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Abstract: This paper considers William S. Burroughs's nonfictional long-form essay *The Electronic Revolution* (1970) and contemporaneous fictional novel *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead* (1971) alongside some moments from the early work of Patti Smith, including her time with the Patti Smith Group and their four albums together between 1975 and 1979. I align Burroughs's concepts of the word virus and wild boy – concepts subsequently taken up by Smith – with the three luxuries of nature identified by intellectual Georges Bataille in his theorization of general, or solar, economy. The parasitic and proliferative appearance of Burroughs's writing and Smith's performances – artworks that resemble electronic spam and speaking in tongues – bear some resemblance to the alien duplicates in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* insofar as these artists waste their textual and physical bodies from within, thereby working against the sociolinguistic logic of identity.

Neo Boys

Daniel Sander

> *Throughout the derelicted warrens at the heart of darkness feral youth cultures splice neo-rituals with innovated weapons, dangerous drugs, and scavenged infotech. As their skins migrate to machine interfacing they become mottled and reptilian. They kill each other for artificial body-parts, explore the outer reaches of meaningless sex, tinker with their DNA, and listen to loud electro-sonic mayhem untouched by human feeling.*
>
> – *Nick Land,* Meltdown

> *Within the context of neo rock / We must open up our eyes and seize and rend the veil of smoke which man calls order / Pollution is a necessary result of the inability of man to reform and transform waste / The transformation of waste / The transformation of waste / The transformation of waste / The transformation of waste is perhaps the oldest preoccupation of man / Man being the chosen alloy, he must be reconnected via shit, at all cost / Inherent within us is the dream of the task of the alchemist to create from the clay of man / And to recreate from excretion of man pure and then soft and then solid gold.*
>
> – *Patti Smith,* 25th Floor

Drawing together the work of William Burroughs and Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze theorizes the society in which we live as characterized by control. As a theorist and artist, Burroughs proffers both the diagnostic for control society as well as the way out of it (which is a way through). This way through, especially as it is outlined in his *The Electronic Revolution* (1970), is in turn taken up by Patti Smith in the rhetoric of her song lyrics, in the experiences on which these draw, and in her self-presentation as an artist. Against the control society of contemporary capitalism, the works of Burroughs and Smith thwart reinvestment through displays of expenditure.[1] In order to unpack over the course of the present paper the performative force of displays of expenditure arrived at by scavenging and recycling, I consider how the reduction of objects to codes allows for societal control as extrapolated by Deleuze. Then I turn to Burroughs for the artistic strategies he suggests to evade control. These tactics, taken up sonically by Smith, will bring us to a discussion of the general economy of Georges Bataille.

1

Wendy Chun clues us in on the ways in which the computer's graphical user interface (GUI) fosters an illusion of control by the computer user that is dependent upon the black-boxing of those writing processes out of the user's control. This black-boxing allows for another sort of control: not control *by* the user but control *of* the

[1] For example, both artists employ homosexual sex as an aesthetic approach in their work.

user. As Chun notes, "the drive to map and to promote transparency enables nontransparent data tracking that cuts across the governmental, the political, the commercial, and the personal" (92). Chun gives the now ubiquitous example of social networks that, while premised upon the (transparent) window of sharing short texts among users, also enable backdoor (non-transparent) governmental surveillance as well as speculative monetization.

This kind of surveillance can be differentiated from another sort that precedes it, each of which can be attributed to a different form of society, for machines "express the social forms capable of producing them and making use of them" (Deleuze 180). Deleuze parses this difference in his essay "Postscript on Control Societies." As he tells us, the basis of the differentiation in question is a temporal one: what Foucault calls *disciplinary society* (associated with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) versus what Burroughs calls *control* (associated with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries). Elaborating upon the different logics suggested by discipline and control, Deleuze writes:

> Disciplinary societies have two poles: signatures standing for *individuals*, and numbers or places in a register standing for their position in a *mass*. Disciplines see no incompatibility at all between these two aspects, and their power both amasses and individuates, that is, it fashions those over whom it's exerted into a body of people and molds the individuality of each member of that body . . . In control societies, on the other hand, the key thing is no longer a signature or number but a code . . . We're no longer dealing with a duality of mass

> and individual. Individuals become '*dividuals*', and masses become samples, data, markets, or '*banks.*' (179-180; emphasis in original)

The transformation from disciplinary to control society, less replacement than palimpsest, which turns individuals into "dividuals" is rooted in the transformation from industrial to neoliberal capital, from the gold standard to the exchange rate. The transformation from discipline to control suggests different sorts of surveillance because, due to the decomposition of the duality of mass and individual, surveillance no longer happens from some privileged point of view, as figured by Foucault in Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, through which facts and figures might normatively regulate an individual in relation to a mass. Rather, surveillance is multiplied everywhere and described more by what Bruno Latour has termed the oligopticon. Differing from "the absolutist gaze of panoptica," oligoptica are command and control centres that "see much *too little* . . . but what they see, they *see it well*" (Latour 181; emphasis on original).

