A Logic Beyond Causality:

Postmodern Narrative Logic in William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Alfred Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse*, and Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*

by

Kazunori Oda

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Allen Hibbard, Thesis Advisor

Dr. Marion Hollings, Member

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary critical discourses on postmodernism narrative have noted that some postmodernist fictions keep readers from settling on definitive interpretations of the narrative and foreground the process of meaning-making. However, the mechanism by which those fictions draw readers' attention to the process of meaning-making has not been sufficiently examined. In this thesis, I focus on unique narrative logics seen in three postmodern novels: William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959), Alfred Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse* (1967), and Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988). The narratives of these three works resist linear and logical development of storylines. Characters suddenly leap from one location to another without any transitional element, and the chronological order of scenes is left in doubt. These breakdowns in the chains of causality unravel the narrative into mere fluid arrangements of narrative-particles, from which readers can create their own order and meaning. This unique mechanism of meaning-making is what I would like to call postmodern narrative logic.

Postmodern narrative logic opens up the text to multiple interpretations and highlights the notion of "the death of the author" and its accompanying "birth of the reader." Postmodern narrative logic is a means to construct one's tentative version of truth out of enormous numbers of possibilities floating in the neutral and free (yet both revolutionary and destructive) space of postmodernity.

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INTRODUCTION

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A postmodern philosophy of decentered-ness largely destabilizes the mythic hegemony of what Jean François Lyotard calls "metanarratives."[1] This skeptical view of *grand*-narratives opens up the semi-free arena for little narratives, in which a multiplicity of local discourses will be fairly reexamined and relocated. Jacques Derrida in his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science" (1970) finds the similar kind of paradigm shift in the concept of "structure." Derrida observes that any structure is *now* (and has been) divested of its fixed origin (the center of structurality) and "the freeplay of the structure"—the neutral situation where any part can tentatively function as the center, which balances and organizes the coherence of the system (structure)—starts over (247-48). This "freeplay of the structure" can be found in the very dynamics surrounding the narrative of some fictions that are likely to be labeled as postmodern. In some postmodernist fictions, the narrative is dislodged from a fixed foundation needed to establish a definitive, meaningful story as a whole; and therefore, any narrative fragment is able to perform as a tentative foundational point, based on which readers (re)-organize and (re)-construct a meaningful succession of narrative fragments, tentatively in their own ways. This unique mechanics—through which readers extract and construct order and meaning at their own disposals from the decentered narrative configuration—is what I would like to call "postmodern narrative logic."

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[1] Lyotard explains that metanarratives are the narratives to which any science refers in order to legitimate itself, such as "the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth … [, and] the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of the knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end" (*A Postmodern Reader*, 72).

Before fully presenting my definition of postmodern narrative logic, I would like to locate my study in the context of critical discourses on postmodern narrative (or fiction). In what follows, I would like briefly to cite four important and interesting studies on the topic of postmodernism in narrative (or fiction)—Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) and *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992), Linda Hucheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), and Mark Currie's *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998)—and identify the relationships between my study and existing critical discussions. In *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Brian McHale "construct[s] the repertory of motifs and devices, and the system of relations and differences, shared by a particular class of texts" and roughly characterizes postmodernism in fiction by stating "postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by epistemological issues" (xi-xii). In brief, whereas modernist fiction foregrounds "such epistemological themes as the accessibility and circulation of knowledge […] and the problem of 'unknowability' or the limits of knowledge" by posing questions as: "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; […] What are the limits of the knowable?," postmodernist fiction leaves problems of *knowing* in the background and foregrounds ontological problems about *modes of being* by posing questions such as: "What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; […] What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?" (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 9-10). This broad characterization of postmodern fiction is seemingly reasonable and serves to point toward a tentative list of basic characteristics of postmodern narratives (or fictions), to which my study is indebted for the analysis of several qualities of postmodern narrative logic.

Published a year after the publication of McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*, Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) presents a more specific characterization for postmodernist fiction. Speculating on "a crisis" in which contemporary literary studies fall—that is, a dilemma involving "the urge to essentialize literature and its language into a unique, vast, closed textual preserve and the contrasting urge to locate it into larger discursive contexts"—, Hutcheon notes that "[p]ostmodern art and theory both incarnate this very crisis, not by choosing sides, but by living out the contradiction of giving in to both urges" (x). Hutcheon characterizes postmodernism in fiction as "historiographic metafiction"[2] and explains that historiographic metafiction "[leaves] overt the contradictions between its self-reflexivity and its historical grounding" (xiii). This "deliberate refusal to resolve contradictions" calls attention to "the process of meaning-making in the production and reception of art, but also in broader discursive terms: it foregrounds, for instance, how we make historical 'facts' out of brute 'events' of the past, or, more generally, how our various sign systems grant meaning to our experience" (Hutcheon x). This "process of meaning-making" that Hutcheon suggest is especially foregrounded in postmodern fiction is precisely the primary focus of my study. My study on postmodern narrative logic will provide another plausible explanations of how postmodern fiction calls attention to the process of meaning-making (the process of constituting a whole from various different parts), viewing the text as a mere succession of words and sentences.

