

Cigarettes are No Longer Sublime

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IN 1993 US LITERARY SCHOLAR RICHARD KLEIN PUBLISHED *CIGARETTES ARE SUBLIME*, which he described as simultaneously a piece of criticism, an analysis of popular culture, a political harangue, a theoretical exercise and an ode to cigarettes. Written in part to aid his own struggles to quit smoking, the book celebrated the forms of beauty and experience that cigarettes foster and offered a counter discourse to the anti-smoking campaigns of the 'health industry' (xii).¹ From the Spanish Gypsy on the Gitanes pack to Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*, from the usefulness of a cigarette as an exposure timer for early-twentieth century photography to the solace of WWII battlefield smokes, Klein explored the culture of cigarettes, a culture which he saw as on the point of disappearing. Originally published by Duke University Press, the book was published in Britain by Picador and was praised by reviewers such as John Banville and Christopher Hitchens.

Two decades on, this article will consider Klein's elegiac account of cigarettes in the context of some of the strategies of contemporary tobacco control. After introducing Klein's text, it will focus on two aspects of the highly regulated and restricted landscape of smoking in countries such as Australia and their impact

¹ Klein continued his challenge to the 'health industry' in his next book *Eat Fat* (1996), a historical exploration of the positive aspects of fatness and a critique of contemporary obsession with the health risks of obesity.

on the meaning of cigarettes and smoking. The first is the changes in cigarette packaging which have so dramatically altered the aesthetic experience of smoking and which reached their zenith in the 'plain packaging' required in Australia since 2012. The second is the denormalisation of smoking and its impact on the social identity of smokers. Finally, the article will briefly consider the rise of the e-cigarette, an alternative nicotine delivery device which does not rely on tobacco combustion and therefore appears to be significantly less harmful than smoking. 'Vaping' (consuming nicotine via e-cigarettes) has some of the visual and sensory elements of smoking, thus raising the question of whether it will take on some of the cultural meanings and uses Klein describes in *Cigarettes are Sublime*.

The article argues that by spatially and temporally regulating the habit of smoking, and by transforming the material qualities of cigarettes, tobacco control has eroded the experiences of transcendence and moments of communication evoked by Klein. The dominant vision of the cigarette in Australia is now that of a noxious nicotine delivery device associated with a non-sublime and banal negativity. The installation of this negative vision as the truth of cigarettes is a public health triumph, as it not only reduces the appeal of smoking but reinforces the understanding of smoking as nothing more than a life-shortening and health-destroying addiction. While smokers are still able to create positive aesthetic and social experiences with cigarettes, these often take place in marginalised spaces and are frequently couched in defensive terms (McCullogh; Qian; Dwyer).

However, the gradual decline and perhaps eventual elimination of a uniquely health-damaging practice is not the only outcome of the successes of tobacco control. From the broader perspective promoted by Klein's work, the demise of smoking represents a reduction in the repertoire of communicative techniques of the body, and the loss of an eloquent visual symbol of autonomy, insouciance, seduction and reflection (see also Gastelaars; Keane, 'Smoking, addiction'). These costs may be rightly considered negligible compared to the health benefits of smoking reduction, and indeed may be outbalanced by freedom from the physical and sensory effects of environmental smoke. But Klein's claim is that the change in the cultural landscape brought about by tobacco control should at least be acknowledged as conferring losses as well as benefits. From a sociological perspective, these changes can be studied as a dramatic shift in norms of responsible civilized embodiment and the inhabitation of public space. Part of the argument of this article is therefore that work which brackets health issues in order to foreground other dimensions of smoking has an important contribution to make to studies of tobacco and nicotine consumption (for example ethnographic studies of smoking such as Dennis; Qian).

In addition, the increasing concentration of smoking among disadvantaged groups provides another impetus for a broader analysis of smoking. Being a smoker in Australia is now closely associated with class disadvantage, poverty, indigenous status and serious mental illness (Chapman and Freeman). Similar patterns exist in other high income countries. While Klein's philosophical and literary analysis does not address the relationship between the demonisation of smoking and the politics of class and inequality, social scientists have begun to critically examine this topic (Graham; Bell *et al.* 'Every space'; Warner). During the late twentieth century as smoking came to signify dirt, pollution, addiction and disease, smokers became objects of scorn and hostility, carriers of a stigmatised 'spoiled identity' (Brandt, 'From nicotine'; Chapman and Freeman). As UK sociologist Hilary Graham has argued, the devalued social status of the smoker is now inseparable from configurations of class, in particular, beliefs about the out-of-control and worthless working class body (92).

