CROSSING THE LINE: KATHY ACKER, WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS AND THE POLITICS OF PIRACY

by

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Abstract

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"Crossing the Line: Kathy Acker, Williams S. Burroughs and the Politics of Piracy" investigates Kathy Acker and William S Burroughs' insistence that pirates and acts of piracy are models for political action in late capitalism. Acker and Burroughs' later texts, *Don Quixote*, *Empire of the Senseless* and *Cities of the Red Night* and *Ghosts of a Chance* respectively, use pirates as both aesthetic and narrative tropes. I seek to show that Acker and Burroughs' use of pirates is an attempt at fashioning a wide-ranging critique of late capitalism and changing and expanding forms of control and power. The pirate, for Acker and Burroughs, becomes a figuration, a vessel, for the re-imagining of a politically active, restive, mode of being. By investigating the role of piracy in their texts, I open a space of discussion that highlights Acker and Burroughs' commitment to revolutionary politics indebted to their deep belief in the power of literature to shape and engender communities. The literary enunciation of affective communities illuminates the gap between literature and theory. Acker and Burroughs maintain the importance of affect in human relations. In other words, in the face of what Fredric Jameson labels the waning of affect under late capitalism, Acker and Burroughs posit highly charged affective relationships between people.

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without you as a reader I could not exist as a writer. Though all these words would be impossible without all of you, I take full responsibility for not living up to your expectations; you are all the best parts of this text, I am all of the missteps.

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An explosive book always keeps its explosive charge.
--Gilles Deleuze

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was." It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.
--Walter Benjamin

Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone.
—Edouard Glissant

Chapter 1: Hostis Humani Generis

Because of the coagulation of real and imagined pirates, the temporal position of piracy is difficult to pin down; the most famous outbreaks of piracy occurred during the "golden age of piracy"—roughly 1690 to 1720. Of course, there have been pirates as long as there has been anything to plunder, but the popularized form of the pirate emerges in relation to the rapid maritime expansion of European nations. The idea of famous piracy is important because, as Hans Turley argues in Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash, it is impossible to divorce the historical pirate from their fictionalized exploits. Pirates, and

their actions, undergo metamorphoses based on whose pen tells their tales.[1] Piracy however, clearly offered a mode of engagement and resistance within the oppressive framework of maritime labor. Through a detailed reading of Kathy Acker and William S. Burroughs' work combined with a historical understanding of the radical alternative pirates presented as a reaction to developing capitalism in the seventeenth century, we may begin to see how pirates, once again, offer a model for resistance within the new phase of capitalism exemplified in globalization and late capitalism.

A piratical mode of being is a construction based on "*Hostis Humani Generis*" or "declaring war against all mankind" and simultaneously declaring a radical egalitarianism in which a spotlight is trained on the horrors and ramifications of living within a society bent on the commodification of social relations. Piratical acts are irruptions of elastic communities, fluid movement, and nomadic subjects, all of which act as interventions within reified hegemonic cultural constructions. Donning piratical garb opens the potential for denaturing social and linguistic relations; operating in simultaneity with capitalism, the locus of piracy is both distinct and invisible, the tale of the teller, the fabulous imaginary of Marco Polo in Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities.[2]

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[1] I must immediately confess being caught up in the same problematic. My discussion of piracy moves through a genealogy beginning with Cristopher Hill's short essay, "Radical Pirates?" but really gaining credibility through Marcus Rediker's impressive scholarship on maritime labor starting with the book he co-authored with Peter Linebaugh, The Many Headed Hydra and continuing with Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, and Villains of All Nations. Each of these texts, however have recourse to Captain Charles Johnson's Pirates. So, though I am cherry-picking my historical information, I am doing so to stress the point that pirates are exemplary of groups of people coming together to imagine a better and more humane way to live.

[2] Of course, this is more than just playing dress up; it is an acceptance and a continuation of a piratical mode of existence.

Through a radical disintegration of social relations found within the nations of Western Europe, pirates created a world in violent contradistinction to the intolerable conditions of emerging capitalism. We can think of Acker and Burroughs' piratical subjectivity growing out of what Timothy Murphy, in his book Wising up the Marks, calls "amodernism." Murphy describes amodernism as a shadowy third narrative straddling the wilds of postmodernism and modernism; it exists concomitantly with postmodernism and captures many of the more politically informed modes of postmodernism. Although, Murphy focuses on Burroughs and Gilles Deleuze as his exemplary figures of amodernism, an argument for punk rock, underground comics, zines, and performance art, seems equally relevant. Murphy wants to mark amodernism's "furtive, almost imperceptible emergence from the same conditions that opened the frontier of postmodernism" (Murphy 23). Murphy's language (and his choice of texts) implies amodernism inherently exists within the confines of subcultural production.[3] Unfortunately, this implies that amodernism is contingent on its furtiveness, a claim that is furthered by Murphy's heavy use of the narrator of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man as exemplar of amodernism. The narrator plans to emerge, but this emergence is extra-textual. For now, he remains underground. Murphy writes that the purpose of amodernism is to "further the production of subject-groups that can extend the differences that already fissure the capitalist socius into irreparable cracks" (Murphy 45). The tradition of resistance through a proliferation of concepts is concisely formulated by

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[3] Murphy's brief list of amodern texts includes: Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, and Robert Coover (all relatively well known authors) and Joanna Russ, Kathy Acker, and Darius James. Of course, Murphy would also add Williams S. Burroughs and Gilles Deleuze. The first three authors capture a wide audience, but the last three often seem under the literary radar.

Michel Foucault when he writes, "Truth to tell, if we are to struggle against disciplines, or rather against disciplinary power, in our search for a non-disciplinary power, we should not be turning to the old right of sovereignty, we should be looking for a new right that is both antidisciplinary and emancipated from the principle of sovereignty" (Societies Must be Defended 39). The basis for a search for non-disciplinary forms of power is a proliferation of concepts, a movement of techniques, a spontaneous eruption and engagement that denatures sovereign forms of power. Piratical subjectivity is just such a grouping; it captures the imaginative and political possibilities immanently residing within postmodernism—the possibility for nomadic couplings, a plurality of individuals. Acker and Burroughs use pirates both as characters and as a narrative technique—they plunder texts as surely as ships, slipping in to and out of textual reference in an attempt to disrupt the codification of narrative practice. This dual use of pirate as subject position and piracy as aesthetic device creates a space where radical politics and postmodernism are not antithetical. Importantly, the romanticization of piracy as an irenic past can lead to a stultification of the actual potential pirates hold for Acker and Burroughs. If authors use pirates only as characters, for example Donald Barthelme's "Captain Blood" or The Sot Weed Factor by John Barth, the potential for reformulating subject positions is evacuated and we are left, simply, with the romanticized pirate. In other words, all parrot, patch, and peg, but no pirate articles or any reformulations of socio-political ideals. Acker and Burroughs outline the beginnings for a radical mode of being—piratical subjectivity. Constructed from disparate elements, a piratical subject offers a way of re-imagining the role of difference and commonality in the contemporary political climate. Piratical subjectivity is constantly in flux, a continual

act of becoming based entirely on movement, on avoidance and on the appropriation of blockages.

Nina Gerassi-Navarro concludes her book Pirate Novels with a declaration: "When violence becomes the structuring axis delimiting frontiers, the pirate seems to be the ideal figure to articulate the confrontation. His lack of political anchorage enables him to roam the seas, free to embody the enemy or the hero. Hence, behind the fascinating legends of these adventure stories lies the pirate sailing from shore to shore, amid the clashing waves of national confrontations: a metaphor for the brutal struggles of the collective imaginings of a nation" (Gerassi-Navarro 188). Pirate Novels stresses the importance pirate narratives played in the creation of Latin American communities. Her book ends however, with a shift in focus from the local understanding of pirate narratives as a defining moment in cultural formation for Latin America to the elevation of the pirate narrative as a paradigmatic moment in the formation of any national identity forged during a period of confrontation. For Gerassi-Navarro, part of the appeal of the pirate is the porous nature of their allegiance. In many ways, this is a misunderstanding of the nature of pirates as part of a close-knit community, with similar goals, language, experiences, and ethics. She is right in attributing much of the importance of pirates onto their cultural reception. The twentieth century has seen an explosion of unending war, police actions, and worldwide oppression. In the cultural ravages of the end of the century, Acker and Burroughs turn to pirates to try to find a model for resistance. One key difference between the community of Acker and Burroughs' pirates and Gerassi-Navarro's is that for Gerassi-Navarro pirates represent an outside, marauders on the horizon; whereas Acker and Burroughs recognize that during this late stage of capitalism

any argument for a strict binary between inside and outside is untenable. Therefore, any resistance cannot come from some horizon, but must exist simultaneously with that which it resists. It is here, within a realm of indeterminacy, that piracy's attack on capitalism and the sovereignty of the state takes place. This resistance is on an individual, subjective plane; though safety and certain rules are conferred upon the pirates because they act in concert as part of a group, this pirate organization is based purely on the individuation of each member. The simultaneous individuation within collectivization plays out within each individual pirate. Piratical subjectivity is a collection of disparate parts cobbled together to form an immanent alternative to global capitalism; this also means that any alternative created is deeply tied with and implicated by global capitalism. Gerassi-Navarro discusses piracy's relation to nation-building from the position within the development of the nation, of the State-form; from her position then, the pirate is an outside, but if we shift our focus and start from the position of the pirate then we see, suddenly, that the development of piracy happens in direct relation to the destructive and haunting forces of capitalism. Rather than thinking of piracy as a group of masts on the horizon, destructive barbarians descending on cities from some place outside, piracy emerges simultaneously and concomitantly with the cities. The binary opposition between inside and outside, pirate and princess is an inoperable relationship. Piracy forms a counter-narrative to the narrative posed by State sovereignty—a counter-narrative that occurs within a proliferation of a multiplicity of networks operating as an unreasonable refraction of sovereign forms of power. The blockages and closures operating within nation building force the irruption of "nomadism and exodus…the desire and hope of an irrepressible experience" (Empire 76). Piracy is

an early example of this irrepressible experience—the desire for something other than oppression and horror. Faced with the encroaching specter of capitalism, maritime laborers rebelled by fashioning radically resistant communities.

The potential for piracy exists within a reevaluation of action and individual subjective production within a system—first in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century during the emergent march of capitalism, and now during the restructuring of capitalism on a truly global scale—that attempts to produce the subject. Therefore, by rethinking piracy as a political movement, collectivization in direct response to capitalism, we will begin to envision the radical potential of a newly reworked pirate emerging in response to the vicissitudes of global capitalism. Both Acker and Burroughs understand this potential for piracy, and they structure their later works around this potentiality. For Acker and Burroughs subjectivity is a protean, slippery, constantly renaturing construction, and they resist any attempts to capture or codify subjectivity as universal. To return to Murphy's formulation, Acker and Burroughs seed the cracks of the capitalist socius, adding to the proliferation of subjectivities. Modes of piratical subjectivity address problems of identity, belonging, community, and the potential for reworking social relations through micropolitical irruptions; re-imagining these relations occurs both on the level of the community and, more importantly, on the body.

Ahoy and Avast: The Pirate as Historical Subject

To begin to understand the intense revolutionary practices of pirates it is crucial to situate them in their own time before catapulting them into the literary works of Acker and Burroughs. It is important to differentiate between pirates, buccaneers, and

privateers.[4] It is crucial, however, to not lose focus on the flexibility between these categories.[5] Privateers, also sometimes called Corsairs, are ships that have received a letter of marque—a rather large and official looking piece of paper—that allows the ship to attack certain nations, i.e. a ship might be asked by the British to attack the French and, in turn, that ship will not be prosecuted by the British. Privateering illustrates, as Gerassi-Navarro points out in her book Pirate Novels, the thin line between patriotism and piracy "undoubtedly depended on the point of view from which they were presented" (Gerassi-Navarro 17). The most famous example of someone straddling the line between fervent patriot and fervent pirate is Francis Drake. Drake never renounced his national allegiance to the crown, but he also engaged the Spanish during times of peace between England and Spain. Strictly speaking, Drake's unwillingness to eschew the crown keeps him firmly entrenched as a mechanism of the State rather than any form of pirate. Many sailors' loyalties however, were neither as fervent nor as static; the movement between pirate and privateer often allowed sailors brief respites of relative safety. Fernand Braudel describes the extension of the word piracy into the Mediterranean as Spain attempting to "stigmatize as dishonorable all robbery on the inland sea" (Braudel 866). Braudel argues that behaviorally there is very little difference between piracy and

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[4] The difference between pirate, privateer, and buccaneer is concisely, and insightfully articulated by Hans Turly in his book Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity. His basic contention is that pirates are distinct from buccaneers and privateers because they remove themselves from the social formations found on land. Also see The Mediterranean vol 2 by Fernand Braudel (865-891) for an informative discussion of how pirates, privateers, and corsairs affected forms of war in the Mediterranean.

[5] The definitional flexibilty that marks the word "pirate" is worth noting because it emerges from the physical impossibility of being at war with all mankind. It follows then, that pirates always occupy a state of exception, the central liminality that allows sovereign power. See Giorgio Agamben Homo Sacer and State of Exception, Judith Butler Precarious Life.

privateering, but the stigma that surrounds the term piracy is clearly evident in Spain's attempt to rebrand privateering against their interests as piracy. The privateer illustrates how different nations used pirates to flesh out their navies during times of war or as attempts to broaden their imperialist agendas; in other words, privateers are an example of the state-form wiring elements of the war-machine of piracy to itself, but it also illustrates that the State can never fully subsume the potential of actual pirates.

Buccaneers were a specific group living on Hispaniola and later on Tortugas; their name derives from *boucanier*, which is a form of curing and drying meat. Buccaneers were used by the English to carve a foothold in the Spanish colonial empire; after their usefulness wore out and they began attacking English ships they were quickly repressed by the English. By far the most famous buccaneer was Henry Morgan. Like Francis Drake, the British knighted Morgan after destroying Spanish colonies. The most egregious example of Morgan's raids on Spanish colonies was his total annihilation of Panama. By the time the golden age of piracy began, the Spanish and the English had obliterated most buccaneers or they had settled down into dubiously legal occupations within the Caribbean.

Succinctly begun: piracy marks any crime on the sea. According to law enacted by Henry the VIII any crime committed on a body of water: lake, ocean, small stream, is piracy and subject to the full force of the law. The definition of piracy differs from nation to nation, but they all agree that pirates are nationless. Therefore, the law acts upon pirates from a position where the law views pirates as exterior. In the case of privateers and buccaneers, there is always a thin veneer of legitimacy; Buccaneers were used knowingly by the English, and privateers have to, at least for a moment, swear

allegiance to the State-form. However, it is the moment of breaking, the removal from legitimacy, which fundamentally marks pirates. It is pirates, more so than buccaneers or privateers, that capture the imagination, that hold the dubious honor of being the models for Captain Hook and Long John Silver. One of the most famous accounts of piracy, written by Alexander O. Exquemelin after falling in with a group of pirates on Hispaniola, marks both his fascination and fear of pirates. He begins Buccaneers of America with a description of pirate life, but then begins his personal narrative with the lines, "I have previously told how I was driven to join the pirates—for I don't know what other name they deserve, as they were not backed by any prince" (Exquemelin 67). Ringing through all the definitions of piracy are similar lines removing pirates from the backing of princes. Pirates exist in contradistinction to the laws of nation-states; instead, pirates seek to form their own communities, their own laws, and their own social institutions.

One typical conception of pirates is as lawless bands of miscreants drunkenly pillaging any town they come across and raping anyone unfortunate enough to stand within a hundred yards. This wantonness, in some ways, is exaggerated. One explanation of the hysteria surrounding pirates is the danger that the alternative of piracy presents for the continued functioning of the nation-state. The interpellation of pirates by the State marks them as criminal, monstrous—inhuman wastrels incapable of rational thought. Rather than thinking of pirates as stumbling through grog-induced killing sprees, we should attempt to examine some of the theoretical and practical reasons behind choosing a life of piracy.

Christopher Hill, in his article "Radical Pirates?" begins to formulate a theory of pirates as radicals disenfranchised by the political process in England. According to Hill, many immigrants moving to the West Indies were Quakers, Familists, and Ranters. Another large group of immigrants were convicts and rebellious slaves; this combination of radicals and convicts was, according to Hill, the likely reason for the "radical ideas among the pirates" (Hill 174). Pirate societies offered a certain tolerance and amnesty to English radicals that may have been "psychologically more congenial than the tensions and economic hazards of a slave-owning society, or the harsh discipline of a merchant vessel" (Hill 175). Marcus Rediker furthers this argument in his seminal work Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. Rediker argues that pirates were mostly seaman who fled the oppressive and dangerous conditions of maritime labor in search of fairer wages and longer life expectancies. Rediker's argument seems counter-intuitive because most pirate narratives end in capital punishment; however, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century nearly half of all those pressed into naval service died.[6] Furthermore, B.R. Burg asserts that many of these seaman were in large part already disenfranchised: runaways, young men unable to find apprenticeships, or failed apprentices, all roving the English countryside.[7] In the face of odds as grim as this, the turn towards piracy becomes a little more comprehensible.

Aside from the deadly conditions of maritime labor, Rediker focuses on the paradigmatic changes in labor practices themselves. Sailors approach maritime work similarly to the peasants Marx describes coming under the yoke of primitive accumulation. Marx writes, "In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are

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[6] Marcus Rediker Devil and the Deep Blue Sea pg. 33.
[7] B.R. Burg Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition.

epoch-making that act as levers for the capitalist class in the course of its formation; but this is true above all for those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process" (Marx *Capital Vol 1* 876). In many cases, maritime workers had little or no choice in becoming maritime workers, often they woke up to find themselves brought aboard ships. Impressment points out the inherent dubiousness of the worker's ability to sell their labor power freely already captured within the terms of primitive accumulation. Furthermore, the demand for workers fluctuated wildly depending on whether or not there was a war. These workers, not only freed from the soil, but freed from land itself, found themselves in the unenviable position of having to scramble for dangerous and uncomfortable work. Therefore, these workers were free to sell their labor power, but as in all forms of primitive accumulation, had little choice. The shipping industry was a precursor to many forms of industrial labor and disciplinary schema; ships became floating factories dotting the oceans. Anyone familiar with the Try-works chapter in Moby Dick can begin to piece together a mental image of the harrowing environment on most ships. The hierarchy of wages on ships in both the navies and maritime industry of the Western shipping powers were typically unfair to the common seaman. On a typical merchant ship the captain would receive between five to ten times the wages a month versus the wage of the common laborer.[8] This unfairness sparked resistance in various forms; perhaps the most compelling and total was piracy.[9]

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[8] Rediker Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea 123. This wage disparity is not as

Piracy accepted the nomadic nature of maritime labor and the unavoidable commonality of the laborers' experience, and out of these features of maritime life molded an ethos of individuals tied closely to a group. Piratical subjectivity is a process of individuation within a group; every *one* is part of the many. Pirate life organized spontaneously in reaction to capitalism. Maritime labor, more than other labor at the time completely subsumed the worker; Cesare Casarino's Modernity at Sea, is correct when he points out that maritime labor is a modernist construction, but in many ways the pirate is a postmodern construction. Maritime labor, by controlling all aspects of the laborers lives, looks forward past modernist developments of capitalism and telescopes the worker into the postmodern age. Paolo Virno, in his book A Grammar of the Multitude, describes the current state of production de-coupling both the terms public-private and collective-individual. Capital diffuses throughout life, blurring the distinctions between time on the clock and time off the clock. Production, for Virno, should be "understood as a broad-based experience of the world" (Virno 24). If we understand production in these terms than it becomes "difficult to say where collective experience ends and individual experience begins" (Virno 24). Virno's description of the collapse between individual and collective experience is a step beyond Marx describing capitalism as the organizational backing for society. Every aspect of the maritime laborer's life is subsumed by their labor; since the seamen sell their labor power to a producer who removes them from the land, places them in a moving factory, and sets them adrift, there is no time where the worker might not be able to work. The elasticity of modes of labor

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shocking in today's climate of massive CEO bonuses, but *any* wage disparity should give one pause.

[9] It is interesting to note that the term "to strike" originates from the shipping industry. Workers would literally strike down the masts of the ships to keep them in port.

for the sailors and their subsequent interchangeability presages the interchangeability between labour and life. Labor subsequently subsumes all aspects of the sailor's lives; the ship, as home and factory, removes the distance between leisure and work. If labor subsumes all aspects of life then discipline begins to shift forms as well; Deleuze, taking his cues from Burroughs, calls this shift the movement from disciplinary societies to control societies. Deleuze writes, "[in] disciplinary societies you were always starting over again (as you went from school to barracks, from barracks to factory), while in control societies you never finish anything—business, training, and military service being coexisting metastable states of a single modulation, a sort of universal transmutation" (Negotiations 179). The move from discipline societies to control societies reiterates Foucault's claim that resistance must de-couple from discipline, but Deleuze takes this call a step farther and tries to mark the passage—the epistemic break—between a passing and an emergent form of social organization.

Pirates set out to erect a form of community that both looked back to a time when capital did not ultimately control an individual's fate, but also look forward to the potentiality of nomadism allowed by capitalism's fluid expansion. Pirates shucked off the bridle of law and created a system that seemed, to them, fairer, more acceptable, and more conducive to human existence; therefore, it is safe to say, they worked in contradistinction to the desires of capital. Pirates' "experience of free wage laborers and as members of an uncontrolled, freewheeling subculture gave pirates the perspective and occasion to fight back against brutal and unjust authority and to construct a new social order where King Death would not reign supreme" (Rediker 286). Pirates form communities—both on land and on sea—where they engage in social formation along

political lines. These communities offer the maximum amount of freedom and avoidance of what pirates saw as social injustice. A social order where King Death does not reign supreme is antithetical to capitalist development.

In Pirate Utopias, Peter Lamborn Wilson makes an interesting argument for renegotiating our idea of piracy: "piracy can be viewed as an extreme case of zerowork mentality: five or six months lolling around the Moorish cafes, then a summer cruise on a nice blue ocean, a few hours of exertion, and hey presto, another year of idleness has been financed" (Wilson 152). Although Wilson's tone implies a much easier relation to work than pirates often had, his claim seems entirely correct in terms of pirates' resistance to capitalism; after all, pirate ships often had twice the crew of merchant ships, meaning there was less work for each seaman. Like any job, maritime labor was structured around getting the most surplus-value—as much labor was taken out of the laborers as possible, and since everyone lived on the ship, there were often disastrous consequences of shirking duty. The increased crew rolls is another example of how King Death does not reign supreme on board pirate ships. Rather than attempting to leech as much value out of laborers, pirates work only for themselves and are not beholden to an owner on land.

To further ease the difficulties of maritime labor, pirates built an informal network to pass information about shipping routes and safe harbors. The informal network was instrumental in the success of pirates between 1716 and 1726. Pirates were able to pick up information about where they might be in danger, or where they might be able to collect lucrative booty.[10] These networks become more important when we

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[10] Rediker Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea 134.

realize that pirates worked under the old share system of payment rather than the wage system implemented throughout the shipping industry. Rather than moving to the wage system, pirates continued to employ the share system; therefore, rather than setting up hierarchical pay scales based on a contract, i.e. a sailor making a fifth of a captain's pay a month for a voyage to India, pirates split whatever loot they took equally amongst themselves. This pay system radically leveled the hierarchies formed by the wage system and, as Marcus Rediker states, "this must have been one of the most egalitarian plans for the disposition of resources to be found anywhere in the early eighteenth century" (Rediker 264). The egalitarian sentiment behind the share system is symptomatic of the strong connections built working together in dangerous conditions. Therefore, these informal networks of communication were set up to benefit anyone initiated into the group; furthermore, the understanding was that better communication allowed for a mutual ability to avoid disastrous working conditions.

That Vast and Borderless Subject:

Foucault first discusses heterotopias in the preface to The Order of Things when he distinguishes utopias from heterotopias:

> *Utopias* afford consolation; although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because

> they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax which we construct sentences but also the less apparent syntax which holds words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and as part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences (Order of Things xviii).

Heterotopias are synonymous with the destruction of the possibility of expected and accepted narrative genres and forms. A multiplicity of possibilities roil under the tenuous veneer of conventional syntax; heterotopias are the space where disturbing juxtapositions flourish, the denaturing of representation—bodies crashing into one another leaving bastard monstrous progeny. Like Walter Benjamin's historical materialist, the heterotopia works against the grain; it is deeply uncomfortable and out of place.[11]

In his posthumously published lecture "Of Other Spaces," Foucault describes heterotopias as the "mixed, joint experience of the mirror" (24). Foucault continues, "The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (Other 24). There are two sides to the

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[11] Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations.

capitalist sea adventure: the first, the socially acceptable maritime industries backed by sovereign nations, and secondly, the devious, monstrous pirate societies, who, on the surface, engage in many similar practices (at least in terms of physical labor). The pirate ship is the mirror of legally sanctioned shipping; the pirate ship reflects and refracts the social relations of State-sanctioned shipping. Foundering on the edge between representability and unrepresentability, pirates take part in the destruction of their own subject positions in terms of the concrete monad, but they simultaneously articulate a relation to the world located within this foundering. Thus, this virtual space becomes the epistemological conditions where we can begin to imagine an ontological piracy.

As Gerassi-Navarro points out, pirates expose the "boundaries between insider and outsider, the pirate becomes instrumental in the construction of the 'other'" (Pirate Novels 11). The pirate is always the outsider, the negative focus that allows the creation of identity *for someone else*. Or, more correctly, the pirate is always the *outsider for someone else*—the uncrossable line, the liminal experience that we center our own subjectivities against; insofar as pirates react against established sovereign nations, the sovereign nations react against pirates by branding them outsiders, monsters; it is simultaneously within this monstrosity that piracy attracts a certain romanticized reverence.

Of course, pirates recognize the impossibility of posing as outsiders; Captain Charles Bellamy exemplifies this understanding while denouncing a merchant: "*They villify us, the Scoundrels do, when there is only this Difference, they rob the Poor under the cover of Law, forsooth, and we plunder the rich under the protection of our own Courage*" (Pirates 482). This difference is quite significant, and it points to a clear

understanding of the relationship between State-sanctioned disciplinary power and violence and the modes of resistance created by pirates. Pirates represent a radical mode of being-against; does not mean that pirates are purely reactive, but that piracy develops within the social realm of capitalism; the creative engagement with maritime labor overwhelmingly suffuses piratical subjectivities.

In Modernity at Sea, Casarino rigorously examines Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces." Crucially, Casarino avoids pirates in his discussion of the heterotopia of the ship. Casarino writes, "the ship is the heterotopia par excellence. *Modernity at Sea* takes its historical and conceptual cue from such an outlandish claim" (Casarino 13). Perhaps my claim is even more outlandish: rather than focusing on the penultimate line of Foucault's "Of Other Spaces," it is necessary to read deeply into his final line: "In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates" (Foucault 27).[12] The juxtaposition of police and pirates might be a little too easy, but when we start thinking of piracy as the place of dreams and adventure versus the State-sponsored ill will of espionage and police, it becomes clear that if we are to take Foucault's heterotopias seriously we have to come to grips with the simultaneously real and unreal aspects of their formation. The heterotopic ship invokes the interstitial relationship between the real and imagined pirate.

Although Casarino articulately mines the nineteenth-century sea narrative, exposing the disjunct between the maritime worker and the world, he avoids the complications that

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[12] Foucault's other examples of heterotopias are: boarding school, the honeymoon trip (specifically for women), prisons, rest homes, mental institutions, cemeteries, theaters, gardens, museums, libraries, brothels, and colonies. These are by no means the only examples of heterotopias; heterotopias emerge and flourish often under intense social strife, for instance various streets during May '68, or the emergence of punk rock in England.

piracy invokes within the heterotopia of the maritime laborer.[13] The ship *is* the heterotopia *par excellence*, but Casarino misses the mark in focusing on the ship of the maritime laborer, insofar as it acts as a potential space for liberation or revolution. The inventive social relations between crewmembers was often not enough to stave off the crushing weight of capitalist exploitation and violent stratification of workers within the shipping system. This distinction is further played out when Casarino correctly asserts, "heterotopias come into being when as the interference between representational and nonrepresentational practices: this is the onto-epistemological modality of interference that…occurs when a practice folds back upon itself and questions both itself and all other practices" (Casarino 11). A difficulty arises however, when it becomes clear that although shipping practices did arise out of the ship as the first laboratory of capitalism, most maritime laborers succumbed after a brief yet furious period of resistance. By the nineteenth century, the period Casarino primarily deals with, the reification of many of the practices of resistance renders them understandable, acceptable, and nearly moot.[14] Therefore, the "heterotopia of the ship" that Casarino describes as producing a "language that gravitates toward the nether world of the nonrepresentational and that operates at the

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[13] In some ways this disagreement is based entirely on temporal issues—Casarino examines the waning of maritime industry's importance within the capitalist system finding the most important moment of the heterotopia at the waning of the maritime industry, whereas I locate these heterotopic possibilities at the nexus between the resistance to shipping's primitive accumulation and the irruption of piracy. Because of these temporal differences Casarino, unfortunately, excludes the most radical gesture—the piratical gesture. I am sorely tempted to say he missed the boat.