In *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992), Brian McHale revises the approach he took in his previous work, *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987). Acknowledging a notorious

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[2] Hutcheon notes: "By this [historiographic metafiction] I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 5).

paradox which accompanies any attempt of theorizing postmodernism,[3] McHale admits that his first work, *Postmodernist Fiction,* inevitably employs a form of meta-narrative—through which he views postmodernism as a kind "fixed essence"—in order to propose a model of postmodernist fictions (6). On the other hand, his subsequent approach, demonstrated in *Constructing Postmodernism,* takes "constructivism's basic epistemological principle"[4] into primary account and views the text or the narrative (as well as those constructs which we call "postmodernism") as a plurality of constructions, which are able to be decoded/deconstructed into agreeably perceptible units of meanings in many different ways. My study on postmodern narrative logic shares this radical view of the narrative as disintegrated configuration presented in McHale's *Constructing Postmodernism* and investigates how select postmodern narratives construct such an amorphous structure.

In *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998), Mark Currie points out that the view of the narrative (construct) as disintegrated/amorphous construction is actually one of the unique aspects of contemporary narratological theory. In his study, Currie carefully outlines a paradigm shift that took place in narratological theory from the 1980s through 90s and roughly summarizes the transition in the theory (of how we perceive and make a critical discourse about narrative) into the following three types—diversification, deconstruction, and politicization, or in other words, "[f]rom

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[3] The paradox is that "attempting to describe the situation is likely to draw accusations of meta-narrating" (*Constructing Postmodernism* 6). Perhaps, one of the most well-known examples of this is Linda Hutcheon's criticism of Jean François Lyotard's simplest definition of postmodernism: Hutcheon states, "[Lyotard produced] an obviously meta-narrative theory of postmodernism's incredulity to meta-narrative" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 198).

[4] "Constructivism's basic epistemological principle is that *all* our cognitive operations, including (or especially) perception itself, are theory-dependent. This means, first of all, that data do not exist independently of a theory that constitutes them *as* data; they are not so much 'given' as 'taken,' seized" (*Constructing Postmodernism* 2).

discovery to invention, from coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics" (2). Currie observes, "[n]arratology has changed exactly because the values of standardization have been replaced in literary studies by the values of pluralism and irreducible difference: not only difference between texts but difference between readers" (14). According to Currie, this realignment of values in literary studies seems to be led by the emergence of poststructuralist critical approaches to language: "poststructuralists moved away from the treatment of narrative (and language system in general) as building, as solid objects in the world, toward the view that the narratives were narratological inventions construable in an almost infinite number of ways" (3). This poststructuralist perspective on narrative—that "the narratives were narratological inventions construable in an almost infinite number of ways"—seems to share its primary insight with McHale's view of the narrative demonstrated in *Constructing Postmodernism*.

My study on postmodern narrative logic shares this poststructuralist perspective on narrative as "narratological inventions" (or in other words, McHale's view of the narrative as disintegrated/amorphous configuration) and examines an interesting dynamics at work in some postmodern fictions: namely, how my target novels—William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959), Alfred Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse* (1967), and Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988)—invite readers to view their narratives as disintegrated configuration, from which readers construct their own tentative order and meaning. As I have cited in the previous few paragraphs, contemporary critical discourses on postmodernism in narrative have discussed the decentered-quality of postmodern fictions—which foregrounds the very process of meaning-making in the narrative—from the poststructuralist perspective (McHale's *Constructing Postmodernism* and Currie's *Postmodern Narrative Theory*).

However, the mechanisms by which those fictions draw our attention to the process of meaning-making (or, more generally, the process of constituting a whole from various different parts) has not been sufficiently examined and discussed. Here, located in this gap, my study on postmodern narrative logic participates in the contemporary critical discourses on postmodern narrative.

Now, I would like to go back to detail my definition of postmodern narrative logic. Postmodern narrative logic is a mechanism that involves the projection of new fluid arrangements of fragmentary parts, from which readers can create their own construction of order and meaning at their own disposals. The narrative deploying a postmodern narrative logic has a unique structure that I would like to call "a *rhizomatic structure*."[5] "Rhizome" is an abstract conception introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand of Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). For the description of "rhizome," Deleuze and Guattari first explain a conception of "root," which contrasts the conception of "rhizome." Deleuze and Guattari call the classical form of book "the root-book" and point out that the narrative in "the root-book" only operates in linear and binary mode. The conventional ("root") narrative constructs a unified, orderly, and meaningful progression of events—which form the rigid chains of causality between each narrative fragment—and assumes a strong sense of unity. However, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, "this system of thought has never reached an understanding of multiplicity" (*A Thousand of Plateaus* 5), because it does not

[5] I understand that a phrase "rhizomatic structure" is contradictory, since the conception of rhizome already connotes the quality of *anti*-structurality, as Deleuze and Guattari clearly explain: "[u]nlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines" (*A Thousand of Plateaus* 21). However, here I would like to use the phrase for indicating a kind of structure which contains a great openness, instability, and susceptibility to multiple and alternative *decipherments*.

acknowledge the fluctuating relationship between signifier and signified that inevitably resideds in the system of language. Narratives that have a *rhizomatic structure* challenge and break through this restrictive quality of the "root" narrative, by abandoning "a strong principal unity" which forged by the chains of causality.

