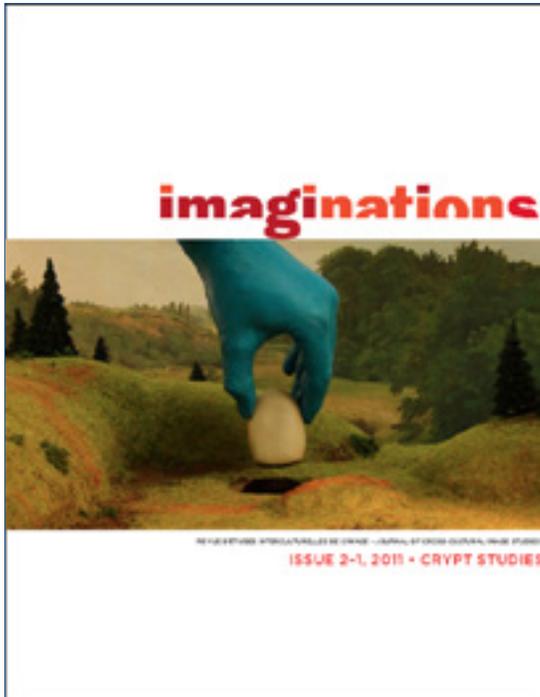


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## "Addictation Machine"

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## ADDICTION MACHINES

AUTHOR • JAMES GODLEY  
ARTIST • VALENTIN HENNIG

Entry into the crypt William Burroughs shared with his mother opened and shut around a failed re-enactment of William Tell's shot through the prop placed upon a loved one's head. The accidental killing of his wife Joan completed the installation of the addiction machine that spun melancholia as manic dissemination. An early encryptment to which was added the audio portion of abuse deposited an undeliverable message in WB. William could never tell, although his corpus bears the inscription of this impossibility as another form of possibility.

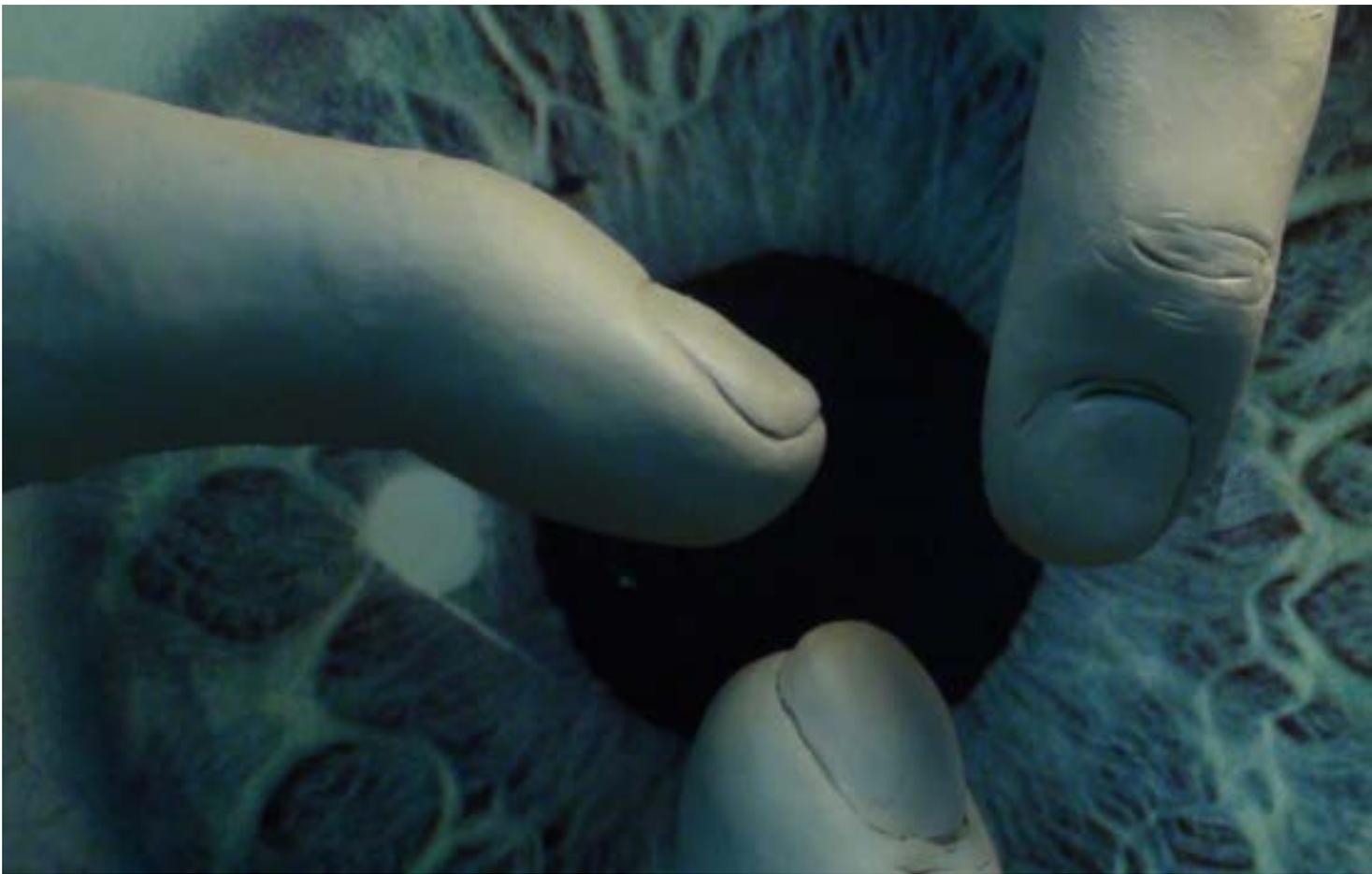
James Godley is currently a doctoral candidate in English at SUNY Buffalo, where he studies psychoanalysis, Continental philosophy, and nineteenth-century literature and poetry (British and American). His work on the concept of mourning and "the dead" in Freudian and Lacanian approaches to psychoanalytic thought and in Gothic literature has also spawned an essay on zombie porn.

