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Love you in Throat Gristle: Subvocal Speech and Tainted Proprioception in the Work of William S. Burroughs

Seni Gırtlaktan Seviyorum: William S. Burroughs'un Yapıtında Sesaltı Konuşma ve Bozulmuş Özduyum

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ÖZ

Amerikalı yazar William S. Burroughs'un yapıtını baştan başa kateden sesaltı konuşma kavramı istemsiz bir biteviyelik ile tanımlanır. Burroughs kavramı davranışçı psikolog John B. Watson'ın 1920 ve 1930'larda yaptığı ve düşünmeyi konuşma ve gırtlaktaki tezahürleri üzerinden açıklama gayretindeki çalışmalarından ödünç alır. Bu vizyonu benimser gibi olsa da yazar sessizliğin imkansızlığına dayanan bir tâbi olma haline vurgu yaparak sesaltı konuşma kavramına daha pragmatik ve deneysel bir yaklaşım getirir. Burroughs bu tarif edilmesi zor dil pratiğini ve ona dair söylemi mimetik bir müdahalenin nesnesi kılar ve "kesme" dahil biçimsel deneylerini sesaltı konuşmanın kayıtları haline getirir; amaç sesaltı konuşmayı ivmelendirip en aşırı sonuçlarına vardırarak zorlantılı niteliğini etkisiz kılmaktır. Bu deneyler tâbi olma halini ortadan kaldırmak yerine yeniden üretir gibi olunca, Burroughs başka yaklaşımların imkanını sorgular: Bu sefer organizma ve evrim anlatı malzemesi olacak ve insan gırtlağı türlü işlevleriyle Burroughs'un söyleminin merkezine yerleşecektir. Böylece Burroughs'un yapıtı felsefi ve antropolojik yankıları olan zengin bir dizi "organolojik" soruşturmaya açılacaktır. Örneğin, Deleuze ve Guattari gibi felsefeciler Burroughs'un eserinde "organsız beden" kavramı için bir kaynak ve esin buluyorken, fenomenolojinin de sesaltı konuşma kavramına taze bir kavrayış getirebileceği görülecektir. Özetle, bu makale kökeninde davranışçı bir kavram olan sesaltı konuşma kavramının Burroughs'un eserinde çok katmanlı bir yapısı olduğunu ve eleştirel bir söylemin yanı sıra kesme, "routine" gibi biçimsel deneyleri ve evrime yönelik spekülasyonu da harekete geçirdiğini gösterir.

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ABSTRACT

The notion of subvocal speech looms over the American writer William S. Burroughs' work and its defining feature is an involuntary continuity. Burroughs borrows the concept from the behaviorist psychologist John B. Watson's attempts between the 1920s and '30s to come up with an image of thinking which foregrounds speech and its laryngeal correlates. Yet, while adopting this picture, Burroughs brings a much more pragmatic and experimental slant to subvocal speech, waging battle against a heteronomy lived as an impossibility of silence. Trying out a mimetic intervention that appropriates this elusive language conduct and the discourse of its description, he positions his formal experiments ("cut-ups") as a medium of registration and acceleration that tries to disable the compulsory character of subvocal speech by taking it to its most extreme conclusions. When these experiments seem to reproduce instead of removing the heteronomy associated with subvocal speech, he explores other approaches, with the organic and evolutionary implications providing material for new directions in narrative, and the polyvalent status of the human throat coming under a detailed focus. Accordingly, Burroughs' work opens out to a series of "organological" inquiries the richness of which finds philosophical and anthropological resonances. While philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari find inspiration in Burroughs for a concept of "the body without organs," phenomenology also turns out to have a lot to contribute to a renewed understanding of subvocal speech. In sum, this paper aims to demonstrate that subvocal speech as an originally behaviorist notion has a much more layered character than is visible at first glance, enlisting at once the modes of cut-up, routine, and evolutionary speculation aside from straightforward critique.

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Introduction

The novelist and counterculture icon William S. Burroughs wrote a great deal about habit as an acquired behavioral tendency that does not depend on conscious or voluntary decisions. From biological theories of addiction to considering writing itself as something driven by habit, the empiricist concept is a fixture of his work. Its easy traversals of the customary dualistic divide between the mental and cognitive on the one hand and the physiological on the other also seems to have appealed to the writer, with his keen interests in the automatic, the subliminal, and the unconscious. As the instrument of a certain form of biopolitical domination he called "control," habit also takes on connotations that go beyond the organic and the psychological, at least in the restricted sense of these words. In many ways Burroughs was one of the great inventors of the "noo-"or the psychopolitical, making habit the figure of a vast and virally propagating social heteronomy perpetrated by mass communication, effective in patterns of perception, representation, and mental association.

Heteronomy of this kind does not find a more dramatic example than Burroughs' concerns with what he calls "sub-vocal speech," a notion which refers to a share of habit in language use, by establishing an immediate association between language and habitually involuntary tendencies to vocalization. The notion of subvocal speech which looms over Burroughs' work finds one of its sources in the behaviorist psychologist John B. Watson's attempts between the 1920's to '30s to come up with an image of thinking which foregrounds speech and its laryngeal correlates. On a certain level, Burroughs is a faithful adherent to this model, even fulfilling the possibilities of reflection on mass culture found in the behaviorist's work: "Thinking would comprise then the subvocal use of any language or related material whatever, such as the implicit repetition of poetry, day-dreaming, rephrasing word processes in logical terms" (Watson, 1920, p. 89). Yet, while adopting this picture, Burroughs brings a much more pragmatic and experimental slant to subvocal speech and therefore thinking, waging battle against a heteronomy lived as an impossibility of silence. Trying out a homeopathic intervention that appropriates this elusive language conduct and the discourse of its description, he positions the cut-ups as a medium of registration and acceleration that tries to disable the compulsory character of subvocal speech by taking it to its most extreme conclusions. When these experiments seem to reproduce instead of removing the heteronomy associated with subvocal speech, he explores other approaches, with the organic and evolutionary implications providing material for narrative speculation on the throat as a polyvalent organ. As a result, this paper aims to demonstrate that subvocal speech as a seemingly behaviorist notion has a much more layered character than is visible at first glance, enlisting at once the modes of cut-up, routine, and evolutionary speculation, aside from straightforward critique.