Deleuze and Guattari announce, "unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states" (*A Thousand of Plateaus* 21). The "rhizomatic" narrative never is retained by the chains of causality that serve to render the narrative's meaning fixed and definitive. The chains of causality in the narrative are induced from the chronological order of the events with a clear delineation of scene, characters, and space; however, the "rhizomatic" narrative in some postmodern fiction barely allows readers to define with certainty any foundational temporal/spatial narrative frame. Characters move from one location to another without any explanation of the means of and the reasons for their relocations; and the chronological order of scenes is left in doubt. Various different scenes are enumerated with few if any causal connections and references throughout the narrative; that is what the "rhizomatic" narrative is ever all about. On the one hand, the text itself no longer embodies any definitive order and meaning, because of the absence of the chains of causality in the narrative. However, on the other hand, readers are able to extract and construct their own tentative order and meaning from the "rhizomatic" narrative at their own disposal, according to their own logic and value systems. "In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states"

(Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand of Plateaus* 21). At a temporal intersection between readers and the text, postmodern narrative logic allows for the construction of a tentative order and meaning of the "rhizomatic" narrative.

Each of the three fictions that I have picked for this study—William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Alfred Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse*, and Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*—respectively employs a revolutionary, new form of narrative (or novel), which can be characterized as a "rhizomatic" narrative (or novel). Interestingly, each of the three fictions shows a different mechanism of breaking down the chains of causality and producing a "rhizomatic" narrative. My study will explore the differences and relations between the three discursive narrative configurations and also examine how the three presentations of new radical narrative form foreground and reflect a complex dynamic with respect to the narrative logic within the context of postmodernism.

The first chapter, "The Narrative that Imploded," discusses the narrative logic of William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959). The earliest of the three of my target novels, Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* seems to constitute the most disintegrated narrative. The narrator is unfixed and unidentified, and the novel's point of view frequently shuffles between first and third person. The narrative suddenly moves from one scene to another with no transitional elements, just like switching TV channels from one to another. Recipients of such a narrative will be trapped in fascinating if disorienting questions such as: "Which scenes are characters actually physically involved in, and which are mere imaginary fantasies that unfold only in the narrator's mind?" For a deeper understanding of this enigmatic novel's narrative logic, the following two questions are posed and discussed in this chapter: first, "How does Burroughs create such instability and openness in the text?" and second, "How does such a

disintegrated narrative with such a multiplicity of possible orders and meanings seem to preserve a certain sense of unity?"

The second chapter, "Logical Construction of a Logic of Simulation," discusses the narrative logic of Alfred Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse* (1967). Like Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse* refuses to enact a linear, logical, and orderly progression of events; however, Chester's narrative politics in *The Exquisite Corpse* seems less radical than those of *Naked Lunch*. The novel's unidentified narrator keeps a third-person point of view and depicts a series of surrealistic events in very clear language; consequently, as Diana Athill notes in her afterword to the novel, "there can never be a moment's doubt about what is happening to the characters" (253). Nevertheless, due to the unique narrative structure of the novel, the clarity of description does not point toward any certainty of interpretation. Readers may indeed have no trouble determining "what is happening to the characters" yet never apprehend what the particular scenes mean within the whole structure of narrative. This second chapter of my thesis discusses and examines the following interesting question: "How does Chester create a narrative that embraces such a strange slippage between surface (description) and what is underneath (meaning)?"

The third (and last) chapter, "An Unreasonable Myth (an Intertwined Dialectic of Discipline and Anarchy)," discusses the narrative logic of Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988). The most recent of the three of my target novels, Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* perhaps embodies the most conventionally plotted narrative. Acker, in *Empire of the Senseless*, constructs a conventional, linear narrative progression, while employing a fragmented, multi-voiced narrative style that serves to break down the chains of causality. The narrative of *Empire of the Senseless* rendered by the two central protagonists is jumbled, equivocal, transgressive, and frequently

seems illogical and discursive; yet at the same time, the narrative surely constitutes a certain, orderly progression of events, which allegorically envisions the corruption of the preexisting patriarchal social order. This third (and last) chapter of my exploration of postmodern narrative logic discusses and examines the following question: "How (and why) does Acker create such a unique narrative configuration that embodies the intertwined tension between rational order (the whole narrative structure) and the freeplay of local discourse (discursive narrative particles)?"

My explorations of the three different "rhizomatic" narrative configurations—which radically challenge the conventional narrative logic based on the principle of causality—will reveal complex dynamics within the field of postmodern narrative logic.

CHAPTER I

The Narrative that Imploded:

Postmodern Narrative Logic in *Naked Lunch*

Postmodern narrative logic breaks down the author's stage for his/her unilateral presentation and opens up readers' playground for their multiple interpretations in the sphere of the text. Deprived of textual chains of causality, postmodern narrative loses the ability to function effectively as agent—that accumulates and delivers invariable meanings of the text to its readers; however, in compensation for the loss of authorial agency, the narrative expands its potential as catalyst that is utilized to create various temporal meanings through readers' collaboration. With postmodern narrative logic, the text reveals itself as an "assemblage" as Deleuze and Guattari use the term: "As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages and in relation to other bodies without organs. We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. […] A book exists only through the outside and on the outside" (*A Thousand of Plateau* 4). There is no fixed essence in the text-as-assemblage; temporal essences of the text will be assumed through collaboration with other assemblages, namely, readers' minds.

