

IN DEFENSE OF DESTRUCTION: HOW ADDICTION PROPELS
NATURAL CYCLES OF DEATH AND RENEWAL IN
WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS' *JUNKY*

by

Beatrice West-Israel, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Literature
August 2020

Committee Members:

Steve Wilson, Chair

Roger Jones

Nathan Pino

COPYRIGHT

by

Beatrice West-Israel

2020

FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT

Fair Use

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

Duplication Permission

As the copyright holder of this work I, Beatrice West-Israel, refuse permission to copy in excess of the "Fair Use" exemption without my written permission.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Gary Hogan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my committee chair, Mr. Steve Wilson, for his reliability in a demanding time and his unflinching edits. This would not have gotten done on time without his guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Nathan Pino for his availability when I needed new information, as well as his encouragement; he imparted a sense of value in a nascent and shaky topic, which made it off the ground with his help. Dr. Jones, my final committee member, aided my writing skills as well as my knowledge on the topic.

I would like to thank the members of my support system, which include Gary Hogan, Shirley West, Gordon Israel, Sarah Israel-Gaines, Casey Israel, and our dog. Life doesn't keep moving, and nothing gets written, without them.

Finally, I am earnestly grateful to the institution that allowed me to achieve a degree with them. The support and optimism of Texas State University, and specifically its English Department, made this daunting experience possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER	
I. IN DEFENSE OF DESTRUCTION	1
i. Glossary	6
ii. Crime, Deviance and Addiction	16
II. FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF DESTRUCTION	20
i. Psychological Destruction	36
ii. Physical Destruction	40
iii. Societal Destruction.....	45
iv. In Conclusion.....	54
III. SITUATIONS OF RENEWAL	57
i. Institutions of Renewal	66
ii. Instances of Renewal in <i>Junky</i>	69
IV. THE ILLUSION OF STABILITY	77
i. Stability in the Modern Consciousness.....	80
ii. Stability in <i>Junky</i>	81
iii. In Conclusion.....	86
V. CONCLUSION.....	88
WORKS CITED	92

ABSTRACT

William Burroughs' novel *Junky* is humorous and meticulously detailed in portraying its protagonist's spiral to rock bottom. However, within the otherwise dispassionate narrative, readers encounter an undercurrent of pure need, with characters and narrator/protagonist Bill Lee at once repelled and empowered by the powers of destruction that junk has over their lives. The book is structured as a descending spiral, ever-inward and downward, as Lee wanders from New York to Mexico: one instance of the text's overarching depiction of a journey from stability to destruction and back again. Burroughs portrays human need as the propellant of this cycle, a catalyst that causes individuals to move because of their own suffering. In attempting to keep himself stable and well, for instance, Lee must always have more junk: his need for junk is what drives him to the very ends of his resources, and propels him out of the phase of stability. When he runs out of junk, withdrawal sickness sets in, signifying the death of his addict self and rebirth into a new life. Just as quickly, his addiction may be reborn in subsequent chapters.

In exploring this text, I document both the forms and functions of this cycle. The protagonist's environment, for example, is analogous to his mindset, moving him from an iconic image of stability (suburban Midwestern U.S.) to a jewel of chaos, Mexico. Bill Lee equates his childhood home in the Midwest with atrophy, and to end the stagnation he engages in violent lifestyles that, like pruning a plant, initiate growth through destruction. Lee finally escapes to Mexico, fleeing a court case: agents of stability and

law in the U.S. After he reaches Mexico, he begins to atrophy again, with “nothing to do” and “no place to go,” since his life is no longer driven by his junk habit (117). Soon after this, driven by a need for junk imposed on him by his environment, Lee is back in the cycle of destruction.

“Junk” serves as a signifier for destruction in *Junky*, a metaphor for human needs which propel the larger cycles in which the text operates. According to Burroughs, kicking junk is a violent process that causes the death of junk-dependent cells. As the text suggests, the entropy that follows is a kind of rotting away as part of a natural cycle of matter. The junk always runs out, and the body goes through the violence of junk-sickness before renewing itself, which is a “suffering of the cells alone” (*Junky* 3). The effect of this suffering appears on the face of Lee associate Jack, who exhibits a “conscious ego that look[s] out of the glazed, alert-calm hoodlum eyes—would have nothing to do with the suffering of his rejected other-self” (3). Junk-sickness creates an undercurrent of violence at the cell level, and all the while Jack is helping Bill Lee to sell a “Tommy gun” (1), invoking a violence beyond the cellular. In a similar manner, the violence that morphine-sickness brings to another Lee associate, Roy, is positioned in the narrative directly after Jack’s homicide story, in which he admits to bashing someone’s head with a pipe. Violence, signifying death, is positioned before Roy’s junk-sickness, signifying rot. The circumstances of Lee’s narrative follow natural cycles of death,

renewal, and life, implying that the spirals of suffering Lee transcends are analogies for the universal suffering and rebirth which transforms all of existence.

I. IN DEFENSE OF DESTRUCTION

A desire to avoid destruction is common to most forms of life. Fears of death, change, and instability are rooted in an evolutionary desire to stay alive. Such fears are one of multiple reasons why, for instance, adults may decide to have children. Through their offspring, parents' habits, influence, and appearance are reborn, fulfilling all three stages—life, death, and rebirth—in a cycle of existence composed of three nodes. Destruction and death are necessary elements in this cycle. Fearing one's own destruction, or the unknowability of death, causes organisms to cling to life no matter how painful. But children comprise the *rebirth* phase of the cycle, made possible only by the death of earlier generations.

This cycle is duplicated, on a smaller and quicker scale, in the patterns of the addicts in William Burroughs' *Junky*. These so-called junkies may be seen as analogies for all people, and junk as a symbol for each of our needs. Each human being is controlled by his or her needs, both natural and imposed by outside forces—in particular, the need to communicate, to eat and feel secure, and to experience fulfillment and love. Junk only acts as an intermediary, a signifier for all these needs, each of which propels a natural cycle of destruction and renewal. If the sense of need is strong enough, such as for security, people will allow their former selves to be destroyed in order to fulfill the need for safety. The pathology of addiction, if *Junky* is seen allegorically, is an analogy for all human need: the lengths to which humans go, or the things they allow to happen, to see them fulfilled. I argue, however, that addicts may progress through these three phases—destruction, renewal, and stability—at a faster pace than non-addicts because of the destructive nature of the drug. Burroughs' protagonist and narrator Bill Lee is a prime example. Since junk imposes need on the individual via corporal dependence--see

“withdrawal-sickness” (Lindesmith 9)--and the feeling of a “kick” or shot of junk creates relief from withdrawals and mimics feelings of safety and connection, opiate-addiction is known to eventually blot out all other needs. The brain gets each of its needs fulfilled, but the feeling is a false one and leads to dependence on the substance.

Precisely this destructive quality is what propels Burroughs’ junkies through their cycles with such rapidity: none can remain in a state of stability while in addiction, and chasing the high draws a person from sobriety to self-destruction even when they aren’t physically dependent. Patterns of death, entropy, and rebirth make Lee’s journey through addiction similar to non-addicts’ journeys to fulfill their own needs. These needs cause security or a feeling of it—money, food, love and validation, junk—while unfulfilled needs cause fear, insecurity, and mental chaos for the individual. Conversely, according to Burroughs, “all pleasure is basically relief from a condition of need, or tension” (*Junky* 137). Pleasure is relief from suffering, and neither exists without the other. Using these principles, an addict or anyone else could be influenced by either providing what they need, which soothes their suffering, or threatening to take it away. Burroughs emphasizes that people aren’t immune to addiction merely by leading typical lives, commenting that the word “addiction” loses its pejorative meaning when it is applied to many circumstances society deems valid or useful. One can be addicted to television, shopping, even food. Defined this way, everyone has their own needs to fulfill, and relies on something or someone to fulfill them. Thus, addiction could be defined as universal. “Junk,” according to Bill Lee, “is a cellular equation that teaches the user facts of general validity. I have learned a great deal using junk: I have seen life measured out in eyedroppers of morphine solution. I experienced the agonizing deprivation of junk

sickness, and the pleasure of relief when junk-thirsty cells drank from the needle. Perhaps all pleasure is relief" (*Junky* xli). Burroughs' use of the words *thirsty* and *drank* in this passage, describing his visceral, physical response to the drug, signifies structurally that junk and water are interchangeable values in the sentence equation, an example of the "algebra of need" (*Naked Lunch* 15). This is one reason why both Burroughs and addiction specialist Alfred Lindesmith agree that anyone is susceptible to addiction, and thus the rapid cycle of destruction and rebirth stamped indelibly into *Junky*.

In my analysis, the foundational secondary source I intend to use is Alfred Lindesmith's *Addiction and Opiates*, a sociological study that researches opiate addicts and their perceptions of self and the world. Both Burroughs and Lindesmith document the same groups of individuals, although Burroughs' text is from a storyteller's perspective, and the text of Lindesmith from a sociologist's. Unsurprisingly, both texts also ponder the cyclical nature of addiction. Each concludes that addicts, feeling as though they can control or resist opiates' cycle of destruction, experiencing only *some* relief and *no* suffering, are often sucked into the cycle due to this delusion.

While one may begin the cycle anywhere, for now I outline stable life first, which happens either during sobriety or during use. This phase can be defined as any stable, sustaining version of existence; in *Junky*, it is usually represented by periods of heavy use. However, Bill Lee also sustains periods of sobriety. Destruction corresponds to relapse, if the addict was sober during the stable phase of the cycle. However, more often in the text, Lee is an addict in the stable phase of the cycle, and the destructive phase of the cycle signifies "junk-sickness," or withdrawals that happen when his supply is cut-off.

While sustaining stability in addiction, fear of withdrawal sickness/destruction can become so intense that it fuels the addiction, since users know that, as long as they continue using, they won't have to endure withdrawals (see Lindesmith's discussion of the "hook of withdrawal" (9)). Lee speaks of jail or rehabilitation as "throwing in the towel," implying a kind of surrender (*Junky* 21) or admission of futility. Like death, which is certain, the addict will experience a certain death of their own when their supply runs out. All of Lee's associates put it off for as long as they can.

The addict responds to the fear of destruction by attempting to continue the addiction. After the addict is destabilized by the death of their habit, and after traversing withdrawal sickness and the death of their junk-dependent cells, they continue to the *rebirth* stage of the cycle. This involves stabilizing themselves in their new reality, without the substance. When Lee is sober or when he is addicted but fulfilled, he can achieve stillness, while the stages of destruction and rebirth that come between these periods of stability are dynamic.

Destruction and death are the unstable forces which undermine life and propel the cycle toward rebirth. The addict's withdrawal sickness is one example of this: as their cells die, they grow new ones no longer dependent on junk, physically undergoing rebirth so that the body can be stable in its new environment. To stabilize something, unlike destroying it, is to make it permanent, not fluctuating, capable of bearing weight both physical and mental. To be a parent, for example, requires a stable home and income, since raising a child requires steady and predictable repetition. The "weight" borne by the stable environment is that of a new life—babies do not thrive in chaos, nor can an addict raise a drug habit without some source of stability to begin with, like Bill Lee's trust

fund. Ironically, like children's impact on a family's finances, addiction also actively diminishes the sources of stability that made it possible, accelerating the addict toward their own destruction. In the text, nothing can remain in a state of permanence, which is universally true—stability seems to be inherently unsustainable, despite Lee's futile attempts to prolong it.

i. Glossary

Before investigating this cycle in William Burroughs' *Junky*, one benefits from precise definitions of the various terms he employs and the concepts I explore as he investigates how needs—both natural and imposed—propel the rebirth cycle. Burroughs' nuanced distinctions in his own end-of-text glossary (*Junky* 129) reveal his underlying goals for the novel, since almost all of the topics can be categorized as destabilizing or stabilizing. In outlining these terms, I will offer (A), the Merriam-Webster definition of the word; and (B), a definition that helps readers consider the ways Burroughs employs and reshapes the terms in his text.

Addiction—A. A compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behavior, or activity having harmful physical, psychological, or social effects and typically causing well-defined symptoms...upon withdrawal or abstinence. B. The result of prolonged drug use and corresponding mental patterns; once the user is an addict, the drug becomes a source of stability until it runs out, after which junk manifests destructive qualities in the form of sickness. Sociologist Alfred Lindesmith emphasizes that “some persons who experience the effects of opiate-type drugs and use them for a period...do not become addicts while others under what appear to be the same conditions do become addicted” (3). Lindesmith also points out that “there is a widespread feeling among addicts that addiction is not understood, that it is misrepresented in the mass media, and that it is dealt with in an inhumane...manner” (7). This concern may reveal one of Burroughs' motivations in documenting Lee's experience. Lindesmith defines addiction as “that behavior which is distinguished primarily by an intense, conscious desire for the drug, and by a tendency to relapse, evidently caused by the persistence of attitudes established in the early stages of

addiction” (64).

Addict—A. One exhibiting a compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behavior, or activity. B. According to Lindesmith, an addict has two defining characteristics: the persistent, “intense desire and striving for the drug...at the cost of unbelievable sacrifices” (49); and the “tendency toward relapse” (50), which is a result of cravings persisting even after all physiological symptoms are gone and rebirth into a sober individual is complete. Though I acknowledge the advancements that have been made in psychology since *Addiction and Opiates*’ publication in 1947, these two characteristics still apply to Burroughs’ text.

American Midwest—A. A region of indefinite boundaries in the north central U.S. including the area around the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi River Valley. B. A section of American society culturally coded as stable, or the endpoint of the “American Dream.” This is where Burroughs himself spent the end of his life, residing in Lawrence, Kansas.

Atrophy—A. From the Greek for “lack of nourishment”; also, a decrease in size. B. A subset within the process of stabilization that takes place after stabilization has dominated an organism or society for too long. Destruction of previous stability is necessary to evolve beyond this step.

Crime—A. An illegal act for which someone can be punished by the government; a grave offense especially against morality. B. A destabilizing act that may be socially violent (theft, drug use) or physically violent (robbery). Sociologist Edwin Sutherland offered a meticulous theory outlining one attitude towards crime in 1947 (near the era when *Junky* was published) which consists of nine elements and loosely defines crime as

a social construct learned from the individual's environment and close relationships, like many other behaviors. Sutherland theorizes that the more an individual is exposed to "criminal" behavior, the more likely they are to integrate this behavior into their worldview (Sutherland 89, qtd. in Pino). Lee, for example, has normalized the act of carrying a loaded gun, beating a man on the subway, and using opioids, probably because his peers often do the same. Sutherland likens the process of adopting criminality to the process by which an individual learns a Southern accent: "any person inevitably assimilates the surrounding culture unless other patterns are in conflict; a Southerner does not pronounce 'r' because other Southerners do not pronounce 'r'" (*Principles of Criminology* 89). Unlike accent patterns, though, "differential associations," or encounters that may reinforce criminal or anti-criminal behaviors, do not have to happen all the time for an individual to practice criminal behavior (24). Like addiction, the pattern gradually increases its hold on the individual.

Death—A. A cause of ruin; a permanent cessation of all vital functions: the end of life. B. The beginning of rebirth; the part of the regenerative cycle of existence that corresponds to "junk-sickness" in *Junky*.

Destabilization—A. Causing something to be incapable of functioning or surviving. B. Any destructive force that causes disorientation to the self or society.

Destroy—A. To ruin the structure, organic existence, or condition of something. B. To propel towards death, rot/entropy, and rebirth.

Drug—A. Substance used as medication or in the preparation of medication. B. This term covers a broad swath of topics. In some cases, drugs can be destabilizers of the self and one's perceptions. Other drugs heighten the functions of the brain, alter the

tissues in the body, or dull/sharpen the senses. Many such as hallucinogens were criminalized because they were counterproductive to societal stability and order, affecting individuals' mood, complacency, or sleep patterns. Others were criminalized in order to target the marginalized groups who used them (Pino). According to Lindesmith, "the first effects of the drug are to produce disturbances of normal bodily functions," but after continued use and eventual dependence, the body establishes a "new body equilibrium or 'drug balance'" within which these functions "seem to return to normal" (32)—at least until the drug supply is cut off. Opiates and alcohol fall into this category, altering the body to create dependency.

Entropy—A. In the field of physics, the degree of disorder or uncertainty within a system. B. A process of destruction, death, and disorder that must take place before rebirth can begin. In *Junky* terms, the junk-sickness that happens before the addict can become sober, "which involves shrinking of the organism and replacement of the junk-dependent cells" (*Junky* xli).

Gang—A. A group of persons working to unlawful or antisocial ends; a group of persons working together. B. N/A. Burroughs does not refer to street-groups as "gangs," even when encountering characters whose behavior or dress might signify gang association. Groups of addicts who do have another common identity include the "young hipsters" (123) and "pushers" (113, 125), but even in Mexico the word "gang" does not enter Lee's lexicon or his concept of addict criminality. I believe he intentionally avoids the term as having particularly "fugitive intentions" (Burroughs 133), since in the 21st century the word *gang* has more criminal connotations than *peddler* or *pusher*, both of which Lee uses often. Lindesmith also refrains from using the word *gang*, unfortunate

because this might have provided a clue of its mid-century connotations. However, it's safe to assume that Burroughs also avoided the word in order to prevent his readers from associating his characters with violent individuals, or because gangs were defined differently in his era than in ours. Criminality became synonymous with gang activity after the book's era, so the drug running in which Lee and associates are involved would not likely be characterized as gang behavior in Burroughs' worldview.

