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From Need to Needle: "The Cult of Addiction" in William Burroughs's *Junky*

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ABSTRACT

Toward the end of *Junky*, William Burroughs makes it quite clear that he is going southwards to Colombia in search of yage, allegedly a sure warrant of "uncut kick" (152). With the novel first published in 1953, this journey of Burroughs' appears to herald the upsurge of the Beat generation in the late 1950s and the early 1960s in the States. As Greg A. Mullins indicates, he even becomes "an icon of underground drug culture" during the Beat movement (49). Accordingly, it leads to a violent alteration of the cultural code, from submission to counter-institutional gestures. Drug, then, serves as an avatar of one of the gestures, giving rise to the cult of addiction that promotes this substance for the sake of reinvigorating the long repressed selves. However, as psychoanalytic reading of addiction shows, drug may be glorified only if dominance of the death drive is a cultural aspiration. So, this paper aims to look into the cult of addiction as depicted by Burroughs, to clarify the meaning of "uncut kick" in sub/cultural contexts and what it can bring about to one's psychic infrastructure—finishing with holding individual subjectivity in abeyance.

Keywords : William Burroughs, *Junky*, cult of addiction, need, drive, desire.

求「針」以為「生」：
巴羅茲小說《毒蟲》中的「癮物崇拜」

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摘　要

中文摘要：巴羅茲於小說《毒蟲》末尾裡表明，他即將南下哥倫比亞尋找一種名爲「耶局」的蔓生植物（yage 音譯，可泡製成致幻飲料），因其據傳是「通體過癮」的確切保證（152）。小說是一九五三年問世的，所以巴羅茲的此趟旅程顯然預告了「垮掉世代」的到來。而如穆林斯所言，他甚至變成整個垮掉運動中代表「地下藥物文化的聖像」（49）。這個運動採取了一連串反抗制度的舉動，不再順從傳統，隨之而來的是對於文化符碼的強行改造。具體行動之一便是訴諸藥物以之鼓舞長久以來受到壓抑的自我而形成所謂的「癮物崇拜」。然而，由精神分析的理論視之，癮物之所以能夠受到讚揚的前提是死亡驅力必已形成文化上的想望。所以，這篇論文將探索巴羅茲筆下人物對於藥物的膜拜，進而釐清在次／文化的脈絡下究竟「通體過癮」的意義爲何，以及「上癮」會如何改寫人類心靈機制而致使主體性擱置的現象。

關鍵詞：威廉・巴羅茲，《毒犯》，癮物崇拜，需要，驅力，慾望

From Need to Needle: "The Cult of Addiction"[1] in William Burroughs's *Junky*[2]

Jen-chieh Tsai

Prologue: "Spirits of America"[3]

While the 1960s has habitually been considered as the period when drug use breaks out all over the American consciousness, the fact is that the consumption of "psychoactive substance,"[4] as John Allen Krout suggests, "has a long history and touches many basic American attitudes and tastes" (qtd. in Warner 7). To begin with, perhaps unsettling to the secured American minds, their national anthem has originated from a drinking song (Warner 3). Yet, already in 1642, William Bradford is astonished to find the proliferation of drunkenness (Warner 6-7). Also, in the struggle for national independence, there is an account that goes like this: coffee was then seen as "the patriotic drink" pit against tea as "a symbol of British taxes and

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[1] The expression "The Cult of Addiction" is a coinage by Professor Yu-hsiu Liu for the purpose of describing the ritualization of addiction in the postmodern culture, which is characterized by unrestrained pursuits of violence and pleasure. The author is thus grateful for her inspiring courses focusing on psychoanalytic readings of cultural phenomena, and in addition, for the anonymous reviewers' suggestions and comments.

[2] In point of publication, *Junky* is literally Burroughs's first published novel. Even though it is true that most of Burroughs's fictions undertake to look into a variety of addictive states (Douglas xix), his *Junky* deserves notice in the present paper for that it is his most factual and even autobiographical writing. So, *Junky* presents a not-so-contrived literary form that cuts across fiction and reality and thus provides a reality-oriented fiction so intriguing that Allen Ginsberg has been the major prompter to have it published. Though not strictly a Beat, his inspiring capacity hence contributes to the Beat movement under the deliberate operation of initiators of the movement. In this sense, the "cult of addiction" is not merely a fad but also a willful creation of a fad partly due to the deification of Burroughs.

[3] This subtitle is borrowed from Nicholas O. Warner's book title, *Spirits of America: Intoxication in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. He means to pun on the word "spirit," which is at once metaphysical—values and attitudes cherished by the Americans—and material—psychoactive substances such as gin and vodka. But, what's more significant, American history shows that these two aspects are consistently intertwined with each other.

[4] This is an expression used by David T. Courtwright in his *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (3). It refers to substances that set out to alter humans' "ordinary waking consciousness," running the gamut from tea, coffee, drug, to alcohol (Courtwright 2).

tyranny" and therefore "an object of colonial boycott and vandalism" (Courtwright 21). In the nineteenth century America, the intoxication theme merges into intellectual discussions of the nature of consciousness, e.g. the Romantic discourse. Not surprisingly, the Romantic concern with the free play of imagination is also shared by Burroughs, who acknowledges in an interview that "I find that when I kick I get a sort of new perspective, which was useful in writing" (qtd. in Courtwright et al 245). Apart from these, as Nicholas O. Warner points out, American literature has long been harboring "a strong affection for the figure of the drunkard," such as Mark Twain's "fragrant town drunkard" in *Life on the Mississippi* (10).