Steven Shaviro provides the example of video surveillance cameras, which, unlike panoptica, are everywhere and often in plain sight, "each presenting its own singular point of view" (*Connected* 36). Where disciplinary surveillance is punitive and constative, surveillance-as-control is preemptive and performative: "The purpose of video surveillance is not to record crimes and other dangerous events so much as to prevent these events from happening in the first

place" (33).[2] Two consequences, highlighted by Shaviro, follow from the performativity of surveillance-as-control. The first is that surveillance is no longer geared towards "an archive of 'permanent documentation' that doubles actual existence" (36) but towards feedback upon itself, "dividuals" feeding back into banks and manipulating behaviour in real time. This is why Deleuze describes the confinements of disciplinary society as moulds versus the modulations of control. The second is that most of the multiplied and partial singular points of view of video surveillance are "devoid of incident" (36), resulting in an accumulation of footage in which nothing happens and through which no one could ever fully sort.

2

One could easily imagine the dystopic man-reptile scenario sketched out by Nick Land in *Meltdown* (to which I allude in this paper's epigraph) or in Burroughs's novels of the early 1970s, such as *The Wild Boys* and *Port of Saints*, in which a band of homosexual youth renegades runs rampant across the planet. Around the same time as the novels' publication, Burroughs also wrote *The Electronic Revolution*, in which he argues the case for the written-word-as-virus

[2] Lauren Berlant adds in *Cruel Optimism*: "In theory, the subject of democracy is a being without qualities, included in the space of politics because of some formal compliance with a rule (of blood, of birth). But the anonymity of the informatic citizen has a different status: what's being recorded is not their citizenship status, but evidence of their potential intentions, of *who they might become*. In this sense, every moment of everyday life is now an audition for citizenship, with every potential 'passer-by a culprit.' In the security state, no one knows when the citizen's audition for citizenship is happening, through what channels, and according to what standards" (240; emphasis in original).

and makes suggestions as to how one might live with and against it. At first glance, the Lord-of-the-Flies barbarism of the wild boys might seem at odds with the technologization of the electronic revolution; however, it is towards a conceptual congruence of these two bodies of work that this paper is geared. While the wild boy figure can and has been considered in terms of gay liberation, gay male misogyny, and racist exoticism, I am less interested in the figure of the boy than in his wildness or uncontrollability, as well as in the themes of replication and sexual display/selection. Both the uncontrollability of the wild boys and the aesthetic tactics employed by Burroughs in *The Electronic Revolution* are responses to the control society and, thus, provide apt contexts for this paper to analyze the ways in which digital transcoding results in a surplus of self-modulating information.

This shift in emphasis from an experience of boyhood to an embodiment of childlike wildness also suggests that the performativity of queerness is less about an artist's representation of queer identities and same-sex object choices and more about the appeals the art object itself, sexual or otherwise, makes to the viewer. Like art, queerness is preternatural in the way in which it thwarts any quest for meaning and leads to experiences in which bodies are de-subjectivized, neither held together through an extrinsic link nor fused. Moreover, meaningless de-subjectivization in the work of Burroughs (and Smith after him) might seem to lend to an analysis based in a lineage of anti-relational queer theory that extends from Jacques Lacan to Leo Bersani to Lee Edelman, in which white gay male penetrative sex is significant primarily because it shatters selves

and hence the opportunity for intersubjectivity. However, this paper resists a psychoanalytic framework, opting instead for a Foucauldian optic through which sex acts themselves matter less than "'the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate'" (Foucault qtd. in Bersani 220). In this respect, the figure of the wild boy is to be valued for the unforeseen kinds of relationships and unprecedented futures it fosters.

The epigraph from Land is an accelerationist account of the not-so-distant future and of the strands of anti-authoritarianism bred therein. How is it that the theoretically driven science fiction of Land and the homosexually fantastic science fiction of Burroughs, written some two decades earlier, both point to a similar account of the future, a future in the wake of Burroughs's so-called electronic revolution? The similarity results from a shared imagining of how resistance might work within a control or network society. Burroughs, Deleuze, and Land conceive of resistance as intensification and/or interference rather than opposition and/or withdrawal. There is nothing realer, truer, and with a more totalizing position outside or underneath an ideology from which it might be critiqued, mapped, and revealed.[3] Rather, "illusion is a revolutionary weapon" (*Electronic Revolution* 12).[4]

[3] Further, Timothy Murphy writes: "The dialectical critique of ideology itself produces ideology, and the structural study of myth itself produces myth. The various critiques of demystification leave us, then, without access to a privileged level of reality that would allow us to determine the adequacy of any representation of the world to that world; truth can no longer be conceived as this adequacy, and therefore no traditional hermeneutic approach will be able to

Burroughs is led to this pronouncement through a semantic consideration of the written word as a virus that precedes and facilitates spoken word, heretofore unrecognized "because it has achieved a state of symbiosis with the host" and assumes "a specially malignant and lethal form in the white race" (*Electric Revolution* 5-6).[5] If, after Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message, then the message and power of written and spoken word, of language, is its viral capacity. Understanding viruses as "very small units of sound and image" (20), Burroughs configures the viral capacity for infection and replication in terms of three tape recorders: Recorder 1 is the virus's host; Recorder 2 is the virus's access to the host; and Recorder 3 is the effect of this access on the host, its playback or reality, its performativity. In terms of the word virus, Burroughs identifies three reality effects: the "IS OF IDENTITY," or "the assignment of permanent condition"; the "DEFINITE ARTICLE THE," or "the implication of one and only"; and the "CONCEPT OF EITHER/OR" (33-34).

These effects align with the moulding confinements of disciplinary society by which, for example, "factories formed individuals into a body of men for the joint convenience of a management that could monitor each component in this mass, and

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provide the grounds for the transformation of existing practices of exploitation and domination by simply unmasking the status quo" (143).