Junk—A. A colloquialism for opiates; synonymous with *dope*, *tar*, *M*, etc. (see *Morphine*). B. An invasive drug that acts as a rapid propellant in the cycle of rebirth; after addiction, it represents normalcy and stability for the addict, but destruction when the junk runs out. This is why, according to *Junky's* narrator Bill Lee, few individuals get clean through their own volition. Instead, they are incarcerated or must leave the city where they have been residing.

Language—A. A systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings. B. A destabilizing, slippery force, because effective communication relies on the assumption of understanding between users. The “language” of junk, according to *Junky's* Glossary, is “made up of words whose intentions are fugitive,” in that they change meanings depending on the time and place they are spoken, and are employed to evade understanding and hide communication from the forces of stability and authority, like police and government. According to Jacques Derrida,

Language invaded the universal problematic; [the moment] in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, when everything became a

system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. (Macksey and Donato, eds., *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, 248, qtd. in *Contexts for Criticism* 355)

A problem with language, then, is that it has no firm anchor or origin in a concrete object. The people communicating within a language system all have to agree on what each word signifies before communication can be effective. Furthermore, words are defined by their differences from other words, so – for example -- the word *up* would have no meaning if the word *down* didn't exist, likewise with the words *suffering* and *relief*. Derrida calls this phenomenon a “decentered” system (355), because, instead of radiating from a common center, the system is composed of binaries whose words are relative to each other, each binary having its own center.

Morphine—A. A drug which is derived from opium and is used for relaxation, sleep, and to alleviate pain. B. The protagonist's drug of choice in *Junky*. Lindesmith shares German investigator Erlenmeyer's writings, who quotes Terry and Pellens' *The Opiate Problem* (Terry and Pellens 1928, qtd. in Lindesmith 7), to describe the little-known phenomenon of morphine-sickness:

The continued administration of morphine exerts an entirely different effect on a morphinism [sic] from that exerted by a single medium dose of morphine injected into a healthy person. While this latter causes nausea...heart weakness, and lowering of the blood pressure, the former occasions...namely pleasant feeling[s], euphoria, increased power, and...invigoration of the pulse. ...By what means and at what time of the

continued abuse does this reversal of effect take place? ...The morphine, originally foreign to the body, becomes an intrinsic part of the body. ...It then acquires the significance and effectiveness of a heart tonic, of an indispensable element of nutrition and subsistence, of a means of carrying on the business of the entire organism. ...If morphine is withdrawn before this reversal, the abstinence symptoms do not appear. (Terry and Pellens 601-2, qtd. in Lindesmith 7)

While this description is rather dated, it corresponds well with Burroughs' understanding that the pain of withdrawals happens because the body's cells rely on the drug the way the body relies on food. It also makes clear that a study of addiction can't be limited to individuals in the early stages, because the effects of the drug change over time. The compulsion to repeat a behavior that caused nausea and heart weakness the first time, however, is probably due to the same factors outlined by Lindesmith in his consideration of criminality: an abundance of opportunity, and an individual interacting with others who are doing the same thing.

Renewal—A. The state in which something is restored to a healthier existence; to do again, repeat. B. A part of the process of an addict kicking the habit, moving from “plant back to animal...from death back to life” (Burroughs 138) – cellular renewal that takes place after the destruction of junk-sickness, and which is part of a recurring cycle. Moving “from death back to life” (138) engenders overpowering hunger, usually for sweets, which Bill Lee calls “getting the chucks” (56).

Sobriety—A. A state in which one is sparing in the use of food and drink; not addicted to intoxicating substances; unhurried, serious. B. A form of stability that is more

sustainable than addiction but is especially vulnerable to destruction through relapse.

Many addicts experience periods of abstinence that can range from days to years.

According to Lindesmith, the motivation for sobriety, or to be “cured,” surfaces due to “the social stigma attached to addiction and the fact that the habit becomes a burden

when the beginning euphoria vanishes and physical dependence is fully established”

(137). For Bill Lee, aversion to social stigma plays less of a role than the burdens of the habit; more often than not, he gets clean against his will, stays clean for a period of months or years, and then shoulders the burdens again.

Society—A. An organized group working together or periodically meeting because of common interests, beliefs, or professions. B. A source and enforcer of stability, usually for the mutual benefit of its participants and leaders. Bill Lee implies that the society of junkies, whose common interest is feeding their habits, is no less orderly than the suburban society of the Midwest.

Stabilization—A. A state in which the current situation is made permanent, unvarying, stable; an effort to limit the fluctuations of something (price, population, etc.). B. The step in the cycle that comes after renewal and before destruction; stability is synonymous with order, security, predictability, and safety. These same factors, however, cause an individual to atrophy because they have no reason to exercise themselves mentally or physically. They are in no danger and they want for nothing, so their unused mental and physical faculties shrink. Represented by the American Midwest of Bill Lee’s childhood, in which violence scares him and he first resolves to smoke opium. Aware of his own state of shrinkage, he attempts to join the army after college, but is rejected and then stumbles upon junk. The drug, signifying destruction of Lee’s childhood stability,

gives him “the real need for money [he] had never had before” (Burroughs, *Junky* xl). In disrupting and disorienting his ordered life, in giving him a sense of urgency and insecurity, junk propels Lee through his first cycle from stability to destruction to renewal. It is important to note that neither stability nor instability has positive or negative connotations. People tend to feel aversion to instability, but it is a neutral step in a logical cycle.

“The streets”—A. N/A. A colloquial term with multiple meanings; may be a low-income environment with instances of homelessness, prostitution, drug-use and drug-sale, and some violence. Without necessary income to purchase and furnish a stable environment for themselves, people “on the streets” may sleep, eat, and live there. The streets of a city may also refer to the city itself, more likely downtown or where all of the above happens. B. An environment where drugs are sold. Propelled by a desire to make money from selling drugs, street culture is often a source of violent disputes.

Violence—A. The use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy. B. Anything destabilizing to society or the individual; it may be physical or psychological. Intravenous drug use, for example, is both physically and psychologically violent because it destabilizes the self.

Withdrawals—A. The syndrome of often painful physical and psychological symptoms that follow discontinuance of an addictive drug; the act of taking back or away something that has been granted or possessed. B. Violence to/death of the body’s cells; the rot that makes rebirth possible; an allergic reaction to a lack of junk, as the dependent cells die and are replaced. Also known as “junk sickness”; according to Lindesmith, the pain or “hook” of withdrawals turns the addict’s experience from one of “escape” to one

of “avoidance...as the user tries to space his shots so as to prevent withdrawal distress” (74). Once beginning users learn to associate sickness with abstinence from the drug, they may involuntarily dig themselves deeper into a habit in an effort to avoid the symptoms of withdrawal.

ii. Crime, Deviance and Addiction

Junky is, overtly, the chronicle of a world that was kept hidden from the broader public of the mid 20th century. As Burroughs states, junk forms a type of in-group with its own language, lifestyle, territory, and hand-gestures: “There is a junk gesture that marks the junky like a limp wrist marks the fag: the hand swings out from the elbow stiff-fingered, palm up” (25). One primary goal of *Junky*, then, like Alfred Lindesmith’s goals in his *Addiction and Opiates*, is to document this underground lifestyle as well as the way the addicts reflect on themselves and their world. Both texts focus more on the addict’s inner world than his or her habits.

Similarly, I intend to emphasize the internal, psychological nature of Bill Lee’s journey before I examine the text’s aspects of criminality. In the original introduction to the “Junk” manuscript, Bill Lee seeks to reveal the lack of connection between crime and drug-use, as well as debunk other myths he perceives around opiate addiction. Some correlation between crime and drug-use is natural because of the addict’s need for money to fuel their habit, pushing some of them to commit petty crimes that can be violent towards each other and society. But many of these addicts, in accordance with Burroughs’ claims, have day-jobs and families, and work for the money used in their opiate habit, much like the addicts interviewed by Lindesmith. Lindesmith’s examination of crime is only offered as it relates to the addicts he interviews, and for how it clarifies their reflections upon themselves.

He first claims that drug use does not always cause addiction (3), and that the book’s definition of addiction is an amorphous one: instead, “the focus of theoretical attention must be on those aspects of addiction which may reasonably be regarded as

basic or essential in the sense that they are invariably manifested by all types of addicts regardless of place, time, method of use, social class, and other similar variable circumstances” (4). The rest of his study focuses on public policy concerning addiction, revealing that rehabilitation practices in the U.S. are “cruel and ineffective” (4) and proposing that the problem be dealt with on a medical rather than criminal basis. This would require legalization of these addictive drugs, or a change in policy regarding those who carry them. Lindesmith derived all these theories from “observing addicts and conversing with them” himself (5). The first hypothesis born out of these meetings is that “individuals who do not know what drug they are receiving do not become addicted and, on the positive side, that they become addicted when they know what they are getting and have taken it long enough to experience withdrawal distress.” This hypothesis was dismantled “almost at once” by contrary evidence from a doctor who knowingly received morphine for a long enough period of time, and did not become addicted (7). Lindesmith draws from Dr. Albrecht Erlenmeyer in suggesting that the addictive qualities are in the “craving” for the drug, and not in awareness of its ingestion. Awareness of withdrawal distress, however, plays a more significant role in the progressive cycle of addiction. As long as the individual doesn’t associate the drug with the swift and intense relief that comes from the first shot when sick, addiction is less likely. Lindesmith’s ultimate conclusion “involved a shift in emphasis from the individual’s recognition of withdrawal distress to his use of the drug to alleviate the distress after this insight has occurred” (8). Therefore, the cognitive aspect of addiction—the individual associating their distress with painful interruption of previous use of the drug—is crucial to developing a habit, or else the addict wouldn’t associate relapse with relief. The same thing is observed in

experiments on animals dependent upon opiates: the drug works through both positive and negative reinforcement, acting directly on the inner brain's reward centers and creating a "hook" so that the addict is at once drawn toward the euphoria yet fearful of oncoming withdrawal. Their fear of later suffering, however, usually turns out to be weaker than their desire for pleasure or relief—most will use the drug despite knowing that it will bring on sickness later.

Lindesmith notes that the group of addicts he studies are in no sense "representative" of the larger population, since his goal was not to make "a statistical description of the variable attributes...of American addicts," but to find a "general theory of addiction...to describe the nature of the experience from which the user's craving...is derived" (12). In these respects, Lindesmith's study and *Junky* have similar goals.

However, Bill Lee's first experiences with morphine don't involve withdrawal symptoms. Even when he is "shooting every day" (*Junky* 16), he does not experience sickness. When he does, he is aware of its causes because he spends time around other users, and has already watched them go through cycles of sickness and health. Lindesmith describes the "causal" process of addiction—understanding and avoidance of withdrawal symptoms—that he assumed would "be found in all cases of addiction and...not be found in any case of non-addiction" (15), and which is also a cyclical process of stabilization and destabilization.

Like Burroughs, Lindesmith attempts to create a profile of the so-called "normal" addict – an addict without any of the personal histories that are typically expected in such individuals: "no evidence of defects, inferiority feelings, inadequacy, etc." (17). Bill Lee falls into this category, having had a stable upbringing and source of income. Lindesmith

attributes this sort of addict to the complicated nature of human psychology, after noting that his theories may only apply to certain groups of addicts, and that there are an abundance of exceptions to each theory. The traits that researchers associate with deviance—feelings of inferiority or an unstable upbringing—assume “the possibility of discovering ordered patterns in the behavior of the individual.” But human nature is “too complex, too dynamic, too indeterminate...to be dealt with in any other way than in the aggregate or the average” (18). Thus, to discover the true nature of need, how it mutates into addiction, and how the cycles of rebirth and destruction both play out upon the human body, researchers must rely on the individual stories of those such as Bill Lee.

II. FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF DESTRUCTION

While human nature may be too complex to accurately predict the effects of opiate dependency, one thing is certain: the cycle continues whether the addict wills it or not. The phenomenon of addiction, if *Junky* is seen allegorically, is analogical to the most extreme human need, and the lengths to which we go to see it filled. Almost as soon as Bill Lee discovers a supply of morphine in New York, the charismatic Roy is there to warn him: “It’s the worst thing that can happen to a man,” he says of opiates. “We all think we can control it at first. Sometimes we don’t want to control it” (7). The idea of control versus desire is one major theme of *Junky*—be it society’s control over its members, junk’s control over the addict, or language’s control over its users. Focusing on the last item in this list, Robin Lydenberg cites as a theme in *Naked Lunch* the “arbitrary violence of language as a system of naming and representation” (55), presumably because it imposes on users a tyrannical dependence. Society, junk, and language control their users in similar ways, either by offering what is needed or threatening to take it away. Patterns of destruction, rot and rebirth connect Lee’s journey through addiction to others’ journeys to fulfill their own needs. Most often, what we need causes stability, or a sense of it—money, food, validation, junk—while the loss of it causes fear, insecurity, and mental unraveling. It’s only natural we seek a sense of control over resources, especially ones that fulfill our needs. This attempt to control junk-dependency is what Roy describes as “the worst thing to happen to a man” (7). The placement of this statement in the text, which appears after Lee’s first time shooting morphine and before he and Roy use up all their supply, foreshadows the destruction that threatens to carry Lee away. The description of his first high is also filled with imagery of death and rot:

A series of pictures passed, like watching a movie: A huge, neon-lighted cocktail bar that got larger and larger until streets, traffic, and street repairs were included in it; a waitress carrying a skull on a tray; stars in a clear sky. The physical impact of the fear of death; the shutting off of breath; the stopping of blood.

I dozed off and woke up with a start of fear. Next morning I vomited and felt sick until noon. (Burroughs, *Junky* 6)

However, as *Junky* confirms, the inner-self death that Lee experiences is unpleasant, and yet necessary in order to make possible the rebirth of Lee the junky. In the vision, Burroughs contextualizes death and silence with images of color, noise, and even renewal (street repairs). Almost following the pattern of the cycle, the next image is one of a skull on a tray, which suggests the destruction of the brain or absence of the body. Lee often likens his addict associates to plants, in that they move little and feel no pain; the increase of Lee's plant-body implies the decrease of his animal-body, signified by the bodiless head. His physical self is absent, dulled of all sensation by junk. The body becomes reliant on the opiate as if it were food, signified by the waitress and tray, and the destructive act of *needing* the drug is signified by the severed skull. While some needs are biologically natural, needs initiated by outside forces influence people to give up their free will and dignity, and they eventually become dependent on the addictive substance in the same way the body is dependent on food. Not surprisingly, Lee often meets his connections at diners, appropriate since he does find nourishment there.

Other symbols of death Lee sees in his junk-dreams are centipedes, which “result from the death of affect,” according to “William S. Burroughs and the Gods of Death:

The Uses of Archaeology” (Wild 54). In other words, the emotionless junky is embodied by the centipede, a visceral image that readers more or less will imagine similarly as some sort of archetype. Wild notes that it may be Mayan in origin. In *Junky*, centipedes appear in a dream of New York as a wasteland (*Junky* 28), linking them to a human-less place. Their difference in form from humans may suggest the junky’s dwindling humanity, losing emotions as well as life-force. Earlier in the text, Lee ponders a worm that scientists shrunk and enlarged, prolonging its life indefinitely (xli), and suggests it is an analogy for the junky; however, the centipede is linked to his vision of a wasteland. The revulsion inspired by both centipede and wasteland may signify the revulsion Lee feels toward death.

This may be Lee’s subconscious fear of overdose, or the “aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh” (*Junky* 128) making itself known. The “shutting off of breath; the stopping of blood” (6) in his earlier vision are all images of suffocation and stasis that scare Lee awake. He is descending towards a lifestyle of movement, chaos, and instability; the image of his body in stillness causes Lee fear even as he risks overdosing. The next morning, he is sick—not yet from withdrawal, as he hasn’t used the drug long enough, but from a kind of nausea caused by early use of the drug. This, too, foreshadows the deeper sickness to follow. Roy describes it in such fearful terms because, while bystanders and acquaintances may be aware of Lee’s progressive disease, Lee is only aware of the present craving. He may experience bursts of clarity in which he sees himself truly, but these moments are uncomfortable to the addict and often buried until recovery.

The long-term effects of the use of morphine are hard to determine at the outset, but Roy understands that, because Lee has access to it and the income with which to get it, he is vulnerable to its breakneck cycles. It isn't the junk that they seek to control, even though the junk is the source of their fulfillment. Ultimately, Roy, Lee, and the other characters of the text seek to control or halt the life-death-life cycle. At first, Roy is the one selling "syrettes" of junk to Lee (7), but this doesn't imply that Roy intends to lure Lee toward destruction. Both are already sick, and both are caught in the cycle.