However, contrary to the vigor implicit in the long history of psychoactive substance use before the 1960s, Burroughs' *Junky*, as Oliver Harris identifies, "presents a dead society, a corpse-cold, one-dimensional realm as reduced to meaningless materiality" (62). Indeed, the novel has lost some possible grandeur in individual pursuits; instead, it creates an *amoral* world of abjects that do not intend to be *immoral*. In it, there is a profound lack of revolutionary spirit with a strong tendency of self-containment. Frankie Dolan, for instance, describes himself as a rat without any apparent intension (*J* 10).[5] William Lee's movement is likewise de-motivated; he moves only when the law comes impending. That is why he is forced to move from New York, New Orleans, to Mexico when he is charged with giving a wrong name on the prescription and illegal keeping of weed. The world of abjects features, in a nutshell, overwhelming passivity and stasis.

Somehow, Twain's image of "fragrant town drunkard" is succeeded by Burroughs—at least, to the Beats, for whom he is certainly a "beatific" figure brining them redemptive power to resist the oppressive culture.[6] According to Harris, Burroughs is even "a legendary persona of the Beats by the Beats" (2). So, in a sub-cultural context, he remains much of an iconic character that recalls the bid to transcend in the antebellum literature. But, what makes Burroughs so special in the 1960s context is that the use of psychoactive substance has been segueing into a cult, that is, a behavior subject to ritualization. If psychoactive substance consumption has a long

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[5] *J* stands for *Junky*.

[6] According to M. H. Abrams, "Beat" carries two connotations. One is "beaten down," as by institutionalism; the other is "beatific," as being blessed in being able to liberate selves through anti-norm attempts (21).

history, it is not so much a qualitative change as a *quantitative* one from the late 1950s to the early 1960s. It turns into a popular event, just as Bill Gains—another junky—observes with "a sly gloating smile": "Yes, Lexington [the Lexington Narcotics Farm in Kentucky] is full of young kids now" (*J* 149).

To do justice to history, however, one may need to add a circumstantial factor to what Timothy S. Murphy describes as "proletarianization" of drug use—the popularization of psychoactive substance (53). He is referring to the American government-led attempt to offer working class soldiers and sailors heroin to treat their battle injuries (52). Similarly, Thomas Newhouse indicates that morphine as a painkiller is also officially sponsored for medication in the Second World War (99). People receiving the treatment during the War eventually form the "old-time junkies" in Burroughs' *Junky*. At all events, they furnish the 1960s with a material base for the cult of addiction.

Toward A Subject-Oriented Analysis of Addiction

Psychopathological studies of addiction, as Rik Loose criticizes, have unvaryingly attempted "to exclude the subject" (269). That is, their interpretative framework sees the whole problematics of addiction as "organic causation," whereby nothing outside the chemical-related repercussions on the body matters in enabling a subject's decision to take drug (267-8). The trouble then consists in the object, whose removal can help restore the subject to its normal state. This is a view of a long tradition. Around the end of the 18th century, an American physician called Benjamin Rush has been "responsible for locating the source of addiction within the substance itself" (Barber 14). Up to more modern times, the object-oriented perspective still prevails, as remarked by Oakley Ray: "There is an overemphasis on the medical and pharmacological effects of drug use as a basis for making psychological and political decisions about drug" (461). In *Junky*, when Dr. Fredericks asks why William Lee needs drug at all, he takes this 'objective' move by posing the question "Is your sex life satisfactory" and thus drawing the latter's attention to the effect of the drug (*J* 99). The hospitals in the novel also treat their inmates via reduction medication, without examining the *a priori* construct of the subject before drug is taken into the body.

Since such an approach neglects the constitution of the subject that has to strike up a decision to act—mediating between circumstantial factors and drug as an object to consume—there have been critics who demand a more human perspective. Hence, James G. Barber urges that psychopathological understanding of addiction "must incorporate non-biological factors as well" (13). Ray maintains that drug-taking is no isolated event but part of our social matrix and thus that "to change patterns of drug use requires changing the social context" (453). But, it is Loose—who brings together the subject of addiction and the constitution of subjectivity—that pinpoints the source of addiction with precision. Starting with Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, he states primarily that "addiction is a social symptom" (276)—in the sense that with civilization demanding abjuration of instinctual pleasures, individuals suffer and, as Freud points to, "the crudest, but also the most effective among these methods of influence is the chemical one—intoxication" (qtd. in Loose 274).

To be more specific, when an individual becomes socialized, he/she is obliged to accept regulations and norms particular to a culture. In Freud's terms, a child has to renounce instinctual pleasures in the face of paternal authority that threatens to implement castration. This is the famous castration complex that, when resolved, effects "the nucleus of the super-ego" so that the relation of child to the mother—sign of instinctual pleasures—is eventually intercepted by the father—symbol of socio-cultural beliefs (Freud, "Dissolution" 176).[7] So, according to Lacan, a "triangular dialectic" is formed among child, father, and mother (*Seminar Ⅲ* 204). The salient feature of this dialectic is the emergence of signifiers, which function, firstly, to mark the genesis of subjectivity, aiming to comply with civilization while giving up instinctual pleasures, and secondly, to enable the subject to seek substitutes—"a centrifugal tracing"—for what has been lost ("the *petit a*") on account of the castration (in a sublimated way) (Lacan, *Seminar XI* 62).