Full of intensities, the unreasonable and scandalous surface of some postmodern fiction tempts readers to domesticate its narrative into some digestible form; however, its disrupted internals—the disjointed chains of causality—always prevent readers from settling on any absolute meaning from what they induce from the text. This experience of fascinated disorientation—rupture, flight, or trip—grasps readers by continually provoking and rejecting their ambivalent desires: the desire to

float and play around in the free-playground of the text with its unknowable end, and the desire to arrive back at the certain, fixed, and knowable terminals, which would be a destination of readers' own hermeneutic journeys over and through the text. Disorientation creates fascination, and fascination creates deeper disorientation; postmodern narrative seems to create an endless cycle of fascination and disorientation.

Stepping down from the hegemonic stage, the author no longer exerts power to ring a bell to stop readers' play within the text, by finalizing the narrative with a certain closure. The playground of postmodern narrative is an open labyrinth without any gatekeepers or even any gates. Readers, by themselves, will decide how to leave, where to head for, and what to bring back from the experience of their play, as pages of the book run out. The open arena (text) and its self-disqualified manager (the author) will embrace, but never legitimate, any idea and impression that readers may draw from their experiences of fascinated disorientation, since no unilateral enunciation would fully grasp the self-contradictory multiplicities of the postmodern narrative. Anything goes; nothing ever reaches. Anything is induced; nothing absolute is deduced from a series of inductions.

What I have described in the previous paragraph will surely be experienced by serious readers of William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959). In *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination* (2003), Oliver Harris accurately describes readers' disoriented/fascinated experiences with the narrative of *Naked Lunch*:

> Anyone who has reread *Naked Lunch* with pencil in hand will understand: the pages flicker back and forth, the pencil scratches cross-references along the margin as phrases replicate across the text, traveling from one context and speaker to another, creating a

> labyrinthine network of verbal repetitions and variations that can be collected and collated and arranged into lists but that, finally, yield eerie surface effects of uncanny recognition, of disturbed memory, not deeper levels of meaning. (221)

The experience of fascinated disorientation grasps readers; yet, nobody is able to fully grasp and fix the absolute meaning of the novel's narrative. In fact, although there is much criticism pertaining to the bizarre shocks and potentials surrounding (outside of) the enigmatic text of *Naked Lunch*, no definitive interpretation of the novel's interior content—the narrative itself—has been established. By asserting this, I do not mean to suggest any negligence of contemporary criticism on *Naked Lunch*, since it seems simply impossible to make a certain, valid interpretation of the narrative and develop a narrative-based analysis of the novel from that point. On the contrary, I would like to claim that the condition—the multitude of responses to the inner workings and external connections of the novel without any definitive interpretation of the novel's narrative—would be *per se* an ideal representation of the assemblage-quality of the novel's narrative. The narrative of *Naked Lunch,* due to the disjointed chains of causality within the text, doesn't by itself point toward any absolute meaning of the text waiting to be discovered by readers. Conversely, the text, as assemblage, will interact with readers in order to assume its tentative meanings, which only arise at the temporal intersection between the text and readers. My contribution, in this chapter, to such a cooperative and collaborative criticism of *Naked Lunch* is to develop a theory that explains the unique mechanics at work in the novel, which provokes and disappoints readers' double desire to play with and fully understand the text.

Among many critical voices that proclaim the impossibility of explaining the narrative of *Naked Lunch*, Carol Loranger in her essay "The Book Spill Off the Page

in All Directions" (1999) emphasizes that "*Naked Lunch*'s enduring appeal arises in large part from its instability, its openness to multiple and alternative readings, and its protean ability to seem always to be addressing the addictions and oppressions of today" (par 23). The great instability and openness in the process of meaning-making is surely experienced throughout the narrative of *Naked Lunch* and produces a fluctuating cycle of fascination and disorientation in readers' minds. The question is: How does Burroughs create such instability and openness in the text, while preserving a sense of unity in the novel? In order to respond to this question, I would like to employ Pierre Rosenstiehl and Jean Petitot's concept of "acentered system," which is introduced as the system of "rhizome" in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand of Plateau* (1980): "[acentered systems are] finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other, the stems or channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their *state* at a given moment […] Under these conditions, *n* is in fact always *n* – 1" (17). By subtracting the chains of causality—which is the basis of so-called Aristotelian logic—from the narrative (which makes the condition of "*n* – 1" in the narrative), the text of *Naked Lunch* seems to constitute an acentered system, which makes the text quite unstable and open to multiple and alternative readings.

A close look at the narrative of *Naked Lunch* reveals that the breakdown of the chains of causality seems to be caused by two smaller slippages in the narrative—that is, the slippage of order and the slippage of identity, the two being greatly intertwined. The slippage of order is apparent on every page of *Naked Lunch*. Far from the linear and continuous flow of a conventional novel's narrative, the narrative of *Naked Lunch* is a series of sudden leaps between and within scenes, without any logical transitional element. The narrative suddenly moves from one scene to another, just like switching

TV channels from one to the other. In most of the cases, such a leap occurs between vignettes, between sets of the paragraphs punctuated by a blank line, between paragraphs without any blank line, and sometimes even between sentences (in this case, it is likely to have ellipses between the sentences); yet, there seems no certain logical regularity of the occasions where the leap will be incised.