[14] For an exhaustive study of this process within black maritime labor in the Atlantic see David Kazanjian's The Colonizing Trick, particularly chapter one, "Racialized Capitalism." Kazanjian draws out the implications of the feminization of racialized work within mercantalist maritime labor. By the nineteenth century the freedom the sea seemingly offered to black mariners becomes increasingly enclosed within feminized forms of labor. See also Paul Gilroy's seminal text The Black Atlantic.

edge of its own dissolution" (Modernity at Sea 16) is already backing away from dissolution, engaging in shipping rather than the limit-experience, pirating.

In order to begin understanding the power of the pirate heterotopia we need to trace the formation of the pirate ship within the context of the two most popular forms of conversion: mutiny and capture. Though mutiny was less common than capture, the social formations springing up around mutiny illustrate the communal nature of pirate formation. All acts of resistance carry strong repercussions for the ringleaders, and these repercussions are magnified if the ringleaders are at sea and unable to appeal to any higher power than the captain of the ship. The complete enclosure of the space of the ship is, on one hand, constitutive of many of the freedoms piracy enjoys, but it also renders systems of justice particularly uncompromising. Whippings, maroonings, and killings were common; punishment was often random, bizarre, and violent; death at the hands of the captain during "correction" was surprisingly common. To combat the discovery of ringleaders and to encourage more sailors to join the mutiny, sailors invented the Round Robin. Marcus Rediker quotes a detailed description of the Round Robin by Nathanial Uring:

> They take a large Sheet of Paper, and strike two Circles, one a good distance without the other; in the inner Circle, they will write what they have a mind to have done; and between the two Circular Lines, they write their Names, in and out, against the Circles; beginning like the four Cardinal points of the Compass, right opposite to each other, and so continue till the Paper is filled; which appears in a Circle, and no one can be said to be first, so that they are all equally guilty: Which I believe to be contrived to keep 'em all firm to their

> purpose, when once they have signed it; and if discovered, no one can be excused, by saying, he was the last that signed it, and he had not done it without great Persuasion" (Uring Quoted in Rediker 234).

Uring cynically describes the reasoning behind the circular format as a way of removing the possibility that any signer will say they only complied with the desire for mutiny because of persuasion from the rest of the crew. Uring misunderstands the circle as a means for removing individual responsibility—if everyone signed and there is no obvious leader then there is a reduced risk of individual punishment. Another way of reading the circularity of the names is as the mutineers' acceptance of common risk. The circularity of names is a direct precursor to—and indicative of—the commonality amongst pirate communities. The life of common peril and the possibility of sudden gruesome death instilled a deep ethos of commonality. Although outsiders viewed pirates as *Hostis humani generis* "a common enemy with whom neither faith nor oath is to be kept," pirate crews looked out for one another, engaging with common enemies, but never attacking one another (Johnson 593). Though no one would argue against the bloodthirsty intentions of pirates, an argument could certainly be made that those threatened most directly by acts of piracy obscured or distorted the close ideological community between pirates.[15] The commonality of experience of the maritime worker lends itself to the creation of practices that stress the reliance between one worker and another. In other words, the faces of workers mirror their coworkers. The ship worked as an object lesson in the disparity between workers and owners; furthermore the ship acted as a testing

[15] Those who had the most to lose because of piracy were nation-states, industry, and religious groups. Pre-execution pirate confessions were a burgeoning industry; they offered moral correction and object lessons in the power of the State. For a survey of objections to piracy on moral grounds see Hans Turley's Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash.

ground for an ethos of radical collectivism.

The Round Robin is an innovative form of social resistance of crews often physically and emotionally intimidated by captains, and at the same time, the Round Robin reified the distinction between crew and captain. If the mutiny was successful, the first grievance addressed was usually the huge gap in wage and treatment between captains and their crews. After a ship becomes pirate, the mutineers overturn the rules that acted to differentiate the captain and the crew; the social order becomes rigid only in protecting a sense of fairness amongst equals. The sanctity of separation and purity between the lines of boss and workers suddenly blurs if the captain retires to the same sleeping arrangements as the crew instead of a posh, well-appointed cabin. Captured captains reacted with horror at the concept of the pirate captain sleeping with the crew.[16] The surprise of captains in the face of what must have seemed like a completely ridiculous act of commonality underscores the deep-seated social lines distinguishing captains from those they command; the difference in space underscored the difference in pay. Reworking spacial relations on board pirate ships crucially points to the changing social structures present on pirate ships.

The Round Robin and the egalitarian sleeping conditions are only two examples among many ways pirates challenge the normative discursive practices of their times. One of the clearest examples of piratical denaturing of the social hierarchies prevalent in the sovereign nations is the pirate practice of mock trials. Most pirates' lives ended, predictably, at the gallows. This instant, and seemingly unavoidable, reinscription into the disciplinary procedures of sovereignty was ruthlessly reworked by pirates during

[16] Rediker quotes an astonished captain as saying that, "the captain himself not being allowed a bed" (262).

mock trials set up as entertainment during moments of relaxation aboard the ship. The pirates engage in vehement parody of a system of justice based on laws that pirates found inherently unjust every bit as satiric and inventive as the trial in Alice in Wonderland. The distinction between the inventiveness of the crew, reacting against new social structures springing up through capitalism, pushed beyond the Round Robin when a ship turned pirate. What distinguishes pirates from privateers or buccaneers is the creation of pirate articles. Pirate articles are laws and codes that attempt to redistribute authority in a more egalitarian manner. The innovative act of creating the articles differentiates pirates from sovereign nations. Predating modern constitutional democracies, pirate communities—organized around a set of articles—are a discredited precursor to the democratic upheavals in colonial America and France. Marcus Rediker is fond of saying that because of the pirate articles pirates lived in a "world turned upside down" (Villains 16).

An examination of different pirate articles recorded by Captain Charles Johnson[17] exposes similar concerns amongst various pirate crews congealing around the dispersal of funds. However, the distribution of funds is only the beginning of the attempt to rework the system against which pirates were rebelling. These articles all bear remarkable similarity to one another, and through a reading of the pirate articles, we begin forming an understanding of the configuration of the piratical mode of being. Captain Mission gives a general sense of the essence of the ethos of pirate articles when he says, "[*that*] *in throwing off the yoke of tyranny, of which the action* [mutiny] *spoke an abhorrence, he*

[17] Nothing is really known about Captain Charles Johnson. His work Pirates was attributed to Daniel Defoe for most of the twentieth century. For an in depth and compelling discussion of the role Johnson's text plays in pirate histories see Turley's Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash.

hoped none would follow the example of the tyrants, and turn his back upon justice; for when equity was trodden under foot, misery, confusion and mutual distrust naturally followed" (Johnson 351). Mission's fear that some of his crew might, in some way "follow the example of the tyrants" and turn their backs "upon justice," clearly outlines Mission's sense that the turn towards piracy represents a movement for equity, fairness, and most importantly, a sensible mode of being. Pirate articles represent a radical departure from the socially understood relationship between individuals and the state; suddenly, individual rights, fair trials, and common insurance funds (after all piracy *is* dangerous) become basic inalienable components for everyone who signs on to the pirate articles.

These loose-knit articles nearly universally adopted a code of radical egalitarianism and an ethos of pluralism. However, just because a sense of freedom reigned over a majority of pirates, this does not mean that every pirate was a plain and fair dealer. For instance, Captain Bartholomew Roberts creates his set of articles after Kennedy, his second in command double-crossed him leaving both him and most of his crew stranded while their supplies quickly evaporated. Roberts, impassioned by his ill treatment by Kennedy, "formed a set of articles to be signed and sworn to, for the better conservation of their society and doing justice to one another" (Johnson 182). Roberts' articles illustrate both the far-reaching democratic yearnings underlining pirate society, and the understanding that freedom can only exist when the minority wields neither more money nor power than the majority. Importantly this desire for freedom is not simply overturning one hierarchical system and replacing it with another; instead, pirate articles attempt to destroy all hierarchies *en toto*. Since democracy was direct aboard the ships,

the pirate captain was always directly beholden to the crew; captains could be deposed at a moments notice if they were no longer doing an acceptable job. Roberts' first article is "[every] man has a vote in affairs of moment; has equal title to the fresh provisions or strong liquors at any time seized" (Johnson 182). We can continue tracing these paths of egalitarianism through Roberts' articles, "every man…called fairly in turn, by list, on board of prizes, because over and above their proper share they were on these occasions allowed a shift of clothes" and finally, "[no] man to talk of breaking up their way of living till each had a share of £1,000" (Johnson 182-3, 184). In addition to the overriding sense of the importance of equality in the articles, it becomes quickly evident that this equality is only possible if a legal code exists where fairness and justice are synonymous. The next sentence, after allowing each pirate a shift of clothing, is "but if they defrauded the Company to the value of a dollar, in plate, jewels, or money, Marooning was the punishment" (Johnson 183). The marooned pirate, finds himself not only in the unenviable position of sitting alone on a deserted isle, but also bereft of the pirate community. The punishment fits the crime; if any pirate undermines the privileged position of the community of individuals over the singular individual then the community excises the problematic member. Pirates settled all their disputes off the ship; according to Roberts' articles there was "no striking one another on board, but every man's quarrels to be ended on shore, at sword or pistol" (Johnson 183). By removing the fighting pirates to land, the ship remains a peaceful place; therefore, the heterotopia is, in some ways, kept intact by momentarily expelling elements that threatened the space. Captain Philips, on his ship the Revenge, sailed under an article that emphasized the importance of the unique space of the ship through who could join the crew: "if at any time we should meet

another Marooner (that is Pirate) that man that shall sign his articles without the consent of our company shall suffer such punishment as the captain and company shall think fit" (Johnson 307). Therefore, if anyone signs the articles without everyone agreeing the purity of the space may, in some way, be jeopardized. In other words, who is this "Marooner," and what did they do previously to find themselves in this unfortunate predicament. In Philips' case, marooning was the punishment for running away, keeping secrets, or stealing—is it prudent to accept someone with these proclivities into the crew? The justice of the pirate ship, focused almost entirely on the continuance of their community, works under the condition that the ship is unlike the land; this difference between land and sea emphasizes the heterotopic nature of the ship by overturning the normal relationship between land and sea. The ship is no longer the place of exile, the ship of fools, the garbage barge, set adrift to protect the purity of land.

The punishments for defrauding the community in any way were extreme, but in turn, injured pirates received payments out of the common fund if they suffered too many injuries to continue a life of piracy before they reached the mark of £1,000. Often, pirates who violated the articles were put on trial and tried by jury; although in the case of violations where a pirate had defrauded the crew, a trial by that pirate's peers does not insure much in the way of a fair trial. Is it more important to look for the groundwork for a legal system that Johnson describes as at least as just as "can be said of several other courts that have more lawful commission for what they do" (Johnson 193) or to focus on moments where that legality might break down? Obviously, the overarching focus on fairness and justice that underscores the importance pirates placed on the continuation of their society through an understanding that every individual is entitled to fair and honest

treatment—at least every individual who signs the articles.

Although mutiny emphasizes the importance of community on ships—especially during rebellion—the most common way a sailor became a pirate was by being on a ship captured by pirates. The basic scene of capture unfolded with surprising regularity. Once a ship surrendered—and it usually did, both because pirate ships carried much larger crews and because the incentives to fight and die for the captain were minimal—the pirates trypically asked the crew of the captured ship who wanted to sail under the pirate flag. A few sailors invariably stepped forward, having decided that life as a pirate could, potentially, be more enjoyable and more rewarding than continuing life as a crew member in the shipping industry. The second event, the "distribution of justice," usually quickly followed crewmembers turning pirate. The distribution of justice was a process whereby the pirates inquired about the treatment of the crew at the hands of the captain and other ship's officers. If there were any complaints of maltreatment, the pirates came up with swift and inventive punishments. Perhaps the most creative and curious punishment was the "sweat." Richard Hawkins concisely describes the sweat: "Between decks they stick Candles round the Mizen-Mast, and about twenty-five men surround it with Points of Swords, Penknives, Compasses, Forks &c in each of their hands: *Culprit* enters the Circle; the Violin plays a merry Jig; and he must run for about ten Minutes, while each man runs his Instrument into his Posteriors" (Richard Hawkins quoted in Rediker 270). This hellish scene—pirates dancing around jabbing the captain with various pointed implements while violins howl in the background—renders captains' descriptions of pirates as devilish creatures more understandable. At the same time, these moments of punishment for captains must have delighted the crewmembers that

complained about their previous mistreatment. For the new pirates, these punishments act as an object lesson in their newfound community's insatiable disgust for tyranny and the unequal treatment of individuals.

Of course, pirates cannot stay at sea all the time. No matter how well equipped a ship is, and no matter how often one procures provisions at sea, at some point the ship has to stop, barnacles must be scraped, hulls must be repaired, and somebody needs to examine the mast. If you are, in Exquemelin's words, "not backed by any prince," life is precarious and naked; how do you stop, where can you find safe harbor, and is there any way to accommodate both the prince and the pirate? Pirates began to settle the areas where they were the most extensively engaged. Cities, and sometimes entire islands, became safe harbors for pirates; in some cases the cities were just amenable to piratical behavior, but in other cases pirates entered the political realm and governed. Using the ethos learned on the ship, pirates set about forming egalitarian communities on land. The settlers in the Bay of Campeche can stand in as a model. The community in the Bay of Campeche were called the Baymen, and they were know for their "marksmanship, three to four day drinking bouts, and communal sharing of food and property" (Rediker 60). They were also famous for the lumber they harvested and sold to any buyer. Thus, they were often a stopping point for pirates because they could safely dry dock their ships and repair and damages incurred over the course of their travels.

In his interesting study Pirate Utopias, Peter Lamborn Wilson investigates pirate communities on land as an overlooked example of radical democratic rule. Captain Mission, probably the most famous founder of a pirate community, created Libertalia with his advisor Caraccioli as an "asylum…that they might have some place to call their

own, and a receptacle when age or wounds had rendered them incapable of hardship, where they might enjoy the fruits of their labour, and go to their graves in peace" (Johnson 370). Mission named the occupants of Libertalia Liberi "desiring in that might be drowned the distinguished names of French, English, Dutch, Africans, etc." (Johnson 371). Mission's desire to drown the names of the different nations' residents of Libertalia came from should not be understood as Libertalia subsuming the names and languages of previous communities in favor of another established language; instead, the residents of Libertalia continued the linguistic palimpsests begun on the ships; a combination of languages mixed with shipping terms created a nearly indecipherable web of language for the uninitiated.

On both the ship and on land the heterotopia combines spacial and linguistic issues. Within the heterotopia of the ship, dreams and desires that are impossible on land become not only possible, but plausible. Are there ways of expanding the heterotopia; to nurture the denaturing of language, thought, and practice without demolishing the micropolitical social forms that create the possibility for the heterotopia in the first place? The failure of pirate land enclaves perhaps points to the impossibility of the pirate heterotopia existing as the stable colony; this is not to say that movement is integral to piratical subjectivities, but rather that once pirates began their own colonies they began adopting modes of existence that conformed too easily to what the pirates struggled against. When pirate communities were not destroyed, they were often subsumed into their surroundings.

Clinging to a Smooth Desert

Perhaps one of the most fearsome and, for sovereign nations, terrifying aspects of pirates was their mobility. Since pirates eschew nation-states, borders become useless lines mapped across potential territory. If maritime trade opened the frontiers of European colonial power, it also seemingly opened the potential space of movement for trade. Both sovereign nations and pockets of resistance operate on the literal and imaginative space of the sea. Lines criss-cross the open water in an unregulated swirl of exploration. However, trade routes were quickly established, and the supposed freedom of movement dried up and the regimentation of space quickly suppressed the openness created by leaving land behind. This tension is at work when Deleuze and Guattari write, "[for] the sea is a smooth space par excellence and yet was the first to encounter demands of increasingly strict striation" (A Thousand Plateaus 479). Although, the sea is seemingly a space of imagination and openness, it is the first space to encounter the strict codification of the expansion of capitalism.

Paul Virilio writes about the liberatory elements of the sea; he bases this argument on the concept that *capture* is the central focus of state power.[18] Control of traffic flows, through speed limits, stop signs, crosswalks, all work to inhibit the freedom of movement of people. As Virilio shifts from his discussion of urban space to the sea, he finds the desire for the "*open sea*…to compensate for every social, religious and moral constraint, for every political and economic oppression, even for the physical laws due to the earth's

[18] I am conflating aspects of Virilio, Deleuze and Guattari here. Deleuze and Guattari see the problem as an apparatus of capture, whereas Virilio sees the problem as regulating public movement. Both involve capture, but Virilio sees the problem as more straightforward than Deleuze and Guattari.

gravity, to continental crampedness" (Speed and Politics 41). Of course, the hopeful possibility of the "open sea" quickly gives way to the expansive forces of capital. Virilio continues, " the right to the sea very quickly became the right to crime, to a violence that was also freed from every constraint…Soon, the 'empire of the seas' replaces the open seas" (Speed and Politics 42). Virilio correctly draws our attention to the quick transition from the free "open sea" and the "empire of the sea." The State quickly brings the sea under its gaze, codifying and mapping trade routes, creating flows congealing around capital. Virilio seemingly conflates "the totalitarian State" which is "located everywhere and nowhere" (Speed and Politics 42) and the acts of resistance to the totalitarian State when he describes the roving empire, which suddenly emerges from European ports. Of course, Virilio is right in describing the horrific working conditions, the disaster of impressments, and the toll the sudden expansion into the ocean, erupting simultaneously with the expansion of capitalism, has on the lives of workers. Virilio quickly drops the roaming potential of the sea in favor of the terrifying possibilities of the "*fleet in being…as the art of movement of unseen bodies:* it is the permanent presence in the sea of an invisible fleet able to strike no matter where and no matter when, annihilating the enemy's will to power by creating a global zone of insecurity in which it will no longer be able to 'decide' with certainty, to *want*—in other words, to win" (*speed and politics* 38). Is there room within the fleet of being for radical resistance, or is this the sole space of the State? What makes the sea more hopeless than the street?

In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari begin to answer this question when they write, "[there] is indeed such a thing as measured, cadenced rhythm, relating to the coursing of a river between its banks or to the form of a striated space; but there is also a

rhythm without measure, which relates to the upswell of a flow, in other words, to the manner in which a fluid occupies a smooth space" (Deleuze and Guattari 364). The rhythm without measure is the rhythm of the nomad, the rhythm of becoming rather than being. It is within this space of becoming, specifically becoming-pirate, that we find the ecstatic laughter of the high seas, the smile and joy of Errol Flynn.

The emergence of piracy underscores the codifying desire of the State-form. Some of the most vibrant skirmishes in the fight for the right to the sea happened during trials for piracy. The declarations of judges and governors clearly bring the ideological underpinnings of both capitalism and manifest destiny into focus. As Major Stede Bonnet awaited his inevitable guilty verdict, Judge Nicholas Trot, Esq. handed down a verdict based primarily on the idea "*that the sea was given by God for the use of men and is subject to dominion and property, as well as the land*" (Johnson 74). Judge Trot's logic relies on the condition that space is *meant* for codification and mapping. By attempting to flatten out the difference between the sea and the land, Judge Trot expunges the wildness from the sea. From this position, Judge Trot easily concludes that Major Stede, by not having the right to domination, was "not empowered to use any force, or fight anyone; and therefore those persons that fell in that action, in doing their duty their King and Country, were murdered" (Johnson 78). Judge Trot exposes the interstice piracy occupied between individual and sovereign rights. Judge Trot is by no means a singular or independent thinker; these juryless trials promised swift and decisive guilty judgments in an attempt to curb piracy along the boundaries of empire. Hanging bodies dotted ports as an active reminder of the dangers of piracy. The striation and codification

of space, read across the bodies of the pirates before their deaths, invites the meditation of onlookers on the legal repercussions of turning pirate.

If, as Virilio writes, "[all] through history there has been an unspoken, unrecognized revolutionary wandering" (Speed and Politics 5) then it is important to recognize these revolutionary moments of wandering. Pirates embody the *will to velocity* and, as such, pirates were a very real threat to the seeds of global capitalism inchoate in the voracious expansion off land in the Eighteenth Century. As global capitalism moves into a new era of control, an epoch of biopolitical structures of capture, pirates emerge, once again, as a model of resistance, incorporating aspects of capital while mutating and reconfiguring these structures. The simultaneous everywhere and nowhere potential of the *fleet in being* is not necessarily the sole province of the State; Virilio overlooks the potential for *the* indigenous surprise represented by pirates. Piracy, because it is without boundary or center, enters into a similar relationship with the sea as the *fleet in being*. Maritime industrial captains had to be vigilant because of the ever-present potential for attack. Pirate ships were always equipped with a large selection of flags; they jumped from nation to nation their allegiance based purely on the allegiance of the ships they were about to attack.

Officials recognized at the time that the desire for mobility was one of the main features contributing to the turn towards piracy. As Rediker reports:

> An officer of an East India Company ship observed in 1701 that seamen 'run from Ship to Ship, and are encouraged in it by advancing their pay,

> which makes up what they lost in the other they left, and after they are a little accustomed to this extravagant course of leaving their ships at Pleasure,…they seldom care to proceed to their intended Voyage, but getting a custome of Roving, they leave their Commander upon every slight distaste, and at last grow so ungovernable, that nothing will serve them but going where they shall all be equal, or all be Masters by turns.
>
> This I think is the occasion of such numbers of Pirates' (quoted in Rediker 108).

In the mind of this East India Company officer, the "custome of Roving" acts as a gateway drug for the more perilous activity of piracy. The conflation of the desire to rove and the desire for egalitarianism, or to be "Masters by turns," underscores the complex relationship between mobility and communal forms of living. The "custome of Roving" presupposes Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri when they write, "[desertion] and exodus are a powerful form of class struggle within and against imperial postmodernity" (Empire 213). Desertion and exodus are by no means constrained to class resistance within imperial postmodernity, but are present in the forms of resistance embodied by piracy. The power of a "custome of Roving," rather than striking or slowing down, lies in forcing possible aporias within systems of control. The increased options for mobility and movement simultaneously engender a desire for liberation, which, for Hardt and Negri, form the basis of the liberatory powers of multitude. They, of course, see this as happening on a massive and unprecedented scale in our times. Yet, maritime labor and the piratical resistance to maritime labor act as a microcosm for our current social climate. Of course, it might be too clean and too oversimplified to insert piracy, which admittedly was a small resistance movement within a small segment of the population,

into the kind of global mobility and exodus that Hardt and Negri discuss in Empire. However, if we think of the pirate ship as a social experiment, an act of engagement, of becoming, during a time when the specter of capitalism was just beginning the haunting Hardt and Negri detail in Empire, then piracy emerges as a precursor, as a model, which has obviously congealed within popular imagination. The massive exodus of sailors from maritime labor to pirate ships is an early example of the power of voting with your feet. Central to any act of exodus is hope; the vision that somewhere, somehow, life is something other than a miserable joke.

Crucially, Hardt and Negri's conception of exodus is not entirely without problematic elements. Hardt and Negri argue that because of the destruction of use-value, creative and affective labor forces not only produce commodities, but also produce a myriad of creative social relations. There are two ways to consider this proposition: first, life is reworked by capitalism, by empire, until the de-linking of use-value from production produces subjectivities not only capable of creative living labor, but overwhelmingly capable of resistance; the relationship between labor and resistance, here, is an entirely active one; the second possibility opened by Hardt and Negri is a passive relationship between labor and capital—empire works towards de-linking while labor waits. Therefore, rather than an active attempt to rework life, the position of labor is passive and reactive. Of course, neither position is quite correct; instead the relationship is relational. Exodus places the worker back in the position of the first sale of their labor power, optimistically then, we can hope for a better deal. However, if exodus is nothing other than a push for a better wage, more benefits, a few more holidays, then it does nothing to combat capitalism; instead exodus acts as a failsafe for

capitalism—an alarm announcing the approach of a limit. Therefore, exodus has to be a line of flight hurtling beyond Lilliputian benefits that leave an oppressive system intact. Exodus must rely on *pure hope and pure imagination*. The rootless character of exodus allows flight and hope, but also relegates the worker to a position of nakedness. The harried multitude are often in the unenviable position of putting their lives on the line of flight. Nearly as many oppressive forces remain to assault the newly naked worker as they left behind; often, as Rosi Braidotti writes, "[the nomadic subject] may be empowered or beautified by it, but most people are not—some just die of it" (Metamorphoses 3). Therefore, when Hardt and Negri write in Empire, "[mobility] and mass worker nomadism always express a refusal and a search for liberation: the resistance against the horrible conditions of exploitation and the search for freedom and new conditions of life" they, oddly, drop the many lessons they learned from A Thousand Plateaus, conflating nomadology with, for lack of a better term, migrantology (Empire 212). Exodus often leads to brutal re-territorializations, striations of space on the backs of naked subjects. Both exodus and refusal are powerful tools workers employ, but in the end, exodus in the form imagined by Hardt and Negri, because it is a line of flight without a productive end, without ties to the creation of *something*, often leaves people in positions as bad, if not worse, than where they started.

Paolo Virno deploys a more nuanced and perhaps more valuable theory of exodus. For Virno, exodus is a "full-fledged model of action" ("Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus" 197). The émigrés engaged in exodus are in a continual search for a space of founding—the foundation of a political sphere. According to Virno, the potential for resistant political action only exists in the moment

when general intellect destroys the "linkage that binds it to the production of commodities and wage labor" ("Exodus" 196). Therefore, exodus must not only de-link production of commodities from wage labor, it must simultaneously engender a public sphere where production and wage labor cannot re-link. Virno describes exodus as an "*engaged withdrawal*" ("Exodus" 197) rather than simply a "push from behind" (Empire 213). For Virno, exodus is fashioned from multiple parts, all of them engaged and active; it is a full-throated cry of resistance. The focus on action underscores the difference between Hardt and Negri and Virno; rather than simply leaving something behind, Virno argues for the production of public spheres existing in contradistinction to State public spheres.[19] The non-State public sphere brims with intemperance—a continual questioning of the possibility of a State sphere. If the space of domination and power becomes amorphous, then, simultaneously, the questioning and resistance to domination must occur everywhere. Intemperance, for Virno, is the "opposition of an intellectual understanding to given ethical and political standards" ("Exodus" 200). We should read piracy, with its assaultive political agenda—the desire to create and maintain a social structure produced through a radical conception of the centrality of life—as a vibrant example of living through intemperance.

This is not to say that the migrant and the nomad do not share components, they do, but the migrant "leaves behind a milieu that has become amorphous or hostile, the nomad is the one who does not depart, does not want to depart, who clings to the smooth

[19] It is important to also note that Hardt and Negri see exodus as a movement of "new barbarians" who "destroy with an affirmative violence and trace new paths of life through their own material existence" (215). Therefore, there certainly are active elements within Hardt and Negri's conception of exodus; Virno acts, more than anything, to invoke the implications and dangers within Empire if exodus is not overwhelmed with intemperance.

space left by the receding forest, where the steppe or desert advances, and who invents nomadism as a response to this challenge" (A Thousand Plateaus 381). One way to understand this distinction is to think about the difference between deserters and pirates. The deserter jumps ship and either goes into an occupation on land or tries to find a ship that will pay better, has better provisions, or a less brutal captain. The deserter uses her mobility and the informal sailor networks to discover the best pay and the best conditions for working. This disrupts individual captains and individual shipping companies, but desertion does nothing to overthrow the system that oppresses the deserters. On the other hand, piracy never leaves the ship, never leaves the trade routes; piracy tenaciously clings to shipping as an industry, but tries to reconfigure shipping toward a form that is no longer oppressive. In other words, nomadic movement has no reterritorialization, unlike the migrant, who quickly finds him or herself enmeshed, once again into striated space—bodily marked and bound, whipped and pummeled, back into her desiccated existence. Perhaps we can also re-imagine the steppe and the desert as the gnashing mastication of the capitalist machine. Therefore, the pirate is reacting temporally by keeping the share system rather than accepting the "evolution" to the wage system. Nomadism is an active engagement with the world rather than merely a withdrawal; the nomad does not passively occur; rather, nomads spring from the inventive energy of the oppressed, the marginal, the myriad. In Virno's words, piracy exceeds the "baleful dialectic of acquiescence and 'transgression'" ("Exodus" 198). Workers became pirates after taking inventory of the dire conditions they toiled under; in large numbers, they stepped outside the relationship of owner and worker, of master and dog.