This contagious self-destruction is one thing that Lindesmith explores in his second chapter, "The Effects of Opiates." In a desire to more deeply understand his subjects, Lindesmith points out that a "nondrinker engaged in the study of alcoholics might deliberately get drunk once himself in order to understand his subjects better" (23). However, he argues against this approach for the study of opiate addicts, in part because the early effects of the drug are so different from the effects on one who is physically dependent, and more significantly because "it is doubtful whether anyone can use morphine long enough to acquire the same experiences as an addict without himself becoming one" (23). Lindesmith senses the underlying current of need that indiscriminately swallows any who spend too long in junk's vicinity. The chemicals it induces in the human brain mimic our most primal needs for connection and safety—truly, the addicts are after the same thing as everyone else, but have learned to get it in a form transmitted through junk. Burroughs uses the medium of literature to describe this process, and the result is a novel that is an accurate description of the trajectory of his narrator's addiction. The author may have only had some formal schooling in archaeology, but "acute insights may come from those not thoroughly trained, but

intimately involved with their subject through their lived experience” (Darke and Farrell 2305). Critics have called Burroughs’ texts “autoethnographies” because the author’s experience with his subject allows him to express “views on addiction, treatment, polydrug use and psychopathology” (2307) that give addicts a voice and humanize them to the 1950s public. However, Kathryn Hume reminds us of “a major tension at the heart of Burroughs’ literary impulses...his sense of being born into the wrong world” (112). Perhaps the world of addiction inhabited by Bill Lee seemed alienated from the world of his parents or neighbors, and made it difficult to get help from anyone but fellow junkies or through a stint in jail. In another of Hume’s articles, she discusses “alien otherworlds” such as Burroughs’ Egyptian universe in his 1987 *The Western Lands*. Hume posits that these “otherworlds” are at play because “in the views of these writers, most Americans are spiritually dead” (“Books of the Dead” 417). This harkens back to T.S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland,” which clothes humanity’s existence in a spiritual wasteland. Lee, too, has visions of the wasteland as the future. The addictive underworld Lee inhabits, however, with its constant cycles of death and renewal, is a world different from the “spiritually dead” environment inhabited by other Americans. To Lee, perhaps this is the superior choice.

However, far from being alienated from others, Lee’s addiction signifies something resonant within the human mind, which Burroughs calls “the algebra of need” (*Naked Lunch*). A person’s need or want for something legal or illegal, especially if society imposes it on the individual (like junk or money), is the propellant for each phase in the cycle. Often, only society can provide for the particular “needs” it creates in the individual, which means that the individual pays society for something they believe they

need. The individual retains autonomy throughout the whole process, treating the imposed need like food or water—if running low, they seek it at all costs. This is an opportunity for easy money across many levels of the system, since the drug needs minimal marketing, can be transported with relative ease, and creates what author Mark Ungar calls “a network of criminality, which “responds more to the exchange of goods—money, information, power—than to the public good” (301). Once dependent, populations of users demand an unlimited amount of the drug. As Burroughs’ “algebra of need” reveals, the money made is just as addictive as the product, and both dealer and user are captured within its cycles. Even if the drug being sold becomes unhealthy for or destructive to the individual, they often fail to maintain stability without it because this destruction only happens after they become physically dependent.

For Lee and many others in *Junky*, the object imposed on them or their peers is junk, followed by the sense of stability provided by it. In order to achieve stability without junk, users would have to endure long periods of intolerable sickness before experiencing the renewal of their sober selves. Even then, their brains would be left with few chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin, and boredom would set in as well as depression. This pendulum action, through which the addict swings between sobriety and addiction, is another form of the cycle.

In Lee’s case, the pendulum swings back toward the inevitable destruction within a few months, destroying his sober self in exchange for renewal of his stabilized addict self. The cause of his relapses throughout the text are unclear—it may be as simple as finding money in a stranger’s wallet (85)—except that the need for junk already imposed on him invades his system like a virus. Once in control, the junk usurps Lee’s natural

needs with its own rhythms. Opiates may limit hunger, sex drive, and the body's reflexes—all extremely animal characteristics, causing Lee's body to become malnourished or weakened because he ignores its natural needs in favor of the imposed need for junk. The difference between the two is complicated: food is nourishing, but doesn't inspire the same chemical reaction in the brain as junk, which is not nourishing. Neither are what they seem to the brain; both are needs, either imposed or natural, and therefore they compete. For an addict such as Lee, the imposed need for junk usually wins out over food.

Allan Johnston's "Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation," sheds light on Burroughs' "basic formula of 'evil' virus" (Burroughs xxxix), and how it asserts control over dependent individuals. Burroughs discusses the viral, "anti-life" qualities of "total need" (xxxix), which facilitates desperation in the individual and makes them vulnerable to manipulation by outside forces just as the virus influences the healthy cell. According to Johnston, the desperation which total need can cause in an individual is the first part of this formula; manipulation of need by society is the second part (109). Burroughs makes this point using the metaphor of a virus, which "can exhibit living qualities only in a host by using the life of another—the renunciation of life itself" which takes over the living body (*Naked Lunch* 134). In the same sense, junk is parasitic, anti-biological matter, a virus that imitates life.

Both junk and money are false providers of happiness, fulfillment, and even nourishment. Money's power is the false security it provides the individual, which results from its exchange value in society. While money doesn't nourish the individual, it's a

means to that end. According to Johnston, “the predominance of means-ends rationalism has promoted...development to such an extent that...humans largely serve as means of production and consumption” (106). The junkies themselves, and the dealers who serve them, are groups commodified and exploited by the levels of the pyramid above them. Johnston claims that post-war American society is especially guilty of authoritarian homogeneity, due to the “increased production and wealth” (107). The excesses and decadence of American lives, far from causing safety and stability, actually hurried the cycle along towards destruction and de-individualization. By meeting its citizens’ needs completely, American society also insured that they would be totally dependent on its “services,” thereby assimilating them via created need.

Society’s goal is to assimilate the individual by creating total need, stabilizing citizens by forcing them to over-consume. Whether that society is providing money or drugs, the individual becomes dependent and passive. In this sense “total need” is a stabilizing force, locking the individual into their place in society by using their needs as a carrot and stick; at the same time, it undermines the person’s individuality. The resulting decadence that society encourages in the individual can cause existential rot, atrophy from too many needs met without requiring the individual to work for them (Johnston 107-8).

The destructive powers of mindless, total need, manifested in *Junky* as heroin dependency, stem from its parasitic transformation of the organism. A human may destroy themselves because of their dependency on love, and their mindless pursuit of it at all costs, just as easily as Lee destroys himself pursuing junk. After all, junk is nothing

but a symbol of well-being, or a sense of completion, and humans pursue these things in different ways than drug addiction.

However, it is important to draw the distinction between *natural* needs and “manipulated” or “imposed” needs (Johnston 108). An organism in a natural state of life isn’t likely to destroy itself in search of its biological needs, such as food. It eats, it becomes full and reaches a state of stability, and then it stops eating and moves its attention elsewhere. Manipulated needs, such as heroin addiction, act more pathologically. The junky shoots up, becomes full—but does not turn his/her attention elsewhere. Instead, the attention remains fixated on the junk: the amount left, or the next score. Johnston and Burroughs both liken this to fixation on money. For both, there never seems to be enough, and scarcity causes the dependent organism to focus all its efforts on gaining more, no matter the cost. The created need holds the organism magnetically, causing the inner brain to act as if it’s a natural need. Money, especially, is biologically senseless: its value is created by society, it does not benefit the body, and societies must train their citizens to recognize it as equivalent to resources. People have been manipulated into valuing it over their natural needs: money can buy food, but it cannot be eaten, which makes it an unnatural need created by society.

Junk is almost the same, as Burroughs suggests in *Naked Lunch*, because “[opium] is profane and quantitative like money” (xxxix). According to Johnston,

[Junk] represents the fullest achievement of the “created need” that Burroughs saw as dominating society. It therefore suggests the degradation faced by individuals caught in this sort of need-centered web: “The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the

consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client. He pays his staff in junk” (*Naked Lunch* xxxix).

The algebra of need supports itself by creating dependencies, not only in its intended “victims,” but also in its perpetrators. (Johnston 108)

This is the “face of evil” Burroughs describes in *Naked Lunch* (xxxix), and the economic equation that explains the “algebra” of need: “many junk pyramids feeding peoples of the world and all built on basic principles of monopoly,” which models all economic interaction (*Naked Lunch* xxxix). If not for its controlling qualities, total need might not be so toxic; however, all life is controlled by needs. But the falsity of junk causes destruction to the body and mind through neglect of every other natural need, and also accelerates the destruction-renewal cycle. Other false needs, too, usurp the natural ones, and exert power over individuals who get caught in the web of fulfilling them.

Such economic destruction of the lower tiers of the pyramid, which is comprised of the ones who buy the junk and don’t profit from it, runs parallel with the cellular and psychological destruction users inflict on themselves. The “cellular equation” of junk that Bill Lee learns in *Junky* (xli) is a physical and psychological version of the economic equation Johnston discusses (108). Psychologically, “created need” works permanent changes in the inner reptilian brain, or the basal ganglia (NIDA), in order to sustain itself. Once established in the individual, the need “degrades and simplifies” its host (*Naked Lunch* xxxix) like a parasite, so that they are even more hard-pressed to be rid of it.

The basal ganglia, the deepest and oldest lobe of the brain, “plays an important role in positive forms of motivation, including the pleasurable effects of healthy activities

like eating, socializing, and sex” (NIDA). Drugs that affect dopamine receptors, such as heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamines, cause a flood of reward chemicals unique to drug-use. Heroin causes a lower output than meth, but for a longer duration of time; in both drugs, the main component of their addictive qualities is the speed with which they affect the brain, or the “kick,” in Burroughs’ words.

With repeated use, the reward pathways become accustomed to receiving this kick, and because the kick uses up so much dopamine, there is little to spare on anything natural—food, sex, and socializing (NIDA). The result is the addict, who in Burroughs’ words resembles a plant in that they have no desire to eat, fornicate, or socialize. Over and over, the drug produces the dopamine, and the food does not. This signal “causes changes in neural connectivity that make it easier to repeat the activity again and again without thinking about it.” Additionally, “the brain of someone who misuses drugs adjusts by producing fewer neurotransmitters in the reward circuit. ...[Consequently] the person's ability to experience pleasure from naturally rewarding (i.e., reinforcing) activities is also reduced” (NIDA). Especially in the case of heroin, the sickness combined with the habituated brain makes control impossible, as Roy says to Lee in *Junky* (7). Not that this stops them from trying—the junky’s dream is to remain in a state of “fixed-ness,” totally content, and only possible during the brief phase which I call “addicted stability.” (This phrase is an oxymoron for any who have experienced the destructive nature of addiction.) Usually, the addict destroys themselves in the search for it, propelling themselves out of stability.

It is little wonder that they will go to such destructive lengths to satisfy what the inner brain believes is the broadest path to safety. Cognitive abilities and personal

discipline have nothing to do with addiction—the inner brain understands the drug to be a biological need, and in the end stages of the disease the addict becomes a “blind, seeking mouth” (*Naked Lunch* 7). Due to the opiate’s powers of mimicry, like a virus mimics bacteria, the inner mind believes that addiction is natural, not imposed need.

No addict intends destruction at the outset of their drug-use, or even deep into their addiction. In *Junky*, the cycle begins with destruction of the pathways making up Lee’s normal life, and replacement of those pathways with a junk-habit. This is the first category of destruction that will be assessed, labeled here as “psychological destruction.” Under this category is the least noticeable consequence of drug-use: destruction of the psychological self, the ego. This manifests as economic self-destruction (using all one’s grocery money to buy junk, for example), as well as loss of previous likes and dislikes, habits, outlooks on life, and efforts to change. All energy goes to scoring, not to self-actualization or emotional development. In this sense junk is distinct from such imposed needs as money and language—it is more viral and destructive, replacing the individual’s personal characteristics in a matter of months.

The second category of destruction evident in *Junky* is physical, and the most noticeable. This physical destruction can be of self or others and happens during addiction as well as when one is kicking the habit. More obvious is the gradual bodily destruction caused by the needle breaking the skin, and the resulting scar tissue that signifies continued abuse. The lengths to which the addict goes to get money, such as robbery, often end with destruction of others. Lee’s first physically violent episode happens while he is robbing passed-out drunks on the subway: he breaks a drunken man’s

ribs after the “lush” wakes and makes a scene (*Junky* 32). It seems that, in the vicinity of need, destabilization and chaos follow. When needs are met, stability returns.

However, due to physical dependence on the drug, Lee’s needs are never met for long. In John Galliher’s “Lindesmith v. Anslinger,” the author cites Lindesmith’s research that the addict’s interpretation of themselves plays a crucial role in the difference between physical and psychological addiction: “For the physical addiction to develop into psychological addiction,” he writes, “the person’s interpretation of his own withdrawal distress is a crucial event...made possible by the existence of language behavior and conceptual thought” (Lindesmith and Strauss 355, qtd. in Galliher). When addicts, seeing themselves as objects affected by external forces, realize that their symptoms are a result of withdrawals, they attempt to fix the problem with another dose. In contrast to withdrawal symptoms is a person’s reaction to the flu, which has the same symptoms—however, very little will make it go away, and usually the individual must settle in and ride out the illness. But withdrawals, which seem identical to the flu except for the depression they cause, can be fixed. Knowledge of this fact causes the addict to fixate on making themselves feel better—probably the reason that shooting heroin is colloquially known as “fixing”—and with this knowledge they are more likely to become psychologically-dependent. The addict repeatedly associates the drug with not only euphoria, but *relief* from sickness. This is another imposed need that rewires the frontal lobe as well as the basal ganglia. Once the person is physically dependent and aware of their condition, they are, as Burroughs calls it, “on junk time. When his junk is cut off, the clock runs down and stops. All he can do is hang on [through the withdrawals] and wait for non-junk time to start. A sick junky has no escape from external time, no place to

go. He can only wait” (*Junky* 72). Here readers are reminded of the cycle again, from stability on junk to stability off junk, with the destruction/renewal—described as *hanging on and waiting*—in between.

The awareness of the self as sick, and the addicts’ knowledge that they can feel better if they only score, makes escaping addiction more difficult. As Burroughs writes in *Junky*, the duration of withdrawal symptoms is “the reason it is practically impossible to stop using and cure yourself.... Twelve hours of it would be easy, twenty-four possible, but five to eight days is too long” (78). This may be an understatement, as sickness for a heavy habit is usually closer to ten days. The first three days, during which destruction of the junk-dependent cells is most keen, are dominated by a depressive state. Curing oneself is possible, allowing the vindicated addict to move into the renewing phase of the cycle, but to do so they often relinquish all personal control over their lives. Either in jail or a rehabilitation facility, they, ironically, must give up their free will in order to regain control over their lives. The needs the individual had been allowing to control them, such as opiate use, die with time. After the torturous renewal phase, the addict may venture out into the world a new person. However, since destruction follows stability, they are likely to cycle back into addiction, as Lee does repeatedly, and then cycle back through the sickness. The repeated destruction and regrowth of the body’s cells causes Burroughs to claim that “the addict never stops growing” (*Junky* xli). However, this growth taxes the addict with near-constant sickness and uncertainty.

Because the major symptoms of withdrawals are psychological, getting through this phase requires positive thought, and destruction of the old wiring and thought-patterns. If Lee does achieve this, the narration devotes little page space to it.

Lindesmith's work confirms the value of positive thought and self-esteem in treating addiction, but Galliher compares his work to that of another researcher, Harry Anslinger, whose opinions form the basis for criminalization of addiction. Anslinger's work directly contrasts with my assertions, but is a useful example of the government's policy on addicts in Burroughs' era. Anslinger, appointed head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in 1930 (Galliher 664), successfully used "law enforcement to control public opinion regarding drug use and addiction" (665). By linking drugs to minorities and requiring licenses for importation of opiates (causing drug companies to be dependent on the FBN for their profits), Anslinger created a culture of fear and censorship in 1930s America. "Truth," writes Galliher of Anslinger's regime, "becomes a function of power rather than factual accuracy" (666). Lindesmith's rival was given power to define addiction, safety, and danger for the public, in order to progress his own agenda. Moreover, law enforcement under Anslinger was given enormous power to pursue the criminalization of addiction. Therefore, these supposed agents of stability became destroyers of the destabilizing underground culture, enforcing their own version of stability through destruction of a perceived "Other" in their society.

This censorship and "neutralization of Lindesmith's early research" (Galliher 667) is a form of societal destruction. According to Anslinger, the addict isn't sick; he/she is an agent of destruction, by their own volition, of societal security. But criminalization of the addict to keep the rest of society secure results in its own kind of destruction. These untruths, disseminated by Anslinger and the FBN, were directly opposed by Burroughs' work—especially in the introduction to the original "Junk" manuscript, where he spends considerable time debunking then-contemporary myths

about addiction (*Junky* 139). Among the beliefs debunked are that addicts want to get others addicted, that escape from the habit is impossible, and that addicts, while they may get their fill for one day, can “never get enough” to be satiated (141).