Since entering the Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe in 2007, Valentin Hennig has studied in the classes of Silvia Bächli, Claudio Moser, and Corinne Wasmuht. In 2010 he spent a semester at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts. His work has been shown in group exhibitions in Freiburg and Karlsruhe.

L'entrée dans la crypte à laquelle participent William Burroughs et sa mère s'ouvre et se ferme autour d'une représentation échouée de la légende de Guillaume Tell essayant d'atteindre une pomme placée sur la tête d'un être aimé. Le meurtre accidentel de sa femme achève l'installation de la machine d'*addiction* qui file la mélancolie comme une diffusion frénétique. Un encodage précoce auquel s'ajoute une part audio de l'abus induit un message impossible à livrer en WB. William ne peut jamais le dire (*tell*), bien que son corps porte l'inscription de cette impossibilité comme une autre sorte de possibilité.

James Godley est actuellement doctorant en anglais à l'Université de Buffalo où il étudie la psychanalyse, la philosophie continentale et la littérature du dix-neuvième siècle des États-Unis, ainsi que celle de l'Angleterre. Son travail sur les concepts de deuil et des « décédés » de la psychanalyse freudienne et lacanienne dans la littérature gothique sert d'inspiration pour un article au sujet de la *zombie porn*.

Valentin Hennig s'inscrit à l'Académie des beaux-arts de Karlsruhe en 2007. Il étudie sous la direction de Silvia Bächli, de Claudio Moser, ainsi que de Corinne Wasmuht. En 2010, il étudie à l'École d'enseignement supérieur des beaux-arts à Dresde. Ses œuvres apparaissent dans des expositions collectives à Freiburg et à Karlsruhe.



## I.

The format of *Naked Lunch* and of its predecessor, *Queer*, consists of what the author called “routines:” short, satirical narratives which, somewhat like vaudeville routines, depict larger-than-life characters in situations of exaggerated violence and eroticism. However, this emphasis on drama derives from trauma, specifically Burroughs’ shooting and killing of his common-law wife Joan Vollmer during a “William Tell act.” This event, which he later claimed instigated his commitment to a career in writing, is transferred to *Naked Lunch* in the form of routines that carry out, under their veil of dark humor, attempts to master the traumatic effects of the killing and to answer for them.

In September 1951, Burroughs was infatuated with Lewis Marker, a 19-year-old expatriate attending Mexico City College (Burroughs, *Word Virus* 40-41). At first responsive to Burroughs’ sexual advances, Marker agreed to accompany him on an expedition to South America in search of the hallucinogenic vine *yagé*. At the end of their trip, now put off by Burroughs’ longing, Marker returned home separately. A few days later, Burroughs, back in Mexico, had some drinks with Joan at an acquaintance’s loft, where, to Burroughs’ surprise, Marker was also present. Joan, who knew of the affair, and who had grown increasingly weary of Burroughs’ prolonged absences and neglect of his parental responsibilities to their two children, made withering remarks and jokes about Burroughs’ love of guns, among other subjects. At some time during the course of the party, Burroughs suggested to Joan that the two of them “show the guys what kind of shot old Bill is,” and they staged what Burroughs called a “William Tell act.” Joan put her gin glass on top of her head and stood at the far end of the room, whereupon Burroughs took out his revolver and shot her in the head, killing her instantly (Burroughs, *Word Virus* 41).

