abnormal (including cocaine depression) have been reported.

Cocaine is considered psychologically habit-forming. One of the characteristics of physical addiction is the necessity of increasing dosages to achieve the same effects over time. But psychological addiction means that one only has to have a continuous desire to achieve the same high over time and does not lead to increasing the dosage. In other words, the key word is "habit." If habit suggests a redundant activity, one that assures pleasure for the user and is done continuously but not

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<sup>55</sup> Byck and Van Dyke, "Effects of Cocaine," p.97.

necessarily in an everyday fashion, there is a question as to whether this also constitutes addiction. If a snorter uses cocaine one day and does not use it again until a week later, is that person addicted? The key word now becomes withdrawal or tolerance. If that person does not experience withdrawal symptoms, then he is not considered addicted. But tolerance to cocaine does happen because sniffers have been noted to expand their use whenever their circumstances change. Users who can afford \$10 to \$20 worth of cocaine will be satisfied with that amount, but if suddenly he can afford \$50 to \$100 worth, they will buy it and use that amount as well.

Laboratory experiments concerning the subjective effects of cocaine in man have been recently completed. Resnick (1977) discovered that 20 milligrams of cocaine, sniffed, will produce euphoria for the experimental users. Fischman (1976) had his subjects inject cocaine and found corresponding results similar to amphetamine use. Dyck (1977) gave subjects 10 to 130 milligrams of cocaine that was sniffed, and found that all had pleasant, euphoric experiences. All these studies indicated increased blood pressure and higher heart rate for the users whether taken intranasally or intravenously. After the volunteers took the cocaine (10 to 130 milligrams), the effects of cocaine were felt within two minutes and lasted about fifteen minutes for those who snorted it, and five to ten minutes

for users who took it intravenously. What these studies seem to indicate is less new information about the effects of cocaine but a wider interest in laboratory experimentation concerning cocaine's psychological and physiological effects. The problem with laboratory experiments is by definition their contrived nature and concern over control. The lack of control is also a problem for street researchers who have no way of controlling the many drugs the users may have had previous to the "coke" setting under observation. And more importantly, there is no control over how much cocaine they have had before entering the setting. Yet the social observation of cocaine use seems far more interesting, if not absolutely a reliable setting. Some interesting facts about cocaine users emerge from both approaches, however. The experiments of Fischman (1977), Resnick (1976), Byck (1977) and Post (1974) point to some of the already observed aspects of the "street" information on cocaine use.

In contrast to laboratory volunteers, the after hours sniffer **uses** cocaine more rapidly and in larger amounts, and whenever he pleases. The amount of cocaine used by sniffers is of course varied, and is indicative of style, personal attitudes, tastes, atmosphere, time of day, the quality and the amount the user possesses. Cocaine users in clubs generally take a sniff every ten minutes or so. The amount per sniff varies depending on the kind of instrument used for sniffing. They may use a matchbook

cover , a spoon (of various **sizes** ) fingernails, plastic cards, or two fingers pinched together. A "one and one" is equivalent, perhaps, to about 2.5 milligrams. The regular sniffers may take about one hundred sniffs in a given five hour period. But this is very much dependent on whether or not the sniffer is a heavy user or a beginner. Sniffers will snort more cocaine if there is a lot of cocaine available to them, and in addition, will snort more at the beginning of a set (4 a.m. at an after hours club) than at the end of the set (about 11 to 12 a.m.)

The reaction to cocaine varies with the individual. Some sniffers experience nothing at all after taking several "blows" or "hits" off the drug. A sniffer might be heard saying, "I didn't feel anything," or "nothing happened." This reaction can be explained in several ways. Since people's psychological and physiological responses to various stimuli is undoubtedly varied and different, the reaction toward cocaine can be as varied as there are people who take it. A great deal has to do with the cocaine itself: the quality, the situation, the people and the atmosphere. One important consideration is whether or not the individual has had other drugs. These factors, mixed with the subtlety of the cocaine "high" can lead to many different responses from the same cocaine. Users who take small amounts of cocaine in a setting (say only a "one and one") may not feel anything, because the amount of cocaine is too small to register a significant response.

Others may take cocaine all night and not know it is affecting them. They may exhibit all the signs of the cocaine high, like thirst, loss of appetite and garrulousness, yet will deny they are "high" or feeling any differently. One of the surest ways many informants and habitues say they "get off" on cocaine is to "sniff" continuously for an hour or more until the effect registers. Alfredo and two other friends were discussing one night at the Club 36 about a young woman they had met who was a newcomer to cocaine:

Alfredo: She was not the same chick who was here the night before was she?

Patch: No, she was with the guy with the beard. But he left early. The part I liked was when everybody started passing blow around and she just kept on sniffing, although we knew she didn't know what it was.

Jubin/

Alfredo: (simultaneously) What you mean she didn't know what it was? (laughter)

Patch: I mean, she was square as a box of graham crackers, but she was gettin' high all right.

Alfredo: Man, bullshit. She knew what she was doing. That woman knew what she was doin'--I mean maybe she didn't know exactly how to sniff but she was getting mighty high.

Jubin: I think she was just trying to con everybody. You know, pretending with that little girl voice as if she didn't know nothing.

Alfredo: Regardless whether she was or not she was very high when it was all over.

## Cocaine Blues

In the street, the abuse of cocaine is a condition described as "coke blues." "Coke blues" is regarded as the acronym for users who are experiencing symptoms of nosebleeds, nasal congestion, depression, and sneezing. After hours clubs often are the places sniffers get the "coke blues." Because of the amount of cocaine sniffed there, it is not uncommon to hear people say, "I hate cocaine--I mean, I don't wanna see no more coke tonight." Cocaine blues is a condition of having too much cocaine, and users have various ways of describing it.

I think coke is dangerous because I have seen people really go off on it, especially when it's around. As long as it's around, they will take it. I used to go with this guy who was addicted to coke. He had this incredible jones (habit) for coke. But because there ain't no treatment centers and places like that, he figures he ain't addicted, and he justifies all this in some way, by saying, "Well, it ain't harmful because I ain't shooting it," Stuff like that, but yet he's snorting every morning when he gets up, every night before he goes to sleep, and constantly during the day. Musicians are really into it. My boyfriend told me about a musician who has a \$1000 a week habit on coke. Can you imagine? \$1000 a week.

**Theresa**, a Manhattan worker, describes her reaction to cocaine this way:

I had only sniffed coke a few times, but when I met Johnny, we sniffed a lot and I began to like it. But he changed so much after a while when he sniffed. Instead of being nice like he was normally, he would get mean after sniffing a lot. The more I tried to talk to him, the more upset he seemed to get. He was real moody all the time and purposely evil. It got to the point where we had no real relationship because the things that would come up when he was upset on coke would hang over into the next day. Because he

acted so ugly and difficult, and because right now I feel that coke was the cause of it, I guess I'd have to get re-oriented into using it, if I ever use it at all.

Although Theresa's experience with cocaine was positive in terms of the high she received, it was the social relationships with cocaine users around her which caused her negative reactions to it.

Pepe is twenty-five years old. He is not a regular in the Blue Cat, but frequents the place occasionally. He is short, about five feet two, and stocky. After one talk with him, I saw him a few months later and asked about after hours clubs, to which he replied, "After hours clubs are for immature people, man, really. I have outgrown those places, so I can't tell you nothing about them." About cocaine, he said:

Cocaine is better left alone. It's better just to go and do something else with your life. Because out there on the streets, ain't shit happening. If you gonna try and sell coke, forget about it, because everybody is selling coke, and ain't nobody buying it. Everybody has something to sell. But seriously, the man, from Ford on down to the narc, is on every poor person's ass in this country. Instead of trying to get to the American dream through selling coke and getting rich, people should be organizing small community groups to take over the institutions in the community. Cocaine ain't no power, it's a glittering symbol of an illusion. My brother sold cocaine for five years, never had a bust, never got robbed, and made \$200,000. And you know what happened to it? He blew it. He trusted people he should not have trusted and didn't trust people he shoulda trusted. Right now he ain't broke or nothing, but he's not well, either. Everytime he sees or takes coke, he becomes, let's say, unstable. He will never make that much money again in his life. And that's sad, because he could have done a lot of things with that money.

This account focuses on one of the problems associated with cocaine. He felt that cocaine, when used habitually, degenerates the mental ability and personality of the user to the point where he loses the ability to make critical judgements, although there is not enough medical evidence to support this.

People who attend cocaine clubs and other everyday people have as many different opinions about cocaine as they do about political issues, social changes, and other everyday realities. Joan is a mother of four girls. She has tried cocaine for years, but remains unimpressed:

People think cocaine is everything. I've seen people go stark raving mad about some goddam cocaine. Cocaine ain't nothing but another high. And that don't even last that long. Folk go mad over some cocaine. I know people who get very evil when they take coke. But I don't see it. There are so many things in the world to get into besides cocaine. I got a daughter eighteen years old. I know she smokes reefer because I have seen her eyes all red and well, I just know when she's high. But if I ever catch her with any of that coke shit, I will break her back. Coke ain't for kids--it's for fools who got money to throw away. When they say on t.v., "Coke adds life," everybody be thinking they mean cocaine, when they don't.

This is a very different account from the previous ones. Joan's concern is with her daughter and the cost of cocaine, indicating she does not wish the money her daughter makes to be spent on cocaine, even though marijuana is all right.

Henry has been a snorter of cocaine for ten years or longer, and he has some anecdotes on the effects of cocaine used intravenously:

I used to know this chick who lived above the old Braddock Hotel (in Harlem) and she and her old man used to shoot up. She was white, a ho, and he was black. One day, he took me up there and they were preparing to shoot up. Well, they had some skag (heroin) and some coke mixed to speedball, and she decided she just wanted to shoot the coke. Well, this bitch shot up that shit (coke), and in a few minutes, she said, "I feel tight and warm," and she took off her skirt. Before you knew it, this bitch done took off everything and is buck naked. Well, wasn't nothing he could do and wasn't nothing I could do, so we both just watched. But that ain't the wildest story I've been told. One day, a few years back, this ho named Sandy who used to work as a barmaid at the Showplace near the Apollo, used to love to shoot cocaine. She was white, too. One afternoon, after shooting up cocaine, she was fully dressed, and decided to do a striptease in the streets. I mean she started to take off all her shit and to drop it behind her as she walked. Well, the police saw her about half way and they watched and followed her along with about 16,000 niggers, and by the time she got down to her panties and bra, the cops rushed over and covered her up. Well, she was just a kicking and fighting and shit, but they put her ass in the paddywagon and took her off. For some reason, that cocaine just makes some dem chicks feel constrained, and they just gotta take it all off.

Henry's account is more akin to street folklore than true fact. The stories have the ring of incredulity to them. The following verbatim account of a cocaine user who shoots up points up another negative aspect of cocaine overuse.

Q: What do you buy usually (meaning amount)?

A: Ten's most of the time.

Q: Why ten's? That's small isn't it?

A: Yeah, it's small, but I don't shoot up no more than \$10 at a time. But I shoot up about \$100, \$150 when my bread is right (his hustle). I've shot up as much as \$200 in blow in less than two hours. That cocaine is a mother-fucker. Once you love it you love it.

Q: When did you first use cocaine?

A: Oh, I used to sniff a lot of that shit, man, a whole lot. But you see, I was into doogie (heroin) then and coke didn't mean that much to me. But then that was a few years back--more than a few. I would speed a little (cocaine and heroin) then, though. I mean, I had some thangs happening to me when I was carrying that monkey that'll make your head curl. That was a good while back. A good while.

Q: Now, you just take cocaine? Is it as good as they say?

A: Who say? Coke is a rush, man, I don't know what "dey" say (mocking). Coke is a rush like no other. As long as I got some blow here I shoot it. Because the high is short, too short. The rush comes and it goes. The only thing you wanna do is get back up there again; get that rush again.

Q: Do you buy street cocaine for shooting like you do for snorting?

A: I don't snort no coke. And coke comes from the same place as far as I know--South of the border, baby. I got a cat here now I swear I'll cut off my right arm for this dude cause he's so together. Every time he gets a new batch in (cocaine), he comes up here and lays a ten or twenty on me to test for 'em. And I mean it's always boss. So I cop from him--he lets me have shit on credit. I mean he's a real boss cat, what better connect can you find than that? You tell me.

In the studies by Byck, et al (1977), the psychological results of cocaine in social-recreational users yield interesting aspects of cocaine's "mean" side. While the drug is pleasurable for some, it also has a negative effect on others. Of course, this is speculative, because personality, mood, and other variables associated with the cocaine user must be taken into account.

The Byck and Van Dyke studies (1977) indicate that along with euphoria, garrulousness, alertness and sexual arousal, a number of effects were observed which may be viewed as negative. Certain people experienced restlessness, anxiety, hyper-excitability, irritability and paranoia. In some cases, where cocaine users at first exhibited positive sexual arousal when taking cocaine in certain settings, different reactions occurred when cocaine use was continual and in high doses. They began to have negative experiences. For men, this meant the inability to maintain an erection. A prostitute found this to be true in her encounter with a pimp:

I didn't want to have sex with Silky. I waited till he got into bed. I thought he was asleep. Then I climbed in with half my clothes on. He said, "Need some help getting undressed?" I didn't answer. He just helped me. Silky took me in about ten different positions. We went twice and then he wanted to do it again, but he couldn't get his dick hard. I said, "Forget it." He said, "No, I can't forget it." That was the first time it ever, ever happened to him. He'd been blowing coke. Usually Silky can fuck and come and fuck and come. After that, he stopped blowing coke for months.<sup>56</sup>

The following snatches of a conversation between Tall Sam, Jody and Snake took place one night at the Blue Cat:

Sam: That's bullshit about cocaine fucking with yo' johnson. I been sniffing cocaine as long as I can remember and my dick gets as hard as a dollar worth a jawbreakers.(candy)

Jody: Man, you lying. I was talking to yo' ol' lady last night and she say (truncated intentionally)... (laughter)

Sam: Shit, my dick gets hard as a Chinese arithmetic that cocaine is good for your sex, boy, shoulda gave Nixon some of it. Maybe he and Pat wouldn't

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<sup>56</sup> Susan Hall, Gentleman of Leisure (New York: Prairie House, 1972) p. 97.

have been sleeping in separate bedrooms so long. (laughter)

Jody: I know the shit (cocaine) will affect your nature--Sam-- of course it'll make it rise but too much of it and you and I both know it'll soften up.

Sam: Where is that barmaid--look everybody is affected different ways; I know that. That's just what um saying. Dena! Dena! Can I have another?

Scientific sources on this particular effect of cocaine are inconclusive. Whether it is real or mythical, its reputation as a sexual stimulant is sufficient to ensure its continual association with clubs and places of pleasure.

#### Market Structure

In the classic article, "Taking Care of Business," Edward Preble outlines how the distribution of heroin in the United States consists of six levels: the importer, the kilo connection, the weight dealer, the street dealer and the pusher.<sup>57</sup> Preble's theory about heroin distribution is applicable to cocaine distribution since the organized syndicate of both heroin and cocaine are interconnected (Retail market prices are illustrated in Table 1).

The current street prices for cocaine in New York City indicate a widening interest by consumers for this illicit drug. Cocaine costs as much as \$2,000 per ounce. Cocaine is sold in kilos, pounds, half ounces, quarter

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<sup>57</sup> Edward Preble, "Taking Care of Business: the Heroin Users Life on the Street," International Journal of Addictions (1969) 4: 1-24.

ounces, eighths of an ounce, grams, and in \$100, \$50, \$20, \$10 and \$5 amounts. The purity of the drug is related to its price. The higher the amount of money one pays, in theory, the higher the quality should be. Therefore, one cannot be guaranteed a very pure ounce of cocaine at \$1500 an ounce. More often than not, the quality and the price also depends on the dealer. If we suppose a buyer knows the dealer in question reasonably well, there are a number of intervening variables the buyer must yet encounter. For instance, he should know whether or not the dealer has gone through a middle man, and whether or not the drug comes from a fresh stock just arrived, in which case the dealer may be willing to sell quickly (and thus give a better deal) or whether the stock is almost depleted, in which case the dealer may adulterate the product more to reach the desired quantity. For example, if he is eight grams short of a full ounce, he may "cut" the drug with eight grams of adulterant in order to make up the difference.

The retail distribution of cocaine is a complex structure which has not been adequately documented. But taking from various sources and splicing together a few historical pieces, the following structure emerges. The distribution channels for cocaine involve at least five important inter-related levels: the importer (who may put up the money for the transport of cocaine to the U.S.)

the kilo connection, the pound man, the eighth dealer and the street dealer. This hierarchical structure of cocaine distribution has been considered analogous to heroin distribution, although there are many independent entrepreneurs in cocaine distribution and, no doubt, heroin as well. Within these five levels, several other individuals, mostly lower dealers in the hierarchical order, surface. The importer is both a part of the host country cocaine network and the network in the country of destination, which may be the United States, France or Canada, for example. The role of the importer is to get to the source of the coca harvest, select quality coca leaves and oversee the chemical transformation of the leaves into crystals of cocaine. This process is amply described by Siegel(1977) Mortimer(1974) Ashley(1975) and others. The chemical process involves essentially three steps. First, the cocaine is chemically extracted from the leaves, then mixed with hydrochloric acid, and then adulterated with lactose, dextrose, inositol, mannitol or some other adulterant. Once the cocaine has been processed, the importer arranges through various networks, airline personnel, customers agents and other, the successful arrival of cocaine into the designated country for distribution. Most of the time, the importer sells his product in bulk (after stepping on or cutting) for a flat fee (\$20,000 to \$100,000 for a kilogram, for example)

to the kilo connection, the second link in the network. After the drug has been acquired, either through buying outright or through "fronting" on a consignment basis, the kilograms of cocaine are broken up into pounds and further adulterated. These kilos are then sold in pounds or fractions of a pound and so the connection can make astronomical profits.

The pound connection breaks the cocaine up into ounces, further diluting them to yield a top percentage return. He usually connects then to the lower level dealers like the "eighth" (of an ounce) dealer or the street dealer, either in ounces or in pounds, at price or on consignment. The pound connection usually has a network of "ethnic" workers who all work for the same ethnic group (for example, Corsicans or Colombians).

The street dealer is the lowest in the hierarchy of dealers. Yet there is a smaller hierarchical structure operating within this level as well. The eighth dealer is, of course, higher than the \$10, \$20, \$50 dealer, even though they are both considered street dealers. They both work the bars and the night dives to survive. But because the street dealer (pusher) has street knowledge, they know where the market and customers are and what their demands are. They are sought out by higher dealer when a new shipment of cocaine has to be sold and distributed.