The renunciation of instinctual pleasures thus confronts "the subject with the trauma of a lack" (Loose 271). Yet, if the symbolic castration is carried out successfully and properly, the traumatic experience will be subdued and remain submerged in the unconscious, a mechanism that controls cathexis, or, the discharge of psychical energy. In contrast, if this

[7] "Dissolution" refers to "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex."

"binding" of energy miscarries, the subject is susceptible to painful and even excruciating occurrences such as nightmares and injuries (Freud, "Beyond" 31).[8] It is at this point that Loose pinpoints the source of addiction: it originates from the "toxicity" of the subject, not the chemicals, when the constitution of subjectivity has already floundered and its cathexes fail to be bound (Loose 275). The implication is that, before addiction occurs, one's subjectivity has been prepared for using drug for a sort of satisfaction not endorsed by the symbolic context. So, Ann Douglas observes correctly that "Most things in Burroughsland function as addictive substances, and the 'self' can be simply the last drug the person in question has ingested" (xix). The liability to addiction eventually inheres in the toxicity of the subject—when an individual cannot overcome "the trauma of a lack."[9]

A look at William Lee's life may help clarify where his toxicity lies. The years—1914 and 1944-5 specified in the beginnings of the prologue and the text— already shroud Lee in an ominous context. They are both times of conflicts and wars, thus offering crucial interpretive points to reveal that he has been situated in a traumatic setting. For instance, in 1944-5, as Lee narrates, after he makes acquaintance with Norton, he has his first junk experience (*J* 1-7). This, incidentally, happens in keeping with the "proletarianization" of drug use during World War Ⅱ so that it explains why drug can be available to Lee.

Only, availability does not necessarily lead to drug-taking. About this, one can refer to the year when Lee was born—1914. It also reeks of portentousness for his childhood. As he tells us,

> Actually my earliest memories are colored by a fear of nightmares. I was afraid to be alone, and afraid of the dark, and afraid to go to sleep because of dreams where a supernatural horror seemed always on the point of taking shape. I was afraid someday the dream would be still there when I woke. (*J* x)

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[8] "Beyond" refers to Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle."

[9] With the problematics of addiction reverted to the constitution of subjectivity, this very concept of the toxicity of the subject can also be applied to other objects of addiction such as TV and mobile phone. The removal of addictive objects could certainly relieve compulsive acts but could scarcely point to the source of compulsion resident in the subject.

This passage demonstrates that there is some unknown traumatic experience that Lee fails to get over, that is, his unconscious falls short of binding the discharge of psychical energy. As a result, Lee as a child is confronted with a constant fear of going to sleep lest he should encounter the "supernatural power." Here, one can perhaps pay particular attention to the power "always on the point of taking shape." If one recalls that "the signifier is the first mark of the subject"—an individual can therefore identify with the symbolic order and disregard the traumatic lack (Lacan, *Seminar XI* 62)—it is palpable that the reason why the horror is always about to take shape but not is that this horror has not been signified. The consequence is that a reliable "triangular dialectic" has not been properly established to drive away those culturally unacceptable entities. What Lee is faced with is exactly the unaccountable and overwhelming "petit a," which, being unable to be substituted, is now intimidating the subject-to-be's existence.

If the father is capable of forcing authority on the child, he/she may ultimately grow into a proper social being, that is, a person having gone through symbolic castration.[10] This is not the case with Lee, however. In the prologue, which depicts his early life, Lee hardly makes any reference to the interaction between him and his parents so one has no way to know how the three of them get by with one another. One thing is certain, though. Lee's parents favor solitude, as he puts it,

> When I was about seven my parents decided to move to the suburbs "to get away from people." They bought a large house with grounds and woods and a fish pond where there were squirrels instead of rats. They lived there in a comfortable capsule, with a beautiful garden and cut off from contact with the life of the city. (*J* xii)

This solitude apparently affects Lee's way of dealing with the symbolic context. That is, he is shorn of opportunities to learn how to cope with people, or, to make the signifying chain at work in order to set up the triangular dialectic in which the society or the culture can act out symbolic castration. In particular, he is wrapped up in the "capsule" created by his

[10] Edward J. Khantzian argues likewise: "If the growing-up environment is optimally constant, nurturing, and relatively free of major trauma or neglect, ego functions and the sense of self coalesces to give us a mature and adaptable character structure" (48).

parents.[11] As the "capsule" connotes a closure, Lee becomes immersed in a state where a culturally significant other can barely enter to effect the rise of the "nucleus of super-ego." Yet, the most direct evidence for the disfiguration of his super-ego consists in that his instinctual behaviors are mostly bypassed by his parents: "My criminal acts were gestures, unprofitable and for the most part unpunished" (*J* xiii). This statement shows that, even in the capsule, Lee's parents are not in a position to carry out the symbolic castration fully to make the signifying mechanism of his psyche work to abide by the world. As a result, with the scarcity of symbolic meddling, it is not surprising that Lee has continually been haunted by fears and nightmares.