The “act,” simultaneously performance and traumatic reality, revealed itself to Burroughs as a spontaneously composed routine which had, as its express purpose, the murder of an intimate enemy. James Grauerholz, Burroughs’ adopted son and personal secretary, makes the case for the confluence of Burroughs’ killing with an

earlier trauma: “[A]ll his life Burroughs had a dark fascination with ‘possession’ by malign spirits; his dread of possession may have had its roots in a childhood molestation by his nanny” (Grauerholz 70). The nanny, Mary Evans, brought a four-year-old Burroughs with her on an excursion to the local park, where they met up with Mary’s boyfriend who, at Mary’s urging, forced the boy to fellate him (Morgan 31). Burroughs’ mother probably discovered something was off, because Mary was soon asked to leave. Yet the act was never conveyed to his father.

The question of what the father knew proved to be a point of impasse in Burroughs’ psychoanalytic treatments, typified by his continually returning to, then blanking out on the molestation. At the time of one of his last treatments, Burroughs became desperate for the affections of his roommate, Jack Anderson (Morgan 74-75). In a desperate plea for attention, he performed a “Van Gogh act,” cutting off his pinky finger with a pair of poultry shears. He then immediately presented the finger to his analyst, Herbert Wiggers. Burroughs’ biographer Ted Morgan assessed the event as the expression of the need, after the molestation, to tell his father, whereby the giving of the finger amounted to the (negative-transferentially inflected) ‘telling’ (Morgan 75).

Laura Lee Burroughs believed she could communicate with the dead, and occasionally had prophetic visions and dreams (Miles 21). All his life, William not only believed wholeheartedly in his mother’s telepathic and prophetic powers, but believed that he sometimes possessed these abilities himself. The choice of the name William Lee as *nom de plume* for his first two novels carries forward Burroughs’ maternal identification into the career choice that coincided with the William Tell act, in which the untold act was also stowaway. While writing *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs recalls a certain “feeling” he had the day Joan died, and traced it back to a sense of fear and despair that came over him “for no outward reason” when he was a child. As Burroughs writes to Allen Ginsberg:

I was looking into the future then. I recognize the feeling, and what I saw has not yet been realized. I can only wait for it to happen. Is it some ghastly occur-

rence, like Joan's death, or simply deterioration and failure and final loneliness, a dead-end set up where there is no one I can contact? I am just a crazy old bore in a bar somewhere with my routines? I don't know but I feel trapped and doomed. (Miles 76-77)

William paints himself in the exact colors he used to describe his mother: someone deeply sad, who can only helplessly await his doom, which he foresees approaching: "She suffered from headaches and backaches, and there was something deeply sad about her, as though she expected doom to arrive at any moment" (Morgan 26). To Ginsberg, Burroughs explicitly admits he "had the same feeling the day Joan died," and that this feeling is linked to a specific point in his childhood (possibly the molestation, though the event is never mentioned). Having withdrawn from drugs and temporarily unable to write the routines that kept mourning at bay, Burroughs reaches out to Ginsberg in a state of excited, even desperate urgency. Ginsberg's characteristic maternal reassurance, however, inevitably fails to meet the demand of such a charged transference request. Thus, Burroughs' implacable demand creates the setting for a third correspondent to intervene, whose apparitional form rises to the surface as "ghastly" or ghostly recurrence threatening to leave Burroughs in a state of "final loneliness"—abandoned even, or especially, by his dead.

Burroughs' references to his mother seem to follow from the image of a powerfully far-sighted, but ultimately helpless, martyr. In *The Western Lands*, Burroughs de-

picts his mother once again as an estranged and expectant spectator: "Outside a Palm Beach bungalow waiting for a taxi to the airport. My mother's kind unhappy face, last time I ever saw her" (42). The next two sentences drop the sentiment: "Really a blessing. She had been ill for a long time" (42). The illness that Burroughs refers to is not a physical condition, but a period of senility following the death of her husband (Miles). Thus, in his beatific impression of Laura Lee the real blessing, in the end, is that she ends. Symbols of departure—the taxi, the airport—promise to expedite her towards the land of the dead, whose uncanny persistence, in this world, was symptomatic of an illness that afflicted her son as much as herself.

