



Article

The Dark Ecology of *Naked Lunch*

George Hart

Department of English, California State University Long Beach, Long Beach, CA 90840, USA;
George.Hart@csulb.edu

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Abstract: In this article, I argue that William S. Burroughs' novel *Naked Lunch* engages in a "perverse aesthetics" that is analogous to Timothy Morton's theory of dark ecology. The novel's main themes of consumption and control are directly related to the Anthropocene's twin disasters of global warming and mass extinction, and the trope for addiction, junk, reveals Burroughs' deep analysis of the political and social forces that attempt to control life, what Burroughs calls biocontrol. By placing the novel's obsession with hanging/lynching in the context of dark ecology, its critique of racism can also be seen as a critique of speciesism.

Keywords: William S. Burroughs; *Naked Lunch*; dark ecology; consumption; control; Timothy Morton; speciesism; consumerism; mass extinction

In the introduction of *The Green Ghost: William Burroughs and the Ecological Mind*, Chad Weidner rejects Timothy Morton's dark ecology as a model for reading *Naked Lunch*. Drawing from *The Ecological Thought*, Weidner dismisses Morton's claims that thinking ecologically is viral (an idea that would seem to appeal to the author of *Naked Lunch*), and that ecology includes such things as human emotions, mental illness, and capitalism, because such a theory "cast[s] a very wide net indeed". According to Weidner, Morton "seems to accept the notion of nature as a cultural construct . . . but at the same time advises that we abandon romantic notions of nature altogether, to develop a more skeptical postmodern position. A more straightforward understanding of ecological concentrations is more helpful for framing this particular study" (Weidner 2016, p. 4). Weidner proposes an ecocritical reading of Burroughs' entire body of work, so his needs may indeed be better suited to other ecocritics and ecotheories than Morton and dark ecology, but I believe that when it comes to *Naked Lunch*, Morton's work has much to offer. The novel's two main concerns, consumption and control, are at play in the Anthropocene's twin catastrophes, global warming and mass extinction, and we need a less straightforward, more twisted and queer, understanding of what this means.

Although it began as the phrase "naked lust",¹ one meaning Burroughs attributed to *Naked Lunch*'s title is nicely captured in *The Ecological Thought*: "We can't spit out the disgusting real of ecological enmeshment. It's just too close and too painful for comfort. So it's a weird, perverse aesthetics that includes the ugly and the horrifying, embracing the monster . . . We have to make do with the nasty stuff that has been handed to us on our plate" (Morton 2010, p. 124). Morton's point is that ecology, rather than Nature (he likes to capitalize it to indicate its unnaturalness, as Weidner notes above), requires a "perverse aesthetics" because Nature is a conceptual containment strategy produced by agriculture that has been in place for 12,000 years (Morton calls this system agrilogistics). The aesthetics

¹ Oliver Harris traces the title's origins to the first version of the novel when it was a composite of *Junky*, *Queer*, and *Interzone* in the early 1950s (Harris and MacFadyen 2009, pp. 14–15). Burroughs' later remark that "the title means exactly what the words say" (Grauerholz and Miles 2001, p. 199), according to Harris, is a feint meant to distract from its original reference to the author's "naked lust" for a reluctant lover.

of agrilogistic Nature is heteronormative, ethnocentric, ableist, and sublime, the opposite of queer or perverse. Ecology, on the other hand, means that everything is connected to everything else, so foreground (human concerns) and background (Nature) can no longer be easily distinguished. “With dark ecology”, Morton explains, “we can explore all kinds of art forms as ecological: not just ones that are about lions and mountains, not just journal writing and sublimity. The ecological thought includes negativity and irony, ugliness and horror” (Morton 2010, p. 17). In other words, dark ecology is exactly the ecocritical frame that *Naked Lunch* requires.