To continue an earlier turn of phrase, the pirate is the nomad *par excellence*. The nomad, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity, in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory” (Thousand Plateaus 380). In essence, the nomad may have fixed territories, a port or oasis, but reaching a territory simultaneously invokes leaving a territory. All fixed points are momentary. The path, for the nomad, is more important than any of the fixed points along the way. Trade, on the other hand, revolves entirely around the fixed points—the securing of products: ore, wood, and bananas. If there are no fixed points there is only a potentiality for movement. The nomad, and the war-machine in general, are constantly metamorphosing into different configurations. For Deleuze and Guattari, the main component of nomadism is its relation to space; the state-form reproduces itself through striated space—constantly mapping, codifying, and legislating; whereas nomadism functions through a reproduction of smooth space—a space of fluid rhizomatic and multiple connections. The nomad relies on speed, which “*constitutes the absolute character of a body whose irreducible parts (atoms) occupy or fill a smooth space in a manner of a vortex*, with the possibility of springing up at any point” (A Thousand Plateaus 381). The speed of the nomad is absolute; there is no stopping the nomad whirling and howling through smooth space. The reproduction of smooth space is the revolutionary moment, a line of flight ripping through the traces or reterritorialization. Hardt and Negri occasionally slip, however, because there is a difference between the line of flight that is reterritorialized, and nomadic absolute movement. To insist too completely on the revolutionary power of lines of flight without problematizing what

transversing striated spaces means leaves the revolutionary at best marginalized and at worst neutralized.

As Casarino writes, "the ship embodies the desire that produces heterotopias, that calls the space of heterotopias into being: the desire to escape the social while simultaneously representing it, contesting it, inverting it—the desire to exceed the social while simultaneously transforming it" (Modernity at Sea 28). The desire to exceed the social while simultaneously transforming it is homologous to the desire of the nomad; the nomad always presents the possibility of breaking in, lurking within a territory, seconds away from furiously emerging and immanently presupposing the impossibility of the territory—the heterotopia is the space of the nomad. One of the most important things to take from both Virno and Hardt and Negri's theories of exodus is the spatially indistinct nature of exodus. Exodus occurs in non-places; there is no specific zone of exodus, rather it is the "evacuation of the places of power" (Empire 212). The heterotopia, as specific non-place, is the site for the propagation of nomadism and exodus—the production of a non-State sanctioned public sphere. Through pirate articles and the reformulation of the role of production in relation to the State-form, on board the pirate ship the potential for reworking social formations becomes a reality.

Proliferation and Exit

If the purpose of modes of piratical subjectivities is the creation and proliferation of subject formations, does the pirate simultaneously undercut its own purpose by creating subjectivities that are unstable and unfixed; furthermore, does the instability of these

subject positions eradicate the potential for political action, or is it within the moments of instability that the potential for political action resides? Marcus Rediker points to the lack of fixidity, the failure to coagulate into large communities or nations as the ultimate reason for the failure of pirate societies. According to Rediker, piracy seeded its own failure by its intemperate distrust and destruction of any form of fixed hierarchies of command or national communities. Rediker writes, "[pirates] produced nothing and had no secure place in the economic order. They had no nation, no home; they were widely dispersed; their community had virtually no geographic boundaries" (Rediker, 285). Rediker is incorrect however, in his assertion that pirates failed to produce anything. *Pirates produced a form of life that was fundamentally more egalitarian, humane, and creative*. The production of life, and the proliferation of these forms of life, is the basis for the potential within piratical modes of being. The piratical mode of being is a form of multitude, which "expresses itself as an ensemble of 'acting minorities,' none of which, however, aspires to transform itself into a majority. It develops a *power* that refuses to become *government*" ("Exodus" 201). Not only does this power refuse becoming a government, it resists being governable. Acts of piracy reconstitute smooth space or a "manner of being in space *as though it were smooth*" (<u>A Thousand Plateaus</u> 386 italics mine). The investigation of what it means to act "as though space were smooth" is the central question for both Burroughs and Acker. Acting as if the world is another way needs both a belief in the world as such, and a powerful rearticulation of that world. How do we reformulate spaces of resistance within expanding regimes of power and control when, clearly, the current state of global capitalism feeds on flexible modes of production and consumption? How subjectivities encounter subjectivization, and in what ways

subjectivities act to elude and denature forms of control and power are the basis of their resistance. Nomadism, because it is not spatially beholden, can work through eddies and rivulets of thought. Piratical subjectivity, for Acker and Burroughs, is an attempt to flee structures of control and capture—linguistic, philosophical, political, or social—and found modes of being that demolish the enervation of life. Piratical subjectivity is a particularly virulent and affective mode of resistance—resistance built on the simultaneous co-optation, adaptation, and denaturing of hegemonic narratives of control and subjectivization; through these multiple denaturings, piratical subjectivity grasps the potential for sovereign individuals to re-imagine both an individual and a political sphere.

CHAPTER 2: Towards an Ethico-Methodological Love

Love is the Drug

Kathy Acker's work consistently invokes and attempts to answer the question: what does it mean to love, and furthermore, how can one love in a society intent on the marginalization of the potential power existent in love? Above all, what Acker posits is the interweaving connections between, love, community, and literature. These connections exist within the space of disconnection between living and the socio-political world during late capitalism. Literature, for instance, should be an immanently social activity; within the realm of literature, the possibilities for connections should spring up and the proliferation of new narratives offers nearly infinite variations. The reading of texts, and simultaneously the reworking of texts, is only possible within a space of love; this is clearly as true for theoretical works as it is for avant-garde fiction. In his remarkable work Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, and Conrad in Crisis, Cesare Casarino describes the encounter with the text as what he calls "philopoesis," which he defines, in part, as "the eternal return of the love of the same, that is, as the eternal return of ever-different ways of loving the very same thing and of loving that thing such as it is" (xiv). Casarino later adds to his definition: "philopoesis is the love of the potentiality that cuts across philosophy and literature—and this is a potentiality that makes itself manifest specifically in writing" (xxvi).[20] For Acker, the text provides the staging grounds for an encounter that articulates the connections between reader and author and author as reader.

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[20] The love of the thing "as it is" unmistakably points towards Deleuze in Cinema 2*: The Time-Image* when he writes, "belief replaces knowledge only when it becomes belief in this world, as it is" (172).

The question becomes, what might an aesthetics based on love look like after the invasiveness of postmodern capitalism has seemingly eviscerated affect? Do we find, in the potential of language, and the love of that potential, new ways of relating to each other, new ways of loving, and new modes of resistance, or is it simply another way of naming a nearly transcendental, commodifiable, blockage? The theorization of the dominant logic of biopolitical capitalism often focuses on the reaffirmation of affect, but simultaneously shies away from literature, where, arguably, affect is alive and well, and, in the case of Acker, constantly on display. Acker's texts, especially her later works, help demonstrate, enact, fashion, and produce a multiplicity of subject-positions perilously close to the void Antonio Negri invokes to describe the transformative power of *Kairos*[21].

Acker writes, "method has become supremely, politically, important. For example, the novelist who writes about the poor Cambridge vicar who can't deal with his homosexuality is giving us no tools for survival. Whereas William Burroughs's writing methods, his use of psychic research, are weapons in the fight for our own happiness" (*Bodies of Work* 11). Acker's method of writing, her attempt to facilitate our own happiness, revolves around two diverging, but not divergent points: appropriation and the creation and dissemination of myths. Acker's appropriations, though still prevalent, take a backseat in her methodology to the exploration and creation of myths. Empire of the Senseless is Acker's first attempt to search for "a myth, a place, not the myth, the place" (11). Although Empire of the Senseless is Acker's first attempt at a creation of a myth, her novel Don Quixote clearly diagrams the underpinnings of those myths. In Don

[21] Antonio Negri. Time for Revolution.

Quixote, Acker argues that discovering the myth of America is at the center of any form of resistance because "economic and political war or control now is taking place at the level of language or myth" (DQ 117). The myth Acker singles out is the myth of freedom, imposed by the Quakers, who, she writes, "left England not because they had been forbidden there to worship as they wanted to but because there they, and more important, their neighbors weren't forced to live as rigidly in religious terms as they wanted" (DQ 117-118). In Acker's opinion, America is based on an inverted sense of freedom, a desire for the freedom of repression. Or as Spinoza writes, "[people] will fight for their servitude as if they were fighting for their own deliverance" (Theological-Political Treatise 6). This paradoxical ideological stance imbues action with being towards death, rather than an affirmation of life. In turn, Acker begins disseminating her own myths, each myth imbued with the potentiality of love. Pirates are one of Acker's most interesting and useful mythic creations; because pirates already hold significant symbolic capital, Acker can rely on certain portions of pirate mythology while simultaneously using factual aspects of cooperation and community between pirates to explore possible subject-positions working within and against capitalism. Acker's explorations of the piratical mode of being in Empire of the Senseless and Don Quixote works to expand the definition of piracy as a political act firmly grounded in love.

Don Quixote revolves around both what it means to love, and how one should love within a world intent on forcing people into false relationships with their world; in other words, a world devoted to the reification of fetishistic relationships. It is within this environment that Don Quixote sets out on a quest to love another person, "the most insane idea that any woman can think of" (DQ 9). Acker continues, "by loving another

person, she would right every manner of political, social, and individual wrong: she would put herself in those situations so perilous the glory of her name would resound" (9). If love is the only cure for the woes of the socius, the underpinnings of the political, social, and individual wrongs are a lack of love; or, said in another way, in the advancement of capitalism, affect does not wane—as per Fredric Jameson's claim—but is trapped, molded, and tamed.[22] Don Quixote's anaesthetized friends can only stare dumbly at her while she writhes in a state of emotional frenzy. In turn, the crushing destruction that besets Don Quixote clearly demonstrates the perilous nature of her quest. Don Quixote learns a lesson Acker says she learned only after the writing of Empire of the Senseless,"the body is real: if one, anyone, lives in hell, one is hell. Dualisms such as good/evil are not real and only reality works" (BofW 13). The reality of the body founds and organizes an ethical engagement with the world.

Don Quixote's quest begins with her invocation of love, but immediately this invocation changes into the failure of love between her and her friends, and her "cowboy sidekick" St. Simeon (DQ 13). Battered and sick, Don Quixote confronts her friends with the reality of her body: "My wound is inside me. It is the wound of the lack of love. Since you can't see it, you say it isn't here. But I've been hurt in my feelings. My feelings're my brains. My feelings're now nerves which have been torn out. Beyond the hole between my legs, the flesh torn inside out and gnashed, inside that red mash or mess, lies a woman" (DQ 17). Her feelings, tensed and electrified, exist in violent contradistinction to her friends, who think insanity is the only possible reason for her outbursts. Don Quixote sees her break from sense and reason—from diagnoses ignoring

[22] Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capiralism.

her feeling body—as the first step in a resistant plan for living, whereas her friends try to capture and reinscribe her back into the social through describing her as insane.[23] Don Quixote's foregrounding of her physically and emotionally electrified body is an attempt to rearticulate affect within a supposedly affectless socio-political moment.

The movement from feelings to the body demonstrates the indissolubility of the two; for Don Quixote, having an abortion removes her from the socially necessary forms of love, which she equates to "letting our political leaders to locate our identities in the social" (DQ 18). The location, and creation of identities, is one of the roots of the myth-making Acker attempts in Empire of the Senseless and that lies inchoate in Don Quixote. In exploring Acker's use of love, it is necessary to differentiate dialectical love and immanent love. In Acker's works, and especially Don Quixote, loving is a means towards identity creation. Acker, scrupulously concerned with freedom—or, said more correctly, avoiding paths that are inherently subjugating—makes love a quest that eschews love based on exteriority. Like the dialectic in general, dialectical love always preserves aspects of what it negates; there is always a push towards compromise that denigrates the notion of love as such. If love is really a push towards the unrepresentable, the dialectic, by its very nature repudiates the idea of love as the motor of the multitude.[24] Existing in the spaces within the singularity of the multiple, love generates power at the edge of unrepresentability. In other words, if love is beholden to the acceptance or domination of the other then the radical nature of love is already systemically compromised.

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[23] The codification of the sane in relation to the insane is a central focus of Don Quixote. Obviously, this is also a major concern for Cervantes' Don Quixote as well.
[24] Antonio Negri, Time for Revolution 255.

Turning towards psychoanalysis, we can see the same sentiments in Jessica Benjamin's Bonds of Love where she writes, "a condition of our own independent existence is recognizing the other" (Benjamin 53). For Benjamin, the difficulty is that there is little desire to recognize the other as similar to the subject; there is little impetus to mark similarity because, within Benjamin's dialectic—moving along the trajectory of Freud and Hegel—the other is around to either dominate or get dominated. These structures of domination need breaking, and Benjamin suggests that destroying the typical patriarchal structure of domination will allow a new form of mutual recognition—mutual recognition actually based on equality. Wendy Brown espouses a similar concept when she writes, "If every 'I am' is something of a resolution of the movement of desire into fixed and sovereign identity, then this project might involve not only learning to speak but to *read* 'I am' this way: as potentially in motion, as temporal, as not-I, as deconstructable according to a genealogy of want rather than as fixed interests or experiences" (States of Injury 75). If identity is based entirely on want, identity is simultaneously based on lack; perhaps a better way of formulating the shifting identity of the "not-I" is to strip it of its Hegelian dialectic, its master and slave, and try to conceive identities not only as unfixed, but working through an internal relation of parts rather that a relationship contingent on the acceptance of the other.

The immanence of love versus dialectical love is the difference between what Acker describes as sick love and normal love. Normal love is acceptable and sanctioned by the State, whereas sick love is "beyond rationality, beyond a return (I love you you love me). Real love is sick. I could love death" (DQ 18). Therefore, sick love or real love is beyond exchange; the basis for love in Don Quixote is a rejection of love having

any foundations in exteriority. Thus, in contradistinction to the dialectic, Acker's conception of identity works through a series of interior dynamics rather than on external causes. Furthermore, since sick love is beyond rationality and return there is no room for the resuscitation of elements tying love to normalcy. Loving death is clearly the most excessive, radical version of loving without return; death represents the ultimate unrequited love—a blank gaping aporia that accepts meaning, but gives nothing back. Love, based on this model, is no longer attached to exchange, and instead marks the space between singularities. Unrequited and unreciprocated, sick love does not seek solace in identity creation nor in the narcissism of exchange. Like Kierkegaard's leap of faith, sick love relies on the moment of decision; as a positive and productive force, love constitutes the force between people—glittering flashes that momentarily connect and lock people to one another.[25] Sick love is giving over to the other, reconstituting subjectivity through and within love.

As with the other statements Don Quixote makes while she is sick after having her abortion, her friends are unable to grasp the significance of what she is saying. They prepare her for her journey to the hospital; a place t*hey* know she belongs in, but that she is simultaneously just as sure she should avoid at all costs. She is, as she repeats continuously, not sick so much as preparing for the ordeals ahead. By making the world into the love she can only "dream about or read in books," Don Quixote changes her sickness into a "knightly tool" (*DQ* 18). How are we supposed to understand the transformation of sickness, a sickness described as the quest for a kind of love that is only possible in the realm of dreams and books—which her friends accuse her of reading too

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[25] Kierkegaard, Soren. Fear and Trembling.

many of—into a knightly tool? Don Quixote's friends label her sick because she is revolting against love based on some form of exchange value. That she expects nothing back, Don Quixote's love is the love of a void. Furthermore, we see an example of Don Quixote enacting an immanent construction of identity. Lack of love is the cause of the sickness, and though this is an external cause, it is an accidental external cause; it does not create any aspects of her being; instead, she uses her sickness, in a purely internal fashion; Don Quixote reorders her world while simultaneously reordering herself.

Don Quixote therefore takes the first step in describing an ethics built on love; a mode of being that rejects the morals of her socio-political surroundings. Since the late capitalist State misunderstands, and even denatures, love, an ethics based on love is insuperable for that State. St. Simeon can only love Don Quixote if love is a form of exchange, but this form of love is insufficient for Acker, and therefore Don Quixote cannot help feeling rejection; she must transform her world into a world where the potential for an ethics of love exists. The de-linking of love from exchange is the preliminary, and necessary, act for any mode of being formed around an ethics of love.

In Difference and Repetition Deleuze describes repetition as the realm of love; simultaneously, repetition works through irony and humor and is "by nature transgression or exception" (DR 5).[26] For Deleuze, the economic principle of repetition is gift and theft, rather than exchange. Therefore, when he writes, "the head is the organ of

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[26] We can immediately see the repercussions of this aesthetically for Acker and Burroughs. The textual piracy and appropriations place love of language and texts in the foreground (simultaneously, Burroughs disavowal of language through languages attests to the power of linguistic appropriation, while Acker posits language as the realm for the transmission of love). Deleuze argues that repetition is "the formless being of all differences, the formless power of the ground which carries every object to that extreme 'form' in which its representation comes undone" (D 57). Thus, for Deleuze repetition is opposed to representation and as such differs from dogma or ideology.

exchange, but the heart is the amorous organ of repetition" Deleuze, though not explicitly, points towards the underpinnings of love in contradistinction to exchange. Love in a non-reciprocal form is the craziest thing Don Quixote's friends can imagine; the entirety of Don Quixote tests the insanity of this idea.[27] There is, at times, momentary hope of an idyllic past in Don Quixote, Don Quixote reasons that "once upon a time there were no evil men" and that times have changed because "today love is a condition of narcissism, because we've been taught possession or materialism rather than possessionless love" (24). If those times ever existed they are gone except for wistful traces of a lingering romanticized past. Don Quixote's quest is the building of a new world where love is not contingent on domination or possession, but instead operates through leaps of faith.

The destruction of the other in Don Quixote allows the reaffirmation of the subject in Empire of the Senseless; once Acker eschews deconstruction, she reformulates her critique into an affirmation rather than a negation. This is a critique that is both linguistic and political, if it is even possible to separate the two. Once she comes to this conclusion, she immediately decides that her madness gives her the power to believe anything, and, therefore, "anyone can be St. Simeon" (DQ 19). The transmogrification of St. Simeon, from human to dog, is an important beginning in the necessary denaturing of the world, which Acker begins to argue more insistently, is based on language and abstraction. Even though Don Quixote has changed St. Simeon into a dog she has not changed his nature, nor the nature of the world. Though Don Quixote is sure of the

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[27] Of course, this is another place of thematic interconnection between Acker's Don Quixote and Cervantes' Don Quixote. Courtly love, in Cervantes, has similar trappings of madness.

dog/St. Simeon's loyalty and friendship, he only comes back after kicking her and running away because he, "having smelled future dead meat in and of Don Quixote, had slunk back into the church" and only follows Don Quixote back out of the church because of hunger (DQ 20). If anything, Don Quixote has only obfuscated the world. Acker writes, "an alteration of language, rather than of material, usually changes material conditions" (DQ 27). The shifting linguistic landscape in all of Acker's texts is a testament to her belief in the potential language carries to rework material conditions. However, a persistent question hangs over Acker's insistence on the power of language to rework material conditions: in texts suffused with affective chaos, with characters unable to transcend or reach beyond the shackles of language—even if they reorder that language—how can we accept Acker's position that, in some way, people are removed enough from language to reorder that language?

Acker recognizes the power of language as the place where myth is formed; if the liberatory desire is within the remaking of linguistic relations until the world becomes a place where living towards life emerges as not only a viable option, but the only option, then we must recognize the potential for both an ethics of love—which must be posited as living through resistance—and an equally powerful drive for new technologies of control.[28] Acker attempts to write forms of subjectification that weave around dominant forms of control; the construction of myths—through the disintegration of previous

[28] The implications, however, are not that there is only one way into living towards life, and, furthermore, that there is a certain way of living towards life. The focus, at all times, needs to remain on the multiplicity of options that, though not inherently liberatory, is the cornerstone of any ethical being. Though at this point it seems nearly obligatory to make this point, proliferation and multiplicity is at the heart of resistance because the basis of critical thought is the question, and any question implies not only an answer, but a previous answer.

myths and the proliferation of hybrid narratives—offers fleeting glimpses of the kinds of resistance possible within the dominant logic of biopolitical control. Deleuze, following Burroughs' example, describes the shift in technologies of domination from disciplinary societies to societies of control. Deleuze likens the difference between control societies and disciplinary societies to the difference between snakes and moles. Any project of resistance must, for Deleuze, and, I would argue equally for Acker, mark the ways emergent forms of control simultaneously offer possibilities of resistance—as long as those marked by these forms of control are able to undulate in such a way as to take advantage of any possible openings. Language, emotions, and the body perforate the plane of resistance for Acker; and it is through the reformulations of these sites that her use of love becomes more apparent. For Acker, love is the center of a whirlwind, constantly shifting, spinning and containing a constellation of moments of resistance. The whirlwind of singularities, grouped loosely around love, teeters along the edge of unrepresentability, and it is the push towards this edge, towards the loss of rationality—and living within the loss of rationality—that constitutes the potentiality of love to simultaneously refashion the self and the world.[29]

So, how does this whirlwind, whirling on the edge of unrepresentability, represent itself? Aporias, confliction, and chaos often mark Acker's whirlwind; as in Deleuze's discussion of the eternal return as a centrifuge expelling all but the most extreme and excessive forms, Acker finds, within unrequited love, moments of commonality.[30] Extremes and excesses change and mutate; the transgressive is not in stasis. Therefore, it

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[29] Although the language here is utopic to say the least it is important to think love as not purely a positive function--Spinoza's description in the Ethics of love of the bad object for instance.

[30] Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 41.

becomes increasingly important to wage engaged critique, while simultaneously dropping aspects of that critique when Power, in its myriad forms, inevitably infuses and corrupts them. Acker writes in search of a world, in search of a myth that acts as an underside to capitalist myths of individual creativity that work to separate artists, workers, people; Acker's myths simultaneously help produce a communal artistic and intellectual sphere—what Paolo Virno, in "Notes on the 'General Intellect'", calls "mass intellectuality." "Mass intellectuality" writes Virno, "as an ensemble, as a social body—is the repository of the indivisible knowledges of living subjects and of their linguistic cooperation" (270). Mass intellectuality refers to one aspect of the movement from societies of domination to societies of control; control societies emerge in the era "*in which language itself has been put to work, in which language itself has become wage labor*" (271). The vital question for Virno is whether it is possible to disengage the mass intellectuality, or the general intellect, from wage labor; in other words, can the potential deposited in the living labor of language find a non-State public sphere, a sphere where languages can collide, generate, and flee without the sanctioning of State power? The painful quests in Acker's work develops the notion of the general intellect as a productive affective force where language (and, simultaneously, for Acker, love) work to generate communities despite the push by capital towards the fetishization of relations. In other words, Acker's texts, by deploying and enacting methods of refashioning the world towards living, act as more than simply examples of theoretical exegesis; instead, her texts push the limits that biopolitical theorists attempt to describe.

In Time for Revolution, Antonio Negri posits that within postmodernity "*Kairos*…is the absolutely singular ontological occasion of naming being in the face of

the void, anticipating and constructing on the edge of time" (Revolution 142). Here, Negri may reference or gesture toward the void, but it is through affect and aesthetics that engendering the void actually takes place. The actualization of the void through Acker's texts supplants simple theorization and depicts *affect affecting*. The central question for Acker and Virno is similar: how do we produce affect that is not beholden to the State? In other words, if biopolitics is, at root, a system of control where capital enmeshes and subsumes the subject completely, where and how do we fashion something that exists in contradistinction to the biopolitical? I would argue that Acker is exemplary of an aesthetics deeply rooted in biopower; through acts of literature—not necessarily avant-garde in nature—the constitution of spaces of resistance emerge; the emergence of these spaces relies on the transmission of affect, a transmission positioned in the human, in the space between humans, which theory can point and stutter at, but at the end of the day cannot actually theorize.[31]

Any aesthetic of biopower is an aesthetic of affect, and, more specifically, love. For Acker the search for love and community is deeply rooted in the body; furthermore, for Acker the body is indissoluble from writing. This indissolubility means writing, and the interpenetration of texts within Acker's work finds a parallel dimension in her understanding of both communities and bodies. If writing works as one of the foundations of community—the radical and political moment of exile for Virno—then the nomadic nature of Acker's aesthetics must be understood not only as a critical intervention within the stultification of interpersonal relationships, but also as a forceful

[31] Another exemplary text in this regard is Angels in America by Tony Kushner, which shows the potential for more accessible works to still think the problem of the void and the production of more life.

reinterpretation of the role writing plays in the creation of foundational spaces. In her essay "Critical Languages" Acker concludes by asking that "we write, not in order to judge, but for and in (I quote George Bataille), 'the community of those who do not have a community'" (Bodies of Work 92). This project, the writing from within a community that has no community, exemplifies the entire range of Acker's work. This community, moreover, exists positively as an absence of community. Absence here, rather than some form of lack, is the productive space which Negri attempts to describe in his essay "Kairos, Alma Venus, Multitudo" when he writes, "in biopolitical postmodernity, love is general intellect…It is this amorous explosion of the general intellect that turns resistance into power and that makes of it the machine of metamorphic events of the common subject. It is the common *telos* that produces the subject" (Time for Revolution 256). Negri describes three technologies of love: generation, co-operation, and militancy. Generation, co-operation, and militancy correspond to love within time, space, and praxis. Acker, while writing for those without community, simultaneously works towards a similar conception of the Power and resistance constituted within love. She writes towards the foundation of a community rooted in rootlessness that through writing continually recreates itself.

The production of life, at least in a biopolitical sense, has to happen through language as praxis because, for the most part, biopolitical production occurs as general intellect. St. Simeon tells Don Quixote, "all stories, or narratives…are revolt…these stories or revolts are especially revolts against parents. Why? Because parents have control, not only over children, but also—to the extent that adults're products of their childhood—over everyone. In order to live or be human, the self must seize control"

(DQ 146). The act of seizing control is the foundational moment when the proliferation of narratives marks the shifting paths of resistance, the cracks in the armor of the seemingly indestructible socius; therefore, narrative works as resistance insofar as multiplicity demonstrates alternatives to the hegemonic singularity of the State. Though St. Simeon argues that all narratives are acts of resistance, much of Acker seems to disagree with his point. There should be a distinction between narratives that offer variety from the myths they are fighting against—whether that difference is through variation in repetition, or the proliferation of alternatives—and narratives that mostly work to reify myths of control.

The foundation of love and language is the entrance into one of the myths Acker uses to describe a form of resistance and community formation. When Don Quixote faces an enchanter and the enchanter's victim, the enchanter offers her the chance to realize what enchantment entails: having no choice, but having to choose. The victim and the victimizer, lashed together by friendship, exemplify the seeming hopelessness that often exists in Don Quixote's quest. This hopelessness, and the pain of the situation, lead Don Quixote to cry unceasing tears for "those who, having nothing, homeless,/ would flee,/ but there is nowhere to flee;/ so we travel like pirates/ on shifting mixtures of something and nothing./ For those who in the face of this mixture/ act with total responsibility" (DQ 187). The floating position of those traveling like pirates, in search of a community, is one of the foundational moments in the connection between piracy, myth, language, and community. Acting with total responsibility is clearly the base for the acts of criticism necessary for the type of resistance Acker wants. For Acker, any engaged critique has as its goal the decimation of that which it critiques; there is no room

for the rehabilitation of the enemy. Don Quixote's ascension to knighthood coincides with her eschewing all fear and no longer being "scared of anyone anymore" (DQ 179). At first blush, this methodology appears chained to the reification of the poor, the marginalized, while, concomitantly elevating the marginalized to a nearly transcendent position of creativity and power. The homelessness Don Quixote cries over however, is the homelessness of being bereft of a world where living is constituted through external relationships to the myths of the State, rather than living based on an ethics of love.[32]

In conversation with Antonio Negri, Deleuze says, " what we most lack is a belief in the world, we've quite lost the world, it's been taken away from us. If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume" (Negotiations 176). The belief in the world, here, is fundamental to the creation of the world—our belief creates and enables our existence. For Acker, writing engenders the world; the proliferation of texts and subjectivities marks the possibilities for living. There is a disparity between the world and the living—a disparity, for Acker, rooted in the idiocy of the State and synonymously, men. At one point Don Quixote wonders, "what do I want? Is it wrong to want life?" (DQ 69). She answers herself by saying, " The liberty for love, the liberty for instinctual roamings, the liberty for friendship, the liberty for hatred, the liberty for fantasy: all of these have faded" (DQ 69). For Acker, then, life is the liberty for love, instinctual roamings, friendship, hatred, and fantasy, all of which have disappeared with the advancement of capitalism. Furthermore, the reconstitution of these

[32] Having said this, it is equally important to keep in mind that subjectivities constituted through the imposition of machinations of the State often result in crushing physical poverty.

liberties in the world can only happen through the use of these liberties; thus, the creation of the world happens through imaginative and innovative practices of thinking the new.

