Teaching Magical Thinking: Notes towards a Burroughsian Pedagogy

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It might seem odd that one would write about the pedagogical practices or educational philosophy of William S. Burroughs, the Beat novelist who is best known as the author of *Naked Lunch* and pioneer of the cut-up method. After all, Burroughs was a writer rather than a teacher, and his experiences as a teacher, not to mention his comments on those experiences, are limited. Of his two stints in the classroom described in *Literary Outlaw,* Ted Morgan's biography of Burroughs, one, his tenure at a school in Switzerland, appears to have been part of a scam, while the other gave him only a short experience of teaching. He lectured at the Naropa Institute, but lecturing is not necessarily teaching. Also, he apparently found that teaching drained his creative energy to such an extent that after teaching one creative writing class he asked, "am I being punished by the Muses for impiety and gross indiscretion in revealing the secrets [of writing] to a totally unreceptive audience — like you start giving away hundred-dollar bills and nobody wants them" (*Adding Machine* 28)?

But behind the drug-crazed, homoerotic violence of Burroughs' experimental novels, recordings, and films lies a peculiar metaphysics and a system of thought that underscores a vision of the world which we can view from an educative angle. In fact, Burroughs does describe pedagogical practices he used in writing classes, and these exemplify some of the ideas, often unusual but coherent in their own strange way, that underlie his vision of the world, and particularly of the word, and stress how the forces of thought, perception, education, and existence shape our approach to daily life. These pedagogical approaches toward teaching writing perhaps parallel or supplement what Joseph Vecchio calls the "pedagogical ... sense" (vii) underlying much of Burroughs' experimentation with film and prose (the "cut-up" technique), through which, Vecchio claims, Burroughs often "is purposefully putting himself in the role of teacher whose curriculum is the destruction of control mechanisms" and whose purpose is "to demonstrate ways in which one could free oneself from control" (4). From the few examples of strategies he describes having developed to teach writing students, we can reach some conclusions about his intentions and techniques, including some that Burroughs himself presents. We will examine these after reviewing some of the predominant ideas Burroughs develops through his writings, interviews, and other works, showing how his persistent effort is to invoke means of countering social control.

At the core of Burroughs' approach is an attack on rationality and ego-centeredness as bulwarks of social order. This rational order is upheld by dominating addictions to

power, which Burroughs sees as more addictive than the heroin to which he was hooked for much of his life. He identifies this addiction early on in his famous calculation of the "algebra of need," which for him demonstrates among other things that selling is more addictive than buying. Closely related to this concept is Burroughs' "focus on the anti-social, anti-life forces which [are] a fundamental expression of the parasitic nature of living [and which] construct his world of parasitism and symbiosis" (Johnston, "Burroughs Biopathy" 108). He expresses the formula of need in *Naked Lunch* through a simple set of rules that he sees as providing the model of monopoly:

> 1—Never give anything away for nothing
> 2—Never give more than you have to give (always catch the buyer hungry and make him wait).
> 3—Always take everything back if you possibly can. (*Naked Lunch* 200)

We see one of the central characters in *Naked Lunch*, Dr. Benway, exploring a corollary to these values when he states, "The subject must not realize that his mistreatment is a deliberate attack of an anti-human enemy on his personal identity. He must be made to feel that he deserves *any* treatment he receives because there is something (never specified) horribly wrong with him. The naked need of the control addicts must be decently covered by an arbitrary and intricate bureaucracy so that the subject cannot contact his enemy direct" (*Naked Lunch* 19). Bureaucracy operates on the "principle of *inventing needs* to justify its existence" (*Naked Lunch* 112), Benway states later.

Jennie Skerl argues that Burroughs' algebra of need replaces the "economic theories of capitalism's apologists" and also opposes the positions of "Marxist critics" (*William S. Burroughs* 38), in that in this model "[s]elling [becomes] more of a habit than using" (Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 287). What this means, then, is that the Burroughsian "world of manipulated needs … serves mainly to keep those who satisfy [these needs] in power," but it also means that "this power elite's control is far from absolute, for its members are driven by their own need to control" (Dolan 535). The algebra of need thus offers "a cycle of diminishing returns [and] a degenerate capitalist economy headed for bankruptcy" (Lydenberg 146).