Burroughs’ approach to writing also connects *Naked Lunch* with dark ecology. In a 1965 interview, he explicitly links his writing with anti-nuclear and environmentalist political action: “All of my work is directed against those who are bent, through stupidity or design, on blowing up the planet or rendering it uninhabitable”. In the next sentence, however, Burroughs describes his aesthetic strategy in terms that would not be seen as ecological: “Like the advertising people we talked about, I’m concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image to create an action, not to go out and buy a Coca-Cola, but to create an alteration in the reader’s consciousness” (Plimpton 1999, p. 32). It is indeed perverse to propose to use the techniques of consumerism and advertising to alter people’s consciousness in order to produce social change. By identifying himself with “advertising people” who manipulate words and images, Burroughs indicts authorship as another form of control, and in terms of *Naked Lunch*, this associates the author himself with the character of Dr. Benway, “a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control” (Burroughs 1991, p. 19). In *Naked Lunch*, as David Ayers points out, “junk” is the major trope of control: “Heroin addiction provides Burroughs with the metabolic model of control which structurally informs other models of control which he will subsequently employ” (Ayers 1993, p. 225). As Burroughs explains in the interview, “I think drugs are interesting principally as chemical means of altering metabolism and thereby altering what we call reality” (Plimpton 1999, p. 7). Perversely, as we will see, consuming drugs in *Naked Lunch* becomes a kind of consumerism that is a way of being ecological.

According to Morton, “there are some ecological chemicals in consumerism, just where we weren’t thinking to look” (Morton 2015, p. 120). The ecological chemicals in consumerism are desire, which in Lacanian terms is what is left when *need* is severed from *want*, and the narcissistic loop of doing something for its own sake. If the title *Naked Lunch* can default to its original meaning of “naked lust”, then eating and desire can be seen along the same lines. Indeed, this is exactly how Harris accounts for the play between *lust* and *lunch*: “what Burroughs termed *schlupping*—which features first in *Queer* and then *Naked Lunch*—was a fantasy of devouring the body of his elusive object of desire and so very much a matter of making lust into lunch” (Harris and MacFadyen 2009, p. 20). The consumption of bodies in *Naked Lunch*, when read through dark ecology, involves not only sexual fantasy and science-fiction ectoplasm but also racism and speciesism. One of *Naked Lunch*’s figures for junk is the Black Meat, which is derived from a giant aquatic centipede and, as the name suggests, is eaten rather than injected. Many bodies become “lunch” in the course of *Naked Lunch*.

The “unexamined meme” of consumerism, for Morton, is “*First there was need. Then there was want*”. Dark ecology, however, recognizes that “there is no ‘proper’ amount, and the proper is where need lives in historical accounts of want versus need. In those accounts, *need* is precisely calibrated not to be excessive” (Morton 2015, pp. 120–21). We are told in the “Deposition” that “Junk yields a basic formula of ‘evil’ virus: *The Algebra of Need*” (Burroughs 1991, p. 201). If “opium is profane and quantifiable like money”, then there is no limit on how much the addict needs, just as there is never enough money for a miser: “The more junk you use less you have and the more you have the more you use” (Burroughs 1991, p. 201). Junk scrambles the distinction that the metaphysics of presence requires between *want* and *need*, which is the metaphysics of the *proper*. Such is the typical way of being ecological: we should only use as much as we need and not give in to *wanting* more. Junk “is the ultimate merchandise” because “the junk merchant . . . sells the consumer to his product”. This is also the “basic formula” of consumerism: need without limit or control “suggests we follow directives emanating from thoughts and Coke bottles rather than deliberately and reasonably ‘needing’ them”

(Morton 2015, p. 123). Environmental ethics typically fails to examine Morton's "unexamined meme". To consume something just for the sake of consuming it is the "evil" virus of capitalism that is ravaging the planet, just as the "dope fiend" uses heroin for no other reason than using it: "Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control. In the words of total need: 'Wouldn't you?' Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do *anything* to satisfy total need" (Burroughs 1991, p. 201). Global warming and mass extinction are the results of the "carbon-fiend" total need for fossil fuels.