Sudden leaps between and within the scenes in the narrative do not in themselves alone break down the chains of causality, as long as readers can reconfigure the same story taken as a whole from the arbitrarily ordered narrative fragments with a certain degree of probability. What breaks down the chains of causality and disorients readers in the narrative of *Naked Lunch* is the great difficulty of identifying each narrative fragment as a part of the same, unified story. Unless a part of the narrative can be identified discretely, readers will be unable to align those particles into a certain logical order and configure an intelligible, unified story that traces a single action, "which forms a whole, complete in itself, having a beginning, a middle, and an end" (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. I* 39).

Radically refusing the notion of wholeness and completeness, the narrative of *Naked Lunch* is full of pores: the narrative is apparently chopped and jumbled with a drifting point of view; moreover, the time/space frames of the narrative fragments are often surrealistic and, even if the frames seem somewhat realistic, they barely indicate any connection between each other. The combination of these two features—drifting point of view and the absence of any fundamental time/space frame throughout the novel, from which readers configure an intelligible story from each successive narrative fragments—causes a lethal disjuncture in the chains of causality in the narrative.

The question "Who is the narrator of *Naked Lunch*?" is intriguing but seems to

have no absolute answer. Although, as Oliver Harris points out, the cyclic structure of the novel between the first vignette, "*and start west,*" and the 23rd vignette, "*hauser and o'brien,*"[1] gives "a coherent first-person, narrative frame" to the novel's jumbled narrative ("The Beginning of '*Naked Lunch*, and an Endless Novel'," 23), a close investigation of each narrative fragment reveals that there is actually a frequent shuffle of the point of view between first and third person within the overarching first-person narrative frame.

The first four vignettes—"*and start west,*" "*the vigilante,*" "*the rube,*" and "*benway*"—are narrated in the first person by a junky called "Lee," who is also designated as the first-person narrator in "*hauser and o'brien*." Even though the narrator seems to be identified, the narrative fragments in these four vignettes radically switch between the description of Lee's waking action, a flashback, and the presentation of his thoughts, without any transitional element. The third vignette, "*the rube,*" is a clear example of this quick shuffling of these different kinds of narrative fragments. The narrative in this vignette begins with an episode of a junky called "the Rube" and depicts a fragmented but still traceable progression of events, in which the first person narrator, Lee, is physically involved in the scenes: "The Rube is a social liability with his attacks as he calls them. […] outside Philly he jumps out to con a prowl car and the fuzz takes one look at his face and bust all of *us*" (9, emphasis added). Then, without any transitions, the narrative suddenly shifts to the presentation of Lee's fragmented thoughts on several abstract subjects unrelated to the episode of the Rube: "Chicago: invisible hierarchy of decorticated wops, smells of atrophied gangsters, earthbound ghost hits you at North and Halsted, Cicero, Lincoln

[1] The cyclic structure of *Naked Lunch* is, as Harris observes, that the last lines of "Hauser and O'Brien"—"The Heat was off me from here on out" (181)—seems to return to the very first line of the novel: "I can feel the heat closing in" (3).

Park, panhandler of dreams, past invading the present, rancid magic of slot machines and roadhouses" (11). After these leaps, the narrative comes back to (and finally closes the vignette with) the fragmented description of Lee's junk-travel story through the United States and Mexico to Mexico City and Cuernavaca—"Came at last to Houston where *I* know a druggist […]" (13-19, emphasis added)—incising another digression into an episode of a surreal, monstrous character named "Bradley the Buyer" (14-17) narrated from a third-person point of view positioned outside of the narrative action. Thus, even within a clear first-person narrative frame, Lee's point of view, from which the verbalized projections of his consciousness are delivered, radically shifts between first (the eyes of performer) and quasi-third (the eyes of observer) person with a series of abrupt narrative turns.

The switch between first and third person narrative occurs more obviously in the 8th vignette, "*lazarus go home.*" The narrative in this vignette is narrated in the third person; and, interestingly, Lee—the narrator of the first four vignettes—is incorporated as a character in the world projected through the third-person narrative. The traceable, linear third-person narration of Lee's actions in this vignette (Lee's visit to a young junky, "Miguel," and his colleague, "NG Joe") may remind some readers of the third-person narrative in Burroughs' other novel, *Queer* (1985)—"the true kernel of *Naked Lunch*" (Harris, *Secret of Fascination* 38), which was published in 1985, but actually composed during a period between his first novel, *Junkie* (1953), and *Naked Lunch* (1959). However, far from *Queer*'s realistic and conventional narrative style, the latter part of "*lazarus go home*"—notably after the scene where Lee gives Miguel a fix with heroine: "Miguel took the nail file. Lee closed his eyes: *It's too tiresome*. 'Uh thanks that was great.' Miguel's pants fell to his ankles […]" (59)—delivers the surrealistic, jumpy descriptions of Lee's action: "He stood there in