The style of Laura's unmourning can be detected in the series of flower-arranging books she produced for Coca Cola in the 1930s. In one, she describes her home: "It boasts no priceless furniture nor art treasures. Everything about the room is a background for flowers" (Rae). Flowers, long associated with the dead (in the pastoral tradition for instance), also represent, when arranged, one of the arts of the mortician. That she places flowers so resolutely into the foreground, in a setting otherwise devoid of emphasis, indicates a certain excess of commemoration. The family appears threatened by the floral invasion: "For years, my flower decorations in the making were a source of annoyance to my family. My efforts in the kitchen always seemed to time with the advent of a pie" (Rae). With a pie in the ascendant,



a more appetizing maternal introject, Laura can stow away the corpse meat, which, otherwise, the family feels she is trying to get under their skin. In his journal entry five days before the fatal heart attack, Burroughs writes:

So when I get to Lex—my mother screaming behind me she had some idea I should go to a private nut house—and I said: “All I need is [a] withdrawal cure. Period.” And she was very annoyed by me and Joan taking the bull by the horns and opting for Lexington. Mother said about Joan: “She was just like a *tigress*.” She said no to any enforced confinement. She was right there, and other where’s and there’s. What can I say—Why who where can I say—Tears are worthless unless genuine, tears from the soul and guts, tears that ache and wrench and hurt and tear. Tears for what was— (Grauerholz 70)

The withdrawal cure with which Burroughs answered his mother, the separation he needed from her, was never successful. Mourning and withdrawal on one side thus compete with the mother and addiction on the other. In between, Joan stands as the substitute that, “taking the bull by the horns,” falls under the sign of the father, enabling withdrawal and mourning. The “tears” of mourning mirror the ache and wrenching hurt of withdrawal, but they are not genuine. The cure never goes through; mourning is refused.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the act named after William Tell is that it committed Burroughs to fire by proxy at the head of his own fatherhood, the sign or son of the internal father. Part of Burroughs’ own sadism, besides the obvious and spectacular instance of his wife’s murder, would be carried out on Billy Jr. who, at four years, was the same age as his father and namesake when he was abused by the nanny. Bill Jr., writer of *Speed* and *Kentucky Ham*, was consequently (as he put it) “the shattered son of *Naked Lunch*” (*Cursed* vii). As he grew up, Billy would come to soak up his father’s crimes with booze and painkillers, essentially living out the life sentence his father skipped out on. Burroughs Jr. underwent a liver transplant operation when he was thirty, which, between the lines, dislodged the crypt. A case report, from the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, notes with fascination that Bill Jr. begins to see the new

liver as “a separate entity” (*Cursed* v). At first, the liver is felt to be “an alien piece of meat,” but soon he “began to feel he was ‘married’ to it; and in response to his surgeon’s mention of ‘foreign tissue,’ he replied, ‘that’s a hell of a way to talk about my new wife’” (*Cursed* v). The report continues: “He thought he had been given life a second time by the donor, who now existed inside him ‘by proxy’ as a separate entity” (*Cursed* v). Inside Bill Jr., the anonymous donor lives on in the organ of living on, the “liver,” and soon subsumes a certain occupancy already established: “At this point, he began to wear an earring that contained the engraving of the Virgin Mary. This concrete representation of the amalgamation of his mother and the donor (who was named Virginia) served as a talisman against damage to the transplanted liver” (*Cursed* v).

## II.

The agency of Burroughs’ haunting is what I am calling, under an emblematic heading, the addiction machine, whose three terms—addiction, dictation, and the adding machine—circumvent, through a combined operation, sublimation and repression, in favor of a fictive autonomy that ‘lives’ in place of the subject. This construct, in turn, serves as a cipher for the system Burroughs represents and projects in the image of the viral technological enterprise of capitalism, an image at once dreaded as intensely persecuting and idealized as the status quo that protects and comforts.

Burroughs’ addiction machine would not achieve its terminal, delusional form until after the writing of *Naked Lunch*, whereupon he began a series of intensive writing experiments in order to thwart a powerful virus he believed operated through a select group (including the CIA and the Narcotics Bureau), allowing them to manipulate the thoughts, actions, and emotions of the general population through the transmission of written language and telepathy. Eventually, Burroughs attributes the name “the Ugly Spirit” to this alien, infecting agent, theorizing that it originated with females, and was transmitted initially through a kind of vampiric sexual seduction. In *The Western Lands*, protagonist Kim Carsons is sent to investigate “what caused the Egyptians to go wrong and get bogged down with mummies and the

need to preserve the physical body” (74-75). The secret, Kim discovers, is that the Egyptians “had not solved the equation imposed by a parasitic female Other Half who needs a physical body to exist, being parasitic to other bodies” (75). The viral female diverts human evolution from the “natural state” of homosexual physical and spiritual union, the only means by which the immortal afterworld of the Western Lands can be reached. “We have been seduced from our biologic and spiritual destiny by the Sex Enemy” (75). Thus, on one side, heterosexuality, language, and telepathy take turns controlling the male subject as an invading feminine entity, mother or ‘mummy,’ causing him to experience unwanted bodily sensations and to conform to a disastrously destructive apparatus that enslaves the world’s population. On the other side, homosexual “contact” is idealized as a total union promising immortality, without the infirmities of the physical body or the ravages of age.