Dark ecology and *Naked Lunch* agree that the algebra of need is also the solution, whether the problem is the total need of junk or carbon. *Algebra* is derived from the Arabic word that means "the restoring of broken parts" and originally entered English as a term for setting broken bones. It is the art of restoring or balancing, so learning the algebra of need suggests a balancing of need and want—or, even better, a chiasmic reversal of them. The fragment of "Word" that begins the conclusion of the restored text ends with the claim: "Through these orifices transmute your body . . . The way OUT is the way IN . . ." ² Morton's algebra is a chiasmic reversal of the same formula: "*The way in is the way out*". ³ For Morton, being takes a loop form, a twisted circle like a Moebius strip that has no definable inside or outside. Agrilogistics and its literary correlatives such as nature writing "tr[y] to straighten out" such loops, and, unfortunately, "attempts to straighten things are violent" (Morton 2015, p. 57). In agrilogistics, *in* and *out* are not chiasmically reversible directions but rather firmly established binaries that must be policed. In dark ecology as in *Naked Lunch*, going deeper into consumerism allows the twist, the perversion, in being to escape agrilogistic control and avoid being "straightened" out.

If we need a perverse aesthetics that "embrac[es] the monster", then *Naked Lunch's* examination of "biocontrol" is central to dark ecology (Burroughs 1991, p. 136). Gilles Deleuze, accounting for the shift from a disciplinary (in the Foucauldian sense) society to a control society in the postwar era, cites Burroughs: "These are the societies of control, which are in the process of replacing the disciplinary societies. 'Control' is the name Burroughs proposes as a term for the new monster" (Deleuze 1992, p. 4). Thomas Nail reports that "according to Deleuze, Foucault was inspired by Burroughs' analysis of social control so much that he based the concept of biopower on it". He continues,

"Foucault and Deleuze are both quite clear in their examples of biopolitics that it includes the management of city-planning, money, transportation, crime, information, communication, water, sheep, grain and the climate, just as much as it is the statistical management of human births, deaths, marriages and illness. These are all living forces insofar as they are ultimately uncertain and non-totalizable phenomena. Accordingly, they cannot be managed as individuals, but only as populations with non-assignable limits: as multiplicities, as zones of frequency". (Nail 2016, pp. 254, 261)

Nail's account shows that biocontrol runs incipiently throughout the agrilogistic era even as it mutates from feudalism into industrialism into the information economy. Morton writes, "Neolithic humans needed to survive (mild) global warming, and so they settled in fixed communities that became cities, in order to store grain and plan for the future" (Morton 2018, p. 11). We cannot separate the "living forces" (demographics) from the material substrate that sustains them—controlling the regulation of life requires the control of non-life as well.

Naked Lunch itself records the shift from discipline to biopower in the political conflicts between the parties of Interzone. Deleuze tracks the change in the different types of machines in each era: in feudal power, it is simple machines such as pulleys and levers; disciplinary power uses machines powered by industrial energy sources such as coal and oil; and "the societies of control operate with machines of a third type, computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose active one is piracy and the introduction of viruses" (Deleuze 1992, p. 6). Control societies operate by codes and passwords

² (Burroughs 1991, p. 191), original ellipses.

³ (Morton 2015, p. 120), original emphasis.

rather than by force or discipline; in other words, language is the means of control. The most “evil” of the Interzone parties is the Senders, whose ultimate goal is to control the planet through “one-way telepathy”, though they must begin with the “crude” technique of installing electronic receivers in the subject’s brain. A Sender technician explains, “The biocontrol apparatus is prototype of one-way telepathic control. The subject could be rendered susceptible to the transmitter by drugs or other processing without installing any apparatus. Ultimately the Senders will use telepathic transmitting exclusively” (Burroughs 1991, pp. 136–37).

Of course, the Senders themselves are susceptible to addiction, and the result of constant one-way sending is that “one Sender could control the planet . . . *You see control can never be a means to any practical end . . . It can never be a means to anything but more control . . . Like junk*”.⁴ Control and junk operate on the same principle, and “junk is the ideal product”. The junk pyramid and the control pyramid are the models of consumerism: “The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product” (Burroughs 1991, p. 201). Deleuze identifies the shift from production to marketing as a characteristic of capitalism in the control society: “This is no longer a capitalism for production but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed” (Deleuze 1992, p. 6). Each of the political parties of Interzone, other than the Factualists, attempts their own control society paradigms: the Senders through one-telepathy, the Divisionists through replicating themselves, and the Liquefactionists through absorbing (or *schlupping*) their opponents. Although the Factualists are against all of these groups, they do not oppose everything about their methods (“the parties are not in practice separate but blend in all combinations”). They reject replicas because “such creatures constitut[e] an attempt to circumvent process and change”; the Factualists accept the “protoplasmic core” that the Liquefactionists exploit, but they want to allow it “a maximum of flexibility”; the Factualists do not “oppose telepathic research”, but they do “oppose . . . the use of such knowledge to control, coerce, debase, exploit or annihilate the individuality of another living creature” (Burroughs 1991, p. 140). Although every character seems to be a double agent, and everyone’s motives are suspect, it appears that the Factualists would be the party most likely to be the resistance against those intent on “blowing up the planet or rendering it uninhabitable”.