Once Anslinger’s myths are debunked, perceived danger of addiction and the drug decreases. Junk may be destructive to society and the individual, but only because it is one of the societally created needs. It may be more precise to say that the most destructive force is the “total need” that results from addiction, and not junk itself. This need results in crime and destabilization, but if an addict has enough money and enough junk, he/she is less likely to destroy the fabric of society than is the representative of the FBN who makes truth “a function of power” (Galliher 666).

Nevertheless, societal destruction may be inflicted by the self on society, or society on the self. While crime may be a type of psychological destruction, I categorize it as societal because it causes damage to a society’s sense of security and economy. There is plenty of overlap between the three categories. Rehabilitation, for example, may correspond to physical destruction if the addict is junk-dependent, because withdrawal sickness causes cellular death. Four institutions of stability that may be categorized as societally destructive are rehabilitation centers, the government, suburbia, and jail: all seem to propel an individual towards any category of destruction, precisely because they impose stability. The prologue to *Junky* espouses a similar phenomenon when Lee discusses the “comfortable capsule” in which he lived as a child (xxxviii) and the indisputable normalcy and stability with which his life began. Though these institutions impose stability like society imposes need, the life-death cycle inevitably draws its participants into destruction, as the only next step available. Though the participants may

try to pause the cycle while stable, hurry through the destruction, or even hurry through the stability, the movement of the cycle is intractable. It heavily influences the humans who are affected by its rhythms, even as they attempt to alter its pattern.

i. Psychological Destruction

Psychological destruction usually manifests within Lee himself: on page one of *Junky*, he uses his trust fund money to purchase and sell a Tommy gun simultaneously with junk. This is to be expected since Lee is living in the post-war underground, where there are surplus weapons of societal and physical destruction. Since they aren't being put to use for their original purposes, warfare, the guns Lee encounters signify physical and not societal destabilization. Curiously, no gun is ever fired in the story. The common thread between junk and guns is that both are destructive to human bonds, although firearms are overt while junk is insidious.

Lee's first experience with junk, for example, is neither violent nor destructive. He wakes from his first high with "a start of fear" (*Junky* 6), while his dreams previous to waking up involve "the physical impact of the fear of death; the shutting off of breath; the stopping of blood" (6). These are physical, tangible words, but the instinctive fear—which Lee experiences repeatedly—is a manifestation of the body's resistance to death. While Lee's conscious mind is drawn to the high, his animal body resists the potential destruction of which Lee is unaware. The words "physical impact" are not physical impacts themselves, but the animal fear that Lee feels is very real to him. The mind plays at words, defining and redefining the junk high, while the body understands the true destructive nature of the addiction. Unfortunately, the mind is mostly in control of the self, so the significance of this "start of fear" is lost on Lee.

The body's instincts may cause it to raise alarm at the presence of junk, but the mind is not so lucky. In Lydenberg's "Notes from the Orifice," the author discusses "parasitism" (60) at work in both junk and words, which contain "precoded message[s] of damage" (*The Job*, Burroughs 200) because they label a body or phenomenon. Burroughs compares this viral, parasitic quality of language with the parasitic quality of junk: both create nothing meaningful unless they have a host, and both baffle the mind but not the body. Returning to the "algebra of need" to connect the psychological and physical need of addiction, Lydenberg states,

As the tyranny of mind turns "live orgones into dead bullshit" (*Naked Lunch* 7), the tyranny of the body turns the life energy of sex and sensory experience into the mindless mechanical responses of pure need. The organ of need is always the orifice—mouth or anus or some vague undifferentiated hole—sucking life out of a host. Like the "blind, seeking mouth" of the junky...the sex addict is alienated from his own body, his own desire. He seeks blindly the same emotionless biological thrill as the junky. (Lydenberg 60)

In this passage readers can detect themes of parasitism, mind over body, psychological addiction over physical, and the "imposed need" that makes use of parasitic forces like money and junk.

Roy is the one who first warns Lee of the impending parasitic cycle into which both of them are slipping. "It's...the worst thing that can happen to a man," he says. "We all think we can control it at first" (*Junky* 7). This lack of control is not only a result of

the mind's bafflement, but also of the "tyranny of the body," which convinces the brain that it needs this parasite to survive (Lydenberg 60).

These forces contribute to the drug's societal and psychological impact, and Lee's cycle of destabilization progresses to the final phase of destruction within a few weeks (or nine pages) of his first shot. Herman, a fellow junky and agent of destabilization, moves into Lee's apartment and both begin "shooting every day" (16). Page eighteen discusses the progression of the disease from the addict's perspective. Lee begins shooting more than he needs to in order to keep up with Roy, so that each gets an equal amount, even though it takes less for Lee to achieve the same high. He stops going out at night, ceases his old habits, and "life telescopes down to junk" (19).

The changes the addict undergoes, Lee says, are difficult to identify and gradual in their onset. He notes that "the addict has a special blind spot so far as the progress of his habit is concerned"; he generally "does not realize he is getting a habit at all" (*Junky* 19). Many would-be addicts, attempting to control the cycle, give themselves rules to follow that they believe will magically insulate them from addiction. These self-imposed guidelines pale before the natural progression of the disease, and can hardly reverse the total rewiring of the inner brain. The addict doesn't always know it, but she is driven by more than her own choices: she is pushed or pulled into this cycle of need by all the factors listed in the beginning of this chapter. For this reason, addiction is now understood to be a disease and not a choice. The addict feels that he is "leading a normal life and that junk is incidental" (*Junky* 19), and there is no moment where he chooses to continue or quit junk. The cycle into which he is drawn happens below his awareness, completely beyond the addict's conscious view.

“It is not until his supply is cut off,” Lee narrates, “that he realizes what junk means to him” (19). This is when the depth of the disease becomes apparent to both the junky *and* their relatives. The vicious anger, depression, or other malignant outbursts that follow a lost shot are shocking—if the inner brain believes that junk is a need, it generates terror and fury when the shot is wasted. Lee himself reports slapping his wife across the face after she knocks his spoon out of his hand. Running out of junk is a different matter altogether. Both situations produce panic in the basal ganglia, just as what our primitive ancestors might have felt after learning that their winter supply of food was gone. Death seems certain. Lee points out to a psychiatrist, “I need junk to get out of bed in the morning...I need it to stay alive” (19). He doesn’t, of course—few people have died as a result of withdrawals from opiates. But the inner brain tells the frontal cortex differently. The need which junk-use generates is powerful in its mimicry, fooling body and brain into believing junk is essential to survival.

Lee and Roy eventually run out for the first time. Roy decides to go to prison at Riker’s Island to initiate the next phases of the cycle, destruction of the addict and renewal into a clean self. Lee, however, tries to prolong stability by shooting codeine into his veins. Instead he almost permanently destroys himself, nearly dying, which emphasizes the uncontrollability of this cycle. Lee progresses into a phase of destruction despite his attempt to stay within the bounds of stability. There is no navigating the cycle: like a whirlpool driving Lee from New York down to Texas, he is forced to spiral whether he wills it or not.

ii. Physical Destruction

The effect of morphine sickness on Lee's acquaintance Jack is the first example of junk's physically-destructive qualities. "The effect was uncanny," says Lee, "A week or so later he would turn up so thin, sallow and old-looking, you would have to look twice to recognize him" (3). From Lee's description of the sickness' progression, we can assume that Jack has only been sick for two to three days, but the impression he presents is that of a starving man. His suffering is only physical, "of the cells alone," because Lee states that "the ego that looked out of the glazed, alert-calm hoodlum eyes—would have nothing to do with this suffering of his rejected other self" (3). I assume that this is Jack's method of coping with repeated junk-sickness, since his reaction is unique in the novel.

Usually the addict will report psychological dependence of every kind, since "the thought of the drug constantly sustains him" (Lindesmith 57), which "intensifies the addict's psychological attachment to the drug much as the scarcity of food intensifies the desire for it and leads persons who are chronically undernourished to overeat when the opportunity presents itself" (91). Jack's situation is dissimilar to this, but there are other Lee associates who are always sick, who never seem to have enough junk, and who ruin their credit with their dealers through overuse. Jack, who does not experience scarcity of junk like the others, "feels assured of adequate supply," and therefore "his concern with the drug would probably be much more comparable to the average American's concern with food" (Lindesmith 91).

The drug still does violence to his cells, but he has dissociated from it. Like the effects of junk, Jack is a participant in purely physical destruction. He talks often of "switching a blade" on someone, and his story of murdering a man in jail marks him to readers as a physically destructive individual, a "cold-blooded killer" (*Junky* 6).

Conversely, Roy, a Texan whom Lee meets around the same time, is the opposite of Jack: pleasant, nonviolent, only into the drug for its psychological annihilation.

The next instance of physical destruction occurs a few weeks later, after plenty of instances of psychological violence. Lee first has to gain a dependency, which does violence to his psyche without his knowledge, before he starts to use physical violence to feed his habit. Morphine's initial effects, says Lindesmith, include "dulling of sensibilities, accompanied by a pleasant...state of mind which is characterized by freedom from pain and worry and by a quickened flow of ideas" (Lindesmith 27). However subtle they are, the changes being worked on the inner brain by these and other effects result in dependency, gradually deconstructing the ego and restructuring the psyche.

Lee cannot experience the physical pain of junk-sickness until he's had time to become physically addicted. His first experience with the sickness is in jail, an institution of stability that seeks to "re-stabilize" the addicts who come through its doors. In this case, the progression from stable addiction, to destructive sickness, to renewal into sobriety takes a minimum of ten days. While here, Lee has a vision of New York that is a result of the intense depression accompanying physical destruction: "Huge centipedes and scorpions crawled in and out of empty bars and cafeterias and drugstores on Forty-second Street. Weeds were growing up through cracks in the pavement. There was no one in sight." (*Junky* 23) Apocalyptic imagery, sometimes Mayan in origin, is common throughout *Junky*, significant because the Mayan civilization famously viewed destruction as positive and necessary for the renewal of a society and its people. Lee's

mental state, which is being destroyed for healthy reasons while he gets clean, is analogous to his vision.

Almost as soon as he leaves jail, he returns to junk, regains his stability as an addict, and begins the cycle anew. Finding himself in need of money, since he had spent the last of his trust fund within a month or two of beginning his addiction, Lee perpetrates violence on another individual for the first time. He works “lushes,” or people passed-out on the subway, for their wallets and jewelry. This is also societally destructive, since those who practice this form of assault commit crimes that affect the safety of the public. While doing this work with Roy, Lee wakes one of the drunks, who comes after them for his wallet. Roy hits the man and urges Lee to kick him, which he does. He feels the man’s ribs break, and the victim does not get up. This blatant physical violence repulses Burroughs’ protagonist, who soon informs Roy that he is “through as a lush-worker” (*Junky* 32).

Needing a new form of violence to pay the bills, he begins selling junk in order to keep up his habit, and reports it to be “a constant strain on nerves”—in other words both psychological and physical violence due to the criminalization of the habit, thanks in part to Anslinger’s control of public opinion to suit his agenda (Galliher 666). One of Lee’s customers, Nick, “looked like the terminal stages of some wasting disease,” a prophetic phrase since few physicians viewed addiction as a disease in Burroughs’ time. Lee guesses that Nick “didn’t waste any money on food,” and looks “harried and desperate” (*Junky* 44) due to his constant search for a kick. Nick is an example of physical self-destruction, which is the effect of subtle psychological self-destruction that had been going on long before the former manifested.

Again, Lee tries to break out of the cycle, or at least hurry himself toward renewal and stability. But the cycle can't be controlled: in attempting the "reduction cure" on his way to Texas, Lee ends up with a worse habit than before – "out of junk and immobilized" by sickness (*Junky* 50). The simple lesson he fails to learn is that there is no way past destruction or renewal: to progress from stable addiction to stable sobriety requires pain, violence, and destabilization. Even renewal's phase can be painful, just as birth is excruciating for human women.

Only when Lee has reached the deepest stage of destruction can he go to Lexington jail for his recovery, discussed in later chapters. This phenomenon is mirrored in addicts and alcoholics the world over, who often refuse rehabilitation until they've "hit rock bottom." As illogical as this is, it's a result of the inner brain's desperate hold on life and its refusal to give up the substance for fear of its own death.

While in Lexington, Lee and the other addicts are "like hungry men who can talk about nothing but food," since their cells are starving for junk. They share "war stories" of their time on the streets. Lee makes it to seven days clean before being discharged. The jail fails in its expressed role as architect of permanent stability: the sickness, even in its final stages, is so violent that Lee scores for paregoric immediately after his discharge.

Even so, after this descent into destruction, the next phase—whether Lee wills it or not—is renewal and stability in a rare bout of sobriety. Lee finds this in Texas, where he stays off junk for four months, but the narrative offers only a sentence or two on his sobriety, after which he begins the cycle anew.

Lee makes his way to New Orleans, which propels him into destruction. The society itself is one of destabilization, in which Lee can never fully gain his bearings. He

narrates that “a complex pattern of tensions, like the electrical mazes devised...to unhinge the nervous systems of white rats...keeps the unhappy pleasure-seekers in a condition of unconsummated alertness.” The city itself “presents a stratified series of ruins” (57). This is a fitting place in order to transition into the next phase of the cycle, which is one of death and destabilization of Lee’s sober self. New Orleans is Humes’ archetype of “the jungle” (Humes 122), whose “jungle lushness [is linked] to female powers that dissolve, rot, or absorb the male” (113), in this case Lee’s old self.

While in New Orleans, he attempts to sell a pistol for junk-money, another overcurrent of physical violence. This pattern happens often in the text: Lee often sells junk and a gun at the same time, or else the firearm comes up around the same time as the junk is bought. I posit that the author is comparing the two symbols, each destructive. While junk is subliminally insidious, and firearms are blatantly violent, each signifies the destabilization of society.

The characters of *Junky* can sell anything for junk. Bill tries selling marijuana for heroin, acting himself as a societally destructive undercurrent. Whether Lee is selling his pistol for the drug, or Bill trades a different drug for the opiate, junk is the commodity and all else amounts to the currency. Likewise, one’s own body can be the currency with which one buys junk. The junkies of the text go to any lengths to fulfill what they perceive as a biological need, like a person starving; all else is peripheral.

However, this need is imposed by outside forces, and is anything but biological. Burroughs uses the dependency they experience to symbolize the dependencies which society places on other individuals, by virtue of its existence. While society is often a benefit to us, it also causes us to depend on money, government, and other tools or

institutions of control. Lee feels he needs junk just as many Americans feel that they need money. In reality, these perceived needs only act as a cage, robbing the individual such as Lee of his autonomy.

In order to be free of these dependencies, Lee must endure a period of withdrawal sickness, which he describes in excruciating detail while waiting it out in Lexington jail. He notes “spasms of the bronchial tubes which shut off the breathing,” “lowering of blood pressure with consequent loss of body fluid, and extreme weakness as in shock.” He identifies “a feeling as if the life energy has been shut off so that all the cells in the body are suffocating,” giving him the impression that he is “subsiding into a pile of bones” (*Junky* 77). This language of rot and death is the way to renewal, as Lee ruminates on total gasping need, which initiates the transition through destruction. Shortly after, he experiences an orgasm for the first time in the text, signifying the pleasurable feelings of the animal state. So far, Lee’s experience of his animal body has been one of deprivation, malnourishment, anxiety, and a small degree of stillness. The return of the biological sexual need signifies the junk-need being uprooted, drained out with the sickness, and replaced with the need for sex and hunger. While the addict may at first prefer junk to sex and food, his returning sexuality is a sign of health and renewal.

iii. Societal Destruction

One of the first straightforward images of societal destruction is the “jimmied pay-toilet” (*Junky* 12) whose contents a young “hoodlum” dumps on Lee. By stealing money from the toilet, the addict does violence on the society that provided the toilet, and to whom the money belongs. The toilet as a symbol of waste-disposal and rot also acts as a touchstone for readers—Burroughs reminds his readers that neither money nor junk, nor the security which they represent, can be attained without a cost. Most often, that cost is loss of self or

psychological well-being, and not loss of a pay-toilet. Petty crimes for the sake of money do not comprise the majority of destruction documented in the text, but they do veil the blind, pathological need that motivates the addict to commit them.

Societal destruction is common enough in terms of crime, but most of the text's destructive moments are both societal and physical, or physical and psychological. Purely societal moments of destabilization are rare, as individual need is the main cause for destruction. Society itself is a stabilizing force, within which the individual addicts create their own chaos.

For example, a physically- and societally-destabilizing moment happens during Lee's trip to New Orleans, shortly after getting clean in Texas. This is signified by his disorientation in the city, its chaos, and its "complex pattern of tensions" that keeps "unhappy pleasure-seekers in a condition of unconsummated alertness" (57). Even the word *unconsummated* has destructive connotations. If marriage is an institution of stability, and requires a gesture of consummation to make its effect certain, then New Orleans puts its inhabitants in a state of uncertainty, a liminal space at best.