## Street Cocaine

The cost of an ounce of street cocaine can be as little as \$1,000 to as much as \$2,000, the difference depending on a number of factors. A major factor is whether the dealer is "on the up and up," that is, whether he is reasonably honest. It also depends on how much the cocaine has been adulterated, and so the \$2,000 price tag is probably reserved for buyers who have the intention of selling the cocaine for a profit (although there are places where cocaine is very scarce and \$2,000 an ounce is then commonplace). Street cocaine fluctuates in purity, accessibility and consistency as cocaine. By consistency is meant whether it is cocaine or not. Several types of drugs are incessantly passed off as cocaine. For instance novacaine, procaine, and various synthetic mixtures are readily available in the street.

Cocaine comes in many varieties, but two of the most common referred to on the street is "Peruvian flake" and "Bolivian rock" cocaine. Both of these types of cocaine are considered excellent by street users. The differences between the two varieties and their alleged quality is difficult to ascertain except through street word. The flake is considered better than the "rock" variety since most dealers know that rocks can be artificially produced by pressing powdered cocaine together.

Barko, a frequent visitor to after hours clubs and a musician who recently toured several South American countries, talked about the processing of cocaine in a Peruvian cocaine factory. His comments, taken for what they are, gives an account of how cocaine is processed in these countries before it reaches the United States:

I never knew they put all that shit in there to make the cocaine I put in my nose. They put some kind of acid in it, and at least ten or more other chemicals before it becomes coke. That shit was so powerful, it made our noses bleed. Everybody that sniffed had a bloody nose. But the Peruvians who took me to this place (cocaine factory) don't sniff cocaine. They say they don't take nothing by air in theirs (pointing to his nose). They smoke a kind of residue in a joint. It's paste type stuff (of cocaine) and you get it just before the final processing to get the crystal rocks of the coke. That paste, they take and put it in a joint and smoke it. And man, oh shit, it is nice. You feel nice from your head to your toes. You don't want to move or do nothin. You just wanna sit there, and wow, it's nice. You know the Peruvians protested the U.S. government because the government intervened in their affairs. But you know what the affair was about? Coke. Yeah, coke. The American government buys up most of the legally produced coke for medical purposes, and as a result, it tries to buy up all the coca which is produced so as to prohibit any excess coca on the market. In this case, the U.S. government intervened against a small cocaine producing company that paid its employees by giving them coca leaves instead of money. The workers protested, and eventually won out. They persisted in their demands to be paid in coca leaves. The coca leaves they receive become the illegal cocaine that makes its way to the United States. The coke produced from this process, by the way, can be cut at least seven times.

Barko's intimacy in the initial stages of the coca-cocaine process, points to some interesting factors.

The factors that contribute to the variance of cocaine prices are quality and quantity of purchase, the

illegal nature of the business, the status of the dealer (established or not), and whether the purchaser is buying for the first time or not. Other factors are dress, mannerisms, time of purchase, ethnic background and whether the dealer has just received the drug or has very little left. Additional factors like whether the dealer has just gotten "burned" (cheated) or not, in which case he may charge more, explaining in some cases that he has to make up for his losses. In other words, a host of intervening factors affect the price of the cocaine for the purchaser.

#### The Cutting of Cocaine

After observing dealers prepare their product for street distribution, I have attempted, in the following section, to reproduce the adulturation process. When purchasing the drug, a buyer will ask the dealer, "What will it take?" This means, how much cut (lactose, dextrose, Benita, mannitol, inositol, in general) can be added to the cocaine. If the dealer says it will take "a one"-- then the same amount of cut can be mixed with an equal amount of cocaine. One dealer described it this way when he purchased a good product:

This shit will take a three easy. I don't mean a three and then find out later that it only takes a two or a one and a half. I mean it'll take a three and stand up.

For the cocaine to "stand up" after being mixed means that it still gives the snorter a good "rush" when snorted and

a burning sensation and/or a "drop" in the back of the throat when snorted. A habitue explains the drop.

"Well it's hard to describe. It sort of like, when you sniff real pure blow or just real good coke you feel a small lump in the throat. Now this lump only last a minute or two. As i hear myself explain it somehow it sounds unpleasant but it really is nice feeling. That's funny i never thought about what a drop was until you asked me about it.

If the dealer buys cocaine that will take a "three," he can put three parts of a mixture to one part of cocaine. Thus he gains three times as much profit. Street knowledge is required to be able to cut cocaine. Practical knowledge about cocaine and drugs in general is also necessary. This knowledge is then a combination of street myths and gossip interspersed with elements of truth. In addition to all of this street dealers usually learn the trade skills via apprenticeship. In the street, the major method of cutting cocaine is to put one part dilutant providing of course the purity of the cocaine is assured, to one part cocaine. More often than not, the cocaine purchased, if in small amounts will not take any cut at all.

This brief account presupposes that the cocaine purchased will take a "hypothetical" cut of some adulterant. The utensils needed are a mirror or some smooth surface to work on, a sifter, a scale or measuring spoons, dilutants, aluminum foil or glassine bags, plastic baggie bags and a plastic card to mix the ingredients together.

The first step is to mix or sift the cut into the sifter. This is done twice, sifting the powder onto the glass in a circular fashion. Then the cocaine is sifted on top of the powder in the same manner. Once this is done, the powder from each step is stirred thoroughly together. If there are any rocks in the mixture, they will remain in the sifter and are crushed onto the powder. Dealers will often keep the rocks separately and if too much powder has been put on cocaine and the product is weak, they will crush the rocks onto the powder in order to "bring it up" or make the product more powerful. After the cocaine and the powder cut is well blended, the entire mixture is put through the sifter once more and is pressed with the back of the measuring spoon until it is well integrated.

The cutting of cocaine serves many purposes. One of these may be unintentional but very important to the snorter; namely the cut minimizes the degree of tissue damage to the nasal cavity by the cocaine. While a snorter wishes to enjoy the maximum pleasure in sniffing cocaine, s/he also wants to be able to snort regularly without having the discomforts of nosebleeds or other nasal congestion problems. Thus cutting cocaine is involved with:

a) maximizing and enhancing the profit for the dealer, b) minimizing nose/nasal problems, and c) maintaining a fine balance between cutting the drug too much or too little so both the dealer and the customer are satisfied. The following portrait depicts how cocaine is prepared.

Frenchy (a dealer) unloaded a bag of crystal cocaine from his dresser drawer and placed it on the table. "Now this baby is some of the best," pointing toward the plastic bag of cocaine. "If I put everything on this that it will take, I'll be sitting pretty. The coke will stand a three on the rocks alone and a one on the flakes (powder). "But what I usually do," he went on (picking up the bag and gazing at the cocaine), "is only put a three on it. If my man (connection) says it'll take a four, because I trust this dude I know if he says it'll take it, it'll take a four. You see most of the time, this shit has been cut a lot of times before it gets to me. And a four is unusual. But listen, this don't happen every time. This is what I cut it with (he holds up a plastic jar of a mixture labelled Mallinckrodt Lactose). This is best because of it's a special number lactose. It's lighter. Some of the other kinds is too heavy. Although it's heavier than inositol. But inositol and dextrose is too sweet and sticky. So if I cut this coke with lactose using this number, the chances are the coke will feel better when you sniff it, and it won't be sticky. Another thing about lactose is that it does not make your nose run as much. The other cuts make your nose run. As for quinine, nobody cuts coke with quinine. It's used almost always to cut heroin. Look, I'm gonna cut this piece (quarter of an ounce) so you can see what I mean." As he was about to begin the cutting, someone knocked at the door. He put all the material away, went to the door, spoke for a few minutes and resumed the operation. Once again, taking out the cocaine and the lactose, he assembled various other common everyday household utensils. He took a record album cover and placed it on the table, carefully wiping it of dust particles. Then he went to the kitchen and retrieved two sifters, one small and one larger. The table already held measuring spoons, a razor blade, scissors, a plastic card and aluminum foil. He then proceeded to do the following rather methodically. First, taking a large tablespoon of the cut (lactose), he sifted it through the larger sifter in a circle, spreading it thinly, covering much of the album cover. Then he took the cocaine from the plastic bag and took one carefully measured spoonful from it, placing them into the smaller sifter. Tapping gently on the outside of the sifter with his thumb, he spread the flaky cocaine onto the cut already on the cover. The rocks that remained, he put back into the bag. He put much less cocaine than he did cutting powder, explaining, "That's the purpose of the cut. I make

money by the number of times this shit (cocaine) can be cut. I put one part coke to three parts cut so I have four times as much product. Well, actually I have the same amount of coke no matter what, but if the coke is good like this, it will take it. And I make four times as much money, let's say. What people seem to forget is that cut don't get you high; it's the coke that gets you high. If I put too much cut on it, I fuck it up." I asked him what that would mean. "It means I gotta go out and get more cocaine to put on the original stuff to bring it back up." After he mixed the cocaine and the cutting powder together (he used the plastic card for this), he sniffed a few sniffs. Commenting on its quality, he said, "This is good, real good. This will take every bit of what it's supposed to." He put the whole mixed product into a loose plastic bag and blew some air into it. He shook it up a few times. Then taking a piece of aluminum foil, and the scissors, he cut some strips into smaller pieces and began packing cocaine into them and sealing them. He proceeded to package them into tens, twenties, fifties and hundreds. Once this was completed, he took one of the larger rocks from the bag and picked up the razor blade and began shaving the rock to a fine powder. Looking up at me, he said, "This is my private stash. It'll keep the ho's (whores) jumping and my heart thumping," with a lot of laughter. He got up to leave.

#### The Packaging of Street Cocaine

Street cocaine, in small amounts, is sold usually in aluminum foil. The foil is cut into small squares to fit the size needed to contain a specific amount of cocaine. Sometimes, glassine envelopes are also used. Cocaine sold in larger amounts (quarter ounces and up) are sold in plastic sandwich bags. When buying cocaine in a bar, the dealer may simply ask the buyer for a "crisp" dollar bill in which to put the cocaine. Street cocaine packaging has not reached the sophisticated stage of street heroin with the Madison Avenue marketing technique of labelling their products. Heroin dealers in recent

years have taken to labelling their products with code names such as "good pussy," "O.D.," "RCA," "skin tight," "Santa Claus," and "star trek." Cocaine dealers do not advertise their product with code names, but they do hawk it with slang names like "coke," "blow," "coca cola."

Good blow my man, check it out... Hey got that cocaine ... cop now blow later.

Cocaine is not always what one buys in these streets transactions. One is more likely to buy ajax, borax, chalk and the dilutant itself (lactose, dextrose) with no real cocaine contained.

#### Copping Cocaine

The literature on copping as an event or course of action as discussed by Preble and Casey (1969), Fiddle (1970), Hughes (1971) and Agar (1973) is not as concerned with copping cocaine. In a study of copping heroin by Agar, copping is broken down into distinct categories. For example, one category is "copping" itself, and another is "getting burned" or buying bad merchandise. Agar analyzes the copping scene by focusing on two aspects: a) the seller of drugs (the dealer), and b) the buyer of drugs (addict). Once an addict has money, he can then select a dealer on the basis of various key criteria. Among them, the addict must determine which dealer has the best product to sell, which dealer is most accessible to him so that he can obtain his drugs easily, which dealer has the best reputation for mixing the drugs, and finally,

which dealer will give him the best buy. Stephens and Smith, although similar to Agar, went a step further in their analysis on copping. They describe copping as a "social and economic transaction" resulting in a number of interacting factors. These factors include: a) the economic structure of the heroin distribution network, b) the illegal nature of the act, and c) the street addict subculture.<sup>58</sup> These issues are important in the cocaine copping context in much the same way.

Dealers are known to sell their best cocaine to: a) people who purchase large amounts, b) those who buy regularly, c) those whom they like and d) those of similar ethnic background. It is said that Latin dealers will sell poorer quality cocaine to black Americans, although this depends on the situations. Jaime, a Latin dealer, comments:

Black dudes don't always know what good coke is. I mean, my (Latin) customers would not buy what I sell to black dealers that come in here. A lot of it has to do with who his buying it from them. When they buy a quarter ounce from me, they break it down to tens and twenties and can sell most of it in a very short time. They do not buy my best stuff because they don't really need to because their customers don't know what good coke is any way. The same coke I sell them that they cut at least once or even twice more, my (Latin) people won't even buy because it's just not what they are accustomed to.

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<sup>58</sup> Richard C. Stephens and R. B. Smith, "Copping and Caveat Emptor: the Street Addict as Consumer," Addictive Diseases: An International Journal (1976) 2(4): 585-600.

The heroin addict must test the drug by injecting it (since few addicts sniff for any length of time), while the cocaine user need only take a pinch of cocaine in each nostril before deciding to purchase the drug. Both the heroin addict and the cocaine user must try to minimize the possibility of being cheated. Since the purchase of cocaine is a crime, the dealers are more often than not apprehensive about selling to new customers. Unlike Agar's notion of heroin "buyer" selecting a dealer, the dealers of cocaine almost always selects the "buyer." On Manhattan cocaine snorter described his problem in copping this way:

I had gone with a friend of mine to a bar on 138th Street to cop some coke. He saw the cat (dealer) and went up to him, bought the shit and we left. It was really fine stuff, so a few days later, I went in and I saw the dude at the bar in the lower corner and I politely went over, ordered a beer and asked him if I could cop a thang (of coke). He looked at me real funny as if I had bad breath or something and said, " I don't know anything." So I left. My friend went again to cop and told him about me and after that everything was cool. Now I go in there and it's hand clapping time.

After this initial "set up," it is the buyer who determines, through quality of the cocaine, dependability and integrity of the dealer whether he will continue to purchase the drug from him or not. It is no uncommon for the cocaine-buyer to be faced with a problem of not having another dealer to go to. He may be forced out of necessity to purchase from the same dealer whether or not his product is good or he is dependable. In addition, dealers have "rights" to certain territory and certain customers:

You see, this area is controlled by Juan and his people. They sell all the blow to folk that come in here. And if you have a dude who buys from one of them and he comes looking for something to buy, you tell him you don't have nothing, even if you do have something. Sometimes you can arrange something with Juan. You say if he (buyer) comes, I sell to him, but I give you a percentage (take). This way, we keep the prices up and we sell whatever we have without competition. This way is good. This way is better for everybody.

Once the dealer has established a fairly stable clientele (those who will purchase enough cocaine to keep him making a profit on a regular basis), he will not be too open to meeting strangers. As a result, a small class of entrepreneurs, or middle men, are created. In this aspect of the copping scene, the chances of an individual buyer getting "ripped off" are heightened. In the account which follows, John speaks about a friend who deals in cocaine as a middle man. Middle men not only avoid being labeled as dealers but they can sell mediocre or bad cocaine without a dent in their reputation. In other words, they are not responsible for the product they sell:

Juan lived in the South Bronx for three years before he moved downtown to the Lower East Side. By the time he got down there, he had his shit so together he was killing 'em. You know how he would do it, when somebody came to him to buy coke? He would say he had a friend who might be able to get what the person wanted. He could say he had a friend who might be able to get what the person wanted. He would ask the person to call back in an hour or so and then when they did, he would say his friend had the coke. He'd tell the person to come on over and he would go and try to get it. If he had real good coke, he would cut it really heavy and say to the buyer that's all his friend had.

In copping cocaine, another instance involved the middle man who purchases drugs for a person who has the money but no direct contact with a dealer. In this situation, the middle man makes what is called a "squeeze play." This means that he takes part of the cocaine for himself as compensation for his work. If the dealer gives him pure cocaine, he may cut it and keep a substantial amount. The purchaser will often be satisfied with his product since he does not know what was purchased, only what he actually received. People who buy from a middle man often are aware that the "middle man got his share." The problems arise when the middle man gets too greedy and brings back an overly-diluted product that the purchaser does not want. In this case, the middle man simply begs off by saying that it was all he could get, as in Juan's case.

The questions related to copping are: how does one "cop" (buy), where is it done, what is the difference between copping in a bar, in an apartment, or on the street. Another question is, can one cop without a dealer, and if so what are the problems encountered.

While the after hours club is a place for cocaine distribution because of the association with dealers, an informal network exists where new dealers and buyers exchange contact. But outside the club, the major areas for cocaine contact are varied. In the city,

copping cocaine can be done on street corners, public parks, clubs and apartments. Snorters will usually want to sample the cocaine before buying whether the purchase is small (\$10 to \$20) or large (\$100 or more). In turn, the dealer will offer a few sniffs so that the purchaser can determine if the product meets his approval. The nature of cocaine copping is somewhat different from heroin copping, but similar to marijuana copping. Most marijuana smokers insist on testing the marijuana before buying it. Marijuana smokers and cocaine snorters have a similar problem in that on many occasions the cocaine tasted and/or the marijuana smoked in the sample is not the same as what is being purchased. And once the buyer is "high" he cannot accurately assess the quality of his particular purchase. One street buyer of cocaine offered this comment on copping:

Out here (on the street), a cat ain't never sure what he's getting. I hear there is a lot of synthetic coke going around. And most of us don't know real coke from unreal. We know when coke is good because we have at least, one time or another, tried the real stuff. But when bad coke is out we pay a few dollars for it and then when it's gone, who we gonna complain to? I had some coke the other night and it was so-so. But once I bought it, I wasn't about to look for the dude and say gimme my money back because he let me try it and I said I liked it.

Part of the problem associated with cocaine copping is the place where this is done. Copping in a bar, an apartment, or on the street yield different problems and outcomes.

Copping in a Bar

Some bars in the city are known as "coke bars" because the clientele there are mostly coke dealers, buyers, and, as one barmaid put it, "coke heads." The bars are places where cocaine can be bought by those who know a dealer. But it is still virtually impossible to buy cocaine at these bars without knowing someone who sells the drug. The interaction between the dealer and the buyer is predicated on a mutual desire: one is to sell the drug and the other is to buy it. The buyer enters the bar, sits and looks for the connection. After the contact is made, the dealer will say, "What's happening?" or "What you need?" Eye contact is sometimes established to discern whether the person (the dealer) has seen the buyer or not and to size him up. It is not uncommon for a new buyer to approach a dealer through someone else at the bar, by inquiring about where and from whom cocaine can be purchased. Once the contact is made, the dealer will inform the buyer to go to the lavatory and wait for him. In a few minutes, he will enter and ask what he is looking for and how much he wants. If the amount requested is \$10 to \$100, the dealer will usually have the amount on his person or hidden in a section of the bar. Often times a dealer will allow a "stash man" to carry his drugs. The dealer often has small amounts already packaged and will produce the amount desired after the money has been given

over to him.

Copping in a bar has its risks because the buyer can, if seen with a dealer, be implicated in a criminal charge. The purchasing of cocaine has variations, of course, and the buyer need not go to the lavatory but can remain seated at the bar to buy. The lavatory is essentially a place to be more discreet. If he chooses to stay at the bar, the buyer is not certain of what he is buying and is more susceptible to be given synthetic cocaine or a product that is heavily adulterated.