When Burroughs began his obsessive work on the cut-ups, which attempted to exorcise the “Ugly Spirit” he believed was inhabiting him, his writing hooked into techno-mediatic extensions, at first as analogies to his writing process, then as a literal mode of dictation (via tape recorders, film, and automatic writing). As Ginsberg describes, “the cut-ups were originally designed to rehearse and repeat his obsession with sexual images over and over again, like a movie repeating over and over . . . and then recombined and cut up and mixed in; so that finally the obsessive attachment, compulsion and preoccupation empty out and drain from the image” (Miles 138). Yet what Ginsberg, recalling Burroughs’ own descriptions, was analogizing, was, as biographer Barry Miles observes, far more elaborate in practice:

Like a routine taken to its ultimate end, Burroughs now suspected that the entire fabric of reality was artificially conditioned and that whoever was doing the conditioning was running the universe, like an engineer running a cinema soundstage with tape machines and films. He assumed that all reality, sight, taste, smell, sound and touch was some form of hallucination and that these apparent sensory impressions were programmed into our bodies. It was another variant on the search for the controllers, the search for the Ugly Spirit that had made him kill Joan. (139)

However valorizing, Ginsberg’s response to Burroughs’ growing delusional system, nonetheless, pinpointed its device of origin: “Ginsberg attributed much of it to the same Burroughs inventiveness which enabled his grandfather to invent the adding machine” (Miles 139).

William Burroughs, the grandfather, invented the first reliable prototype of the adding machine, which used hydraulics to regulate the pressure exerted on the handle pulled by its users to calculate basic arithmetic operations (*Word Virus* 3). The Burroughs Adding Machine Company prospered well into the 1920s, and the money from Mortimer Burroughs’ (the author’s father) share in his father’s company kept the family upper-middle class during the Great Depression. The image of the adding machine, therefore, evokes stability, even constancy; its operations are repetitive, yet easily manipulated. It serves as a quintessential prototype for an influencing machine, the common delusional imago of paranoid psychotics that Victor Tausk studied in his famous essay, and which Rickels relies on for his excavation of Artaud’s theater of cruelty.

The influencing machine appears when an attempt is made to resolve “an out-of-phase alternation between projection and identification” (Rickels, *Aberrations* 150). Like drugs in Avital Ronell’s reading of *Madame Bovary*, which provide “a discreet if spectacular way out” of deadlocked identifications (60), the influencing machine purveys the possibility of a new autonomy. Essentially, the influencing machine takes the whole psychic apparatus, as it is organized around the projection of sense organs and skews it, while retaining the complexity of the psyche’s functions. For his case illustration, Tausk presents his patient, Natalija A. Like Burroughs, Natalia A. writes in the mode of live transmission, as if by dictation: for many years she has been “writing everything down in lieu of her absent hearing” (Rickels, *Aberrations* 149). In analysis, Natalija gradually reveals the shape and scope of a delusional structure that administers identification with a persecutor “such that everything the enemy wants and does happens to the victim” (Rickels, *Aberrations* 149). From this position, a period of intense sensations of alteration follows, which eventually becomes projected or externalized as an all-powerful machine. In time, “enemy agents, often



physicians and professors, crowd the projection booth” and are granted control over the subject “to the extent that they always demand, and usually obtain, transfer of libido onto themselves” (Rickels, *Aberrations* 149).

Burroughs’ history on the couch (with Freudian, Jungian, and Reichian analysts) transfers, in his novels, into the manipulation of thought by those who employ, among other methods, psychoanalysis as part of an elaborate process of rendering subjects susceptible to suggestion. In *Naked Lunch*, Dr. Benway, a former psychoanalyst, is introduced, in different places, as a practicing surgeon and “a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control” (19, 51). As with the doctors and professors at the controls of Natalija’s influencing machine, Benway uses a delusional system to

invade and indoctrinate his subjects’ thoughts, which he also, often sadistically, intends to ‘protect.’