Subvocal speech affords a uniquely pragmatic perspective on what Burroughs deems the "word virus," which corresponds to the humans' evolved ability --but also limitation-- to communicate through language; thus it implicitly supports larger ideas about language. As Robin Lydenberg (1994) informs: "Burroughs' experiments with voice and sound can best be understood in the broader context of his theories about language. He views Western culture as ruled by a system of mass ventriloquy in which disembodied voices invade and occupy each individual" (p. 411). With all the experiments and interventions to which it gives rise, subvocal speech can easily be assigned a similar background. Different from the blanket category of the word virus however, what makes subvocal speech singular is that, taking a step back from message or content, it directs attention to an effort or preparation for speech, regardless, and even because of, how abortive it may ultimately be.

The following discussion aims to follow the most salient developments of this strange notion across Burroughs' work (giving primacy to the pair of trilogies called the *Nova trilogy*—

especially the novel *The ticket that exploded*—and the *Red night* novels), with a range spanning its organic underpinnings, its relation to time, its place in Burroughs' vision of the evolution of language, as well as the interventions he comes to devise. What makes Burroughs' take on subvocal speech unique and different from other inquiries into "inner speech", is the blend of discourses—evolutionary theory, sci-fi, addiction discourse, technological and somatic viewpoints, a critique of modernity—that helps Burroughs shape his arguments, and which are organized by his antagonistic stance toward the object of his discussions, making subvocal speech the locus of a certain struggle for rehabilitation, and even self-transformation.

Numerous instances from Burroughs' work could show that his interest in the notion is not merely theoretical, but perhaps his novel *The ticket that exploded* is the most representative, with its form of a direct challenge to its reader:

> Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk. That organism is the word...The realization that something as familiar to you as the movement of your intestines the sound of your breathing the beating of your heart is also alien and hostile does make one feel a bit insecure at first. Remember that you can separate yourself from the Other Half from the word... (2014a, "Operation rewrite" section)

The essential elements of Burroughs' critique are all in display here, laid out by a playfully serious type of biological speculation which characterizes his approach to language at large. What this discourse singles out for attention are the difficulty—but also the desirability—of achieving inner silence, the organically rooted character of language which makes somatic and autonomic features as breathing and heartbeats revealing analogies and correlates, and finally a dramatization of the strangeness of inner vocalization with an emphasis on the figure of a separate and parasitic organism that nevertheless dwells in the same body as the speaker/thinker. Burroughs makes much of the negative aspects of the phenomenon, turning a seemingly harmless and even possibly useful everyday tic or self-regulation into an image of baneful addiction: after all, one can reassure oneself in talking to oneself, half-articulating words, gaining some needed confidence etc. If as Denise Riley (2004) suggests, inner speech is "reassuringly or irritatingly there on tap, and persists quite independently of our faltering memories," (Riley, 2004, p. 8) Burroughs obviously thinks what is irritating about it deserves more attention, with all its diverse implications for auto-affections of proprioception and the sense of time.

In neutrally technical terms, subvocal speech is a "speech" defined by activity in absence of external articulation, in this sense corresponding to a function of language or a language behavior that has close affinities with internal monologues, or spontaneous thought processes taking form in incipient speech acts or potentials. Also noteworthy is that it is not particularly language-specific: one can have a subvocal speech running in Farsi, Finnish, or English, but as will be seen shortly, this does not mean it is independent from the historical state of a natural language, with all the cultural outlets that sustains it. While it presupposes the more general distrust of the word Burroughs shows in his career otherwise, subvocal speech also seems to channel it toward more particular dynamisms involving speech. From snippets of reflection or worry to catchy tunes of the day, anything can provide material for it, making up for a certain correlation with Burroughs' critical engagement with forms of technologically enabled modes of mass culture, visible in works like the "Electronic Revolution".

Partly due to this heterogeneity, arbitrariness, and the "stickiness" of the sources which it recycles, for Burroughs, subvocal speech is different from a nice internal monologue helping personal reintegration, being a phenomenon closely associated with dispossession, alienation, and a certain uncanniness. Notably, Burroughs (2001b) refers to a case of "internal dialogue," (p. 443) and it is the quality of this dialogue that is in question here. Departing from unassuming cases of phantom tunes and egocentrically murmured sentences, Burroughs goes on to raise

questions as to the very possibility of an authentic speech: for him our speech is endlessly caught up in the contaminations of a movement that goes from the external to the internal. The difficult question subvocal speech raises is therefore Nova express' (2014b) "do you own a voice?" ("The death dwarf in the street" section) which refers not only to the possible reversal "who is it that the voice owns?" but also to an experience in which what is internal is no longer necessarily a domain of the same; inner voice it may be, but one's own it is not.[1] If speaking is to be a speaking with one's own voice, then the pre-articulate of subvocal speech is also an unspeakable. As I will elaborate later, one can even point to a tainted proprioception here, as what is ordinarily considered to be a movement creditable to an individual is denied and attributed instead to agents of uncertain provenance. Burroughs suggests that what he stages as a bodysnatching is really an everyday experience, even a default setting for a given individual, and yet, the dispossession is real, and it may require drastic pragmatic interventions.

To specify what is captured, one must think back to a point anterior to the usual demarcation that separates voice and language: What is below the voice, intimately conditioning or grounding it, is a speech, giving to think that the voice is not to be regarded as a stratum of undetermined purely material sonority. Speech has a way of bypassing "voice" to achieve a direct route to its bodily possibility, tending to co-opt the body sound. Notwithstanding possible instances of a head-on opposition to language in his work, what is really interesting in Burroughs' writing comes from the fascinated contemplation of the impurity of the voice which makes it eminently open to capture through its hang-up on words, or its default of *uniqueness*. One might also speak of a strategy of acceleration on his part; the distrust of language or the word virus is not Burroughs' final word on the matter of language: "communication must become total and conscious before we can stop it" (2014a, "Operation rewrite" section), and this quip would have implications for subvocal speech as well. An interpretation of subvocal speech as driven by a resentment of the social function of language, or as a hasty prescription of a form of asocial silence would miss the point. For now let us put it this way: what is captured is not only autonomy or self-identity as such, but also speech as gesture, the very beginning and impulse to speech; this is what Burroughs' various formal experiments try to render up-for-grabs.

The larynx crossroad

With this background it is now possible to offer an overview of the organic underpinnings of subvocal speech. Burroughs repeatedly suggests that subvocal speech manifests in a movement or materialization in the body —"we know that subvocal speech involves actual movement of the vocal chords," (2001b, p. 453) — and this is the condition for his being able to conceive a technological solution. The movement is created by a permanent *intention to signify*, without this intention being held to real account. In contrast with a novelist's cherished device, the internal monologue, and less structured than it, these constitutively abortive acts also involve a certain compulsiveness that is not often applicable to monologues. In a way that is largely responsible for the sinister aspect, for Burroughs subvocal speech is a habit insofar as the half-articulations it puts into play are characterized by an insensible facility, attraction, and automatism that ultimately deliver *time* itself into the inconsequential domain of unthinking intentions to signify without accountability. This is why an imaginary of parasitism and alien possession comes to dramatize this form of relation in Burroughs' work, as in the designation "the word organism the 'Other Half' spliced in with your body sounds" (2004a,

[1] Also see a letter by Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg included in *Yage letters*: "My voice. Whose voice?" (cited in Harris, 2003, p. 243).