#### Copping on the Street

Buying cocaine on the street involves much of the same procedures and problems associated with the bar. The immediate disadvantage is that the buyer does not taste the product at all and is usually given a poor quality, heavily adulterated product. It is also much more dangerous and hazardous, since the possibility of detection is greatest. Specific places in New York City where cocaine street dealers are often heard hawking their drugs are:

- (1) the Times Square area between 7th and 8th Avenues and Bryant Park
- (2) Rockefeller Center mall
- (3) major rock concerts
- (4) sections of East Harlem
- (5) sections of Central Harlem (Eighth Avenue between 116th and 118th Streets is often referred to as the drug marketplace)
- (7) Washington Square Park

Copping in an Apartment

Buying cocaine in an apartment is the surest way of buying a good product because you can test the quality, bargain the price and interact with the dealer on a basis impossible on the street or in a bar. A snorter expressed this opinion about buying in an apartment:

I wouldn't cop from no bar and the street is out of the question. I would be too afraid of being ripped off. If I can't go to his place to get it, I really don't think I'm that interested. But come to think of it, I used to go to the Brass Bar when the Sandman was there. But that was different; he knew me and practically owned the place. No mother would dare fuck with me. Anyway, I've graduated from all that bar shit--I mean at this point, I cop enough to be able to go to his (the dealer's) house any time.

Acquiring cocaine from an apartment serves the buyer's purposes for many reasons. Firstly, there is the protection from the street and the police. One can test the product without undue interference and anxiety. Secondly, the purchaser is able to see what the product looks like. Finally, he is able to bargain with the dealer on the price.

TABLE 1

RETAIL MARKET PRICES AND AMOUNTS FOR  
COCAINE, MARIJUANA AND HEROIN

(1976 - 1977)

| QUANTITY        | PRICES:                    |             |          |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------|----------|
|                 | cocaine                    | marijuana   | heroin   |
| 1 kilogram*     | \$60,000-100,000<br>and up | \$800-1,000 | \$18,000 |
| ½ kilogram      | \$20,000-50,000            | \$300-400   | \$9,000  |
| ¼ kilogram      | \$14,000-\$18,000          |             |          |
| 125 grams       | \$4,000-6,000              |             |          |
| 1 ounce/28 gms. | \$1,000-2,000              | \$50-100    | \$300    |
| ½ ounce         | \$600-750                  | \$25-50     | \$150    |
| ¼ ounce         | up to \$300                |             | \$70     |
| 1 gram(½ tsp.)  | up to \$100                |             |          |
| ½ gram**        | up to \$50                 |             |          |

\* The prices beginning with the ounce to the kilogram is based on whether or not the drug has been diluted, and who the seller of the drug is. An undiluted product costs more than a diluted one. A buyer purchasing directly from a high level dealer may be able to purchase a good quality product without paying the highest prices. With marijuana, the prices fluctuate according to the grade, and of course, quality of the plant. Marijuana from certain regions are higher priced than from others.

\*\* One can buy smaller amounts of any of these drugs.

Figure 1Q Snorter/habitue.



## CHAPTER VI

## SOCIALIZATION OF COCAINE USERS

There is a high frequency of cocaine use in the after hours clubs. This use varies from person to person, but the socialization process for beginning cocaine users follows a consistent pattern. Consequently, in terms of the initial reactions, or the effect the cocaine first has on the user, the process of cocaine socialization in club culture highlights interesting differences between sniffers and non-sniffers.

Generally, instruction to the experimental sniffer about the method of sniffing cocaine is done by the provisional or compulsive sniffer. The initiate is told during this process what to expect from the cocaine. This initial showing of how to take a "blow" is accompanied by other sniffers as they sit around saying to the initiate, "hold one side of your nose and sniff hard into the other one." This is done so the sniffer can "feel the blow." The initial reactions the beginner sniffer receives from his first cocaine experience determines in large part whether or not he will become a regular user of cocaine. The other reasons, like whether he can afford the cocaine or

whether he can find a "connection" to buy it become peripheral because if the initiate does not get a positive reaction (i.e., "get high"), he may never attempt to use cocaine again anyway. This is similar to the marijuana user's first attempt at smoking.<sup>59</sup> The onset of regular use is predicated on desire, money and establishing a positive experience. Socialization in the club reinforces the tendency to believe that the high will be a positive one.

The after hours club is the home of a variety of cocaine users. Habitues who come in only sporadically may be typed beginner or experimental sniffers. The setting is ideal for cocaine users. The place has low lights, dark ceilings, no windows, soft music, and a host of other sniffers who constantly urge on newcomers to the scene.

#### The Beginner User of Cocaine

The beginner user's use of cocaine is short-term in a temporal order that is based on weeknights, weekends, every day and/or only occasional visits. Regular users spend at least four hours sniffing, drinking, smoking and dancing at the club on any particular night. The beginner sniffer is usually motivated by street gossip and curiosity.

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<sup>59</sup> Howard S. Becker, Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance (New York: The Free Press, 1963) pp. 41 - 53.

and in cases where they are outside or alien to the culture, can be seen as "squares."

Diana has sniffed cocaine for about fourteen years. She lives in Brooklyn. She said it was only in the last six years or so that she really knew what cocaine really was like and how to appreciate it and recognize its subtle effect.

When I started sniffing coke--a long time ago, my old man was into gambling, you know, buying loaded dice and cutting games. He used to bring in a little coke every now and then after he'd won a little money during those days. I would keep a ten (of coke) for a few days, that's how good it was. But now a ten I don't even bother with, it's so little and so cut up. It's just a waste of money. But also I didn't know what coke was like, either. I would sniff a little and taste a little, but basically leave it alone. I guess a few years in between there, I didn't have any at all, but I know around 1970, I met Harry, and he took me to this spot (after hours club) on 23rd Street. Well, in that place, we sniffed and got turned on to so much coke I was flying. I mean I had never felt that way before on coke. I don't know whether it was the place, the club, the people I was with, the quality or the quantity of coke that did it, but I really enjoyed myself. It was only afterwards that coke has meant so much to me. For some reason, I had always expected a big bang or something from it, but that's not what it's about.

Diana, like many cocaine users, began her cocaine experience with close friends or intimates, but developed and matured as a user in an after hours club setting. Most cocaine users did not begin their experience in after hours clubs, nor did they all begin them in a positive way. It is important to stress that few experiential sniffers had initial negative responses to cocaine but after continued use, they began to assign negative attitudes toward

the stimulant. Often this is not related to the person actually taking cocaine, but to other factors in which it is used. Bob, a Brooklyn mechanic, recalled his response to cocaine and the club culture.

John (the owner) had been asking me for a long time to come to one of his places. And I never had the time to get up at four in the morning to go to no bar. But he finally convinced me when he brought these two fine chicks in with him to the shop one late afternoon. They were really fine, and one of 'em kept giving me play. He said they would be at his club in Harlem and that I should come. Well, that night, I went. I saw them same chicks there and they had a whole lotta coke with them. They kept giving me blow after blow after blow until I started to get nauseous. I went to the bathroom and threw up all over the place. Every time I took a drink, I had to go to the toilet. I felt like I had a hole in my chin. I didn't wanna admit I couldn't take it so finally I just pretended I was sniffing but actually I wasn't. An hour or so later I was okay. I took that chick home with me and my dick would not go down. We fucked for hours it seemed. But now I heard if you take too much of that shit, your jones (penis) won't even rise up with you in the morning.

#### The Provisional Sniffer

The provisional sniffer is another type of snorter in the after hours cocaine club. The user of cocaine whose presence is more consistent than the beginner sniffer is considered a provisional sniffer. The provisional sniffer generates a social party-time mood by his use of cocaine. He usually carries his own cocaine and frequents the club more than just on weekends. He may be further typed as a working street person who maintains a hustle. The provisional sniffer may be male, female, black, white or Latin.

### The Heavy User

The user of cocaine whose presence on the scene is extremely regular (i.e., everyday and night) and whose work and play are related to his use of cocaine may be typed as a heavy sniffer. The heavy regular sniffer is one whose use of cocaine may exceed several grams a day. They may be dealers who must constantly sell and promote the product, in which case he carries cocaine for "business purposes." This cocaine is also referred to as "Calling card coke." There may be others who are heavy regular users as a result of their contact with the dealers. They may be the wives, husbands, girl/boyfriends or relatives of the dealer. Employees of the after hours clubs can also be considered regular users because their use of cocaine is continuous over a given work day/night, and because of the many "turn-ons" they receive in a given night. Cocaine use in this way becomes an occupational hazard or pleasure, depending on how one views it.

### Cocaine Club Way of Life

Cocaine, as one snorter/habitue put it, "loosens the tongue." Because of its property as a stimulant, cocaine also lowers inhibitions and the cocaine habitue is bound to a setting where interaction is not only possible but expected. One expects to be sociable and to meet

others who are sociable in the cocaine club. Cocaine facilitates this sociability. Strangers encounter other strangers in a setting where the obligation to engage in conversation, illicit cocaine use and other encounters is commonplace. Cocaine as a central nervous system stimulant puts the sniffer into a mood of heightened excitability. Generally, the person entering the cocaine club has indulged in the drug before he arrives and the interaction comes with a set of expectations about the scene. The person entering can be expected and must be ready to engage in conversation, be "gamed on," listen to arguments, see fist fights on occasion, watch women take off their clothing, be asked to participate in illegal gambling, drink illegal alcohol, smoke marijuana and sniff illegal cocaine, whether or not they wish to indulge in any of these things/events. If a young woman comes in the club alone, she can expect to have men approach her continuously, offering cocaine, making sexual advances and listening to their "rap." When the patron/habitue arrives, s/he will either talk, sit quietly alone (when possible or desirable), drink, sniff, or dance. A woman sitting and snapping her fingers to the music is usually a signal to men to ask her to dance. Habitues who enter the club are immediately given the "once over" look by the bar sniffers and the table sniffers, who will gaze up at the incoming party. A person sitting alone will usually be approached by the barmaid

and asked if they "want something." Once the desire is met, be it cocaine, marijuana, or a drink, she may return to chat for a few minutes. Others will approach the table to talk about the weather outside, the latest political event, one's clothing, the crowd in the club, or any number of topics to begin social interaction.

A young man and woman were sitting alone in the corner near the door at the Blue Cat one night. The music of Monte Rock and the Discolettes was heard blaring under the smoke-filled atmosphere of the club. As the couple sniffed cocaine, one other woman standing by came over and said to the man, "Listen, baby, can I have a little bit (of coke)? I been waiting for somebody to come in with some all night." The woman, obviously a little high already, was not met with hostility or cold stares but was given cocaine by the patron. A few minutes later, the doorman came over to them and said, "Don't you give her no more of your coke, man, she's a freak." The woman came over again and asked the man what he like to drink. When he replied, "Scotch," she ordered a drink for him and his companion. After he received the drinks, he gave her another "blow" from his cocaine and she left, winking to him and saying goodbye.

The doorman's warning to the habitue that the woman was a "freak" was an indication that she was a person who took advantage of cocaine offers, or more specifically

that she loved cocaine excessively. When few snorter/habitues have cocaine to share, as in this case, the snorter/habitue who enters who has cocaine is often approached to share, to sell and in general, to be more generous. I might note the man kept his cokespoon in his hand and gave her the cocaine instead of allowing her to do it herself. In this way, he controlled how much she took.

A habitue who does not desire any contact with others may refuse to say anything, lay his head on the table or bar, stare motionless for a time, or give no verbal or non-verbal cues to others to indicate interaction possibilities. S/he may also go to the lavatory to sniff. There are instances when snorters do not wish to share their cocaine with others. Some snorters do not like to sniff openly without offering cocaine to others since such behavior is considered rude and contrary to the norms of cocaine culture. Cocaine users are under no enforced obligation by management to share cocaine. They are only following rules established by the cocaine sniffing group. The passing of cocaine is not relegated to any special party mood, but takes place as everyday courses of action. However, as snorters mingle and a certain party mood is created, snorters will pass their cocaine around more freely. The lavatory, moreover, is a private area where snorting can take place without offering or sharing with others. Snorting cocaine in a somewhat secluded area

like the lavatory, even within the privacy of an after hours club, is an interesting aspect of cocaine culture, especially since the club is a place where cocaine is sniffed openly anyway. But if the snorter has very little cocaine, or cocaine of exceptional quality, he may not wish to be in a situation where others may ask. In addition, he does not suffer any loss of status by sniffing openly and not offering if he snorts away from the view of others.

It is not any easier for men sitting alone sniffing cocaine to avoid being approached by women than it is for women sitting alone to avoid being approached by men. Here is an example of the latter.

Long view of the bar.

Close up on the cocaine in silver aluminum foil on the bar counter.

Tall Sam: look/drink/look/sniff

Woman: look/blink/look/drink

Tall Sam: gets up, moves over two seats and begins sniff/silence/rap...  
"Listen, before I ask you your name, I wanna give you some of this baad cocaine."

Woman: blushes/reaches out for the cocaine/giggles/smiles slightly then says...  
"Okay..."  
sniff/silence/sniff/silence  
passes it back

Tall Sam: takes it back/sniff/silence/rap...  
"How in the world did your ol' man let a fine, foxy lady like you out of his sight?"  
passes the cocaine back to her, stares at her while she sniffs.

Woman: sniff/silence/sniff/sniff  
 smile....  
 "He didn't let me. I came here on my  
 own."  
 passes cocaine back to Tall Sam

Tall Sam: takes it back/sniff/silence  
 motions for the barmaid to bring two more  
 drinks.  
 smiles.

Although this may not be a typical approach, the sequence is characteristic of the cocaine encounter. The man approaches the encounter with his cocaine to offer. Then as the woman sniffs, he watches how she does it to see if any teacher role is called for. In other situations where no teaching is necessary, he may wait the appropriate seconds, then looking into her eyes, begin a standard "rap," utilizing the latest cues, taking words from a song, comment on a latest hit record, the atmosphere, the quality of the cocaine. His beginning approach is an interrogative sentence, one in which a question is asked in order to elicit a response. This makes the encounter reciprocal and "opens" the person to interact.

#### The Game

The minimal arena of game action is the social situation which Goffman has designated variously as a "focused gathering," an "encounter," or an "engagement." The characteristics of a focused gathering are that two or more persons have come into one another's visual and audial presence, and have granted one another mutual rights of cognitive and communicative recognition.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Stanford Lyman and Marvin Scott, The Sociology of the Absurd (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1970) p. 30.

In the cocaine sub-culture, a strong "game" is contingent on several factors. First, a game involves props such as attire, money and an articulate manner of talking, as well as personal style. The game is a front the snorter/habitue constructs in order to "get over" or win the approval of certain women. If it is a woman "running her game" to win approval from a man, the same props apply, although the approach may be a little different. The strong game is in essence a strong impression with all the attendant variables mentioned above intact.

To talk game is to articulate, flawlessly and without slips, stuttering or pauses in intonation or averted eyes from the person to whom the game is being elucidated. The opposite of the smooth, strong game is the "lame who does not have his game (shit) together."

In the game, the implications are usually sexual, with the result hopefully ending in a sexual liaison outside the club. In general, the idea is to have someone to talk with, to share concaine with, for the night. When a woman arrives in a scene where few women are available, and the men are talking among themselves, the man who is able to "scoop the chick" or "pull the ho" that is, get the woman's attention and rap to her over the other men, assumes a high status among the men for that evening.

On occasion, the game can go awry, as the following account attests:

The day following the incident with Feco (a friend of Alfredo the dealer) and the transvestite, the men at the bar were all discussing and laughing about what had happened to Feco and the man/woman the night before. Apparently, during one of Feco's cocaine binges, he had seen this young woman in the club and had rapped to her and "gotten over." The following day, he found out to his chagrin that the woman he thought was so fine was actually a transvestite. The men chided him about it. Since he was caught dead to right his only comment was, "Fuck you, the bitch was fine, man, I don't care what she was."

The dimly lit club does create problems for the habitue. Small change is often found along with dollar bills on the floor because patrons cannot see clearly in the low lighting. The dimly lit rooms give the illusion of constant night-time. Feco's mistaken identity problem with the transvestite was somewhat attributable to this lighting factor and contributed somewhat to the amount of cocaine, alcohol and marijuana he had ingested.

#### Club Talk

The talk in the clubs are often laced with laughter, good humor, political and social conversation. Tall Sam, a bearded but bald man about forty was sitting at the bar conversing with the barmaid and two other patrons, when this interaction took place:

Sam has just passed the cocaine to the barmaid who takes a few quick sniffs. She hands it back to Sam. He takes a sniff, then says, "I just left Patrick and he said he saw a pussy yesterday as wide as one of them tall ships." Everyone laughs. He continues, "That dude reminded me of a joke a cat told me in the joint (jail) one year." The barmaid chuckles and the other two men sniff the cocaine and laugh along. "What did he say, Sam?" one asked, and the other said, "Go ahead, man, run it down." "Well, he was with this

chick and they had a few drinks and then they decided to get in bed. The bitch takes off her clothes and the cat takes off his. He decided like most men do to first warm her up, you know, fingering the lower part of her vagina and the clitoris. You know. So he puts one finger in, and then two, and then three, and goddam, before he knows it, he got his whole fist and wrist in there. So the cat don't think nothing is wrong too tough yet cause he's seen some big pussys before anyway, you know. So he decides to crawl up in there. Well, he gets in there, he gets lost, and runs into another dude in there walking around as if he had lost something. So the first cat says to the second, "Hey, man what you lookin' for?" and the cat says, "I'm just trying to find my keys so I can drive outta this motherfucker". Everybody cracks up with laughter--a few people down the aisle are rolling. Tall Sam rubs his bald head, tilts it slightly back and takes another sniff of the cocaine.

The use of profanity and language of a sexual nature are commonplace within the cocaine club setting. Men and women are heard cursing and telling profane jokes. Management and personnel are not the enforcers of rules relating to language mainly because they are often heard using the rather spicey language themselves. Occasionally, a snorter/habitue will say to another snorter, "Be cool, there's a lady present," and a woman will tell her man/friend to lower his voice and not curse so loud. But these are the few instances where control on language is seen. In a bar club where cocaine use and sexual references are commonplace, surprisingly little overt sexual contact is exhibited among cocaine sniffers.

#### Physical Contact among habitue

The nude dancer may on occasion allow her body to be touched by a patron, but there is a strict rule against this type of behavior unless the dancer or the person

exhibiting his/her body desires it. The most common sexual contact between cocaine users is kissing, holding hands and embracing. Men are often seen winking, holding onto women if they pass them, offering cocaine. It would appear that cocaine sniffers, because of the effects of cocaine as a stimulant, would be predisposed to more overt sexual behavior than is observed.

The club held about twenty people who were sniffing cocaine at the bar. Many were couples. Three or four were laughing with the barmaid on the far-Southern end of the bar. In the middle of the bar was a couple kissing in a rather involved manner and all the conversation, rattling of money, slapping of fives, clinking of glasses, loud talking and cursing all around didn't seem to affect them.

Dancing provides another kind of sexual contact in the cocaine club between men and women. A few years ago, a dance called the "grind" was in vogue and involved a very serious attempt at simulated sexual intercourse while standing with one's clothes on. The slow dances today are not quite as arousing to on-lookers, but is part of a common feature where intimacy between the sexes is seen. Very few comments are heard as people dance closely, and while a dance such as the "bump" involves the touching of genitalia by both partners, it is a "fast" dance, where only momentary sexual contact is exhibited.