The supervision the addiction machine administers as regression or suggestion causes Burroughs to lapse into a state of radical alterity in which, as is the case with Natalija, “narcissistic libido and object libido are opposed” to such a degree that even the maintenance of “sexual preference and identity” become unhinged (Rickels, *Abberations* 149). Dr. Benway recalls the case of a female agent “who forgot her real identity and merged with her cover story” (24). This turns him onto the idea that agents can be made to repress their actual identity behind the fiction they are compelled, by necessity, to repeat. Thus, “his agent identity becomes unconscious, that is, out of his control; and you can dig it with drugs and hypnosis” (24). Intoxicants and

mind control thus take turns revealing and manipulating a secret agency that becomes totally dependent on the narcotic power of the interrogator, to the extent that sexual object choice, too, is assigned by an omnipotent other: “You can make a square heterosex citizen queer with this angle” (24). The threat implied in this reversal, that it transfers autonomy to another scene, is urgent enough for Burroughs to wonder whether the “lifelong addiction to a cellular cover” could ever be removed (275). Burroughs describes his self-state under the influence of addiction as a ‘cover,’ such that “when the cover is removed, everything that was held in check by junk spills out” (*Word Virus* 90). The cover is an elaborate construction and includes, to some extent, gender identifications and sexual object choice: “[H]omosexuality is the best all-around cover an agent can have” (*Naked Lunch* 180).

However, prior to projection and identification, Tausk theorizes an “inborn narcissism,” according to which the infant, entirely a sexual being, is, in effect, a body-genital (Rickels, *Aberrations* 150). Organs and their functions retain this vulnerable position when battling the progression of the ego as and in relation to the outside world. This “inborn narcissism,” a polymorphous Inter-zone of self-relations, lacks the facility to distinguish the boundaries between inner and outer realities. In a tight spot, the influencing machine constitutes the sort of cover story that the protective sheath of addiction also provides: “[B]y succumbing to an influencing machine, the schizophrenic casts out an emergency projection of his own body to circumvent regression” to inborn narcissism (Rickels, *Aberrations* 150). In *Naked Lunch*, addiction allows its subjects to stagger forward as junk-sick reflections of the body, pursuing a purpose alien to the ego’s sense of its own agency or identity.

Burroughs describes the process of finding a “useable vein” in a way analogous to the operation of a recording medium: “The body knows what veins you can hit and conveys this knowledge in the spontaneous movements you make preparing to take a shot . . . Sometimes the needle points like a dowser’s wand. Sometimes I must wait for the message. But when it comes I always hit blood” (*Naked Lunch* 56). The “message” he “must wait for” recalls the picture he has of his mother in the

receiving position “as though she expected doom to arrive at any moment” (Morgan 26). Thus, the message from the medium of junk is also his mother, the medium’s message of doom that she transmits to her son via the “Man Inside,” the pusher at the controls guiding the addict’s movements. If Lee is off his mark by a few days or a few grams, he either risks being totally devoured by the melancholic introject (suicide by overdose) or submitting to the withdrawal pains of mourning. Suspended between the threats of suicide and murder on one track, and libido and destrudo, on the other, addiction keeps him safe from himself in the meantime, the time of waiting.

### III.

In an audio recording, “The Last Words of Hassan Sabbah,” Burroughs interrogates his paternal name, as if it had been withholding some secret that had to be thrown into the visible world like a techno-mediatic projection: “All right, Mister Burroughs, who bears my name and my words, bear it all the way, for all to see, in Times Square, in Piccadilly. Play it all, play it all, play it all back! Pay it all, pay it all, pay it all back!” (“Last Words of Hassan Sabbah”). Both the adding machine and the name ‘Burroughs,’ which pays while it plays, keeps a record of gains and losses that, upon demand, must release its invisible calculations before the public it has manipulated.

In Rickels’ reading of Freud’s case study of Ratman (“Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis”), the rejection of the patronymic (rather than his identification with it) resulted in Ratman’s adoption of the “rat” totem as the heading for guilty payments to the dead father which never suffice to balance the account of death wishes which endlessly circulate and rebound without destination (*Aberrations* 163). For Burroughs, the unpayable debt is symbolized in the signifying constellation of the adding machine. In an economy of scores and hits, pushers and marks, adding machine and addiction perform a combined operation, tabulating the effectuality of the dose, appropriating loss into every calculation or addition. Burroughs calls this the Algebra of Need:

If you wish to alter or annihilate a pyramid of numbers in a serial relation, you alter or remove the bottom number. If we wish to annihilate the junk pyramid, we must start with the bottom of the pyramid: the Addict in the Street, and stop tilting quixotically for the “higher ups” so called, all of whom are immediately replaceable. The addict in the street who must have junk to live is the one irreplaceable factor in the junk equation. When there are no more addicts to buy junk there will be no junk traffic. As long as junk need exists, someone will service it. (*Naked Lunch* 201-02)

The only way to cancel the debt is by removing the “bottom number” of the equation. Burroughs’ solution threatens the commercial enterprise that profited his grandfather, who, by careful calculation (before he started his adding machine company he was a bank clerk), made himself a ‘higher up’ on the money/junk pyramid by producing a machine that computed “serial relations.” But William Burroughs II, the addict in the street, not in addition or serial relation to his paternal line, removed himself from the patronymic, calling himself by his mother’s maiden name for his first two novels.