"Operation rewrite" section).

Regarding the very precise location Burroughs assigns, it seems one cannot write everything up to the brain as the seat or center of language, but has to consider the throat too, and not merely as a peripheral zone. In subvocal speech, the human throat becomes the stage of "deterritorializing" and expropriating processes which can be assigned to nothing else than language at large, language gaining something inherently visceral and organic, and the organ on its part gaining a measure of inherent psychism with its potentially associated pathologies. One of the strongest pieces of evidence for this is Burroughs' contemporaneous attempts at a technological disclosure of subvocal speech that are the "throat microphone" experiments, bespeaking a faith in the equation "the more thematizable, the less controlling". As Lydenberg (1994) reports, "on 'Throat microphone experiments' we have an example of Burroughs's efforts to record 'subvocal speech.' A vague voice snarls incomprehensible words, but the tone of hostility and suffering comes through clearly. The vocal bursts and softer mutterings suggest some internal, unedited language, closer to the body and perhaps also to unprocessed raw emotion" (p. 423). These experiments suggest Burroughs associates subvocal speech with bodily rumblings and gurglings, putting an emphasis on the nondestination of bodily sound for speech, alongside its seeming destination for it. However, even by their expositors, and firstly by Burroughs himself, these experiments are generally considered to not really fulfill the effects hoped from them, which would be a real neutralization of subvocal speech to the benefit of the opportunities that hinge on its silencing. At most, we are told, "All we got were some interesting noises" (Burroughs, cited in Lydenberg, p. 424).

This is where Burroughs the mad scientist[2] enters the picture, with bold speculations as to the evolutionary emergence of language, the organic conditions for its existence, and its unnoticed implications for subjectivity. Generally, Burroughs uses various characters—often shady physicians—for expressing his ideas on these matters, giving free rein to his conclusions without being restrained by assumptions of a normal science, or a sociology of scientific acceptability. In fact, subvocal speech is one of those idiosyncratic notions which helped support a common—and a bit unfair— image of Burroughs as a crank with rather obsessive and paranoid schemes.[3] And yet, as Burroughs (1988) would himself remind with a designation like "crank satori," a crank can have moments of satori or insightfulness too (p. 178).

With its reference to his staple categories like habit, need, and addiction, as well as an organological disorder in tow, the discourse on subvocal speech both extends and transforms Burroughs' engagements with the question of the living otherwise, which generally find their pivot in the experience of addiction. The organism as a variable and relational evolutionary entity grounds the link between habit and language established by everyday subvocal speech, so that we can state what is at stake in the form of two minimal propositions: habit, including its most extreme manifestations such as addiction, is a form of heteronomy that belongs to the discourse of the organism in Burroughs; and the throat is an "organ" which takes language habits in the form of an innervating subvocal speech. As seen from Burroughs' reference (2014a) to a "pulsed need" which "dictates the use of throat bones" (p. 166), there are explicit organic presuppositions involved here, correlated with potential effects of *need* on time perception: "The addict runs on junk time. His body is his clock, and junk runs through it like an hour-glass.

[2] Burroughs' theories about the living departing from the phenomenon of addiction can be found in *Interzone.*

[3] Burroughs is a writer who often easily exhausts the sympathy of his readers, for which a good example would be the influential critic Steven Connor (2014): "Burroughs developed a weird and frankly rather wearisome political psychophysics, according to which all human beings were programmed by external messages" (p. 91).

Time has meaning for him only with reference to his need" (Burroughs, 2001a, p. 85). The use of throat bones in subvocal speech is driven by a process that should be understood in analogy with a sensibility and a time sense shrunk to obscure anything but the next fix: if need is a time affair, and the throat partakes of the dynamics of need, then subvocal speech should also have a "junk" temporality at the limit.[4] For Burroughs, subvocal speech is the scourge of what can unfold with consequence and novelty in thought. This homogenization or linearization of time by the word can be glimpsed behind Burroughs' (2014a) puzzling question, "Would there be any time if we didn't say anything?" (2014a, "Combat troops in the area" section).

Since subvocal speech is deeply determined by a habit reaching into the physiological level, it is also tied up with the organic and even the organological. Burroughs' fantasies of a creatively disordered organism famously offered material to thinkers like Gilles Deleuze to conceptualize a "body without organs" (*Anti-Oedipus),* a body of unregulated intensities Deleuze first found in Antonin Artaud's famous call for the abolition of the genitally sexualized body, in defiance of the legislation of pleasures, thoughts, and encounters the French writer called "the judgement of God". Hewing closer to Burroughs' work, it is possible to describe its commitment to a discourse of the organ with reference to a few guiding headings each informative of the status of the throat. The first is the value of differentiation, as the-anatomist-with a-mission Dr. Schafer negatively shows in *Naked lunch* (2001a): "the human body is scandalously inefficient. Instead of a mouth and an anus to get out of order, why not have one all-purpose hole to eat and eliminate? We could seal up the nose and mouth, fill in the stomach, make an air hole directly into the lungs where it should have been in the first place" (p. 110). The value of differentiation implicit in Burroughs' satire of the maximally efficient "all-purpose hole"[5] does not exclude his fascination with polyvalence and virtual exchanges of function between organs, which often results in an affirmative vision of organological disorder: "No organ is constant as regards function or position; changes color and consistency in split second adjustments (...)" (2001a, p. 9). It is this vision that lends itself to an assimilation to the concept of the body without organs: differentiation is not abolished, but made more mobile and less constraining, to the benefit of not only new bodily arrangements, but also those concerning thought. Finding reflection in the throat, this preoccupation would insist on the specific and irreplaceable functionality of the throat, without ruling out the mordantly fascinating scenarios of the expansion, reassignment, or outsourcing of its duties (to the rectum for instance, as in Burroughs' "talking asshole" episode from *Naked lunch*).