Later works by Burroughs suggest a movement toward a "next step" in which the human may leave the body altogether (Whitmer and VanWyngarden 106), though Burroughs elsewhere states, "I do not think of myself as a materialist but I do insist that anything that affects the human nervous system must have a point of reference that is a definite location in the human nervous system" (*Adding Machine* 90). David Ayers associates Burroughs' move away from the body with Gnosticism (225), while Jones Irwin, following the lead of Daniel Belgrad, would probably associate this tendency more with a "Third Worldism ... understood from a spiritual rather than an economic perspective" (272). It could also be that "Burroughs … aims to destroy society through fantasy" (Johnston, "Burroughs Biopathy" 119), and as a corollary to this destruction, tends to move away from the dominating presence of the body, its entrapment in the senses, and its material expression through language by transcending it through telekinesis, extra-sensory perception, and other means. In this light the anarchic homosexual gangs

described in such novels as *The Wild Boys* and *Red Cities of the Night* represent an idealized form of anti-society based on decentralized, cooperative social structures that seem focused intently on homoerotic violence and sometimes ritualized death. These imagined communities attempt to supersede bourgeois social order by exiting from language, which Burroughs at some points suggests can itself be disembodied, even to the extent that voices in the air or voices in silence can be detected given the right circumstances (*Adding Machine* 53). Which brings us to the concept of the word virus.

Having posited addictions to power and to selling as primary forces in contemporary societies, Burroughs connects this supposition to an identification of language with endemic features that are expressed through the trope of the word virus. Burroughs apparently considers the word virus as literally extant, though one may question the extent to which Burroughs' vision of the world is flatly materialistic. Put another way, a spiritualistic component appears in Burroughs' presentations of the word and the societies that the word virus infects, but we cannot say that this is a religious view. Rather, it is "magic" in a sense that implies indirect and non-rationally knowable connections in a way that we will come back to later. But the word, in its endemic spread, its self-replication, its disembodied capabilities, and its ability to control thought through standardization of meanings via cliché, repetition, and other devices, achieves, in Burroughs' cosmology, a viral quality that removes it from the usual arguments regarding the conveyance of meaning, the processes of ideation and naming, and other features we associate with language. Skerl describes the word virus as consisting of "linguistic-social constructs linked to particular economic and political structures" (*William S. Burroughs* 63), and if we accept this model, escape from this virus involves "an escape from entrapping modes of consciousness" (Johnston, "Consumption" 110). In his more avant-garde writings Burroughs works toward this escape through experimentation with cut-ups (in which two texts are cut apart, and the pieces are aligned to create a new text), fold-ins (in which a text folded over on top of itself generates altered content), and other forms of textual manipulation deliberately designed to subvert meaning as it is determined by the ordering process of words constructed into sentences.

Burroughs himself states, "My general theory since 1971 has been that the Word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host" (*Adding Machine* 48). He uses as evidence for this claim the following argument: "The Word clearly bears the single identifying feature of virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than to replicate itself" (48). From this angle we can see that the word virus, even if we do not accept it as a literal virus as Burroughs apparently does, is capable of obtaining an independent and perhaps even quasi-mystical force, often operating beyond the usual levels of human control, but nevertheless manipulated by some in ways that allow words to subdue individuals and control social organization. One way to think of this is via the model of sentence structure that posits an entity (the subject, usually a noun) that acts upon another entity (the object, manipulated through a verbal limb that controls the relation between these two ideations). Gunther Kress, in a context totally unrelated to Burroughs' description of the word virus, illustrates this relation well when comparing the linguistic presentation of rain in the sentence "It is raining" to the visual, auditory, or

other modes in which rain is presented as a feeling of wetness, the sounds of water splashing, and so on. The sentence structure in the lingual mode posits an "it" that is somehow making raining occur, suggesting a subject-based manipulation of perception that relies on an external or perceptually distinct entity or quality that makes raining operate ("it"). Whether for Burroughs such powers as those that these features of language permit are controlled by forces beyond earth, as some of the novels suggest, or whether such meanings are deliberately subverted by experimental textual techniques such as the cut up or the fold in, which try to undermine the domination of the word and the representational presentation of reality that it often manifests, much of the effort in Burroughs' work is to describe control structures and to show how these structures can be attacked and subverted through violation of the social and linguistic forces that shape or determine appropriate social behaviors.

In the novels these attacks often take the form of overt social violence, and are accompanied by descriptions of obsessively obscene, vicious erotic practices such as asphyxiation by hanging, almost invariably in a homoerotic context. Yet importantly these practices are not accompanied by any sense of standardized abiding moral evaluation. The style of writing, involving what Burroughs calls the "routine," removes us from moralistic or "bourgeois" consideration (particularly after Burroughs develops the mature style that starts with *Naked Lunch*), and becomes reportorial, deadpan, fantastical, generally macabre, and comic in a "black" or "arabesque" way. This effect, and the general style of the routine as an anecdotal strategy, is exemplified well by the famous routine describing the talking asshole in *Naked Lunch,* a passage that also illustrates in graphic manner how language takes over and degenerates individual existence:

> Did I ever tell you about the man who taught his asshole to talk? His whole abdomen would move up and down you dig farting out the words. It was unlike anything I ever heard.
>
> This ass talk had a sort of gut frequency. It hit you right down there like you gotta go. You know when the old colon gives you the elbow and it feels sorta cold inside, and you know all you have to do is turn loose? Well this talking hit you right down there, a bubbly, thick stagnant sound, a sound you could *smell*.
>
> This man worked for a carnival you dig, and to start with it was like a novelty ventriloquist act. Real funny, too, at first. He had a number he called "The Better 'Ole" that was a scream, I tell you. I forget most of it but it was clever. Like, "Oh I say, are you still down there, old thing?"
>
> "Nah! I had to go relieve myself."
>
> After a while the ass started talking on its own. He would go in without anything prepared and his ass would ad-lib and toss the gags back at him every time.

> Then it developed sort of teeth-like little raspy in-curving hooks and started eating. He thought this was cute at first and built an act around it, but the asshole would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights. It would get drunk, too, and have crying jags nobody loved it and it wanted to be kissed same as any other mouth. Finally it talked all the time day and night, you could hear him for blocks screaming at it to shut up, and beating it with his fist, and sticking candles up it, but nothing did any good and the asshole said to him: "It's you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here any more. I can talk and eat *and* shit."
>
> After that he began waking up in the morning with a transparent jelly like a tadpole's tail all over his mouth. This jelly was what the scientists call un-D.T., Undifferentiated Tissue, which can grow into any kind of flesh on the human body. He would tear it off his mouth and the pieces would stick to his hands like burning gasoline jelly and grow there, grow anywhere on him a glob of it fell. So finally his mouth sealed over, and the whole head would have amputated spontaneous — (did you know there is a condition occurs in parts of Africa and only among Negroes where the little toe amputates spontaneously?) — except for the *eyes*, you dig. That's one thing the asshole *couldn't* do was see. It needed the eyes. But nerve connections were blocked and infiltrated and atrophied so the brain couldn't give orders any more. It was trapped in the skull, sealed off. For a while you could see the silent, helpless suffering of the brain behind the eyes, then finally the brain must have died, because the eyes *went out*, and there was no more feeling in them than a crab's eye on the end of a stalk. (*Naked Lunch* 110-112)

What happens in this passage is a literal takeover of ego-centered humanity as expressed through language by a malevolent oppositional force in what Skerl calls a "downward metamorphosis" (*William S. Burroughs* 39). This process occurs through a gradual assertion of voice over the person via political and emotive manipulation (the demand for equal rights and the crying jags). In the anecdote this voice reduces the body through a non-human (or perhaps, *à la* Nietzsche, too human) shutting down of the brain through cliché, emotion, and demand. Base human functions overtake capacities of language and all possible normal oral expression, and in this instance the effect is the devolution of the person into undifferentiated tissue, a form of stem cell material, though here achieving the opposite possibilities of plenipotentiary cells in that this material becomes almost a type of napalm disfiguring the body and devolving it toward the level of the crustacean or even further.

If for Burroughs much language usage incorporates a "definite technology for the negative use of words to cause confusion," this is "the opposite of what a writer does" (*Adding Machine* 34). "An essential feature of the Western control machine," Burroughs states, "is to make language as non-pictorial as possible, to separate words as far as

possible from objects or observable processes" (Burroughs and Odier, qtd. in Baldwin 63). The writer, on the other hand, trains himself or herself to use words to focus on the particularities of existence, away from the exigencies of power and control, perhaps by setting up a counterbalance to this control. One might compare this vision of the word and how it works to evoke "charged" particularities, even if imagined or hallucinated, with the idea of the image developed by Ezra Pound, one of the leading Modernist poets whose work helped break the gridlock of traditional forms to usher in the free verse movement. According to Michael Alexander, Pound's *Cantos* follows a strategy in which "honesty to perception involve[s] a shifting focus and the use of superimposed images and dissolving forms" (138), in a way that foreshadows Burroughs' adaptation of the rapidly shifting routine. In a similar vein, "Imagism," the pioneering focus on "direct treatment of the thing" that Pound and others introduced in the years before World War One, "attempted a new purchase on reality ('direct treatment of the "thing"') by a process of limitation ('the "thing"') and exclusion of inessentials by a formal purism. The pursuit of the essential, the illuminating moment caught in the significant detail, was Pound's habitual aim, an empirical mysticism involved in the origin of descriptive poetry" (90). This "direct treatment of the thing" can be compared with Burroughs' explanation of the title of *Naked Lunch* as referring to "a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork" (Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 199).