Something intriguing is that one time when he feels bothered by nightmares, Lee hears "a maid talk about opium and how smoking opium brings sweet dreams," and then he says "'I will smoke opium when I grow up'" (*J* xi). From this, one can know that Lee as a child—perhaps unknown to him—has bred a vague idea about drug as a satisfying object that is nevertheless disapproved by the symbolic context. On a broader scale, however, it is indicative of an important facet of addiction: to make life both livable and bearable. So, here comes Lee's "junk equation": "Junk is not a kick. It is a way of life" (*J* xvi). Later he also makes a similar remark: "I need junk to get out of bed in the morning, to shave and eat breakfast. I need it to stay alive" (*J* 15). Thus it is obvious that for a junky like Lee, the effect of drug is secondary; what is primary is a form of surviving the traumatic lack. This adheres to Edward J. Khantzian's argument that

> Pleasure- or stimulus-seeking and self-destructive motives are indeed apparent in addictions, but in my opinion they are more often by-products of or are secondary to problems in self-regulation in which the capacities for managing feelings, self-esteem, relationships, and self-care loom large. (44)

[11] This is perhaps the reason why Newhouse contends that William Lee "enters a drug underworld to escape the boredom of middle-class existence in a Midwest suburb where all contact with life was shut out" (108). The statement may also be corroborated by Ray: "Beginning use of illegal drugs in the early years of secondary school is a sign of an unhappy, unsuccessful youth and is midway in the development of a deviant life-style, not the beginning" (462).

For Khantzian, addiction is consequently a way of "self-medication" (44). When Lee takes Benzedrine, the effect indeed projects a harmonious relationship with the symbolic context for he is then "full of expansive, benevolent feelings, and suddenly wanted to call on people I hadn't seen in months or even years, people I did not like and who did not like me" (*J* 15).

The euphoria experienced by Lee returns one to Loose's definition of addiction: it pertains to the act of "administration" to execute "a certain economy and distribution of pleasure and jouissance" (274). Namely, through self-medication, an individual regains feelings of reciprocity, by which self and other engage in the triangular dialectic and the subject is somehow able to live on, with minimalism of pain. In particular, such a relationship between reciprocity and euphoria can be evidenced in the word "connection," which is used by the junkies to refer to the drug dealer (*J* 29, 41, 69, &76). Despite its perverted connotation, "connection" points to the fact that junkies are endeavoring in one way or another to make connections, trying to enter the triad and derive euphoric feelings from it.

Nevertheless, such connections are, after all, emptied out. As Loose explicates, self-medication is "an attempt to administer a jouissance independently of the Other" (277). In other words, an addict seeks the triangular dialectic via detouring around the symbolic other so that he/she actually misses out the essence of this triad: the subject-to-be must run across a threatening other and then it is possible for the nucleus of super-ego to arise. So, for the addict, even though euphoria is effected likewise, *the non-interference of the drug* as 'other' makes the triad flattened out and no proper subjectivity exists at all. For him/her, the euphoric state is a fantasy of recovering petit a, a product of the drive, in contradistinction to that derived from the triad, a product of desire.[12]

In light of this, it is easier to understand Lee's statement that "Junk short-circuits sex" (*J* 124). The reason why junk could short-circuit sex at all is that though both promise euphoria, junk achieves it without resorting to the symbolic other while sex needs to consider the whole triangular dialectic. This is even more explicit in what Lee goes on to say: "The drive to

[12] Drive, as Lacan understands it, is "a constant force" aiming at petit a (*Seminar XI* 165). However, desire—though backed by drive—is structurally distinct from it in that desire is the corollary result of drive being sexualized in the symbolic order (Jaanus 120-1). Since desire is born with the interference of a symbolic other, its genesis is related to the formation of the triangular dialectic.

non-sexual sociability comes from the same place sex comes from, so when I have an H or M shooting habit I am non-sociable" (*J* 124). His non-sociability stems from the fact that he has effected sociability of his own in his relationship with the drug as Other so that in a *realistic* world he rather shows indifference and apathy. Furthermore, Lee himself is quite aware of the effect of Beats' attempt to withdraw from the triad, as he comments on their disinterestedness in sex (*J* 147). Such correlates Ray's observation that "The tablet does not solve the problems you are having with other people, but it does make you less concerned about them" (458). Finally, Mullins offers a succinct depiction of Lee's failure at symbolization: "He has traveled to a place of security, but a security purchased at the cost of near-complete alienation from other people" (53).

From Need to Needle

Judging from the two possible connotations of euphoria an individual might experience either in the symbolic context or in the imaginary or semiotic, a distinction has to be drawn between two kinds of economy in the distribution of jouissance. Whereas the symbolic economy apportions the sense of well-being according to need, the other one according to drive.[13]

[13] This distinction between need and drive, to begin with, is an appropriation of Lacan's "The Deconstruction of the Drive" in *SeminarXI*, in which he indicates that "…no object of any *Not*, need, can satisfy the drive" (167), thus enabling Jaanus to distinguish between instinctual pleasure and drive pleasure (120). For the rationale of the present study, here are two points in need of qualifications. Firstly, the concept of need is for both Lacan and Freud virtually "a purely biological concept" though the Freudian term is "instinct" (Instinkt) (Evans 122). Need is thus a "pre-linguistic" hypothesis indicative of homeostasis without quasi-social mediation (Evans 122). Instinctual pleasure is accordingly a matter of preservation and survival. But, as Dylan Evans criticizes, since need is always known and articulated in demand (for signifiers mark the birth of human beings), this pre-linguistic need "never exists as a pure biological given" (122). So, this paper postulates need as contained in the symbolic context, for the sake of explaining that any endeavor to maintain the triadic dialectic for self-preservation either biologically or socially is initiated by need. After all, Lacan once also claims that trauma is followed by "the subjectifying homeostasis that orientates the whole functioning defined by the pleasure principle" (*Seminar XI* 55). That is, be it pre-linguistic or not, need commands homeostasis guided either by the pleasure principle, or, the pleasure-reality principle (see note 20), for the well-being of individuals. Secondly, as this paper shows later, the death drive is opposed to need and read in the negative sense. This negativity arises because, whether in Freud or in Lacan, it bespeaks a return to an inanimate state (Freud) or an appeal to the "lack of being" (Lacan) (Benvenuto and Kennedy 170). However, Lacan differs from Freud in that he regards the drive as constructed in the symbolic order for the appearance of the signifier is the beginning of the drive (Evans 32). Moreover, every