In perhaps one of the clearest explications of the connection between language, community, and the creation of momentary flashes of resistance, affirmation, and creation Don Quixote says, "I write words to you whom I don't and can't know, to you who will always be other than and alien to me. These words sit on the edges of meaning and aren't properly grammatical. For when there is no country, no community, the speaker's unsure of which language to use, how to speak, if it's possible to speak. Language is community. Dogs, I'm now inventing a community for you and me" (DQ 191). The edge of language, in the sense Acker seems committed to, is an edge only insofar as a marker differentiating an alternative to controlling language, the linguistic stultification that suffocates the potential for more life. Always shifting, the edge denotes surprise within regularity, the monstrous within the everyday. The edge does not imply an outside as much as the moment of change. Furthermore, it is the inherent push towards the edge within love that creates foundations; pointing towards the inconstancy of signification is not enough, rather Acker uses this inconstancy to advocate for spaces of monstrosity. Importantly, the edge, here, is also about confusion, mixing, and the destruction of what is typically understood as an edge.

The community Don Quixote invents for the dogs is a community steeped in the potentiality of confusion, fluidity, and distributing rather than being distributed. In Difference and Repetition Deleuze differentiates between two kinds of distribution within univocal being: fixed and nomadic. Fixed distribution operates along established pathways, hierarchies, and judgment. Nomadic distribution works "without property,

enclosure or measure. Here, there is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute *themselves* in an open space—a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits" (Difference and Repetition 36).[33] The basis of a community formed by those lacking community—seemingly lacking voice and language—is desire and the delirious distribution therein. Rather than differentiating within themselves, in internal differentiation through hierarchies and formal paths, in Don Quixote, Acker begins to map out a style of life through nomadism, a life where the only codes are the destruction of codes—in other words, the creation of community for those lacking community, a community where the dogs run without their masters, where languages converge, connect, disintegrate, and reform.

The push towards the creation of community through delirious language, the language of nomadic distribution, accelerates as Don Quixote reaches its climax, poised on a drawn-out selection of moments in a transitory twilight. Both Don Quixote and the howling packs of dogs sing/howl theories of the shifting and possibly positive moments the edges between night and dawn suggest. However, Acker never loses sight of the difficult and often ambiguous relationship resistance shares with the State. Don Quixote laments, "'I wanted to find a meaning or myth or language that was mine, rather than those which try to control me; but language is communal and here is no community.' Having concluded, Don Quixote turned around and started walking home, although she had no home" (194-95). Unfortunately, Don Quixote only finds language rooted in mythologies of control. Her homelessness is hers, but her language is not. Clearly, a

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[33] This form of distribution is often indistinguishable from capitalist diversification, or post-national global capital. If anything, we can see the confluence of tactics of resistance and control in Deleuze's formulation.

central difficulty in constructing a community without control is the inheritance of language. In Don Quixote, Acker undermines the propagation of myths of control by depicting "some messed-up language, which wasn't quite language" ringing through Don Quixote (195). Don Quixote's language approaches language, but is simultaneously unlike language; the slight difference between language and "messed-up language" marks the potentiality, the denaturing of heterotopic language. Messed-up language infiltrates and implicates normal, acceptable language, Don Quixote's inner monologue exists in the same space as accepted language, but the space is filled differently. The way language connects subjects differs within the spaces of messed-up language; it copies, builds, and re-imagines the snaking undulations Deleuze uses as a model in "Postscripts on Control Societies." The closeness of messed-up language to language underscores the intertwining of resistance and control. Acker reaffirms the closeness of these two languages when she writes, "[the] dogs who had been following the aged failure in the hopes that she would age and fail enough to give them fresh (dead) meat, howled" (195). Although Don Quixote explains poetry to the dogs, wills her life to the dogs, and dreams of a time when dogs are free, the dogs are primarily concerned—as they have been all along—with circling around her waiting for her to die. However, at the close of the text, both the dogs and Don Quixote sing the end of the world—the destruction of bosses and the reaffirmation of living towards life rather than death.

The dogs outline the total subsumption of life in control societies when they howl, "city, owner of me. When you want pain out of me, you throw me amidst your bums and pimp-toads who wield smack needles like knightly swords in ancient or romantic times. When you want joy out of me, you make me famous, for I'm the baby, you're my only

parent, and fame is your nipple" (197). Though the dogs are becoming feral, they still imagine the city as their owner, which implicates the dogs within the system they oppose; although they are becoming feral the dogs still have a history of domestication. The dogs see the world of the city as a world embroiled in an ideology of idealism and purity; they understand culture and history as the "denial of [their] flowing blood" (198). After this admission, the dogs abandon Don Quixote—although she does not abandon them—and on the edge of morning howl "when morning's about to begin, in the winds of our lusts and emotions, I am a ship about to move.

"I/eye. We/Oui.

"Yes, we the dogs are pirates" (199). The dog pirates declaim the poverty of the world in which landlords control everything and posit, in opposition, flight from property and land itself. However, the pirates disgust at the poverty of the world appears problematic when juxtaposed with Don Quixote's quest for love because the pirates are unwilling to give Don Quixote any love—they constitute a brick wall that Don Quixote can only continually crash into.

Amidst the impossibility of love, the female dog points to a glimmering of hope founded in the freedom of the sea, of the motion of the quest itself: "listen, men. Listen. By this day of total disarmament, in our total naïveté in our total gleaming helplessness I am sailing over the crumbling European waters. Listen to your graves…Rise, sun. Rise into the morning" (200). The moment of total disarmament is simultaneously the moment wherein the potential for resistance arises; the pirates, here, operate as the beginning of one possible myth of resistance against control. However, in a move typical

of Acker, she immediately attacks this position when she writes, “Now I’m going to speak directly.

“It is true that women are never men. Even a woman who has the soul of a pirate, at least pirate morals, even a woman who prefers loneliness to the bickerings and constraints of heterosexual marriage, even such a woman who is a freak in our society needs a home” (202). The painful resignation in the line “Even freaks need homes, countries, language, communication” seems to recognize the futility, the madness surrounding Don Quixote’s quest for love (Don Quixote 202). Suddenly, the quest Don Quixote endures seems compromised; after all, she is speaking from beyond the grave—a ghost giving incorporeal advice within a text fixated on the corporeal. When Acker “speaks directly,” she reaffirms the need for community, and simultaneously establishes the precarious position of women who try to live in ways outside or against proscribed norms. If the options inscribed by the socius are either brutal loneliness or imposed heterosexuality, then there are no social spaces allowable for women or pirates. This inscription is why love fails, but it is simultaneously why love is the most radical gesture possible. In a position of extreme liminality, Don Quixote expresses the hope that people can view each other as people rather than things, as subjects rather than objects; it is here, within the intermingling of subjects—wholly dissimilar subjects—that we find love acting as a radical, anarchic, nomadic principle.

The underlying basis of identity in Don Quixote is difference—difference that is, at heart, irreconcilable—difference that is both aesthetic (in terms of the slippage between textual appropriations) and narrativistic insofar as we have characters who are dogs changing into pirates. Difference should be understood in Deleuze’s sense, as in

making a difference, the moments that show difference occurring—difference based on movement and chains of centers; difference works as an engine propelling varied couplings. In Difference and Repetition Deleuze writes, "difference must be shown *differing*" (Difference and Repetition 56). Describing difference as differing shows the active and affirmative principle behind difference; the force of difference is that "each composing representation must be distorted, diverted and torn from its centre…Difference must become the element, the ultimate unity; it must therefore refer to other differences which never identify it but rather differenciate it" (Difference and Repetition 56). The string of centers, moments of movement do not reach any form of synthesis, but rather implicate each other in acts of differentiation. It is this act of differentiation that lies at the heart of Don Quixote as Acker writes, "the only characteristic freaks share is our knowledge that we don't fit in. Anywhere. It is for you, freaks my love, I am writing and it is about you. Since humans enjoy moralizing, over and over again they attack us" (Don Quixote 202). Freaks exist as a monstrous psychic reflex to the moralizing humans; they are maintained dialectically as outsiders. Therefore, the creation of spaces where freaks can exist must be a priority. Clearly, friendship and love motivate the creation of communities through language, even if, or perhaps especially if, it is a language deeply rooted in the alienation imposed on the marginalized subject formations.[34]

In her essay "Writing, Identity, and Copyright in the Net Age," Acker writes, "when I talk to my friend, when I write her I am writing to someone whose otherness I

[34] However, thinking of Foucault, the creation of these subject positions begins to appear slightly dubious…once these positions appear, discursive techniques simultaneously arise to attempt marking the borders of the supposedly borderless.

accept. It is the difference between me and my friend that allows meaning; meaning begins in this difference" (Bodies of Work 104). Rather than the similarities, which are merely general, Acker focuses on the spaces of difference, the specificities of subjectivity, as the space of meaning. It is within, and through, difference that friendship occurs, and, furthermore these differences are the foundation of the creation of spaces where friendships can flourish. For Acker, it is the act of writing that works as the catalyst in the creation of meaning, community, and love; therefore, for Acker, it is impossible to divorce writing from love. When she writes, "[language] presupposes community. Therefore, without you, nothing I say has any meaning. Without love or language, I do not exist. We who are freaks have only friendship," Acker offers the clearest formulation of an ethics of love during the biopolitical moment (Don Quixote 202). Though friendship is the only thing freaks have, it is also the only thing they can have; being a freak is being-in-exclusion. Stripped of any social position—other than as Other, which is clearly still a position—freaks, in the most optimistic formulation, create new social bonds in resistance to the impoverishment of life. However, sinking into a joyous love of the *jouissance* of the freakish can also lead to cynicism and passivity in the face of crushing and horrifying socio-political degradation. Again, at this moment of potential conflation is where difference, in the Deleuzian sense, helps elucidate the power of Acker's texts. According to Acker, "friendship is always a political act, for it unites citizens into a *polis*, a (political) community" (Bodies of Work 104). A *polis* constituted through friendship fundamentally differs from the State. In contradistinction to the State, a *polis* constituted through friendship works through connections built on the space of difference between people. The difficult and important work of friendship is why

Antonio Negri focuses on the importance of love in the creation of the common; love is the motor that traverses and constitutes the common.[35]

Don Quixote ends with a plea for an audience, without which the writer is nothing more than a ghost slipping through the hall. Acker finds, within the ruins of language, in the spaces seemingly evacuated by love, the potential for the creation of a community constituted by the singular movement of desire and love. This is Don Quixote's final dream, and it "is not the dream of capitalism" (DQ 206). The dream points to the need for the formation of myths that work to create connections acting in discordance with acceptable social relations, myths constituted by the desire of the freaks.

You'll Stay on Your Own for Slightly Longer

In Empire of the Senseless, Acker uses pirates and piracy as one of the possible myths for living towards life; she begins to trace out some of the elements of a piratical mode of being, while continuing to struggle with the inherent difficulties presented by forming communities through the impossibility of community. Again, Acker focuses on the hardships surrounding the quest for friendship and love in a world starkly organized against any such possibility. In a search for a way to elude the subjugation of the subject within control societies, Acker introduces flight—as movement and desire—as a constituting element of community and resistance. The pirate represents the nomad *par excellence*, engendering nomadic forms of communities invested with desire. When

[35] In "Kairos, Alma Venus, Multitudo," Negri describes three "technologies of love" (218); the highest technology of love is militancy. Negri writes, "militancy, as the *praxis* of love, reveals the coexistence of the dynamics of poverty and of the constitution of the common" (218).

Acker began writing Empire of the Senseless she thought there was no more need to deconstruct; now the focus of critique begins by attempting to "find somewhere to go, a belief, a myth. Somewhere real" (Bodies of Work 11). The breakdown of chains of codes no longer holds the power it seemed to hold originally; the power of decoding acts purely as a first step, without the affirmation of beliefs or myths—momentary and spontaneous centers—decoding devolves into cynicism. Acker clearly considers the search for myths an active movement. We find *somewhere to go*—rather than simply a turn of phrase, this injunction to move is one of the driving forces behind Acker's sense of the potential of language. To quote Acker quoting Hannah Arendt, "[flight] from the world in dark times of impotence can always be justified as long as reality is not ignored" (Bodies of Work 101). In other words, if flight keeps political realities at the fore it is a productive mode of resistance—a way of shaking off impotence and engaging in potentially powerful denaturing of socio-political structures, but if flight becomes a mode of ignoring, an ostrich retreat, then we have nothing but abandonment and silent acceptance. Productive flight is a form of exodus; Paolo Virno, in his essay "Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus" argues that exodus is a continual search for a foundation—the beginning of a non-State public sphere. For Acker, this non-State public sphere is clearly the foundation of myths that reaffirm the political importance of friendship and love. A difficulty emerges however, with the realization that friendship is often antithetical to capitalist modes of production, which reify the strict boundaries between individual subjects through myths of individual acts of creativity divorced from any sort of socio-political milieu, as if, in some fabulous manner, we write without reading, we speak without hearing, that we are not trained into language. Therefore, we

need to discover "languages of wonder, not of judgment. The eye (I) is continuously seeing new phenomena, for, like sailors, we travel through the world, through our selves, through worlds" (Bodies of Work 92). How we travel through worlds is one of the central themes in Empire of the Senseless. Acker poses the question: how do we create worlds, and in what capacity does the author serve to repossess, or denature spaces once inimical to life? Since there is not an active outside, the creation of foundational spaces occurs within the spaces of Power—the goal of this form of active resistance is the metastasizing of foundational spaces.

Similarly to Don Quixote, Abhor, the protagonist in Empire of the Senseless, searches for a foundational space—and simultaneously a mode of being—suffused with difference, and therefore marked by love.[36] In Empire of the Senseless Acker traces various attempts at communal zones scattered along a post-apocalyptic landscape. Abhor, a study in the concept of difference: a woman who is part black, part robot, part Jewish. In the harrowing, war-strewn world Acker describes, Abhor is left looking for love and companionship in—once again—a world seemingly ill equipped to supply her demand. Whereas Don Quixote more explicitly deals with the quest for love, Acker, in Empire of the Senseless, trenchantly explores the connections between nomadism, resistance, and love. Acker describes Rebel Without a Cause as a film where "the kids are desperately looking for a place so they can live" (BoW 11). The teenagers, struggling under the oppressive weight of their parents and the world of adults in general, flail about

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[36] Of course, having said this it is equally important to stress that difference in and of itself does not offer any particular plan for living, or of resistance. Simply speaking, difference is often profitably exploited by capitalists to increase the scope of markets.

attempting to find enough space to live. That Acker alludes to Rebel Without a Cause is unsurprising because her work teems with the same oppression, horror, and violence.[37]

In Empire of the Senseless, the pirate uneasily becomes a model for a mode of being towards which Don Quixote hinted. The question becomes, simply, how does piracy work as a model for language, for flight, and as a mode of being? Acker attempts to negotiate the problems of using pirates—who carry the potential for extreme violence and cruelty—while still excavating the power of their resistance, the totality of their militancy. The trick exists in understanding that any subject-position exists in multiple forms: the reified, passive position where the subject collapses into stultification—this is the plane where marketing and branding occur, where all difference is telescoped into the smallest portions. The other form of subject-position is, in actuality, multiple and is most easily understood as the ability to jettison aspects of any schematic form of subjectivity. In other words, attachments are fleeting, momentary connections that work only as means of creating further couplings. Through Abhor, Acker writes the process of traversing these two planes—her heteroclitic language mirroring Abhor's seemingly monstrous genealogy. This movement begins with Thivai, her sometime partner, speaking for Abhor, and ends with her confidently concluding that she knew "what [she] didn't want and what and whom [she] hated" (ES 227). Often discovering the enemy is the hardest moment of any form of resistance because it is impossible to divide the enemy from the self. The difficulties of flight as a mode of resistance clearly illustrate the intertwining of enemy and self.

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[37] This is also reminiscent of the dogs' speech at the end of Don Quixote about how parents have all the power because parents control things like school, but also were kids once too.

Acker understands that flight has always been an integral part of resistance. She writes, "the modern Terrorists are a new version, a modern version, so to speak, of the hoboes of the 1930's USA. Just as those haters of all work, (work being that situation in which they were being totally controlled; the controllers didn't work), as far as they were able took over their contemporary lines of communication" (ES 35). Hoboes embody the dual nature of flight; in one respect hoboes were under intense material duress: crushing poverty and huge reserves of surplus labor, which lead directly to their movement; simultaneously, networks and communities developed amongst the dispossessed riding the rails.[38]

Hoboes are one of the first forms of roving communities Acker mentions in Empire of the Senseless, and though they work as a beginning, they do not offer the militancy of pirates. However, both pirates and hoboes excel at what Edouard Glissant calls a "poetics of relations." Poetics of relation are the "modern form of the sacred" that occur within foundational acts employing a "dialectics of rerouting, asserting, for example, political strength but, simultaneously, the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other" (Poetics of Relation 16). Acker's work hums with desire for the sacred, and it is the sacred, in this way, that works as the foundational impulse within acts of piracy. The haunting and fleeting possibility of love within Acker's texts—most notably, because of the representations of love, in Don Quixote and Empire of the Senseless—has the ephemeral yet over-determinedly real quality of the sacred. The search for the sacred,

[38] William Burroughs often uses Hobo communities as models for political action and resistance. One of the few sympathetic female character in Burroughs' writing is Salt Chunk Mary whom he based on a character by the same name from Jack Black's You Can't Win. Burroughs often cites Black's autobiography as a formative text for him as both a writer and as a model for life (c.f. biographies and Burroughs' forward to You Can't Win).

in these texts, is a search for a space intermingled with desire; the sacred is never quite a subject, nor can it become an object.

Acker's texts are exercises in nomadic wandering. For instance, the quests, in Acker, are not only the search for foundational spaces, but also simultaneously the creation of those spaces. A crucial form of resistance for Glissant is errantry, which he describes as the underlying force behind Poetics of Relation. Within a Poetics of Relation "every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (Glissant 11). Errantry looks for foundational space and is not, like arrowlike nomadism—the nomadism of conquerors—nor circular nomadism—the nomadism of the plains, caught in a desperate and continual search for food. Errantry is nomadism that continually reinvents itself, and it is this errantry that Acker forcefully depicts in Empire of the Senseless. While Don Quixote is primarily a quest for love, Empire of the Senseless is a search for identity; Abhor, in her quest to become a pirate, and her imposed quest to become a famous female writer, circles around the intersections between flight, love, and identity. Abhor's seemingly cynical comment, "I had learned something (already) in the dead city: You are wherever you are," forces us to question the meaning of motion and flight; the acceptance of being wherever you are, stands as a powerful injunction to constantly rework *wherever you are* (Empire of the Senseless 58). Acker points to the singularity of the world, and her belief that only through engaging in that world can anything meaningful change.

Acker presents Abhor as a collection of the socially abject; her questionable humanity—after all, she is part robot—renders her an even more liminal character than the seemingly delusional Don Quixote. To cope, and furthermore, to develop a sense of

identity that absorbs (without universalizing) her radical difference, Abhor flees. She flees without plan, with only one direction: away. The first step in her flight is to leave her sometime boyfriend, sometime partner, Thivai. " I would have run somewhere if there had been anywhere to which to run. But there wasn't. I knew, I know there's no home anywhere. Nowhere" (Empire of the Senseless 63). As Acker continues she becomes more specific: "exile was a permanent condition, a permanent community, in terms of relationships and language" (ES 63). Acker finds permanence within the amorphousness of flight; impossibility and possibility simultaneously string Abhor along. She attempts to fashion a community of language and relationships out of the smoldering remains of Paris. Resilience in the face of unquenchable horror embodies Acker's heroines—especially Abhor. It is a bizarre misreading of Acker to view her as a cynical writer; her realism is unmistakably rooted in hope. Even during an old man's speech reminiscent of Pynchon's *Schwarzkommando* attempting to convince Abhor that double-suicide is the only solution to the overwhelming poverty of life, the argument revolves around love. "But: We're still human. *Human* because we keep on battling against all these horrors, the horrors caused and not caused by us. We battle not to stay alive, that would be too materialistic, for we are body and spirit, but in order to love each other" (69).[39] Abhor resists the old man because he inserts a duality between mind and body; Abhor, realizing this, focuses on feeling as much pain as possible because "if you feel pain you're not dying" (69). Acker views the split between mind and body as both destructive and distracting. Acker writes, "I learned it is impossible to have, to live in a hypothetical, not utopian but perhaps freer, society if one does not actually inhabit such a

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[39] Pynchon, Thomas. Gravity's Rainbow.

world. One must be where one is. The body does not lie. Language, if it is not propaganda or media blab, is the body; with such language lies are not possible" (Bodies of Work 12). Acker meticulously and relentlessly attacks the split between mind and body; in other words, she sees ideologically based struggles as doomed from the outset because they propose and idea an then attempt to push the body along. Therefore, the old man and his suggestion that a double suicide will fix or in some way ameliorate the world's problems is antithetical to Acker's project. Rather than suicide, the struggle becomes discovering how formulating a plan for living is possible, and where spaces of potentiality exist. These difficulties become especially apparent when exile as a mode of resistance is reliant on groups of people whose mobility is highly hindered.[40] What Acker captures in her texts is the productive potential of this blockage, but she also captures—and this is what separates the theoretical model from her texts—the uselessness and horror that often accompanies the blockage. Reliance on potentiality is one of the sites where criticism of biopolitical theory can most easily take hold, but as Paolo Virno points out in Grammar of the Multitude the core of biopolitics is labor power, "generic undetermined potential: where one particular type of labor or another has not been designated, but *any* kind of labor is taking place" (Virno 81). Therefore, potentiality points to the moment before decision-making—a tumultuous mass of undifferentiated potential. Of course, it is often much easier to do nothing than to do something, so potential for action often corresponds to the potential for inaction. Acker's

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[40] In "Many Politics" Deleuze writes (which he will later reiterate in A Thousand Plateaus) **"**At the limit, it is the Earth itself, the deterritorialized ('the desert grows…'), and it is the nomad, the man of the earth, the man of deterritorialization—although he is also the one who does not move, who remains attached to the environoment, desert or steppe" (134).

texts are realistic enough to portray the potentiality of inaction as frustrating and destructive; often it is partially this inaction that Acker's characters struggle against.

Drifting through the swirling ashes of Paris, Abhor faces the aftermath of the violent final dissolution of French power; institutions of culture and empire, and language itself crash to the ground while "thousands of Algerians were walking freely" (ES 67). The leveling of Paris and the freely walking Algerians signal the smoothing of a previously striated space. Of course, an energetic attempt to re-striate the space occurs immediately afterwards. During their moment of control of Paris, the Algerians offer another example of an explosion of smoothness within striated space. Amidst the horrifying conditions of oppression enacted upon the Algerians while under the control of the French—and this theme is constant throughout Acker's work—every route leads to suicide. In the face of omnipresent suicide, the Algerians construct two plans for living: "one is a pure act of will. To bang one's head against a wall, preferably a red brick wall or the world, which seems unbearable and inescapable, breaks open. The Algerians in Paris had banged their heads against walls for years on the street. Finally their heads opened into blood" (ES 73). The plan, and its outcome, stumbles under the weight of its own irony; the soft skulls of the Algerians versus the heavy red bricks of the French is a bet no amount of handicapping can fix. The Algerians' inevitably broken heads operate as the foundation for the second strategy. "The second strategy wasn't exactly one of will. The heads, being broken, gave up. Gave up in the face of unopposable suicide of the owning class…Because in almost every nation political torture was a common practice so there was nowhere to which to run. Because most of the nations' governments are right-wing and the right-wing owns values and meanings: The

Algerians, in their carnivals, embraced nonsense, such as Voodoo, and noise" (ES 73). In embracing nonsense, Voodoo, and noise, the Algerians construct detours within the expected routes of language, sense, and sound. The Algerians' return to Paris is like the barbarians at the gates, the periphery infiltrating the center. Furthermore, the Algerians' use of cultural practices that are not typically associated with Algeria—voodoo for instance—marks another moment where broken heads are not purely destructive, but also work to constitute commonality within the transmission of affect. In other words, Acker disrupts the specificity of place to position the Algerian resistance as an eruption of communal desire that stretches beyond boundaries of nationality. Simultaneously, it is impossible to forget the specificity of the Acker's use of Algerians as a motor of resistance within the decimation of Paris. Paris works as a bastion of European culture, a monument to reason, actively excluding the Other. This mode of resistance, rising out of the broken heads of the Algerians, is one of the many examples Acker constructs within Empire of the Senseless to illustrate the seeming impossibility of resistance as the cornerstone of resistance.

Acker populates the apocalyptic Parisian landscape with Algerian resistance fighters, terrorists, sailors, pirates, anarchists, and hoboes. Arguably, each of these groups has broken heads, reveling in the carnival, searching for moments of connection within the swelling noise. Glissant argues that a historical transition takes place in literature of relation, that within Caribbean texts "historical *marronage* intensified over time to exert a creative *marronage*, whose numerous forms of expression began to form

the basis for a continuity" (Poetics of Relation 71).[41] Algerian-controlled Paris is clearly in the throes of historical *marronage*, but the CIA seemingly closes in before creative *marronage* begins. It is the movement from the historical to the creative that forms the space for literary communities to form.

It is only after her escape from the CIA crackdown that Abhor becomes an example of *marronage*—not only during her imprisoned stint as an aspiring woman writer, but also as she rips apart her instructional copy of The Highway Code. In perhaps the most hilarious moment in Empire of the Senseless, Abhor scatters pages of The Highway Code in the wind as she learns, on the spot, the rules of riding a motorcycle. As an act of *marronage*, Abhor uses memory and common sense to dismantle the set of acquired/required rules. When Abhor reads, "leave enough space between you and the vehicle in front so that you can pull up safely in it slows down or stops suddenly" she is confused because there are no vehicles in front of her; she decides that the best way to follow this rule is finding a car she can stop behind (*ES* 215). However, the rules fail her because they do not take into account the possibility of the stopping distance between a car going five m.p.h. and a motorcycle going fifty-five m.p.h. Abhor, frustrated and angry, runs directly into the car. Abhor's experience with the discontinuity between the situations the rules describe and her experience of the world leads her to speculate that "the problem with following rules is that, if you follow rules, you don't follow yourself. Therefore, rules prevent, dement, and even kill the people who follow them. To ride a dangerous machine, or an animal or human, by following rules, is suicidal" (ES 219).

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[41] The term *marronage* comes from *marrons*, the name given to slaves who escaped from plantations or ships in the Caribbean and settled in makeshift communities. As an act of resistance, *marronage* implies a rejection of the west through a creation of alternative communities, language, and history.

Abhor, having come to the realization that rules, in the form of works like *The Highway Code*, curtail freedom through universal proclamations, interjects personal experience into the universal. We can simultaneously read Acker's style of textual piracy into Abhor's reconstruction of texts, thus marking a moment where Acker comments on her own stylistic appropriations. If, as Acker writes, the language of the body cannot lie, then the rewriting of The Highway Code serves as a guide to using the language of the body to rework rules and regulations in the image of a subjective plan for living.