Pound's imagism thus bears relation to the strategies Burroughs employs. We must of course recall that the "image," as it is presented in poetry, literature, and writing generally, directly implicates itself in the "word," from which it is formed. For Pound, and in poetry generally, images are the creation of words that are used to stimulate or recall mental processes initiated by sensory perception. In this way the word, if not a virus, is a manifestation of energy, or at least becomes a funnel (like Pound's vortex) that can direct energy through its establishment of relations between energy fields. Thus Hugh Kenner can say of Pound's strategy that "Patterns made visible ... occupied [Pound]"; "'Emotion [evoked through language became] an organizer of form'" (146); "'Energy creates patterns'" (147). The "funneling" that words achieve is presented by Kenner as operating through indirection established by relation: "For Pound Imagism is energy, is effort. It does not appear itself by reproducing what is seen, but by setting some other seen thing into relation.... The action passing through any Imagist poem is a mind's invisible action discovering what will come next that may sustain the presentation ... to the end that the poem shall be 'lord over fact'..." (186). Again, this "image" is a creation of the word or of words that have been arranged to provide "psychic charge" through "direct treatment of the thing." It could be argued then that Burroughs achieves intensely "imagistic" effects through his presentation and disbursement of (often erotic) scenes that appear, evoke, and "fade out" in rapid order, rendering and in fact deliberately imitating a style that is often associated with the filmic or cinematographic.

The core concepts regarding the word and the power structures surrounding us lead us to Burroughs' suggestions regarding human interaction with the world in a way that can point toward the pedagogical approaches he mentions in some of his writings. Burroughs identifies his approach to the world as "magical thinking," and he contrasts it with other perspectives such as ego-dominated rationalistic thinking. Irwin associates Burroughs'

position with "animistic values" and "a literary and mystical move which attacks the basis of Western modernity and indeed the very self-justification of the West itself" (278). Burroughs does this, Irwin continues, through the introduction of "demonology and ... thematic possession" (278) in a way that posits these forces without reduction, recalling (Irwin states) the position Paulo Freire takes toward animistic societies in *Cultural Action for Freedom*: "As Freire has shown, reductionist readings of animism and magic in non-Western societies apply an externalist logic which fails to understand the inner coherence of the magic system" (Irwin 278). A primary aspect of Burroughs' magical thinking is a belief that the individual is at the center of his or her own perceptual universe and in some ways makes things happen in that universe, be it intentionally or unintentionally. That is to say, the perceptual universe of the individual is specifically *that person's* universe, created and manipulated by that person, though often without that person's knowing or conscious intention. In fact the question of intentionality versus non-intentionality, insofar as it is centered in ego consciousness and rational decision, is misleading in that Burroughs sees "the ego" as a "liability," at least insofar as artistic creation goes. As he puts it, "The best writing and painting is only accomplished when the ego is superseded or refuted. An artist is in fact transcribing from the unconscious" (*Adding Machine* 88).

The power to make things happen surpasses conscious manipulation through ego-centered domination in that Burroughs suggests that Freudian Id and Superego merge with ego, and that most action occurs outside conscious thought, though the links between consciousness and unconsciousness can often be traced. Burroughs believes in fact that the Freudian model offers an "outmoded" (*Adding Machine* 88) description of the spheres of human consciousness and the subconscious. To the end of usurping the domination of perceptions by the ego and increasing awareness of the connections between consciousness and the subconscious, he describes exercises he uses in writing classes that involve observation and a pursuit of the thought patterns that lead to particular events or perceptions. These exercises, which resemble some of the techniques used in Scientology and aim at results similar to those underlying spiritual beliefs and practices associated with eastern religions and disciplines, alert the student to perceptual processes and help the student understand or trace subliminal links that underlie "accidents" (which, for Burroughs, who is operating in a magical universe, are never accidental) and other actions and interactions in which the student is involved. In a way we could call these practices instances of spiritual pedagogy, in that behind them lies an effort to increase awareness and perhaps mindfulness. These efforts thus become central to developing a sense in which the student learns to shape or construct his or her own world, which Burroughs essentially sees as the activity the artist or writer engages in — making reality.