As Maire Jaanus explicates, this difference designates two bodies, one of "Not" while the other of "Bedürfnis" (120). She specifies,

> *Not* refers to necessity, to that which is indispensable for self-preservation. We need to eat and breathe to survive. *Bedürfnis* on the other hand refers to a strong, or even overwhelming want or requirement that feels like a necessity, but that is in fact not a matter of survival. In German one can say, *Ich habe ein Bedüfnis ins Kino zu gehen*, i.e., I have a want to go to the movies, but obviously, doing so is not a matter of self-preservation. (120)

So, Lee's statement that he needs junk to stay alive is now subject to examination. As a matter of fact, he as well as other junkies attain euphoric feelings not in the symbolic realm; instead, they are activated by bodies of drive. Lee once observes that "I guess he [Nick] didn't waste any money on food" (*J* 53). Likewise, Bill Gains pawns his coats to procure money for junk (*J* 55). Originally, both food and coats serve as means for self-preservation, but now they become dismissed when drive for jouissance claims foremost priority. As Lee and Pat seem to make a living—the only 'social' behavior in which they are involved—Lee says they are "pushing a

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drive is for Lacan a death drive because of their potential for going beyond the pleasure principle (Evans 32). Yet, I contend that, in this case, even though the drive arises out of the symbolic order, it is subjugated for the reason that the maintenance of this order is proffered by desire—which dresses up the drive in an appropriate façade. Otherwise, if the drive gets intensified, it may well lead to the destruction of the symbolic order. It is in this rationale that this paper argues that need and needle—need and the death drive—represents two opposing forces that develop in a line: while need follows the pleasure(-reality) principle and operates in sync with the symbolic order, the death drive always aims at the lack, the non-being and the collapse of the above order. As a matter of fact, in *SeminarVII*, Lacan propounds that the drive can be productive. He argues, in the "creationist perspective," the death drive has its "historical dimension" in that it makes possible revolutions and establishments of new order just as "the radical elimination of God" is meant for a better living world (*Seminar VII* 213). Namely, even if the death drive means total annihilation, one cannot slight its overtone that "…it is also a will to create from zero, a will to begin again" (*Seminar VII* 212). This is compliant with Benvenuto and Kennedy's view that ironically, "non-being" becomes the source of pleasure and the motivating factor for averting jouissance (symbolic) (179). Nevertheless, as indicated earlier in this paper, the junkies in Burrough's novel are simply amoral instead of being immoral. That is to say, they are truly de-motivated and have no "negativity [the death drive] to overcome" (Benvenuto and Kennedy 179). These junkies resort to the death drive without turning back to re-map a more acceptable ethical terrain. This is the reason why this paper chooses to highlight the 'negative' aspect of the death drive.

small way, just enough to keep up our habits" (*J* 76). Survival for these junkies, then, is taken in an extremely deviant sense.

Addiction in such a state culminates in a total disregard of the symbolic order and an intractable attraction (by force of drive) to the real, a non-existence, or, "a gap"[14] claimed by petit a. Junkies are therefore possessed by the real, unable to engage themselves in the "centrifugal tracing" toward the symbolic order in search of realistic substitutes. In the end, as Lee discerns, "They won't listen to *no* [italicization mine] when they want junk" (*J* 67) and "Once they get in the vein that's all they care" (*J* 77). The peremptoriness of the drive is so forceful that Lee aptly notes: "The kick of junk is that you *have to* [italicization mine] have it" (*J* 97). Here, one can observe that the symbolic "no" is countered by "have to" and discarded for the sake of junk, a transition from need to needle, which may exemplify an excursion to what Harris calls "meaningless materiality"—meaningless owing to non-signifying. Cole also demonstrates his obsession with the real when he is told to discard weed as the police are chasing him and his partners. However, Cole is still found with the weed as the police searches him, an event indicative of being possessed by the real and failing to be symbolized (*J* 82). Roy, in like manner, is claimed by the real as he exhibits an intractable pull to the real as a lush-worker—he *has to* have the money from the drunkard's pocket (*J* 38). Such is the force of the gap of the real that Lee perceives: "If the junk were gone from the earth, there might still be junkies around…to feel the lack" (*J* 112). This observation points out what is crucial in understanding addiction: a persistent attraction to a maternal domain, the real, which is fundamentally a hole that is nevertheless non-signified by the symbolic order.

The regression from need to needle betokens the transformation of a speaking subject into a subject of indeterminacy inclined to the real. Jaanus thus regards "the drive subject" as "an object anchored in the real" (126). Loose also notes that, in addiction, the relationship between subject and object is "problematic and extremely disturbed" (271). It is as if a striking conflation between subject and object devoid of symbolic intervention arises to place the position of the subject in doubt.[15] Moreover, the real can be

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[14] Lacan describes the real around which drive approaches as "the gap-like structure" (*Seminar XI* 176).