Mourning Cigarettes

In *Cigarettes are Sublime*, Klein states simply that his aim is to praise cigarettes. However his praise takes two related but distinct forms. On one hand, Klein writes that his book *attributes* a 'philosophical dignity' to the cigarette, and *lends* it 'the poetic qualities of a sacred object or an erotic one' (xii-xiii). Here the subjectivity and agency of the author is highlighted. He is actively attaching positive qualities to cigarettes or at least carrying out the interpretive work which gives the devalued object an enhanced status. On the other hand, Klein presents his work as descriptive: the object already has philosophical dignity and aesthetic virtue, and the author's role is to reveal these qualities to the late twentieth-century reader whose perception has been limited by the ideology of 'healthism'. The book is built on the elegant combination of these two authorial approaches and its appeal comes in large part from Klein's light-handed and playful wielding of cultural capital and the beauty of his language. It is not only that cigarettes are sublime, but that Klein is able to produce an experience of sublimity by writing about cigarettes. But Klein's detailed analyses of literary, visual and philosophical texts also aims to convince the reader that his book is based on an empirical truth about cigarettes: they are culturally significant, 'a crucial integer of our modernity' (xi).

For example, Klein highlights both the material role cigarettes played in the writing of *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre smoked two packs a day) and their appearance in the text as objects of philosophical reflection (30). Sartre illustrates the existence of attributes that are objective properties of things without being inherent to them by talking about cigarettes. If the cigarettes in a case are counted and come to twelve, he observes, they appear to have the objective property of being twelve. But this appearance emerges only at the

moment of being counted. Their 'twelveness' thus is not a property of the world, 'at the moment in which these cigarettes are revealed to me as being twelve I have a non-thetic consciousness of my act of addition' (Sartre, qtd in Klein 30). Moreover, as Klein points out, cigarettes have distinctive characteristics which make them ideal objects for reflections on being and consciousness. They have an abstractness and a lack of distinctiveness:

Each individual cigarette has its identity insofar as it is like every other one, mere interchangeable tokens. There is no existential, Kierkegaardian uniqueness in the individual cigarette, only an abstract Hegelian generality in which every individual is subsumed. (30-31)

Continuing his reading of Sartre, Klein highlights the appropriative function of cigarettes and the way their destruction enables the smoker to symbolically take in and possess the world. For Sartre, smoking reveals the essence of appropriation and possession, because the solid thing is turned into smoke and becomes part of the self:

Smoking a cigarette is therefore a 'sacrificial ceremony' in which the disappearance of something solid, tobacco, is infinitely compensated by the symbolic gain I acquire in appropriating to myself the world around me. (38)

Through this kind of analysis Klein makes cigarettes fascinating as objects, and provides evidence of their capacity to provoke philosophical thought. However, he also admits that his praise is deliberately and rhetorically excessive. Because cigarettes have been so denigrated, he states, it is only through hyperbole that the truth can be conveyed. Klein's invocation of the sublime is part of this strategy of exaggeration, but it also allows him to praise the pleasure of cigarettes while acknowledging that they 'are poison and they taste bad'. In a Kantian sense they are not beautiful but they are sublime, because they produce a negative pleasure accompanied by pain and fear (62). For Klein, celebrating cigarettes requires an embrace of rather than denial of their deadliness. However, while the category of the sublime acknowledges danger and fear, it is completely different from the kind of prosaic and yet devastating physical harmfulness now most commonly associated with smoking.

Klein's understanding of the addictiveness of cigarettes illustrates his vision of harmfulness as an intensifier of desire rather than its negation. He does not deny that smoking is an addiction, rather he includes the prodigious addictiveness of cigarettes as an aspect of their negative beauty (64). His analysis of Italo Svevo's novel *The Confessions of Zeno* is a meditation on the impossibility of quitting which highlights the paradox faced by the addicted smoker: 'making resolutions

to stop smoking is the indispensable condition, the *sine qua non* of continuing to smoke' (Klein 79).² The novel takes the form of a memoir written by the protagonist at the suggestion of Dr S., his analyst. Zeno writes of his smoking career and his repeated efforts to stop. But he faces the problem of 'the last cigarette' and the vow to stop which precedes it:

To stop one *first* has to smoke the *last* cigarette, but the last one is yet another one. Stopping therefore means continuing to smoke. The whole paradox is here: Cigarettes are bad for me, therefore I will stop. Promising to stop causes enormous unease. I smoke the last cigarette as if I were fulfilling a vow. The vow is therefore fulfilled and the uneasiness it causes vanishes; hence the last cigarette allows me to smoke many others after that. (Klein 91; emphasis in original)

In this way, Zeno adds the habit of resolving to quit to his habit of smoking, and the one habit enables the continuation of the other. For Klein, however, the paradox of addiction is not restricted to the resilience of habitual consumption, but instead tied to the experience of the self in time. Drawing on Sartre's discussion of the gambler whose resolution not to gamble fails as he approaches the gaming table, Klein suggests that the inability of past resolutions to act as a barrier to present desires is both a source of anguish and the essence of freedom (93-94). This provocative suggestion that addiction is not always freedom's opposite has fostered more extensive critical analyses of addiction discourse within medicine, public health and popular culture, such as in my own work *What's Wrong with Addiction?* (2002).