Burroughs points toward this understanding of magical thinking in his collection of essays *The Adding Machine*, where he declares his acceptance of magical truth. As he puts it, "Magic is the assertion of *will*, the assumption that nothing happens in this universe (that is to say the minute fraction of the universe that we are able to contact) unless some entity wills it to happen. A magical act is always the triumph or failure of the will" (99-100). He continues:

> Among so-called primitive peoples, if a man is killed in a fall from a cliff, the friends and relatives of the victim start to look for a killer…. The magical push or pull, which potent magic men achieve by a projection of their malignant will, reaches its purest form in defenestration…. You can observe [the mechanisms of magic] operating in your own experience. If you start the day by missing a train, this could be a day of missed trains and missed appointments. You need not just say 'Mektoub, it is written." The first incident is a warning…. Writers operate in the magical universe and you will find the magical law that like attracts like often provides a key note.... In the beginning was the word and the word *was* God. And what does that make us? Ventriloquist dummies. Time to leave the Word-God behind. (100-103)

Many of the exercises Burroughs recommends for writers involve acts of perception designed to increase awareness of the immediate environment. As an example, he presents the following recommended practice: "when walking down any street, try to see everyone on the street before he sees you. You will find that if you see others first they will not see you, and that gives you time to observe" (*Adding Machine* 33). Whether we can say that the results of this practice are true – whether, that is, by seeing others first you prevent them from seeing you – is obviously debatable, and would need to be tested through data collection or controlled experimentation, though such an approach would inevitably sabotage the results of the testing of the "magic" by its imposition of controls. Variations on this exercise mentioned by Burroughs involve successive observations of objects of specific colors as one walks, so that for instance one focuses on the red objects, then on the blue, green, yellow, etc., taking note of each. Burroughs' name for this exercise is "walking on colors," and he describes it this way: "Pick out all the reds on a street, focusing only on red objects…. Switch to green, blue, orange, yellow" (*Adding Machine* 50). The point of such exercises is that *perceptually*, the writing student who practices externalized focus of attention develops observational skills that increase awareness through centering on external realities rather than a potential interiorized monologue of random thought, or in literary terms a "stream of consciousness." Additionally, these exercises turn perception into montage, recalling Douglas Baldwin's assertion that for Burroughs, "montage in film and literature more closely matches human perception (especially urban perception) than ideologically inspired linear narrative with its satisfying closure" (Baldwin 71).

I have suggested that such techniques resemble some of the strategies that Scientology employs. In Scientology, one simple exercise can be interpreted as involving an effort to consciously observe objects via a process of direct questioning that emphasizes objective existence. An example would be to choose an object, say a tree, and consciously follow the steps suggested by the words "See that tree? Look at that tree. Thank you. See that sign?" and so on. An interlocutor might start you on this process, but eventually it gets internalized, so that the perceiver him- or herself follows the steps of itemization, observation, and disengagement via acknowledgement. The person practicing the exercise is of course expected to actively connect through the steps by *really* looking at

the tree (or whatever), even to the point of acknowledging its individuality and the particularities of its existence, appearance, and qualities through the act of thanking, paying respect to the tree, which perhaps merges with the self-congratulation implied in the acknowledgement of one's participation in the exercise. The effect might be said to involve separation of the perceiver from the visible world, and objects in the visible world from each other, so as to emphasize the individual's existence as a detached being (in Scientological terms, an operating Thetan) that is not actually part of the physical world as such. In fact one of the physical effects of such exercises is increased depth perception and awareness of existential dimensionality, accompanied by a "quieting of the mind" through externalized concentration on perception that makes the exercise useful as a technique of increasing mindfulness and awareness.

The connection between Burroughs' approach and strategies employed in Scientology may not be accidental. Burroughs himself practiced Scientology and apparently reached the state of "Clear" (Kostantinou), which refers to a level of consciousness in which past memories (called engrams) no longer generate uncontrolled reactive response. Burroughs has written regarding Scientology,

> Some of the techniques [of Scientology] are highly valuable and warrant further study and experimentation…. On the other hand I am in flat disagreement with [its] organizational policy. No body of knowledge needs an organizational policy. Organizational policy can only impede the advancement of knowledge. There is a basic incompatibility between any organization and freedom of thought. Suppose Newton had founded a Church of Newtonian Physics and refused to show his formula to anyone who doubted the tenets of Newtonian Physics? All organizations create organizational necessities. It is precisely organizational necessities that have prevented Scientology from obtaining the serious consideration merited by the importance of Mr. [L. Ron] Hubbard's discoveries. Scientologists are not prepared to accept intelligent and sometimes critical evaluation. They demand unquestioning acceptance. ("William S. Burroughs on Scientology")

We see Burroughs acknowledging the possibilities Scientology offers, but attacking it because of its adherence to bourgeois order, and in fact its slippage into the "control" mode that underlies "organizational necessities." Scientology becomes just another control structure attempting to dominate thought and existence. The freedom implicit in the exercise, in that it distinguishes and provides individuality to each entity perceived, is negated by the mechanisms of control that the Church of Scientology imposes upon its members, not to mention its control over the techniques this organization has developed to increase individual awareness.