Each of the parties in opposition to the Factualists are manifestations of biopower, and Morton observes that “an ecological politics like that would be a monstrous situation, a ‘control society,’ a useful term invented by philosopher Gilles Deleuze to describe our contemporary world. An ecological control society would make the current state of affairs . . . look like an anarchistic picnic” (Morton 2018, p. 11). For Morton, there are “*styles of being ecological in thought mode*” and the dominant ways of “being ecological” are not adequate. A “very popular style”, according to Morton, is “the efficient style”, which “value[s] a smoothly functioning biosphere optimized for human existence without too much damage to other lifeforms”. This style, as opposed to other ones Morton calls immersive, authentic, and religious, treats nature as a blank slate that can be manipulated and formatted at will—geoengineering would be an extreme example—and “the seduction of this approach is the sense of mastery it bestows” (Morton 2018, p. 148). Dr. Benway is both the paradigm and parody of the efficient style. His operations parody medical efficiency because they have “absolutely no medical value”, and his associate Dr. “Fingers” Schafer proposes that the “human body is [so] scandalously inefficient” that it should be modified to “have one all-purpose hole to eat *and* eliminate” (Burroughs 1991, pp. 52, 110). Schafer’s proposal, of course, prompts Benway to tell the story of the talking asshole. The talking asshole routine is the most famous allegory of control in the novel, and it is therefore a distinctive parody of the efficient style (which usually ends with unintended consequences). The framing dialogue between Benway and Schafer, as we will see, is also related to the novel’s recurring references to lynching.

⁴ (Burroughs 1991, p. 137), original ellipses and emphases.

The most notorious hangings, as opposed to *lynchings*, in the novel are the sadomasochistic scenes of eroticized violence in Hassan's rumpus room and A.J.'s annual party.⁵ The lynching of Black people, however, occurs or is referenced five times in *Naked Lunch*—six if we include one of the “outtakes” in the restored edition—and lynching, which usually involved burning the body as well as hanging, is distinctly different than the eroticized hangings favored by A.J. and Hassan.⁶ Certainly, the ritualized hangings and pornographic movies are control devices being employed by Hassan and A.J., devices which evoke the underground world of sex trafficking and snuff films. Lynching, however, evokes a distinctly mainstream form of control, the system that W. Jason Miller calls “American lynching culture”: “a uniquely American practice that was enacted, sustained, and tolerated by a complex interplay of socioeconomic, psychological, racial, sexual, and political motives” (Miller 2011, p. 4). One of Burroughs' figures for addiction, “the Black Meat”, takes on new meaning when the connections between American lynching culture and speciesism come into focus. The Black Meat is a figure for junk, of course, and it is related to the Heavy Fluid excreted by Mugwumps, whose addicts are known as Reptiles. It is the “flesh of the giant aquatic black centipede” and its addicts are “Meat Eaters”. The Black Meat is sold in the Plaza of Interzone and Reptiles frequent the Meet Café, also located in the Plaza, to obtain the “addicting fluid” from the Mugwumps' “erect penises”. Two recurring characters are associated with the Black Meat, the Sailor and “Fats” Terminal. It appears that the Sailor is a Meat Eater because he is the middleman between Fats and Reptiles who sell “eggs” filled with the Black Meat. One form of junk is liquid and is absorbed through a “fan of green cartilage” behind the ear, and the other is solid and is ingested: “(The Black Meat is like a tainted cheese, overpoweringly delicious and nauseating so that the eaters eat and vomit and eat again until they fall exhausted)” (Burroughs 1991, pp. 45–47). The Black Meat, as a figure for junk, is directly connected to consuming, eating specifically.