The pyramid scheme, indeed a pharaoh’s or father’s tomb, consists of an interment, at the bottom level, guarded by many levels of elaborate traps, snares and false exits that mimic the effects of the devouring mouth. In *Naked Lunch*, addicts are prone to a thousand horrible fates: they overdose, they become absorbed in someone else’s body, or they get shot, lynched, burned alive, tortured, mind-controlled—and always to someone else’s profit (until the addicts, themselves, also succumb to some grisly fate). Each successive layer of power (or the autonomy and exercise of power, because ‘hooked,’ is always only an illusion) depends on its subsistence by devouring and assimilating the lower levels, such that the only way to break out of the junk pyramid is to remove the bottom layer. Taking out the bottom, expelling it, follows an anal reception of withdrawal and rehabilitation. Under the *aegis* of renewed sphincter training, the addict can learn to let go of his oral dependency. The “talking asshole,” as introduced by Dr. Benway, thus appears as a prescription (by a former psychoanalyst forcibly expelled from the Vienna

Circle). But it also doubles as a proposed antidote to maternal encryption, an “all-purpose hole” that evacuates what it incorporates (110).

Like cartoons and comics, Burroughs’ Hieronymus Bosch-like anthropomorphic and physically inverted figurines—Mugwumps, monster centipedes, the talking asshole—all follow the fecal re-routing and lubrication of identifications with the pre-Oedipal or primal father. Caricature, as Rickels argues by way of Ernst Kris’ *Psychoanalytical Explorations in Art*, is aimed at the libidinous satisfaction of aggressive impulses, which “allows for more bearable acceptance of father down the laugh track” (*Vampire Lectures* 276). Adding to the store of the ego’s techniques for getting around and getting along with the strictures of the paternal superego, these comic inscriptions were originally conceived via caricature’s “autoplastic ancestor,” the grimace (Rickels, *California* 40). The psychotic defends against a foreign body’s immanent takeover through repeated grimacing before his own mirror image, a routine of trying on different personae: he attempts to save “face by making faces which, like apotropaic masks, also ward off the demons” (Rickels, *California* 44).

The donning of faces, masks, or alter-egos is thus an attempt at stabilizing the psychotic’s fragile contact with an outside world, protecting him from impending threats of possession. In *Naked Lunch*’s “Post-Script” Burroughs writes:

Sooner or later the Vigilante, the Rube, Lee the Agent [...] Doc Benway, “Fingers” Schaefer are subject to say the same thing in the same words, to occupy, at that intersection point, the same position in space-time. Using a common vocal apparatus complete with all metabolic appliances—that is, to be the same person—a most inaccurate way of expressing Recognition: the junky naked in sunlight. (186)

Note that the point of *cathexis*, or occupation in “space-time,” of these prosthetic personae requires an artificial medium for speaking rigged to a technologized metabolism of “appliances” or serviceable organs. The effect of this technological reordering of the body then expresses “recognition” as inaccurate, as a foreign body illegible to the other’s readout. This foreign antibody left “naked

in sunlight”—the un-key—links up the son with the father watching him through the mirror:

The writer seeing himself reading to the mirror as always . . . He must check now and again to reassure himself that the Crime of Separate Action has not, is not, cannot occur . . . Anyone who has looked in the mirror knows what this crime is and what it means in terms of lost control when the reflection no longer obeys . . . Too late to dial *p o l i c e* . . . (186)

The demons threaten to take possession, if reading the mediumistic message to the mirror succeeds in finding recognition—in making the specular image a spook or dead junky.

Burroughs’ “talking asshole” routine represents an attempt to short-circuit the possessing entity’s manipulations by removing the self from the field of the father’s influence. This is what Artaud attempts in his theater of cruelty when he breaks from “the dictation-dictatorship of phonic linearity” by producing an alternate transmission of linguistic meaning (*Naked Lunch* 135). Instead of making ‘sense’ in a linear way, Artaud would “recycle the refuse of language . . . including the lapsus, the stutter, and . . . even the rumbling of the stomach and other sounds” (*Naked Lunch* 135). Similarly, the talking asshole delivers its messages on a “gut frequency;” its speech emerges synaesthetically, as “a bubbly thick stag-