[4] Or, "Nothing is true. Everything is permitted" (Burroughs, *Wild Boys* 178).

[5] "Many policemen and narcotics agents are precisely addicted to power, to exercising a certain nasty kind of power over people who are helpless. The nasty sort of power: white junk, I call it – rightness; they're right, right, right – and if they lost that power, they would suffer excruciating withdrawal symptoms" (Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction").

trade unions that could mobilize mass resistance" (Deleuze 179). Burroughs's hypothesis, however, is that the assignation of fixed, reified, and contradictory identities, and of permanent, singular, and exclusive positions in society with respect to a mass, is actually the result of a transhistorical virus that is only recently breaking down and revealing itself to society through media events such as nuclear testing, the Watergate scandal, and the therapeutic program of Scientology. Because control society does away with, by flattening through coding, the duality of individual and mass, Burroughs's artistic provocation is to hijack the viral mechanism itself, the medium, and reverse-engineer different reality effects. In terms of the above, this would be to produce a non-Aristotelian logic (which Burroughs attributes to Alfred Korzybski) by eliminating the verb *to be*, swapping the definite *the* for the indefinite *a*, and replacing *either/or* with *and*.[6]

The reverse engineering of different reality effects is also the basis of Burroughs's use of the cut-up writing method, "a kind of predigital form of sampling" (Shaviro, *Connected* 67-68), devised by Burroughs along with Brion Gysin. Furthermore, Burroughs's tape recorder analogy can be understood as follows: Recorder 1 is the

[6] "Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. That's a cut-up . . . Yes, it is unfortunately one of the great errors of Western thought, the whole either/or proposition. You remember Korzybski and his idea of non-Aristotelian logic. Either/or thinking just is not accurate thinking. That's not the way things occur, and I feel the Aristotelian construct is one of the great shackles of Western civilization. Cut-ups are a movement toward breaking this down" (Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction").

source text, Recorder 2 is the access/extraction/recording/sample from the source text, and Recorder 3 is the playback of these recordings and pictures against their source and its order. Playing back different words, different moving images, results in different reality effects. Burroughs thus imagines reality as a war, or game, amongst competing scramblings (unscramblings and rescramblings), or scannings, of information, and this is why illusion is a revolutionary weapon. Like the revelation of epigenetics, the study of gene expression outside a hereditary framework (i.e., genes actually select and edit what will be expressed based on environment), "what you notice and store as memory as you walk down the street is scanned out of a much larger selection of data which is then erased from memory" (*Electronic Revolution* 21-22). Replacing the genotype of the word virus or cutting up its phenotype thus works "to break down automatic scanning patterns" and "train[s] the subject to see at a wider angle and also to ignore and erase at will" (21-22). And because the word virus is particularly white, one result of such training is a becoming-brown of the earth's population.

In a way similar to that by which the black-boxing of the computer both allows for control by and of its user, the liberatory properties of the virus are forever tethered to and tempered by its main purpose of replication. Building on the work of Douglas Kahn, Mark Hansen has written about the way in which Burroughs' conceptualization of the word virus draws on two competing images of the virus:

> If the body-as-tape-recorder foregrounds the interruption and selective materialization of data flow, the virus-as-replicator inverts the direction of this process, taking root in (and indeed from) materialized bodies and gradually but inexorably replicating its looped, closed-circuit message until the point of total dematerialization." (Hansen)[7]

This is why control cannot be foregone so much as evaded. Consequently, Burroughs is geared less towards the propagation of different playbacks of reality for the organic body and more towards a playback that would virally dissolve the body as such, "hence Burroughs' fatal endgame: to appropriate the viral techniques in order to do away with the [white] body before it can be replicated and used against us" (Hansen).[8]

While Burroughs conceives of the virus through the image of the written word, the sound of the spoken word, and their shared purpose of replication, his word virus can be placed within a cosmology of

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[7] Shaviro makes a similar point in his analysis of Burroughs's work: "On the one hand, Burroughs says, cut-ups are valuable tools to scramble the dominant codes and to break down our preprogrammed associations. Cut-ups 'establish new connections between images, and one's range of vision consequently expands' . . . On the other hand, Burroughs later pessimistically worries that cut-ups have only limited efficacy since they still assume, and still serve, the viral replication of the dominant language: 'the copies can only repeat themselves word for word. A virus is a copy. You can pretty it up, cut it up, scramble it – it will reassemble in the same form'" (*Connected* 68).

[8] "This is the space age and sex movies must express the longing to escape from flesh through sex. The way out is the way through," Burroughs writes in *Wild Boys* (90). In his interview with Conrad Knickerbocker, Burroughs explains: "Words, at least the way we use them, can stand in the way of what I call nonbody experience. It's time we thought about leaving the body behind . . . The hope lies in the development of nonbody experience and eventually getting away from the body itself" ("The Art of Fiction.") "The body, then," as Mark Fisher reminds us, "emerges as a set of nonorganic recordings, triggers and replays."

viruses, or universal equivalents, definitive of control, or network, society. All of these viruses, while potentially producing an illusion of variety, actually work to replicate themselves and thereby homogenize their hosts. As Shaviro elaborates,

> Dollars, bytes, DNA, and LSD: these are the magical substances, the alchemical elixirs, of global network culture. In all these cases, a 'universal equivalent' imposes itself upon, and homogenizes, what was previously a heterogeneous group of materials. The equivalent first works as a common measure, or a simple medium of exchange, but soon enough it outgrows its utilitarian function and takes on a strange new life of its own. It ceases to 'represent' the objects against which it is exchanged, and instead appears as their ground, or their animating principle. (*Connected* 192)[9]