[15] So, junkies easily slope backward to the real and hark to the symbiotic state with the mother: Lee

devouring, as Lee asserts: "Junk is a biological necessity when you have a habit, an invisible mouth" (*J* 124). The image of mouth is apparently working to lay siege to the junky's subjectivity and consume him/her as an object. At one time, in order to impress someone he is interested in, Lee has "a Van Gogh kick" and cuts off his finger (*J* xiv). This is similarly an event in which Lee places himself in the position of the object for being consumed. However, this has happened even before he turns into a junky, and yet, it actually highlights Loose's argument that toxicity consists cardinally in the subject. Hence, the primary consequence of tending toward the needle is the rise of a drive subject—a true irony because subjectivity lies in constructing a life of need in the symbolic context.

The Dysfunction of Verbal and Behavioral Levels of Signification

1. The symptomatic narrative: Inherent in Burroughs's *Junky* is an antinomy to its purport of being an autobiographical account. That is, since passivity and stasis underline the narrative, the novel is deprived of the slightest hint of growth and development that inform its pseudo-form of Bildungsroman (Harris 53; Murphy 65). The reason why is that the narrator Lee, as the protagonist, does not arrive at the point of "recognition of one's identity and role in the world," which is requisite to the genre of Bildungsroman (Abrams 193). Yet, from this inadequacy, one can discern the psychoanalytic underpinning of Bildungsroman: an individual's growth into the symbolic order, a process that involves negotiations with the third and subsequently defines his/her own subjectivity in the triangular dialectic.

The inadequacy also reveals a significant trait of the narrativity of *Junky*: the absence of a dialogic counterpart that can serve as the realistic other for Lee to operate on the signifying plane. This is because, fundamentally, *Junky* is a compilation of letters addressed to Allen Ginsberg, who contributes an introduction to the novel. However, in Lee's narration, there is hardly any suggestion of its epistolary practice. The dialogism between the addresser and the addressee is utterly displaced and dominated by the referential function of language. Thus Harris points out, "William

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once reminisces about his mother and childhood in an aftereffect of junk (*J* 125-6). Also, paradoxically, as Lee sees it, Pat is "a possessive mother"—a juxtaposition of the force of the real and the maternal realm (*J* 78).

Lee's first person account of past events is simply narrated," and what is more important, "a live audience" is not incorporated in the epistolary practice (50). Accordingly, *Junky* features "zero-degree narrating interaction," whereby the relationship between subject and object does not come into existence (Harris 63).

Lee does not merely address a non-being, but also fails to recognize himself as the dialogic counterpart when addressed. As Harris notes, "Several times Mary asks Lee questions, but there are never any replies, as if the questions were only rhetorical. The bizarre climax of Lee's scene with Mary indicates the full significance of his ghostly absence as a subject with the narrative" (Harris 63-4). The "ghostly absence" also applies to other junkies' ways of interacting with others. For instance, Jack is "an inveterate liar who seemed to lie more for himself than for any visible audience" (*J* 3). He often addresses a hallucinated audience without a realistic other to respond, the effect of which even makes Lee feel "uncanny" (*J* 3). Whitey, too, places himself in a closure where there is no actual relationship for he is "convinced that nobody liked him" (*J* 10). The certainty of his conviction again makes his world impenetrable, unable to be addressed and questioned.

Hence, Mullins argues with precision that "the tightness of the narration in the first novel [*Junky*] produces Lee as a hermetic shell" (57). No meanings are derived from this shell for one to know how Lee conceives of the world; the aura is much of indifference and apathy. Only mechanical repetitions fill the novel, forming a cycle that moves in itself but does not move forward. This is also pinpointed by Mullins, who contends that the narrative of *Junky* is "fixed in a static cycle of need and relief, frozen in a cycle of consumption that repeats itself monotonously until his supply runs out" (53). To borrow Elster's description of himself as a former inveterate smoker, for Lee as well for the other junkies in the novel, junk "became a ritual" and it "provided the commas, semicolons, question marks, exclamation marks, and full stops of experience" (64). The narrativity of *Junky* is ultimately that of junk, destitute of dialogism in an impervious closure.

2. De-symbolized signs: The closure formed outside the symbolic context de-symbolizes the signifying function of signs. They are no longer contained in a well-sustained structure, as in Saussurean synchroneity of language. Signs are thus characterized by fluidity and slipperieness, short of

targeting the signified and accommodating the lack. The junkies become a group of abjects that shun the symbolic castration of names. Lee, for instance, is accused of violating Public Health Law 334 for "giving a wrong name on a prescription" (*J* 27). It is in order to obtain jouissance independently of Other that he has to make what is originally a symbol into a volatile sign. Actually, all the junkies in the novel change their names quite constantly whether in asking "croakers" for prescriptions of morphine or in registering at hotels. Furthermore, such indeterminacy of semiosis is particularly accentuated at the end of the glossary for "jive talk," junky's language, where, as Lee kindly reminds his readers, "A final glossary, therefore, cannot be made of words whose intentions are fugitive" (*J* 158). The words used by junkies are fugitive in that they are not to be pinned down by the symbolic order.