The culture of cigarettes celebrated by Klein is obviously a partial rendering, with an emphasis on philosophical and literary modernity. He is a scholar of French literature and in addition to Sartre and Svevo, authors such as Cocteau, Mailer, Mérimée, Baudelaire and Mauriac feature in his text. Although the Hollywood film *Casablanca* is discussed in some length, it is analysed through the work of critics Annie Leclerc and Clement Greenburg. The role of cigarettes in more recent and less refined forms of popular culture, for instance in forming and communicating the cool subjectivities of Rock and Roll and Punk, is not mentioned. While Klein argues convincingly that smoking is a discursive as well as physical act, the discourses he attends to are carefully chosen. The emphasis on cigarettes in 'high culture' allows Klein to stabilise one rather rarefied version of smoking as an alternative to public health discourse, rather than exploring the multiple and polysemic nature of the cigarette as a relatively cheap and accessible mass produced commodity. Nevertheless, *Cigarettes are Sublime* does give a strong sense of the adaptability of cigarettes and smoking. By examining war novels, for example, Klein highlights the value of cigarettes as 'tokens of a

² A more recent English translation has been published as *Zeno's Conscience* (2001).

soldier's generosity', as a form of currency, as consolation during times of fear or boredom and as a tool for heightening concentration and enabling detachment from a horrific situation (137).

Writing in the early 1990s, Klein is determined to praise cigarettes because he sees the 'beautiful culture' of cigarettes vanishing under an onslaught of contemporary Puritanism – hence he frames his book as an elegy. He locates the high point of the culture of cigarettes in the early- to mid-twentieth century, before the epidemiology of lung cancer and the addictiveness of nicotine was established. By the 1990s, when he was writing, smoking was associated with disease, dirt and compulsiveness rather than 'sociability, leisure and pleasure' (Brandt, 'From nicotine' 390).

But for the reader in 2014, the smoking landscape of the 1990s is as noteworthy for the visibility of cigarettes and their presence in public space as it is for their regulation and denigration. In 1993 when *Cigarettes are Sublime* was published, about 27% of US men and 22% of US women smoked (rates were similar in Australia) and a pack of twenty cigarettes cost less than \$3 (Jemal *et al.*; Tobacco Control Supersite). Smoking was still allowed in restaurants, bars and workplaces (although only in designated areas) and on international flights. Cigarette advertising still appeared in US magazines and tobacco companies could still sponsor sport, music and other cultural events. The US health warnings on cigarettes were small and unobtrusive. While the Australian warnings were larger and more direct, they included relatively mild warnings such as 'smoking reduces your fitness' (Tyrrell; Brandt, *The Cigarette Century*; Tobacco Control Supersite). Thus, as I explore in more detail in the following section, Klein's elegy to a lost culture now seems itself part of that lost culture. He is able to mourn cigarettes because at the time he was writing they still existed, albeit precariously, as the abstract and useful objects reflected on by Sartre and wielded so photogenically in *Casablanca*.

It should be noted that one of the claims made by Klein in relation to the sublime has not stood the test of time. He argued that because part of the appeal of cigarettes lies in their harmfulness, in the 'little terrors' invoked by every puff, the relentless condemnation of cigarettes paradoxically enhances their appeal:

The repression of smoking often ensures that when the repressed returns, it does so violently, hyperbolically. Whenever what is unhealthy is demonized it becomes irresistible, with all the seduction of vice and the fiery allure of what ought not to come to light. Censorship inevitably incites the very practice it wishes to inhibit and usually makes it more dangerously compulsive, because illicit, in the bargain. (181-182)

By understanding tobacco control as a form of repression or censorship, Klein is able to claim that the regulation and stigmatisation of cigarettes is a misguided strategy which cannot succeed in destroying their charms. In the psychoanalytic economy of repression that he invokes, prohibition produces and intensifies the taboo desire. But tobacco control has used a range of strategies that are not captured by the metaphor of censorship. Cigarettes have not been outlawed and therefore have not gained the transgressive allure which can attach to illicit substances. Rather cigarettes have been regulated and managed through a form of liberal governance that acknowledges and indeed highlights their deadliness and yet keeps them within the realm of the ordinary. Moreover, as I discuss in the following section, tobacco control has changed not only the meanings of cigarettes and their accessibility, but has materially altered their form, transforming the practice of smoking. Prevalence rates suggest that the strategies of tobacco control have not enhanced the appeal of smoking by making it taboo, but have rather made it much easier to resist, at least among large parts of the population. In Australia, the percentage of adult daily smokers is now about 13% and most smokers say they want to quit (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare).