Lee also describes the city as "a stratified series of ruins" from 1900 to 1920. The resulting road patterns, the hostility of the citizens, the miscellaneous transient population, and the constant noise all make the city like "the electrical mazes devised by psychologists to unhinge the nervous systems of white rats and guinea pigs" (*Junky* 57). In this way, New Orleans is also psychologically destructive, and it is to this disorienting place that Lee's sober "I" comes to die. He tries to find junk immediately, but the town is unfamiliar and he "thought [he] wanted to stay off" (58). In this way, the society in which he resides is already destructive, and it seeps into him psychologically and physically.

Lee meets an agent of destabilization in a bar, a disordered institution where he was drinking to forget his cravings. While his physical need for junk is long gone, the brain is slower to forget its old patterns of use due to the rewiring of the basal ganglia. Shortly before the bar, Lee has an episode of sexuality that is self-destructive, as the man who catches his attention eventually robs him—the body, in a sense, begins to betray him as the mind turns to junk. Then, the man he meets by the jukebox—after a few lines of small-talk—asks, “Do you want to score?” This is all it takes to forget four months of sobriety, such is the drug’s psychological rooting and the difficulty in destroying the old self. The perceived needs don’t disappear as quickly as the physical sickness, and both are equally destabilizing. When he and Pat use together, Lee overdoses—experiencing the ultimate destruction of junk-use in his very first relapse. Pat, agent of death, robs him, as Lee has done to associates before. This crime is indicative of societal destruction, while the overdose is physical, and the relapse is psychological. In short, Lee’s four-month-old self is destroyed in exchange for a newborn addict (*Junky* 61). The repetition of relapse and addiction ensures that many addicts stop emotionally developing at the onset of their first use, because they repeatedly kill their old selves. In one sense, they never stop growing; however, they never “grow” past a few years old.

The next instance of societal destabilization is the criminalization of addiction—the word “addict” becomes as fugitive as the words in Burroughs’ glossary provided at the end of *Junky*, since police are allowed to interpret it in whatever way suits them. This imposes a new layer of social control on the individual, having less to do with imposed need and more with the threat of taking those needs away. Texts that refer to drugs are censored because of Harry Anslinger’s dissemination of his own personal truth, acting as

a “moral enforcer” (Galliher 667) and supplanting Lindesmith’s and Burroughs’ progressive ideas about addiction with myths, exploitation through fear, and law enforcement. For example, discussing drug-use in public becomes a criminal activity, as are track marks (667). Burroughs’ publication of *Junky* and *Naked Lunch* was therefore necessary, even daring, and destructive to Anslinger’s commodified truth.

Examples of Anslinger’s influence abound in *Junky*. While Lee is going clean in jail, a doctor refuses to give him a shot because of the “moral question” (*Junky* 79), believing that Lee voluntarily put himself in such a position of vulnerability. Society’s criminalization of addiction doesn’t take into account the inherent power of the destructive cycle. Another doctor sees Lee’s condition as sickness, which is curable, unlike the self-destruction assumed by the first doctor. The shot provided by the second doctor returns Lee to a sleepy, plant-like homeostasis, and his normal strength returns.

However, the most significant and important example of societal destruction can be found in the qualities of language, which concerned Burroughs significantly. Robin Lydenberg notes,

The central issues that pervade and support Burroughs’ fiction [are]: the arbitrary violence of language as a system of naming and representation; and the possibility of an ontology and an aesthetics based on negativity and absence. If there is an ultimate literary goal envisioned by Burroughs, it is to escape both the body and language, to travel in bodiless space and silence. (Lydenberg 55)

For this reason, Burroughs values telepathy—a motif in his oeuvre—as truthful communication in its purest form, without the chaos and unreliability of words. This

leads him to explore Mayan hieroglyphs that he believes employ images in order to communicate more truly. Paul Wild criticizes these beliefs as “romantically naive in believing that hieroglyphic ‘picture’ writing could communicate ideas directly without the intervention of language, bypassing the Word Virus” (Wild 39) by directly invoking what they signify. While Burroughs’ anthropologic knowledge was informed, Wild claims that his “thematization of Maya priests as gods of death is not consistent with either the archaeological views of the 1950s or of the present,” but it seems that such inconsistencies are to Burroughs’ own ends. “Burroughs’s Gods of Death theme,” says Wild, “is not...about worship...nor is it about regeneration—it is about control. Burroughs’s Gods of Death...are priests who control the populace in a living death.” Death as an archetypal place of silence, stillness, and stability opposes the destructive forces of language and life. Even junk is a type of living death, imposing silence and stillness on the user. However, while junk ensures that the user is no longer controlled by the tyranny of language and flesh, it replaces language as the puppeteer, and the user is still a member of a society trapped in “living death” (Wild 44).

Language is thus another form of social control, since none of a language’s speakers would be able to express concepts for which they have no words. This is reminiscent of George Orwell’s rumination in his work *1984*, in which he describes “Newspeak”: language gradually simplified until its speakers have no word for such complex concepts as *freedom*; they are limited to describing objects or feelings as *good*, *plusgood*, *bad*, *plusbad* (Orwell 40). Because the speakers can conceptualize freedom but have no means to discuss it with others, they can’t demand it from their oppressive government. Burroughs might have viewed this simplification of language as positive,

used in a moral way, since the inhabitants of *1984* aren't tangled up in the nuance and relativity of complex language. However, they are made vulnerable to societal manipulation because they can't communicate effectively, nor share problematic thoughts with each other. In this sense, Orwellian society controls its citizens by neglecting the imposed need for communication, instead of granting an imposed need like junk.

While language has been crucial to the development of all societies, for Burroughs it is mainly a source of chaos and destruction. We rely on words in order to connect with each other, but those words often fail, causing misunderstanding and heartbreak. Douglas Baldwin's "Undermining Language and Film in the Work of William S. Burroughs" discusses how "*both* [sic] visual and verbal narratives traditionally fail to mimic real processes of perception; they instead redefine how people 'see.' For Burroughs, this 'redefining' becomes a trope for how perception...is controlled by outside forces" (Baldwin 65), as with the authorities of *1984*'s Oceania. Burroughs' cut-up style, Baldwin says, "offer[s] an alternative narrative style that promises to free readers from social, aesthetic, and political forms of 'control' represented by society's 'normal' visual and verbal storytelling" (65). In a sense, the destruction and violence done to the text creates a channel for the individual to buck societal control and stability. The tyranny of language is minimized, and the cut-up narrative more fully mimics natural human perception. Robin Lydenberg uses an anecdote from *Naked Lunch*, in which the protagonist teaches his anus to talk, to illustrate the "ominous tale of control and domination, a tale of the struggle between body and mind," that underlies "the Rabelaisian joke of a talking anus." "The central weapon of that struggle," claims Lydenberg, "is identified as language itself," since the anus learning to talk and eat

causes the man's mouth and face to become superfluous (Lydenberg 56-7). Language is the weapon of the body in Burroughs' anecdote, as opposed to being a tool of the mind as it is in reality. Just as Lee associate Jack seemed to want "nothing to do with this suffering of his rejected other self, ...of flesh and viscera and cells" (Burroughs 3), so the mind "mocks the body's weaknesses, its needs and dependencies" (Lydenberg 58). However, when the body is given the power of language—such as the carnival man teaching his anus to talk—the "hierarchy of power is ultimately reversed...when the anus appropriates language entirely; the mouth grows closed, the brain is sealed off and trapped inside the skull so that it can give no orders" (58).

In each of these circumstances, language is a source of domination and control. In naming objects, we are able to understand them through definition, and this is just what the talking anus does to the carnival man in *Naked Lunch*. Pinned-down, stabilized, redefined by his own body, the essence and selfhood of the carnival man is removed from its state of growth. Therefore, the brain and the self both perish, harkening back to the worm which could keep living only as long as it kept growing (*Junky* xli). Language's destructive qualities in these texts stem from its viral, dominating nature, as "a basic weapon in that struggle for supremacy [between body and mind]" (Lydenberg 59). This appears in the glossary of *Junky*, in which Burroughs laments his own terminology as words "whose intentions are fugitive," in that their meanings vary widely based on time period and individual (*Junky* 133). It seems only natural that the author, becoming aware of this, might rebel by using the cut-up method, or lament the "intentions" of his own words, and might feel the weight of language's control over him. In Lee's trip to Mexico, the narrator becomes enamored with certain words in the Spanish language, but his basic

ignorance of how to speak it causes him to socialize with others very little. Instead, he spends most of his time drinking. Cut off from his own language, a fundamental and imposed need for communication goes unmet for Lee, just as his imposed need for junk goes unmet in Mexico, and this leads him to further destruction and chaos. When he finally does find junk, while managing to repeatedly converse in English with another man, he almost overdoses and is left for dead by the same man. Burroughs expresses Lee's dependency on junk and language as something infuriating, misleading, and ultimately destabilizing. *Junky* was the beginning of the author's rebellious texts, which sought to deconstruct their own medium, and possibly the beginning of the author's awareness that language would never say exactly what he meant.

Burroughs' destabilizing narrative techniques evolved from the excruciatingly structural, orderly narrative styles of the American Romantics—another example of destabilization and destruction being born from stability, as the cycle goes around. Just as the characters of *Junky* want to control or stop the cycle, Burroughs seeks to control or fix in place the meaning of his words. He tries to pin them down using the *Glossary* in the text's appendix (*Junky* 133), but admits that even these definitions might change. The text plays out a self-aware reflection of exactly the conundrum faced by its cast. The characters of *Junky* constantly rotate through these phases of destruction, renewal, and stability; each tries to avoid the painful phases, since rebirth is rarely brief or easy. Renewal and stability, or getting and staying sober, is usually done under threat of death. Lee tries to control his use so that he won't be marshalled into the phase of renewal, since this involves death of his old self and, literally, the death of his "junk-dependent" cells (*Junky* xli). During the first instance of renewal in the text, he makes it through the initial

morphine withdrawals, is partway-renewed, but backslides on the cusp of the *stability* phase and chooses stability via substance-use, placing him where he started.

Like Lee, other addicts rotate through these phases with astonishing speed. A person who hasn't been caught in the trap of total need, so to speak, might experience a few rebirths of the self in their lifetime. If addicted, that same person could careen from sickness to health and back again over the course of a few weeks. The resulting destruction to society, others, or the self is most often caused by the addict's blind spot for their own dependency, as well as increasing cravings. Society's destruction and control of the addict results in the criminalization of drug-addiction and exploitation of the public's fears in order to punish these individuals. Both do violence to each other, but also rely on each other for need-fulfillment. Even if an addict viewed society as villainous, she would still have to tap into it for her natural and imposed needs, be it junk, food, or money. Escape from society is impossible when it has a monopoly on needs both natural and imposed. Its citizens, even if they are convicted criminals, still provide for their society in exchange for having their various needs fulfilled.

This natural process is disrupted by junk, which moves through groups of people like a virus, leaving them utterly dependent on society but, in some cases, hard-pressed to provide for themselves. They turn to societal disruption, such as petty theft, to fulfill their financial void instead. This is an illusion of control, since the addict is still dependent on some part of society to provide him with money or junk, and this network in turn benefits from exploited users at the bottom of the "junk pyramid" (*Naked Lunch*, 115). In the case of psychological and physical destruction, usually the addict destroys himself unwittingly. His sense of self is swallowed up by his addiction, imposed by a society

which benefits by convincing him that its needs are his needs. In this sense, an organized criminal network is just as destructive as any other force in *Junky*, except that it must seem orderly and stable in order to feed off its less-fortunate. Destruction by legal society also happens when addiction is criminalized and truth commodified; however, addicts are also victimized by the orderly criminal networks which provide for their habits.

iv. In Conclusion

Psychological, physical, and societal destruction in *Junky* are caused by more than addiction to junk. One of the myths that I believe Burroughs attempts to debunk in his texts states that the addict is the problem, and should be disciplined in order to stay off the drug. However, the drug is nothing but one manifestation of some unfulfilled need, and the junky only a person who hasn't had their needs met. The use of junk progresses from habit to disease, not habit to crime.

It's the sensation of need that propels addicts toward their destructive behavior, and also keeps them in a brief phase of stability while in their addiction. The destruction necessary to progress out of the addict's self-created stability, both psychological and physical, is often the reason that the addict remains trapped in the cycle, and cannot move into "sober stability." Lindesmith's work states that the objective self plays a huge role in dependency as well, because the awareness of one's own withdrawal symptoms—and the intellect that knows how to solve it—makes resistance to the next shot surprisingly difficult. If each human being is controlled by his or her needs, both natural and imposed by outside forces, then junk only acts as an intermediary, a signifier for all these needs, or a stabilizing force for someone neglected by society. Anslinger's disagreement with and censorship of Lindesmith's work creates a division between sober society and addicted society, because no amount of jail time (which Anslinger suggests will solve the opiate

problem) can cure a disease. However, Anslinger exploits the destructive powers of the public's fear in order to change 1930's policy on addiction, arguably causing more societal destruction than the addicts themselves. I believe his intentions were not to cure social problems, but to manipulate the public into allowing laws that target marginalized groups. Anslinger pushed to criminalize specific drugs by exploiting public fears, increasing his own authority in a hegemonic, patriarchal and racist society (Pino). He inflicts damage on the society's integrity in the process, but gains political power by implying that the junkies and homeless are the culprits of societal destruction.

Psychological destruction is the main culprit for addiction, the most difficult to suppress or escape, and the reason why *Junky* features plenty of internal narration from Lee. Physical and psychological dependency facilitate each other, but only the body recognizes junk as a parasite. The mind experiences it as a source of well-being, while it gradually reshapes the brain's inmost wiring. This cycle of transformation is only a smaller, quicker version of the life-death-life cycle shared by all living things. Addicts experience a death of sorts, but they are usually also lucky enough to experience the rebirth as well.

Both addiction and sobriety may be forms of stability, and progression through destruction/destabilization takes the form of sickness (if the individual is an addict) or the development of total need (if the individual is sober and progressing into addiction). Renewal is always progression back into stabilization. However, it manifests in more subtle ways than the cycle's other two phases, usually causing pain and need of a different kind than destruction, and showing up in the subtext more often than the text itself. Destruction may dominate both the undercurrents and over-currents of *Junky*, as it

is the most glaring and obvious event, but renewal populates the spaces after destruction, when—like a plant—Lee’s pruned self grows back.

III. SITUATIONS OF RENEWAL

In *Junky*, renewal requires a loss of personal control—whether the individual allows this voluntarily, by entering a rehabilitation center; or involuntarily, by being incarcerated or going broke. As discussed in the previous chapter, “total need” asserts control over individuals, whatever their addictions may be, and parasitically replaces their autonomy with its own routine. Recovery from a state of total need involves acknowledging that one’s own autonomy has been usurped and, ironically, giving up that autonomy to be rehabilitated.

Individuals such as Anslinger encouraged the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) to control the nature and spread of information about addiction, exploiting public fears in order to prevent any curious individual from venturing near illegal drugs. However, the FBN wasn’t able to prevent every discourse about addiction from escaping, and the process of rehabilitation continued its progression toward the modern-day use of jails, boarding schools, hospital wards, and private rehab centers. In order to work, these institutions have to guide an addict from a destructive phase to one of renewal, using whatever resources they have. Some only control the addict’s mobility for thirty days; others medicate and sedate him, imposing control on his mental state; while still others give him a replacement drug, thereby creating needs similar to those in his previous addiction.

Agents of renewal/stability in *Junky* include all institutions of control, as well as some of their satellite forces: a pervasive law enforcement presence, and a culture that frames drugs and violence as abhorrent and stability as the source of fulfillment. Still, as Burroughs reveals, even these agents of order contain elements of destruction. Some, like the stability promised by pursuing the family lifestyle embodied in 1950s suburbia, may

even create chaotic and violent reactions in their participants, as it does for the protagonist of *Junky*. This fits with the pattern of stability, destruction, and renewal that can be found in the plot of the text.

In “Burroughs’ Phantasmic Geography,” Kathryn Humes discusses the “repetition nodes” Burroughs uses to express these cyclical sequences. Humes draws attention to “his re-used sex, disease, and death sequences [that] have frequently been noticed by critics”; as well as “the repeated phantasmic locations of desert, jungle, city, and America; his other planets mostly offer variations on jungle or city.... Through these geographies, Burroughs reflects his sense of being born into the wrong world” (112). Humes briefly describes her perception of Burroughs’ tangled web of “phantasmic” locations:

Desert, jungle, and city all play off against each other, and one cannot discuss what the desert symbolizes for Burroughs without knowing that he links jungle lushness to female powers that dissolve, rot, or absorb the male. Likewise, for him, the city is not the metropolis of high culture but embodies the gridded spaces ruled by Control society. Its visible denizens are Control’s agents—the policeman, military officer, and politician. (113)

Sex may correspond with the jungle, disease with the city, and death with the desert; likewise, sex may correspond with renewal, disease with destruction, and death with stability. The city, a place of disease and destruction, is particularly under the suffocating control of society, while the desert is free due to its scarcity of life and thus controlling forces.