The “struggle against racism is exactly the struggle against speciesism”, Morton asserts (Morton 2017, p. 133). For Morton, species is “spectral”—it is both there and not there at the same time. Because we share most of our DNA with our nearest primate relatives, we are not 100 percent human. There is a gap between what we are as individual lifeforms and what we are as a species: “Racism exists when one fills in the gap between what one can see (beings starting engines and shoveling coal) and what this human thing is: the human considered as a species, namely as a hyperobject, a massively distributed physical entity of which I am and am not a member, simultaneously” (Morton 2015, p. 15). Species is not a stable container in which lifeforms can be confined and thereby controlled. It is the ambiguity of evolution, which works by mutation—things turning into other things—that threatens the hierarchy of control. “The impulse behind racism . . . is also what empowers a thin and rigid distinction between humans and nonhumans. . . . We and all other lifeforms exist in an ambiguous space in between categories” (Morton 2018, p. 16). *Naked Lunch* itself is such an “ambiguous space” as well as its primary setting, an “in-between” place called Interzone.

The “*Meeting of International Conference of Technological Psychiatry*” is one place in Interzone where an evolutionary metamorphosis occurs. Dr. Schafer presents his “Master Work” to the conference: “*The Complete All American Deanxietized Man*”.⁷ On stage, “The Man wriggles . . . His flesh turns to viscid, transparent jelly that drifts away in green mist, unveiling a monster black centipede. Waves of unknown stench fill the room”. The other doctors see that Schafer has gone too far and decide to

⁵ Rob Johnson traces Burroughs' weird obsession with hanging back to “Word”. He writes, “I’m not enough of a psychologist to begin to speculate on Burroughs' sexual fixation with hanging, but it does seem to have something to do with the involuntary nature of the erection.” (Johnson 2020).

⁶ References to or images of the lynching of Black people occur on pages 88, 106, 133, 147, and 174 of the restored edition; the “outtake” is “The Black Meat”, pp. 266–69.

⁷ Another version of this hanging can be found in “Word” when “Mr. America” is hanged “a monster centipede squirms in his spine”. (Burroughs 1989, p. 137).

destroy the centipede because their “duty to the human race is clear”.⁸ The course of action is clear as well:

“We must stomp out the Un-American crittah”, says a fat, frog-faced Southern doctor who has been drinking corn out of a mason jar. He advances drunkenly, then halts, appalled by the formidable size and menacing aspect of the centipede . . .

“Fetch gasoline!” he bellows. “We gotta burn the son of a bitch like an uppity Nigra”!⁹

In speciesism, humans must clearly be distinguished from centipedes just as, in racism, white people must be distinguished from Black people. Once the ambiguity is resolved, the violence is justified.

In the outtake “The Black Meat”, there are no giant centipedes or Meat Eaters; in fact, the phrase “black meat” does not occur in the outtake. The episode begins with the dedication of a Generalissimo’s statue in which “some joker of an apprentice had made an ass hole” that produces “loud farting noises” and “a horrible stink” when the statue is unveiled (Burroughs 1991, p. 267). The smell pervades the scene and the narration follows it through suburbs in America, houses in Spain, the streets of Bogota, then abruptly shifts to Saint Paul on the road to Damascus. “Paul never miss a burning”, we are told, and then the scene shifts to the American South: “Yes”, the sheriff said, pushing a wad of snuff into his cheek. ‘Nothing like a good *slow* Nigga Burnin’ to quiet a town down for a piece . . . And folks go around all dreamy and peaceful looking and sorta sleepy like they just ate something real good and plenty of it . . . ”¹⁰ The vicarious feeling of being sated by symbolically consuming an actual Black body is not a fiction (though it is powerfully portrayed in fiction in James Baldwin’s “Going to Meet the Man”). *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, for example, reproduces a 1916 postcard with a picture of Jesse Washington’s burned body, on which the sender writes, “This is the Barbecue we had last night”.¹¹ The “black meat” that white Americans are addicted to (because it is what produces whiteness) is a literal as well as figurative addiction.