#### Leaving Cocaine

As dance partners leave to dance, their cocaine is sometimes left on the table. Seldom is cocaine left unattended, but if it is, habitues respect the right of the

snorter enough to leave it until it is claimed. Snorter/habitués will also take their cocaine with them, however, if they go to the bathroom or if they move from one area of the club to another for any length of time. It is interesting that while a snorter may leave his cocaine if he moves briefly from one place to another, he rarely leaves his coat behind. It is not uncommon to see snorter/habitués standing with their coats on at the bar for hours. This is characteristic of both men and women. It is not known what is the maximum amount of time a snorter can leave cocaine unclaimed or unguarded before it becomes the property of the barmaid. Dena, a barmaid at the Blue Cat one night, said in a loud voice so all could hear:

Who's sitting here? (pointing to a spot where someone had left some cocaine). Is this anybody's? If this ain't nobody's, I'm gonna take it (at which point a few patrons laughed).

Leaving cocaine is analogous to regular bar patrons leaving change or bills on the counter. The bartender waits the appropriate time before considering the money his. The barmaid will make an attempt to find the owner of the cocaine as the example above illustrates. But she may not look very hard. To leave cocaine, money, drinks at the table is both an act of trust and an indication that the space is occupied, although the party may be somewhere else in the club.

The barmaid may take cocaine from the table if it is unoccupied and unclaimed for any length of time.

The snorter/habitue is not likely to leave it indefinitely. One of the curious features about the taking of the other's cocaine is the unconcern about whether it is sanitary or not. By this, I mean few people will eat or drink after a stranger. If a person were to leave a drink at the bar the barmaid would throw it away. Yet strangers will sniff from the cocaine package of other stranger without a complaint, although they may refuse cocaine if they feel the offer is from someone they don't particularly care to interact with. But this refusal is not based on the cocaine as a safe and healthy product but on other personal characteristics. Dave, a patron at a midtown club, expressed his concern this way: "I don't put nothing in any nose that my tongue don't try first. I have to watch out because they be putting ajax, all kinds of shit in the coke."

#### Non-sniffers

Although the after hours club is largely the place for sniffers of cocaine, many individuals in fact do not sniff. There are many reasons for this. Some are based on conjecture. The more obvious reason is that they either have no cocaine to sniff and/or are not offered any by others. But there are situations where the latter is not true and the former cannot be ascertained. The following example comes from the Pussy Cat Club in East Harlem's El Barrio:

I was sitting in the club with two friends. Several people were passing cocaine around in a semi-circle. One of the men who was talking with the others continued to refuse the cocaine. Each consecutive time around, he refused. After about three times of refusing and about a half-hour of time had elapsed, he finally offered an explanation: "No, man" he said, "I'm trying to cool my head out," at which point, the others, accepting his explanation, continued to sniff.

"To cool the head out" is another way of saying the sniffer has had enough cocaine. When a person refuses cocaine in a group setting, several reasons are at play:

- (1) The sniffer may refuse because he is experiencing nasal problems.
- (2) He has taken cocaine to the point where abuse may be detrimental to his health. Occasionally, sniffers who have been sniffing cocaine for several days will refuse cocaine for several days following in order to let their heads "clean out."
- (3) The cocaine sniffer may simply be tired of cocaine and refuse it on general principle.

Sniffers will respect the non-sniffers, but since refusal is often viewed as an affront in the culture, non-sniffers will offer explanations such as:

"I'm all coked up."

"Hey, I'll take you up on that later. I'm solid."

"No thanks, I'm cooling out."

John, a weekend user of cocaine discussed the occasions on which he refused cocaine.

Most of the time, it's because I have had a lot of coke the day or the night before, or sometimes it's because my nose had been bleeding, in which case I know it's time to stop. And sometimes, I get this sneezing, runny nose after I have over-done it. The funny thing is I know when I am about to take too much or over-step my bounds. But I usually take "just one more sniff" and then my nose gets fucked up.

## The Cocaine Exchange

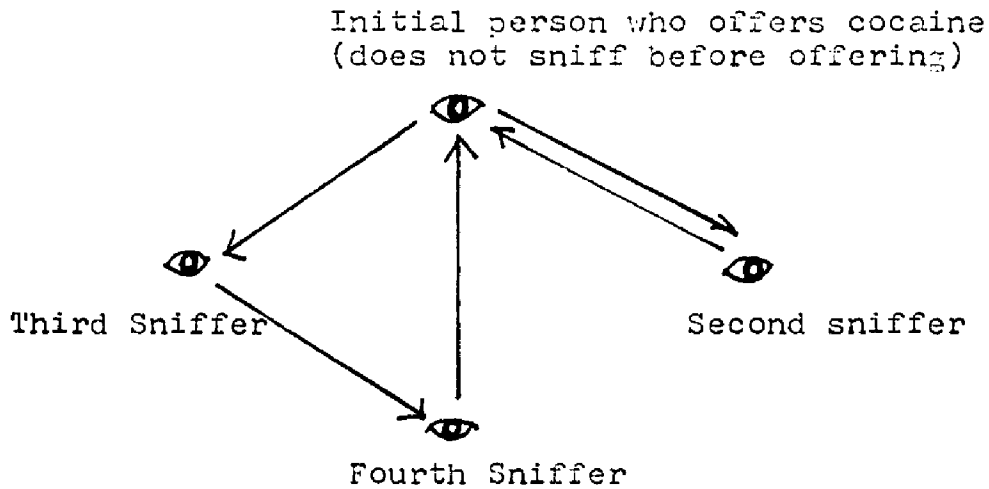


Fig. 11 . Possible diagram of exchange of cocaine among four patrons.

The exchange of cocaine between snorter/habitues is largely predicated on a "mood," feeling or "vibes." When habitues are in a "party" mood, they are more likely to pass cocaine to others around them. On the average, the snorter/habitue sniffs about every ten minutes, taking in about 2.5 milligrams each sniff. Regular snorters spend about four hours a night at the clubs. During this time, they may take about a hundred sniffs, consuming about one to two grams in a night. As the diagram above shows, the snorter passes the cocaine to the person nearest them. Sometimes, a person is given cocaine after he has offered the owner of cocaine something.

Dena (the barmaid) was on her off-night and was standing with two of her friends when a lone male came in and stood up next to them. After a brief

encounter with one of the women, Dena passed him a joint of marijuana. When he was snorting cocaine later on that night, he remembered her and went over to her to offer cocaine and conversation in return for the joint.

When a snorter passes cocaine, there is a chain communication reaction between them. Even though they may be strangers, there is talk between those who pass cocaine. Although talk is suspended momentarily because the person sniffing cannot talk at the same time, after the sniff, the habitue will often comment on the quality of the cocaine and how it has affected him. Those who offer cocaine like to be complimented in regard to the quality of their cocaine. It is indeed customary to make a comment about the cocaine to the giver. This can be either in the form of approbation or simply a "thank you" comment. The snorter/habitue makes comments like "This is dynamite," or "This is good shit, man." If the cocaine is very well-liked by the sniffer, he may even ask to buy some. Offering to buy cocaine is the ultimate compliment to the owner of the cocaine package. This comment will usually get the person who commented another sniff. This interaction was observed at the El Greco Club:

Pedro and Sammy were sitting along the edge of the wall near the juke box. A Monk album was playing in the background. The room was decorated with paper strips and hanging balloons. The carpet was well-worn from all the traffic. A crowd of sixty-five people laughed, chattered and talked, seemingly in unison. Men and women in jeweled attire, fancy hats (skimmers), high boots, silk scarves and shirts accentuated the gay atmosphere of the club. Pedro opened a silver aluminum foil and handed it

to Sammy who was talking to a woman on his right. Sammy, after a sniff, said in an exaggerated fashion, "This blow is dyno!" P, man, hey man, I like that." Pedro took the cocaine and sniffed a few quick ones, then sipped his drink. Sammy offered, "Hey, why don't you give me a \$50 of that?" "Ho, man, take another hit, don't worry about it." Sammy reached over and took another few "blows" or "hits" from the cocaine. Pedro smiled and ordered another round of drinks.

Habitues who have "personal" cocaine do not often sell it. Although they are willing to impart a few "blows" to the person next to them, they do not, as a rule, relinquish the cocaine for money. Cocaine is more valuable here for reasons already outlined, for without it their status in the club is lost. They will, more often than not, give the person who wishes to buy a few extra sniffs to satisfy them. Dealers, on the other hand, will sell cocaine to others in the club, but this depends a great deal on whether they have extra cocaine or not. To a large extent, the dealers, like the others, are at the club to relax, and very little overt selling is observed.

#### Bad Vibes and Cocaine

Cocaine culture in the after hours clubs permits a range of activity and behaviors to transpire that are illegal. Because of its illegal status, habitues are more or less required to maintain a low profile. The habitue may not feel any regret about personal arguments, fights or exaggerated acts involving other habitues, but are bound by rules of decorum set up by the management. On a

personal level, the snorter/habitue has his personal dignity and status among friends to be concerned about. These elements act as prohibitors against certain adverse behavior. Despite these rules, various kinds of negative behavior emerge from the scene. Some behavior is considered extreme, such as fights between patrons, and others are seen as mild and frivolous, such as sitting on the dancer's platform. Unlike the regular bar, where violence and other forms of boisterous behavior is normal, the cocaine snorter/habitue is expected to exude "coolness."

Coolness is exhibited (and defined) as poise under pressure. By pressure we mean simply situations of considerable emotion or risk, or both. Coolness, then, refers to the capacity to execute physical acts, including conversation, in a concerted, smooth self-controlled fashion in risky situations, or to maintain affective detachment during the course of encounters involving considerable emotion.<sup>61</sup>

One thing that can definitely cause a major altercation is the spilling of the other's cocaine. Seldom is this done intentionally, but occasionally, the snorter/habitue is confronted with this situation.

The upper and lower sections of the Blue Cat were so crowded one of the patrons said, "It's wall to wall people in here, man." At least one hundred people were packed in to celebrate a new barmaid's birthday. Around the side tables near the men's room, several men and women were standing, resting on the juke box. Two women were seated tightly against the cigarette machine, one holding cocaine and about to pass it to the other, when one of the men raised his arm off the cigarette machine, hit the woman's

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<sup>61</sup> Lyman and Scott, Sociology of the Absurd, p. 145.

arm, and the cocaine powder spilled onto the carpet. She looked up in disbelief and said, "Mother-fucker, what is the matter with you! Do you know what you just wasted? A \$100 of the best high in town!!" The man said something inaudibly, but the other woman started to say how it was an accident. The woman who lost the cocaine continued to talk about it and didn't stop until the man offered to pay her for the loss.

This spilling of cocaine is not, however, a common occurrence. Given the size of the cocaine package, usually not more than three or four inches long, it would appear spilling would occur more often than it does.

Any snorter/habitue who takes to starting trouble actually jeopardizes himself and every person present since the clubs are illegal. The most common forms of trouble are arguments, pushing and shoving, abusing furniture (making cigarette burns on the carpet and bar counter), and fights over women and men.

Aside from cocaine snorting, other behavior is permissible in the clubs that normally would invoke the wrath or shock of members of the larger society. On one occasion:

The patrons were sitting around the dance floor intently watching a young woman possessed with too much cocaine. She was stripping on the stage. One of the men at the club was screaming at the top of his lungs, "Where is the dancer? Where is the dancer?" to which most of the other patrons said, "Shut up." When she came off the stage, several men went up to her to offer cocaine.

## Loud-talking Conversation among Men

Claudia Mitchell-Kernan said of "loud talking":

It is applied to a speaker's utterance which by virtue of its volume permits hearers other than the addressee, and is objectionable because of this. Loud-talking requires an audience and can only occur in a situation where there are potential hearers other than the interlocutors.<sup>62</sup>

In the cocaine club, loud-talking is one of the common-sense features which is taken for granted as acceptable behavior by the snorter/habitue. Cocaine users converse incessantly and loud-talking becomes standard behavior. The notion of loud-talking as an approved form of behavior is contingent on whether or not the speaker is angry or engaging in a verbal duel that might be the prelude to a more physical encounter. In this case, the audience may exhibit some concern by remaining quiet until the speaker has been quieted down. Sometimes, cocaine is offered to appease the antagonists. Unlike other culture, where talking simultaneously is part of the norm, club culture allows for pauses between speakers and hearers.<sup>63</sup> The loudtalker,

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<sup>62</sup> Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, "Signifying, Loud-talking and Marking," Rappin' and Stylin' Out, ed. Thomas Kochman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972) p. 315.

<sup>63</sup> In the Antiguan interior, the people speak in groups simultaneously (see Alan Beals). Goffman et al., were mostly concerned about white conversation in their work on syntactical rules. However, blacks do exhibit some of the same patterns of allowing speakers to speak, hearers to listen and pauses. But the tonal quality of black language permits a wider tone and louder volume than Goffman et al. noted, and this is the point being made here.

however, takes advantage of this pause and continues without interruption until his point is made. One night, a tall, dark man dressed in white pants, white jacket, white hat and white shoes kept repeating to a young woman he was escorting, "All my bitches go straight to the window to the bank, huh." Whatever triggered this statement was unknown, but the intentions were obviously to embarrass the woman, and he succeeded in doing this. His tone was over and above everyone else's. Loud-talking exists among men in the club regularly. Cocaine facilitates this notion of loud-talking because of its effects:

4:50 a.m. at the Blue Cat Cafe. Henry, Tall Sam and Jody, three regulars at the club, were seated around the lower part of the bar area. The bar was quiet and the juke box was being repaired. Jody and Sam were talking about how a police officer had killed a black kid in Queens and they discussed the possibility of his getting convicted. When John (called "Snake") came in, the conversation switched to sports. "Snake" opened up some cocaine and within a few minutes, they were all arguing rather vociferously about whether Muhammad Ali was going to win his next fight.

In the bar, it is customary to hear patrons engage in a number of verbal exchanges that can be referred to simply as "talkin' shit," or "bull shittin'." Talkin' shit involves a range of communicating from feelings of affection to hostility and contempt. Men are often seen talkin' shit before any interesting women arrive, for example. To talk shit is to exaggerate for the sake of the group interaction, to further the conversation along. The talker need not be held accountable for such talk because

it is framed within a non-serious time. This type of talk between habitues is usually full of wishful thinking. "Man, I'm gonna get me a..." or "you know what I coulda did..." are common beginnings for such talk.

An individual may himself recognize that he is or has been talkin' shit with statements like:

Yo, you know I was just talkin' shit, you didn't have to take that for real. Anyway, Sammy knew I was bullshittin' from jump street.

But more often, the other members of the scene will quickly acknowledge the person was just talkin' shit. In other words, he was not taken seriously by anyone.

It is said by snorter/habitues that "cokeheads" talk much more shit when they are high on cocaine. Snorters are aware that too much cocaine can result in a specific type of talk referred to as "coke talk." The listener to the talk of a snorter who has ingested too much cocaine need not take the substance of the excessive snorter talk as serious. In other words, the listener need not hold the person to their word. The coke talk aids in concealing identities. The lack of personal biographies aides in the social intercourse. Its vagueness is a virtue, since the action is between, to a large extent, strangers whose commitment beyond the night is never assured.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE COCAINE DEALER:

FRENCHY CHARLESTON  
AND ALFREDO ROJAS

The cocaine dealer's main line of work, of course, is to sell cocaine. He may, on occasion, sell marijuana, heroin, typewriters, stereos, tape recorders and other gadgets. But his main hustle is dispensing cocaine for top dollar. His street skills are associated with cocaine dealing. The dealer must have a certain knowledge of drugs. He must be able to determine, without the assistance of chemicals and equipment, the quality of the drug. He must be able to tell whether it is synthetic, how pure it is, and to assess how much a certain amount of quality cocaine, for instance, is worth monetarily. He must identify cocaine adulterants and have a working knowledge of the metric system (since sales are based on metric weights much of the time). He must use critical judgement in acquiring the drug, in combination with acute "street-wise" bargaining skill. The major skills involve measuring, packaging and cutting, which must be learned

by actually carrying out these functions. Dealers are taught--by someone who has "street drug knowledge" already. The actual selling of the cocaine again involves inter-personal skills; these require the dealer to be sharp and cunning. He must be able to "lay low" when necessary and be able to recognize "narcs" (undercover police), as well as newcomers. A dealer with a regular clientele does not necessarily have to be an extrovert with a "sharp rap." The "street" or bar dealer, however, must be articulate and a good salesperson. They both have to be able to sell in a competitive market, that is by making their product seem better than it actually is. Once the sale has been made, moreover, the dealer must have a certain business sense because he ideally should know how to use the money (investments). Finally, the dealer must have street prowess, that is, be able to use a gun or other forms of defense or coercion when necessary.

Street hustling is a very complicated network of interacting factors. Whether the hustle is "three-card monte"(a street card con game) or cocaine dealing, it involves some degree of risk and a variety of socio-ecological conditions. Cocaine hustling is no different in that it involves the ability to con, a degree of risk, and an awareness of socio-ecological factors (such as selling cocaine in closed areas, i.e., the bar or an apartment as opposed to open areas like the street corner). The dealer in this section is Frenchy Charleston. In the following

account, some of the elements of hustling mentioned above are born out.

### Frenchy--Hustling/Dealing

Frenchy was born in rural Kentucky, and joined a minstrel show as a dancer after leaving the army. He traveled from Maine to Mississippi with the show, making the trip three or four times before getting into a fight with a white man in a North Carolina gambling game in 1941. He moved up North to live with an aunt afterwards and soon became involved with "policy" operations. He said, "I could never stand that day job thang because I couldn't take orders from nobody, white or black. The numbers thang was very exciting to me. I could make \$80 or \$90 without even trying, and pretty soon, I was making a hundred, two hundred. And, for a kid, that was like being rich." Frenchy got involved with drugs through the numbers racket. Many of his numbers customers would ask him for "reefer" and he started selling reefer as a result. This was during the 1940's and 1950's.

### A Day/Night in the Life of Frenchy Charleston

Frenchy, now fifty-one years old, lives in a run-down section of central Harlem. Garbage cans polka-dot the street, overflowing with refuse. On the corner, a small cluster of men stand around a huge can with fire

gushing up and smoke disappearing in the sky. Every few minutes, a new face will walk past and ask one of the men in the group, "What's the number?" or "What's leading?"

Frenchy's building is centrally located on the block, opposite Tom's Bar, a local "jook joint" or "bucket of blood" where drugs are bought and sold like a pharmacy. As I walked into the building, I thought about Frenchy's reputation for not building friendships too easily. I felt he allowed me to see part of his life mainly because I was not a part of it. It was not incumbent upon Frenchy to tell me anything, and the fact that he did made me somewhat privileged and uncertain.