Mackandal, the leader of the Algerian resistance in Paris, is a one-armed orator preaching resistance through violence. He exemplifies the connections between resistance, mobility, and love—the desire to push beyond the impossibility of the everyday and work towards a future project. Acker provides a concise back-story for Mackandal: horribly maiming him as a child, a cane mill shaft ran over Mackandal's arm. While he wrenched his mangled arm out of the machine, Mackandal hallucinates vivid images of "Africa—many kinds of animals easily running, loping, over hills—him running alongside of and as fast as these animals who accepted him as their friend, without effort" (ES 74). Mackandal uses the mobility of the animals and their easy acceptance of him as one of them, no matter how different, as a model for resistance. Both an example of multiplicity and a laughably irenic scene, the animals show Mackandal that life outside and removed from the Parisian owners is an existence imbued with a vibrant sense of life-before-death rather than vice versa. Mackandal's followers directly mimic this behavior, stealing onto the Metro and freely flowing under the city. Similarly, Mackandal and his followers dump poison into the water supply; in an interesting juxtaposition, both the Algerians and the poison flow through the underside of

Paris, destroying the possibility of serenity and comfort for the white Parisians. Acker plays on the fantasy of poison and disease coming from the periphery. The poison and the Algerians are liable to appear anywhere at any moment, churning Paris into chaos with their fluidity and ease of movement.

The violent reterritorialization of Paris culminates in a vicious scene of dominance and power by the CIA against three boys and one girl. After watching the brutal killing of her three friends, the six-year-old girl begins shouting the names of any leaders to the resistance. The CIA then kill her. The CIA eventually captures Mackandal, tie him to a post, and set him on fire. While Mackandal burns, Acker offers an interesting description of love. Mackandal's "guiding spirit, surprisingly, was Erzulie, the spirit of love, that is not of fertility but of that which longs beyond reality infinitely, of all unrealizeable desire" (ES 80). It is love, unrealizeable desire that causes Mackandal to say, "in the beginning of the world…there was a living person. Because a person has to be living before he or she can be a corpse. The white people believe that death is prior to life" (ES 74). Mackandal is fighting desperately against the doctrine of death before life, and it is this fight that pushes him beyond, that sends him crashing through a window, on fire into the night.

In Time for Revolution, Antonio Negri describes love as the constructive force of being. Love constitutes being, while simultaneously binding beings together, therefore acting as the force that renders community possible. Negri predicates the existence of love on poverty. He writes: "the experience of poverty introduces one to the constitution of the common; the experience of love is an activity of construction of the common. If the common is the incarnation of love, then poverty provides the corporeal basis of this

relation" (<u>Time for Revolution</u> 210). Coupling the ubiquitous poverty within all of Acker's work with her insistence on love as a primary theme seems to correspond with Negri's sense that the bare life of poverty—not to be confused with Agamben who Negri chides as overly concerned with romanticizing degradation—is the catalyst for the kind of love necessary for the creation of the common. However, Acker's materialism, rooted in language that attempts to capture both the brutality and desperation of individuals bracing against the paucity of love, appears, if not more genuine, at least more realistic. In a body of work filled with becomings, there is no "becoming-poor" for Acker. When Negri writes, "the common is animated and given subjective determination when born of the creative relation between poverty and love. It is for that this reason that, in order to nourish the desire of the common, one must be or one must make oneself poor," there is clearly a yawning separation between Negri and Acker (Negri 210). Momentarily for Negri, poverty seems to be a hat one can don or doff when it is philosophically useful rather than an actual material condition. Part of the power of Acker's work is the insistence on the hideous uselessness of poverty. Poverty is not romanticized; rather it is the outcome of living within a system supported through the continual decimation of the potentiality of love. The difference between literary production and theoretical production crucially illustrates the poverty of affect in theory. Acker's texts actually work towards engendering the kinds of communities of resistance Negri describes; they mark the unrepresentable void Negri tries to trace.

Piratical Subjects

Even though each subject group ends in destruction and an ultimate sense of impossibility, Empire of the Senseless depicts multiple attempts to construct social groups through renunciation of authority and living-towards-life. The shifting planes of existence within Empire of the Senseless illuminate the myriad approaches to practicing a politics of living. The hope expressed by Abhor in the final lines of Empire of the Senseless mirrors the ethos of nomadic existence. Acker writes, "I didn't as yet know what I wanted. I now fully knew what I didn't want and what and whom I hated. That was something" (ES 227). Acquiring knowledge of the despised is the fulfillment of Abhor's quest. However, knowledge can only work as a tool; it is not, by itself destructive of the segmentary hierarchies of domination. Thus, even though Abhor reaches an awareness of the destructive forces arrayed against her, the revolutionary movement needs a pushing desire towards something—not just a push from behind, but also a destination. When Acker writes, "And then I thought that, one day, maybe, there'ld be a human society in a world which is beautiful, a society which wasn't just disgust" she enunciates the foundational moment within exodus (ES 227). Unsurprisingly, Acker reiterates her position from Don Quixote; the activity and process inherent in the quest delivers meaning; the creation of any vibrant politics revolving around an ethics of living is an act of becoming. The disturbance of the political project in Acker invokes Negri when he writes, "when one looks forward rather than back, it is innovation itself, that which is about to be, that appears incommensurable with the preceding dimensions of being" (Time for Revolution 169). Continual innovation, balancing on the edge of time,

marks the temporality of the piratical mode of being; reveling in change, the pirate, like the hobo or motorcycle gang member, clings to the shifting ground of their being, but also simultaneously lets go.

The piratical mode of being and Empire of the Senseless intersect in the explosion of mobility in reaction to the festering inequality in the everyday lives of the majority of the population. There is a discrepancy between nomadic histories—whether an oral tradition, or simply the histories of the defeated—and state history, which depict sailors and pirates as amoral monsters, bent on the destruction of society. In fact, this is nearly correct, but the claim of amorality rings false when compared to the activity of the state. Morality, in these contexts, merely implies sponsorship by states. Acker describes the gap between these two narratives when she writes, "throughout history most normal people have thought sailors are immoral and should be burned" (ES 113). She counters this sentiment by describing liminal characters who cling to memory rather than history: "there have also and are now a few people, human fringes, scraps of dog food hidden in cracks under shoes, who say that sailors hairs are silver and that sailors have huge dicks. Female. For today some sailors are female" (ES 113). Below low, in cracks under shoes, memory counters history and forms counter-narratives where pirates are not just horrible criminals. For Acker the tension between memory and history is another articulation of the search for myths and storytelling that work in contradistinction to the codification of desire within history.

Acker continues in the voice of the human fringes: "because a sailor has spat on and shits on poverty, the sailor knows that the worst poverty is that of the heart. All good sailors espouse and live in the material simplicity which denies the poverty of the

heart…A sailor is a human who has traded poverty for the riches of imaginative reality" (ES 114). Sailors, having known brutal poverty, remove themselves from the world responsible for that poverty; they trade the accumulation of material goods for the riches of an imaginative reality. The trade represents the primary rejection of the morality of the state; if the measure of progress and personal success is monetary markers then the rejection of material goods is a rejection of the ideology of teleological growth. In turn, this rejection represents a radical break with social norms and morality. Avoidance of the poverty of the heart represents the most important ethical moment in the piratical mode of being; the quest for love is often desperate, ineffectual, brutal, and disappointing, but the recombination of bodies based on desire shatters the rigid regimentation of the social. A sailor's heart is a palimpsest of loves. These loves traverse the sailor's plane of existence, forming cracks, cuts, and breaks in the socius. The use of imaginative reality "constitutes destruction of society thus is criminal. Criminal, *continuously fleeing, despising property, unstable like the weather, the sailor will wreck any earthbound life*" (ES 114 italics mine). Relations of flight become relations of speed—both fast and slow—where the disparity between flux and stasis illuminates the multiplicity of affects churning under a state apparatus. Herein lies the beauty of the sailor; the sailor rejects, and that rejection is a complementary rejection; the sailor, and the pirate especially, liberally uses segments of capitalism, while simultaneously disrupting the foundations of capitalism. Abhor watches the sailors "wandering in and out of the shadows of low buildings and alleys, directly searching for and finding what [she] was too shy to find for [herself]" (ES 114). The sailors, therefore, not only wreck earthbound life, but they also search for and find a replacement for that earthbound life. Acker describes the sailors as

"places" that Abhor is too afraid to visit; the sailors are planes of desire (ES 114). Even though Abhor is afraid, the sailors offer her a model of how to live towards and through life. The sailors are not involved in the same fruitless quest as Abhor; their desire directs them resolutely towards its fulfillment.

Though Abhor is afraid to visit the sailors she begins to haunt around the fringes they represent. Dressed as a naval lieutenant, Abhor has her fortune read by a decrepit crone. The crone, covered in drool, gurgles out Abhor's fortune: "the lieutenant will always be lonely. So lonely that the lieutenant will feel that loneliness is equivalent to him" (ES 115). When asked if Abhor will ever "hold and continue to hold" someone she can truly love, the crone answers, "the lieutenant is struggling not to fall overboard, but he must fall overboard if he's to experience anything besides loneliness. The lieutenant must fall overboard if he's going to experience pleasure or pain" (ES 115-116). The grotesque crone's response reiterates Don Quixote's quest, while simultaneously touching on Abhor's nervous guardedness in the face of emotions other than disgust. The chest-tightening horror of throwing yourself at another person, risking rejection, having your advances slapped back is the space Abhor occupies; the crone correctly assesses Abhor's panic, and gives Abhor the answer she is least able to digest. Abhor, wrapped in loneliness, finds the crone's words terrifying; letting go and falling overboard, living towards the beyond, naked to the world, forces a reevaluation of the subject's role in the world; an insistence on living on the edge places the subject into the crucible of experience. In Empire of the Senseless we see Abhor gazing wistfully at the legions of roaming sailors, terrified of the "shadows of this town, of sailors' fingernails, of the shadows of ants, of the shadows of the knives of control…I must have been two people.

I must have been thousands of people" (ES 117). Her proliferation from one person to a thousand people is not simply adding one person onto another, but it is a multiplication of whole sets of people. Thousands of people simultaneously afraid and desiring, subjugated and resisting, watching the wandering of the sailors—those already part of the community that is no community, in a place that is no place.

Directly after Abhor has her fortune told Acker switches characters and focuses on a twin named Agone, a sailor who desperately desires criminality, but is unable to achieve criminality because, ostracized from society, he can never "find criminality which could equal his loneliness" (ES 120). Of course, as a sailor Agone knows that "loneliness is worse than impossibility, that loneliness is worse than death" (159). Buffeted by the twin poles of loneliness and criminality, Agone desperately seeks a home within criminality. The search for criminality is simultaneously a search for freedom, a line of flight that Agone discovers on the lines of a tattoo artist's body. Agone acts as an unwitting mentor to Abhor as she watches from an alley as Agone discovers a line that ruptures his loneliness. Fighting the tattoo artist, whom Agone alternates between timidly, and violently wanting, he finally feels happy. The drift Agone feels while fighting with the tattooist leads to the first time Agone has any sexual stirrings—sexuality revolving around the intense interconnection between the body and language vividly represented by tattooing. Acker, with an almost irenic sentiment, writes, "the far seas contained paradises. There, people lived harmoniously with themselves and their environments. Their writing was tattooing or marking directly on their own flesh" (ES

139).[42] Here, in the arms of the tattooist, Agone's initialization into a community of criminality finally begins. Tattooing repudiates the distinction between language and body; simultaneously, Acker combines homosexual desire and the criminal associations tattoos garner when she writes, "in decadent phases…the power of the tattoo became intertwined with the power of those who chose to live beyond the norms of society.

"in the same manner, normal society had ruled that he shouldn't touch another man, but he was, that he shouldn't love another man, but he was, that he shouldn't come simultaneously with another man, but—" (ES 140). The combination of sexuality and tattooing exposes the iterability of sexual desire, if not desire itself, on the body. Agone finally gets what he wants; he begins to love and he pushes beyond normalcy and onto the fringes of criminality. Acker realizes that "the wild places which excite the most profound thinkers are conceptual. Flesh unto flesh" (ES 140).[43] In other words, flesh becomes the space of nomadism—a perpetual-motion machine writing the body. In Acker, bodies never fully conform to expectations.

During this process of corporeal nomadism, Abhor is "watching the shadows of [her] own desire" (ES 135). By voyeuristically watching Agone claim a place within the criminal fringe, Abhor simultaneously incorporates herself within the desire and potential for connection through the process of falling overboard that the fortune-teller describes to her. Of course, Thivai and Mark quickly demolish the steps Abhor takes when they forcibly attempt to reify the position of women within phallocentric society. However, as we see in her harrowing escape from captivity, her desire for freedom finally outweighs

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[42] There are definitely resonances between this irenic scene and Mackandal's dream of Africa.

[43] Perhaps some of the best examples of conceptual flesh unto flesh are the films of David Cronenberg. I am thinking particularly of Videodrome, Crash, or ExisTenZ.

her timidity. If it is the journey, quest, or process that marks the moments of resistance within the biopolitical, the push towards the thing-to-come, then Abhor's flight from the captivity of *being* a woman writer, towards the nebulous freedoms of the open road.

The seeming failure of the quests in both Don Quixote and Empire of the Senseless do more to express Acker's belief that "the demand for an adequate mode of expression is senseless…all acts, including expressive acts, are inter-dependant, paradise cannot be an absolute. Theory doesn't work" (ES 113). Acker sees any form of concretization of identity at variance with reality. Therefore, the endings of Empire of the Senseless and Don Quixote point toward the potential for change, while simultaneously offering a plan for living. In Acker, this plan for living revolves around flight; thus, when Acker ends her texts with openings she is not obfuscating her point so much as reiterating it. Both Abhor and Don Quixote discover what they hate, and attempt to move towards something, though unclear and blurred, they love. They move to create and engage a world where friendship and love can exist removed from exchange. Though firmly tied to a utopic vision, the multiplicity of roads towards this vision keep Acker from substituting theory for affect. Her texts are blistering palimpsests of feeling bodies that attempt to change the world by re-imagining their place in that world. It is within the relations between people where Acker locates foundational space—a space of myth-making, of potentiality. Much as when Glissant writes, "peoples who have been to the abyss do not brag of being chosen…they live Relation and clear the way for it, to the extent that the oblivion of the abyss comes to them and that, consequently, their memory intensifies," Acker shares the experience of abyssal longing, desire, and love. (Glissant 8). In the creation of these spaces, Acker offers a set of

tools—one set of many—wherein groups of myths are destroyed and new myths are piled onto the rubble left behind. The momentary flashes of space where freaks find homes occur in the heterotopic moment, the space of the denaturing of language and the reappraisal of normative social structures. The world Acker creates is a continuous quest for becoming-love through the reaffirmation of affect. The radical gesture of love eschews exteriority and the binding of mutual recognition within exchange. By denaturing and overcoding language, foundational spaces emerge—not magically, but often accidentally—creating spaces infused with love, which undulate with and around the enervating effects of control societies. Acker deeply believes in the world, or at least in the potential the world holds, and it is through this belief that she constructs moments of resistance, moments where the freaks of the world unite.

CHAPTER 3: The Ambivalence of Utopia

The Ambivalence of Utopia

In his essay "Postmodern Anus," Wayne Pounds examines the parodic and utopian impulses in William S. Burroughs' work, going so far as to describe the "building of utopia" as the telos of Burroughs' project (Burroughs at Front 219). Pounds' essay, a vacillating yet favorable reading of Burroughs' oeuvre, asks an important question that it then fails to answer:

> to put it country simple, the question is whether the boys' camp of Burroughs' earthly garden of delights is one any of us would want to spend a summer in—not to mention a lifetime. More specifically, it should be asked whether even the most charitably allegorical reading of the boys' camp utopia, with its sexist exclusionism, can save it from falling back into an unredeemed mechanism indistinguishable from the systems of control it is meant to subvert (222).

This question cuts to the heart of all utopian writing. Is it possible for any utopia to transcend its foundations, or do they always remain tethered to the past? Pounds measures out what he considers to be utopian and dystopian, though he is vague in his utopianism while specific in his dystopianism—the books are utopian because they "do imagine utopia" and because of their "semiotic structure," while they are dystopian because of their misogyny and their linking "knowledge to destructive technology" (222, 225). What Pounds' murky analysis misses is the ambivalence of utopia as a conceptual

framework in and of itself. The brilliance of Burroughs' work is his understanding of the complexity of claiming utopian projects and universalizing political positions. In other words, Burroughs' texts engage with the difficulty of writing utopia within a historical context that shies away from totalizing narratives. Therefore, rather than attempting to schematically trace what is or is not utopian in Burroughs' later work, an examination of how the ambivalence of utopia becomes an encapsulating social and thematic category provides richer ground for study.

I Know What the Future Holds for Me

Burroughs is justifiably famous for his stark and uncompromising criticism of structures of social, economic, and political control in the United States in the late twentieth century. For all of his criticism, however, Burroughs did not offer any concrete positive alternative visions for social organization until the publication of Cities of the Red Night in 1981. Cities of the Red Night is an important literary intervention into the possibilities of utopia during the rapid expansion of the logic of late capitalism. In Cities of the Red Night Burroughs develops the idea of the retroactive utopia as a way of conceptualizing utopia in a time when utopias, or at least left-leaning understandings of utopias, are facing attacks from all sides. Burroughs imagines the retroactive utopia as a historical moment when there is a chance for radical alteration in the social fabric. Cities of the Red Night uses Captain Mission, a seventeenth-century pirate, and his attempt to create a utopian pirate colony on Madagascar, to imagine what might happen if this historical moment had been successful. Burroughs continues his investigation of the potentiality

and ambivalence of utopias in his short text Ghost of a Chance, published in 1991. Captain Mission reprises his role as the subversive leader of Libertalia, and once again the sinister forces of control destroy his utopian experiment. Cities of the Red Night and Ghost of a Chance form the backbone of Burroughs' investigations into utopia, democracy, and friendship. These later works focus many of the concepts present in his earlier texts, honing both technique and critical engagement into sharply focused invectives that dissect networks of hegemonic control. The utopic desire plays out as both wish fulfillment and political tract—arranging desire against control, particularity versus universalism, and in that process reformulating the politics of liberation and desire that influenced Burroughs' work in the sixties. The question of utopia and its possibility within late capitalism—especially in conjunction with the dissolution of faith in master narrative—plagues Burroughs throughout Cities of the Red Night. Marianne DeKoven examines his use of cut up/fold in his work during the sixties, positioning it firmly in an avant-garde tradition with heavy ties to leftist ideological positions of liberation.[44]

As a literary genre, Utopian writing most obviously wrestles with Fredric Jameson's injunction to "always historicize!"[45] (Political Unconscious 9). Utopian literature must balance between narratives familiar enough for readers to connect with and de-familiarizing enough to shock readers into imagining alternate political positions. The formation of new forms of subjectivity through the practice of reading utopian

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[44] DeKoven, Marianne. Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern. Durham: Duke UP. 2004.

[45] Jameson begins The Political Unconscious with the powerful slogan "always historicize," and concludes with the equally powerful proposition that "*all* class consciousness—in other words, all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes—is in its very nature Utopian" (PU 289).

literature is the primary reason utopian texts are written and distributed. However, after post-structuralism and a much deserved distrust of totalizing master-narratives, what is the space for utopian narratives and the concomitant commitment to molding subjectivity through utopian narrative?

In Archaeologies of the Future, Jameson describes a bifurcation in utopian thought: one line invested in the realization of the Utopian project and the other in an "omnipresent Utopian impulse" (Future 3). The two lines intertwine and inform one another. The Utopian project is impossible without the Utopian impulse, and once the impulse erupts into practice, it passes over a threshold wherein the impulses are codified and degraded. In a sweeping and monolithic manner, Jameson outlines the constellations of utopian desire and narrative—trying at once to distinguish the momentary flashes of revolutionary desire from the simultaneous recodification of those desires. This desire is inherently political, but not motivated by politics. In other words, a political system insulates the populace from their potential, but the utopian impulse, the hope for something better, invests all political thought. Therefore, the utopia occupies a paradoxical space where the fulfillment of utopian desire simultaneously renders it desiccated and obsolete.

Utopian texts are programmatic insofar as they attempt to engender new worlds through their textual practices. In Imaginary Communities, Philip Wegner argues that utopian narratives and the modern nation-state are inextricably tied to one another. Wegner extends Etienne Balibar's argument that "*Every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary*...But this comes down to accepting that, under certain conditions, *only* imaginary communities are real" (Balibar 93). According to

Wegner, the narrative utopia engenders social practices of the reader so that even as a failure the utopia begets something. Therefore Wegner asserts that "if we too quickly and uncritically accept as a conclusion that the narrative utopia, like every other form of cultural representation, fails to break free of the gravitational field of the ideologies, or 'beliefs,' of its moment, we risk losing sight of the unique critical, pedagogical, and representational work performed by the genre" (23). The facile acceptance of utopias as marked primarily by failure elides the possibility inherent within the utopian project. In Wegner's formulation, the performance of oppositional practices through narrative utopias allows a rupture from the text's specific politico-historical framework. Furthermore, the act of narrating utopia itself works as an exploration of utopia as genre, and as such, the modern utopia must struggle with the weight of self-awareness. However, it seems that the representational, critical, and pedagogical work performed by utopian narratives appears through failure; a meditation on utopia, on nowhere, cannot help but struggle with what Jameson calls the "formal flaw" of utopian writing (232). So, though utopia may succeed through failure, the postmodern utopia must make this formal flaw clear. Furthermore, if the performance of narrative Utopias is the depiction of something beyond the politico-historical moment of their formations, then thinking the moment of that break, or that beyond, *has* to confront its own impossibility constantly and has to radically approach its own contingency.

In Cities of the Red Night, Burroughs creates a text heavy with the weight of its impossibility. He begins Cities of the Red Night with an invocation, if not a challenge, to his readers. Readers must imagine a world where the pirate articles of Captain Mission were accepted on a worldwide scale. Captain Mission's articles, slightly changed by

Burroughs, outline a society where mutual recognition of individual and collective rights powers social interaction.[46] This, coming before the American or French revolutions, radically re-imagines social relations based around mutual recognition. According to Burroughs, the acceptance of Captain Mission's articles is a total re-imagining of Western History—an avoidance of the horrors of colonialism and slavery, capitalism and oppression. The foreword of Cities of the Red Night, humorously titled "Fore!," is the blueprint for the socio-political changes envisioned by Burroughs and narratively enacted throughout the rest of the text. Here, Burroughs first describes the history of Captain Mission and the pirate articles; he then moves into a description of what he calls a retroactive utopia; and finally he points out the missed chance represented by the failure of Mission's pirate utopia. Burroughs repeats this arc of hope and failure throughout the rest of the text. Though he points to the ingenuity and imagination of pirates like Captain Mission who, in the face of encroaching capitalism, created alternative ways of living that stressed an immanent set of individual rights within communal groups, Burroughs' utopia is certainly ambiguous insofar as the positive aspects—freedom from oppression based on sexuality, gender, or race—are predicated on the violent eradication of a wide swath of the population. The reliance on destructive and exclusionary practices simultaneously opens all the potential traps of utopias shifting into despotic totalities.

Burroughs depicts a utopia, but he also describes its spectacular failure. For Jameson, "the Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal ideological conviction

[46] Burroughs incarnation of the Articles are as follows: "Article One: No man may be imprisoned for debt…Article Two: No man may enslave another…No man may interfere with the religious beliefs or practices of another…Article Four: No man may be subjected to torture for any reason…Article Five: No man may interfere with the sexual practices of another or force any sexual act on another against his or her will…Article Six: No man may be put to death except for violation of the Articles" (C 186-188).

that no alternative is possible, that there is no alternative to the system. But it asserts this by forcing us to think the break itself, and not by offering a more traditional picture of what things would be like after the break." (Future 232) Cities of the Red Night, through its constant repetition, gives the reader *nothing but the break*—the break from traditional political formations, but also the break from that disruption. Utopias, by describing new and oppositional positions, simultaneously engender these same positions. It is, however, also the forceful positioning of disruption as a socio-political framework, the discovery of new ways of imagining social formations, though almost immediately mapped and subsumed, that gives Cities of the Red Night its power as a political intervention.

Space is the Place

The pirate narrative of Cities of the Red Night begins with Noah Blake's father deciding to move Noah and his friends out of town because of the nosiness of the neighbors. Burroughs writes, "Noah Blake and his father, Bert Hansen, Clinch Todd, Paco, and Sean Brady board a boat with their luggage stacked on deck. The villagers watch from the pier.

"Mrs. Norton sniffs and says in her penetrating voice, 'good riddance to the lot of them'" (C 31). The prejudice the boys feel on land disappears once they ship out on the *Great White*.[47] Noah Blake writes about the difference between the discrimination on land and the freewheeling acceptance and community of the ship:

[47] The *Great White* cannot help but remind readers of Moby Dick and the intrepid members of the *Pequod*. Here the ship is refracted, referring both to the great white

> and who are the others—Brady, Hanson, Paco, Todd? Strangers like myself. I think that we came from another world and have been stranded here like mariners on some barren and hostile shore. I never felt that what we did together was wrong, but I fully understood the necessity and wisdom of concealing it from the villagers. Now that there is no need for concealment, I feel as if this ship is the home I had left and thought never to find again (C 60-61).

The ship operates as a safe zone of conduct for Blake. On the *Great White*'s deck Blake encounters a level of freedom impossible in the village he grew up in; the dissolution of the social bonds that forced him to conceal his sexuality allow Blake to realize that many of his problems stem from ideological formations that he can avoid through divorcing the land. Of course, Blake realizes that this idyll has to end, that the voyage must stop, and he asks the question that haunts the entire novel: "and what then?" (C 61). Blake avoids the need for concealment, but only within a specific space, a space cordoned off from the rest of the social—a sacred space. The crew of the pirate ship offers solace and community; Blake feels "not only attraction, but kinship" to the rest of the crew (C 61). He recognizes that they too are strangers, extra-terrestrial interlopers, but this recognition is tied, and remains tied, to the space of the pirate ship. The safety and kinship on the *Great White* is a model for a utopian space, but it happens in a real space, the space of the ship. During their revolution, Nordenholz et. al. do not account for or navigate the singularity of the piratical space, and this lack of forethought leaves the revolution (though still full of potential) a closed circuit. This is not to say that the piratical project

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whale and simultaneously to the great white shark. Like the *Great White*, the *Pequod* is a heterotopic space where homo-sociality and sexuality inform and reform social practices.

is a total failure or must remain immanently impotent. Rather, the failure redeems the piratical potential, but simultaneously reasserts the power of control societies.

Utopias, in many senses, are about refashioning space and spatial relations through social practices—momentarily imagining desire, Cities of the Red Night goes a long way in describing the everyday practices of the Articulated. According to Wegner, "by inserting something heretofore unknown in the world…the narrative utopia generates the cognitive space around which new kinds of lived experiences and theoretical perceptions form" (xx). Therefore, if one of the major purposes of utopian narratives is to articulate changing social practices, even texts that fail to transcend their specific historicity (as it seems they must) paradoxically offer momentary escapes. Burroughs writes moments of escape; this escape parallels Foucault's heterotopia—a denaturing of language and social practices that infiltrates legitimate spaces momentarily rending them and engendering lines of flight. Foucault writes:

> Brothels and colonies are two extreme types of heterotopia, and if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development (I have not been speaking of that today), but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The

> ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates" (Other 27).

By describing the boat as a place without place, Foucault asserts the materiality of the ship while simultaneously inscribing the ship within utopian discourse. In other words, Foucault maintains More's seminal concept of Utopia being precisely nowhere while inscribing a spacial specificity to nowhere. Moving from sea to land complicates the heterotopias of the pirate ship. Though Foucault wants to distance the heterotopia from the utopia proper—mostly by claiming utopian space as unreal space—it is all too clear that if utopian space *does* manage to come into being, it does so as a heterotopia. Unfortunately, if heterotopian space is tied to specific sites (the ship, the cemetery, the whorehouse), then moving a community whose subject positions are built around that site fractures the founding epistemological notions. In other words, the pirate ship, as the site of the formation of the Articles, is, by necessity, the only space where the Articles operate clearly. Losing the ship and the sea eviscerates the Articles and concomitantly, the articulated.

If all communities are, at root, imaginary, then the truly utopian moments are those that imagine different forms of the imaginary—the accretion of these moments lays the material framework for revolutionary politics. Revolution is not necessarily positive; reading "different forms of the imaginary" as only a positive thing obfuscates the dreadful catastrophes inflicted by humans upon themselves and the world. What renders the heterotopia useful is the denaturing of existing systems and practices—pirate ships,

for instance, are the refraction of maritime labor.[48] The problem, of course, is that the heterotopia binds the users to that particular space. Does the repetition of these spaces, multiple or singular, render what was once denaturing impotent and codifiable; do subject-positions, spatially arranged, embrace spaces that, emancipatory at first, simply shift from reformulating and reshaping systems of power and control to reproducing new and greater control structures? A multiplicity of interconnected heterotopias might solve this problem, a vast patchwork of friendly (or even neutral) spaces, but these spaces cannot be the lynchpin of the communities within them.