Changing the Cigarette

Opposition to smoking on both health and moral grounds has a long history, dating back to the seventeenth century when tobacco was first introduced to European consumers (Tyrell). But the epidemiological evidence of the direct link between smoking and lung cancer which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s enabled a new form of tobacco control supported by government action and based on notions of medical risk (Berridge, 'Post-war smoking'). From the 1970s onwards a combination of increasingly restrictive tobacco advertising bans and increasingly prominent and graphic health warnings altered the cigarette and its meanings.

This change should not be imagined as a process of smooth, inexorable progress, as the tobacco industry's intense opposition to regulation, and its strategic responses to government initiatives, delayed and limited the effects of many changes (Hiilamo *et al.*). For example, billboard advertising in the United States was not prohibited until 1998, and this ban resulted in increased tobacco marketing at point of sale (Wakefield *et al.*). Nor, as Virginia Berridge has argued, can tobacco control be seen as a straightforward battle between 'heroes and villains' because attitudes and ideologies within medicine, public health and government also influenced the uptake of anti-smoking policies, at least in the UK ('Post-war smoking').

Early tobacco policy focused on individual behaviour and responsibility, for example in advertising campaigns which warned smokers about health effects and urged them to give up. Although these campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s have been characterised as merely 'friendly persuasion' compared to later strategies, they do mark a shift in the meanings attached to cigarettes and to smoking (Tyrrell). One advertisement produced by the UK Health Education Council in 1970 warned smokers of their increased risk of lung cancer under the headline 'You can't scrub your lungs clean' (Berridge and Loughlin 961). The image used in this advertisement, of nicotine stained fingers being scrubbed with a nailbrush, is characteristic of a relatively measured and non-confrontational approach to fear production. While the text tells the viewer that the potentially fatal damage to lungs from smoking can't be erased, the image depicts an everyday non-medical practice which *does* remove the signs of smoking from a part of the body. Moreover, the part of the body depicted is not directly harmed by smoking. In contrast, another advertisement in the same campaign combines the statement 'Why learn about lung cancer the hard way?' with an image of a chest x-ray showing an ominous white shadow in the right lung (Berridge and Loughlin 961). Here the image directly represents the presence of disease and the medical context in which its existence is confirmed.

These early anti-smoking campaigns also introduced a new way of representing cigarettes to connote dirt and disease. Rather than the pristine objects depicted in tobacco advertising, the cigarettes shown in anti-smoking campaigns were often half-smoked with long ash ends, or butts crushed and bent in ashtrays and surrounded by ash. They no longer invoked the promise of future pleasure and leisure, but instead represented the abjection of waste left behind after the fulfilment of a bodily function. Of particular note is a poster produced by the American Cancer Society in 1972 which superimposed the statement 'smoking is very glamorous' over a black and white close up photograph of a ungroomed, bedraggled and wrinkled middle-aged woman drawing on a cigarette. This poster, along with two others using the statements 'smoking is very debonair' and 'smoking is very sophisticated,' directly confronted the 'beautiful culture' of cigarettes represented in tobacco advertising and eulogised by Klein. In these images, cigarettes are being consumed without pleasure, in response to a base and bodily need. They depict smoking as a purely physical rather than communicative or discursive act. The documentary style photography presents ageing, poverty, unhappiness and sickness as the reality of smoking, highlighting the almost ridiculous deceptiveness of the fantasies promoted by tobacco advertising.

As negative images of smoking became more widespread and the evidence of health effects and tobacco industry maleficence mounted during the latter part of the twentieth century, cigarettes lost the abstract quality and adaptability and

utility praised by Klein. The blankness and neutrality of cigarettes which enabled them to represent philosophical concepts was overtaken by their status as the iconic 'individually avoidable health risk' (Gastelaars 470). While it can still be argued that 'every single cigarette numerically implies all other cigarettes, exactly alike' (Klein 26), the open-ended seriality of cigarettes now represents the power of smoking as an addiction that forces the smoker to continue even when she or he wants to stop.

Health warning labels which first appeared on tobacco advertisements and cigarette packets in the mid-1960s have also played a significant role in the changing nature of the cigarette, both through their content and through their effect on the appearance of the product. In a recent article Hiilamo *et al.* identified five generational categories of health warning labels, progressing from the vague and unobtrusive to the specific, prominent and graphic. Although countries took different paths through these stages, the generational model provides insight into the way warning labels altered the cigarette, and its ability to transmit a range of meanings.