One goal in Scientology is the "clearing" of reaction to external stimuli that "trigger" the individual. A strategy employed to this end involves sitting in a chair facing another person. The goal is to remain in a still, "meditative" state while the person opposite you says or does any number of things to provoke you or to "push buttons." The exercise is

meant to eliminate charge from what Scientologists call "the reactive mind." Similarly, the e-meter, a device that resembles a lie detector, is used to measure reactions with the aim of reducing the emotional "charge" associated with memories, just as by repetition one might imagine a subject reducing the charge measured by a lie detector. The intention is to "clear" the subject of emotional reactions generated by latent memory in order to prepare the subject for direct reception of the Scientological "truth" of human existence as "operating Thetans" (which is beyond the scope of this paper; as the Scientologists would put it, "understanding is agreement"). Hence the idea of "going clear" or of being "clear" refers to achieving or being in a state where the emotional charge of past events has been lessened or erased. Writing to Allen Ginsberg, Burroughs described this method of clearing as involving "directed recall": "[the Scientologists] simply run the tape back and forth until the trauma is wiped off. It works" (qtd. in Kostantinou).

Similar goals of deprogramming operate in the "pedagogical sets" (if one can use such words to describe them) of disciplines or religions such as yoga and Buddhism, both of which employ or encourage exercises to limit, counter, or reduce the "charge" of reaction generated by experience — sometimes in past lives — and its (often unconscious) internalization. Thus in these traditions the aim is to "empty" the mind through restraining and ultimately "clearing" mental content, as is made evident in the description of yoga that opens Patañjali's *Yoga Sutra*, which specifies the aims of yogic practice:

> Yoga is the cessation of the turnings of thought.
> When thought ceases, the spirit stands in its true identity as observer to the world.
> Otherwise, the observer identifies with the turnings of thought.
> (Stoler Miller 29)

The "turnings of thought, whether corrupted or immune to the forces of corruption" (31), are identified as "valid judgment, error, conceptualization, sleep, and memory." These in turn are defined as follows:

> The valid means of judgment are direct perception, inference, and verbal testimony.
> Error is false knowledge with no objective basis.
> Conceptualization comes from words devoid of substance.
> Sleep is the turning of thought abstracted from existence.
> Memory is the recollection of objects one has experienced.
> (Stoler Miller 31)

The role of language in perpetrating such "turnings of thought" should be obvious. Language arguably underlies all acts of inference and verbal testimony, as well as all "false knowledge" and "conceptualization," even if these relations are not always immediately obvious. Arguably the "image" structure of the brain involves visualization existing under a layer of verbalization that shapes and disguises visualization. The Poundian "imagism" discussed above in fact achieves its "psychic charge" through the

word's power to evoke the (deeper) visual or sensual image and/or perhaps to link images in a way that generates energetic responses. In many ways, then, "thought" can be understood as a manifestation of language, and often this manifestation occurs as what Patañjali calls "verbal delusion." Yogic practices included among the eight limbs of yoga, such as *asana* (yoga poses) and *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses), are designed to move one progressively toward "the cessation of the turnings of thought," which includes the cessation of (internalized) language.

Buddhism similarly encourages practices such as meditation that are meant to lead to states involving the stilling of thought. A primary aim here is to move the subject away from the separation of self and other and imprisonment in the past (i.e., karma) towards a recognition of the illusory nature of reality, or the "void." Burroughs in fact describes a conversation he had with Allen Ginsberg in relation to his theory of the word, as follows:

> I asked some of my Buddhist friends, including Allen Ginsberg, this simple question: who are you actually talking to when you are 'talking to yourself'? Without presuming a complete understanding of the nature of the Word, I suggested that such an understanding would make it possible to shut off the internal dialogue, to rub out the Word. Allen replied that the Buddhists have developed techniques over the centuries to do just that; it may be so. Not having experimented with their techniques, I can't say. But I wanted some *answers,* and it seems to me that in the three thousand years the Buddhists have had to toss this around, they have not come up with any. I offered this challenge then and I repeat it now: give me ten years and a billion dollars for research, and I'll get some *answers* for the question of the Word. (*Adding Machine* 48)