The way in which a virus eventually exceeds its purpose of making its host exchangeable such that it appears to be the cause of its host – in terms of dollars, that which constitutes the Marxist commodity fetish

[9] "The upsurge in drug taking is intimately related to the impact of the electric media. Look at the metaphor for getting high: turning on. One turns on his consciousness through drugs just as he opens up all his senses to a total depth involvement by turning on the TV dial. Drug taking is stimulated by today's pervasive environment of instant information, with its feedback mechanism of the inner trip. The inner trip is not the sole prerogative of the LSD traveler; it's the universal experience of TV watchers. LSD is a way of miming the invisible electronic world; it releases a person from acquired verbal and visual habits and reactions, and gives the potential of instant and total involvement, both all-at-onceness and all-at-oneness, which are the basic needs of people translated by electric extensions of their central nervous systems out of the old rational, sequential value system. The attraction to hallucinogenic drugs is a means of achieving empathy with our penetrating electric environment, an environment that in itself is a drugless inner trip" (McLuhan).

– is precisely the negative form of nonhuman energy harnessed by the feral youth cultures described by Land and Burroughs. While the digitization of society – begun in the cybernetic fold through the paranoid implementation of game theory during the Cold War – sought to engineer and control efficiency by surrendering, for example, psychiatry to diagnosis, evolution to genes, and politics to the free market, what Land's and Burroughs's designations of feral and wild respectively recognize is the ultimate futility of such control.

The reasons for this are twofold. The first has to do with the way in which algorithmic calculation is dependent on an excess/potentiality/surplus that can be modeled by calculation but not reduced to it; that is, a virus requires a host, but the map is not the territory.[10] Shaviro describes this in terms of the inverse relation between the operations of brains and computers: "A computer's operations are *actually* linear and sequential, but *virtually* they are multiple and synchronous . . . The brain's operations are *actually* multiple and synchronous, but *virtually*, they are linear and sequential" (*Connected*, Shaviro 116; emphasis in original). In terms of these operations, we could now say that the virtual linearity and sequentiality of consciousness is a reality effect attributable to the word virus, an interface that makes navigable the brain's parallel processing of the surfeit information it receives from its environment. The second reason that calculability taken to its extreme is ultimately

[10] "One of the many paradoxes of the Control virus that Burroughs so carefully delineates is its need to keep its victims alive: no control without something to be controlled, no parasitism without a host" (Fisher). Morton, too, adds that, in order "[t]o compute, you need something to compute. You can't get this from computation."

feral and wild has to do with the way in which the virus's sole purpose of replication outstrips any utility to which it might be put. These two reasons together can again be thought of in relation to video surveillance: many cameras monitoring a place might succeed in imaging it convincingly but never totally, never to the point of duplication, for they necessarily see much too little. What results from many cameras seeing much too little but seeing it well is a great deal of descriptive and imagistic, but meaningless, footage.

In these respects, Burroughs's wild boy novels can be read as inconsequential video surveillance: the *Kirkus* review of *The Wild Boys* writes that Burroughs "is weird and comic, but the pornography isn't at all inventive; there are abrupt successes, a few interesting failures, and a great deal of waste motion we used to call masturbatory in between." This reading of Burroughs's prose as uninventive pornographic video surveillance is heightened by the cinematic organization of the wild boys novels from the perspectives of a movie camera and a voyeur watching the penny arcade peep show.[11] The virality the wild boys novels employ points to a useless luxuriousness, a masturbatory waste motion, that evades control both formally and conceptually. Formally, like many of the author's other works, they are produced in part through the cut-up, which circumvents plot by

[11] "The novel as a whole thus presents itself as a film, or rather an anthology of films, unrolling from the peep show" (Murphy 157). Burroughs, himself, says that his novel *Nova Express* evinces "a theory that what we call reality is actually a movie. It's a film, what I call a biologic film" ("The Art of Fiction"). And Fisher makes the peep show connection: "Being free is not in the first instance about doing what you 'want' to do, since the human organism's defaults tend towards repetitious-compulsive controlled hedonic circuits (the penny arcade peep show)."

surrendering the story to scissors: the novels exist as footage cut from a meaningful narrative, which is then cut together in differing replications and proliferations.[12] Conceptually, the wild boys themselves – as a collective character, gang, or tribe – are viruses geared towards similar replications and proliferations. The waste motion of masturbatory fantasy is just how they reproduce:

> Offspring are known as Zimbus, and they are created through masturbatory fantasy. This method allows the Wild Boys to escape both the binarism of gendered reproduction . . . and the ideology of the nuclear family that constantly reinscribes it . . . Masturbatory fantasy actually creates its own object: another Wild Boy . . . They appear and exist because they desire and are desired in an affirmative manner that has nothing to do with lack, and the flow of this desire is self-generating. (Murphy 165-66)

Reproducing virally in this manner, not from an interiority but by imbuing a material host with wild boy sexual desire such that it plays itself back as another wild boy, evidences the flat self-similarity, or reversible mereology (no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual), of control, or network, society. That is, being born from the outside, the wild boys, against the Aristotelian or identitarian logic