An example of a first generation warning is a small label on the side of the pack with a vague statement such as 'caution: cigarette smoking may be hazardous to your health'. As well as using qualifiers such as *may* and *could* these early labels often attributed the warning to a particular governmental source, such as the surgeon general (US) or HM government (UK), rather than presenting it as indisputable fact (Hiilamo *et al.* 3). Second generation warnings mentioned specific diseases such as lung cancer although they remained small and unobtrusive (specific warnings were introduced in Australia only in the mid-1980s, and the vague 'smoking reduces your fitness' was one of the four agreed on). Third generation warnings are specific and clear messages placed on the front of packs, with increased size and visibility and the fourth generation is marked by the use of a rotating series of warnings (Hiilamo *et al.* 3).

In Australia in 1995, new regulations mandated the following series of rotating warnings: 'smoking causes lung cancer', 'smoking is addictive', 'smoking kills', 'smoking causes heart disease', 'smoking when pregnant harms your baby' and 'your smoking can harm others'. These warnings were to appear on the flip top of packs and cover at least a quarter of the face of the pack (Chapman and Carter, iii15). Each warning had an accompanying explanatory statement which was to cover a third of the back of pack. This warning regimen was the first to significantly alter the visual impact of a pack of cigarettes by disrupting the balance of the design. The warnings confined the brand logo to the bottom part of the pack and the large, black font captured the eye. The text took the form of unqualified statements (smoking kills, smoking causes lung cancer) rather than cautionary advice about possible harm. The lethality of cigarettes is highlighted,

but with a blunt facticity and inevitability that erodes the sublime and 'darkly beautiful' dimensions described by Klein.

Fifth generation warnings are those which incorporate graphic images as well as text. In Australia, pictorial warnings covering 30% of the front the pack were required from 2006 (Tobacco Control Supersite). There were 14 different warnings approved, the majority of which showed diseased organs or body parts, close up and in vivid colour. For example, the warning 'smoking causes peripheral vascular disease' showed an image of a gangrenous foot with blackened, swollen toes and necrotic flesh. The warning 'smoking causes lung cancer' is illustrated by an image of a pinkish white growth in what appears to be a bronchial tube. These warning images expand the medical realism found in earlier campaigns such as the chest X-ray poster to include the graphic representation of biological destruction or degeneration. Thus they draw from the fictional genre of body horror to invoke fear and repulsion (Radley).

The introduction of tobacco plain packaging legislation in Australia in 2012 marked a new phase in the long career of the cigarette as commodity and perhaps brought to an end the generational progression outlined by Hiilamo *et al.* The term 'plain packaging' refers to the absence of distinguishing brand features but is misleading because the packaging is anything but plain. The new packs are highly distinctive and eye-catching, and they make the difference of cigarettes from any other retail product into an instantly obvious material truth. Under the new regulations, all distinctive branding and design features are removed from cigarette packs and they become almost entirely given over to the display of high impact health warnings and images of disease and degeneration. All brands of cigarettes are packaged in the same 'drab dark brown', a colour which has apparently been found to be the least attractive, especially to young people (Thompson). At least three-quarters of the front surface is covered with the warning text and image, and the text must fill the flip top, be in white on a black background and be in bold upper case Helvetica font. The back surface is 90% covered by a warning statement, image and explanation, with the text in red on a black background. Cartons of cigarettes, pouches of tobacco and cigar tubes are subject to similar rules (Australian Government).

The packaging of cigarettes, including the colour, shape, branding and texture of packs, has been central to the appeal of smoking (hence the cover of *Cigarettes are Sublime* displays the silhouette of the Gypsy dancer on a blue background which illustrates packs of *Gitanes*). While packaging is key to the marketing of most consumer products, the tobacco industry has regarded packaging as particularly critical to its success (Wakefield *et al.*). For one thing, as has already been discussed, one type of cigarette is very much like another, thus it is branding which enables the differentiation of products into markers of

sophistication or authenticity and femininity or masculinity. This is not just a matter of visual distinctiveness. The process known in the tobacco industry as 'sensation transfer' suggests that branding, including the packaging, of cigarettes actually affects the taste. 'Smoothness' and other sensory attributes are transferred from the symbolism of the brand to the subjective experience of smoking (Wakefield *et al.*, 175; Hoek *et al.*). Indeed evidence that smokers rated cigarettes from plain packs as having a less appealing taste than branded packs was used to support the Australian government's case for plain packaging as an effective smoking reduction strategy (Thompson).