The female principle involves the jungle, a place of rot which continuously creates life because of its high quantities of water. Hume suggests that the male principle is the substance that rots *or* what is controlled (113), while the female principle is the rotting or controlling agent. In the case of rot, the agent is water. In the case of control, the agent could be any number of things already discussed—mostly needs and desires, both natural and self-imposed. Humes argues that society’s “agents of control” are agents of the law and government, such as policemen and politicians. Due to its high levels of population and order, the city embodies both male and female principles, inhabited by both controlling agents and controlled individuals.

In the desert, “drought enables freedom to flourish, because lack of water renders high-density plant and human population—jungle and city—impossible. Desiccation in the imaginary protects [the protagonist] from nightmares” (Humes 113). So, while the city may not be as humid or fertile as the jungle, it is subject to less rot—a female principle—and therefore less change, destruction, and chaos. Humes describes an individual, like Lee, striving to stop the cycle of rebirth from altering out of stability. This is a normal attempt to protect one’s own way of life, but futile even in a desert. Despite its desiccation and seeming protection from rot, the desert continues to undergo a cycle of destruction and renewal—as does the addict, even when he tries to place himself in a state of perpetual desiccation using junk. Since it causes the body to atrophy, experiencing more periods of sleep and stillness, junk-use signifies placing oneself in a situation of thirst and death, as does the desert environment Humes describes. So, while the desert may allow for freedom, that freedom and space is achieved by a lower concentration of life and energy; therefore, the desert is a place of stillness, as Lee points

out in *Junky* about the Rio Grande Valley. Curiously, this is where he goes to get sober on his first attempt, destroying his addict self in a place of low life concentration by spending “four months in Texas” (*Junky* 57).

Following the *stability* of the dead valley is *destruction* of the self, after which comes a desire for *renewal*, or the transition from a disorderly, chaotic state back to a stable, orderly state. In living things, this is a state of homeostasis, even and still. The closest Lee gets to this state of stillness, which he likens to becoming a plant, is while he’s high. Thus, deep in his addiction he visualizes being among a group of chlorophyll addicts, whose ingestion of the chemical turns them gradually into plants themselves (*Junky* 138). I believe this is an intentional comparison to the progress of opiate addiction, in which one moves through a phase of stability, stillness, and sleeping death due to the analgesic effects of the high. The destruction that follows this stability is the destruction of the addict self, and a renewal into sobriety. But first, the old self has to evolve into the addict. David Punter discusses this endless evolution and devolution in “The Scene of Addiction,” claiming that Burroughs’ deconstructions of language represent his attempt to break free from a larger cycle:

It could therefore also be an attempt – perhaps always doomed – to interrupt the pattern of repetition (the pattern of the addict), a way to find a way out of the ‘dungeon of the self’.... For the truth of the addict – and if this is a repetition, then it is a deliberate one – is that there is no escape; it is not as though one can detach the ‘substance’ from the subject, for the substance has already become that from which the fabric of the subject is woven. (77-78)

In other words, any addictive behavior or the abuse of any substance becomes ingrained into the very body, the tangible substance that carried out the abuse, and Punter posits that this reality results in Burroughs' continuing frustration with and inability to escape his own patterns of abuse, which are born from his inescapable ego. Non-addicts may experience their own personalities as a series of patterns, as they act and react to situations. Punter claims that they can no more escape the patterns of their selves than they can escape language's pre-coded messages or the body's needs, symbolized in *Junky* most overtly by addiction. Just as Lee's body needs junk, so the non-addict's body has needs that exert control over the individual. These needs create a sense of entrapment, which is what Burroughs refers to as the "dungeon of the self" (*Nova Express*, qtd. in Punter 77).

In the first half of *Junky*, the earliest type of renewal—through which Lee evolves *into* the addict, and becomes a gaping, bottomless mouth—is the most obvious. Renewal into an addict means moving away from a mainstream existence, while renewal out of addiction means moving back toward a typical life. Lee is still in his first few months of addiction, the period Burroughs defines as the liminal space where the individual could still "back out" and keep from becoming an addict (*Junky* 141); therefore, he has only experienced the cycle in one direction. His old self, the non-addict who could take a shot of junk without sending his life into a tailspin, was destroyed and replaced with his current self. The "big book" of Alcoholics Anonymous describes a similar phenomenon in the chapter "More About Alcoholism":

We [alcoholics] know that no real alcoholic *ever* [sic] recovers control. All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals—

usually brief—were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced to a man that alcoholics of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness.

Over any considerable period we get worse, never better. (30)

Similarly, Burroughs' text *The Soft Machine* identifies addiction as “a metabolic illness” and “an illness of exposure” (132), because it seems to be passed from addict to non-addict, and this only after enough exposure to the drug causes psychological dependency. After enough exposure, the individual is hard-pressed to return to a state of ignorance. The paradox this presents to humanity is that no one wants to stop until it's too late, or in AA's words: “The difficulty is that few alcoholics have enough desire to stop while there is yet time. We have heard of a few instances where people, who showed definite signs of alcoholism, were able to stop for a long period because of an overpowering desire to do so” (AA 32), but stopping by relying on one's own willpower alone can lead to feelings of satisfaction, feelings of “deserving” a drink or hit. The addict or alcoholic might also then feel “cured” of their addiction, and certain that they can drink “like other people,” but this is probably an illusion. Alcoholics, the AA text claims, and in my belief addicts, are “like men who have lost their legs; they never grow new ones” (30).

Bill Lee, similarly, claims to be “cured” after he makes it through the trials of rehab at Lexington and reaches Mexico (*Junky* 84). His feelings of renewal and rebirth are followed by newly heightened senses, and then a destructive period of depression during which he distracts himself by drinking. Instead of renewal into a new, healthier form of life, therefore, Lee substitutes alcoholism for addiction and stays doggedly in the destructive, destabilizing phase of the cycle. His reasons are obscure—Lee never

mentions why he needs narcotics, only that he does (82)—but it’s probable that his subconscious is hiding his addiction from him. A few pages after he pronounces himself cured, he finds a bit of money on the bar and takes it: “I opened the wallet and took out a twenty, a ten and a five. I decided to use some other toilet in some other bar and walked out leaving a full martini. I went up to Pat’s room” (85). This initial decision to leave the bar hides Lee’s subconscious desire to score, and he pretends that the former is driving his actions instead of the latter.

Like the alcoholics discussed earlier, Lee is driven by an illusion of control—that he can use junk moderately or “normally” and still control himself in the future. The first step of AA’s program is to admit that one’s “life has become unmanageable” and that addicts are “powerless” over their addiction. This is one method of progressing toward renewal, when attempting to control oneself is the path back into destruction and relapse. In documenting both successful and unsuccessful methods of renewal found in *Junky*, control—or lack thereof—seems to be the predictor of success. When Lee tries to do it himself, and control his own intake, he fails; when he relinquishes control to an institution devoted to returning him to stability, such as a hospital, he is usually able to get clean.

It isn’t until almost fifty pages of narrative after his first shot that Lee tries a cure for the first time, attempting to destroy his addicted cells and regrow normal ones. Lee tries to progress through this phase on his own first, coincidentally during his downward transition to Texas. The Rio Grande Valley will later provide a place of total stillness and rot, a place where Lee’s ego goes to die, provided he can make it there. But four days into his first venture out, he ends up “in Cincinnati, out of junk and immobilized,” and gives

up his hopes of a reduction cure. Lee's personal control alone proves not to be enough, so he enters Lexington for "the cure" (50).

Because of Lee's imposed need for junk, which started as an issue of too much exposure, or "because [he did] not have strong motivations in any other direction" (*Junky* xl), he seeks to control himself and his own cycles of rebirth. He means to get sober exactly when he intends, and what follows are many failed attempts to do so. Like all humanity, Lee hopes to experience stability for as long as he wants, destruction when he's ready, renewal quickly after destruction. We are naturally hard-wired to seek pleasure, which we think corresponds with stability; and avoid pain, which we think corresponds with destruction. However, renewal seems to be the most painful phase of Lee's journey. As he tries to get off junk, working to destroy the cells dependent on junk (and therefore his addict self), he moves from the stability of addiction via renewal into someone sober. However, this requires first the pain of withdrawal sickness, and then the process of regaining a clear mindset.

The pain of the process is proven by the fact that Lee rarely gets through it without relapsing at least once. However, he makes it through the slow burn of renewal and reaches a state of stability again. The longest stretch of full sobriety occurs during his four months in Texas (57). When Lee goes to Mexico, he stays off junk by replacing it with alcohol, and reaches a stable state of alcoholism. However, not once in *Junky* does Lee regain the idyllic stability described in the preface, during which Lee was a child whose only exposure to opiates was a maid talking about how "opium brings sweet dreams" (xxxvii). Lee's loss of sober stability corresponds with his exposure to junk; the more times he is exposed to it, the less ease he has in returning to that state. Without

stability in sobriety, the cycle might look more like many relapses in a row, punctuated by failed attempts at getting clean. With this ability to return to sobriety, Lee's cycle looks like this:

sobriety	stability
first experience with junk (not physically dependent)	destruction of sober self renewal into addict (painless)
addicted to junk (physically dependent)	stability (atrophy)
attempts to get clean	destruction of addict self
becoming sober (sickness going away, regaining old mindset)	renewal
sober	stability

The cycle repeats itself as long as Lee continues to use. If he loses the ability to be stable in sobriety altogether, he goes back to stability in addiction—he might try to get clean, feel sick for a day or two (renewal phase), and then go back to junk with a vengeance (stability phase). So, the cycle retains its structure, whether the junky is able to stay sober or not. As noted above, Lee tries to control his cycle but fails—it seems much easier to allow the cycle to continue on its own, trusting that one will be propelled back and forth whether one wills it or not.

Since junk acts as a signifier for all types of need, I conjecture that the more our needs are met, the more “stability” we seem to experience. People are controlled by their

needs to communicate, to eat and feel secure, and to experience fulfillment. But to meet their need to communicate, for example, they must rely on *and* be controlled by words, which are unreliable at best. If the object of our need becomes scarce, usually in times of destruction, we respond with fear, forgetting that the cycle will carry us through and forward.

i. Institutions of Renewal

Renewal acts as the intermediate point between destruction and stability, and in *Junky* it's often no more than a blip between Lee's time in jail and his first shot upon getting out. However, evidence of his renewal can be found in the subtext, especially because Alcoholics Anonymous and other rehabilitation programs had developed around the time of the book's publication, 1953. I intend to examine the institutions of renewal that were well-known at the time of *Junky*, as well as the instances when Lee experiences personal renewal, in the following sections.

Lexington, the rehabilitation center to which Lee travels after failing to cure himself, is his first experience of rebirth. But as the original source for later rehab centers' thirty-day timeline, jail-time increased as a method of transitioning addicts from addiction to sobriety after Harry Anslinger criminalized addiction, and more addicts ended up in jail than in a psychiatric ward or hospital (Galliher 667). The original target of opium criminalization was Chinese immigrants, just as the primary target of crack criminalization more recently was African-Americans. Such was Anslinger's goal, according to Galliher:

Beginning after World War I, ...there were wholesale demographic changes in the United States which created public anxiety and suspicion directed at African-Americans, immigrants, and Communists. During the

Great Depression of the 1930s, the expanding role of the federal government created an opportunity for Harry Anslinger to successfully exploit these fears by linking drugs to minorities. (665)

Clearly, there is only a minor correlation between addiction and crime, and it has nothing to do with the character of immigrant or minority populations. However, the government and the WASPs of the era before *Junky*'s publication were threatened by other populations, and the easiest method was to make them criminals through targeted legislation. Even Prohibition, which targeted alcohol, also happened to target the Polish, German, and Irish immigrants who were unwanted by WASPs, or white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Pino). What correlation there is between immigrants and crime, or addiction and immigrants, results from the attention created by the immense amounts of money the drugs can make, and the FBN's efforts to obscure the truth about addiction. Gangs develop more likely because people fight over the resources and the market, and less because of the drugs themselves. According to Lindesmith's book *Addiction and Opiates*, non-addicts who can minimize their intake can keep from becoming "junkies" for a significant amount of time (103). But the street culture that develops to protect drug profits, which affects dealers more than junkies, can be destructive and life-threatening when clashing with agents of stability/renewal in legal society. Junkies or dealers might lose years of their lives if they are sent to jail for a drug charge; few addicts are Chinese immigrants anymore, so the laws now affect a huge percentage of the population. However, Lee goes to Lexington of his own free will, and is given special privileges and shots of demerol, presumably because he is white and he chose to turn himself in (*Junky* 53).

Modern institutions of renewal include rehabilitation centers and methadone/Suboxone clinics. Lee has a brief experience in a psychiatric ward or “Charity Hospital” (79), which may be comparable to modern rehab hospitals which were inspired by the jails’ 30-day cure. Lee’s time in the sanitarium is court-ordered, like sentences imposed on many addicts today, and he is questioned by a doctor who asks him, “Why do you feel that you need narcotics, Mr. Lee?” Lee thinks to himself that “the man knows nothing about junk” (82), echoing the way Lindesmith would describe the “need for narcotics” as a disease of exposure, one fully legitimate instead of a “feeling” that the addict needs junk. But the doctor, like all the other doctors in *Junky*, is a symbol of society’s inability to deal with this crisis instead of the symbol of healing and renewal that readers expect doctors to be. He doesn’t help Lee’s case much; after Lee leaves Charity Hospital, he writes simply “I was cured” (84). This is one instance of Lee making it all the way through the renewal phase. But within a few days he finds his old friend Pat, and instead of staying within the stability of sobriety, he slips back into the stability of addiction.

The point of most of these rehabilitation and recovery institutions is to re-condition the individual to replace addiction with other needs—still imposed/created by society or the institution—but more manageable, less destructive needs. Individuals make it through the physical pain of withdrawals by giving up their own agency to the institution, in other words relinquishing their own sense of control, and agree to allow the jail or rehab to dictate their needs instead. They may want junk, but the “total need” for it is reduced significantly after a month off. Their cycles of destruction and renewal,

ideally, slow down to a normal pace, and they relearn how they met their needs for fulfillment and security before being exposed to junk.

In *Junky*, these instances of renewal are few and far between, as Lee's experience of opiate addiction is dominated by a sense of gradual destruction. Many instances can be found in the subtext, but most often they happen after the phase of destruction has reached its worst and most violent point. The renewal that follows may entail Lee going to jail, traveling long distances, regaining his sexual desires, experiencing or having a vision of rot (*Junky* 111), visiting a doctor, or trying ayahuasca/yage. Nevertheless, his old self is destroyed and renewed into addict Lee or sober Lee, neither of which endures. Renewal, it seems, is the shortest phase of the cycle, since his imposed need for junk swings him quickly from stability to destruction and back again.

ii. Instances of Renewal in Junky

In the first half of *Junky*, during which Lee finds himself mired in a destructive haze, there are few instances of renewal because he hasn't yet progressed through the phase of destruction, and without the phase of destruction renewal is unnecessary. The only symbols of renewal to be found in the first half of the text are doctors, or "croakers," as they are named in the text. These are false symbols of renewal; Lee experiences their powers of destruction when he is sick at Charity Hospital, and one doctor refuses to give him a shot to relieve his sickness. "After all," he says to another doctor, "there is the moral question. This man should have thought of all this before he started using narcotics" (79). Like many "experts" of his era, he seems to believe Lee's addiction is the result of Lee's weak moral fiber. The doctor attempts to maintain a morally upright position by refusing to treat a sick man or provide him more drugs. Based upon today's understanding of addiction, this response would be equivalent to refusing to treat because

the doctor believes the injury is the patient's fault. If one is in a car accident because they made a wrong turn, they would still be treated at a hospital; likewise, even if the addict was aware of the risks when they started injecting morphine, they would still deserve treatment.

A different doctor in the text agrees. "Yes, there is the moral question," he says. "But there is also the physical question. This man is sick" (79). Like Lindesmith, he is of the school of thought that espouses that the addict is sick, and not just when suffering from withdrawal symptoms. In order to heal and be "cured," a problematic word in addiction therapy, the physical symptoms must be treated first. Afterwards, the moral or mental problem underlying the addictive behavior can be addressed. But while Lee is shivering and vomiting and "thawing" his "junk-frozen flesh" (*Junky* 78), the topic of sobriety can't yet be broached.

These two doctors, one addressing Lee's morality and the other addressing his physical state, are destructive due to ignorance. They do not cause renewal of any kind, though the latter may renew Lee's addiction with the shot of morphine. However, they are not unique: other doctors in the early parts of the text, who write opiate prescriptions for Lee and his associates, are destructive forces as well. They are aptly called "croakers" because they enable and continue the addicts' cycles of destruction until these addicts, too, are swallowed up by the algebra of need, the "junk equation" (xli), and pack in.

Moreover, the doctors who treat addicts are controlled by their need for money as much as any dealer. They rely on junk as much as the addicts do, though it is a need created by outside forces and not inherent to their own biology. The doctors of the text's first half are propelled through these cycles as well, since their prescriptions are limited

and Lee and other addicts will “burn down” the pharmacy if the doctors write too many. The company of addicts, however, seems to be expert at preying on old croakers, who may have forgotten how many prescriptions they already wrote. They continue to do so for the money, despite the risk. So, just as need controls the addicts, so need controls their suppliers, and both groups of people are propelled through phases of stability, destruction, and renewal due to their proximity to junk and money.