Late afternoon, about 6:40 p.m., I walked into the hallway. Graffiti written in purple magic marker was scribbled on the first three steps. I read: "Fuck you, Santiago." He has no children in the house. His oldest daughter lives in Virginia, and he sees his former wife only when he needs bail money. He lives with Debbie, a woman from an earlier acquaintance.

Debbie answered the door. She was an attractive and easy-going woman--but seemed jealous and possessive. The apartment is a railroad flat. The hall walls are green with linoleum leading to the kitchen table where Frenchy is sitting. His bathrobe was draped around his two hundred pound frame. "How the hell are you, man? Sit down.

Find yourself a seat." His voice has the inflections and rhythm of a dignitary, a politician and a gangster, all combined. "Wanna beer? Some wine?"

There is an uneasy silence in the room. Debbie is usually more talkative. Frenchy is preparing his cocaine "product" for the night sales. The table is littered with plastic bags, spoons, aluminum foil, a scale, a sifter. He reaches behind him and pulls out from the drawer a small plastic bag full of cocaine (about two ounces). He opens the bag, pours its contents into the sifter, gently hitting the side of the sifter with his thumb. After all the powder has filter through, he takes the back of a large measuring spoon and crushes the hard rock-like crystals that remain. The phone rings. "Who is it, doll?" he says. Debbie doesn't answer him. He get up, mumbles, "Let's get out of here before I have to kill this bitch."

Frenchy as a low-level dealer must turn over large volumes of cocaine and heroin to make a profit. He once made as much as six thousand dollars a week on cocaine sales. Today he barely gets by. Two years ago, he was busted for possession of cocaine. He served a year in an upstate prison and has not made an easy transition back to the streets. He had to "re-group," (re-establish himself by finding a new "connect" and new clientele). Because of his sniffing, consuming and giving away cocaine

in volume, he makes little profit, about \$500 a week at the most, and many times, more likely than not, he breaks even. He gets his drugs on consignment, which means he is given cocaine on loan by a higher dealer and is required to repay him as soon as he sells it. Frenchy will then take part of the money that is left over as profit from the sales. Debbie once gave the opinion that "He never really makes any profit but just enough to repay "Goat," the backer. The rest is snorted up and given away."

Frenchy makes additional money by fencing "hot" or stolen items from heroin addicts and professional boosters. He will often sell typewriters, tape recorders, radios, television sets (he owns three) and calculators.

Since he is considered a low-level dealer or pusher, he takes daily risks and must make a volume of transactions in order to make money. He gets his drugs on consignment and must make quick turnovers in order to pay off his "connect," or backer, and acquire another share of drugs.

Friday 12:30 p.m.

The dealer is the connecting point between the work-a-day world of the daytime and the leisure world of the after hours clubs and night-time. His sense of work time is not altogether different from regular workers. It is, however, organized as if it were not work at all. Frenchy's regular day begins after he has gotten up from sleeping, which is about 1:00 p.m. He dresses, eats

breakfast, packages his cocaine product and walks over to the post office where he makes his first sales at 4:00 to a changing shift of workers who know and expect him at this hour. Some employees who work double shifts buy the cocaine in order to help keep them going through the double work load. Frenchy cracked, "This is one of my best spots. It's a gold mine as long as I keep it up."

3:30 to 4:00 p.m.

Frenchy struggles daily to make the 4:00 break of some of the local workers, which is tough because of his late hours. He says, "A few years ago, I wouldn't have bothered to go over there every day (to the Post Office) because I was making too much bread to bother. But now, well, it's tough, and it's too good to turn down." He sells small amounts to the workers (he didn't say how many).

6:00 p.m.

After making his rounds, it is 6:00 p.m., and Frenchy is at the bar relaxing, drinking "Remy Martin" and making occasional sales but mostly sniffing with his friends. Every few minutes, they will saunter to the lavatory to emerge sniffing loudly. The bar is a dealer's zone. Here, he waits for the "lames," the nine-to-five crowd, to come in to drink and buy cocaine from him. Freddy works at a factory in the garment factory. He makes buttons every day; and on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday,

Freddy stops by the bar religiously at 6:15, orders a beer and buys two twenties from Frenchy. If Frenchy isn't there, he was been known to leave a tiny package twisted with a rubber band around it for Freddy with the barmaid.

6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Between 6:00 and 8:00, the lame crowd has disappeared and Frenchy goes back home to change his clothes. He eats quickly (sniffs as he eats). Debbie offered, "He is the only man I know who can sniff cocaine and eat at the same time."

10:00 p.m.

By 10:00, he has finished eating, dresses and goes back to the bar. There, many sales are made. Monday through Wednesday at the bar is generally considered slow days, and his income from those three days amount to about fifty sales a day of \$10, \$20, \$50 at the most; maybe \$1,000 worth of sales a day. On Thursday, Friday and Saturday, sales pick up considerably. He makes more \$50 and \$100 sales during those days. Then he sells about \$2,500 worth of cocaine a day (his share should be about \$500). His daily consumption of cocaine alone is between \$300 and \$500. He bags about one ounce of cocaine every day. This amount includes "turning on" people, new customers, and friends. He enjoys this interaction, and as a result, gives away a lot of cocaine. It is also

important to note that the amount he sniffs and gives away may yield more than the \$300 to \$500 figure. If he chooses to sell it, the price of the same amount of cocaine could conceivably double (because if he did not sniff it it could be cut and packaged into smaller amounts and sold). But most cocaine dealers know they cannot sell all the cocaine they get because a certain amount of it is "business coke," "calling card coke," or "personal coke." A percentage of cocaine is put aside for these purposes. Most buyers want to be given a sample, whether a small amount to "walk with," or at least a "blow," "a one and one," to test the potency of the cocaine before purchasing it.

Once Frenchy finished packaging the materials, he pressed a small thirty-eight caliber revolver in his belt, and dressed in overalls. This was his first attire for the night. He would change at least one more time before retiring. Debbie was reminded not to leave the apartment and to expect a call at about eleven from a man named "Jack." Frenchy whispered he would be back at about one o'clock. The first bar we were to go to was called the "Sham." It was on 181st Street and was an established "home base" for him. The operations from the "Sham" were almost always cocaine sales. The bar on the "Avenue" (Eighth Avenue), Harry's Bar, was mainly for heroin sales.

We walked out into the street and the three men were still standing around the fireplace garbage can. One of them came over to see Frenchy. "What's happening, Frenchy?" "What's good?; "Hey Snake, everything is right on the money." Frenchy does not actually stop walking. He has a swift stride and Snake is walking on the inside between the two of us. Frenchy walks over with him near a local bar (Tom's Place) and sells him either cocaine or heroin. He continues up the street. As we walk, people either speak out loud to acknowledge his presence or whisper under their breath to one another. He never really stops his gait, and walks about three blocks with only brief pauses here and there (save the bar). The red street light on Edgecombe Avenue stops us. He asks me what I had been doing lately, and where was "Gators," a mutual friend. He motions for the car to go on ahead. It has gotten colder since we came out, and Frenchy sees a dude across the street he recognizes. He approaches him and yells, "Motherfucker, if you don't pay me what you owe me real soon, your heart ain't gonna be able to stand the pressure!" The guy is frail-boned with big eyes and a bandanna around his head. He tells Frenchy, "Don't worry, Frenchy," (nervously going into his pocket), I wouldn't shit you, man. I just ain't got nothing right now. This is all I got (he pulls out a few dollars), and I gotta eat. You know I gotta eat." Frenchy raises his hand as if to hit the

buy. He screams, "I don't care if you never eat, mother-fucker. YOU didn't say nothin' about eatin' when you took MY stuff and spent MY money, did ya?" Frenchy makes part of his profit from "crediting." This is a practice of lending out heroin or cocaine to others who sell it for him. Occasionally, the creditors do not reciprocate quickly enough. They often come back with stories like they got robbed or things were stolen from their apartment. They also know Frenchy is in a very volatile and dangerous position in the sense he cannot go to the police for help.. He has to take things into his own hands and cannot do too much if they don't pay on time.

A few years back, Frenchy had several young men selling heroin for him. One of these individuals was continually delinquent in his accounts, failing to meet the appropriate deadlines with the money from which the heroin was sold. After repeated warnings and protestations from Frenchy to the young dealer who was also a heroin user, Frenchy saw him sitting on a car near the Cupid Bar and struck him on the back of the head with a small lead pipe he picked up in the street. The man suffered a concussion and Frenchy's "rep" grew.

Now, as the man moves on away, Frenchy tells him one last time to get him his money or else. Frenchy, who appeared visibly upset, gives a quick wry smile as we cross the street to the "Sham" Bar. He breaks out in a grin

finally, and says, "I was just woofin' but the dude know that if I dont' get my money, I'll kill him. He'll have it the next time I see him." He offers some reassurance behind his attitude. He says, "You gotta be like that. I got to be tough with these cocksuckers because they will suck your blood. If you let em get away with a nickel, they will try a dime the next time, then a dollar the next."

Frenchy remarks that "the drought in scag in scag is here, man. It ain't coming. It's here. If a man wanted to make a million real quick, let him come out with some good dope. No, some bad dope right now, and he'll make it. If, of course, he 's got the nerve." While the drought in heroin exists, Frenchy says that cocaine is the most logical substitute. Although the highs are opposite, he adds, "They (junkies) jes wanna get high." <sup>64</sup>

### The Cocaine Bars

The Sham is a neighborhood bar situated between a record shop and a "botanica." The botanica window has candles, plants, incense and other items for the spiritualist follower in the area. The neighborhood has a large

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<sup>64</sup> Heroin is a depressant. Cocaine is a stimulant. Quite a few addicts mix the two for a "speedball," but the use of one is not necessarily a substitute for the other. Heroin is a "down" and makes the user "nod out" or drift into a semi-fantasy state. Often described as the best high for your money, it is, according to sources, the closest one can come to for a complete head to toe sensation. The drug can be sniffed or taken intravenously. Cocaine as a stimulant can also be injected intravenously. The route of injection can make the high last anywhere from twenty to thirty minutes and supplies a tremendous "rush" for the user.

Spanish character with many South American and Latin Americans scattered throughout. The black American population is small, and mixed with a close-knit section of West Indians who live in the area between Amsterdam Avenue to Broadway from 146th Street to 148th Street. Other bars in the area cater to a few Irish and Italian workers who serve as its clientele. There are three other bars on this side of the long block.

The Sham Bar is small with a juke box, a cigarette machine and two ladies' rooms. It does not have a sign indicating a men's room. Frenchy uses this bar as a base because several of his old friends hang out there. In this bar, he's "clean," meaning he doesn't sell heroin there. Even if someone comes in to buy it, he won't sell it to them because he says, "It will only attract a certain element and I don't want that here." We stayed in the bar about an hour while he made several cocaine sales and was give free drinks by about four or five people. He is at his best in this setting. Sitting around the far end of the bar, everyone greets him as they come in. Two or three women come over to sit and talk with him. "The barmaid has been after me for years but I just haven't had the time for her," he says. "Let me explain something. My woman thinks I'm out fucking all these bitches, but what she don't understand is that every man ain't attracted to every woman. You know what I'm saying. Just like every

woman ain't attracted to every man. Listen. I know bitches I would just love to get my johnson into but dey ain't interested in me. See. Then by the same token, there are some women, like this bitch here:(barmaid) that got this thing for me but I ain't interested. You understand." Frenchy would often tell me these intimate or at least personal accounts with people in his world, as if offering me explanations for his actions or non-actions so as to set the record straight.

He gets up and goes to the ladies' room with a guy who came in while we were talking. Meanwhile, he returns, pays the tab, and we leave. This time, we got toward the "Avenue" (Eighth Avenue). This is where he says, "You make the real money." We cross the street and pass behind 126th Street where the old Braddock Hotel used to be. Frenchy is reminiscing about how he met Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughn, and other stars in the Braddock when Harlem was "jumpin'!"

Back in them days (1940's and 1950's), it was nothing to see Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughn, Duke, the Count, Billie Eckstein, all them cats up here. The Braddock was a swingin' place. This whole area was so clean you could eat off the sidewalk. White folk used to come here and leave their mink stole on the seat of their chauffeured Cadillac with the door unlocked. That was Harlem, man. Harlem was what was happening. But now you can't pay one of them stars to come back up here.

We walk up the "Avenue" and, as we approach a bar, a crowd becomes visible a block away. This is a section called the "scag market place," because street sales of heroin

and other drugs have been conducted freely for years. Often, one can see New Jersey license plates coming up to cop dope--whites, Latins, men, women with children. They all converge on this street to buy heroin, cocaine, pills and other various and sundry products. Several people see him coming. Three men walk up towards him and ask him if he has anything. He says, gruffly, "No." Several others, among them a woman with a small boy, say hello and walk over. By the time he reaches the bar, there are at least ten or twelve people asking him about dope or cocaine. Several go into the bar. Others are not allowed in as the owner stands inside the bar door and keeps the unwanted ones out.

Inside the bar, Frenchy sets up shop. He goes almost immediately to the back room. On his way there, he instructs the barmaid to put a "Remy Martin" for him on the counter. He always sits near the end of the bar. His "stash" is placed in the bathroom above the toilet string box. In the meantime, he walks out with a few bags, and the plastic bottle full of five dollar caps. He gets his drink and waits for the action to start. It is 11:00 p.m. A few sales are made openly at the bar. By 11:30, he has sold everything. He wants to go back home and re-group (get some more cocaine to sell), but decides instead to go back to the Sham. When we go outside, a similar group of hungry "scag cravers" approach him and inquire about the heroin

scene. He says he has only cocaine and five dollar caps left. Several buy a few, but he does not wish to appear too conspicuous, so he makes the sales quickly. We then jump into a gypsy cab and head back over to the Sham. As we ride, he explains why he never walks from "that" bar anymore. Fidgeting in his pocket for the money he has collected ( a lot of it in change), altogether about \$700, he relates:

I was standing out in front of this bar on 145th Street and this guy walks up behind me and says, "Don't move or I'll blow your motherfucking brains out, and keep walking straight ahead." It was broad daylight. He said to me to walk away from the bar. And I did. As we walked, he keeps telling me what a dog I was, a low-lifed son of a bitch dat deserve to be killed because I'm killing black kids with my dope. He keeps reminding me that he'll blow my mother-fuck-ing brains out if I make a wrong move. He walks me to 126th Street and St. Nicholas. He tells me to give him all my money, my watch, my rings. I had two diamond rings on each pinky and my scorpion ring on that day. You know that scorpion ring I got from Jolene. Well, I give him all my bread. I had three hundred in cash, about twenty-five bundles of scag(worth about \$75), twenty five dollar caps (\$100), and fifty ten dollar thangs (\$500). I give him all this. And he continue to tell me he's gonna blow my brain out for fucking over black kids. Then he asks me where I live. I tell him and he says, "Okay, let's go over there. You must have some more bundels over there." He hails a cab and as we are about to get in, a friend of mine sees me being robbed. But I don't know this until later. It was "Wooky." You know "Wooky." Anyway, he (Wooky) hails a cop car and tells them I'm being robbed. As soon as the cops come up to the area where we're standing, the two of us get into the cab. The cop follows the cab. They stop the cab on 125th Street and St. Nicholas. I'm on the driver's side. See (he gestures). The cop is on the other side. Check this out. Then, as the cop who is an ofay opens the door, the dude (robber) shoots the cop. Dig this shit. The officer staggers out into the street and shoots twice, trying to hit the cat who at this time had gotten out and was running down the street. The cop's

partner shoots at the guy and runs after him. Meanwhile, I'm stunned and I don't know what happened. The cab driver is bewildered and I get out and run up Convent to a friend's house and we talk over what happened. I stayed there for three days. Then I went to the Precinct and gave myself up. Finally, I was let go because they knew I hadn't done anything. And "Wooky" came to the rescue at the police station along with the cab driver.

### Midnight at the Sham Bar

We go inside the Sham and have a few drinks. As soon as we get in, the barmaid calls Frenchy over and hands him a note. She tells him "Jack" left a message and a number for him to call. Frenchy asks me if I want to go to an after hours spot uptown sometime later on tonight. By this time, the Sham, which is part of the liaison between the home and the after hours, was filled to capacity. The patrons are mostly men, who are seen congregating with a few women seated at either end of the bar. They are what the culture characterizes as "shooting the shit" or "bull-shitting," which is another way of saying they are "shooting the fat," "jiving," "making time," "wasting time." The barmaid is wrapped in a seductive low-cut halter top with a short mini-skirt and high boots. Every time a new person walks into the bar, eyes perk up with expectant looks. Familiar faces are greeted with handshakes or are given a "five" slap on the palm while settling into the scene. Occasionally, a "booster" will stop by, selling some item. "Good watches here, bro, Longine, Omega," or "Transistor radios, baby, can't beat the price." "Go ahead man,

check it out--it works." "Women's dresses, coats, tape recorders, wigs," he continues. These peddlers can be called local commodity distributors or "boosters." They are hustlers who steal goods from local merchants, apartments, department stores, and re-sell the goods to local residents at a lower price. They hurry in and out of local bars. If someone is interested in purchasing or looking at an item, they stop and hold it up against themselves and then give a quick sales talk. Their sales approach is to convince the customers that the merchandise is expensive but "you can have it for five...no, just gimme three."

The Sham is a mixture between the market place bar and the home territory bar. The bar is situated in an area frequented mostly by local residents who come to drink, share communal ties, and to buy or sell goods, drugs and other services. These market places can be described this way:

Some public drinking places derive their special character from their use as center of exchange for various goods and services, as well as clearing houses for certain kinds of information. Other than liquor, perhaps the commodity most frequently handled in the public drinking places is sex, on either a commercial or a non-commercial basis. But there are also bars that deal in narcotics, stimulant drugs, gambling, stolen merchandise, and a variety of other illicit goods.<sup>65</sup>

The Sham functions as a home territory bar in the sense

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<sup>65</sup> Sherri Cavan, Liquor License (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co. 1966) p.171

that the regulars consider the bar as "their bar," because of their close ties and connections with it. Messages, phone calls, gifts (sometimes "hot" items) are left at the bar for those customers known to the owner and the barmaid.

Occasionally, patrons at the bar will go to the lavatory to sniff cocaine. One will know if they are sniffing by the frequency with which they go (usually every twenty minutes or so) and more likely by the constant nasal sounds they make when returning to their selected areas around the bar. The Sham differs somewhat from the market place bar because it is perhaps more a mixture of many types of bars. While the Sham is not strictly a cocaine-purchasing bar, it does cater to the cocaine habitue. When the bar closes for the evening, a few select patrons remain. They move to the back room to snort cocaine, play cards, have sex, eat food, dance, shoot pool or gamble (mostly cilo, crap, and poker). At a bar burther uptown, the El Tiempo Bar, cocaine is snorted at the bar openly because the owner allows cocaine dealers to sell their cocaine with no prohibitions (although customers are usually taken to the lavatory to transact business).