In addition, cigarette packaging is generally not discarded after opening but instead becomes a personal item, handled every time a cigarette is smoked. As a cigarette pack designer stated in 1980, 'A cigarette package is unique because the consumer carries it around with him all day ... it's part of a smoker's clothing, and when he saunters into a bar and plunks it down, he makes a statement about himself' (Koten qtd in DiFranza *et al.* 98). The pack is not only seen by the owner, it is publically visible. Thus plain packaging puts the smoker in a complicated position in relation to the practice of smoking. She becomes a transmitter of the public health message about the lethality of cigarettes through the very act of demonstrating her failure to respond correctly to this message. In a reversal of the action of the youthful portrait of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's cautionary tale, the graphic cigarette pack makes it impossible for the currently healthy smoker to escape the apparent truth of their abjection and decay. No wonder that smokers have devised different strategies to avoid association with the plain packs and that silicone covers designed specifically to 'cover the ugly plain packaging images with bright vibrant colours' are for sale on eBay (Dennis). Given the dramatic changes to the appearance of cigarette packs, it is surprising that the cigarette itself still looks almost indistinguishable from its earlier self, a plain white tube with an orangey-brown 'cork' band over the filter. However this continuity in the appearance of the object masks the transformation in its meanings.

Denormalisation and its effects

The transformation of the cigarette has not just been a matter of altering its packaging and circulating information about its health effects. Tobacco control has explicitly aimed to denormalise smoking through a wide range of programs, policies and interventions all designed to 'reinforce the fact that tobacco use is not a mainstream or normal activity in our society' (Lavack qtd in Bell *et al.*, 'Smoking, stigma'). The success of denormalisation in Australia is marked by the range of negative attributes now associated not only with smoking but with smokers. In a recent review of 'the spoiled identity of smokers' these characterisations included 'smokers as addicts', 'smokers as selfish and

thoughtless', 'smokers as malodorous', 'smokers as excessive users of public health services' and 'smokers as employer liabilities' (Chapman and Freeman 26-27).

One of the most successful forms of tobacco denormalisation has been the progressive restriction on the places and spaces where smoking is possible. The prohibition of smoking in public spaces began with public transport in the 1970s and now includes bars, pubs and outdoor recreational areas in Australia (Tyrrell). These restrictions were enabled and justified through the emergence of second-hand smoke and passive smoking as health risks. The establishment of passive smoking as a scientific fact in the 1980s, as a result of new alliances of public health, epidemiology and biochemistry, transformed smoking from a personal matter into a risk for the general population (Bayer and Colgrove; Berridge, 'Passive smoking'). While it could be argued that smokers had a right to smoke, the right to harm others could not be defended.³ Passive smoking expanded the group of innocent others harmed by smoking from fetuses and the children of smokers to anyone exposed to smoky environments (Berridge, 'Passive smoking'). It undermined the accusations of puritanism and paternalism made by critics of anti-smoking campaigns such as Klein. While Klein writes eloquently of the ability of smoking to communicate messages of desire, sociability and self-sufficiency to others, he does not mention the noxious effects of smoke on non-smokers, except to state that the danger tobacco actually poses to others is 'wildly disproportionate' to the zeal with which smoking is being repressed (15). While his avoidance of this topic is entirely consistent with his desire to praise cigarettes as a form of self-solace and mode of communication, it does circumscribe his account of pleasure and freedom.

From the 1990s onwards tobacco control policy focused on the dangers of environmental smoke, and thereby reinforced the image of smokers as sources of pollution and contamination who violate the personal space and bodily integrity of non-smokers (Poland; Bell). The research on 'third hand smoke' which draws attention to the contamination of surfaces which remains long after second-hand smoke has dissipated, furthers this image of extensive and lingering harm produced by smokers (Ballantyne).

Tobacco smoke itself has been transformed by the discourse of passive smoking. In Klein's text the insubstantial and transitive nature of smoke, its lack of clear

³ This is one of the differences between smoking and other public health issues like obesity and the marketing activities of the food industry. However, the applicability of tobacco control policies and mechanisms to 'obesity control' is currently a hot topic within public health, and there is growing body of literature pointing out the similarities between 'Big Food' and 'Big Tobacco' (Brownell and Warner; Mercer *et al.*; Klein and Dietz). According to Klein and Dietz, obesity needs to be reframed as an 'immediate threat' through notions such as 'the toxic food environment', which would highlight its parallels with an issue like smoking.

boundaries, its ability to make spaces atmospheric and intimate and its passage in and out of the body are the subject of poetic reflection. He cites a passage from a short story by Pierre Louÿs in which smoking inevitably accompanies writing and meditation:

The important thing is always to have a cigarette in hand; one must envelop the surrounding objects with a fine celestial cloud which bathes the light and shadows, erases hard edges, and, by means of a perfumed smell, imposes on the agitations of the mind a variable equilibrium from which it can fall into daydreaming. (70)

In contemporary public health the 'celestial cloud' has lost its insubstantial and ethereal nature and instead become re-categorised as a measurable substance, a precisely indexed collection of toxic chemicals which causes cardiovascular disease and cancer. It is no longer something one experiences, but something one is exposed to.