[12] "Burroughs' pitiless interrogation of his own passions and passivity; his continual 'breaking of the frame' to upset any sense either that his writing was an expression of a substantive self OR that it was a representational 'window on the world'; the sudden petering out of narrative lines or their 'descent' into hyperbolic farce . . . all of these tendencies were part of a deliberate (and deliberated) move from Romanticism to NeuroMancy (cybernetic sorcery) = Spinozist Neurobotics" (Fisher).

of disciplinary society, "have no navels and no names. They have erased the concept of identity" (qtd. in Teeuwen). Rather, the wild boys make manifest that "selfhood is an information pattern" (Shaviro, *Connected* 13) and that "the individual organism is only a transitory by-product of the multiple processes running through [a] network" of interlocking fields of replicator power (16). Without unique, internal identities, the wild boys are nevertheless highly differentiated and varied in terms of their appearances and abilities. This variation serves the purpose of spreading the wild boy virus, the difference of each group ultimately masking an increasing incorporation and homogenization of the globe on the part of the wild boys. In this respect, the wild boy virus is of a piece with the logic of control society, and, for this reason, it is no wonder that "the image of a smiling wild boy becomes a hugely popular media icon which spreads the wild-boy virus across civilization, causing more and more youths to join the wild boys" (Hine).[13] The difference (along with the intensification and interference) of the wild boy virus, however, is that it works against capitalist reinvestment through its playback of sex and violence. As will be argued in the next section with reference to the work of Patti Smith, the wild boy is a becoming-animal that reconnects man with shit in the general economy of Bataille.

[13] "I've recently thought a great deal about advertising. After all, they're doing the same sort of thing. They are concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image . . . 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" (Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction").

3

The Wild Boys is subtitled *A Book of the Dead*. The book of the dead is a textual genre that guides the soul in its afterlife in non-Judeo-Christian belief systems (because what happens in the afterlife of Judeo-Christian belief systems is typically preordained) (Murphy 148). Burroughs retools the book of the dead, Timothy Murphy tells us, first, by replacing the definite article with an indefinite "a": "one embodiment of a genre, it cannot claim the privilege of being the only guide to the contemporary lands of the dead" (157). This goes against the conservatism of most books of the dead, which were intended for a privileged ruling class and the maintenance of their power in the afterlife. Second, the dead of Burroughs's title does not connote literal death but a fantasized force that is deadening. Drawing on the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, Murphy discusses the way in which Burroughs's book of the dead not only repurposes that of the Egyptians and Mayans, by giving "lessons in intensifying rather than resolving or avoiding social antagonisms" (156), but also the idealistic visions of most utopian fantasies. Recalling the negative energetics of the virus of the previous section, the wild boys are dead, or half-dead, or have flattened the opposition between life and death, because they augur the death of the status quo. The book in which they appear is a book of the dead because "it projects a world whose realization would entail the death of our world" (156).

If Burroughs provides one set of blueprints – theoretically in *The Electronic Revolution* and fictionally in *The Wild Boys: A Book of the*

Dead – for a viral takeover of society, then Patti Smith architects her performance, in part, based upon these plans. She implements them through the medium of rock and roll and, more specifically, through the guitar, which is reimagined as weapon of quasi-religious proportions.[14] This weapon is directed against the moulding confinements of disciplinary society, especially that of the factory. This argument – that Smith shares, adopts, and adapts Burroughs's utopic vision of a viral, or reverse, heat death of society through rock and roll – can be witnessed in Dan Graham's video essay *Rock My Religion* (1982-84). Kodwo Eshun, in his book of the same title, describes Smith's vision, as presented by Graham, in the language of Herbert Marcuse: "To reprogram the unconscious, one would have to invent methods capable of entering into the 'one unconscious rhythmic automatism' and hacking its mechanisms" (19).

Smith's method of hacking the rhythmic automatism of disciplinary society is to throw a viral wrench in its works, to replace its beat with that of rock and roll, to make it melt itself down, which is described by another of Burroughs's artistic heirs, Laurie Anderson, in her song "Odd Objects" from her third album, *United States Live*:

> One of the reasons that Chrysler has run into such financial trouble is that there have been some problems with the relay devices between the computers and the robot welders. When a problem develops further up the line, it takes a long time for the computers to tell the robot welders to stop. So the robot welders continue to make these welding motions, dropping

[14] This is evident, particularly, in "Feedback and Poetry" (Sherer).

> molten steel directly onto the conveyer belt, even though there are no cars on the line, building up a series of equidistant blobs. It takes several hours for the computers to tell the robot welders to stop. At the rate of eighty cars per hour, a typical plant is capable of manufacturing approximately 100 of these blobs before the plant can be totally shut down.[15]

This is precisely the problem for which Smith is chastised on the B-side to her debut single, "Piss Factory": "You're screwin' up the quota / You're doin your piecework too fast." As viruses, Anderson's robot welders and Smith's narrator perform a repetitive replication that causes Chrysler to run into financial trouble and screws up the quota respectively. Like most of video surveillance footage and Burroughs's fiction, what results is a bunch of useless blobs. Such waste is deadly to our world because, whether operative in disciplinary or control society, the economics of capitalism still presuppose a closed system, regulated either by Smith's song about the moulding of a floor boss or by Anderson's sonic and electronic narrative. Whether proceeding from disciplinary society (as Deleuze would have it) or having always