The suggestion Burroughs here makes in fact echoes one sometimes associated with Scientology, in that (so the argument goes) the Scientological employment of the e-meter and other technologies or practices eliminates the trial-and-error or "marathon" approach of the ancient disciplines, substituting technological solutions for ardor and money for time. It should also be noted that Burroughs' focus is much narrower than those of these ancient disciplines, in that 1) Burroughs concentrates exclusively on the effect of the word on human consciousness, and links it with the effect of social control mechanisms on human consciousness in a way that if addressed at all in the ancient systems, is only approached indirectly; 2) Burroughs lays aside the direct focus on morality as traditionally understood, not evoking concepts such as faith or consideration of observances (the yogic concern with *yama* or moral principles, the Buddhist emphasis on "right speech" and "right action" as part of the eight-fold path). In fact Burroughs hints in *Naked Lunch* that the state of peace and full awareness sought in *samadhi* (which he calls Soma) is in some ways just another form of addiction: "I have heard that there was once a beneficent non-habit-forming junk in India. It was called *soma* and is pictured as a beautiful blue tide. If *soma* ever existed the Pusher was there to bottle it and monopolize it and sell it and it turned into plain old time JUNK" (*Naked Lunch* 201). It must also of course be remembered that Burroughs here is writing a novel rather than

exploring a philosophy, so we are allowed to "suspect" the representation of the "truth" as it appears in the text, or in the perspective of the characters presented in the text.

If we wanted to link Burroughs' perspective to a more familiar or western pedagogical stance, we could point to Paulo Freire's description of the human relation to the world as presented in *Cultural Action for Freedom,* where he suggests the effect language has on human interaction with the world:

> Engagement and objective distance, understanding reality as object, understanding the significance of men's action upon objective reality, creative communication about the object *by means of language*, plurality of responses to a single challenge — these varied dimensions testify to men's relationship with the world. Consciousness is constituted by the dialectic of man's objectification and action upon the world. (40-41. My emphasis)

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire posits the "banking school of education" as the tradition in which students become depositories of information later to be regurgitated at will or at the bequest of the educational system. He argues for a critical pedagogy of "problem posing" that should allow the oppressed to regain their humanity and overcome their condition of oppression, a position that tallies in part with the Burroughsian approach in which the pupil becomes central to (and hence presumably gains some power over) interpretation of the world. Freire, however, does not suggest that the individual "makes" his or her own reality, but rather confronts and (hopefully) overcomes the problems posed by an extant reality, be they environmental, physical, or social. Burroughs goes beyond oppression at the social level by exploring the mechanisms of thought through which such information can be posited. The word virus, for example, becomes a controlling motif pointing toward the mechanisms of control that need to be confronted to go beyond the mechanism. In this way, through the quasi-spiritual or magical, the Burroughsian approach sidesteps the Freirian position in that Burroughs calls the very mechanisms of organization of the 'real' into question. For instance, in discussion with Daniel Odier, Burroughs points out that "If we realize that everything is illusion, then any illusion is permitted. As soon as we say that something is true, real, then immediately things are not permitted" (qtd. in Baldwin 70). An example of this approach to reality can be seen in the perception of something as seemingly basic to the human experience as time. Vecchio, in discussing the impact of Burroughs' theories on industrial music, points out that "The linear nature of time is usually not thought of as a 'deliberate attack' from an enemy, but time is an imposition that is never agreed upon *a priori*" (25). While it is difficult to imagine how one might escape from temporal linearity, it is not totally inaccurate to state that the *perception* of time as linear (in opposition, for example, to a cyclical understanding of time) is generated by social, cultural, and perhaps mechanical forces. It might in fact describe the difference between a mythical and a rationalistic approach to existence, in that it replaces eternal recurrence with temporal linearity. In his writing, Burroughs often undermines the perception of linear time through paramnesiac manipulations of words meant to generate senses of déjà-vu or jamais-vu. Bonome relates this practice to "ritornello," "a term describing a

section of a musical composition, which is repeated at some point during its performance," and discusses this practice in relation to "paramnesia":

> "paramnesia" typically defines a condition where the subject is not able to remember the proper meaning of words. Two other forms of paramnesia are worth mentioning; one occurs when someone thinks she has seen a scene before or lived a situation when in reality it is the first time such scene or situation is encountered, and is associated with "déjà-vu." The other type of paramnesia, where the familiar is thought to be experienced for the first time, is called "jamais vu."

These effects, manipulated in textual presentation, perhaps call into question, or reflect, or sabotage similar factors of control that are seemingly embedded in our perceptions, so that (Baldwin states), according to Burroughs, "*both* visual and verbal narratives traditionally fail to mimic real processes of perception; they instead redefine how people 'see'.... [T]his 'redefining' becomes a trope for how perception — individuals' 'narrative self-fashioning', as it were — is controlled by outside forces" (65). Thus we reach Burroughs' contention that "'Reality' is simply a more or less constant scanning pattern — The scanning pattern we accept as 'reality' has been imposed by the controlling power on this planet, a power primarily oriented towards total control" (qtd. in Baldwin 69).