a misshapen overcoat of flesh that turned from brown to green and then colorless in the morning light, fell off in globs onto the floor" (59). The vignette ends the flow of the third person narrative with a symbolic line: "A long slug undulated out of Lee's right eye and wrote on the wall in iridescent ooze: 'The Sailor is in the City buying up TIME'" (62). Interestingly, this line seems to anticipate (or be anticipated by, if the reader is reading this temporally amorphous novel backward) the scene in the 21th vignette, "*the exterminator does a good job,*" in which the character named "the Sailor" demands "Time" from a junk boy in exchange for one shot of "Pure, one hundred percent H" (170). After this line, without any transitional element, the vignette switches to the first-person narrative: "*I* am waiting in front of a drugstore for it to open at nine o'clock" (62, emphasis added). This "I" can be identified as Lee, the structurally designated first-person narrator throughout the novel, or could be assumed as a fictional version of the author himself; however, of course, there is no absolute answer to this question. In this vignette, the apparent switch between first and third person narrative breaches the overarching first-person narrative frame. This breach destabilizes the pre-set notion of Lee-as-"The Narrator" and opens up new possibilities concerning who the narrator is in *Naked Lunch*. The narrator of *Naked Lunch* is no longer identified, unified, or fixed, so can be multiple; and, this unfixity of the narrator betrays one of the expectations of Aristotelian narrative logic—that is, each fragment of the narrative should be a part of the unified story (, and the story should be considered mimetically as the unified consciousness of the narrator)—and debunks the presupposed referential relationship between each narrative fragment.

In what follows, I would like to discuss the second key feature—the absence of any fundamental narrative frame—introducing examples of the absence, respectively, on the vignette level and novel level. First I will address "the absence"

on the vignette level focusing on the 19th vignette, "*have you seen pantopon rose?,*"—in this vignette, where the leaps occur as frequently as every paragraph, the narrative seems to be a mere enumeration of various kinds of what I would call glimpses that pop up in the narrator's mind. With no temporal progression or narrative development, the text projects a series of *glimpses*—a scene of the moment, from which readers are unable to assemble any plot, because of the inaccessibility of its past and future—rather than *events*—a scene of actions occurring with a certain temporal progression and causality. An extremely flat enumeration of the glimpses of the scandalous visions does not establish any syntagmatic configuration of the narrative, since each of the glimpses seems to hold the same level of importance (= no importance) for readers' interpretation of the story narrated in this vignette. Here, selecting one example from many, I would like to cite the last three paragraphs of the vignette (each just one sentence), which I consider especially fragmented:

> Conspicuous consumption is rampant in the porticos slippery with Koch spit …
>
> The centipede nuzzles the iron door rusted to thin black paper by the urine of a million fairies …
>
> This is no rich mother load, but vitiate dust, second run cottons trace the bones of a fix …" (166).

Each paragraph seems to address a different scene, and there seems no temporal, spatial, or causal relation between each scene. Consequently, it seems impossible for readers to make any certain logical connection between each scene and assemble a series of glimpses—which provide no climaxes, not even any notable actions—into one unified story.

The extremely fragmented narrative in "*have you seen pantopon rose?*" certainly demonstrates a key aspect of postmodern narrative logic in *Naked Lunch* on the vignette level; the narrative in the vignette never allows readers to define any fundamental time/space narrative frame, which would allow readers to derive each fragment's causal relation (the chains of causality) and picture an intelligible story. However, another noteworthy point is that some of *Naked Lunch*'s vignettes actually generate a seemingly intelligible story, which establishes a coherent time/space frame throughout the set of narrative fragments. Probably, the largest portion of a unified, intelligible story is delivered in the 20th and 21st vignettes, "*coke bugs*" and "*the exterminator does a good job.*" Over the span of the two vignettes, the narrative seems to maintain a reasonable continuity of characters' actions without any drastic leap. From the narrative in the two vignettes, readers can picture a story of junkies narrated in the third person, where a character called "the Sailor" gives a shot of Heroin to "a boy" in the café-like place. Actually, in *Naked Lunch,* there are four other unified vignettes that project a coherent, framed story with a certain sense of temporal progression: the 5th vignette, "*joselito,*" narrates in the third person a story of the interaction between "Joselito," a patient with "*catarro de los pulmones*" (pneumonia), who is sent to the sanitarium, and "Carl," either a junk nurse or doctor, who visits Joselito in the sanitarium; the 16th vignette, "*the county clerk*," narrates in the third person a story of Lee's visit to a strange county clerk; the 18th vignette, "*the examination*," narrates in the third person a story that "Carl Peterson" visits "Doctor Benway" in the "Ministry of Mental Hygiene and Prophylaxis"; and the 23rd vignette, "*hauser and o'brien*," narrates in the first person a story of Lee's escape from the agents named "Hauser" and "O'Brien." Among *Naked Lunch*'s twenty-five vignettes, the six vignettes above are easily traceable, comprehensible, and explainable as

individual stories, due to their linear narrative style and the coherent, common narrative frame on the vignette level.