Only in the second half of the book do we find a few honest instances of renewal, usually while Lee is incarcerated or immobilized somehow. According to Lindesmith,

The pervasive and persistent impulse to relapse is a consequence of the persistence of impulses, cognitive patterns, and attitudes originally learned from experiences with the withdrawal distress. Since addicts are tempted to resume the use of drugs long after all withdrawal symptoms have vanished, it is not suggested that relapse occurs because of these symptoms in any sense. The argument is rather that the craving for drugs originally established in connection with these symptoms becomes functionally independent of them. (129)

In other words, for an addict’s true renewal into stability, it isn’t the “physical” or “moral” question that doctors need to answer, but the addict’s impulse to relapse. Even when the addict is no longer physically dependent, strong confrontations with the urge to take a shot of morphine, or to smoke a cigarette, tend to result in the addict submitting to them (Lindesmith 129). The brain works against itself, coming up with any and all reasons why a shot or a cigarette is actually a productive thing, why it won’t do as much harm as the user thinks. Lindesmith notes that “the positive satisfactions involved in

taking a shot are assured and immediate; in contrast, the negative effects of the habit are remote and indirect and can sometimes be avoided or postponed” (131). This self-defeating formula, in which the brain can start to fixate on the “assured” positive feelings of the drug, causes the addict to lie to themselves and others in a subconscious quest for the high. Lee experiences this shortly after a long period of sobriety, thinking to himself that he is “cured” just before finding a wallet in the bathroom. Immediately, he leaves the bar *intending* to go have a drink somewhere else. Unsurprisingly, though, he finds himself at his dealer’s door, having subconsciously decided to relapse the moment he found the money.

What does it take to stay sober? Lindesmith attempts to parse out the question in his midcentury studies, noting that “there are two separate and somewhat different theoretical problems involved in dealing with relapse. The first is to determine the source of that tendency; the second and more difficult problem is to try to describe the mechanisms which lead to relapse” (131). He notes that this is particularly tricky because the brain’s processes are so quick and subliminal—the addict may have, during winter, subconsciously decided to relapse when the summer comes around. They may fixate on the drug all spring. Cases have been recorded of addicts holding out this long, planning and postponing a brief lapse back into addiction, but the lapse always comes once planned. *Relapse*, as it is acknowledged today, is a complete spiral back into old ways. A *lapse* may be a single shot, and doesn’t have to mean throwing away all of one’s sobriety and stability. This distinction is important for modern addiction therapy, but Lindesmith shows no sign of employing it.

The need for junk going unmet is what pushes Lee toward renewal into an addict, since the alternative is sickness and fighting temptation. But to continue to deprive oneself is exhausting work, and it's no wonder that Lee would rather "renew" himself into an addict than into a functional, sober citizen. Lindesmith's attempts to untangle the brain processes that cause relapse or lapse confirm Lee's experience finding money in the bar. More than anything, it seems, specialists aren't altogether sure what causes relapse, and which ingredient is key to the individual's renewal into sober stability.

Many doctors and institutions also attempt to figure this out while treating Lee – especially at Charity Hospital, where they propose to "reassemble his psyche in eight days" (*Junky* 82). This intense period of destruction and rebirth works for a little while, and Lee again thinks "he wanted to stay off" (57). The first sign of his renewal into sobriety is his returning sexual desire, an animal trait that opposes the plant-like life he was living as a junky (95). He is only able to meet other men for sex while *off* junk, but they are ironically the same people who usher in the destructive phase of his cycle, in which he again finds junk and destroys his "cured" self. Evidently, the desire to stay off the drugs is not present in his subconscious, though he believes it to be. Gradually, Lee sinks back down to Texas, where the Rio Grande Valley mirrors his own destruction.

While in Mexico, Lee is renewed into an alcoholic. He replaces his need for junk with his need for alcohol (107-8), but the stability he experiences is brief. Instead, he carries around a loaded pistol—a Chekhov's gun of coming destruction—and his health deteriorates so much that Ike, an acquaintance, advises him to get back on junk (108). Lee has a vision of a human face rotting, indicative of his alcoholic cycle and the disease that is breaking down his body. Rot is often the precursor to rebirth or renewal, but his

use of alcohol causes the cycle to stall at destruction—the withdrawal sickness returns, even though it has been weeks since Lee has used junk. Alcohol stopped him from renewing into someone who isn't physically dependent on junk, since he became dependent on alcohol instead. His addictive needs are still being met, in other words, so he is still controlled by them. At one point Lee is able to drink without doing so to excess, and experiences atrophy and boredom (116). He stops this atrophy from stability by taking a morphine shot provided by Ike, ushering in destruction of the alcoholic self.

Lee tries to take peyote to soothe his addictive symptoms, a symbol of death because it rots before it can even be brought back across the border. The rotting peyote is the opposite of junk, which freezes the flesh, while peyote stimulates warmth, growth and change. In its own sense, peyote is a tool of renewal, prompting Lee late in the narrative to pursue yage or ayahuasca due to the renewing effects of each on addicts. He seeks “the uncut kick that opens out instead of narrowing down like junk. ... Yage may be the final fix” (128). Junk tends to constrict and immobilize the user; Lee seems to hope that yage will do the opposite—will renew instead of destroy, warm instead of freeze, and expand instead of constrict.

The last instance of renewal to note is Lee's decision to “move out from under and head on south” (127). He says of relapse and renewal,

Suicide is frequent among ex-junkies. Why does a junky quit junk of his own free will? You never know the answer to that question. No conscious tabulation of the disadvantages and horrors of junk gives you the emotional drive to kick. The decision to quit junk is a cellular decision, and once you have decided to quit you cannot go back to junk

permanently any more than you could stay away from it before. Like a man who has been away a long time, you see things different when you return from junk. (127)

So, the “snap” that Lindesmith was seeking to induce, the “cellular decision” to quit that causes the body and mind to reject junk forever, can be seen as a form of renewal.

However, this “renewal” leads to suicide in some, possibly because they maintain a destructive mindset *after* kicking junk, or want to return to it in vain. While they are physically renewed, they are still in mental destruction. Burroughs’ subtextual advice seems to be to keep the cycle going, to keep moving even when renewal is only physical. Otherwise, the addict allows the despair and self-destruction of their situation to control them, just as their needs controlled them before, and they destroy themselves instead of renewing into someone else. Under threat of self-destruction, Lee keeps his own cycles moving by escaping New York and heading to a new place, keeping himself physically moving to keep himself mentally pushing through the destructive phases of his cycles. He desires to stop his needs’ control over him. Symbolism of this desire is evident in Lee’s discussion of telepathy: “What I look for in any relationship is contact on a nonverbal level of intuition and feeling, that is, telepathic contact” (127). Just as he seeks to communicate without being controlled by the tyranny of pre-coded language and words, so he seeks to fulfill his needs for language, satisfaction and love without being controlled by the “junk-equation.” Junk and language both fulfill imposed needs and control those who use them. Lee expects yage and telepathy, respectively, to usurp junk and language as tools to fulfill his needs.

There is no escaping the cycles of destruction and renewal. However, Lee imagines a way to use them to his own advantage in the last pages of the book. If he accepts his own unfulfilled needs, especially if those needs are imposed instead of biological, he is no longer controlled by the fixation to fulfill them. Similarly, if Lee accepts the presence of destruction in the cycle, and stops trying to keep himself in the most comfortable phase, he can use the dynamism of the cycle to his advantage. Even though rebirth and destruction may be painful, Lee's acceptance of their discomfort allows him to move through them without expending any effort. As long as he keeps moving, the temptation to self-destruct, which may cause other clean junkies to commit suicide, will eventually be replaced by the next phase of the cycle.

IV. THE ILLUSION OF STABILITY

According to the dictionary, to stabilize something is “to limit [its] fluctuations (price, health condition, or population, for example).” To “stabilize” a junky is to limit the fluctuations in his/her use. Either they stop using, or they are able to use a comparable amount each day coupled with the consistent increase formed by tolerance. From Burroughs’ narrative, we know that such stasis is possible for only a short time. For Lee, stability is the ultimate fix: the steady supply or the shot that will never wear off. However, even pounds and pounds of junk would only create the illusion of stability, since it too will run out eventually. For the non-addict, “stability” might be the perception of control, the feeling that one has power over one’s surroundings. This is an image only. The hard truth is that all things change, and all change sparks uncertainty in both addict and non-addict. Uncertainty is uncomfortable, but total security is unattainable.

In the Glossary offered in my introduction, each of the terms may be understood as falling under the broader categories of “destabilizing” or “stabilizing.” Some – such as *entropy*, “the degree of disorder or uncertainty in a system”; and *violence*, “the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy” – are obviously destabilizing. But others, such as *addiction*, “a compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance,” are ambiguous. Given unlimited amounts of their drug of choice, an addict could create stability for years. In the depths of his addiction, Lee too achieves a form of stability. While he still has enough junk to keep from getting sick, he is in no danger of withdrawal symptoms, and can continue his cycle of use until he finds more. Each shot, for Lee, is a few more hours of security.

However, addiction becomes destructive once it starts to destabilize, or as soon as the junk runs out. While in his cycles of use, Lee may feel that he is secure. As soon as he is unable to find any more junk, however, he rapidly descends from a sense of stability into a destructive, destabilizing withdrawal period. However they try to stave it off or ignore it, few addicts use anything without later paying a price. Therefore, the stability that junk creates is an illusion, or at least is negated by the destabilization that inevitably follows.

Everyone, addict or non-addict, experiences similar situations. Borrowing money comes to mind: in the moment, that money creates an extra sense of stability, but it must be paid back later. The debtor is “fixed” for a time, just like the addict, but though it may be his dream to borrow endlessly, at some point he will have to repay his debts. Burroughs calls it “throwing in the towel” when Lee or one of his associates gives up the endless hunt for more junk and surrenders to withdrawal sickness.

On the flipside of the Glossary term *addiction*, another term that relates to stability is the state of being *sobber*: “not addicted to intoxicating drink”; or “unhurried, calm.” This comes about after the withdrawal sickness has passed. In the periods after the sickness ends, sobriety is a form of stability that is more true and lasting than addiction. While it takes up little to no room in the text, Lee’s bouts of sobriety are in reality months longer chronologically than his stints in deep addiction. However, his experiences in addiction take up most of the narrative, probably because they make a deeper impression on Lee as a narrator. Months of sobriety in Texas are summed up in one sentence (*Junky* 57), while a few days drinking in Mexico creates pages. Nevertheless, the time Lee

spends in sobriety is usually longer than his time in addiction, more sustainable because it is mundane and unchanging.

Other terms of stability include *society*, which is “an organized group working together or periodically meeting because of common interests, beliefs, or profession.” A society of junkies, whose common need is junk, may be just as orderly as the suburban society of the American Midwest, whose common need might be security or a sense of belonging. Lee’s parents, part of a Midwest suburban social group that lived “in a comfortable capsule...cut off from contact with the life of the city,” only moved there “to get away from people” (*Junky* xxxviii). This overly ordered environment is in a state of stasis due to a diluted ratio of life-forms, much like Kathryn Humes’ “desert, city, jungle” archetypes (122). The suburban “desert” in which Lee’s family lives fulfills their need for security, and causes the young Lee to seek destabilization and destruction out of boredom and curiosity. “You become a narcotics addict because you do not have strong motivations in any other direction,” he says of junk. “I tried it as a matter of curiosity” (xl). Bored and unfulfilled, his needs for enrichment unmet, Lee moves from his parents’ house to the destabilizing “city” of New York, where he tries junk a few too many times.

People are controlled by their needs, both natural and imposed, and the need for security is one of the most significant. Since our needs propel the natural cycle of destructions and renewals, and humans have a natural need for security, it’s this primary need that propels the cycle. In seeking security in junk, for example, Lee frequently burns through all of his money, placing himself in a situation ripe for destruction and destabilization.

i. Stability in the Modern Consciousness

Western society, and especially American Western society, seems to have a conflicted view of change and its place in existence. The only change that American culture celebrates is “positive” change: a society adding to, expanding, heightening itself. Suburban homesteads creep outward from the edges of cities, and companies focus on growth. Individuals seek to raise their status, improve their finances, add to their families. The American Dream supports “biggering and biggering,” in the words of Dr. Seuss’ *The Lorax*.

However, negative, “subtracting” change is the necessary underside of positive change, creating stability by making room for the endless adding and expanding of the American consciousness. Even if we feel that loss such as death is destabilizing, it creates room for growth. The addict who is repeatedly growing and shrinking, like the worm in the beginning of Lee’s narration (*Junky* xli), experiences an overall longevity or stability in life-force.

In the collective consciousness of Burroughs’ era, stability for the junky—which meant endless amounts of junk—was detrimental to society’s stability. The criminal structure and undermining of the U.S. law necessary to traffic an outlawed substance into Lee’s veins would put legal American society in danger of being influenced. In “Networks of Criminality,” Mark Ungar notes that “most security policy” made by lawmakers to target criminal networks “is both ineffective and counterproductive” (318). Similarly, FBN leader Anslinger was unable to use law enforcement to curb drug use and addiction, and instead “us[ed] law enforcement [to] control public opinion regarding drug use” (Gallagher 665). Legal and illegal society disturb and threaten each other. Both

systems came about to cater to human needs: imposed or natural, moral or immoral. Returning to Burroughs' "algebra of need" in *Naked Lunch*, it is significant that Lee and associates go to such great lengths to fulfill a need for junk, while others seem to be destroyed by money. The economic system is the legal twin to the drug-running system.

In *Junky's* Mexico, Lupita and other dealers have paid off the police, as well as members of the government, so the two societies work together symbiotically while the illegal dominates the legal since it is a system that makes more revenue, isn't bound by the law, and attracts plenty of participants (96). However, in the New York of Lee's narration, the push-and-pull between both legal and illegal networks ensures that neither gains much power. The result for Lee is a decreased ability to fulfill his imposed needs for junk, and more trips to institutions of renewal like jails and hospitals.

ii. Stability in *Junky*

In *Junky*, stability is often a matter of location. Mexico is presented as a chaotic, unstable place – the "jungle archetype"; compared to New York City, the "city" archetype, which is ordered and policed. Lee spends four months in Texas (*Junky* 57), which is a "desert" archetype (Humes 122) that, despite its proximity to Mexico, acts as an oasis of stability where he can put his life back together. Its desiccated environment and lack of population density make it a dead space, dissecting Lee from the anti-society in New York and giving his mind and body a chance to recover. This seems to be the most boring state of existence for him (57).

However, from Texas he ventures to the disorienting "jungle" of New Orleans, whose population density soon causes Lee to be destabilized and lost. Mexico and New Orleans have this archetypal nature in common, and both exert a chaotic influence on

Lee's life. Lee's disorientation signals that New Orleans is a destructive place for him. After his four months being off junk, it only takes a few moments for Lee to be convinced to try it again when a companion asks if he wants to score (61).

Soon after his journey to New Orleans and back into using, Lee overdoses. Pat, who was supposed to be a companion, robs him and leaves him for dead. This is a stage of physical, psychological, and even societal destruction, since someone who was societally obligated to look out for Lee fails to do so. This sudden end of Lee's stability embodies what defines it: the ultimate collapse of stillness, a transition into a dynamic state, and the sober individual renewed into an addict. Lee's old lifestyle is destroyed, his using lifestyle reborn, and eventually he stabilizes into a pattern of shots per day that gradually increases in number. David Punter observes in "The Scene of Addiction," that, "in the body politic, as in the human body, Burroughs exposes the hidden violence of domination, paralysis, and damage to individual life" (61). The addict's stability is ephemeral, since all during his addiction the junk is depleting his physical, societal, financial, and psychological reserves.

During his descents, Lee's friends and acquaintances slip in and out of contact. His body grows thinner and he never bathes, while his veins are traumatized repeatedly; his trust fund money is spent in a year; and all the time in jail and hospitals gives him a dull outlook. His newfound stability quickly disappears, soon followed by the destruction of his addict life (often through suffering withdrawal while in jail), then a period of renewal in a new geographical location, and stability for a time after he has achieved sobriety. We find that the impact of the "algebra of need" on Lee's relationship with himself is the "hidden violence of domination" (Punter 61), presumably by junk. In

“Notes from the Orifice,” Lydenberg describes a similar phenomenon: “Science, politics, the personal relations between individuals and the individual’s relation to himself, to his own body—all of these are variations of what Burroughs calls the basic ‘*Algebra of Need*’” (Lydenberg 62). When the individual life is damaged, the homogenizing process that facilitates security and control can more easily take over. The addicts who give up their autonomy in exchange for comfort and a high are easily led. They, like all humans driven by the cycle, will do almost anything to make themselves well.