Other exercises Burroughs suggests for writers go beyond the direct focusing on externalities described above, and may suggest ways in which "magical" approaches can begin to undermine such established notions as temporality. These approaches involve an effort to provide inroads into the subtle psycho-spiritual or magic interactions that emerge from the interplays of self, unconscious, environment, and perhaps the unnamable or unspeakable. Thus Burroughs recommends an exercise that mingles subject, object, and other potential entities or agents, perhaps as a way of beginning to penetrate the dichotomies such naming suggests. Here is the exercise, along with some results and suggested effects:

> Take a walk around the block. Come back and write down precisely what happened with particular attention to what you were thinking when you noticed a street sign, a passing car or stranger or whatever caught your attention. You will observe that what you were thinking just before you saw the sign relates to the sign. The sign may even complete a sentence in your mind. You are getting messages. Everything is talking to you. You start seeing the same person over and over…. At this point some students become paranoid. I tell them that of course they are getting messages. Your surroundings are *your* surroundings. They relate to *you*. (*Adding Machine* 101-102)

"Writers operate in the magical universe and you will find the magical law that like attracts like often provides a key note" (*Adding Machine* 101), Burroughs explains. In the exercise one of the most notable features is the subject's subtle perception of escape from linear time and rationalized organization of events. The sign completes a sentence

in a way that might suggest pre-perception or Jungian synchronicity (which Burroughs mentions, though he does not associate the phenomenon with Jung), or it points to the interference of environment with thought so that the sign becomes the logical or necessary end by somehow imposing its message on the subject's consciousness prior to direct awareness. Again, rational or any scientific testing of this approach and its effects would require some form of double-blind testing that given the subjective nature of the experience would be almost impossible, since it would require an affirmation of subjectivity through objective means — employment of the sort of organizational structure that Burroughs wishes to subvert, and a process posited upon the terms and meanings the exercise in some ways seeks to question. The question becomes, to what extent do we live unconsciously outside rational order in a world where voices float in the air, a sign completes a seemingly unrelated meaning, synchronous occurrences immerse us in repetitions of the same, invisibility is achieved through perception, etc.? These are both features of and questions posed by the magical world Burroughs claims he exists in and defends, and they return us to the realm of the shaman, spirit traveler, and other beings who exist in a world we in contemporary society claim to have left behind, a world of "primitive" "magical" existence in which all events are controlled *not* by assigning them meaning, but by attributing causal components that are often identifiable as unnamable forces. Burroughs' deliberate Rimbaudian deregulation of the senses, not to mention his experiences living in Mexico and Morocco, and his deliberate immersion in hallucinogenic experimentation during his journeys in the Amazon as depicted in *The Yage Letters,* suggests the extent to which he has tried to replicate, in modern terms, qualities of the primal, magical world order that seems ubiquitous in primordial societies. As he puts it, "I [give] my writing students various exercises designed to show how one incident produces a similar incident or encounter. You can call this process synchronicity and you can observe it in action" (*Adding Machine* 101).

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Burroughs lived as a writer rather than a teacher, so his comments on teaching are limited. From the few examples of strategies he developed to teach writing students, however, we can reach some conclusions, including those Burroughs himself presents. The intention of his teaching is to increase student awareness of the immense subtleties of the present moment as it passes, and to suggest the degree to which slippage of past and present, and interference of subliminal components, constitutes what we perceive as present reality, which so often includes what we *don't* perceive even though too often this component becomes the dominating agent in events that shape lives. It is the effort to capture the complexity of this reality, or to make this moment as fully alive as possible, that motivates the artist, Burroughs might suggest. The "word technology" the writer uses as a tool of trade is a "technology of magic," he would maintain, though "in the case of newspapers and magazines, [it is] mostly black magic. They stick pins in someone's image and then show that image to millions of people" (*Adding Machine* 49). Burroughs aims to sharpen perception "to help [students] make their own enquiries into the nature of word and image as they manifest themselves along association lines" (*Adding Machine* 50). The approach of "taking a walk with the continuity and perceptions you encounter" (*Adding Machine* 50) is useful to writers because "Writers operate in the magical universe" (*Adding Machine* 101), and the "variations of the walk exercise [are] all designed to show the student how incidents

are created and how he himself can create incidents. Artists and creative thinkers will lead the way into space" — a goal Burroughs foresees as pivotal in the next stages of human evolution — "because they are already writing, painting and filming space" (*Adding Machine* 102). We can give the last word to Burroughs, who describes "writing as [a] magical operation" and "[t]he written word [as] an image" "originally ceremonial or magical" (*Adding Machine* 48-49) in nature, perhaps because of its very capacities to generate, collect, and direct energy in all its forms. The continuity of the magical capacities of language is central to Burroughs' attempt to "destroy society through fantasy" in an effort to assert the viability of the individual's power of invention and imaginary force as basic to the center of perceptual control — as creating a reality remade through magic.

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