As geographers Collins and Proctor have pointed out, the issue of environmental tobacco smoke has produced a transformation in lived space. Cigarette smoke has been eliminated from many everyday spaces not just through legal bans but through the actions of private individuals who determine that their houses and vehicles will be smoke-free. Such formal and private bans clearly erode the social status of smoking and mark it as abnormal and undesirable. The success of denormalisation is demonstrated by the assumption made by smokers and non-smokers alike that indoor spaces are smoke-free, and by the self-management of most smokers in observing both formal regulations and informal norms, even when these rules are not explicitly stated. The once common request 'Do you mind if I smoke?' and the sometimes difficult personal negotiations which followed have become almost redundant within the constrained landscape of smoking. Paradoxically, one of the effects of the expansion of non-smoking space is that the 'considerate smoker', one who is careful to refrain from smoking when appropriate, takes measures to minimise the effects of smoke and responds politely to requests not to smoke, has almost disappeared as a subject position (Poland). Given the extent of regulation, the restraint of the smoker in not smoking can no longer be read as freely chosen conduct and evidence of personal virtue.

Spatial restriction has also had a devastating impact on the versatility and usefulness that is so crucial to Klein's vision of smoking. Smoking has become something that is difficult to perform, a practice that is separated from the tasks of everyday living. It therefore consumes time rather than opening up what Klein calls 'a parenthesis in the time of ordinary experience' (16). For example, instead of accompanying work and aiding concentration, smoking requires a temporal

disruption from work, relocation to a designated area and a break in concentration. The experience of relaxation and pleasure is undermined by the need to smoke in places that are marginal, unattractive and uncomfortable, such as the smoking rooms found in some airports. These spaces tend to reduce smoking to the swift consumption of nicotine, thereby confirming the image of the smoker as a desperate drug addict. They also provide a vivid visual representation of the lowered status of smokers. As Stuber *et al.* note, 'although smoke free laws are imposed on the act of smoking and not on the smoker as an undesirable type of person, one need only look at the huddle of smokers commonly seen outside public buildings in inclement weather to witness the decreased social standing of smokers relative to non-smokers' (422).

In particular locations and circumstances, smoking does continue to fulfil a range of uses, both psychological and social. A 'huddle of smokers' gathering outside a workplace or restaurant can develop a sense of solidarity, conviviality and companionship that emerges from social exclusion. And there are neighbourhoods and locales where smoking is still normal and integral to social life (Dwyer; Collins and Proctor). But these are usually disadvantaged and marginalised neighbourhoods, reflecting the distribution of smoking in the population.

The relationship between social disadvantage, tobacco denormalisation and stigma has begun to receive attention from researchers who highlight the class dimensions of smoking. This kind of analysis produces a picture of contemporary smoking which is in stark contrast to Klein's focus on the 'civilizing' properties of cigarettes and the intellectual pursuits promoted by their consumption. Smoking prevalence in high income countries has dropped over the past few decades but the reduction has been greater among high income groups, meaning that smoking is now concentrated among the poor and other disadvantaged groups such as prisoners and mental health service users (Bell *et al.*, 'Smoking, stigma'; Warner). In Australia, rates of smoking are much higher among indigenous populations than among the non-indigenous and 'smoking is increasingly a badge of unemployment, low socioeconomic status and low educational attainment' (Chapman and Freeman 27). Thus the stigma now attached to smoking as an anti-social and health-damaging behaviour exacerbates existing views about certain types of people as morally deficient and lacking in self-control. The rise of health as a site where individuals can perform ideals of prudent consumption, risk reduction and self-management provides the broader context for the disparagement of smokers. Embodied behaviours and attributes such as smoking, eating, weight and dress have taken on great significance as indicators of responsible citizenship (Peterson *et al.*). As Graham has argued, the derogatory terms applied to smokers in studies of social attitudes and stereotypes, such as ignorant, smelly, dirty, disgusting and weak-

willed, are also class labels. Thus smoking has become one of the most visible social markers which differentiate the proper, restrained middle class body from the uncontrolled and excessive bodies of the underclass.