Cocaine dealers do not pay the owners of the establishments anything for use of their bar. There is a mutual or reciprocal agreement that the cocaine dealer is an asset to the establishment because he brings in a

constant stream of customers who purchase drinks, cigarettes and play music. It is these customers who regularly buy from cocaine dealers yet simultaneously provide additional income and clientele for the bar owner. If the dealer is not present when the cocaine customer arrives, he will, on most occasions wait and buy a few drinks in the interim. The negative aspect of this peripheral clientele is the problems associated with cocaine dealing in general: robbery. The street stick-up man preys on the cocaine dealer as he does on other illegal entrepreneurs. Most bars that have cocaine dealers as clientele also have problems with robberies. The stick-up men will rob a bar if it is known as a hang-out for cocaine dealers or as a "cocaine bar." A customer recalls a robbery at the El Tiempo Bar and Lounge:

This was the fourth or fifth time this year this place has been robbed. You know who it was? Two kids, man. I mean kids. They come in here and say, "Attention, attention." They tell everybody to put their money, everything on the counter. The one tall skinny one stood at the door with his gun out telling everybody to be cool. Then his partner comes down the bar and takes all the money, even the change, man, even the change. Then they take off. Pedro had \$500 and half an ounce of coke on him but he dropped it under his feet and they didn't see it. They were kids. They couldn't have been more than seventeen or eighteen years old. They took the barmaid by her titty and felt her over, you know. But they were kids, man.

A number of bars have this dual quality: fronting as home territory bars but also having market place quality in the sense that various illicit goods and services are bought and sold on the premises. Selling cocaine in bars,

however, is a perilous business. I once asked Frenchy if he felt he was successful because a lot of people believed he was and because his reputation as a shrewd, demanding cocaine dealer is almost a legend in the community. He said he was successful to a degree, but being successful meant not getting arrested, buying a house, a car and retiring. He was busted two years ago and served some time for possession of cocaine, a revolver, and an assault charge. Because of his arrest, he could not have a driver's license. He had no money to buy a car or house. Frenchy was a long way in his own mind from being successful.

I got back out on the streets, and I forgot about what I'd told Papnek on the ride from Wiltwyck to Poughkeepsie. I knew what I was going to do. And there was nothing to think about. When I got back to New York, I did the same things I'd been doing. I kept on working. I kept on dealing pot. I kept on dealing a little cocaine.<sup>66</sup>

Frenchy continuously articulated about how the dynamics of cocaine, heroin and policy operations were all intimately related to the police. Frenchy had intimate contact with the law enforcement agencies. In his daily rounds on the street, in the bars, he was acutely aware of the police, in their official and unofficial capacities:

I live out here. I know bar owners, prostitutes. I see cops, every day. I see them every day coming in to pick up their share of the loot. The bar owners have it ready for them. The numbers operators have it; that Knapp Commission wasn't telling us out here nothing new. We knew it all the time.

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<sup>66</sup> Claude Brown, Manchild in the Promised Land (New York: Signet Books, 1965) p. 174.

The numbers man, he got to pay off those snotty-nosed motherfuckers every week. They don't care whether he makes a dollar or not, he's got to come up with the bread. Now, let me tell you a little story about the po-lice (emphasizing the "po"). I used to know this cop named Gopher. He was a rogue cop. Now what I mean by that is he would rob dealers, rob numbers men, you know, use his uniform and his piece(gun) to bust cats. Then he would sell the coke, or dope, or whatever to other dealers. This was his hustle. I knew Gopher well, from way back when he was mopping floors at the old Baby Grand. He took the test for cops and became one of the first spooks in there. But he had that hustling thang in his veins and always stayed around hustlers, gamblers, after hours joints and places like that after he was a cop. Gopher used to bring me eighths of cocaine at a time. I'd pay him what I had in cash and he would give me a couple days to do it (sell it) and bring him the rest of the money. So I know about cops, man. I think I would be exaggerating if I said all cops were crooked but if I said 99%, I wouldn't be that far off. That's why a regular gig (nine to five) ain't never gonna appeal to a hustler once he's turned a dollar. It's foolish. A man works every day all his life to get a gold watch and when he checks the watch, he see thattime done run out. What's the point. Once a hustler turns a dollar (makes fast money), he is forever corrupted you might say, to the life of the fast dollar. As long as it's money I gonna be out there. If it was apples and oranges then, hey jim, I'd be trying to bring in a bushel over a peck any day.

Most dealers have a very convincing argument about their roles in society and their rejection of office hours "gigs." Akin to Frenchy's comment and a most perceptive statement on the subject of illegitimate goods and services is made by Hawkins and Waller:

The prostitute, the pimp, the peddler of dope, the operators of the gambling hall, the vendor of obscene pictures, the bootlegger, the abortionist, all are productive, all produce services or goods which people desire and for which they are willing to pay. It happens that society has put these goods and

services under the ban, but people go on producing them and people go on consuming them and an act of the legislature does not make them less a part of the economic system.<sup>67</sup>

### How Does One Become a Dealer?

A dealer must have a connection in the drug world to someone who sells drugs on a wholesale and/or retail basis. The dealer must have such a connection to buy good quality cocaine or other drugs at a cost below the street market price in order to make any money. In the case of low-level (street) dealers, the quality of their product may have been diluted many times before he receives it. The dealer, after having secured the drug, sells it, and quickly turns it over. He is an asset to his supplier because, as one dealer put it:

He (the supplier) has got to get rid of all that coke. He needs me as much as I need him. There is only so much and so many people he can sell to and is willing to sell to in large amounts. Granted, he can find other buyers, but where is he going to find another me! Let's face it, he ain't. He needs me to get rid of his shit. He's very paranoid as it is. When he's sitting up there with all that coke, he knows he be going away for a long time if he gets busted. I know this. And when I go to deal with him I have that slight advantage.

The process of becoming a dealer is, in essence, the ability to maneuver into a position to be recognized by older hustlers or those involved in the "rackets" who

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<sup>67</sup> Hawkins and Waller, "Critical Notes on the Cost of Crime," Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology 26(1936) 679-94.

can tap the energies of a young up-and-coming hustler. It is that hustler quality or hustler mentality in young street "cats" that is sought and looked for by older hustlers. There is a kind of legacy or hereditary aspect about it. The older hustler knows how he was recruited and looks for similar traits in a younger man. The young recruit must have such qualities as stamina, courage, guts ("a lotta nerve"), a rap, and a special business "head." Frenchy tells how he became a dealer:

Back in those days (1940's), the numbers racket was the thing. Very few people were into coke. Scag was beginning to make an imprint, I say beginning because morphine was on the scene then, more so than scag. I used to hang out in the pool hall on 135th then. A lot of hustler used to come in there to shoot the shit, and shoot their game all the time. I was just a youngster but I had my head straight. I would clean the place, rack up for the cats, shine shoes, almost anything to make a buck. And I learned to shoot a pretty mean game (pool) myself before long. So one day, this dude named "Dank" came in. He in the big time. He had a bit short (car) and dressed all spivvy. He wanted to play but nobody was around. So I jumped up and said half-jokingly, "Hey man, you wanna game? I'll play you. Give you three shots to one, put the stick behind my back one eye open and one eye shut. And still bet your six dollars to one." I was just kidding around, of course, but he liked me and beat me. But after that he came in one day and asked me how would I like to make some real money. I said, "How,?" And he said, "You be my numbers man." And that's the story of my life.

In this illustration, the linkage between young men in the neighborhood and experienced criminals is made clear. Young handsome men are sometimes recruited (turned out) by prostitutes to be pimps. In a similar fashion young men possessed with a hustler mentality are turned out by older hustlers.

Alfredo Rojas: The Dealer

Alfredo is twenty-six years old and Puerto Rican. He has been selling cocaine on and off for about eight years. He attended college, but he felt "There was jive and bullshit everywhere." He came to New York in 1960 with his parents. His mother is a seamstress and his father was a cook. Two years ago, his father died of a heart attack and for a while, he, his mother and two younger brothers lived together in a small apartment in the East Bronx. His mother knew he was selling cocaine, but like many parents, he said, "It is tolerated because I bring in money, food, clothes and other things that we wouldn't normally have." Alfredo is one of four members of a loosely organized group of confederates who control three small bars on one block in Brooklyn. His expertise in selling cocaine came about through his "apprenticeship in the street." That is, he learned the various ways to sell cocaine by picking up tips from older individuals who were suppliers. He describes how he first became a cocaine dealer:

About 1969, I was about eighteen and into selling grass. This friend of mine who was supplying me would bring over a couple of ounces at first, and I would get rid of that. After a while, I was selling three pounds a week. Real quantity. Then, one day, he comes over and he says, "Listen, my friend, I have some coke here. It's only a little bit (I think it was a half ounce), but it's really good. Now if you can sell it, I'll bring some more." What I neglected to tell him was that I didn't know shit about coke. I had never really snorted it and never knew how to cut it. You know I knew none of the things you should know if you're gonna be dealing

in it. So anyway, I was too embarrassed and didn't want to seem like, ah, green horn, so I told him I'd like to sell it. So anyway, a friend of mine at the time, you know, Pedro, he happened over a day or so later, and I told him about the coke. He said he wanted to buy some. I think he bought a hundred dollars' worth. I was real excited and shit because I said, goddam, if I can sell that little bit for a hundred dollars, whit, I can be rich (laughter)! So I gave him about half of what I had and he looked at me real happy and said, "Great!" and that he'd probably be back to get some more. A few hours later, Pedro came back. He wanted another hundred. Well I gave him not quite the other half I had left (laughter). And he said he knew people who wanted some more coke. And he'd check on it for me. A few days later, my man (the connection) came back and I was real excited and shit (laughter). And he says, "How did you do on the coke?" And I said, "Okay, okay. I sold two hundred dollars worth." He looks at me, nor particularly impressed. He said, "Well, where is the rest?" I said I sold it. He said, "Then where is the rest of the money?" I said, I sold it for \$200. He said, "What!!            (mother-fucker in Spanish)!! What, man, you just gave away \$1,000 worth of pure coke!" (laughter) Blah, blah blah. So I felt this small (holding his hands to indicate the size he felt). But as I explained to him he believed me and he took part of the blame because he should have made sure I knew what I was doing before hand. And you know, to this day, Pedro and I still laugh about it. You should hear his story.

Part of the dealer's skills his ability to "get over," is definitely related to his personality, his lifestyle, and the way he carries himself on the street. Alfredo articulates:

People dig me and they think I'm crazy too. You know. Because, hey I come off like gang-busters. They dig that. All my connects dig me cause I can talk the ears off a billy goat. But I know when to be cool. In this business, you gotta get out there. You gotta make every deal count and you gotta keep everybody happy. And that's what I do. You know when Mad Dog saw me, he dug me. You know why? Cause we had been gambling together. Although I

was a kid compared to him shooting craps and shit. And then he says, "Don't be fucking with no drugs and shit, snorting no cocaine, and if you do, sell it--do it so you can make some money." He dug me. He got big bucks. He's the man. Cause he got two big houses and shit down on 29th Street. A fine car. He say I can be his man if I don't fuck up, so hey, I listened to him.

The Cocaine Dealers' Cliques:  
The Dealing Zone

In Alfredo Rojas' turf, the members of the group have a monopoly on the bars in the area. There are three bars: the Sweet House, Bob's, and La Casa. These bars are the territory of Alfredo, Patch, Jubin and Ricky. These four dealers established certain area bars by restricting other sellers from entering. They protect each other: all the men are Latin Americans between twenty-two and thirty-three years of age. The territory is protected by silence, stares, force and total ignoring of strangers. Non-Spanish speaking strangers are especially looked down upon with distrust and contempt. A patron at the bar who does not know who you are, even though you are in the company of someone the patron knows, will inquire in Spanish, "Who is he? Is he one of us?" "No," is the reply, he is a "negro Americana," and from there you are set apart. Of course, there are times when you are accepted like at the after hours or at a party, but because you are basically an outsider who does not speak the language, your chances of entering the group intimately is seriously

handicapped. Alfredo said of a friend of his:

Jorge hates English; whenever we are together at his house and any English is uttered, he recoils and tells us that in his house only Spanish is spoken. He works in a factory in Queens, his wife is a college graduate. He sells cocaine--not a lot but a little key (kilo) here and there. But this guy is a genius. He works every day, gets up at five in the morning every morning, goes to this fucking factory, works till six o'clock, comes home, and in two years he moved back to the island, bought a house, a car, owns a bar and some land.

Members of the group resent English, and English-speaking people. Although individuals may be predisposed to liking someone on the basis of friendship and mutual contact, most of the time, no such relationships are encouraged, especially if you do not speak the language at all.

The protection of the dealing zone (the three bars) is predicated on the territory. Certain turf is defined as belonging to a clique who sells to all who come within the bars looking to buy cocaine. If customers enter and none of the clique members are there, a mutual arrangement is worked out with other sellers. The "tout" steers new or old customers to one of the sellers in the group--if none of them are present when the customer arrives. This is often done by making a phone call to one of the dealer's houses. Tout is compensated by the dealer usually by charging the customer more money than it is worth or by cutting the cocaine further before the buyer gets it, thereby making enough profit for the two of them. For example, if a customer comes to buy and

wants a \$100 package, the tout "cat" goes to the dealer and asks for \$100 on credit, payable in an hour. He takes the \$100 worth of cocaine, cuts it to make, say, \$200 worth. He then pockets \$100 worth and takes the other half to the customer, collects the money and repays the dealer.

The tout acts as eyes for the clique and he may also warn customers and others if the police are around.

After going to the bar, I saw three men (one white, two latin), sitting and drinking in the back. They were watching a fight on closed-circuit TV. The white man was apart from the others, drinking a beer. Jubin (23 years old), a tout, is tall, gangly, came in and asked what did I want; after looking over my shoulder, he saw the three men and said, "Be cool, there's the man."

In this capacity, the tout is the eyes for the dealer and the customers, although this reference to the "man" was off the mark. The white man was actually a doorman in one of the buildings in the area. All white men are noticed and any new white men or white women newcomers to the dealing zone are considered "the man." Most of the operation will cease until "the man" leaves.

#### The Role of the Police

When Alfredo's cousin, Rafael, was busted, it was said that the worst thing that could happen to you was to have to go to jail, but aside from this, the worst fear of all is the loss of status that accompanies being arrested. Dealers worry about being arrested no doubt, but the

criminal penalties are not as bad as losing the market, the friendship, the clique, the glory of selling. While the dealer concerns himself with the police agency as a way of being busted, he must also contend with personal relationships as well. His profession is illegal and it must be nurtured and protected. His personal relationships with women, even friends, for example, must be carefully scrutinized. When Frenchy said he could not "fire" (leave) his lady friend, he had to let her down "gently," what he meant was that it is this kind of relationship that regulates and controls his normal inter-personal relationships. He realizes that to act extremely nasty to a woman or to hurt her in a personal relationship may lead her to "drop a dime on him" (call the police). In other words, although the police are a threat, the inter-personal relationship is a more closer threat.

Dealers are faced with many problems in the street, and are most apprehensive about police busts, robberies by stick-up men, being informed on by girlfriends/boyfriends, family. To be arrested is the beginning of a downward trend or a status loss for the dealer. Here is a recent illustration:

Rafael deals cocaine on the street level. He is aggressive and is constantly trying to build up his clientele so that he can acquire enough money to move up in the cocaine business. Rafael was recently arrested when the car he was driving was stopped by the police. He had \$1,000 worth of cocaine on him which he threw away as the police

approached him. The others in the car, two women and one man, all threw their cocaine on the floor of the car. The cocaine that Rafael lost (\$1,000) had to be replaced at a later date. In addition, his lawyer's fee was about \$2,000 after his arraignment charges were dismissed against him. But in the interim, some of his clientele heard of his arrest. After the incident, he was not able to regain the money he lost. Most of his old customers had moved on to other dealers. And the ones that stayed were apprehensive about coming to his apartment. Rafael explained, "You see, a lot of them dudes won't come back. I know that. They're afraid my phone is tapped or I'm being watched and shit like that. In a way, I don't blame them. But I'm in a position now that's hurting me. That's bad for business. You know what I mean? I was making five or six hundred dollars in a few hours before that latest ordeal. Now an ounce I would have moved in a day or two takes me--you know how long it's been since I've had this stuff (pointing to some coke on the table)--three weeks. I'm looking for a new apartment because that will ease some of my people's minds. Just the move itself. And listen, don't let nobody fool you. There is lots of cats out there dealing blow. Right here in this neighborhood. There are plenty of cats selling coke. So it's not like it used to be where one dealer was the main cat on the block. Man, there are lots of cats out there selling coke and selling it cheap."

The dealer must, in order to keep his clients, sell good cocaine at the going prices and put in a little extra, if necessary, to woo the customer back. At the same time, he must try his best not to get arrested. If he does get arrested, as in Rafael's case, he may lose his business, prestige and all the advantages that go with his occupation. The dealer's downward mobility begins at the arrest stage and with the resultant loss of contact with the community he serves. It is nor impossible, though, to move back up the cocaine selling hierarchy, if he is resourceful and maintains strong

relationships with those who supply the drug.

In this movement from status, the cocaine dealer, after being busted, may either go to the after hours club for solace among friends and acquaintances, to drown oneself in the cocaine euphoria or else to stay away and keep a distance. A habitue states:

Last year, I was busted on a bullshit tip (a frivolous charge) and I'm on probation. The spots are off limits for me. It's not that I don't want to go to any--I would be lying if I said that, but it's not wise to go. Benny's (a club) might be okay. But I wouldn't even chance that. Although I know he's got protection, I just can't take a chance. If I'm busted, I'm gone, and I don't want to go back to the joint.

Consistent with the dealer's personality is his ability to handle inter-personal relationships. A dealer must interact with people of different ages, personalities, sexes and ethnicities. He is often provided little privacy in his home life. But while he has cocaine to sell, he must constantly contend the with phone ringing at all hours of the night, and the incessant ringing of the door bell by a continuous stream of visitors. Often, it is the same person calling more than once. In addition, he has his own personal life to consider, especially if he has a woman or is married and has children.

If the dealer conducts business from his home, it is only a matter of time before he has to "cool out," "lay low," or work only out of the bar. And, once he is in the bar, especially bars known as cocaine hang-outs,

other risks are involved such as robberies and police busts. Dealers working out of their homes or apartments have special problems, mainly attracting too much human traffic. One of the ways dealers are noticed is by the number of visitors coming in and out of their apartments.

Dealers in low-income communities need not worry too much about traffic and the neighbors, mainly because dealing or hustling is an acceptable way of life. Not because the community and its people are not concerned, but because in times of economic deprivation, most people in the community are hustling in one way or another. Also, there exists a strong apathetic attitude that police and other government agencies are not about to stop drug dealing since they are so intimately connected with it. Nevertheless, when I asked one dealer, X, why didn't he fear getting arrested because of the heavy traffic in his apartment, he said:

Look, I don't have that much to lose. I sell little stuff. \$10, \$20, \$50 and if the man comes in here, and busts me, the most he will find is a quarter of an ounce, and depending on when he comes, probably less. Now if he hits (busts) the guy with the keys (kilos), the weight, the half keys, man, then that's all she-row (the end) for that chump. It's a vicious cycle because it's the little guy whose got the heavy traffic. The big guy with the keys ain't got no heavy traffic. You dig? But me, I ain't got nothing and they know it.