It is not hard to read “*The Complete All American Deanxietized Man*” and “The Black Meat” as allegories of what Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence, ultimately showing us how racism is linked to mass extinction. There are multiple allegorical parodies of control society in these scenes—academia, medicine, law, state—each of which exposes the violence of the metaphysics of presence, the insistence on consistency and non-ambiguity, its enforcement of binary norms: American/Un-American, White/Black, sane/crazy, human/“crittah”. Racism has “to do with thinking one can point to certain physical features as indicators of the proper” (Morton 2017, pp. 135–36). The idea of the proper is related to notions of property and possession that are the basis of racism. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida talks about the “proper body” and relates it to “the metaphysics of the proper [*le proper*—self-possession, propriety, property, cleanliness]”.¹² This is the logic of colonialism and ethnocentrism—whatever one wants to define as other lacks a proper self to possess; therefore the other is unable to be proper or to own property, and is otherwise a pollutant. In dark ecology, “the struggle against racism is thus also part of the deanthropocentrization project” (Morton 2017, p. 136). Reading *Naked Lunch* through dark ecology demonstrates that Burroughs’ analysis and critique of control extends to racialization and American lynching culture.

The talking asshole routine and the “*Meeting of International Conference of Technological Psychiatry*” are linked by the smell of the giant aquatic centipede and the burning Black Meat. Before the talking asshole routine, Benway appears to be discussing Schafer’s lack of success with “*The Complete All American Deanxietized Man*”: “Don’t take it so hard kid . . . *Jedermann macht eine kleine Dummheit*.”

⁸ (Burroughs 1991, p. 87), original ellipses.

⁹ (Burroughs 1991, p. 88), original ellipses.

¹⁰ (Burroughs 1991, p. 268), original ellipses.

¹¹ (Allen 2000), plate 26.

¹² (Derrida 2016, p. 28), original emphasis.

(Everyone makes a little dumbness)". Schafer has his doubts, but he concedes, "Yes, yes of course . . . and yet . . . I can't get that stench out of my lungs . . ." To which Benway ("irritably") replies, "None of us can . . . Never smelled anything remotely like it".¹³ Benway abruptly turns back to their task at hand, and Schafer, still lingering on his failed experiment perhaps, proposes his return to surgery to make the human body more efficient, prompting Benway's recounting of the talking asshole routine. Benway's point in telling the story is not to discredit Schafer's theory of efficiency, but to comment on American culture's prurient and puritanical attitude toward sex (or the repressed in general). "That's the sex that passes the censor", he explains, "squeezes between bureaus, because there's always a space *between*, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness, spurting out like breaking boils". The metaphysics of presence requires the Law of the Excluded Middle because it needs binary distinctions with no gray area.¹⁴ Benway's anti-bureaucracy tirade that follows is an implicit argument for the excluded middle, for "a space *between*" bureaus that is not supposed to exist. Michael Jarvis describes the critical debate around Benway's rant against bureaucracy here. The "two possibilities for the presence of this passage within a Benway monologue" are either to read it naturalistically as the character's own opinions or "as narrated by Burroughs' direct authorial voice". He proposes that to avoid "the author/character debate altogether" we can "allow ourselves merely to read this as the novel's own voice of critique" (Jarvis 2017, p. 199). The notion of "mere" reading assumes a pre-theoretical idea of reading and severely abuses the idea of "voice" in writing. Burroughs' distrust of character and authorship are certainly at play here, but it is safe to say that Benway is a mouthpiece for Burroughs' political critique: old Bull Lee, the character based on Burroughs in *On the Road*, expresses the same opinion (Kerouac 2007, pp. 133–34).

Bureaus, according to Benway/Bull Lee/Burroughs, are a cancer upon democracy. The "American rottenness" spurts out into these between spaces, like the "Undifferentiated Tissue" that covers the carny performer's mouth as the asshole takes control, and "grow[s] into some degenerate cancerous life-form, reproducing a hideous random image". According to Benway, as opposed to a cooperative, "Bureaucracy is [. . .] a turning away from the human evolutionary direction of infinite potentials and differentiation and independent spontaneous action" (Burroughs 1991, p. 112). "*The Complete All American Deanxietized Man*" reveals the Blackness at the center of American whiteness, and the talking asshole reveals the human institutions that corrupt and control potential, difference, and life ("independent spontaneous action").