Moreover, some vignettes employ a fragmented narrative style yet also seem to deliver an intelligible story with a coherent, common narrative frame on the vignette level. In those kinds of vignettes, each narrative fragment collaborates and constitutes a unique narrative configuration, from which readers are guided to form some sort of story in their minds. Among many, the 9th vignette, "*hassan's rumpus room*," would be a clear example of this. The narrative in this vignette begins with the description of the interior of some palatial mansion, in which "a Near East Mugwump" sodomizes a slender blond youth and snaps his neck: "Gilt and red plush. Rococo bar backed by pink shell. The air is cloyed with a sweet evil substance like decayed honey. Men and women in evening dress sip pousse-cafés through alabaster tubes" (62-63). Although three paragraphs of glimpses are incised [the paragraph on "An old garbage collector […]" (63), on "A vast still harbor of iridescent water […]" (64), and on "Naked Mr. America, burning frantic with self bone love, screams out […]" (64)], the narrative follows the continuous actions of the Mugwump until a blank space at the end of the first set of paragraphs on page 65. In the second set of paragraphs, after the blank space, the narrator delivers a series of individual glimpses, each of which depicts a scene of the unusual sexual intercourse between the multi-racial/national characters (mostly male homosexual intercourse between adults and boys) taken place in some oddly furnished room. The paragraph on page 67 presents a description of an oddly furnished room and seems to weave together the earlier fragmented glimpses (of such multi-racial/national abnormal sensualists) into a seemingly all-inclusive picture.

> Boys by the hundred plummet through the roof, quivering and kicking at the end of ropes. The boys hang at different levels, some near the ceiling and others a few inches off the floor. Exquisite Balinese and Malays, Mexican Indians with fierce innocent faces and bright red gums. Negroes (teeth, fingers, toe nails and pubic hair gilded), Japanese boys smooth and white as china, Titian-haired Venetian lads, Americans with blond or black curls falling across the forehead (the guests tenderly shove it back), sulky blond Polacks with animal brown eyes, Arab and Spanish streets boys, Austrian boys pink and delicate with a faint shadow of blond pubic hair, sneering German youths with bright blue eyes scream "Heil Hitler!" as the trap falls under them. Sollubis shit and whimper. (67)

As this somewhat summarized vision shows, this paragraph seems to guide readers to interpret those prior glimpses of sexual deviation as parts of a coherent story within a certain time/space narrative frame. The spatial narrative frame may be interpreted as "*hassan's rumpus room,*" suggested by the vignette's title and the repeated presence of a character called "Hassan." Maintaining a certain coherence of the narrative frame, the vignette concludes with a nonsensical, "filthy shambles" that a character called "A. J." brings into Hassan's rumpus room (70). Unlike the unrelated glimpses in "*have you seen pantopon rose?,*" the glimpses in this vignette seem to maintain a certain degree of relation to one another. In other words, sudden leaps seem to occur only within the range of the vignette's coherent narrative frame. The fragmented narrative in "*hassan's rumpus room*" constitutes a unique narrative configuration on the vignette level, which guides readers to stitch together the narrative threads into some sort of story set in a seemingly coherent time/space frame.

As I have discussed in the previous two paragraphs, some of *Naked Lunch*'s vignettes actually deliver a unified, intelligible story within a coherent narrative frame on the vignette level. However, on the novel level, such individual stories in the vignettes do not seem to configure any certain unified story. Although the characters' names seem consistent throughout the twenty-five vignettes of *Naked Lunch*, their stories do not seem to have any clear causal relation to one another. Just like a series of fragmented scenes in "*have you seen pantopon rose?*" each individual story within a vignette seems to address a different scene and hold the exact same level of importance (no importance) for readers' interpretation of the novel as a whole. Therefore, readers can barely picture any certain fundamental level of reality (time/space frame) on the novel level, from which they are able to assume the chronological and causal order of each individual story needed to configure a certain unified story.

Actually, the two key features of postmodern narrative logic in *Naked Lunch*—drifting point of view and the absence of any fundamental time/space frame throughout the novel—are always in a symbiotic relationship. The inability to determine the narrator compounds and reinforces the absence of any fundamental narrative frame and *vice versa*. Either of the two features on its own breaks down the referential relationship between each narrative fragment; however, more significantly, the combination of the two features transforms the very nature of leaps (breakdowns) in the narrative from an epistemological one to an ontological one. This "transformation" is exactly what Brian McHale points out as a significant paradigm-shift from modernist poetics to postmodernist poetics: "postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by epistemological issues" (*Postmodernist Fiction*, xii). The

combination of the inability to determine the narrator—the possibility of the multiple narrating consciousnesses—and the absence of any fundamental narrative frame on the novel level—the possibility of the multiple time/space frames—highlights the new possibility that the depicted events may be taking place in different versions of reality, which exist in different subjective temporalities, which belong to different states of the narrating consciousness. Here, a poetics dominated by epistemological issues, which are based on the unified narrating consciousness and constructed cosmological time, becomes a poetics dominated by ontological issues, which are based on multiple narrating consciousnesses and subjective temporalities. This very condition breaks down the chains of causality and traps readers in these three fascinating if disorienting questions: (1) which scenes are characters actually physically involved in, and which are mere imaginary fantasies that play on only in the narrator's/narrators' minds?; (2) Which narrative fragments should be connected to which fragments; or, which consciousness of the narrator delivers which narrative fragment?; (3) Or, do these questions even matter? These open-ended questions create the great instability and openness in the process of meaning-making in the postmodern narrative of *Naked Lunch*.