Burroughs' mad science of the throat also finds echoes in contemporary approaches to the unique phylogenetic status of this organ. In the context of a larger discussion that aims to extend the credit for thinking to the body at large, Elizabeth Wilson (2015) considers the throat to be pivotal in its polyvalence: "The back of the throat is a local switch point between different organic capacities (ingestion, breathing, vocalizing, hearing, smelling) and different ontogenetic and phylogenetic impulses. Much more than the front of the mouth or even a little lower down into the esophagus itself, the fauces is a site where the communication between

[4] Another instance of this analogy is found in one of Burroughs' late novels *The place of dead roads* (2001c): "And the body keeps reaching back for the old language,--it's rather like junk withdrawal in a way" (p. 207). As Casey Rae (2019) points out, this connection also finds support on a deeper sonic level: "Burroughs believed sound could affect people at the molecular level, like junk rearranges the cellular makeup of biological organisms" (p.118).

[5] Burroughs' vision of dedifferentiation to a large extent recapitulates central assumptions that characterize thinking about the organism in the European tradition. Goethe for instance, also seems to have thought that "the more developed an organism is the less similar are its parts to one another" (reported in Vygotsky, 1997, p. 85).

organs may readily become manifest" (p. 61). It will be more clear later how relevant such a description can be for Burroughs, when it comes to the overlapping functions of sexuality and language. Another parallel is found in the cognitive scientist Philip Lieberman's work, in its recognition of the importance of the structuration of the human throat in the evolution of speech capacities, without the leap Burroughs allows himself to make of course, that a *virus* and its gift of function was responsible for the onset of this morphogenesis.

Regarding the underlying assumptions about the living that supports Burroughs' treatment of the throat, one can also refer to Burroughs' seeming allegiance to a Lamarckian vision of directed evolution according to which use and real time function has a decisive role in the long-term phylogenetic fortunes of an organ, making for a much more active interchange between the phenotype and the genotype than is generally admitted in biological evolution. In the words of a fellow literary innovator like Samuel Butler (2015), an atrophy evokes how "use and disuse must have come into play and reduced the function to its present rudimentary condition," (1970, p. 215) and Burroughs replies with his vision of atrophied organs or organs imperceptibly changing in responsive adjustments across millennia, a good example of which is his obsession with the phylogenetic status of gills (as if to mimic the throat in fish). The late novel, *The Western lands*, (1988) gives the role of rogue biological speculator to a character named Sanford:

> Rule Two carries the implicit assumption that time is irreversible (...) Sanford challenges Rule Two...claims to have reinstituted gills in mature, air-breathing newts by injections of a lamb placenta concentrate. This is a biologic revolution, fought with new species and new ways of thinking...Like the old joke executioner makes a swipe with the samurai sword...well missed me that time. But just try and shake your head three hundred years from now (p. 33-34).

In its reflection on the throat, this strand of organological interest implicates the need "dictating the use of throat bones" insofar as any prolonged use or functioning is understood to have possible long-term structural and evolutionary consequences. If the throat is understood to be captive to a use of subvocal speech, and use in turn to be consequential for evolutionary change, then subvocal speech in the throat, and its image of an inchoate flow mixed up with assorted cultural junk, takes on evolutionary stakes. This also means that a certain fragile intercourse between the pathological and the evolutionary is opened: as a literal anatomical joining or isthmus, the throat also becomes the place of a joining between Burroughs' phylogenetic word virus (genotype) and everyday pathologies (phenotype), especially a common hysteria compulsively droning on phrases in circulation or the half-articulated otherwise, as in Burroughs' cynically funny treatment of greeting and small talk: "(...) the dreaded Talk Sickness. (...) They will swarm out of a derelict building and yack in the faces of pedestrians: 'We love New York', or stick their heads into car windows and yack out: 'Have a good day!'" (2001c, p. 258).

Switching from the long-scale dynamics, the following section will turn toward the directly phenomenological underpinnings. Following Burroughs' discourse into its relatively more metaphysical extensions, next I will outline some radical interventions he designs in the capture of subvocal speech, such as the practical exercises aiming to survive the death of voice, the link between cut-up and subvocal speech, and finally, the sexual practices of strangulation which are a constant in Burroughs' later work.

From stridency to gesture

Before the problem of dispossessing habits of speech comes into its own, there is the strange *Naked lunch* episode of the "talking asshole," foreshadowing both the challenges thrown by the *Nova trilogy* ("do you own a voice?"), and soberer statements of the late novels like "one talks with one's whole body" (2001c, p. 207), with their logical conclusion that if one speaks

with the whole body, this means the throat and mouth apparatus often takes the sole credit for an activity in which the asshole should have its rightful place. The "talking asshole" is funny and obscene, and this is the whole point, insofar as obscenity literally corresponds to the uncanny actual intimacy of what is ostensibly offstage, and this aspect will find further confirmation in Burroughs' later career. The routine as Burroughs' doctor Benway tells it starts with a circus act: "Did I ever tell you about the man who taught his asshole to talk... This man worked for a carnival you dig, and to start with it was like a novelty ventriloquist act. Real funny, too, at first" (2001a, p. 111). However, in dramatic pulp horror fashion, the episode continues by offering a flashy paradigm for the succeeding Burroughsian scenes of bodily expropriation and parasitism: "after a while the ass started talking on its own," making demands and even taking on new functions, one of which is food intake: "Then it developed sort of teeth like little raspy hooks and started eating" (p. 111).

Thus what the talking asshole routine presents is a certain monstrosity of displacement behind which we can glimpse the throat itself, since it is an "organ" that is already polyvalent like the final state of its monstrous double, itself discharging the functions of food intake, breathing, and speech through the structure of a single opening. But this also means that the "scandal of the talking asshole" if you will, is a displacement of the less immediately sensational scandal of the talking throat. In other words, the weirdness and obscenity of the fiction is retroactively clarified by reflection on the throat, the imaginary dispossession opening up to the question of the real but unconscious dispossession.

A part of the uncanniness comes from a certain relation to hearing. If there is a speech in advance of vocality in the throat, it has a sensory status that is different than externally articulated, thus audible speech. As Jean-François Lyotard (2001) pointed out in relation to the experience of "stridency" he found in André Malraux's work, one might even talk about a different type of audibility for this droning:

> We don't hear ourselves...Lying in ambush within our megaphonic apparatuses some little raptor or stridulating insect stowed away in the hold of phonation supposedly keeps watch....I am so accustomed to hearing a parasitic hissing when I speak or sing that when a sound recording allows me to hear my voice—the one that others attribute to me—I fail to recognize it as mine...When good sense affirms that the inaudible voice is homogenous with the audible without for a moment questioning whether the former is even a voice, it omits the fact that what passes by way of the throat is not perceptible, remains unknown to the ego, absolutely forgotten in terms of position, has never been and never will be heard. (2002, pp. 82-88).