Another facet of the de-symbolization of signs is the materialization of language. If the symbolized language refers to a set of signs abstracted from the materiality of the real, it is metaphorical in signifying a lack in or of the body. When regression occurs, the maternal as well as the corporeal draws signs to the real. Critics have specified this aspect by pointing out that Burroughs has deliberately and incessantly utilized his mother's maiden name—Lee—in his novels as if it contributes to the making of his artistic creation (Murphy 48; Lyndenberg 170). It suggests a reading of Burroughs's choice of perspective in writing his most factual account—*Junky*. That is, he chooses a stance antithetical to the symbolic order. Hence, Robin Lyndenberg comments, "through his writing Burroughs becomes, in a sense, his own mother" (170). Concomitant with this is the language of body—attention re-drawn to body parts that should have been veiled by symbols. For example, when Bill Gains takes his shot, his signifying mechanism casts aside the metaphoric aspect of language and approximates to materiality of body. He would prattle on his bowel movements and make conversations "most distasteful" (*J* 46-7). This is a state possessed by the real. Also, as Lizzie desecrates Lee and Herman with "You're both mother fuckers" after her nembutal sleep, her words sound if "referring to actual incest" (*J* 17). This is because signs have lost their metaphorical capacity in the addictive state.

3. "crowding out" (Elster 69): This is an expression used by Elster in describing the behavioral patterns of junkies, to the effect that their mode of

action fossilizes into, in Mullins's words, "a static cycle of need and relief," to the minimization of other activities.[16] Lee is quite aware of this, for he says: "As a habit takes hold, other interests lose importance to the user. Life telescopes down to junk" (*J* 22). In the case of Nick, "his constant, unsatisfied hunger had burned out all other concerns" (*J* 43). Therefore, junk, the only event in junkies's life, narrativitizes and fictionalizes their behavior because they constitute a closure destitute of reality. As Newhouse puts it, junk acts as "an isolating, self-absorbing agent that deters self-definition and determines the path of the user's life" (101). Dovetailed with the argument of the need-needle regression above, the "crowding out" signifies a salient feature of junkies's mode of behavior: their actions feature "anti-productivity"—as far as self-preservation is concerned.[17]

Accompanying this narrowing-down of behavioral repertoire is the dysfunction of interpersonal relationship. Since junkies favor a jouissance independently of Other, negotiations and compromises are barely reached. Harmony being displaced, junkies are prone to aggression. Lee's violence done to his cat is exactly another version of Poe's "The Black Cat," in which the narrator also abuses his cat after drinking bouts.[18] In another case, the dysfunction may point to some form of radicalism, as in the hinted suggestion of the relation of junk to communism (*J* 130). Finally, junk might give rise to inattentiveness to others. Lee's wife once complains to him: "…how bored you get when you have habit" (*J* 117). All these are instances of Lee's aphorism: "Junk short-circuits sex," by which jouissance is attained at the expense of being alienated from people. Perhaps Newhouse summarizes it quite aptly: "for the drug addict, outermovement was eschewed in favor of an inward journey, an interiorization" (98).

4. Eyes without contact: The inward journey, with its detachment from people and lack of dialogism, is best evidenced in Burroughs's delineation of

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[16] Studies of addiction all point to this facet. Andrew Johns points out that one of the dependence syndromes is "a relatively stereotyped drug-taking habit, i.e. a narrowing in the repertoire of drug-taking behavior" (10). In a similar strain, Koob et al refer to "a narrowing of the behavioral repertoire" (101).

[17] Murphy also pinpoints this antiproductivity in *Junky*. But while I propound the idea in light of how an individual preserves life ingesting aliments or refraining from life-endangering acts, he pits the anti-productive moves by junkies against institutionalism (55). Thence Murphy aims to explain the criminalization of junkies by the symbolic order, the capitalist society.

[18] For the connection between substance abuse and aggressive tendencies, please refer to Wekerle and Wall's "The Introduction: The Overlap between Relationship Violence and Substance Abuse."

eyes. They constitute inorganic closures that jettison any possibility of interchange. For instance, Jack displays a "conscious ego that looked out of the glazed alert-calm hoodlum eyes" (*J* 3). Herman's brown eyes give off enmity "like some sort of television broadcast" (*J* 5). Roy's eyes have "a peculiar brilliance," which, when meeting the light in the room, glints "like an opal" (*J* 6). Moreover, his eyes shine "with their peculiar phosphorescence" (*J* 11). Doolie's eyes look "artificial" (*J* 49). Sol Bloom's gray eyes are "serene and cold behind steel-rimmed spectacles" (*J* 64). Pat, seen as a "possessive mother" by Lee, has eyes that always seem "bloodshot" (*J* 77&80). As to Richter, he is one-eyed (*J* 78). Once in a rest induced by wine, Lee sees an Oriental face, melted by disease and floating with "dull crustacean eyes" (*J* 133). The common denominator of these eyes suggests, first and foremost, in Harris's words, "zero-degree narrating interaction." As the eyes are shown, they do not manifest the slightest intention of addressing Other just as the fugitive words attempt to signify beyond the symbolic terrain.

Between Junk and Religion

Karl Marx once touches upon the relationship between junk and religion, claiming religion to be opium of people (Courtwright 135). Whatever his starting point might be, such juxtaposition is recurrently seen in Burroughs or his *Junky*. Already in the introduction by Ginsberg, Jonathan Robbins conceives of Burroughs as assuming "a saintly poise" (*J* ix). In an interview, Burroughs considers that narcotics can be a "blessing" to Indian farmers, for instance, who take little opium to keep life going (qtd. in Courtwright et al 246). Bill Gains, as Lee depicts, is "a prelate of junk," or, "a mere parish priest in the hierarchy of junk" (*J* 42). Also, junkies can be pathetic, following the drug-dealers asking for alms of junk just like religious supplicants (*J* 58). Junkies in Mexico would carry out pilgrimage every year (*J* 121). Ike is a junky peddling religious medals and later, crucifixes (*J* 115&120). There is also a paradoxical juxtaposition in the instance of Charity Hospital, where morphine shots are delivered as treatment (*J* 95). In the end of *Junky*, Lee maintains that "What I look for in any relationship is contact on the nonverbal level of intuition and feeling" (*J* 152). This "nonverbal level," however, is comparable with St. Augustine,

who seeks the grace of God while dismissing the usefulness of signs. So, it appears that the likeness between junk and religious experiences is not just a matter of resemblance, but homogeneous with each other.