nant sound, a sound you could *smell*” (*Naked Lunch* 111). The smell-sound provokes an internal reaction in the listener, to the extent that hearing the asshole speak is also an auto-auscultation: it “hit you right down there like you gotta go” (111). Even before the anecdote begins, Benway’s associate, Dr. Schaefer complains that he cannot get a certain “stench” out of his lungs. This mysterious, stinky internalization, like a rotting corpse, leads Schaefer to bemoan the “scandalous inefficiency” of the human body, with a mouth and anus that can get “out of order” (111). Instead, why not “seal up nose and mouth, fill in the stomach, make an air hole direct to the lungs where it should have been in the first place?” (111). If this were the case, after all, no poisons or corpses would ever be incorporated, and nothing that was already being retained would ever have to be let go. Thus, what has been incorporated is not being properly metabolized, leading Schaefer to fantasize “one all-purpose hole to eat and eliminate,” in effect, a process of internalization less subject to aberrant, secret transformations and mysterious blockages (111).

Insofar as the working-through of loss necessarily involves active psycho-somatic metabolization, the “all-purpose hole” excludes mourning altogether. In the story, the man’s asshole not only takes over his speech, speaking for him, but also dispossesses him of eating and digestion. The anus develops “sort of teeth-like lit-



tle raspy incurving hooks,” then tells the man “we don’t need you around here anymore. I can talk and eat *and* shit” (110). But, watch the slip: the “we” that the asshole drops blows the cover of a secret encryptment. The asshole turns on the man, takes over his bodily functions, and develops a parasitic growth, a “virus” that grows until it effectively destroys the man, paralleling the way Burroughs once described his routines: turning on him, growing more insane, a “literal growth like cancer” (Miles 75).

Rickels follows Karl Abraham’s theory of archaic mourning down to the close-range distinction between the divergent ways in which melancholia and paranoia preserve lost objects:

The Urmund, especially the anus with teeth, opens onto the anal/oral recycling system of archaic mourning which, veiled by resistance to chewing or biting, is lodged, according to a logic of double projection, inside paranoia. The aperture of paranoid projection is thus the anus: whereas the melancholic’s introjection of the lost object is oral and, hence, total, addressing the entire corpse which must be swallowed whole, intact and undisclosed, the paranoid incorporates anally only body parts. (*California* 141)

The talking asshole’s “raspy, little incurving hooks” develop (as combined biting-mouth and anus) in order to break apart the distrusted objects it incorporates. At first, the man dictates to the asshole what lines to use and when; then, after a while, when this ventriloquism becomes habit or routine, the asshole stokes the current of addiction and takes over.

The staging of the routine was inspired by a barker at the flesh fair: “He had a number he called “The Better ‘Ole” that was a scream” (*Naked Lunch* 111). The B movie reference Burroughs makes in this allusion is a primal scream of cinema. As only the second full-length sound picture, “The Better ‘Ole,” starring Syd Chaplin (the shadowy older brother of the silent Chaplin), used the short-lived Vitaphone method of recording sound on a disc that was separate from the film reel (as opposed to ‘live’ synchronous recording, Frisioe). The film premiered a year before the *Jazz Singer*, the first formal “talkie.” The “‘Ole” in the title refers to the foxholes of

World War I (a line in the film goes: “If you know of a better ‘ole—go to it!”); but of course, Burroughs recognizes its other scene. Talking cinema, like speech itself according to Jones, premieres from the other orifice that the oral, respiratory function supersedes only secondarily. Burroughs’ blueprint for surviving in the midst of the addication machine’s persecutions also parallels the advance of sound into cinema. In the case of both cinema and the talking asshole, a mere accessory to the specular realm ‘takes over,’ becoming:

the sex that passes the censors, squeezes through between bureaus, because there’s always a space between, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness, spurting out like breaking boils, throwing out globs of that un-D.T. to fall anywhere and grow into some degenerate cancerous life-form, reproducing a hideous random image. (*Naked Lunch* 112)

From sound to sight, America exhibits, in the anal underworld of B cinema and popular songs, something that rots away at the foundation.

Thus, what starts as a private affliction, a secret burial lodged in the anus of a subject unwilling or unable to mourn, becomes an unstoppable force, a viral pandemic, that infects through technical-mediatic outlets, turning millions into corpse-carrying machines. This, in sum, is Burroughs’ great fear for the planet: that it will be overrun by what are, essentially, zombies. The cold, inhuman part of us that exerts its influence most palpably when we are dependent on ‘substances’ (like zombies hooked on brains) is also the part of us that would wish or strike dead the parts of ourselves that exert autonomy of any sort (especially libidinal). The addication machine, finally, is not entirely within Burroughs, but is an entity that exists in the Interzone between psychical and social reality—in culture at large—whose imminent takeover promises to be irrevocable and final.

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