Building on and criticizing the longstanding identification between the ego and the voice, Lyotard points out an inassimilable alterity in the relation established with one's own voice. It is possible to argue that subvocal speech in Burroughs' work has precisely the same status as this stridency, in terms of taking the throat as an organ of innervated and obscure reception; describing a state of habituation to what is inherently strange; and finally, in terms of a constitutive imperceptibility which can only respond to oblique strategies. The exception being, with Burroughs there is also compulsion in addition to mere inassimilability by the "ego."

Interestingly, when subvocal speech crystallizes in Burroughs' discourse, especially with *The ticket that exploded,* it is offered as a historical diagnosis about the condition of "modern man" in general, without giving up on new variations on the figure of dispossession and literal capture by alien organisms: "From symbiosis to parasitism is a short step. The word is now a virus. The word may once have been a healthy neural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that *forces you to talk*. That organism is the word" (2014a, "Operation rewrite" section). This suggests the general idea owes no less to a synchronic

diagnosis about the "modern man"'s relation to the word than a biologically phylogenetic framework, a relation defined as losing the option of silence. Modernity spells an aggravation for the word virus, making a proprioception not overcoded by chatter an impossibility; it delivers language users under its influence to a constant intention to signify with no great regard for the context and interlocutor, ending up in an addictive pursuit of the good of throat and brain static for its own ends. This is the diagnosis that Burroughs' strategy of acceleration departs from, his own prose not being immune.

The manner in which one carries on the static matters, however, as becomes clearer around "cut-up". One of the original formulations of subvocal speech is significant in joining it with Burroughs' longstanding interest in conditionings forged by unbreakable verbal, perceptual or ideational associations with a life of their own. The famous technique of literary montage called cut-up, originally developed to bring surprising and unaccustomed syntactic novelties into being, accompanies early formulations of subvocal speech. Thus, interventions in the "system" of language on the one hand and those in the pragmatic voice level are complementary in Burroughs, so much so that cut-up as a model of syntactic subversion also appears as a concept playing across nuances between interoception and proprioception. In a logic underwritten by an expansive understanding of conditioning, subvocal speech hinges on a visceral association or organic splicing which ties the very sense of existence to it, an association underwritten by habit: "Subvocal speech is the word organism the 'Other Half' spliced in with your body sounds. You are convinced by association that your body sounds will stop if sub-vocal speech stops" (2014a, "In that game?" section).[6] Burroughs' refrain in the *Ticket* (2014a) which correlates the "movement of your intestines the sound of breathing", with subvocal speech on a level of familiarity also relies on the same move. By anticipating a series of forays into various linkages among sex, death, and language in the locus of subvocal speech, Burroughs draws attention to a fear at the core of self-preservation, which implicates speech through a sequence of sonic intermediaries or associations: properly functioning organs and their obscurely or interoceptively registered "sounds" are in an inextricable association with subvocal speech (which is an experience of tainted proprioception for Burroughs), with a consequent confusion in the attribution of the sense of existential security. Thus for Burroughs there is a fear that the cessation of subvocal speech can only be on pain of a sense of inexistence or dying—largely because of the immediately felt, unbreakable sensory association between this speech and the "sounds" of organs, which grants a tacit reassurance about well-being.[7] A certain existential fear involving the body's continued existence sanctions the forms of bad infinity which speech takes in subvocal form. By way of an example, Lydenberg's remarks on the splicing and ideological identity between breathing and speaking is useful. According to Lydenberg (1994), for Burroughs, "the breathing circuit, the passage between inside and outside, is where the individual is most vulnerable and where the word insinuates itself most effectively" (p. 425). Burroughs finds in the simple affirmation that "words are made from breath" the danger of a perverse causal reversal between breathing and subvocal speech (Burroughs cited in Lydenberg, p. 425). One no longer speaks because one can breathe first, but as it were, one owes breathing to speaking/muttering.[8]

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[6] In an interview with J.E. Rivers (2000) Burroughs remarks, "the whole of Western psychiatry has been sidetracked...It should have gone along the lines of Pavlov and the conditioned reflex" (p. 98).

[7] Largely because these "sounds" must have a different status than external objects of audition, there is room to think that they are more properly acts of interoception themselves. Subvocal speech works like an ever present—but ideological— guarantee of a continued interoception and bodily self-regulation.

[8] In this context, Burroughs' difference from other influential theorists of the word and voice, Charles Olson for

Silencing subvocal speech by renouncing the assurance of being inherent in it therefore appears as a desirable route of consciousness alteration, recalling so many "spiritual exercises" of confrontation with death: "Death is the final separation of the sound and image tracks. However, once you have broken the chains of association linking sub-vocal speech with body sounds, shutting off subvocal speech need not entail shutting off body sounds and consequent physical death" (2014a, "In that game?" section). Ideally, one would not have to die to get rid of undesirable subvocal speech, but only ideally. Thus, gesturing toward the more desperate and mystical strategies of his late work, Burroughs finds a promising possibility in surviving one's death of voice—which must at the same time be conceived as coming off a really entrenched habit— making a bid on new experiences of time and presence outside the need-based time of subvocal speech. The ordeal of voice death is supposed to restore what is stolen: the possibility of an expanded consciousness and an alterity in discourse; a fully responsive attitude to context.

Moreover, the idea of a splicing between the generalized body sound and subvocal speech also seems to imply that this splicing can respond to manoeuvrings of the kind that restore spontaneity by disassociation, as in cut-up. This aspect is significant because it also relies on that strange topology at stake in Burroughs' concerns with the body, whereby methodical interoception or scanning of what is "inside," might be the scanning of a heteronomous and heterogenous outside; and alternatively, something synthesized "outside" like cut-ups, can help reorient "lines of association" taking root in a given individual. But there are other external and more malign influences afield as well, as in Burroughs' visions of the parasitic mass-media proxies the Death Dwarfs with their deliberate induction of sonic misattribution as a way to full takeover: "These noxious dwarfs can spit out a whole newspaper in ten seconds imitating your words after you and sliding in suggestion insults—That is the entry gimmick of The Death Dwarfs: supersonic imitation and playback so you think it is your own voice" (2014b, "The death dwarf in the street" section).