The confluence of smoking with the devalued embodiment of the underclass obviously undermines the aesthetic qualities of the cigarette celebrated by Klein. In *Cigarettes are Sublime*, smoking often appears as a transcendental and disembodied activity, associated with thinking, writing and dreaming. In *The Confessions of Zeno* the fictional autobiographer's struggle to give up smoking is written as an extended 'fumo-analysis', a substitute for a psychoanalytic exploration of the unconscious. In other parts of Klein's book, the physiological effects of nicotine, its ability to relax *and* stimulate, are eloquently discussed, as is the capacity of tobacco to make the smoker sick. However, the corporeality of the smoker, including his need for cigarettes, is not presented as excessive or uncontrolled. In fact, in the chapter on smoking in war fiction, Klein points out the common motif of cigarettes as a defensive weapon against what is loathsome and inhuman in the soldier's situation. Specifically, soldiers are often described as using cigarettes to burn parasites and leeches off their skin. For example, in a scene from *Platoon*, a novel by Dale Dye based on the screenplay by Oliver Stone, one soldier uses a cigarette to defend a fellow soldier under attack from the gruesome parasites of the Vietnamese jungle: 'Rhah had spotted a bloated specimen on Taylor's lip and used the lit end of a soggy cigarette to force the leech to release its grip' (qtd in Klein 149). In the current landscape of smoking, the reliance on the cigarette as well as the existence of the leech could signify the extremity and inhumanity of the soldier's situation.

Concluding Thoughts: Are e-cigarettes sublime?

If cigarettes have lost their sublime qualities, as I have argued, one question is whether an alternative form of nicotine consumption will take on the symbolic, cultural and social functions of smoking. E-cigarettes, electronic devices which produce a vapour by heating a nicotine containing solution, are currently the most likely candidates for this role. Since being developed in China in 2003, e-cigarettes have had a rapid rise in popularity despite uncertainty about their legal and regulatory status (Foulds *et al.*; Bell and Keane). They are marketed as a healthier alternative to smoking and have been adopted by smokers who wish to cut down or quit their tobacco use. E-cigarettes have divided opinion in tobacco control and public health, with some experts viewing them as a form of harm reduction with 'tremendous promise in the fight against tobacco-related morbidity and mortality' (Cahn and Siegal 16). Others have concerns about their safety, as well as their potential to undermine the denormalisation of smoking and the tobacco industry (Flouris and Oikonomou).

E-cigarettes are unlike other forms of nicotine replacement in that they mimic (at least to some extent) the appearance and ergonomics of cigarettes and the sensation of smoking. While they do not produce smoke, the vapour that is inhaled and exhaled looks like smoke, and users comment positively on the pleasurable mouth and hand feel which e-cigarettes offer (McQueen *et al.*). In addition, while they are used for health reasons, they are not (yet) medicalised and not subject to packaging and labelling regulations. Some e-cigarette packs and containers resemble the cigarette packs of the pre-health warning era. Therefore, they seem to have the potential to produce some of the experiences of beauty, reflection and communication that are described by Klein.

However, e-cigarettes also have distinctive characteristics which make them unlike traditional cigarettes, and which limit their capacity to induce the special 'quality of experience' Klein attributes to smoking (6). While early e-cigarette models (sometimes called cigalikes) replicated cigarettes in size and appearance, the second generation models which are becoming increasingly popular are quite different. They are larger and more colourful and varied in design. They have different kinds of mouthpieces and manual switches which make clear their identity as personal electronic devices.

Also increasingly popular among enthusiasts are e-cigarette 'mods' or modifications, in which standard models are upgraded with new parts, often a larger and more powerful battery. These modified devices do not resemble cigarettes at all. In fact, the hobbyist aspect of vaping, perhaps seen most vividly in the internet forums in which users discuss and review products and share information on modifications, demonstrates how embedded e-cigarettes are in twenty-first-century social and cultural forms. Compared to the abstract, generic and insubstantial blankness of the cigarette, e-cigarettes are more like mobile phones in their capacity to be individualised, and yet they have a fixity which perhaps limits the messages they can express. Certainly, in current form, they cannot act as tokens of friendship, camaraderie or generosity in the same way as cigarettes have done. They are singular objects, stamped with the identity of the owner and not readily exchanged or distributed. Neither can they symbolise appropriation in the Sartrean sense, because the vaper's inhalation does not cause the solid object to gradually disappear.

While e-cigarettes offer some of the pleasures and sensations of smoking, they are unique twenty-first-century commodities which cannot replace cigarettes in the cultural contexts explored by Klein. As well as their inherently distinct properties, e-cigarettes are emerging into a landscape transformed by the regulation of smoking and thus their consumption will be moulded by this regulatory context. While the legal status of vaping in non-smoking spaces is currently unclear, legislation subjecting vaping to the same restrictions as

smoking is under consideration. Twenty years after its publication, *Cigarettes are Sublime* remains a poignant and powerful response to the dramatic social, cultural and physical transformation of smoking from civilized adult pastime to antisocial health risk. It demonstrates the benefits of studying smoking (and other forms of dangerous consumption) from a range of perspectives, including those which challenge the orthodoxies of public health.

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