Since individual life is a threat to homogeneity, it is no surprise that some ruling classes and governing bodies have sought to quell individuality. The algebra of need creates stability by forcing individuals to rely on it, thus ordering their behavior. Lee’s narrative warns against relying too much on money, drugs, sex, or any other needs that the physical body experiences. Punter discusses how the body is turned against itself in many of Burroughs’ texts, reframing the same idea: “Religion, drugs, and sex in *Naked Lunch* either amputate the body or condense it to one insatiable organ of need. ... In *Naked Lunch*, all surgery is a power play, an oppressive regulation of the body or mind, and its purpose is clearly to control rather than to liberate the individual” (Punter 56). This shows that surgical healing, just like the so-called “renewal” journey from sober to addicted individual, can be negative, turning the body against itself and threatening individual autonomy. In *Junky*, Burroughs warps symbols of healing—doctors and surgery—into something carnivalesque, because the doctors are the most frequent enablers of the addicts’ cause. They are called “croakers,” to position them even nearer to death in name, and farther from the healing and rebirth they are supposed to represent.

Their process of “healing”—writing prescriptions—results in spiritually-truncated clients such as Lee and Roy, who will say whatever they must to get a prescription.

Burroughs argues in his “Letter from a Master Addict” that “all opioids have a dependence liability even if variable. One could certainly argue that the habit-forming nature of these drugs has been under-appreciated by clinicians, and we should also note the substantial marketing efforts by manufacturers of drugs such as oxycodone” (113). Doctors’ and marketers’ efforts to push these prescriptions onto clients, or to make them easily obtainable by veterans and young individuals—along with the benefits available to society in having a docile and dependent population—create the likelihood that governing bodies would allow their population to become addicted to opioids. As Burroughs writes, the power and addictive nature of these drugs has been seriously underestimated, as have peoples’ abilities to provide for their perceived needs. The pathology of addiction is an analogy for all human need, and the huge lengths to which entrapped individuals will go to see them fulfilled. The addict brain ends up perceiving junk as nourishment, and the withdrawing addict starves for it. It practically sells itself, causing dealers to depend just as heavily on junk for money. Their financial needs, like the junky’s needs, fasten them to the lifestyle and therefore to the society which provides for them in the form of “croakers” and an illegal transportation network.

Kathryn Humes’ “Burroughs’ Phantasmic Geography” examines the authority figures who benefit from this system:

We see two other motives guiding the authority figures, one mostly masculine, the other mostly feminine. The masculine motive is addiction to control: male bureaucrats need the boost to their egos that bullying

others gives them. ...The masculine control addicts include all sorts of officials: bureaucrats, policemen, army officers, doctors, intelligence agents, drug agents, sheriffs, pharmacists.... The doctor or pharmacist might be willing to supply morphine to the addict, but neither can afford to be noticed by bureaucrats who check records. (119-120)

According to Humes, “the more feminine motive involves forcing people to conform to narrow, middle-class norms. Such women bully other people not primarily for the ego boost but because they are convinced they know what is right and must force others to behave accordingly” (120). Both of these forces, feminine and masculine, are methods of control and coercion in Lee’s America. Junk, like money, is another tool in the stability-inducing toolbox, since an individual satisfied with junk is indefinitely stable, as long as they are supplied it. Humes’ masculine method might involve taking money or junk away from a dependent citizen, hence bullying them into stability. By replacing junk with money, the system echoes employers’ disciplinary suspensions. Authority figures benefit most from keeping citizens stable, and both money and junk are tools available to do so.

When Lee arrives in Mexico City, the first character he meets, Lupita, has an ongoing relationship with the supposed agents of stability (police) in the city, which allows her to operate her business with impunity. Humes writes that “Burroughs is particularly offended at interference in how someone chooses to live if those choices do not damage the person who wishes to interfere. He hymns Mexico City in *Queer* for lacking such intrusive coercion” (120). This attitude of individuality cannot work in a society concerned with controlling its citizens, such as Lee’s New York. His imposed needs are easier to fulfill in Mexico, which welcomes destabilization because the legal

system is infiltrated by the illegal one. However, the individualist outlook is what draws Lee there, escaping agents of stability in the U.S. but losing his autonomy to the junk.

iii. In Conclusion

Stability is a predictable element in the cycle of renewal and destruction, though perhaps manifesting in more subtle ways than the other two phases. Society thrives on stability, and to achieve it many leaders are willing to use any tools of coercion they can. Burroughs and Lee both object to these carrot/stick methods, which involve masculine and feminine tools of control (Humes 120). However, Burroughs argues that the use of opioids in order to stabilize a citizen population is inhumane and its negative effects totally underestimated, since the power opioids ended up having over individuals was unexpected and not handled well by the countries themselves. However, Burroughs' texts argue for no interference from a country's police and governing agencies—as is the case in Lee's Mexico—unless the addict is causing harm to those around him or her. The criminalization of addiction criticized by Burroughs and touted by Anslinger radically destabilizes the countries implementing it.

Lee himself travels into stability via both directions throughout the course of *Junky*: from addict to stable, sober individual; and from sober to stable, addicted individual. His sober stability has the potential to last a very long time, but it's his addict stability that lasts the longest. In both instances, the old is destroyed to create the new, so the ultimate outcome is the same.

In his plan to seek *yage*, expressed at the end of *Junky*, Lee hopes for a kick that “opens out instead of narrowing down” (128), one that presumably doesn't cut off and leave him in withdrawals the way junk does. He tries to move south, in the direction of destabilization and chaos (if we take New York to be more stable than Mexico City), but

searches for “freedom from the claims of the aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh” (128). What he’s searching for in *yage*, however, seems to be the same thing he was searching for in junk—the ability to stay in that state of freedom, and to never come back down. He seeks to stop the cycle during the kick, to remain in stability—the same goal his fellow American citizens pursue. Even if junk is merely the *feeling* of stability, Lee gives up on all his other needs in exchange for it.

However, the cycle doesn’t stop, and Lee eventually reaches the end of his resources and is forced to move on from junk. In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs describes addiction as a sickness, and notes that he “awoke from The Sickness at the age of forty-five” (199). The sense of awakening from a dream as Lee comes out of drug use is evident also in *Junky*, since the return to reality and the needs of his animal body is always unpleasant. However, he has no choice but to make his way through the cycle again – from destruction of his addict self, to renewal into his sober self – in order to experience the sense of security he so profoundly desires.

V. CONCLUSION

A liveable life can be defined as any stable, sustaining version of existence—represented in *Junky* by periods of opiate-use or periods of sobriety. Both of these, according to Sutherland, are learned behaviors from Lee's close associates. Therefore, getting clean requires an "unlearning" of behaviors, especially of the attitude that junk will help him feel better, even if such an attitude is true.

Lee progresses through this unlearning in the form of withdrawal sickness during the next, destructive phase of the cycle, which takes away the addict's stability because his supply is cut off. He almost always unlearns his addiction involuntarily. No law or jail time will do this for him, which is why criminalization of his addiction would only facilitate it. Fear of withdrawal sickness/destruction can become so intense that it fuels the addiction, since addicts know that as long as they continue using, they won't have to endure withdrawals (see Lindesmith's discussion of the "hook of withdrawal" (9)). Lee calls this "throwing in the towel" (*Junky* 126) implying a sort of surrender as he watches his associates give up on running away and turn themselves in at a jail or psychiatric ward. Lee, however, tries his hardest to keep using, prolonging his sense of security and avoiding the thought of death and destruction. His reaction to impending destruction is no different from any non-addict's, in that he bargains and postpones all that he can.

The addict responds to the fear of destruction by avoiding it, using even more junk, and moving themselves *closer* to destruction. In a healthier reaction, an adult might avoid destruction by having children, in whom he/she can experience rebirth. Both parent and addict are trying to prolong the *life* stage of the cycle, but both will eventually go through the inevitable *death* stage. For the parent, this means their own physical death; for the addict, who has been through the cycle many times, this means withdrawal

sickness. Just as childbirth is painful, so is rebirthing oneself, which involves stabilizing in a new reality.

Once an addict is stabilized, such as happens to Lee in Texas, it is possible to remain stable for however long the environment allows. Upon leaving Texas and moving to New Orleans, Lee initiates a new phase of the cycle: destruction, disorientation, and a loss of security and stability symbolized by his chaotic experience on New Orleans' streets. This is the trajectory of *Junky*: back and forth through stability, destruction, and renewal.

Shortly before writing this thesis, I had returned home to Texas—the place of deadness in *Junky*, the place of stability where Lee spends four months sober. However, for me home was a place of destruction, more like that played by New York's in Burroughs' text. Texas is where I first discovered that I had a vulnerability to substance-use, and an addictive personality. Lee, and Burroughs, might argue that everyone has an addictive personality; I discovered mine shortly after graduating high school. It stayed with me through my undergraduate years in college. I completed my studies, but when I returned home—like Lee returning to New York--I found myself in a destabilizing phase.

The period of substance-use and destruction that pervaded my years in graduate school influenced my choice of focus for this thesis, as well as my specialization in my studies. Gradually, the phases of stability I experienced lengthened, and those of destruction became shorter. I am grateful for the support and love I received from my peers, professors and family, which helped me to regulate the perpetual cycle. As I progressed into my last two semesters of school, the phases through which I was traveling synchronized with the material I was writing. While I wrote on destruction and

addiction, I was experiencing the destructive powers of addiction myself. The first chapter of this text is as long as the phase of destabilization through which I slogged. As my imposed needs propelled self-destruction and renewal, I started writing chapter two. Finally, stability settled into my life, and I replaced my needs for substances with other, better behaviors. I wrote chapter three in the springtime, at the most optimistic point of my studies, and I remain there as I conclude my thesis.

This experience leads me to withhold judgment on Lee's lifestyle, but it doesn't qualify me to write about addiction any more than a non-addict would be qualified. As Lindesmith claims in his second chapter, "The Effects of Opiates," "A nondrinker engaged in the study of alcoholics might deliberately get drunk once himself in order to understand his subjects better. ...[But] it is doubtful whether anyone can use morphine long enough to acquire the same experiences as an addict without himself becoming one" (23). I was in no such danger during my studies; I was already an addict. However, the cycle of *destruction/renewal/stability* that I've described, and the needs that propel it, are a universal reality. We are all dependent on something; we can all understand evading destruction and chasing security. Each of us is controlled by needs, both natural and imposed: in particular, the need to communicate and be validated, to eat and feel secure, and to experience fulfillment and love. Junk only acts as a signifier for all these needs, as Burroughs points out in discussing "the algebra of need" in *Naked Lunch*. The chemicals that junk induces in the human brain mimic our most primal needs for connection and safety—truly, the addicts are after the same thing as everyone else, but in the particular form of junk.

By pondering Lee's reactions, readers of *Junky* might better understand themselves and each other. I believe that Burroughs' body of work resonates with so many people because it expresses fundamental truths about human society and individuals. Society benefits from fulfilling the needs of the individuals, so it creates more needs to be fulfilled. Ultimately, the individual becomes totally dependent on something other than themselves for their quality of life, giving up their autonomy in exchange for their imposed needs to be met.

However, as I have experienced in the course of this thesis, relinquished autonomy isn't permanent. The process is painful, as renewal is, but the authentic and self-reliant stability that the individual gains is a fitting twin for the destruction and renewal they endured to get it. There is no avoiding destruction, nor should we try. The desire to avoid destruction because we believe stability will make us "happier" is a Western construct created by a society that benefits from unfulfilled needs. On the contrary, the happiness and security I thought I needed was waiting to be found in accepting the organic wholeness of the cycle itself, and surrendering to its perpetual motion.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

Burroughs, William S. *Naked Lunch*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1959. Print.

---, and Oliver Harris. *Junky: the Definitive Text of 'Junk'*. Penguin Books, 2012. Print.

Burroughs, William Seward, and Lotringer Silvère. *Burroughs Live: the Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs: 1960-1997*. Semiotext(e), 2001. Print.

Secondary Sources

Ang, Rebecca P., et al. "Functions of Aggression and Delinquency: The Moderating Role of Parent Criminality and Friends' Gang Membership." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 33, no. 22, Nov. 2018, pp. 3531–3550.

Ayers, David. "The Long Last Goodbye: Control and Resistance in the Work of William Burroughs." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, Aug. 1993, p. 223-237.

Baetens, Jan. "Mentored by a Madman: The William Burroughs Experiment." *Leonardo*, vol. 51, no. 5, Oct. 2018, pp. 545–546.

Baldwin, Douglas G. "'Word Begets Image and Image Is Virus': Undermining Language and Film in the Works of William S. Burroughs." *College Literature*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2000, pp. 63–83.

Bush, Clive. "An Anarchy of New Speech; Notes on the American Tradition of William Burroughs." *Journal of Beckett Studies*, no. 6, 1980, pp. 120–128.

Carrington, Kerry, and John Scott. "Masculinity, Rurality and Violence." *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 48, no. 5, Sept. 2008, pp. 641–666.

- Caveney, Graham. *Gentleman Junkie: the Life and Legacy of William S. Burroughs*. Little, Brown, 1998. Print.
- Chambliss, William. "On the Symbiosis between Criminal Law and Criminal Behavior." *Criminology*, vol. 42, no. 2, May 2004, pp. 241–251.
- Darke, Shane, and Michael Farrell. "Burroughs' 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs': A Forgotten Classic." *Addiction*, vol. 113, no. 12, Dec. 2018, pp. 2305–2308.
- Demeau, Elodie, and Geneviève Parent. "Impacts of Crime Attractors and Generators on Criminality in Montreal." *Canadian Journal of Criminology & Criminal Justice*, vol. 60, no. 3, July 2018, pp. 387–412.
- Galliher, John F., et al. "LINDESMITH v. ANSLIGNER: AN EARLY GOVERNMENT VICTORY IN THE FAILED WAR ON DRUGS.[*]." *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, vol. 88, no. 2, Winter 1998, pp. 661–682.
- García-Robles Jorge, and Daniel C. Schechter. *The Stray Bullet: William S. Burroughs in Mexico*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013. Print.
- Géfin, Laszlo K. "Collage Theory, Reception, and the Cutups of William Burroughs." *Perspectives on Contemporary Literature: Literature and the Other Arts*, edited by David Hershberg, University Press of Kentucky, 1987, pp. 91–100.
- Ginsberg, Allen, et al. "William Burroughs, Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg: How to Notice What You Notice, How to Write a Bestseller, How to Not Solve a Crime in America." *First Thought: Conversations with Allen Ginsberg*, edited by

- Michael Schumacher, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN 2017, pp. 157–171.
- Grattan, Sean. “A Grenade With the Fuse Lit: William S. Burroughs and Retroactive Utopias in Cities of the Red Night.” *Utopian Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2010, pp. 118–138.
- Harris, Oliver. “Can You See a Virus? The Queer Cold War of William Burroughs.” *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, Aug. 1999, p. 243-266.
- Hoffman, August John. “Understanding Conflict and the Role of Community Development: Is Building a Peaceful Society within Our Reach?” *Aggression & Violent Behavior*, vol. 37, Nov. 2017, pp. 63–70. Hume, Kathryn. “William S. Burroughs's Phantasmic Geography.” *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1999, pp. 111–135.
- Johnston, Allan. “Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation.” *College Literature*, vol. 32, no. 2, Spring 2005, pp. 103–126.
- Lees, Andrew J. “William Burroughs: Sailor of the Soul.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol. 49, no. 5, Nov. 2017, pp. 385–392.
- Lydenberg, Robin. “Notes from the Orifice: Language and the Body in William Burroughs.” *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 26, no. 1, Spring 1985, p. 55-73.
- Morgan, Ted. *The Literary Outlaw*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2012. Print.
- Murphy, Timothy S. “Intersection Points: Teaching William Burroughs’s Naked Lunch.” *College Literature*, vol. 27, no. 1, Winter2000 Special Issue 2000, p. 84-102.

- National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction." *NIDA*, National Institute of Health, July 2018, www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/drugs-brain.
- Orwell, George. 1984. New York: Signet Classics, 1950. Print.
- Pino, Nathan. Personal interview. 28 Jan 2020.
- Sampson, Robert J. "Whither the Sociological Study of Crime?" *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, Aug. 2000, p. 711-714.
- Schneiderman, Davis, and Philip Walsh. *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*. Pluto Press, 2004. Print.
- Towers, Sherry, et al. "Factors Influencing Temporal Patterns in Crime in a Large American City: A Predictive Analytics Perspective." *PLoS ONE*, vol. 13, no. 10, Oct. 2018, pp. 1–27.
- Ungar, Mark. "Networks of Criminality: The State and Crime Policy in Contemporary Democracy." *Desafíos*, vol. 28, no. 2, July 2016, pp. 299–331.
- Wild, Paul H. "William S. Burroughs and the Maya Gods of Death: The Uses of Archaeology." *College Literature*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2008, pp. 38–57.
- Willett, Ralph. "William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need." *Modern Language Review*, vol. 74, no. 3, July 1979, pp. 690–691.
- Zajdow, Grazyna. "What Are We Scared of?: The Absence of Sociology in Current Debates about Drug Treatments and Policies." *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 41, no. 2, June 2005, pp. 185–199.