But, apparently, the corollary results of the two experiences differ from each other. This can be exemplified by Burroughs's own statement:

> Perhaps the most basic concept of my writing is a belief in the magical universe, a universe of many gods, often in conflict. The paradox of an all-powerful, all seeing God who nonetheless allows suffering, evil, and death, does not arise. ("My Purpose Is to Write for the Space Age" 268)

He is contrasting two ideas of god. One refers to many gods in discord with one another while the other to one God, who, though almighty, approves of anguish and ordeal. What one can observe from this contrast is that Burroughs denies the paradoxical nature of the latter God, and, this reveals his denial of a symbolic other that regulatory as it may be, there is still possible antagonism not always ingratiating. In other words, the formation of the reality principle—in Freud's usage—is incomplete in him.[19] In turn, this explains why he has not undergone fully symbolic castration so that he seeks self-medication for a jouissance neither derived from need nor solicited from the symbolic order. This is precisely the point that differentiates junk experience from religious sentiment such as charity, which is carefully enveloped in the symbolic order.

So, inherently, Burroughs has clandestinely rejected the possibility of a harmonious complex (though paradoxical) in his junk world. Harris's study of his manuscripts can support this argument for he finds that after "magic of

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[19] In Freud's "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," an individual is primordially dominated by the pleasure principle, but later on as this principle must agonize over the realism of the world, the reality principle is formed to alert the individual to the not-all-ingratiating milieu. In a more constructive sense, however, the reality principle "implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it" (Frued, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" 223). In other words, the reality principle does not in factuality repulse pleasure; instead, it proffers satisfaction as it sees fit so that the individual is not led to destruction. The two principles are in this sense two sides of a coin and could be termed "the pleasure-reality principle" in their finalized state. Burroughs's denial of the one God is then an exemplar to account for his repudiation of the realism of the world, which is not to be tolerated for later satisfaction. It demonstrates the dysfunction of the reality principle.

childhood" in page 126 of *Junky*, there is originally a line reading "The glory and the freshness of a dream," which is taken from Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (70). Judging from the "toxicity" of Burroughs's subjectivity, his de-symbolized state is assuredly incompatible with Wordsworth's redemptive connotations of the above line. In accord with this contrast, Newhouse encapsulates this writer with exactitude that, "In Burroughs, all dreams of salvation are countered with nightmares" (119). The metaphor of religion, then, is again displaced by the drive, the unbound nightmarish energy.

Conclusion: Pharmakon

The ritualization of drug consumption in *Junky* shows that, whether drug is taken as a foregoing symptom or an aftereffect, the core of addiction resides in the toxicity of individuals. Their subjectivity is underdeveloped, a withdrawal from the triangular dialectic. Indeed, these junkies have attempted to create connections, but their connectedness to drugs is nevertheless a construct of an imaginary world. That is to say, the pleasure derived from psychoactive substances is merely narcissistic production. The reality of a dialogic counterpart loses luster as it might hinder the rise of jouissance. This is, as indicated above, why Loose defines addiction as seeking jouissance independently of Other. Such independence, however, runs counter to the concept of survival proper because junkies are oriented to bodies of drive more than to bodies of need, a regression suggestive of swerving from the symbolic territory.

Pharmakon, a Greek word for remedial drug, then, now signifies its other meaning: poison (Durrant and Thakker 23). In Freud's terms, this denotes the dysfunction of the reality-principle for that these junkies's sense of survival is a result of self-projection. Simultaneously, it invites a search beyond pleasure and into the domain of anti-productivity and the death drive. Lee's nightmarish vision may serve as an example of the exertion of the drive:

> One afternoon, I closed my eyes and saw New York in ruins. Huge centipedes and scorpions crawled in and out of empty bars and cafeterias and drugstores on Forty-second street. Weeds were growing

> up through cracks and holes in the pavement. There was no one in sight. (*J* 28)

In this vision, the symbolic order—the mechanism for self-preservation—appears devastated and destroyed by abject figures like centipedes and scorpions. Interestingly, this sight of ruination is, however, forcefully envisaged in relation to the sprouting up of weeds through "cracks and holes"—wreckage of symbolic order. In such a state, it is hardly conceivable to establish relationships, let alone the fact that "There was no one in sight." Ergo, ultimately, with need superceded by needle, not only does the death drive loom large,[20] but also individuals hold their subjectivity in abeyance, lacking a realistic other as their dialogic counterpart.

[20] As suggested in the abstract, drug may be glorified only if dominance of the death drive is a cultural aspiration. Here I am interpreting Loose's argument that if the addictive state is indeed endorsed by the symbolic order, it is because our superego has changed into one that is "enjoyment-demanding" (285). What's implicit in this change is consequently a guaranteed enterprise of deadly pursuits, a search beyond Freud's pleasure(-reality) principle, which sets out to safeguard individuals.

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