[15] "*Time, Life, Fortune* applies a more complex, effective control system than the Mayan calendar, but it also is much more vulnerable because it is so vast and mechanized. Not even Henry Luce understands what's going on in the system now. Well, a machine can be redirected. One technical sergeant can fuck up the whole works. Nobody can control the whole operation. It's too complex. The captain comes in and says, 'All right, boys, we're moving up.' Now, who knows what buttons to push? Who knows how to get the cases of Spam up to where they're going, and how to fill out the forms? The sergeant does. The captain doesn't know. As long as there're sergeants around, the machine can be dismantled, and we may get out of all this alive yet" (Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction").

been there (albeit in hiding, as Burroughs would have it), what the viral logic of control points to is the ontological primacy of open systems. Or, as Smith subsequently realizes on "Piss Factory," "it don't matter whether I do labor fast or slow, there's always more labor after." When Burroughs proposes that the cut-up method trains the subject to see at a wider angle, then, he is speaking in terms of Bataillean general economy.

For Bataille, what is unique to capitalism is its disavowal of the necessity of surplus and expenditure and its drive towards optimization by "reinvest[ing] as much of the surplus as possible in its own reproduction on an expanded scale" (Shaviro, *Connected* 221). The base materialism of Bataille's cosmology and Smith's artistic practice speaks to the inability to deny this disavowal, to transform waste, and the necessity of pollution. The problem for them is not how to generate more surplus through reinvestment but how to spend.[16] Against the scarcity of capitalism (which, for Bataille, is imposed and not inherent), this is Smith's dream on the song "Free Money," from her first record, of "buying you all the things you need for free," a transaction that exchanges the terrestrial for the stratospheric.[17] This is a movement towards general economy, for Bataille conceives of life not as the outward realization of an internal

[16] "As a rule, particular existence always risks succumbing for lack of resources. It contrasts with general existence whose resources are in excess and for which death has no meaning. From the *particular* point of view, the problems are posed in the first instance by a deficiency of resources. They are posed in the first instance by an excess of resources if one starts from the *general* point of view" (Bataille, *Accursed Share* 39).

[17] "Henceforth," says Bataille, "what matters primarily is no longer to develop the productive forces but to spend their products sumptuously" (*Accursed Share* 37).

identity through a code – be it genetic, monetary, and/or informational – but as a partial, or incomplete, privatization of solar radiation: "The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy – wealth – without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving" (*Accursed Share* 28). The privatization of the sun is partial and incomplete because the energy of the sun exceeds that which is necessary for life. Burroughs's call, taken up by Smith, is to use viral mechanisms to reveal this inherent excessiveness, which flies in the face of the equilibrium of closed systems. While some scholars, such as Reza Negarestani, have criticized the solar basis of Bataille's general economy as too particular in its dependence on the sun, this paper accepts Bataille's heliocentrism. Further, as I suggest below, the movement from particular to general economy is not necessarily itself liberatory. The aesthetic work of Burroughs and Smith, though, is to imagine a situation in which it might be.

Both Bataille and Burroughs appreciate archaic forms for the ways in which they deal with death, ways that could be deadly for the status quo. Where Burroughs appropriates the book of the dead, Bataille appropriates, for example, Aztec sacrifice. Sacrifice is one example of archaic unproductive expenditure, a display of destruction that persists as and in the cruel practice of art: "sacrifice promises us the trap of death, for the destruction rendered unto the object has no sense other than the menace that it has for the subject" (Bataille, "Cruel Practice"). Death is one of three luxuries of nature identified by Bataille, the other two being eating and sexual reproduction. These

three luxuries are all ways of using up the excess energy of the sun "for the growth of a system (e.g. an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically" (*Accursed Share* 21).

This is the point at which humanity stands, both at the time of Bataille's writing and arguably still. Humanity is unique in terms of its ability to be burdensome, to generate and consume waste. This is because, past the point of growth, humanity, through labour and technology, has, in a sense, developed a way to grow growth. Rather than spending the excess that cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, humanity, like capitalism, reinvests it in its own reproduction. Consequently, "the revivals of development that are due to human activity, that are made possible or maintained by new techniques, always have a double effect: Initially, they use a portion of the surplus energy, but then they produce a larger and larger surplus" (Bataille, *Accursed Share* 36-37). This is the situation to which the art of Burroughs and Smith responds. Not only do Bataille's three luxuries align with these artists' preoccupations, but they can also be roughly linked to Burroughs's configuration of the virus in terms of three tape recorders: eating spreads viruses amongst hosts; viruses reproduce within their hosts; and reproduction produces cytopathic effects, often death. From this perspective, that of the general economy of Bataille, all life is essentially luxurious, or viral, in its appropriation of and proliferation from solar energy. Shaviro, with explicit reference to Burroughs, makes this point in a blog post:

> Spam or art is a virus; and, insofar as we have aesthetic sensibilities (including self-consciousness and dwelling just in the present moment), *we are that virus*. Our thoughts and bodies, our lives, are 'needlessly recursive' and wasteful. Our lives are pointless luxuries in a Darwinian 'war universe.' ("They Don't Like Spam"; emphasis in original)

Spam is perhaps the most contemporary example – of the many which have proliferated throughout this paper: video surveillance, the masturbatory waste motion of Burroughs's fiction, Anderson's blobs – to display the logics of control society and general economy.