Although the street dealer has a continual stream of people, this is not an indication of his willingness to sell to anyone. It means he sells only to those he knows. A dealer will often admonish a buyer if he or she

indicates the desire to bring a new person when they acquire cocaine. Frenchy, speaking to a young woman buyer on the phone who wanted to bring a friend along, said, "I don't-want-to-meet-nobody(emphasizing every word). You come by your lonesome. If you need somebody to hold your hand, I'll do it for you."

The dealer who sells small amounts of cocaine believes he will not be affected as much by the stiff penalties against the drug as someone who deals on a higher level. This kind of logic is in line with "Jimmy's", a higher level dealer in Woodley's "Portrait of a Cocaine Merchant":

He reached over to the end table and from under a towel, took a .38 Smith and Western snub-nosed revolver, and six bullets. "See this? I think maybe you've seen this gun before. But look at the bullets."

They were hollow tipped, the kind that blow open inside and leave a bigger hole where they exit than they did where they entered.

"This is a kill gun," he said soberly. "See, copping what I'm copping now could put me in prison for life, if I was caught. Hey, I'm not going to prison. So there are situations that would call for a shoot out. So when I'm copping these amounts, I carry this gun. And I would kill anybody that tried to stop me."<sup>68</sup>

The low-level dealer, like K, feels he faces much less risk than Woodley's "Jimmy" because of the smaller amounts of cocaine he sells. A recent illustration of the low

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<sup>68</sup> Richard Woodley, "Dealer: Portrait of a Cocaine Merchant," The Coca Leaf and Cocaine Papers ed. George Andrews and David Solomon (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975)

level dealer's relative freedom from arrest took place when New York's Mayor Beame and Police Commissioner Codd went to Harlem to witness drug arrests from a camouflaged van.<sup>69</sup> The van contained a one-way mirror. After sitting in the van for only a few minutes, a casual nonchalant street dealer approached the driver of the van with a bag of heroin to sell. It was only after such a blatant example of the relative laxity against the drug dealer on the street that a minor crackdown ensued.

#### The Dealer and Social Ties

The dealer's occupation is to sell illegal goods and services to people who have a taste for an illegal substance. As an entrepreneur, and like all business people, dealers are confronted with risk, problems and competition in their day to day trade. Competition is a major source of anxiety for the dealer who sells drugs and/or any illegal contraband. There is a certain paranoia that develops because of it. Dealers must also concern themselves with a wide variety of inter-personal factors including who they cultivate as friends and lovers in relationships. They must be cognizant of the kinds of relationships they are involved in. Frenchy relates this story about a woman he is presently seeing:

She says she's in love but I don't believe it. You

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<sup>69</sup> "Police Drive Stalks Heroin Dealers in Harlem," New York Times, 30 January 1977.

know you can't trust all these bitches out here. You can't possibly know what they have on their minds, or know what they will do. Now last week, we had an argument. She blew up, got mad because Thelma called. Now I don't wanna have to go through all that shit 'bout explainin' to her who Thelma is. As far as she's concerned, Thelma is one of my customers. That's it. But no. If she wants to believe otherwise, that's her problem. But as I think about it, it's my problem, too. Let's suppose she is in love and I tell her to get the fuck outta my life. Well, hey, she could just as soon go outta here and drop a dime (call the police) as drop her skirt. That's all it takes. One dime and um gone. So I gotta play it cool and not break her heart. And if I do let her down, it's got to be easy, real easy.

Aside from the peculiar and sensitive issue of inter-personal relationships with lovers, dealers have to wary of most everybody including close friends:

Any motherfucker that walks in here and says he wants to be my friend, I'm double on guard. Cause I know the only friend I got is my mother and she's been dead for twelve years. So I know when you're dealing drugs you ain't really got no friends. You just got parasites. Everybody wants to be your friend. Everybody wants the best. So friendship is a very shaky thing with me. I don't put much faith in it.

What is expressed here is the dealer's role as dealer and as a person is often ambivalent and conflicted. He is unsure at times whether people like him as a person or as the "coke man." Friendships that are nurtured after the dealer has established himself are often suspect, especially with regard to women. Frenchy makes a distinction, however, between women in the street he meets and women in the after hours club. He is often putting new formed friendships to the test:

You know who your friends are when you have absolutely nothing. No money, no coke, stone broke, and ask a motherfucker who has been pinching and begging off you for days for something, for a favor. You see as long as you got coke, everybody and their mother is around. They be sniffing and grinning and handclapping, but once the coke is gone, they're gone. Now you get in trouble and see what happens. I have lent motherfuckers my last dollar and go back two days later when I know they got bread, and what do I get? "Sorry, I'm all out," or "I gotta pay my rent," or this bill or that. It's happened so many times, it ain't funny. Now I know ho's around here who know I'm into coke, and whenever I go into a club, they all around, talking shit, snugglin' up, you know. Well, I know what they want and it's hard not to succumb to this, man, it really is. But I don't respect those bitches. I don't, I mean it. Now I respect the ho's in the spots (after hours clubs) much more because they are just there to hang (to have a good time). You know that, they know that. It's mutual. I go to have a good time, to give them my shit and they're there to enjoy you and whatever you have to offer.

### Competition

Competition is a major problem for dealers. They must not only be concerned about the quality and price of their own product, but concerned with the competitor's price and quality as well. Dealers are also interested in maintaining a rapport and an understanding with his clients that the best product can be gotten only through him. Dealers of the extrovert type play the "I have the best coke in the world" game or "I can get it for you any time" approach. They are hustling salesmen with smooth tongues.

John, a thirty-five year old black dealer, commented:

I don't take the first coke he (the connection) offers. As a matter of fact, my standard rule is always to reject it. That's why when I go to him, I like to take cash. Because if I go empty-handed, I have to take whatever he has to offer. Right? I have no choice. But if I take the cash, then I can ask for the best. The best (with emphasis). I will take a piece (one ounce) on consignment plus with my cash, I will take another piece. Something that's good. Real good.

Dealers have qualities similar to those of a salesman, in the sense that they are also con men. They are able to sell a poor product as if it were a good one, and a good product as if it were an excellent one. As I watched Frenchy make a transaction, he was saying to one of his customers:

Listen, my man. This shit is dynamite. Dy-na-mite! Now you know, I always have the best shit. Don't I?

If the buyer has tasted it and finds it is not everything the dealer made it out to be, Frenchy's line is:

Well, listen man. You always get the good stuff when I have it. As a matter of fact, I make sure you get the good stuff when I got it. So now that I'm a little short, you ain't gonna support me no more? But if you willing to give me a little play now, although I know it ain't super-duper...Well, dig, I'll be willing to tighten you up later on when the lady is really smoking. You know that, when the lady is really smoking. You know that, right?

Thus, in a situation such as this, the degree of trust between the dealer and his customer is what makes the transaction go over smoothly. The dealer expects his regular customers to buy his product, even though it is not as good in quality as he would expect. By doing so,

the customer can expect a fair to better deal for his money in the future. This type of transaction has several meanings. One, if the customer does buy, the dealer has sold a mediocre product to the customer, who has felt he not only has gotten "something" to sniff, but also has an open invitation to return for something better. The customer has a lead bargaining card for future purchases. The dealer has found out the level of quality which this particular customer wants in buying cocaine, and in addition, he has established a relationship whereby the customer will return (to purchase even more cocaine). When the customer returns, the dealer might admit to having no better cocaine than he did before, and this type of "con" can go on indefinitely.

#### Dealers on Addiction

Dealers face many problems, some of which have already been outlined. In addition to concerns about the police, robberies, inter-personal hassles, the dealer is confronted with the possibility of becoming addicted to cocaine. Addiction is defined as:

...an overwhelming involvement with, and craving for, a substance often accompanied by physical dependence, which motivates continuing usage, resulting in a syndrome of identifiable symptoms appearing when the drug is suddenly withdrawn. Because the social problems of addiction are more precisely defined in terms of a specific drug, the WHO has recommended that its use be abandoned in favor of the formula "drug dependence of (name of

drug)"type further differentiating between physical dependence and psychic dependence, the latter referring to a compulsive need for the drug's mental effects such that the user feels his well-being depends upon continuing its use.<sup>70</sup>

Addiction has been associated with cocaine dealers, mainly because of the high amount of cocaine they ingest during their everyday operations. The addiction is to a large extent occupational. In order to sell cocaine, the dealer has to be cognizant of the drug's quality. This means he has to sniff the cocaine in order to test its marketability. Every time cocaine is mixed, the dealer has to sniff the product to determine its quality. This means, in essence, that the dealer must test whether the product is sellable in the street market place, and whether it compares with the cocaine of other competitors. Dealers are also known to use friends as "testers," that is to sniff the cocaine for them and give a judgement to its quality. The most common tester is the "coke shooter." A dealer gives a small amount of his product to a person who injects cocaine. If a "shooter" registers a good response to the product, it is considered all right for distribution.

Dealers reveal intimate aspects about their lives only at times that are rare and unpredictable. They may be either at a low, depressed state of mind, or in a state of cocaine euphoria. The following instance occurred in

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Lingeman, Drugs from A to Z: A Dictionary (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1969) p. 3.

a bar when Alfredo elucidated this on his life in dealing:

I never told anybody this before but you know I'm addicted to this stuff. I don't snort coke for pleasure any more. When you got ounces and ounces of this stuff all around you all the time and you got to sell it, you got to hustle it, you got to go out, you got to sell it when you're tired or sad, whether you're hungry or drunk. You got to go out there. Now when I snort, I snort to stay up. If I want to get high, I can't take a ten and enjoy it. I got to take a quarter (\$150 - \$200 worth of cocaine). That's what I need to enjoy myself. It's different when a guy comes to cop and buys a fifty. He can enjoy that. He can sniff a little at a time and enjoy himself. I can't. Fifty dollars means nothing to me. It's a difference having coke to sell and coming to cop coke. I think a person is addicted when they take anything more than once what they like or get pleasure from. That's right. Whenever you take one sip of coffee and two hours later, you're back for another cup, you're addicted to that coffee. And that applies to alcohol, pot, whatever. If you take anything for pleasure more than once, you're addicted to it. I know I'm addicted to coke because this is one of the problems I face in this business. When I first started snorting, I would take a ten or twenty and that would be sufficient. If that ain't addiction, what is? All this stuff about coke ain't addictive is bullshit. Anything you take for pleasure over and over is addiction. Have you ever heard of weekend junkies? Well, listen man, there are dudes and women who shoot up on weekends, get straight and go back to their nine to fives every day and then on weekends shoot up again. That's right. Now are they addicted? Just because they don't shoot up every day and run around, scratching, robbing and killing people don't mean they ain't addicts. It just means they got discipline, that's all. They can regulate when they get high.

Another snorter who has sniffed cocaine for over twenty years believes cocaine should not be considered an addictive substance:

Coke is a desire than, dope is a demand thang. There is a difference. You desire or have a strong desire for coke. You don't have no crave or get no cramps in your stomach behind no coke. But that dope, you do. If you run outta coke, you just might have the

mental desire to have more but you can do without. But if you run outta dope you have a mental and physical demand to get some more and you cannot do without. So what do you do? You beg, borrow, and steal to get it.

In both these cases, some clear implications about cocaine and habitual use are present. The habitue who has sniffed cocaine for over twenty years is testimony in itself of cocaine's subtle yet powerful attraction.

Alfredo mentioned tolerance and how he gradually progressed from consuming \$10 to \$150 just to get high and enjoy it. While this is excessive (for buyers, not for dealers), the indication of increased need is clear. No conclusions have been reached concerning these assumptions about addiction. And indeed the very use of the term addiction is problematic. The assumptions about increased use is predicated on several factors. (1) few snorters will remain at a small (\$10, \$20, \$50) level when they could obtain more cocaine freely or could afford to buy more cocaine. (2) Few snorters will sniff small amounts of cocaine if they have access to larger amounts. This does not imply that cocaine is addictive. It only alludes to its psychological attractiveness. The use of cocaine by the dealer is to a certain extent an occupational hazard, because it is essential to his nocturnal life style. Cocaine remains image, object and illusion for the dealer and the snorter/habitue other.

Alfredo: Not only do I like coke but I do not wish the night to end. If I had my way, the sun would never slap me in the face. The world would be eternal darkness.

## CHAPTER VIII

## CONCLUSION

The city is constructed of many social realities and social worlds: among them the world of finance, religion, politics and drugs. Each social world is a universe of regularized mutual responses. Each is an arena in which there is a structure which permits the anticipation of the response of others, an arena in which one pursues his interests with reasonable confidence. Each social world, then, is a culture arena, the boundaries of which are set by territory and communication. In fact, in the social worlds of the various sub-communities, there are to be found mutual identification, companionship and solidarity.<sup>71</sup>

Among the more obvious of these is the underworld with its complex system of stratification. There are the professional thieves and gunmen, the racketeers who operate under the protection of corrupt officials, the various types of "grifters" who depend upon fraud rather than violence, and the "hustlers" a category of marginal people such as retail dope peddlers, prostitutes, and procurers, and the distributors of counterfeit currency.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Tamotsu Shibutani, Society and Personality (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1961) p.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

The cocaine culture found in after hours clubs is a kind of underworld in a metaphorical sense: its location in the basements of apartment buildings, its night culture under the cover of darkness, its catering to those who are literally of the underworld criminal network. Some of the social factors inherent in the night world, the various categories and standards for conduct and behavior, are what set them apart from outsiders. After hours clubs function as an old place (historically) that offers hope for new activity. People embracing the values of their shared experiences form these social enclaves that are characterized by personal risk-taking, emotional depth, thrill seeking, personal intimacy, and continuity in time. The club is emerging in the frontier of time as a center for community action not unlike the barber shop, or the street corner once played and still does.

This study has been an exploration into the nocturnal sub-world of cocaine snorters, cocaine dealers and cocaine clubs. The habitue in this subterranean world maintains an allegiance to the night side of the city's social life rather than to the diurnal side--because his/her activity transpires between 1:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m., although the time for the habitue's activities fluctuates both when the activity begins and when it may end. Time is an important consideration because between 1:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m., most people in the city are asleep. The

night habitue share something the diurnal beings do not. They exist in two different spheres.

Conceptually, what brings the actors, rituals, plots, language, scenes, stages, fronts and drugs together is time. The after hours club is a settlement and the dealer is the outlaw in the frontier of time. It is essentially night time that they are both in operation. They operate in the wilderness of time, those unofficial hours where law enforcement is enforcing the least and where there is a strong demand by people to enter into the frontier experience. The evidence of 24-hour services, events (from all-night gay films to all-night diaper services) illustrate the demand.

The attempt here has been to explore the night world of the habitue, to understand and describe the lifestyles, the attitudes toward society, cocaine, sex and to gather some sense of the habitue's relationship with strangers, women, friends, and the whole network of actions within this sub-world. This after hours world, in many ways, defies description. The habitue is ever changing, his friendship affiliations at times non-existent, appearing at times as if everyone was a loner. There was often no norms or rules present, everything and anything was possible. The uniqueness of the after hours clubs makes it difficult to provide uniform descriptions and/or easy categories in which to place habitues.

The club maintains a therapeutic function and substitutes for other socially pressing problems. There is trust, companionship, loyalty, honesty, along with paranoia, jealousy, distrust, envy among the habitues: a range of behavior attributable to people anywhere. There is the unpredictable side to the after hours world where the habitue need not be concerned about conforming to the situation. To be unpredictable in this world is to defy roles and establish new rules of conduct that are differentiated from the institution rules and to a certain extent, the rules set up by the group.

Cocaine leads the habitue to a world of action, people, experiences and events. It is not only an illegal drug but is a way to success and respect, for the dealer, the owner of the club, the individual snorter and others involved in the lifestyle. Cocaine users develop identities throughout their interaction with each other. More often than not, the scrutiny characterized by the habitues towards strangers is done to limit and protect. Habitues come and go as they maintain a close-knit network by providing news about the daily events, the street scene, drug busts, politics of the country and the world.

Drug use has been synonymous with rebellion against society. This characterization has been especially attributed to marijuana users (hippies), LSD "acid heads," to mention a few. Cocaine users in the after hours clubs, however, are more involved in a kind of detachment and

aloofness from society rather than rebellion. There are some after hours club habitues who do not work regular jobs but rather than resent "lames" or working people, they maintain a more or less peaceful acceptance of them.

The after hours club presents the community patron with a place to satisfy forbidden pleasurable desires in a socially conceived, regulated sub-culture. These wants are not properly served by the legitimate institutions. The cocaine after hours club like the Blue Cat Cafe caters only to cocaine snorters, late-night drinkers and odd-hours workers among others in its specialized functions.

The after hours club can also be seen as a subterranean resistance to the meaning of what legitimate needs really are, and how people find illegitimate ways to satisfy illegitimate wants. The spiritualist in Latin communities provides help for many psychological disorders; this is a role psychiatrists and psychologists usually perform. The spiritualists, the "hare krishna" religious sect, abortion clinics, Reverend Moon followers and others take on an organized form because they service demands that exist and cannot be deprived of its utilitarian function. These services are not part of legitimate institutions, they must then be found in an illegitimate institution that meets the needs of a growing number of individuals in the metropolitan region.

The common characteristic of illegitimate institutions is that they satisfy some special taste for pleasure

or needs that society reflects. They, do not operate totally within the law and are in direct conflict with the legitimate distributors (Hughes 1971).

### Institutionalized Cocaine

Cocaine use has become institutionalized in both pattern and consumption in the after hours club. It is distributed and marketed for consumption there and in this sense it is the privatization of an illegal enterprise. Part of the institutionalized function is to establish social control over those members who form the cocaine sub-culture. What has been shown is how this sub-culture in an urban environment not only survived but is nurtured in the city. People with like ideas and lifestyles find involvement in sub-cultures necessary and socially rewarding. In addition, urban life intensifies sub-cultures. The number of people who support the after hours club institutions grow larger and larger every day.

The changing urban space produces a need to reconsider the interaction between rights and responsibilities of the individual and of his/her society. As the physical and emotional space between people diminish, what happens to the right to be left alone and to do what one pleases with one's own body and mind? How can these rights be reconciled with the regulatory duties of the state to protect us from drugs unfit and too hazardous for unrestricted availabilities?<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Claude S. Fischer, The Urban Experience (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1976) p.59

## APPENDIX 1

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, I was interested in cocaine culture in after hours clubs in New York City. My research methodology was largely as a participant observer. I assumed the role of a patron, looking primarily at how people use cocaine in their face-to-face relations with others. I followed no firm ground rules except to describe accurately what went on and be true to my informants. The research was replete with problems of an ethical, political and dangerous nature. The question of ethics still hounds me, although the field work has long been completed. I had no delusions about the danger involved in researching drug users and I was then, as I am now, concerned about any possible legal and legislative consequences that might transpire as a result of this study. There is one consolation, however, in the notion that people in after hours clubs have been going there and doing what they do since the days of Storyville in New Orleans. My study, hopefully, will not change that.