As we both form and are simultaneously formed by our spaces we must make both our future spaces and ourselves unrecognizable to our current selves. This is the apex of Burroughs' insistence that in the final instance the only thing that can save humanity is a miracle or a disaster. The creative act is one of resistance, and this is where Burroughs describes the author. Here the author works as a forger: Clem Snide literally creates what he imagines the Iguana Twins—or whoever his sinister client is—expect the Cities of the Red Night books will look like. Yes, the constituent subject-positions fighting for their momentary freedoms form communities wherein they denature existing social relations and replace them with systems seemingly more invested in individual rights and freedoms—and this fight moves through the streets re-articulating and re-

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[48] In Times Square Red, Times Square Blue, Samuel Delaney praises the space of porno theaters for gay male culture. Though the theaters were ostensibly not built to facilitate anonymous gay sex they were taken over and re-imagined by their denizens. I think it is important to note the fearful reaction of Delany's female friend when he takes her to a theater (25-30). In some ways the horror felt both by Delany's female friend and the normal denizens of the heterotopic space ties in to the fear David Harvey expresses about heterotopias as a "sinister fragmentation of spaces that are closed, exclusionary, or even threatening within a more comprehensive dialectics of historical and geographical transformation" (Spaces of Hope 185).

imagining narrative and social structures, opening a continuous stream of potentiality. The miracle or disaster: can we even separate the terms? Both terms play on the insistence of futurity, while simultaneously marking—in the most spectacular ways—breaks and connections within social frameworks. Both the miracle and disaster are written, cause writing, are allowed by writing, but simultaneously *cannot be written*.[49] We get the constant horizon, Burroughs' cities laid out on a burning page. A fragmentary joke at totality, the text offers a map, a concrete plan for living, only to unwind into a conflagration of failure, resignation, and simulacra.

A Ghost Writer and a Poison Pen

The oscillation between Utopian desire and the actualization of that desire forms the central productive blockage to Utopian texts. It is precisely the ambivalence inherent in utopias that causes Jameson to remark, "the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively" (Future xiii). Though Jameson judges the spectacular failures of Utopic texts as the best in the genre, he also insists on the continual desire for Utopias. Jameson asserts, "[the] desire called Utopia must be concrete and ongoing, without being defeatist or incapacitating; it might therefore be better to follow an aesthetic paradigm and to assert that not only the production of the unresolvable contradiction is the fundamental process, but that we must imagine that some form of gratification inherent in this very confrontation with pessimism and the impossible" (Future 84). Thus, the best Utopian desire does not fall into resignation because the confrontation itself helps form the *jouissance* of Utopian desire.

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[49] See Maurice Blanchot Writing the Disaster.

The balance between expressing the desire immanent in utopian projects and the codification inherent in the creating of utopias is the lynchpin of Burroughs' later forays into utopianism, specifically what he calls "retroactive utopia" (C xiv). Burroughs describes the retroactive Utopia as a historical moment that, if it had been slightly different, would radically alter history; the retroactive Utopia "[rewrites] history from certain crucial junctures" (Burroughs Live 675). A major aspect of this problem lies in the decision whether to push through the dissonance and difficulty of adopting modes of resistance marked by the dissolution of master narratives or, as David Harvey recently insisted, returning to master narrative.[50]

The most important concept to stress is the failure of this project; not only is the Captain Mission chance missed, but the Burroughs chance is missed as well. The "Fore!" section of Cities of the Red Night begins on a seemingly high note, but then in the final line the mood shifts and the complexity, nuance, and difficulty of any utopian project emerges. Here is where Jameson's statement about failure both complicates and complements Burroughs. Are all utopias nothing but chances that were there but missed, spectacular and impossible missteps that, if anything, further Power's grasp on the social? Cities of the Red Night traces the movement from utopian desire to utopian failure narrativistically; we see the moment of hope and desire and nearly simultaneously the failure of that desire. "Fore!" encapsulates this movement, and then the rest of the text plays this movement out. When Burroughs writes, "the chance was there. The chance was missed" and then continues, "only a miracle or disaster could restore it" he is revealing the structure for the rest of the novel, and as we shall soon see, for Ghost of a

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[50] Harvey, David. Spaces of Hope.

Chance as well (C xiv-xv). Burroughs takes a historical possibility, a place he perceives as empty or open, and tries to imagine the radical potential of taking a different path.

The retroactive utopia differs in many respects from other utopian projects, most specifically by looking backwards in order to move forwards. Burroughs' utopia carries both hope and sadness, looking wistfully towards the past while accepting the crushing conditions of the future and the near impossibility of the situation getting any better. The retroactive utopia begins by accepting that something could change, but that a change is impossible without a massive restructuring of the social. After failing to accept the challenge of Captain Mission, of taking the path that leads to utopia, that path is destroyed. Unfortunately, for Burroughs this leaves only one possible solution: an apocalyptic rupture, whittling the population down into only the acceptable freaks and degenerates—in other words, those capable of realizing the potential of friendship and community. The utopian chance in Cities of the Red Night lies with Captain Mission and the pirate articles he attempts to use as a model for a commune on Madagascar. Burroughs cathects revolutionary desire through Captain Mission; he acts as a signifier for the entirety of piratical revolutionary action. Captain Mission reappears in Ghost of a Chance as the *point de capiton*.[51] In Burroughs view, had this ghost of a chance been taken, fought for, and achieved history would have been rerouted and the tyranny, oppression, and disaster of European colonialism would have been avoided.

The missed chance—the ever-present road not taken—hangs over much of Burroughs' work, but as it looms it also informs. The missed chance and the retroactive Utopia form a web of simultaneity—a multiplicity of possibility anchored in history, but

[51] Jacques Lacan invents the term while Slavoj Zizek and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe invest it with a political valence.

also existing as a phantasmatic construction. The section "Fore!" structurally encapsulates the entire text; moving from hope to desolation, towards a teleological openness—a blank aporia that problematizes both the hope and the desolation. In many ways, what we are left with is a kind of transcendental writing—that somebody, sometime, will make the necessary moves to allow a retroactive utopia to move away from retroactivity and fulfill the moments of potential inherent all along in the utopian chance.

The retroactive Utopia is a missed chance; it presents an obsolete possibility, a possibility only retrievable through storytelling. The two main protagonists in Cities of the Red Night Noah Blake and Clem Snide both work, in one way or another, as scribes. Noah Blake begins the novel apprenticing as a gunsmith, but when he ships on with *The Great White* he begins keeping a diary; Blake's diary forms the backbone of the historical pirate narrative. However, he does not realize the power of his work; the pirate Captain Strobe wonders, "Noah writes that I am interested in printing his diaries 'for some reason.' Does he have any inkling what reason? He must be kept very busy as a gunsmith lest he realize his primary role" (C 91). The role of the author as revolutionary is central to the entirety of Burroughs' work. Like Noah Blake, Clem Snide also works as an undercover author. Snide starts the novel as a "private asshole," but soon enough he also finds his "primary role" as a forger of historical texts for the dubious Iguana Twins (C 35). The Iguana Twins, who are in both the pirate and the detective narrative, understand the power of originals when they say "changes, Mr. Snide, can only be effected by alterations in the *original*, but simultaneously accept Snide's forgeries and, as such, problematize the notion of the stressed "*original*" (C 166). Clem Snide's forged

documents make up the Noah Blake pirate narrative as well as function as a precursor to Burroughs' next novel, the Western adventure The Place of Dead Roads. Burroughs always believed in the revolutionary power of the word, and we can see the shifts in his position as he becomes increasingly political throughout his career. In the Nova Trilogy Burroughs first advocates rupturing socio-political structures through "rubbing out the word." The writer, for Burroughs, is the revolutionary seer pushing the socio-political limits while sitting on the social fringes attempting to eradicate those fringes.

An interesting juxtaposition appears when Noah Blake describes the dinner he has at Skipper Nordenholz's house. Eating at a table filled with the most nefarious characters in the novel, Blake reports that the conversation was

> all concerned with weaponry and tactics but on a level I had never thought possible outside my lonely adolescent literary endeavors—for I have always been a scribbler and during the long shut-in winters filled notebook after notebook with lurid tales involving pirates from other planets, copulations with alien beings, and attacks of the Radiant Boys on the Citadel of the Inquisition…The conversation at the dinner table gave me the feeling that my notebooks were coming alive (C 103).

Blake's feeling is hardly surprising; the entire text of Cities of the Red Night sounds like his notebooks. The movement of this passage to the description of how the articulated insurrection will happen is telling. Nordenholz rises and says, "I *would like to say* that our enemy in this area is Spain, and our most powerful weapon is the freedom hopes of captive peoples now enslaved under the Spanish" (C 103 italics mine). The conditional here pertains to both which enemy and to which weapons are most powerful. The long

list of weapons pushes the reader's attention away from the odd abdication of surety that has dominated the text up to this point. Simultaneously, what we find is that the most powerful weapon at the Articulated's disposal is not Noah Blake's firearms innovations as much as his power as an author.

After the section "Fore!" Burroughs writes an invocation, dedicating the text to an unsavory and motley collection of deities, a seemingly nihilistic grouping of death and disease, pestilence and abortion. However, more importantly (and appropriately) in the penultimate paragraph Burroughs dedicates Cities of the Red Night to "all the scribes and artists and practitioners of magic through whom these spirits have been manifested…" (C xviii). By juxtaposing writers with a list of seemingly destructive deities, Burroughs invests writers with mystical potential.

The creation of a text is the formation of a world, and believing in that text—by an individual or group—invokes that world, filling it with power. Sorcery and writing exist hand in hand; not sorcery through deception, but the creation and reworking of the world. Hirondelle de Mer, a sorceress who is part of Nordenholz et. al.'s revolution, wonders how a society can continue to function without "the usual machinery of government, ambassadors, standing army and navy" (C 112). She replies to her own question: "they can only plan to hold the area by sorcery. This is a sorcerers' revolution. I must find my part as a sorceress" (C 112). The sorcerers' revolution casts light on Noah Blake or Clem Snide's role within the novel, as not merely gunsmiths or private investigators, but *writers*. They rewrite the world through their texts; however, these acts of writing work to codify desire. Furthermore, the Articles is a text that the revolution circles around; when the Articulated capture a town they immediately find the literate and

have them read the Articles and explain it to the rest of the captured enemy. The circulation of the Articles maps the desire for revolution—marking territories and shaping the form of the potential utopian moments.

A Faded Trace

After finishing his later trilogy, Burroughs returns to the figure of Captain Mission in his treatise on time, Ghost of a Chance. Ghost of a Chance acts as the next sentence after the ellipsis ending Cities of the Red Night. A new dream world emerges in Ghost of a Chance, a dream world called the "Garden of Lost Chances" or the "Museum of Lost Species" (G 17, 20). In an oeuvre of texts punctuated by moments of blinding sadness and cynicism, Ghost of a Chance offers the clearest rebuttal to critics only pointing to the misanthropy within Burroughs' works. The text ends by describing the plight of lemurs and their shrinking habitat. Burroughs' move towards environmentalism represents an expanding focus on the interconnectedness of the world, but also underscores his disgust and disavowal of humanity.

Ghost of a Chance acts as a complementary narrative to Cities of the Red Night; Captain Mission, the organizing theoretical principle behind Cities of the Red Night, becomes the central narrative character in Ghost of a Chance. While Cities of the Red Night offers either disaster or miracle, Ghost of a Chance collapses the possibilities—in this case disaster and miracle are interchangeable; both violently interrupt what Burroughs calls "the dies, the *molds*" (G 50). The molds, the dies, are the ideological constructs humanity builds around itself; the constant reification of these molds is what Burroughs blames for the lack of radical political action. Burroughs writes, "Nothing is

more expensive than to change the dies, the *molds*, and this is why the Boards and the Syndicates and their subsidiary politicians, mafias, drug agents, police, churches, and news media don't want to know about a better human product, any more that General Motors wants to know about a turbine engine. It would mean scrapping all the existing dies from here to eternity" (G 50). Scrapping and recasting dies is essentially the same as the Burroughsian trope of the prerecorded universe, and here is where Captain Mission fits in and Burroughs explains the retroactive utopia the most clearly: "In a prerecorded and therefore totally predictable universe, the blackest sin is to tamper with the prerecordings, which could result in altering the prerecorded future. Captain Mission was guilty of this sin. He threatened to demonstrate for all to see that three hundred souls can coexist in relative harmony with each other, with their neighbors, and with the ecosphere of flora and fauna" (G 8). Burroughs envisions groups of power brokers, "the custodians of the future" working to maintain warps and wefts of control (G 8).

Burroughs argues for de-miraculizing the miraculous—Christ, he argues, tries to corner the market on miracles, thereby rendering his magic the only magic. Christ, he continues, never sought out a man who "*deserved* to be healed because he had a special gift, a one-in-a-million talent…Christ was concerned with quantity not quality" (G 25). In Cities of the Red Night, Burroughs describes Christianity as one of many competing magical systems, but the hegemony of Christianity is responsible for the shutting down of other operative narratives.[52] The singularity of the miracle is the singularity of the multitude insofar as the miracle itself is singular but the practitioner is open and radically democratic. In other words, if *anyone* can perform miracles, the miraculous is no longer

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[52] Burroughs, Cities of the Red Night. 105.

fetishized; instead, the field of miracles is open and egalitarian. Destroying the molds and the plurality of the miraculous intertwine to force a reconsideration of the retroactive utopia and the symptoms of freedom and liberation. Like his rejection of all master-narratives, Burroughs also rejects atheism. He is not arguing for simply destroying Christianity, instead Burroughs incorporates Christianity into a pantheistic matrix of religion and magic. To reject the miraculous in Christ further reifies his power, robbing the multitude of their power. Burroughs writes, "every man has the *potential* to heal and influence the weather…between believers and non-believers there is only a razor's edge; on both sides of the razor, the abyss of willful ignorance. None so blind as he who will not look" (G 28). The refusal to look is an acceptance of ideological structures of control; even if looking does not guarantee liberation or freedom, it at least keeps the potential in play. The missed chance is partially missed through ignorance and intellectual laziness. Trying to think the new while rejecting and destroying the dies is the affirmation of multiplicity.[53]

The retroactive utopia is the utopia of the Garden of Missed Chances, and it is from this garden that Captain Mission unleashes the vituperative curse upon the Boards and Martins,[54] a curse leveled at all the killers of hopes and innocence. The Boards and the Martins are the cold evil bureaucracy that Captain Mission unleashes the unsymbolizeable upon—the curse rips apart the fetishization of control, an unstoppable cloud of disease that resets the dies and molds. Resetting the prerecordings makes us

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[53] For an interesting study of religion during late capitalism see William Connoly's Why I am not a Secularist.

[54] Martin is the last name of the colonist who kills a lemur and then blames the death of the lemur on Captain Mission and the other colonists. He is the inside man for the shadowy board members seeking to preserve the ideological status quo.

unknowable to ourselves; if humanity immanently holds its own horrifying disease, a corpse bereft of soul, having long ago bartered it away for "time, language, tools, weapons, and dominance" then, Burroughs argues, we must evolve into something else. (G 49). The idiocy of humanity unleashes the immanent curse of Captain Mission, lying cancerous in the Garden of Lost Chances, a lost chance himself, which can only, with a Nietszchian laugh, destroy everything around it.

The retroactive utopia remains chained to the Museum of Lost Species, but the radical potential of anyone willing to walk into that garden and pay the toll of "the ability to endure the pain and sadness of observing extinction and by so doing to reanimate the species by observing it," keeps each chance slightly in practice (G 51).[55] Mediation always occurs when faced with the traumatic horror of the Museum of Lost Species/Garden of Lost Chances. An aesthetic shift occurs when Mission sees the brutally destroyed Garden of Lost Chances. Burroughs immediately draws the narrative back. Lines slashed by ellipses, the entrance becomes an "old film…dim, grainy explosive charge…plaintive paw up to his face…He knows I am a hundred sixty million years away…Torn roots like broken hands…a sad, weak cry" (G 21). Burroughs rewrites and reworks the proceeding paragraph, inserting the filmic element, forcing the reader to observe, in the manner he had described the destruction of the chance to see and reanimate the lost species. This is the end of the Captain Mission narrative. Like the Garden of Lost Chances the potential for the radical democratic institutions Captain

[55] A popular representation of the suspension of chances is Billy Crystal's performance as Miracle Max when he proclaims Wesley "mostly dead" rather than "all dead" in the film The Princess Bride.

Mission created have been leveled, ground to dust, leaving only a faint lingering memory. Mission, in his rage, unleashes all the extinct plagues upon humanity.

Unlike Cities of the Red Night, Ghost of a Chance offers no plan for living. Instead, Ghost of a Chance illustrates Burroughs' concept of chance. A utopia where people live peacefully without destroying the planet is one of the many chances, if not the central chance, presented in the text; when this chance is missed, Captain Mission unleashes a plague of missed chances upon the rest of the populace. If Ghost of a Chance is a commentary on Cities of the Red Night, it is almost impossible not to read it as a virulent repudiation of the potential for humanity threading through the later trilogy. No one wins in Ghost of a Chance; it is too late for humanity—the vicious stupidity of the Martins and the Boards blacks out the potential for Captain Mission.[56] Dissent is potentially a concern for the Board, but the lack of curiosity and creativity keeps dissent within the bounds of the Boards. In other words, dissent never leaves a closely proscribed cage.[57] As such, dissent merely acts as a safety valve for the Boards' webs of control. Captain Mission's dying maneuver, unleashing the plagues, *does* destroy the molds, but it is a renunciation, or at least a violation of the democratic principles he espouses earlier. There is no vote on the cleansing of man; Mission acts alone, and he acts as a soldier when he "transmutes his grief into an incandescent blaze of hate" (G 22).

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[56] The Martins and the Boards are roughly equivalent to "the Shits" from Place of Dead Roads. The world is divided amongst the Johnsons and the Shits. The Johnsons form a loosely knit band of rebels believing in a universal rights firmly formed by particularism. Burroughs gets the concept of the "Johnson Family" from Jack Black's You Can't Win.

[57] This notion should be all too evident to anyone who has attempted to protest in New York City. There are closely monitored areas for marching; it is only when someone moves outside of these boundaries that it becomes interesting. Of course, this is described quite persuasively in Virillio's Speed and Politics. Furthermore, if the models of protest do not change from a watered down simulation of sixties counter-culture then very little change can occur. The dies are already cast.

The conflagration that ensues spares no one—disease makes no judgment between Johnsons and Shits. However, it is a cleansing, a cleansing that reduces humanity to its constituent elements: "[people] of the world are at last returning to their source in spirit, back to the little lemur people of the trees and leaves, the streams, the rocks, and the sky. Soon, all sign, all memory of the wars and the Plague of Mad will fade like dream traces" (G 54). Burroughs wants to disentangle humanity and time. In other words, insofar as the unleashing of the plagues returns humanity to a pre-temporal "natural" state, it simultaneously empties Captain Mission's push for radical democracy of much of its significatory power. Returning humankind to this early state holds the potential of altering the prerecordings, but since the diseases do not distinguish between victims, this is not an answer. Unlike earlier texts where Burroughs eradicates the 'bad guys,' Ghost of a Chance does not discriminate; all humanity is equally guilty.

Repression and Utopia

The utopian move is an example *par excellence* of universalizing desire. In Contingency, Universalism, and Hegemony, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Zizek all argue powerfully for universalism rooted in the moment of exclusion/inclusion.[58] Utopias founded in friendship and love spring from roots deeply entrenched in hatred and disgust. The constituent power of the utopians struggling for revolution satiates themselves on the blood of the unwanted. Even the most democratic community frames itself against an outside or an Other.

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[58] Universalism, Contingency, Hegemony. Butler, Judith, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Zizek.

The confluence between desire and repression forms the central axis of Burroughs' later work. If, as Fredric Jameson asserts, "the Utopian remedy must at first be a fundamentally negative one, and stand as a clarion call to remove and to extirpate this specific root of all evil from which all others spring" then Burroughs' antinomianism registers as a foundational axis in the formulation of utopic desire (Future 12). In other words—and Burroughs' texts are clear examples—it is a mistake to imagine utopias as springing primarily from a desire for inclusion. Now, in the case of Burroughs, and simultaneously his model pirates, there is a tendency for violence and bloodshed to foreground any revolutionary practice. Though this violence clearly opens multiple routes for wish fulfillment—whether through a desire for lawlessness, revenge, or control—it also inaugurates the community within the same dialectic of repression and freedom. Thus it becomes instantly obvious that any wholesale endorsement of a utopian project concomitantly has to question its own genesis.

Modeled after pirate communities like Captain Mission's, Burroughs develops a set of articles that each new recruit must sign. The signing of these articles inaugurates the signer into the group, or the articulated. In his study The Colonizing Trick, David Kazanjian glosses the etymological genealogy of "article" and "articulate" as it pertains to early American colonial texts. Kazanjian brings to light a "set of terms in which bodily and linguistic terms co-mingle" (Kazanjian 7). Signing the articles—both in Cities of the Red Night and Burroughs' pirate source material—inaugurates or continues a communal bond. The articles allow speech, freedom, and community, and any breaking of the articles—or disarticulation—sunders the political body.

After the Articulated capture Panama City they separate the garrison into two groups: those suited for training as partisans and the troublemakers. Burroughs writes, "any body of men will be found to contain ten to fifteen percent of incorrigible troublemakers. In fact, most of the misery on this planet derives from this ten percent…there is but one sure remedy. In future operations, as soon as these individuals are discovered, either by advance intelligence or by on-the-spot observation, they will be killed on any pretext" (C 190). Thus, for the utopia to exist Burroughs eradicates the troublemakers whenever and wherever they are found. The lines directly before Burroughs' tract on troublemakers offer an interesting juxtaposition. Blake describes the rationale behind the killing of two Inquisitors:

> brutal sanctions against a minority from which on is generally exempt cannot but produce a measure of satisfaction in those who are spared such treatment: 'as decent clergymen you have nothing to fear.' Thus the burning of Jews, Moors, sodomites produces a certain sense of comfort in those who are not Jews, Moors, or sodomites…to turn this mechanism back on the Inquisitors themselves gives me a feeling of taking over the office of fate. I am become the bad karma of the Inquisition. I am allowing myself also the satisfaction that derives from a measure of hypocrisy, rather like the slow digestion of a good meal (C 190).

The brutality of the Inquisition is, simultaneously, the brutality of the Articulated. Power shifts, but in certain important ways, the discursive practices remain the same. In becoming the "bad karma" of the Inquisition, Blake accepts the logics of the Inquisitional practice; therefore, from the very beginning, this Articulated has a veneer of newness, but

remains rooted in the past. The acceptance of the violent practices of the status quo is a fundamental failure in thinking the new.

Blake commands the captured soldiers who can read to "read [the articles]. I want you to read it carefully. Then I want you to explain what is written there to those who can't read" (C 184-185). Because Blake makes the soldiers who can read describe it to the other soldiers, he solidifies the community he is trying to inaugurate. In other words, the onus of explication and understanding lies first with the reader rather than having the information simply passed on to the soldiers. The clarity of the desire behind the creation of the Articles is perhaps the most evident when a population encounters the articles who are completely unfamiliar with their tenets. For instance, when faced with the article "No man may enslave another" a soldier responds, "does that mean we get out of the army?" (C 186). The soldier's response underscores the particularity of his current subject-position. The universality of ending slavery only resonates with the soldier on the plane of particularity. A second soldier instantly criticizes this article, "'you mean you're going to abolish slavery?' the mulatto youth asked suspiciously.

"'I mean exactly that.'

"'I'll believe it when I see it'" (C 187). Like the first soldier, this second soldier's particular subject-position trumps the universalizing language behind the articles—a knowing cynicism that plays itself out through the ambivalent tone taken up by much of the narrative.

Utopian desire runs through Burroughs' opening polemic—enough so that he ignores obvious problems within his own narrative of Captain Mission's failed settlement. Even though Captain Mission's colony was destroyed in a surprise attack by

the indigenous population, Burroughs maintains that under the articles "we have allies in all those who are enslaved and oppressed throughout the world, from the cotton plantations of the American South to the sugar plantations of the West Indies, the whole Indian population of the American continent peonized and degraded by the Spanish into sub-human poverty and ignorance, exterminated by the Americans, infected with their vices and diseases, the natives of Africa and Asia—all these are potential allies" (C xiii). The desire to envision the utopian agenda here dilutes the particularity of the situation. Rather than deciding to live under the Articles—becoming Articulated—the native population surrounding Mission's colony slaughtered the colonists. The failure of Captain Mission starkly contradicts the utopic desire espoused by Burroughs in the forward. Instead of greeting the Articles with open arms, the indigenous population rose up and eradicated the colonizers. The slaughter underscores the simultaneous cynicism embedded in Burroughs' project—and perhaps the cynicism within any utopian project.

Like any utopia, the Burroughs' retroactive utopia attempts to flatten out the conflicts between people, and this flattening happens through antagonistic relationships between the utopic community and those outside of it. And, although any utopia delimits itself from the community it exists in resistance to, Burroughs makes this resistance explicit and immanent at the foundational moment of the utopia, and continues, though antagonistic relationship with the outside as both a narrative device—the fluctuation between pastoral and urban, experimental and traditional narrative—marks many of the antimonies within utopias and utopian literature. Therefore, the insistent question is: how does one first construct and then navigate a utopia, and, furthermore, how does this constituent utopian desire manifest itself within the text? How does the desire for a break

with the socio-political formations of the present moment emerge in a way that does not fall back upon the violent or exclusionary practices of that present?

Freedom, in Burroughs' model, is only possible through a reconstruction of space; the codification of space at the hands of oppressive forces is the beginning of Burroughs' critique of capitalist social relations. In his later trilogy, Burroughs uses examples of seemingly open spaces (early colonial South America, the old west) as the entry point into his reconstruction of revolutionary projects. Burroughs writes, "there is simply no room left for 'freedom from the tyranny of government' since city dwellers depend on it for food, power, water, transportation, protection, and welfare. Your right to live where you want, with companions of your choosing, under laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century with Captain Mission. Only a disaster or a miracle could restore it" (C xv). It is impossible to continue without stopping here and noting the glaringly problematic moment in Burroughs' formulation. The most obvious problem is Burroughs' insistence on the positive potential of renegade Europeans occupying "underpopulated" continents like Africa and South America (C xv). To strip Burroughs' formulation of grace and nuance leaves a shivering version of manifest destiny. Burroughs uses Captain Mission and the pirate articles as a specific historical irruption—had Captain Mission lived long enough to set an "example for others to follow, mankind might have stepped free from the deadly impasse of insoluble problems in which we now find ourselves" (C xiv). The obvious problem persists—a problem not directly addressed by Burroughs—Captain Mission was slaughtered by the indigenous population of Madagascar. This is the population Burroughs claims will welcome the articles with open arms, but the theoretical reality is gravely out of touch with the practical

manifestations. There is a failure of imagination here similar to becoming the bad karma of the inquisition; Burroughs' entire project is redolent with imperialist overtones.

Is it enough to focus on the immanent revolutionary desire expressed in Captain Mission and rearticulated in Burroughs, or are the problems so overwhelming that they leave that desire emaciated and stultified? How do we move from the mapping and codification of desire to a plane that allows, perhaps, a repository of desire that does not inherently and immediately stamp it out, but instead works through and with that desire? To believe in the project, to have faith in the world, is the foundational step in any constituent desire. According to Gilles Deleuze, "if you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume…our ability to resist control or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. We need both creativity *and* a people" (Negotiations 176). The Articulated emerges as a people invested with creativity; the drawing up of pirate articles, for instance, is a radical reinvention of maritime living. Burroughs imagines deciding to live under the Articles as an explosive event, a moment that blows "a hole through time" (C 332). The decision is the foundational moment for a future politics. In part, then, the work becomes tracing this decision—which is synonymous with foundational belief—through Burroughs' utopian construction. To return to the quotation we began with, how different is Burroughs' utopia from the systems of control it seeks to subvert?

The codification of desire into a constitutional politics marks the foundation of the oppression of that desire. In Insurgencies, Antonio Negri describes the power of revolutionary politics as the difference between constituent power and constituted power.