Where Bataille posited his three luxuries as ways of absorbing excess energy through the growth of a system, and labour and technology as ways of extending this growth, Burroughs and Smith employ these luxuries over and against growth and towards the inherent luxuriousness of life itself, toward its spam-like quality. Of the three luxuries, this is most apparent with respect to sexual reproduction. Bataille had already stipulated that, for the higher animals, "sexual reproduction is the occasion of a sudden and frantic squandering of energy resources [that] goes far beyond what would be sufficient for the growth of the species" (*Accursed Share* 35). But Burroughs and Smith push this even further with their shared emphasis and celebration of sexual difference and homosexuality.

In "Piss Factory," Smith sings, "I got something to hide here called desire." While within the closed, particular economy of the phallus in psychoanalysis, desire is conceived of as lack, Smith's conception of desire is closer to what is articulated by Deleuze and

Guattari, as well as what Bataille presents. Smith's notion of desire is always already in excess, as Burroughs does through the wild boys: "The Wild Boys' threat to capitalist society is immanent within that society in the form of desire that exceeds the available forms of fantasy" (Murphy 168). The desire that Smith hides is a form of expenditure, or anti-production, that goes against the moulding mandates of her factory floor boss. This is emblematized by a t-shirt worn by Smith with a slogan from her poem "Babel": "Fuck the Clock!" Where industrial capital in disciplinary society punishes such a form of desire, neoliberal capital in control society attempts to profit from its modulation. However, Bataille's lesson, promoted aesthetically by Burroughs and Smith, and evidenced, for example, in the subprime mortgage industry collapse of 2007, is that "at a certain point the advantage of extension is neutralized by the contrary advantage, that of luxury" (*Accursed Share* 37).

Recognizing this point – the point at which using surplus produces surplus, at which pollution becomes a necessary result of the inability of man to reform and transform waste – Smith celebrates the advantage of luxury. Shaviro's description of Burroughs's war universe as Darwinian provides one way through which to think of the luxury of Smith's desire. This would be to align it with what Darwin calls sexual selection, which is distinct from natural selection and driven by sexual difference. Most succinctly, and calling upon its common connotation, natural selection is synonymous with the survival of the fittest. Recalling the poles of disciplinary society, fittest here is not to be understood as referring to fitness or physical

strength (which more readily belongs to sexual selection) but to the fit between an animal and a habitat, the survival of which is to be understood as reproduction. Sexual selection, however, as the selection not of biological traits within a population but of mates amongst sexed individuals, is a process much less motivated by life or death than it is by the appeal and beauty of erotic attraction. Elizabeth Grosz, with explicit reference to Bataille, juxtaposes natural and sexual selection:

> If natural selection functions, in the terms provided by Georges Bataille, according to a restricted economy, according to determinable rules and procedures, then sexual selection functions according to a general economy, without order, without striations or organization. The laws of sexual selection are the principles of aesthetics, not the strategies of game theory; the functioning of appeal rather than the operations of rational agents who act according to their self-interests; the order of taste rather than forms of miniature calculation. (131)

Sexual selection is driven by sexual difference because it operates through two strategies, those of competition and choice, which, in Darwin's animal world, usually happen between males and females. Males compete with each other "for the attention of and access to females," and females "discern and select those males that most please them" (Grosz 126). Lest it would seem that sexual difference imply the necessary predominance of heterosexuality, the point here is not that sociological categories are the given, not that difference is

inherent sexually, but that life differentiates itself sexually, that being must be bifurcated if it is to generate variation through recombination. Not only are roles plastic within one bifurcation, but it is also possible to have more than one bifurcation. Sexual selection, then, driven by competition and choice and producing sexual difference (as bodily difference) in a sort of feedback loop, accounts for language and race, for Darwin, and, for Grosz, "may be understood as the queering of natural selection, that is, the rendering of any biological norms, ideals of fitness, strange, incalculable, excessive" (132).

The desire manifest in sexual selection and difference is the luxury virally deployed by Burroughs and Smith to work against humanity's extension of itself through capitalist reinvestment. But where Burroughs cuts up written words and boys, Smith cuts up spoken word and girls. She does so through the universal equivalent of psychedelic drugs and "her method for speaking in tongues and automatic writing" (Eshun 21), a feminist approach to possession through rock and roll dubbed "Babelogue." And, in the prose poem "Histories of the Universe," she stipulates that it was through such a method that the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* was written. While Burroughs's method might be described as misogynist and Smith's as feminist, what they share is "a conception of the fundamental irreducibility of sexual difference" and "an attempt to take sexual difference as a point of departure for political transformation, rather

than seeing it as a problem to be overcome" (Murphy 147).[18] Smith is reoriented from the boy to the girl, in part, by a letter written by her idol, poet Arthur Rimbaud, that begins, "When the infinite servitude of woman shall have ended" (qtd. in Eshun 21). In this respect, the sexual difference insisted upon by Burroughs and Smith alike takes part in an appeal for artificial reproduction. Reproducing artificially, virally, as the wild boys do, means that sexuality is freed from the restricted economy of natural selection, from the utility of population growth, and relocated more properly in the general economy of sexual selection, in the luxury of aesthetic sensibilities.