The Beginning of the Study

In 1974, I had conducted a small research project on marijuana users in New York for a course given by Dr. Charles Winick. The results of that study showed that marijuana dealers also snorted cocaine, and more significantly, that they had a special place in which to meet to exchange ideas, show off new paraphernalia and to specifically share in a highly expensive drug with others. I attended one of these after hours clubs with a friend before 1974, and paying no particular interest in what it had to offer sociologically, I never returned. When I completed the report on marijuana dealers, Dr. Winick was struck by the reference to the underground cocaine scene and suggested I do a brief research paper on the after hours club. During this same year, I began teaching at Rikers Island Prison, and because of some political opinions the inmates favored, I gained some invaluable informers that were to prove crucial to my study. Three of the students at Rikers, once returning to the street, contacted me and in a flurry of partying, introduced me to ten different after hours clubs during a two week period. It was in the after hours club that I met two other invaluable persons in regard to the study--Alfredo Rojas and Frenchy Charleston. In the different clubs, I was moved by their variety, both in terms of their locations in the city, as well as by their special qualities. I went to

clubs that catered to gay men and lesbian women, transvestites and sanitation workers. The ethnicities in the after hours clubs are as diverse as the city itself. Some contain essentially black clientele, others, white habitues in black/latin communities. It was common to see Italians, Asians, Blacks and Latins coterminingling in the clubs.

On a few occasions at the initiation of the research, I ventured alone down dark streets, hoping to get in without my friends. It was standard house<sup>e</sup> policy not to admit strangers, but I tried to get in by giving someone's name who I knew frequented the club. On several occasions, this was successful, and after entering, I would make it a point to make the acquaintance of the doorman. After eight months in the field, I became familiar with a doorman at a midtown Manhattan transvestite club. He assured me I was welcome to come to his "spot" (club). In the event he was not there when I arrived, I could just inform the other doorman I was a friend of his. Thus, his name was my password and it guaranteed my entry into the club. He said he knew "hundreds" of other places. Getting into clubs did not mean I had available informants, however. Quite the contrary, I had to be especially careful not to appear overly friendly or curious. I knew additionally I must interact with at least one person who "hung out" in the clubs on a regular basis. Going to these clubs unrecognized meant being sized up by the door man and being looked over by the patrons.

Inside the cocaine club, there existed a society of night people, snorting cocaine, smoking opium, marijuana, hashish, and drinking illegal alcohol--whores, pimps, gamblers, con men. It seemed like New York at its most naked. There were young boys, crap shooters, bulldikes, peddlers of marijuana, peyote, cocaine, photographers, hustlers, hipsters, doctors and dancers. The dancer with pasties and a G-string whispering, "Don't you want some of dis sugar, daddy?" while flashing her G-string back with a crisp snap. The patron with a beer and a "reefer" mesmerized, sitting at the edge of the stage.

The after hours club was only the beginning of what this study was to be concerned with. The use of cocaine by snorter/habitues led to dealers who sold the drug, and they appeared to be as significant as the club itself. On occasion, managers of clubs sold cocaine to patrons, but it was essentially the dealer who supplied cocaine to users outside the clubs in order for them to have it to give away inside. In order to supplement my understanding of after hours clubs and cocaine snorters, I conducted informal interviews with cocaine dealers and users outside the clubs. I sought to follow an illegal act to the institution in the community that allowed such behavior to take place, in order to establish a connection between cocaine and after hours clubs.

I visited thirty-three after hours clubs all totaled, most of them in Manhattan, two in the Bronx, two in Brooklyn, and one in Queens. Once I settled on the number of clubs necessary for the study (three), I sought to focus my interest in Manhattan. Because of the travel involved in commuting to Brooklyn and Queens, and because I knew habitués and the doorman at two clubs in Manhattan, I chose the Blue Cat Café as the control club to conduct the study. There were other considerations. The club in Queens was an integrated one, located in a white neighborhood. I thought I might have entry problems and indeed other difficulties arose that kept me from this location. I felt my going and coming at these late-night hours might be viewed as being suspicious by the neighbors and the police. The clubs in the Bronx, while closer, did not allow me access to them without my friends. In addition, I had no contacts within the institution, as I had in Manhattan. In the Brooklyn club, I became a conspicuous non-snorter and a bit over-zealous, in the sense that

I was staring too much and asking too many questions. One of the owners at the Brooklyn club came over to me one night and said, "Listen, my man, if you're under-cover, I got people that'll take care of all that." I was not sure whether he meant bribes or force, but I nevertheless terminated my association there after the episode. A friend of mine who calls herself "the fag's

fag hag" knew the owner of the gay club (the Bottom Club), and as a result, I had little problems in getting into the place. But getting to know the patrons was something else again. After about two months of coming to this club (initially I went to each club seven days in a row), I did not see open cocaine use, although I heard and witnessed cocaine sniffing in the lavatory, and on rare occasions, in small cubicles in the club. One night I went there, I noticed a group of four men in a corner conversing. Up to that point, very little action was going on save the embracing, dancing and sexual intimacy between men. But there was no overt ritualized passing of cocaine and this night I was hoping to see the beginning of a comparison between heterosexual cocaine snorters and gay snorters. I walked, inconspicuously, I thought, nearer to the group of men (but still about eight to ten feet away). One of the men stared up at me and I of course looked toward him. His sleeves were rolled up past his elbows and both arms revealed purple and red tatoos. After looking at me for a few seconds, he walked over and offered to buy me a drink, to which I replied evenly, "No thanks." But he went on to say, "Okay, I know I haven't seen you here before. Is this your first time?" At this point, I was comfortable enough in the place to inform him that I was a researcher of sorts and just wanted to talk. He grew red in the face, and in a loud voice, said:

Hey, get a load of this one. He wants to do research on us. You scum bag! What do we look like? Fuckin

guinea pigs? You got some nerve walking in here, talking about doing research!

At about this time, everyone was looking and staring at me, and I was, to say the least, embarrassed. After he finally cooled down, I went over to the bar. The bartender said to me, "Don't mind Wayne, he's off-duty (cop) and likes to throw his weight around."

There were incidents like these that were at once hysterically funny and at the same time, outrageously dangerous. It was these times I sought to reconsider my ethical role in this study. I thought seriously and naively at first that I should inform everyone in the club about my role. But I soon realized that was not the way to do it. I decided to be selective about who I told and to inform others once the research was completed of my findings. The latter method has proven all but impossible to do. Many of the clubs have either closed or have moved to unknown locations. Many of the habitués at the clubs have moved on, some have died, others have gone to prison. And still others moved out of the city. The after hours club has a transient quality that I was not aware of at the beginning of the study.

My initial contact with the Blue Cat Cafe was a pleasant one. My informant knew the doorman and several patrons, which made my coming back without him easier.

At the initial point in the study, I was still in the process of choosing clubs to concentrate my research interest.

The first time I went back to the Blue Cat Cafe, the door-man did not recognize me. I told him I had come with a friend of his only a few weeks earlier but to no avail. On the second visit, however, he let me in without incident. On this re-entry into the Blue Cat I met Frenchy Charleston who had just come off "vacation" (prison) and we struck up a conversation about "research" on cocaine users. Frenchy agreed to talk to me about his life in drugs. I had no idea what his "hustle" was at the time but his physical and verbal presence was striking. He stood over six feet tall, weighed about two hundred pounds and had the articulate skills of an orator. Frenchy was to prove invaluable in this study. Not only did he tell me about the "life," but he also talked about the police, women, politicians and society in general. He later owned an after hours club and this gave me added insight into the daily operations of the business. Alfredo Rojas and I met at Frenchy's "spot" (club), although they did not know each other. We met as a result of a brief discussion on, of all things, the "academy." Alfredo was discussing with a friend of his the pros and cons (mostly cons) of university education and, more specifically, the role of credentials in society. After this talk, we shared ideas on a number of topics, politics, drugs and sex. He was having a party the following week which he invited me to, and from there on we became friends.

The Quid Pro Quo in Street Research

As a researcher in the field, it was clear to me what information I needed. I needed information about cocaine, cocaine sniffers and about the night life in cocaine clubs. But as every researcher knows, there is a quid pro quo in most research situations. In other words, while it may be clear what the researcher wants, it is not always as clear what the respondent/informant wants. In his study on the speed scene, Carey (1972) noted how his "speed freak subjects" in San Francisco wanted him to give them access to drugs in return for the information about their sub-culture. In the blue collar steel worker community in Chicago, Kornblum (1974) was asked to aid in union politics. There is then this research relationship where the "respondent" attempts to get things beneficial to him in return for information given to the researcher. In this study, I was often asked to lend money, do research on trial cases, dig up information on good lawyers, hold drugs and drug paraphernalia and act as "straight" man in stressful situations.

One night at Alfredo's the phone rang and he was screaming in a loud voice to the party on the other end of the line. After he hung up, he said, "Listen a guy is coming over here to cop and I owe him money. He wants it (money) in coke. I told him I didn't have any but somebody already told him I did. Now I told him my friend was here who had some but it was expensive. All I want you to do is hold this bag (an ounce or two of cocaine), and when he comes, tell him it'll cost him \$1,500--no more, no less. Don't bat an eyelash no matter what he says or does."

These and other kinds of situations put me in a difficult position. I felt clearly this was something I should not do. But while it was not my role, I could not refuse what appeared to him a simple favor, especially if you consider he had let me witness and become privy to information that could send him to prison for life.

#### Other Research Considerations

I conducted casual interviews in the clubs, and more structured ones in the homes of patrons and non-patrons who use cocaine. I had more biographical data on Frenchy than on any of the other snorter/habitues because they feared that I could not guarantee confidentiality. I did not use real names of people or places in this study. My university background was a help rather than a hindrance in the study. I had initially felt I would be ostracized and told where to go (I was, in some cases), but on the whole, people had a "story to tell" and I was there to listen. These conversations provided me with invaluable knowledge about owners, patrons, drugs and street life in general.

Part of the data for these results were obtained from extensive lay literature on cocaine available, and also government material on the statistical numbers of cocaine users nationally, in addition to hundreds of "man-hours" of observation and conversations with dealers,

patrons and people who inject and snort cocaine. Several of those interviewed had snorted cocaine for twenty years or more. I have witnessed cocaine being sniffed with marijuana, alcohol, hashish, opium and heroin by over 2,000 people in the past two years. In essence, I have seen the most intimate portrait of this cocaine world and what it means to those who sniff, eat and inject cocaine.

## APPENDIX 2

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study must be seen in a political context because government agencies (in this case, NIDA), often use such data to further their own ends. In other words, these agencies can manipulate the data in ways they see fit. This research should not be seen as "value free" and I recognize its larger political meanings. Carey (1972) noted how we "need to consider every study of an unconventional nature as 'victims.' If it is true that our work will contribute only to the suffering of our 'respondent,' then we should be well advised to withdraw from field studies of powerless groups and focus on the 'overdog's deviance.'"<sup>74</sup>

Most of the research to date on cocaine has omitted an entire range of behavior and possible causes of cocaine use. Street myths about cocaine still need adequate documentation. Future research should also concentrate on factors in the popularity of cocaine use such as the media's role. Multi-drug use is another area of research that should be pursued.

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<sup>74</sup> James T. Carey, "Problems of Access and Risk in Observing Drug Scenes," Research on Deviance, ed. Jack D. Douglas, (New York: Random House, 1972) p.84.

## APPENDIX 3

## THE SLANG IN THE AFTER HOURS

American slang was not developed out of some exceptional gift. It was developed out of the fact that new typical situations had arisen and people needed names for them. They had to "size things up." They had to console and strike, to promise and admonish. They had to describe for purposes of forecasting. And "slang" was the result. It is, by this analysis, simply <sup>75</sup>proverbs not so named, a kind of "folk criticism."

The snorter/habitue has a vocabulary of hundreds of verbs, adjectives and nouns that punctuates his/her experiences. There are no neutral words in the argot. It is either "get down" this, "dig that," "check it out," "get hip," "cool out," or "kill me." The language gives extremely accurate descriptions of people as they exist. A "cat" who had problems hearing was called "Deaf," an excessive talker "Motor mouth," and a woman with a penchant for wigs "Wiggy." A habitue having a good time is referred to as someone "getting his jollies off."

The habitue's argot places everything into a plane of the 1970's, a space age, a hallucinogenic, mind-expanding sphere where things are geometrically "solid" or "square" or "octagon-headed." Those habitues that are elaborately

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<sup>75</sup> Kenneth Burke, Perspectives by Incongruity (University of Indiana Press, 1964) p. 106 - 107.

dressed or "high" on cocaine are either cosmically "way out there," "gone," "spaced," "wiggged out," "tripped out," "far out," or more realistically "decked out." The earth bound habitue is into the "real deal," "the struggle," "surviving," "gettin' down," or "tightening up." One habitue, speaking to another, put it succinctly when she asked, "How you doing, baby?" "I ain't doing" was the other's reply with a sly, wry frown on her face. When the habitue takes leave of the place, he "books," "splits," "spaces" or "hits the brick." "Motherfucker," "blow," "coca cola," "get down," "get yo' shit together," "the joint," and "player" are only a fraction of some of the current words frequently heard on the lips of these nocturnal night trippers.

In the night-time, the habitue shares with others the wee hours that are sensate, "something to get down behind." To "get down" is pleasurable and time is of no consequence. The habitue in his/her search for hedonistic delights use sexual innuendo to form a crucial part of their vernacular. Nouns for genitals or other sexually-related matters include pussy, cat, cunt, jaws, prick, dick, peter, gimme some, meat rack, tea room, rough trade, t.v., transie, baby pro, chicken, box, fuck, screw, jam, go down, head, ac/dc, blow, boody bandit, cream, head hunter, stuff, joint, weiner, jelly roll and thang.

The language of the habitue is comical, satirical, and truthful. To be "crazy" is an exclamation of approval.

To "grease" is to eat food. The use of this special nocturnal language developed into snobbishness, parodying the ways of diurnal culture. In the company of a "lame," the habitue knows he is scoring a point on the outsider because suddenly the "lame" is caught in a social web of night creatures speaking a strange tongue. To be "down" in the after hours is not always possible for the "lame" because the "lame" is inevitably "undown."<sup>76</sup>

The following glossary is an attempt to capture a few of the many words heard in the sub-culture.

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<sup>76</sup> for a classic article on slang, see Anotole Broyard's "A Portrait of the Hipster," Partisan Review, Vol. XV, No. 6 (June, 1948) p. 727.

## GLOSSARY

"Think with the wise but talk with the vulgar"  
(proverb)

AC/DC: a bisexual person

all she-row: the end; final; finished

baad: good; excellent

baby pro: young teenaged prostitute

black butt player: a musician who can't read music (archaic)

blast: to get high on any drug or have a good time

blow: cocaine

blow job: to perform oral sex

boo: "bambu," a brand of rolling paper

boody bandit: a person who enjoys anal sex (prison slang)

booster: a shoplifter

box: vagina

bread: money

bullshit tip: a frivolous act, as in "I got busted on a  
bullshit tip."

burn: to cheat or to be cheated

cake: money

chick: a woman

chump: a loser

clean: to be dressed elegantly

cocksucker: a woman or a man who engages in fellatio; also  
used in a derogatory way

cream: semen

crib joint: house of prostitution

dime: ten dollars

dipper: a pickpocket

drop a dime: to call the police, or more specifically, to make a phone call in a phone booth to inform

faggot: a homosexual person, usually male (derogatory)

felony shoes: sneakers

fire: to terminate a relationship

get yo' jollies off: to have fun

gimme some: to ask for sex

go down: to engage in oral sex

gone: a euphemism which means to go somewhere in an exaggerated way; to be gone would not be simply to walk, but to fly.

half-a-"O": half an ounce of any drug

head: to engage in oral sex

headhunter: a woman who enjoys giving oral sex exclusively

hit on: to approach a woman verbally in the hope of winning her favor

ho: a whore

hog: a Cadillac

jelly roll: penis

johns: male customers of a prostitute

johnson: penis

joint: marijuana cigarette; jail; an after hours club; penis

the joint: the quintessence of a "thing"; the highest quality

jook joint: a bawdy street cafe

key: a kilogram of any drug

lame: green; an outsider, newcomer or virgin in experience in life

lay low: to restrict one's activity

loose joints: sale of individual marijuana cigarettes

mark: the victim in a con game

Mickey Mouse: denotes amateurishness; a thing or situation on a low scale - "She had a Mickey Mouse game."

nickel bag: five dollars' worth of heroin, cocaine or marijuana

nickel and dime: the small time hustler; individual who has not reached the level of sophistication in the trade

octagon head: unusually dense or feeble-minded person

ofay: a white person, man or woman

one 'n one: two pinches of cocaine; one in each nostril

O-Z: an ounce

pimp steak: a hot dog or frankfurter

play: to seek approval from a man or woman by using various verbal and non-verbal cues

popped: to be arrested - "So 'n so got popped the other day coming out of Piggy's."

to pull: "She attracts the men and is considered the prize if a dude is able to pull her." This word implies motion, a form of play between men and women as opposed to "getting play," or simply "hitting on," or "rapping to," to pull is to actually "cop," that is, to secure a relationship beyond the moment

pure: the highest quality of any drug

piece: an eighth of an ounce of cocaine; a gun

pussy: vagina

rapping: random informal talk or conversation

roach: the small end of a marijuana cigarette that is almost finished; the color and shape resembles that of a New York cockroach.

scoop: a matchbook cover folded diagonally, and is used to lift cocaine into the nose; it also refers to winning a woman in an encounter.

scratch: money

set: a place; an apartment or club where people gather

short: a car

short heist: pornographic literature (prison slang)

skag cravers: heroin buyers

skimmer: hat

snort: to inhale cocaine through the nose

solid: great, all right

speedball: a mixture of heroin and cocaine that is injected intravenously

spoon: \$50 worth of cocaine; also is used in reference to heroin

square: an outsider; any newcomer who is not part of the subculture

street word: the street culture communication network

stuff player: a con game artist

tater pie: vagina

tell me something slick: to give a person new information; a form of greeting

the joint: denoting something of the highest quality

three card monte: a street con game

through gamblin': to be finished; complete

tighten up: to give or repay a favor, or simply to give someone something: money, drugs or sex

trick: customer of the prostitute

vibes: feelings between people

weight: a larger than usual quantity of drugs;  
"After buying a few ounces from Hector,  
Renaldo then came back and asked for  
weight."

weiner: penis

what it is: a form of greeting

wig: head or hair

yo: a form of greeting or way of getting the other's  
attention.

huh: to instruct the talker that what was said was not  
clear and bears repeating

uh-huh: to affirm, in other words - yes, or a guttural  
sound indicating agreement

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