Constituent power is an “act of choice, the precise determination that opens a horizon, the radical apparatus of something that does not yet exist, and whose conditions of existence imply that the creative act does not lose its characteristics in the act of creating” (Negri 22). Taking cues from Negri: is it possible to exist entirely within constituent desire without succumbing to the stratification of constituted desire? Perhaps it is only within a Utopia like Burroughs’, a Utopia fully indulgent of its impossibility, that constituent desire can take root. Captain Mission drew up a set of rules and standards of behavior, which, in their democratic principles, shame the French and American revolutions. The decision to shift from state and corporate sanctioned labor and turn towards piracy is the moment when constituent power makes itself known. This decision precedes the signing of pirate articles, but is marked by the articles themselves. Burroughs calls those who sign the articles the Articulated, and he declares, “there is no stopping the Articulated” (C xiv). The Articulated mark both those that have signed the articles and simultaneously the claiming of a voice for those who were unable to speak. Constituent power as subjectivity claims a voice within the articles. This is not to say that the articles truncate the potential of constituent power, but rather that they work as an accretion point for that desire. The creation of the articles is an expression of the revolutionary desire of the articulated. The writing and the signing of the articles inaugurates the community.

Burroughs perpetually repeats the form of the foreword; the diary of Hirondelle de Mer is perhaps the most interesting repetition because she is one of the few positive female characters within Burroughs’ body of work. Since she is also a diarist, Hirondelle de Mer is a member of the pantheon of heroes in Cities of the Red Night. The unequal power structure based on gender within the Articulated is therefore brought under

scrutiny by Burroughs. The explicit attack on gender inequality under the guise of universalism is one of the moments that make Cities of the Red Night such a rich and complex text in relation to utopian studies. With Hirondelle de Mer, Burroughs points to the formal flaw in the Articulated utopia; from the very beginning this utopia fails to take the singularity of the ship into account as its foundational moment. While Burroughs seemingly does not see the problem with the assumption that certain underpopulated areas are open for colonization, he does register the inherent problematics of the universalization of freedom through antagonistic relationships. The enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend.

Hirondelle de Mer simultaneously describes the utopia and points out its inherent sexism. Her critique of Captain Strobe and his band of "shabby adventurers" is a scathing indictment of the ideological rigidity and immanent flaws within utopian movements (C 111).[59] In a diary entry by Hirondelle de Mer she remarks, "I am a sorceress and a warrior. I do not relish being treated as a breeding animal. Would this occur to Skipper Nordenholz? No force, he says, has been applied—but I am forced by my circumstances, cast up here without a peso, and by my Indian blood which compels me to side with all enemies of Spain. The child will be brought up a sorcerer or sorceress" (C 111). Choice, here, is fraught with all the negative valences of lesser evils. She enumerates the positive aspects of the Nordenholz revolt, but also acts as a voice of reason and caution against simplifying Utopia and revolt. Poverty and her gender force Hirondelle de Mer to side with Nordenholz and his crew; though she signs the articles,

[59] Jameson notes that many Utopias, for all of their seeming creativity and other worldliness are inextricably linked to the historical moments when they were created. Archeologies of the Future.

she does not enter the community in the same way as Noah Blake or any of the other male members of the Articulated. Do they recognize her as a sorceress and warrior? No. The lack of recognition, coupled with a naivety about freedom of choice, hobbles the revolution from the beginning. Though Burroughs looks for "freedom from the Tyranny of government" the problems of Hirondelle de Mer are exemplary of the webs of control operating in late capitalist global economies. Later, when the mulatto soldier scoffs at the abolition of slavery, traces of Hirondelle de Mer hover around the text. Hirondelle de Mer remains with the Articulated, but also must search for her own role within a revolution mostly constructed for and by men. This is a good reminder that no community functions as a totality no matter how universalizing its convictions. Shifting and fluid hegemonies can still entrap and brutalize—the multitude, even as it valorizes its constituent humanity, still exposes that humanity to the vicissitudes of the fringe.

In conversation with Antonio Negri, Deleuze writes: "it definitely makes sense to look at the various ways individuals and groups constitute themselves as subjects through processes of subjectification: what counts in such processes is the extent to which, as they take shape they elude both established forms of knowledge and the dominant forms of power…One might equally well speak of new kinds of event, rather than processes of subjectification: events that can't be explained by the situations that give rise to them, or into which they lead" (Negotiations 176). Hirondelle de Mer represents the kind of creativity that Deleuze calls for in the creation of subjectivities and events, but she is also a refraction of the failure of utopian projects. In Wising up the Marks, Timothy Murphy writes, "[the Noah Blake narrative] contains Burroughs's first fully articulated *affirmative* model of revolutionary subjectivity" (Murphy 182). Yet, when Murphy writes that in

Cities of the Red Night Burroughs attempts to navigate the "Scylla of violent, specular rupture à la The Wildboys and the Charybdis of idealistic utopianism," he misunderstands the nature of the retroactive utopia (Murphy 185). Inchoate in the retroactive utopia are both Skylla and Charbydis; there is no navigating between the two. Remember, the chance was missed and though Burroughs writes the disaster that might allow the chance to reemerge it remains submerged throughout the work. Cities of the Red Night depicts the continuation of Captain Mission's chance, an event that appears for a moment "that moment that matters, it's the chance we must seize" (Deleuze Negotiations 176). Even though Burroughs seizes that chance, the repetition of failure continues. The final pages of Cities of the Red Night make this all too evident. Port Roger is in disarray, the pool covered in algae and the stairs falling in—"nothing here but lost years" (C 331). The sense of frustration is palpable as Burroughs writes, "I didn't want to write about this or what followed. Guayaquil, Lima, Santiago and all the others I didn't see. The easiest victories are the most costly in the end" (C 332). The Articulated, it seems, swept through victory after victory, but their revolution still ends with failure and despair. The Articulated succeed, but their success is mirrored by regimes of power and knowledge; the lost years fill with newer and more insidious forms of control. In the final scenes, set as a play performed by the "Billy Celeste High School" titled Cities of the Red Night, time and space collapse, leaving a delirious combination of characters playing each other. The effect is chilling insofar as the velocity of the text increases; reveling in the revelation that all the characters are as indistinguishable as we have been led to believe Burroughs collapses the entire narrative into a few pages.

The combination of resignation and hope painfully collides in the final two paragraphs:

> I have blown a hole in time with a firecracker. Let others step through. Into what bigger and bigger firecrackers? Better weapons lead to better and better weapons, until the earth is a grenade with the fuse burning.
>
> "I remember a dream from my childhood. I am in a beautiful garden. As I reach out to touch the flowers they wither under my hands. A nightmare feeling of foreboding and desolation comes over me as a great mushroom-shaped cloud darkens the earth. A few may get through the gate in time. Like Spain, I am bound to the past (C 332).

This passage simultaneously transcends the teleological structure of narrative and remains firmly entrenched within it; the narrator (newly introduced) looks backs with distaste at what has come before. If, as Fredric Jameson asserts, utopian writing is primarily concerned with its own inability as a genre to imagine itself, then the final lines of Cities of the Red Night perfectly illustrate his point. The narrator, having opened a hole in time, is unable to step through; rather he stares backwards tied, like Spain, to the past.

Any Island will do

Both Cities of the Red Night and Ghost of a Chance illustrate the radically contingent nature of utopic space. As Ernesto Laclau writes, "the only democratic society is one which permanently shows the contingency of its own foundations" (Laclau 86). These foundations, mired yet resplendent in their ambivalence, force a reformulation of the

present by intensely engaging in thoughts of futurity. Utopias are never free of their foundations, but the only ethical way to maintain a utopia is for those foundations to remain under constant scrutiny. The idea of becoming-new, probably the most horrifying and radical possibility, is the aporia of every Utopian text. Utopias are unrepresentable by nature; authors trace elements, but these tracings only briefly work to separate utopias from the socio-historical framework from which they emerge. Burroughs, by using Captain Mission and the retroactive utopia, simultaneously engages and side-steps the problem of representing a future through the past—both are unrepresentable, teeming with subjective concerns of the specific present moments. By laying the ambiguities of Utopia bare, Burroughs grapples with the contingency of political foundations—simultaneously, undermining and asserting utopian desire. To finally return to Pounds' question of whether any of us would actually want to live in a Burroughsian utopia: the actualization of utopian desire renders it impossible for the social to coagulate and maintain the utopian. We might answer, resoundingly, "yes, sign me up to the pirate ship," but that ship, and that utopia, can only pale in comparison to our actual desire.

Chapter 4: Shoplifters of the World Unite

Throughout their respective careers, Kathy Acker and William S. Burroughs both construct aesthetic styles and programs that I will argue as *aesthetics of piracy*. Aesthetics of piracy spring from a destabilization of the ideology of the primacy of the author. Of course, at least since Roland Barthes, the primacy of the author has been under attack; what makes Acker and Burroughs different is that while they destabalize the position of the author they simultaneously reinscribe authorship as central to the text. One way to think of the distinction is to focus on the difference between power and potential, or being and becoming. Authorship, in its centralized and reified position, maintains an authoritative and ideological relationship to the text and the reader; however, tracing Acker and Burroughs' position, it is possible to imagine an aesthetic of writing and reading that imagines the author in position alongside the reader. In other words, Acker and Burroughs take the power of language incredibly seriously, and through their commitment to emancipatory politics attempt to fashion evasive subject positions aesthetically. Their texts emerge from and produce a myriad of textual potentialities; these potentialities signal a shift in the way readers and writers array themselves around the notion of authorship. By using the cut-up/fold-in method, or permutations thereof, Acker and Burroughs create an equality between themselves and other authors. This parity gives birth to new ways of engaging with the power shored up within archives of language and knowledge. Through an active engagement with literary and cultural archives—everything is potential grist for their aesthetic mills—Acker and Burroughs trace forms of ethico-political engagement through aesthetic techniques.

In Archive Fever, Jacques Derrida stresses the etymological possibilities of the archive when he writes,"[the] citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to posses the right to make or to represent the law. Because of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians" (Derrida 2). The authority of the archons is publicly recognized and as such, contingent on the repetition of their authority. Furthermore, Derrida writes, "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory" (Derrida 4 note 1). Of course, the power of naming, as both Derrida and Nietzsche assert, comes from, and solidifies, the power of the ruling class.[60] With the famous distrust in grand narratives heralding postmodernism it seems that there is more room for maneuvering within the strictures of archival power and regulation.[61] However, the legitimation of discursive practices remains firmly lodged in the hands of whoever maintains authority—even if this authority is myriad and diffuse. If power is, at root, technologies of capture, and language is both a mechanism of power and a symptom of it, then Burroughs' radical position of cutting apart word lines is at least a beginning for an aesthetics of piracy—an aesthetics of speed, potentiality, excess, and evasion.

Speaking for others, and the accretion of speaking for others, becomes the ideological right of the *archons*—the reification of names and language, of discursive practices, what Foucault calls a "*historical a priori*" (Knowledge 127). The historical *a*

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[60] Nietzsche parenthetically writes, "the right of lords to give names goes so far that we should allow ourselves to comprehend the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of those who rule: they say 'this *is* such and such,' they seal each thing and happening with a sound and thus, as it were, take possession of it." Friedrich Nietzsche Genealogy of Morals.
[61] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition.

priori is not a Kantian condition for validating judgments, but instead the realm of possibility for statements. As such, it represents the plane of possible representations—a cacophony of disparate threads connecting, knotting, intertwining, and breaking apart. For Foucault, the archive is "first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity" (Knowledge 129). The archive, therefore, is a place for both the collecting and the structuring of discursive practices; furthermore, the archive allows the substantiation and allowance of claims. The fastidious collection of notes, records, paraphernalia, and discursive detritus marshaled into patterns, zones, practices, and technologies produces the realm of acceptable utterances, and, concomitantly unacceptable utterances. The archive produces both zones of inclusion and exclusion, and both are equally powerful technologies of control. If it is impossible to divorce knowledge from power it is equally impossible to divorce knowledge from the archive, and if any critique of the archive must, in the final instance, remain complicitous, oscillating between resistance and selling out, then the question becomes where and how can language work as wildcat strike, as guerrilla warfare?

Lyotard describes terror as "force…[that] lies outside the realm of language games, because the efficacy of such force is based entirely on the threat to eliminate the opposing player, not on making a better 'move' than he."[62] He goes on to renounce terror as forcing language into isomorphic relations rather than recognizing the heterogeneous valences of language, but this renunciation relies on always maintaining the opposition to

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[62] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition. 46.

multitudinous language. Language games rely on a commitment to the rules that language operates within; whether universal or local—and Lyotard argues for a renunciation of the universal—each language game functions only if allowed to work through the discursive practices that inform and dictate acceptable utterances. Although Lyotard frames terror negatively, it seems that this is the closest formulation to Burroughs' own desire to unlock words, to break the reality screen. The resuscitation and maintenance of an enemy's language games—or to keep Lyotard's language, opponents—necessitates the parallel subordination of one's own language games. It is strange that Burroughs and Lyotard come to the same democratizing solution to the multiplicity of discursive practices, when their methods of arriving there are in such wild opposition. Lyotard proclaims that the "line for to follow for computerization is…give the public free access to the memory and data banks. Language games would then be games of perfect information at any given moment."[63] However, the language of giving already presupposes a hierarchical relationship; who gives the public free access, who accepts this gift? As Burroughs writes in Nova Express, "Who monopolized Immortality? Who monopolized Cosmic Consciousness? Who monopolized Love Sex Dream? Who monopolized Life Time and Fortune? Who took from you what is yours? Now they will give it all back? Did they ever give anything away for nothing? Did they ever give any more than they had to give? Did they not always take back what they gave when possible and it always was?"[64] The controllers of the memory and data banks—the controllers of the archive—have to bestow access to data and memory, and if we remember Derrida's reminder that power is linked to control of both memory and archive

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[63] Ibid. 67.
[64] Burroughs, William S. Nova Express. 187.

then Lyotard's proposal maintains an unequal relationship that may engender new language games, but does not make space for the kind of legitimation that it seems Lyotard seeks.

It is not so much that Lyotard creates a false dualism between the computer ruled by the performativity principle and his egalitarian open knowledge bank, it is more that regimes of control are equally invested in the creation of these seemingly open systems. What Lyotard turns to, as a means of egalitarian resistance, is merely a structural necessity for more intensely formulated technologies of control. The radicalism of the suggestion, an open forum for language games, the full multiplicity of potentiality within such a field, is obvious, but the slavish reliance on the gift renders this radicalism mute. And, of course, what Lyotard wants is communicability; he strives for a framework resistant to totality, to the whole, but he still invests computerization with a framework where it represents a totality. Lyotard is right: "the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience."[65] Lyotard however, offers nothing to resist this terror; he maintains the framework buttressing the regimes of control responsible for these totalities. Burroughs, with his cut-up/fold-aesthetics takes a decisive step to break these lines apart; he answers that it is impossible to gift freedom and open knowledge—readers and writers have to take, forming alternate pathways into the archons and destroying the hegemonic repositories of knowledge, the holders of representation and memory.

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[65] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "What is Postmodernism?" The Postmodern Condition. 81-82.

Shoplifters of the World Unite

Bosch, Michelangelo, Renoir, Monet, Picasso—steal anything in sight.
---William S. Burroughs

In his 1976 essay "Les Voleurs," Burroughs describes his sudden awakening to the ideological grip of what Michel Foucault calls the "author function." According to Foucault the author function is:

> tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; it does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer purely and simply, to an actual individual as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subject positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy (What is an Author? 130-131).

A precondition for the cut/up method is an alteration in the role of the author and the acceptability of plagiarism, and the realization that authorship is a socially constructed position. In an often repeated and potentially apocryphal story, Brion Gysin accidentally sliced through a number of sheets of text with a razor blade, and when he saw the mangled texts realized that this might be a potent method for working with language. The simplest cut-up is produced by taking a single sheet of paper and cutting it into four quadrants and then rearranging those quadrants. From this beginning the rate of complexity increases exponentially. All writers are also readers, and furthermore—and

this realization quickly follows—writing is always an act, to one degree or another of plagiarism, and "Les Voleurs" is an imperative call to "come out in the open with it and steal freely" (Les Voleurs 20). In other words, both reading and writing are forms of transmission, and Burroughs wants to expose the transparency of this system of exchange. In some ways, it is the obviousness of his position that makes it hard to grasp in its complexity. Burroughs did not always have this opinion; when Gysin first openly plagiarized a piece in front of Burroughs he describes himself as being "slightly shocked by such overt and *traceable* plagiarism" because he had not yet "abandoned the fetish of originality" (Les Voleurs 20). The "fetish of originality" is discernable even in his discussion of this seminal event. The italicized "traceable" underscores not only the horror, but also the guilt contained in the act of discovery. Transparent theft evolves from Burroughs' original fear of discovery. Burroughs continues to drive the point home when he writes, "you see, I had been conditioned to the idea of words as property—one's 'very own words'—and consequently to a deep repugnance for the black sin of plagiarism" (Les Voleurs 20). It is stunning and enlightening to see the deep-seated pathways of ideological repression at work in a writer who is later known as a nimble-fingered plagiarist.

It takes the jarring plagiarism of Gysin, and Gysin's subsequent examples of places where Burroughs himself steals scenes and lines to shake Burroughs of his repugnance of plagiarism. The tearing away of ideological veils is deadly for some; Burroughs describes a Jack London story where the author kills himself because he has accidentally plagiarized, and then Burroughs slyly comments, "he did not have the courage to be a writer. Fortunately I was made of sterner or at least more adjustable

stuff" (Les Voleurs 20). Burroughs' realization that he is either sterner or made of more adjustable stuff lets him follow Gysin to a total renunciation of the sacredness of the author function. He and Gysin write a manifesto also titled "Les Voleurs" that begins, "out of the closet and into the museums, libraries, cultural monuments, concert halls, bookstores, recording studios and film studios of the world" (Les Voleurs 21). Here, Burroughs and Gysin command the thief to burst out of the closet and take over the centers of cultural production.

When Burroughs warns at the end of Naked Lunch that "now I, William Seward, will unlock my word horde," he is making two promises (Naked Lunch 230). The first aligns with modernist figurations of authorship insofar as Burroughs' author/narrator William Seward can change the world by unleashing *his specific* word horde. Another reading suggests something that resonates strongly with Burroughs' later interventions—that Seward, in opening his word horde, unlocks those words for everyone. His small corner of the archive market is suddenly free. It is hard to overlook the homophony between horde and hoard. In unlocking his "word horde" Burroughs simultaneously implies he had been previously hoarding this horde. Like any other archivist, Burroughs' has kept his horde under lock and key. The nomadic and multitudinous nature of words is at the heart of Burroughs' threat. Horde and hoard intertwine insofar as the nomadic movement of hordes try to shift, slide, and evade control. The vertiginous nature of the horde should point to the futility of Burroughs ever thinking he had any control over his own word horde, a futility that his experimentation with the cut-up method quickly underscores. Burroughs, as author, is no more in control of his word horde than any one else. The great innovation of the cut-ups is Burroughs' insistence that *everyone* should

do it: not only should they, but it is imperative that they do. The egalitarianism of Burroughs' technique rids it of the centrality of the author because the text not only looks backwards to the texts it consumes, but forwards to its own consumption. The final moments of Naked Lunch attest to the interstitial time Burroughs aesthetically straddles. Directly preceding the opening of his word horde Burroughs describes the word as "divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement" (Naked Lunch 229). The infinite combinations of words is the beginning for what Burroughs later theorizes; however, in this same section, Burroughs separates himself and his "Gentle reader," a move theoretically antithetical to the Burroughs of the cut-up trilogy—those gentle readers are expected in the cut-ups to viciously turn on texts, ripping them apart for themselves, and, as such, enter into an open and piratical relationship with the written word.

The egalitarianism of plagiarism is a central tenet of Burroughs' position. Once he realizes that the author—and subsequently plagiarism—is purely an ideological construction, that intellectual property is nothing more than a thinly veiled method of controlling artistic production, then Burroughs advocates "[stealing] anything in sight" (Les Voleurs 19, 21). When Burroughs dismisses Jack London's character as not having the courage to be a writer, he dismisses the character's inability to shift or maneuver, the failure to stand in resistance to the reification of the author-function and the massive hulk of cultural artifact represented by the ideology of individual creative production. As Foucault writes, "the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (Author 138). The writer is not a

monad operating in isolation insofar as one written text shares permeable boundaries with another—the author cannot exist by her or himself, and the relation of exchange is more complicated than merely author/reader. The cut-ups stress the materiality of words; for Burroughs the ability to touch and manipulate artistic mediums reconnects the producer with the mode of production. If the author cannot directly and tactilely work with her/his medium, a level of abstraction always hovers around the text. In this respect, Burroughs describes writing as years behind other artistic mediums insofar as writers do not directly handle language. Not only does Burroughs advocate stealing everything in sight, he simultaneously advocates that every thief produce. The obvious progression, for Burroughs, is that the thief storms the archons, demolishing the accumulation of memories and words and scattering these newly liberated word lines to the wind.

The Materiality of the Word

Burroughs' realization that words do not belong to the author, that words are for the taking, shaping, destructuring, and restructuring, massively alters his view on the nature of language. Although Burroughs always considered the word a means of control, the realization that words are material elements allows Burroughs to fashion a means of resistance to ideologies of control. For Burroughs, the means of resistance is the cut-up/fold-in technique. The problem with writing, according to Burroughs, is a level of

abstraction between authors and their medium; painters handle paint, but authors do not handle words and therefore "[do] not yet know what words are" (The Job 27). The obfuscation of what words are simultaneously attempts to define words, to describe, and place them through their malleability and multiplicity. The pliability of words exists in contradistinction and resistance to what Burroughs calls word-locks. He explains:

> there are certain formulas, word-locks, which will lock up a whole civilization for a thousand years. Now another thing is Aristotle's *is* of identity: this *is* a chair. Now, whatever it may be, it's not a chair, it's not the word chair, it's not the label chair. The idea that the label is the thing leads to all sorts of verbal arguments, when you're dealing with labels, and think you're dealing with objects (Job 49).

The problem with the verb "to be" for Burroughs is the concretization of language into certain lines of thought; as accepted labels acquire more legitimacy through repeated use, they replace what they are labeling.

For Burroughs, dualistic thinking represents the most fundamental "word-lock"—the reliance on either/or formulations and the insistence on the definite article *the*. Each is bound up in structuring identity as binding, contained, and uncompromisingly controlling. Burroughs puts it clearly when he writes, "when I say to be me, to be you, to be myself, to be others—whatever I may be called upon to be or say that I am—I am not the verbal label 'myself.'…the word BE in English contains, as a virus contains, its precoded message of damage, the categorical imperative of permanent condition" (The Job 200). These binds structure and maintain lines of control; the rigidity of western linguistic structures forces behavior and thought into seemingly immovable frames. One

of the many ways ideology operates is through the insidiousness reification of habitual behavior. Burroughs writes, "words are still the principle instrument of control. Suggestions are words. Persuasions are words. Orders are words. No control machine so far devised can operate without words, and any control machine that attempts to do so relying entirely on external force or entirely on physical control of the mind will soon encounter the limits of control" (Adding Machine 117). If words are the basic structure of control, then Burroughs seeks to undo that control by replacing abstraction with particularity; in other words, the singularity of "to be" is abstracted and forces faulty exclusions—either/or versus and/and—and these exclusions operate on the level of control.[66]

There are a number of implications to Burroughs's attack on control at the level of the word; the cut-up/fold-in technique makes intertextuality explicit, shatters the ideology of the author-function, and opens up language to a fury of multiplicity. As Robin Lydenberg writes in her seminal analysis Word Cultures, "in the cut-up or fold-in narrative, reading is non-linear, every reading already a rereading in which the whole exists simultaneously, sensed almost subliminally by the reader in vague feelings of familiarity, dislocation, and premonition" (Lydenberg 48). Lydenberg points to how certain phrases that at first were nonsensical spring to prominence, while other clearly important phrases sink into nothingness in the cut-ups. The materiality of Burroughs' fiction crushes the reader—Burroughs is a deceptive Ariadne, offering narrative threads that continue to unravel, but simultaneously wind and twist back towards the reader.

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[66] Though Burroughs does not mention reading Deleuze and Guattari, Deleuze was an avid reader of Burroughs's writing and it is hard not to find echoes of Burroughs throughout Deleuze's work.

Lydenberg unwittingly highlights the tenacity of the ideological stranglehold narrative maintains on literature and literary study when she brushes aside her own argument in favor of laying out a reductive blueprint over a chapter of The Soft Machine (56-69). The unity Lydenberg constructs is instructive insofar as it shows how Burroughs' texts do contain narrative and thematic lines; however, it is also instructive in illustrating the insidiousness of the technologies of control at work within the word.

Lydenberrg's insistence on reinscribing the cut-up texts into overarching narratives highlights what Slavoj Zizek describes as the enjoyment of the symptom.[67] For Zizek, implicit in any ideological formation is the symptom that allows the often contradictory material world to coincide with our preconceived ideological notions. So, in typical Zizekian fashion, ideology exists because ideology exists; this does not however, result in sinking into cynical acceptance of ideological mystification. Quite the contrary: Zizek argues to move beyond the simple act of unmasking ideological formations and accept that mystification does not occur on the level of ideology, but instead in the acceptance of the desire with the ideology. Thus, even when Burroughs breaks through narrative frameworks in his cut-up/fold-in texts, Lydenberg's critical project ensnares them again. However, Lydenberg's description of the *affective* response to Burroughs' cut-up/fold-in texts remains correct; it is hard not to read the cut-ups without uncanny moments of premonition—and Burroughs often swore by their powers of prediction.[68] Words and phrases that mean nothing the first time you read them slowly gain resonance. This is both a relational effect and a subjective one insofar as the

[67] Zizek, Slavoj. The Sublime Object of Ideology.
[68] It is important to stress the separation between the affective response and the programmatic and reductive reading Lydenberg offers.

juxtapositions of phrases, the shuffling of word order, and absurdity transforming into credibility all happen through a network of texts that appear constantly in flux.[69]

For Burroughs, the revelation of ideological assumptions at work within written language is more than simply pulling the curtain aside and revealing a decrepit old man. It is the discovery of the transformative power of language itself. Once authors get their hands on the materiality of their medium they have the ability to effect monumental changes socially, politically, and aesthetically. When describing the cut-up technique in terms of tape recorders Burroughs nearly always refers to political speeches, rallies, riots, and interventions. Burroughs elevates his discourse to universal desires and international politics, but in his clearest description of his *actual* use of cut-ups using tape recorders his target is the insidious "Moka Bar at 29 Frith Street, London" (The Job 18). The reason Burroughs trains the full power of the cut-up technique on the Moka Bar is "outrageous and unprovoked discourtesy and poisonous cheesecake" (The Job 18). Burroughs' testimony on the poisonous nature of the cheesecake is the only record we have of the establishment as it shuttered its doors only two months after Burroughs began his operations against the Moka Bar. What a solid enunciation of politics always being personal.[70]

Oliver Harris investigates the material base of the cut-up method in his fabulous essay "Cutting up Politics." Harris notes the mistakes made by previous critics when they attempt to read the cut-up trilogy through assembling tropes—although many of

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[69] There is a strain of Burroughs criticism that marks these moments of the uncanny in the cut-ups; for instance, chapter four of Timothy Murphy's Wising up the Marks and Oliver Harris' "Cutting up Politics".

[70] I would like to thank and credit Peter Hitchcock for making the important point that British cheesecake *is* truly horrible.

these tropes tie directly into the cut-up project: the Power of language and the need to disassemble syntax and structure—which only works to reassemble many of the operational power assemblages Burroughs seeks to destroy. Furthermore, the cut-up/fold-in is a chronological beast; each cut-up/fold-in holds the previous cut-ups, often working to hone the messages into increasingly potent verbal assaults. As Harris writes, time is integral to Burroughs' approach "the process itself was future-oriented, in the sense that cutting up pre-existent texts reverses the sequence that is axiomatic to mimesis, so that the sign *creates* the referent: production replaces reproduction, and meaning becomes contingent, a coded message awaiting the 'intersection point' that will decipher it" (Harris 178). Each text folds into itself, sections reemerging in different contexts, mutated, disturbed, and vibrating with urgency.[71] The cut-up, Harris writes, "promises that the method works—in unspecified destructive ways—and yet creates that meaning only in hindsight and only as an open question" (Harris 175). Harris crucially draws attention to the open question asked by the cut-up/fold-in texts. Burroughs' cut-up/fold-in texts make the open temporal position of literature explicit; ideally, the cut-up/fold-in never ends. Thus, the cut-up works within a realm of pure potentiality, each line of text opening a multiplicity of options, but also invests the texts with surprising moments of the uncanny.