Following Burroughs' mention of a neural cell and the references to "body sounds" earlier, the relation between the neural level and the body at large requires an elaboration, since grasping this relation matters for coming to terms with the pragmatic interventions that Burroughs designs and attaches to his diagnoses of capture. The absence of external articulation does not mean a solely neural, mental, or incorporeal agitation, and the mode of corporeity involved can be specified further. Given the continuum between the neural impulse and the body at large, there is room for the adjunction of a notion that does not appear often in Burroughs: gesture. There is a precision to this notion that is often not found in most approaches to Burroughs' work which often take dispossession as a linguistically global phenomenon given once and for all, without regard for the micro-acts that constitute it. Phenomenological visions of language with their insistence on the fundamental character of gesture might have a lot to offer in this context, despite their tension with the influential body-without-organs model of corporeal experience that Burroughs' work often highlights. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "the spoken word is a genuine gesture, and it contains its meaning in the same way as the gesture contains its" (cited in Gallagher, p. 125). Long after the phenomenologist's assertion, Shaun Gallagher (2005) also affirmed it from a psycholinguistic point of view by writing that there is a "microgenesis of speech and gesture from a primitive stage or 'growth point' through the

instance, is striking. For Olson, the link between breath and word is an original source for poetry that needs reactivation, requiring the poet to reach "down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs." (Cited in McCaffery, 2001, p. 184).

kinesic stroke where they coincide semantically, pragmatically, and motorically" (p. 125). I believe this characterization can help reformulate the status of subvocal speech, for which the fact that it is always on the brink of actualization, like a gesture, is so important. Thus, "the labial preliminary" of the throat microphone experiments which led Philip Mikriammos to think that "before it is heard, Burroughs' voice precedes itself, it announces itself," extends into even further preliminaries in fact (Mikriammos cited in Lydenberg 424). It is the capture of "kinesic stroke" or the microgenesis of linguistic meaning, the aberrations of the subtle transformation of neural impulse into a material intention to signify that Burroughs' subvocal speech engages. According to this recasting, the imperceptibly motor and even vibrational forms of materiality, as per the earlier example of Death Dwarfs, or as when Burroughs talks of the "disaster of nova pulsed need dictates use of throat bones" and "scratches of throat gristle," would be gestures, no longer safe from heteronomy.

To recapitulate, for Burroughs subvocal speech is a phylogenetic heritage exacerbated with contemporaneous collective uses of the word in mass media; it implies uses of the throat which are gestures of the throat, where throat is understood as a polyvalent organ. The assumption of gestures of speech in the throat provides a more precise answer to the question what it is that may be captured. What is incipient for meaning and relation turns into a bad infinity of habitually abortive acts. The incessant character of subvocal speech deprives intentions to signify and their materialization in throat gestures from any relation to their motivating contextual occasions and possible receivers in a shared world, the habit itself masquerading as the all-sufficient occasion. It therefore becomes a nihilism of solipsistic communication and commentary. It means looking at a tree, and risking "seeing" or mumbling the word tree, and not seeing the tree itself; it is a great occlusion of context. Therefore, when Burroughs wants to make of language an organ of perception in its own right, he encounters the obstacle of subvocal speech, for which the perceptual context does not seem to matter in the right way, hence the often antagonistic relations between the visible and the verbal in Burroughs.

Sex and death in the throat

While subvocal speech is the throat caught in a habit of invisible gestures, the organic presuppositions of this situation can only be accounted for with reference to long scale processes responsible for giving shape to the related structures of human anatomy. Burroughs' vision of the more directly phylogenetic aspect of these questions can be traced through a number of characters, which regularly take on the role of speculating on the evolutionary status of human language. Almost all of these characters serve as mouthpieces for Burroughs to expound on his insights about biological questions like the anatomy of human speech, pathogenesis and its impacts on human evolution, as well as parasitism and symbiosis, starting with the duo of *Naked Lunch*: Dr. Schafer of the all-purpose-hole, and Dr. Benway of the talking asshole (thank god they are not running a real hospital).

In a further stage of his career starting with another trilogy (the "Red Light" novels) Burroughs' concerns with subvocal speech enter a more intimate association with matters of sexuality and death, their juxtaposition with language charging both with novel significance and vice versa. While *The Ticket* also flags these relations in its momentary flashes and refrains like "do I love you in throat gristle?" and "sex words back to color," the later trilogy is more focused in its pursuit. It offers multiple ways of navigating the relations among this trio, even to the point of a certain indeterminacy, sometimes insisting on the tie between sexuality and language, sometimes extending and literalizing the scenario of a death which could serve as an escape from subvocal speech. This final section concentrates on the mobile constellation made up by these more extreme developments, and which find expression in a similar group of characters that continue the functions of Benway and Schafer in articulating borderline biological and linguistic speculation.

The fictional character Dr. Kurt Unruh von Steinplatz has an important role in Burroughs' book of interviews and essays entitled *The Job,*--which precedes the Red Night novels-- and one of his boldest theories pertains to the viral emergence of the word in relation to the anatomical structure of the throat, offering indirectly one of the most complete statements of Burroughs' views on this subject:

> Dr Kurt Unruh von Steinplatz has put forward an interesting theory as to the origins and history of this word virus. He postulates that the word was a virus of what he calls "*biologic* mutation" affecting a change in its host which was then genetically conveyed. One reason that apes can't talk is because the structure of their inner throats is simply not designed to formulate words. He postulates that alterations in throat structures were occasioned by a virus illness…. The illness perhaps assumed a more malignant form in the male because of his more developed and rigid muscular structure, causing death through strangulation and vertebral fracture. Since the virus in both male and female precipitates sexual frenzy through irritation of sex centers in the brain, the male impregnated the females in their death spasms and the altered throat structure was genetically conveyed. (2008, "Playback from Eden to Watergate")

Extending the faint intimations of the link between subvocal speech and death, this passage also concentrates so many of Burroughs' interests bearing on the living at large. An important thing to note is the scientifically unorthodox degree of power granted to the environmental influence that is the word virus to "affect a change in its host" that will take evolutionary hold involving at once structure and function. Those who do not perish of illness, seem to find routes to a selection process through adaptive progeny. Thus pathology in its norm bending capacity and evolutionary processes intertwine here in no uncertain way. Interestingly, Burroughs' adventurous foray into origins of the capacity of speech does not seem so incompatible with specialist discourse on the matter. As Philip Lieberman (2000) points out, "it is incorrect to claim that the human SVT [the supralaryngeal vocal tract] (which has a low larynx position) evolved to make swallowing possible. The only adaptive value of the low human larynx appears to be to enhance the phonetic robustness of human speech" (p. 141). It is the catch attached to this evolutionary ability that seems to interest Burroughs: "The advantages derived from having a vocal tract with 1:1 proportions are balanced, however, by a serious biological cost—the threat of death resulting from a blocked larynx. There is very little doubt that many thousands of incidents of fatal choking occurred in the human past" (Lieberman, 2007, p. 17).