Benway, as is commonly noted, is not only the master figure of control in the novel's Interzone chapters, he is also a figure for authorial control, or anxiety about authorial control: if characters exhibit "independent spontaneous action" then the author has lost control, "The Crime of Separate Action" has occurred (Burroughs 1991, p. 186). However, the point of these comments from the "Atrophied Preface" is to problematize the idea of *voice* in the first place:

Sooner or later The Vigilante, The Rube, Lee The Agent, A.J., Clem and Jody The Ergot Twins, Hassan O'Leary the After Birth Tycoon, The Sailor, The Exterminator, Andrew Keif, "Fats" Terminal, Doc Benway, "Fingers" Schafer are subject to say the same thing in the same words, to occupy, at that intersection point, the same position in space-time. Using a common vocal apparatus complete with all metabolic appliances—that is, to be the same person—a most inaccurate way of expressing *Recognition*: The junky naked in sunlight . . .

If we can hear "the novel's own voice", it is because there is "a common vocal apparatus" that all speakers in the novel share—the author's. Bakhtinian heteroglossia notwithstanding, Burroughs' voice is the narrator's voice, is Benway's, the Vigilante's, the Rube's, and Lee the Agent's voices. It is an "inaccurate" representation—as all representations are—of what happens when "the writer sees himself reading to the mirror as always" and realizes "what it means in terms of lost control when the

¹³ (Burroughs 1991, p. 110), original ellipses.

¹⁴ For Morton's discussion of the Law of the Excluded Middle, see (Morton 2015, pp. 87–88).

reflection no longer obeys".¹⁵ Intersection points are like Interzone itself and the in between spaces in which "independent spontaneous action" occurs.

The character from the above list who is the intersection point for the themes of consumption and control as they relate to eating and the Black Meat is "Fats" Terminal. The first passage with Fats as an actor occurs immediately after the talking asshole routine, in which Fats sponsors "the Hunt Breakfast" for a motorcycle gang, The Huntsmen, in a gay bar. Such A.J.-like hijinks indicate that "'Fats' is connected in some unspecified way with every underground of the world", as we are told when he appears in "Word" (Burroughs 1989, p. 184). Fats' significance in *Naked Lunch* is his association with "The Algebra of Need":

"Fats" Terminal came from The City Pressure Tanks where open life jets spurt a million forms, immediately eaten, the eaters canceled by black time fuzz . . .

Few reach the Plaza, a point where The Tanks empty a tidal river, carrying forms of survival armed with defenses of poison slime, black flesh-rotting fungus, and green odors that sear the lungs and grab the stomach in twisted knots . . .

Because Fats' nerves were raw and peeled to feel the death spasms of a million cold kicks . . . Fats learned The Algebra of Need and survived . . .¹⁶

Fats is associated with the evolutionary life process, the ability of species to adapt to new environments and survive. If junkies exist in a state of suspended animation because they slow their metabolisms down with heroin, "Fats" Terminal's association with living beings means he has found the way out by the way in. Biological processes appear as a positive force against biocontrol twice in the novel. The "great blue tide of life" represented by "pictures of men and women, boys and girls, animals, fish, birds, the copulating rhythm of the universe" is how A.J. disrupts Hassan's "rumpus"; and, in the section "describing The City and the Meet Café [which was] written in a state of *yagé* intoxication", the narrator feels a "beautiful blue substance" flow into him as he "turn[s] into a Negress" and "everything stirs with a writhing furtive life".¹⁷ The *yagé* vision of Interzone, where "all houses [. . .] are joined", is a dark ecological version of the *oikos*, the interconnectedness that Morton calls "the mesh" (Morton 2010, p. 28).