The cut-up/fold-in often narrates the method while enacting it. The opening line of the section titled "Public Agent" in the Soft Machine reads: "So I am a public agent and I don't know who I work for, get my instructions from street signs, newspapers and

[71] In this manner, Burroughs' interviews and essays become an integral part of his polemical *oeuvre*. They reappear in mutated and disjointed forms in the cut-ups/fold-ins. Even sections of his first creative attempts find themselves folded back into later texts.

pieces of conversations I snap out of the air the way a vulture will tear entrails from other mouths" (Burroughs 175). The line both reads as Burroughsian instructions, but also enacts its own method through the repetition and variation of the construction "the way a vulture will." The phrase repeats on the next page, " I can smell them fucking the air the way a vulture will," and later, "shaking my head and pushing the air the way a vulture will into my brief case," and this shifts the focus from reading *about* the cut-up method to *engaging* in the reconstruction of seemingly random phrases. (Soft Machine 23, 30). Even in these few pages we can see the way phrases mutate to catch the eye, and how they gain meanings, but meanings that at best remain opaque.

This is our Emergency

If an aesthetics of piracy relies on speed, cutting, violence, destructuring, stealing, and perhaps more than anything else, the realization that textuality is *always* at odds with property, that individuals share—willingly or not—ideas, words, and affects, then it follows that the most important moment in textual creation is not the primary cut, but the secondary one—for instance, the space *after* Burroughs finishes his text and someone else cuts into it. The difference between the primary and secondary cut is Deleuze and Guattari's confusion about the cut-up/fold-in technique in A Thousand Plateaus as they differentiate cut-ups (which they describe as "the radicle-system") from rhizomes when they write, "the folding of one text onto another, which constitutes multiple and even adventitious roots (like a cutting), implies a supplementary dimension to that of the texts under consideration. In this supplementary dimension of folding, unity continues its

spiritual labor" (A Thousand Plateaus 5-6). The secondary cut is supplementary only insofar as one of the texts might be Burroughs, but what Burroughs demands is each reader emerge as an author, a cutter her or himself. Actually, Burroughs is much closer to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes. In their formulation a rhizome "subtracts the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at n –1 dimensions" (A Thousand Plateaus 6). The rhizome replaces the uniqueness or primacy of the author with a multiplicity of writers. To translate Burroughs into this language, his egalitarianism, his fierce commitment to everyone storming the streets and taking up knives and pens, is a pack—packs of pirates, authors, and wildboys. The cut-ups work through a radical system of in-betweeness which "does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (A Thousand Plateaus 25).[72] The Burroughsian text starts *in medias res*, both narratively and aesthetically; it is between authors, between temporalities, and the excessiveness of the texts lies in its speed. Because of the in-betweeness of the language, of the writing process, the cut-up/fold-in technique unfixes seemingly fixed points. Aesthetics of piracy exceeds the covers; the injunction to do it yourself gives the texts a futurity that other kinds of pastiche, parody, or homage do not possess.[73]

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[72] Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the middle is articulated in a different manner in Deleuze's Spinoza: A Practical Philosophy, when he describes reading Spinoza as an act beginning in the middle. See especially chapter 6: "Spinoza and Us".

[73] Of course, it is hard not to think of other injunctions to do it yourself, most notably punk rock. For instance, the Sex Pistols show in Manchester in 1976 attended by future members of The Smiths, Buzzcocks, The Fall, and Joy Division spawned some of the most notable bands of the seventies and eighties because the rules for music seemed to

The eddying texts both subsume and uphold the author as unique; each author connects, rearranged, rewritten, and reworked into the Burroughsian text, and, because of his insistence on the egalitarianism of writing becomes a part of that writing. The beginning of the section "The Mayan Caper" in The Soft Machine is an extended lesson on how to participate in cut-up/fold-in production. Burroughs couches the programmatic text in grindingly deadpan faux-factuality—the first person account of Joe Brundige bringing "you the shocking story of the Mayan Caper exclusive to *The Evening News*" (SM 81). The tone of authority increases when Burroughs writes, "A Russian scientist has said: 'We will travel not only in space but in time as well'—I have just returned from a thousand-year time trip and I am here to tell you what I saw—And to tell you how such time trips are made—It is a precise operation—It is difficult—It is dangerous—It is the new frontier and only the adventurous need apply—But it belongs to *anyone* who has the courage and know-how to enter—It belongs to *you*" (Soft Machine 81).[74] What differentiates an aesthetics of piracy from parody or pastiche is the egalitarianism of the pack, the insistence of the text addressing the reader: you can do this, you can be part of the textual revolution, and, furthermore, without you there is no point. This is also a difficult and precise operation, fit only for the adventurous who, like Burroughs, are made of sterner material than the suicidal Jack London character.

Nova Express opens with a similar address, this time as a signed statement from Burroughs' *nom de guerre*, Inspector J. Lee. However, unlike Joe Bundige, Lee

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have changed; suddenly anyone could play. The rise of hip-hop and sampling is another exemplary moment of pop-cultural egalitarianism.

[74] The move from spatial to temporal forms of resistance and exploration mirrors the shift from space to time described by Harvey and Jameson in their overviews of the shift from modernity to postmodernity.

understands the complicity of language in a war on language, and since he stresses the power relations implicit in the board syndicates and governments offering pleasure, love, desire, or immortality he must simultaneously rub out his own words when he writes, "and what does my program of total austerity and total resistance offer *you*? I offer you nothing. I am not a politician. These are conditions of total emergency" (Nova Express 188). Oliver Harris describes this moment as Burroughs' "didacticism…[canceling] itself out" (Harris 185). However, in actuality it is the culmination of that didacticism. In his command for total resistance he *must* simultaneously resist himself—otherwise Burroughs is just another huckster seeking an easy mark. Crucially, Burroughs does offer something; he offers a method of resistance to the hegemony of the government's and board syndicate's stranglehold on the word; Burroughs offers, with the cut-up/fold-in method, a rearticulation of archives, memory, and time. The trip the Russian scientist takes is a trip through time, through history and memory—and this is a trip that Burroughs commands everyone to attempt—with the final goal of destroying the reification of cultural and historical narratives.

In Between

Given Burroughs' decades of insistently and vociferously preaching the power of the cut-up/fold-in method, and calling for authors to take over the means of production, Oliver Harris asks a fundamentally important question "where are all the cut-up revolutionaries?" (Harris 187). Harris traces the genealogy of the cut-up method and cites the influence it had on artists from "Kathy Acker to John Zorn," but too quickly dismisses the way the technique morphed over time, in both Burroughs' hands and, for

instance, Kathy Acker's (Harris 188). The cut-up is a method *about* influence, so it seems odd that Harris chooses to avoid the minimal zones of success the cut-up method enjoys. One reason for this, and Harris immediately points it out, is the nearly total failure of the politics within the texts. The simplicity of Burroughs' position, in Harris' view, "conflates success *in* the novels with the success *of* them" (Harris 189). However, resisting language, through language is *always* complicit; in fact, Burroughs never strays from this position—the cut-up novels, for all of their rhetoric of breaking word lines, almost always follow these positions by undercutting them. Furthermore, Harris sees the in-betweeness of Burroughs political positions, played out literally in his texts, as fundamentally alienating to the formation of political subjectivities, that he can only "gesture toward positive social justice" (Harris 190). Harris attributes impotence to the gesture—failure built into the opening of potential versus the finalization of that potential, but what if, as Burroughs recognizes at the end of Cities of the Red Night when he writes, ""I have blown a hole in time with a firecracker. Let others step through," he has done all he can (Cities 332). Thus, following the influence of the cut-up as a method is one of the few ways where Burroughs' project might seem a success. When Harris writes, "not millions, not thousands, maybe no partisans at all—only Burroughs," influence takes a secondary position to aesthetic technique, and by separating one from the other Harris tragically misrecognizes Burroughs' project (Harris 190). Furthermore, this separation truncates the possibility for aesthetic growth or evolution; the text remains in stasis in a way that is antithetical to Burroughs' approach.

The Bugaboo of Imagination

In an interview with Sylvere Lotringer Acker says, "I had really been trained in the idea that you don't sit down and write, you have to know why you write and why you use certain methodologies" (Myths 5). Passed on from her mentor David Antin, was the dictum, "form is determined not by arbitrary rules, but by intention. And intentionality is all" (Myths 5). Acker calls this focus on methodology "conceptualism." When she searched for prose authors whose work mirrored her theoretical and methodological concerns, she naturally gravitated to Burroughs who was "the only prose writer I could find who was a conceptualist. Oh he's very much of a conceptualist. So I used The Third Mind as experiments to teach myself how to write" (Myths 4). It is almost impossible not to imagine hearing Burroughs' sighs of relief that *someone finally* used The Third Mind as a primer for how to write, because, of course, this is one of the primary functions of the cut-up text. Acker's earliest work is the most clearly influenced by the cut-up technique, but it stays integral to her writing process for the entirety of her career, and in her variations of the cut-up/fold-in we can trace the mutations and evolution of the technique.

Elizabeth Grosz offers a systematic intervention into the nature of feminism and authorship after the death of the author. Though she does not mention Acker in her essay "Sexual Signatures," it is hard not to read Acker throughout. According to Grosz, the death of the author "opened up a whole history of patriarchal discourses to feminist appropriations and recontextualizations" (Space 16). Acker clearly excavates the newly opened history of patriarchal discourse, changing, denaturing, and rewriting texts that challenge the fashioning and production of texts. Yet, in Grosz's view, the author's demise also functions to problematize the essentialism of many strands of feminist

theory. In other words, if the death of the author heralds the radically contingent nature of the transmission of meanings and authority between reader and text, then falling back on the gender of the author as a critical point of departure re-integrates the author, as authority, into the text. Recontextualization and appropriation work to destabilize the role of the author, but simultaneously maintain the author, but now in an egalitarian position with other texts and the reader.[75]

Grosz asks what makes a text feminist, and supplies three criteria: the text must "render the patriarchal or phallocentric presumptions governing its contexts and commitments visible…problematize the standard masculinst ways in which the author occupies the position of enunciation…and third, a feminist text must not only be critical of or a challenge to the patriarchal norms governing it; it must also help, in whatever way, to facilitate the production of new and perhaps unknown, unthought discursive spaces—new styles, modes of analysis and argument, new genres and forms—that contest the limits and constraints currently at work in the regulation of textual production and reception" (Space 23). The third of Grosz's criteria is only possible if the author accomplishes the first two; the commitment to the creation of the new renders her criteria ethical. Looking at these criteria it is readily apparent how Acker's work fits into Grosz's framework: Acker's methodology focuses on reworking the language given to her. As she says, "whenever I engage in discourse, I am using given meanings and values, changing them and giving them back" (Bodies 4). The act of exchange, of gifting meanings, builds alternate unthought discursive spaces; furthermore, similarly to

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[75] It seems obvious but simultaneously necessary to mention that this does not mean that texts are open to any interpretation; there are clearly rules or guidelines produced by texts that mark certain readings as more or less plausible than others.

Burroughs, newly minted readers and authors fill these new spaces; the act of reading and writing—and Acker maintains the impossibility of writing without reading—engenders new subjectivities. For instance, Acker ends Blood and Guts in High School with the invocation, "so the doves cooed softly to each other, whispering of their own events, over Janey's grave in the grey Saba Pacha cemetery in Luxor. Soon many other Janeys were born and these Janeys covered the earth" (Blood 165). Each of these Janeys is a reader and an author, a pirate and a lover. The multiplication of Janeys is the nomadic and viral infiltration and subversion of the patriarchal and phallogocentric systems that helped spawn them.

Sensing the World

During the Huckleberry Finn section of Empire of the Senseless, Abhor ("a part robot, and a part black" woman) replaces Jim, and is imprisoned while Thivai (her sometime boyfriend) and his friend Mark attempt to rescue her. Anyone familiar with Huckleberry Finn immediately recognizes the structure of the implausible rescue plans hatched by Thivai and Mark. The plan—such as it is—to spring Abhor from the hoosegow, revolves around smuggling her a pen so she can "write down, with her own blood as ink, how [Thivai and Mark] rescued her, how brave [their] hearts were, how strong [their] arms.

All of human posterity would hold [them] in their esteem" (ES 201). This plan differs importantly from the Huckleberry Finn source material insofar as Abhor's freedom is contingent on her ability to not only write, but to narrativize the triumphs of the men around her. Of course, at best these triumphs are ephemeral and entirely in Thivai and Mark's minds; like Huckleberry Finn they are not Abhor's emancipators as much as her captors.[76] Ostensibly, Thivai imprisons Abhor to *improve her*, and though this is patronizing in the extreme, it seems to work—though not at all in the way he imagines. Empire of the Senseless begins with Abhor unable to speak; she can only speak through Thivai, but by the end of the text she discovers a voice and the language and announces, "I didn't as yet know what I wanted. I now fully knew what I didn't want and what and whom I hated. That was something" (ES 227). The double-bind of emancipatory politics, especially those revolving around language, is the bewildering wall both Acker and Burroughs run up against; as Acker puts it, "the need for narrative and the simultaneous need to escape the prison-house of the story—to misquote" (Bodies X).[77]

Thivai and Mark's plan evolves until they decide Abhor must remain in jail to become a "great writer…and at that time, society needed a great woman writer" (ES 203). Immediately Thivai and Mark set upon her, cut her finger with a penknife, and tell her to write with her blood—that it is through her blood and body that she will become a great woman writer. Perhaps one of the most telling moments in Empire of the

[76] Thivai is not exactly a sympathetic character, but his confusion mirrors Abhor's; neither of them have any idea what they want or how to communicate with one another; ostensibly they love one another, but have no means of really expressing anything other than pain to one another. The affective character of this love, unrequited in its insanity, creates a complexity that underscores the pain, hurt, and violence of the text.

[77] I feel remiss not mentioning how funny Acker often is; her ironic "to misquote," does more to elucidate the difficult positioning between using given meanings and stumbling into unfathomable territory.

Senseless, Abhor writes *exactly* what she means and is consistently misunderstood by Thivai—in her writing he sees only senselessness—a senselessness he argues for, but cannot come to terms with.

In the final instance, resistance often melds with collaboration, but the denaturing of given discourse, whether verbal, literary, archival, theoretical, or historical, sheds light on the production of discourse, and opens minute cracks and spaces filled and fought for by a multitude of factions. However, the repetition of pain, repression, and violence works to reify relationships doomed to toil under a fear of freedom; as Thivai says, "All I've ever wanted is freedom from fear or to fly. But the ice-cold freedom which I barely tasted, tasted only in my imagination, was too weighty for a child whose identity is predicated upon Monsters" (ES 171). Interestingly enough, Thivai soon becomes Abhor's captor, forcing her to write, but also forcing his own Monster-identity onto her. When Abhor finally writes she does so over Thivai's writing, scrawling, "FUCKFACES ALL MEN then THE SHIP IS SINKING" (ES 204). Writing over Thivai's text, Abhor denatures the words given to her. Thivai's response is that, "these words weren't good writing because they had nothing to do with nothing. With Abhor…To write or to describe a heart, I explained, demands accurate observation of the self and of the self's world" (ES 204). Of course, Abhor does describe her situation accurately, imprisoned by the men around her, forced to write in her own blood, and swooning from blood loss, while they play at helping her out of jail—another prison-house of language. Not only has she taken his writing, changed it and given it back to him, but she also writes from the heart insofar as she writes in her own blood. What makes a body that matters in Abhor's case? If her body is partially encapsulated in her name, what is it to be Abhor?

An embodiment of disgust, repugnance, and the foulness of the world around her on one hand, but also a violent disgust *at* that world; this repugnance allows her ethico-political engagement. Her body is what allows her to write, but she only writes at the behest of the men around her. Is the moment of resistance the moment when cut and bleeding, Abhor surprises her captors by telling them—rather than thanking them for freeing her—that she hates all of them?

The repetition of violence, and vileness perpetrated on Abhor's body in the name of making her a great woman writer, is an attempt to interpellate her as a particular kind of author. This interpellation both works to stake out the boundaries of Abhor's subjectivity and to engender the potential for her to resist or exceed those boundaries. In Judith Butler's formulation, "the paradox of subjectivation (*assujetetissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (Butler 15). In her use of received discourse, Acker maps zones of excess, but these zones as discourse are immanent to discursive regimes of control and power. Subjectivation is the repetition of acts, a repetition of citationality; every use of power relies on a previous understanding of power, but said in another way, every use of language relies on previous uses of language. Thus, writing that seeks to resist discursive norms also relies on those norms for the ability to resist. As Acker writes, "the ceiling of language is falling down. Either add to this rubble or shove at least some of it away" (ES 163). The two choices are complementary insofar as the existence of the rubble predicates both uses of language.

Through pirating texts, Acker both adds to the rubble and shoves some of it away; the received meanings transform and reform, shift, stumble, and lurch through the confusing liminal zones of subjectivation.

By ignoring Thivai, Abhor signals a refusal of his logic that he needs to torture her in order for her to become a great woman writer and a "model and heroine to women" (ES 224). The only extended piece of writing of Abhor's is a letter she leaves with Thivai and Mark before she runs away from them. In the letter she writes, "this is what I'm saying: you're always fucking deciding what reality is and collaborating about these decisions…I don't know what reality is. I'm so unsure, tentative, tenuous, lonely, uncertain from loneliness, anguished, sad that I'm not certain enough to fight the decisions I should" (ES 210). Abhor's indecision is the productive gap within her subjectivation at the hands of Thivai and Mark; her inability to understand reality—a reality that she rightly sees as contingent on collaborative decisions made by Thivai and Mark—marks the exclusion that simultaneously opens a productive space where her different subjectivity announces itself. Abhor describes writing as feeling like she is "taking layers of my own epidermis, which are still freshly bloody scar tissue, black brown and red, and tearing each one of them off so more and more of my blood shoots into your face" (ES 210). For Abhor, there is no separation between the writing and the body, and it is not surprising because this is the method taught to her by Thivai. When he and Mark give her the pen/knife to learn how to write they simultaneously dictate the terms she uses to write. Obviously, though, the body only sets the limits—the first criteria for Grosz: rendering the phallocentric presumptions and commitments visible; from here Abhor pushes her bleeding hand into Thivai and Mark's faces, sundering their

limits and taking a step towards the potentiality of the something new on the horizon. Abhor receives instructions and rules, but she takes those and warps them into something unrecognizable and new.

Butler's model of subjectivation illuminates the power repetition and reiteration play in subject formation through exclusion, foreclosure, and productive gaps. The easiest criticism of this position is that it too often relies on hegemonic positions for its possibility. However, through her textual piracies, Acker makes it clear that what she does is appropriate hegemonic discourses, alter and denature them, and throw them back. Yes, these reappropriations rely on the existence of hegemonic discourse, but it also affirms the power and existence of marginalized, degraded, and excluded subjectivities. The raiding of archives asserts that the archives are open to everyone, and through egalitarianism either no one owns words or everyone does. As Abhor postulates, "then I thought about how a sword pierces a cunt. Only my cunt is also me. The sword pierces me and my blood comes out. It doesn't matter who has handled and shoved in this sword. Once this sword is in me, it's me. I'm the piercer and the pierced" (ES 224). Abhor's realization that though she may not have had control over the sword before it entered her body, once there it is *hers*, is central to both Acker's conception of subjectivity and writing. Abhor knows that Thivai has not imprisoned her to make her stronger; he imprisoned her for solely narcissistic reasons. However Abhor uses her imprisonment as a means towards embracing subjectivities, thinking new potentialities while contesting the limits of what can and cannot be language. Not only does she reject Thivai and Mark, she also rejects their modes of existence. This rejection appears as a negation, but it is a moment of production, of addition. Though Thivai and Mark attempt

to subjugate Abhor through imprisonment and repeated beatings, bloodlettings, and threats of dismemberment, she not only ignores their reasoning for this, but recognizes that this treatment, now, is an integral part of Abhor's subjectivity.[78]

When Acker pirates other texts, she commandeers other characters, books, authors, for her own means. By no means does this make them her characters, any more than they were the original authors' individual imaginative creations. Each author still exists singularly—the sword does not disappear, but a transformation takes place. Deleuze describes his work within the history of philosophy as

> a sort of buggery (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed (Negotiations 6).

The shift and slide between Deleuze and Acker seems easy here. Acker mutates the texts given to her and spits back recognizable, yet hideous and monstrous children. One may hasten to note that Deleuze begins and ends in a position of mastery or of power. If we fall into the trap of thinking that in taking this sword Abhor is passive rather than active we are guilty of foundering in both a vulgar essentialism and a cynical desire to maintain

[78] Abhor's mastery of the situation is reminiscent of using traumatic breaks as a productive means of opening and potential. For instance, Freud's famous description of the "fort/da" game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Furthermore, see Jessica Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*; Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*; or Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.

the dialectical relationship between master/slave as the foundation of subjectivity. To circle back and paraphrase Derrida, power maintains control through both the archive and memory. Abhor, in the final instance, wrests control of her imprisonment and her memory away from Thivai and Mark, and—like Acker's writing in and of itself—gives them monstrous children.

It's Pronounced Eye-Gore

For Acker, it is impossible to separate subjectivity from discourse. The constitution of who is and is not a person relies on the repetition of linguistic and physical acts. As such, the role of the writer is to problematize existing discursive practices while substituting viable other options. Thus, Acker relies on the antinomies of existent discursive practices to form oppositional—or said less dialectically—subversive subjectivities. In a short section in My Mother: Demonology, Acker writes about the complicated relationship between existence in language and the lack of recognition that forecloses what can or cannot be understood as human. "In China, when a woman doesn't believe in God, she, like everyone else, validates her existence by believing in a man. It all amounts to the same. The only way that she can escape this kind of structure (this society, this community, this language) is to make her own. But then she'd be outside society, or nonexistent" (Mother 80). Creating their own language, community, and society renders them nonexistent because they rely on the recognition of those other structures for their subjectivities. This invisibility is the fate of the individual woman, and when Acker's narrator enters a hallway entirely filled with Chinese women clutching meat cleavers, she

is the one who is inhuman, who is outside of the structures of language and control, and in this reversal she remarks "since I was no longer part of society, everything around me is malevolent to me. In this world, I'm only an object" (Mother 81). In the creepy silence surrounding the Chinese women, Acker makes an interesting point; the impossibility of their position outside of society renders them mute insofar as no one speaks their language, but also imprisons them in a long hallway filled with stereotypical Chinese iconography. The Chinese women's inability to recognize the narrator as one of them—they regard her "the way one gazes at an object that is so other it can't be human"—reduces her to merely an object, but it also highlights the inability to act ethically or politically in the world without engaging in the structures that make up that world. (Mother 81).[79] The myriad of languages works as a means of control and separation when these languages are so individualized as to be ineffectual as means of communication.

The reification of identity through repetitive discursive acts is a continuous foundational moment. Conversely, problematizing identity happens continuously; each foundational moment is open to contestation. For Acker, this contestation occurs within the realm of language; therefore, like Burroughs, Acker demands the destruction of the reified, and reifying, structures of grammar and language. During a long appropriation of Wuthering Heights Acker writes, "the only way is to annihilate all that's been written. That can be done only through writing. Such destruction leaves all that is essential intact. Resembling the process of time, such destruction allows only the traces of death to persist" (Mother 123). The seemingly paradoxical position of destroying everything

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[79] Of course, it bears noting that Acker plays into the stereotype of the inscrutable Asian, and there are a host of problems surrounding her reification of western stereotypes.

written through writing is the central difficulty of a system of piratical aesthetics. What is the essential that remains intact after the annihilation of all that has been written? Perhaps a clue lies in the passive voice; the destruction of language, of the written word, that facelessly exists, yet still exerts control over what can or cannot remain within the realm of language. In other words, the foundation—the essential—remains, but the written words clinging to it, forming, changing, engraving meanings are explicitly contingent, and Acker advocates the destruction of the false notion that these contingent meanings are natural. This destruction is more than simply another call for the unmasking of ideological formations, because the stress is not on the unmasking as much as the stress lies on a constant cycle of destruction, rebuilding, and reifying. As such, Acker demands a continual becoming in and through language. For Acker, the body is a site of materialization, but also a site of citation. Both the body and the text rely on futurity; the continual becoming and contestation of their presumed foundational sites operates as the foundation of those sites. As Acker declares to Sylvere Lotringer, "I also came to the decision that [identity] was a false problem because it's a thing that's made. You create identity, you're not given identity per se. What became more interesting to me wasn't the I, it was text because it's texts that create the identity. That's how I got interested in plagiarism" (Lecter 7). The difference between the creation of identity and being given identity is what is at stake in Abhor's transformation; Thivai and Mark try to give her an identity through brutality and violence, but Abhor does not have to accept that identity; Thivai and Mark's interpellative call goes unanswered, or at least unanswered in the form they expect.

Playing with Building Blocks

When Sylvere Lotringer introduced Acker to the work of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari she says, "suddenly I had this whole language at my disposal…and other people were doing the same thing. I remember thinking, Why don't they know me? I know exactly what they're talking about. And I could go farther" (Lecter 10). Acker does go farther; insofar as she does not deal in any level of abstraction. She sees identity as created through texts and vice versa; as such, she deals directly with her medium, and directly with the fashioning of identity. However, Acker is also in a unique position to see the shortcomings, failures, and missed chances. In Empire of the Senseless Acker writes, "Ten years ago it seemed possible to destroy language through language: to destroy language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prisons of meaning.

"But this nonsense, since it depended on sense, simply pointed back to the normalizing institutions" (ES 134). Acker pinpoints the difficulty with the cut-up method as a theoretical position and instead posits, "an attack on the institutions of prison via language would demand the use of a language or languages which aren't acceptable, which are forbidden. Language, on one level, constitutes a set of codes and social and historical agreements. Nonsense doesn't per se break down the codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the codes" (Empire of the Senseless 134). Perhaps, but speaking precisely the forbidden is still firmly lodged as a relation to sense. One of the many things Foucault taught us other than the injustice of speaking for others is that the ability to speak often carries with it new forms of power and control. Codes have a way of shifting. Forbidden and taboo language must remain protean because a realm of

the forbidden, or dangerous, is just as easily reified as the acceptable and safe—spaces of protest, captured and regulated, work to expand hegemonic regimes of control. What this means is that each individual speech act has to take into consideration what languages are forbidden and how those languages operate. In other words, aesthetics of piracy, as practiced by Acker and Burroughs, are tactical insofar as they attempt to push past what delimits acceptability—not only in terms of content, but also in terms of literary structures. Predictably though, these limits are equally protean; new and resistant aesthetics only merge through a constantly shifting and tactical approach.[80]

It is in the interest of forging new and resistant languages, codes, and agreements that updating the cut-up method becomes imperative. The basic structure remains the same, mostly due to the continued emphasis on the fictive author-function in mainstream culture. Acker's understanding that codes are a series of agreements of course simultaneously means that these codes are contingent and potentially alterable, but a willingness to alter regimes and codes of resistance is of primary importance. As such, when Oliver Harris asks where have the disciples of the cut-up method gone, he is asking the wrong question. Disciples are everywhere. The cut-up method engenders new ways of thinking about language in relation to property, communication, and community. Acker and Burroughs both embody Acker's injunction to write the forbidden; furthermore, the methodology behind their writing is equally forbidden to a culture of ownership. Piracy of texts hijacks the idea of original meaning and through juxtaposition and play spits new meanings back. The subjectivities Acker and Burroughs construct lie

[80] It is no surprise that both Acker and Burroughs (Burroughs especially) are read mainly by people who want to read something shocking. The books are behind the counter, and this makes them both more interesting to the curious, but also captures and codifies them as "shocking." What is shocking about being shocked by a text written to shock you?

outside the acceptable realm of language, they are, as Lyotard would say, terror, and this is precisely what radical politico-aesthetic movements need.[81] If identity and culture in their most repressive forms are a series of agreements imposed on individuals, then the moments of resistance by these individuals occur when those agreements miss their mark or are reworked in such a way as to become unrecognizable. The unique position of literature is the creation of communities and identities through language—communities of readers reading community. Both Acker and Burroughs grasp the positive and negative power these communities hold; aesthetics produce what is or is not discernable, knowable, or sensible and, as such, act to maintain or destroy regimes of control.

[81] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition*. 46.

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