Burroughs seems to have had a sense similar to Lieberman's concerning the common origins of an ability for articulate speech and the likeliness of choking. Since throat is a polyvalent organ for Burroughs, it matters a great deal that it is not only for speaking, or only for food intake, but a junction or "switch point"—as Elizabeth Wilson puts it—where various functions overlap, not always with a perfect division of tasks. There is even room for cross-investments: speaking itself taking an abrasive character with material effects reflecting back on its organic conditions: "Nimun does a shuffling sinuous dance singing in a harsh fish language that tears the throat like sandpaper" (1981, p. 328); "so you're bound to have a sore throat, just like legs are sore after riding a horse (...) and Arabic is frankly the worst...it literally cuts an English-speaking throat" (2001c, p.207).[9] Similarly, what Burroughs was doing with the throat microphone for instance, with choking and gurgling sounds, seems to take on greater stakes than apparent at first sight with its admittedly perplexing sensory outcomes and artistic

[9] Burroughs' theories on the potentially adverse effects of infrasonic sound vibration lends support to this vision of a language and throat gesture with destructive effects: "(…) slow vibration, below the hearing level, can create a sort of pendulum action, a reverberation in solid objects that quickly builds up to intolerable intensity " (2008). As Casey Rae reports, this intrigued people like David Bowie, who calls the destructive infrasound vibration of the kind that appealed to Burroughs "black noise" (2019, p. 118).

failures.

Theoretical conjectures such as Steinplatz's indicate something deeply disquieting about speech, which, as a parasitic imposition with corporeal effects finds much more practical countermeasures in Burroughs' late work, fitting a pragmatic approach to language and subvocal speech bent on formulating interventions. One of these is given in the novel *Cities of the red night*, (1981) and it involves taking subvocal speech as the object of bodily neutralization through a practice of self-control akin to meditation or a yoga of silence. This time Burroughs offers the stage to a character "who excels at the martial arts": "He explains once general body control is mastered, any physical skill can be learned at once" (p. 126). Continuing, Burroughs makes him offer a whole narrative of self-training:

> To accomplish sexual control, I abstained from masturbation. In order to achieve orgasm, it is simply necessary to relive a previous orgasm...Having brought sexual energy under control I now had the key to bodily control....I went on to bring speech under control, to be used when I want it, not yammering in my ear at all times or twisting tunes and jingles in my brain. I used the same method of projecting myself into a time when my mind seemed empty of words...One day as I was paddling on the lake and about to put out fishlines, I felt the weakness in my chest, silver spots appeared in front of my eyes with a vertiginous sensation of being sucked into a vast space where words do not exist. (p. 128)

There is an apparent influence of the unorthodox psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich here, with reference to the tendency of uncontrolled sexual energy to wreak havoc, but what is rather more significant is the way this weird psycho-somatic-analysis assigns a common source to sexual impulses and speech conducts like subvocal speech. Particularly, in the associational logic of Burroughs' work, the silver spots are a patent orgasm leitmotif used in a way that signals the intimacy among sex, death, and language. A brief detour will turn up enough evidence: "Silver spots boiled in front of his eyes and he ejaculated"; " I ran through a sex dream like reciting my ABC's when suddenly silver spots boiled in front of my eyes and I experienced a feeling of weakness in the chest—the dying feeling..." (1981, p. 11; p. 128). It is possible to appreciate a dual gamble for Burroughs here: exploring the death of subvocal speech as a type of orgasm, and at the same time exploring an orgasm proxy for death as a muting of subvocal speech. Hence Burroughs' ambivalent fascination with the risky practice of strangulation as an aid to orgasm, which would offer indirect benefits in a drastic muting of subvocal speech: "Every sort of copulation was going in front of him, every disgusting thing he could think of. Some of them had pillow-cases and towels wrapped around each other's neck in some kind of awful contest"; "Kiki fucks Jerry, pulling a red cashmere scarf tight around his neck and grinning into his face. As Jerry ejaculates, blood gushes from his nose" (1981, p. 19; p. 324). Consequently, it is safe to point to a literalization of the strategy Burroughs evokes earlier in his career: the survival of the death of voice. In *Ticket* and under the banner of cut-up, Burroughs thinks the shutting down of subvocal speech is always a risky proposition, thanks to its inevitable conditional splicing with body sounds, as the body sound is a form of interoception itself. Yet the late work precisely seems to be pursuing this strategy in a way: Orgasm as a syncope in which one could "die" and, as a secondary benefit, get rid of subvocal speech.

The place of dead roads, Burroughs' next novel after *Cities*, only makes this new route more visible, by a further claim on the mutual intertwinements of speech, sexuality, and strangulation with the description of an evolutionary primal scene that is none too flattering for humanity. In the context of an adventure sequence pursuing "a final solution of the language problem," (2001c p. 206) the novel transports its protagonist Kim to witness a fictional species called "smouners," also known as "larynx rubbers," who are at a stage of nascent speech. Before being sent on his mission, Kim is tutored by another doctor who offers his perspective on the link between language and sexuality: "It must be something inherent in the language itself. After all, language is communication—that is, getting to know someone all over like in the altogether.... There is in fact strong evidence that at one time the larynx was a sexual organ...The

first words were not warning cries or exchanges of information.... The first words were obscenities" (p. 242). A more prominent sociality comes to supplement and correct the specious solipsism of subvocal speech here. The polyvalence of the throat is taken one step further with the throat being assigned a direct sexual role, shedding retrospective light on the earlier instances of the erotization of the throat in this work.

In Burroughs' thought experiment, smouners, the fictively isolated species observed by Kim, afford contemporary observation of primitive language structures and behaviors, and give vivid support to the linkages Burroughs wants to establish by embodying them. In other words, they represent a phenomenology of human speech turned inside out, and taken monstrous form, in that sense having something in common with the talking asshole episode. The scene of obscene manifestation in the novel—an absorption of male by the female that recalls Steinplatz' conjecture that "the male impregnated the females in their death spasms" —does not live up to Burroughs' insistent and somewhat outlandish, but nevertheless stimulating vein of imagination (pure revulsion and a touch of misogyny take the place of intelligent subversion). Nevertheless, bringing the diverse strands discussed so far to a culmination, the episode offers a fanciful interspecies phenomenology that helps Burroughs summarize his latest linguistic speculations about human speech as of *Dead roads*: "These beings have sex by talking in each other's throats. They are called 'smouners'...An experienced smouner can strangle an adversary by this ventriloquism" (2001c, p. 208).[10] By this point, this is an association that is not coincidental for Burroughs, for whom the strange *partage* between speech and masochistic eroticism becomes an essential feature of reflection on the origin of language. And he still reveals the same motivations that seemed to have guided his campaign against subvocal speech, conceived as a dispossession by an alien organism: "the study of the larynx people could give us a vital clue...a way to descend into our own minds and confront the intruder on what he is trying to make his home ground" (p. 247).