The "open life jets [that] spurt" out lifeforms that immediately eat each other are precisely the image of Morton's "disgusting real of ecological enmeshment" that we find on our plate. It is also captured in one of the most famous ecological figures, Aldo Leopold's "biotic pyramid". The key distinction between the control pyramid and the biotic pyramid is that the former operates on the principle of monopoly. Leopold's pyramid is a much more unruly affair: "Each species, including ourselves, is a link in many chains . . . The pyramid is a tangle of chains so complex as to seem disorderly, yet the stability of the system proves it to be a highly organized structure" (Leopold 1949, pp. 214–15). As a work that is constantly undoing itself, that "resists the idea of a fixed text" and, as Harris puts it, "torment[s] us by presenting an experience we cannot master", the biotic pyramid might be the better model for reading *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs 1991, p. 233; Harris 2003, p. 217). Leopold's pyramid is self-deconstructing (and therefore, self-renewing, ideally): the energy that flows upward in the pyramid has to return to the lower levels through detritus pathways or else the system collapses. As the "Deposition" suggests, there is a way to undermine any pyramid: "If we wish to annihilate the junk pyramid, we must start with the bottom of the pyramid . . . *The addict in the street who must have junk to live is the one irreplaceable factor in the junk equation.* When there are no more addicts to buy junk there will be no junk traffic" (Burroughs 1991, p. 202). As dust bowls, droughts, and crop

¹⁵ (Burroughs 1991, p. 186), original ellipses.

¹⁶ (Burroughs 1991, p. 172); original ellipses.

¹⁷ (Burroughs 1991, pp. 69, 91–92). Although *yagé* is supposed to be a cure for heroin addiction, Burroughs (or Benway) associates the color blue with junk in the *Paris Review* interview: "You see, as Dr. Benway said, I've now decided that junk is not green, but blue" (20).

failures demonstrate, the same is true of the biotic pyramid—remove the bottom layer, the soil, and the pyramid collapses.

Here, then, is a composite of Burroughs' political theories: bureaucracy is cancerous because it tries to control a process monopolistically. In fact, he speaks of capitalism in ecological terms when he refers to Rockefeller as "a specialized monopolistic organism" (Plimpton 1999, p. 24). Burroughs speculates that Rockefeller would not survive as an "organism" in the post-monopoly capitalist economy. The force of "independent spontaneous action", however, breaks through the space between bureaucracies and monopolies, though it is deformed in the process. Ecology does not function on the "basic principles of monopoly", which, according to *Naked Lunch*, are give nothing away for free, keep a reserve, and take as much back as you can (Burroughs 1991, p. 200). If the bottom level of the pyramid does not have something returned to it, it will stop functioning. The tangled food chains in the biotic pyramid mean that everybody has lunch and everybody is lunch. Fats' surname associates him with "the fibrous grey wooden flesh of terminal addiction", whereas his nickname associates him with the "flesh of cure", in which "thirty pounds materialize[] in a month when you kick" (Burroughs 1991, pp. 195, 203). The junk pyramid and the biotic pyramid function by consumption, and Fats is fat because he is a dealer as well as an addict: "(it is no accident that junk higher-ups are always fat and the addict in the street is always thin)" (Burroughs 1991, p. 200). The Mexican dealer Lupita twice proclaims, "'Selling is more of a habit than using,'" and "non-using pushers" develop "a contact habit, and that's one you can't kick" (Burroughs 1991, pp. 14, 193). So, unlike Bradley the Buyer, an agent whose contact addiction becomes terminal when he turns into "a creature without species" and must be destroyed with a flame thrower, Fats survives because he is both an addict and a dealer, a short circuit in the junk pyramid. The Algebra of Need is itself the short-circuit that turns consuming into consumerism.

Fats learns the Algebra of Need and survives because he is both addict and dealer, both terminal and fat. Being in a loop is the way lifeforms exist according to dark ecology, and being in a loop is evil in the metaphysics of presence (that is, it is narcissism). Binaries such as in and out cannot be reversed in agrilogistics—there must be a definite inside so what is not proper can be exiled to the outside—but they can in the Algebra of Need. For Lee the Agent, control addiction is a particularly American phenomenon, and he links it directly to eating, metabolism, and the efficient style: "Americans have a special horror of giving up control, of letting things happen in their own way without interference. They would like to jump down into their stomachs and digest the food and shovel the shit out" (Burroughs 1991, p. 179). *Naked Lunch* and dark ecology practice the perverse aesthetics required to embrace the monster, to give up control, and, since we are being ecological, to enjoy "the nasty stuff that has been handed to us on our plate".

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