Earlier I suggested that Smith moves from a restricted to a general economy. This can also be thought of as a movement from the space of places to a place called space. According to Shaviro, "the space of places is less that of nostalgically idealized traditional communities than that of turbulent urban modernity. It is the space of the urban *flâneur*" (Shaviro, *Connected* 132-33). Smith, no doubt, self-consciously conjures the space of places of the urban *flâneur* in her sartorial and literary allusions to the Decadent movement and specifically the figures of Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and

[18] "Burroughs's infamous misogyny, unlike that of heterosexual chauvinists like Norman Mailer or Ishmael Reed, is premised on a conception of the fundamental irreducibility of sexual difference as radical as that of a feminist like Luce Irigaray. Burroughs has never demanded the subordination of the feminine to the masculine, as many heterosexual male chauvinists have; he has argued, rather, for the total separation of the masculine from the feminine, as befits his theory that men and women are actually separate species that cannot be united under the rubric of an expanded, and therefore abstracted, definition of 'humanity'. In light of this, it seems more fruitful to view the project of The Wild Boys not simply as 'the occlusion of women' but as an attempt to take sexual difference as a point of departure for political transformation, rather than seeing it as a problem to be overcome" (Murphy 147).

Oscar Wilde. Here, however, I suggest that we read the specificity of these references to an aesthetic movement and moment alongside a more general sense of decadence, one that accords with Bataillean general economy and appears as follows in Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*:

> The concept of decadence. – Waste, decay, elimination need not be condemned: they are necessary consequences of life, of the growth of life. The phenomenon of decadence is as necessary as any increase and advance of life: one is in no position to abolish it. Reason demands, on the contrary, that we do justice to it. (25)

Smith's notion of place-called-space, at which she arrives on the centerpiece of her debut record *Horses*, the tripartite song "Land: Horses / Land of a Thousand Dances / La Mer(de)," is thus still decadent in this sense but is an updated take on the space of places that responds to Shaviro's question of finding "a twenty-first-century equivalent, within the space of flows, for Benjaminian *flâneurie* and Delaneyesque contact" (*Connected* 133). As Smith recounts in her memoir *Just Kids*, her arrival at a place called space on the song "Land" resulted from her first acid trip with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe:

> That night we walked down Christopher Street to the river. It was two in the morning, there was a garbage strike, and you could see the rats scurrying in the lamplight. As we moved toward the water, we were met with a frenzy of queens, beards in tutus, leather saints and angels. I felt like the

> traveling preacher in *The Night of the Hunter*. Everything took on a sinister air, the smell of patchouli oil, poppers, and ammonia. I became progressively more agitated.
>
> Robert seemed amused. 'Patti, you're supposed to feel love for everybody'. But I couldn't relax. Everything seemed so out of hand, silhouetted by orange and pink and acid green auras. It was a hot steamy night.[19] No moon or stars, real or imagined.
>
> He put his arm around my shoulders and walked me home. It was nearly dawn. It took me a while to comprehend the nature of that trip, the demon vision of the city. Random sex. Trails of glitter shaking from muscled arms. Catholic medals torn from shaved throats. The fabulous festival I could not embrace. I did not create that night, but the images of racing Cockettes and Wild Boys would soon be transmuted into the vision of a boy in a hallway, drinking a glass of tea. (243)

Smith drops acid and the hallucinogen flattens, expands, and remixes her consciousness. She becomes a wild boy, Johnny, who, between the eyes of a horse, sees that "up there – there is a sea, the sea's the

[19] Land, too, meditates on heat: "Heat. This is what cities mean to me. You get off the train and walk out of the station and you are hit with the full blast. The heat of air, traffic and people. The heat of food and sex. The heat of tall buildings. The heat that flows out of the subways and tunnels. It's always fifteen degrees hotter in the cities. Heat rises from the sidewalks and falls from the poisoned sky. The buses breathe heat. Heat emanates from crowds of shoppers and office workers, the entire infrastructure is based on heat, desperately uses up heat, breeds more heat. The eventual heat death of the universe that scientists love to talk about is already well underway and you can feel it happening all around you in any large or medium-sized city. Heat and wetness" (444).

possibility, there is no land but the land" ("Land"). This is the notion of becoming-animal similar to which Bataille subscribes (and one that is more fully developed subsequently by Deleuze and Guattari): "The apathy that the gaze of the animal expresses after the combat is the sign of an existence that is essentially on a level with the world in which it moves like water in water" (*Theory of Religion* 25). Thus, the viral mechanism of LSD indoctrinates Smith into general economy and an intimacy with the world lost through industrialization. This lost intimacy is what Smith's "Babelogue" is geared towards – "at that Tower of Babel they knew what they were after." In this sea of possibility (general economy), Smith-as-Johnny "felt his hand on my knee" ("Land"). Or, as she says in a live televised performance of the song on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* in 1976, "If you are male and choose other than female, you must take the responsibility of holding the key to freedom" (Astralasia23). Smith imagines herself homosexual because sexual selection functions according to a general economy where sex is luxurious, meaningless, and anti-productive. The sea (*la mer*) of possibility, therefore, is also the shit (*la merde*).

The work of Burroughs and Smith presented in this paper reminds us of the necessity of waste. Bataille describes this in terms of the wealth of the sun. Because the energy of the sun always exceeds that which can be put to use on earth, our efforts to continue to harness its power must inevitably confront our inability to do so. The virus is a form that makes apparent this inevitable inability because it disinvests energy from the productivity of a closed system and spends it uselessly and ruthlessly – Burroughs' cut-up novels and

Smith's "Babelogue" spend energy this way, unearthing queer sex in the process. In the 1980s, the link between the virus and the luxury of queer sex would become all too material, exacerbating fears that queerness is something that can be caught. This paper offers a more positive meditation on such fears, suggesting the necessity of viral mechanisms to kill this particular society in favor of another that has not forgotten the necessity of pollution.

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