The associations that seem to come out stronger than before from this scene, are those between sexuality and language, yet this association is not treated in a way that would let one decide with exactitude what of language is erotic, and what of sexuality is linguistic beyond the strange functional superimpositions and sedimented time in the throat. As to this old theme, a hypothesis about the likelihood of choking still attends the conjectures about original language, but it seems that Burroughs is no longer interested in strangulation as a subversive practice of language death, shifting from ambivalent endorsement to seeing a threat of weaponization of sound that recalls the *Nova express*' Death Dwarfs. Overall however, in *Dead roads* a remarkable career-long consistency asserts itself in Burroughs' return to a notion of compulsive subvocal speech as something alien and not to be owned.

Conclusion

As outlined above, Burroughs' critique of subvocal speech departs from the primacy he gives to a sense of compulsion, which often results in a lack in his work of a more affirmative slant of inquiry into speech, be it with reference to its libidinal undercurrents, or its capacity for recursion, rational deliberation, communication, and self-expression. This last however, has a negative presence that is hard to ignore, especially since subvocal speech regularly appears as an encroachment on a domain often credited to a self: it is an inner voice which is by default caught up in phrases, its automatic facility giving the impression that it is some other agency who is ultimately responsible. Thus, if one of the two controlling figures of Burroughs' views

[10] It seems a certain infrasonic effect is at play as well, Burroughs mentioning "an ancient evil crooning sound that stirs and twists in their throats, the converse between the creature and the bladder" (2001c).

on language is a sci-fi conception of a parasitic alien "other half," the other is the biological word virus, resulting in an implicit exchange with immunology as a discourse that has done a great deal to interrogate notions of a pure and autonomous self with clearly delineated borders and free of infection.

The semblance of the lack of a directly affirmative approach to language and subvocal speech does not mean that Burroughs is not deeply sensitive to the ambivalences of his subject: so much negation and suppression is both the sign and generator of a dynamics of fascination. As indicated above, Burroughs also pursues a distinctive strategy of acceleration, which requires one should traverse and tarry with the alienation before turning away from it. Hence the whole sci-fi, evolutionary, and diagnostic apparatus rallied against subvocal speech often shows a self-propelling nature, fighting language compulsion by means of language, approaching the threshold of a silence immanent to the word.

Moreover, despite its fundamental asymmetry, this critical discourse sheds a strange light on various relations among sound, language, and voice. Particularly, Burroughs' discussions of subvocal speech display a keen sense of the voice as a medium of uncanny exposure: to the other, to the other in oneself that precedes the self, and even an ancient virus, not to forget the imitative forms of mass-culturally mediated sociality about which he has always a lot to say. With its various extensions, subvocal speech confirms the case that an author can make their acute discomforts revealing of larger issues, producing impersonal insight.

In highlighting the bodily conditions and manifestations of speech beyond external articulation, Burroughs trains a particularly close attention on the throat as a locus of spooky animation. The simple experience of the movement of the throat in articulating words, comes under a really minute and estranging attention in this work, hence my reference to concepts which often attend phenomenological philosophy's conceptualization of corporeal experience: proprioception, interoception, and gesture. On the level of speech, gesture especially seems like a concept that could be useful in helping reconstruct the experience of subvocal speech in a "bottom-up," way, as it were. These categories of corporeal experience also demonstrate how Burroughs' attention enfolds a large continuum of sound phenomena, ranging from the more physiological body sounds or dangerous infrasound on the one end, to linguistically coded and conventionalized sounds on the other—with the body acting as an active conduit stretched between them.

In the foregoing I have argued that despite their irreverent and chaotic sense of humor, Burroughs' reflections on subvocal speech and its locus in the throat may support some serious commitments as well: Throat as a virtually polyvalent organ at the crossroads of potentially antagonistic impulses, and subject to multiple functions may be the most important of these serious commitments. I have tried to trace this central preoccupation through potentially conflicting associations and philosophical perspectives, such as the tension between the more phenomenologically oriented concepts named above and the clear affinities with the concept of "body without organs" as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, for which it ultimately served as an inspiration.

Burroughs endows the stock trope of language-pharmakon, or the poisoned gift figure with theoretical specificity thanks to some evolutionary hypotheses: Language as a gift, yes, but not without a threat of choking. Subvocal speech itself, inasmuch as it takes form in a materialization in the throat, also supports this approach to language. The way Burroughs' experiments—both imaginary exercises in the novels and real life tinkering with technological intervention through throat microphones—often target the throat is not an accidental choice, and finds another justification in Burroughs' engagements with biology. Through the long-scale evolutionary view it provides, this final dimension brings a richness to Burroughs' experimental

contributions to inner speech, vocality, and language.

Regarding the biological aspect, it could be argued that there are some unmistakable overlaps between Burroughs' ideas on the viral origins of speech (and by implication subvocal speech), and theories broadly categorized as posthumanist. Just as the posthuman often adds up to a sense of entanglement with otherness constitutive for the human, Burroughs thinks what has long been identified with the essential property of humanity, is actually an alien or viral incursion, rendering the origins of humanity themselves up for grabs. A related and perhaps far more decisive parallel is the degree of acknowledgment given to heteronomous influence on human action and self-expression, whereby the stress is placed on distributed agency.

It is here also, around the matter of heteronomy, that the success of the critical thrust of Burroughs' notion can be evaluated. Burroughs' problem with subvocal speech ultimately depends on a sense of lost *presence* that attends compulsive speech, but over the years his counterstrategies seem to get more and more eclectic, and perhaps a little desperate as well. At first the syntactic operation of cut-up is transposed to the level of body's own dynamics, but this approach is not endorsed in a sustained way throughout the later work. The more immediate and direct route of throat microphone exercises also seems to reach a dead end in trying to externalize and isolate that whose effectiveness depends on being an internal murmur: the virus of subvocal speech is not captured alive. As to the last and most radical tack the brief appearances of which mark the late work: I have argued for the non-coincidental nature of the strangulation motif in Burroughs' late novels and its reciprocal presuppositions with the theme of subvocal speech. This is also a motif which not only makes sense from the point of view of Burroughs's evolutionary theories, but also highlights a pragmatic interest with risky forms of life and pleasure. Perhaps it is right to take Burroughs at his word when he identifies addiction as a whole way of life, as this would mean taking the gesturally underwritten dispossession that is subvocal speech itself as a way of life as well, demanding nothing short of deadly confrontation to alter it.

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