Paul Ricoeur, in his discussion of the possible congruence between historical and fictional narrative, emphasizes that the fundamental standard for narrative configuration would be "emplotment," namely, "the temporal synthesis of the heterogeneous" (*Time and Narrative Vol. II*, 157-58). The breakdown of the chains of causality in the narrative of *Naked Lunch* multiplies the number of ways to synthesize the narrative fragments by refusing the simplest model of emplotment—that is a plot Aristotle regards as probable, in which the episodes follow *one because of another* (qtd. in Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol.I*, 41). Regardless, the novel

surely seems to preserve a certain sense of unity—which sustains a quality of emplotment—and the "protean ability to seem always to be addressing the addictions and oppressions of today" (Loranger, par 23). Now, the question is: How does a text with such a multiplicity of possible meanings and emplotments seem to preserve a certain sense of unity? In order to respond to this question, I would like to discuss the following two features seen in the narrative of *Naked Lunch*: the recurrent phrases and images, which create *déjà vu*-like experiences for readers, and the concluding monologue delivered from the author as fictional in the 24th vignette, "*Atrophied Preface.*"

The first feature—the recurrent phrases and images—is readily apparent at many points in the narrative. For instance: Lee's recountings in the first vignette—"duty calls. As one judge said to another: 'Be just and if you can't be just, be arbitrary'" (5)—is repeated by the character called "The Inspector" in the 8th vignette—"Well, as one judge said to the other, 'Be just and if you can't be just, be arbitrary'" (62); the first-person narrator's (Lee's) explanation of cocaine addiction in the 3rd vignette—"This is a yen of the brain alone, a need without feeling and without body" (17)—is repeated in two other places in the novel, by Doc Benway in the 4th vignette ("*benway*")—"the C yen is of the brain alone, a need without body and without feeling" (22)—and by the narrator in the 7th vignette ("hospital")—"It is a need of the brain alone—a need without body and without feeling" (55); and also, the 19th vignette's third person narrator's description—"Down Skid Row to Market Street museum shows all kinds masturbation and self-abuse. Young boys need it special" (165)—is repeated by the fictive author himself in the 24th vignette—"down Skid Row to Market Street museum shows all kinds masturbation and self-abuse … young boys need it special" (193)—; and so forth. These recurrent phrases and

images vividly create a certain degree of unity to the multiplied narrating consciousnesses (drifting point of view) presented in the narrative of *Naked Lunch*.

The last three vignettes—the 23rd, "*hauser and o'brien*"; 24th, "*Atrophied Preface*"; and the 25th, "*quick*"—seem especially important for readers' intellectual operations to configure "the temporal synthesis" from the narrative-fragments. Paul Ricoeur emphasizes the significance of "the conclusion" for reading a story:

> To follow a story is to move forward in the midst of contingencies and peripeteia under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfillment in the '*conclusion'* of the story. This *conclusion* is not logically implied by some previous premises. It gives the story an 'end point,' which, in turn, furnishes the point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole.
>
> To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this *conclusion*, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story. (*Time and Narrative Vol. I*, 66-67, emphasis added)

According to Ricoeur's theory of narrative, any conclusion must be accepted as the very point to start investigating the story as a whole, even if the configuration of the narrative particles seems to be a-logical and temporally amorphous. In this regard, the 23rd vignette, "*hauser and o'brien,*" seems effectively to function as "an 'end point,' which, in turn, furnishes the point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole," by providing psychological unity and a formal closure upon the sets of the narrative fragments under the overarching (Lee's) first-person narrative frame.

More significantly, the 24th vignette, "*Atrophied Preface,*" seems to function as a radical end point, in turn, to start making sense of the text. In the vignette, the author, "William Seward" (192), himself steps to the fore as the narrator and reveals several of his intentions upon composing *Naked Lunch.* The opening explanations concerning the character "Lee" suggest that the jumpy, fragmented narrative of *Naked Lunch* is the representation of Lee's consciousness, which is on a "space-time trip": "[the narrator Burroughs explains,] Lee The Agent (a double-four-eight-sixteen) is taking the junk cure … space-time trip portentously familiar as junk meet corners to the addict … cures past and future shuffle pictures through his spectral substance vibrating in silent winds of accelerated Time" (182).

On one hand, the beginning part of the vignette steers readers to interpret the novel's narrative between "*and start west*" and "*hauser and o'brien*" as the representation of Lee's consciousness on a "space-time trip"; yet on the other hand, the confessional passages in the latter part suggest the likelihood that the novel's fragmented narrative is the representation of the author's responses to each temporal space-time condition in front of him during the compositional period of *Naked Lunch*'s manuscript. On page 184, the narrator Burroughs explains, "There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing* … I am a recording instrument … I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity.'" Moreover, in the latter passages, the narrator Burroughs clearly emphasizes the interchangeability of the characters in the novel:

> Sooner or later The Vigilante, The Rube, Lee The Agent, A.J., Clem and Jody The Ergot Twins, Hassan O'Leary the After Birth Tycoon, The Sailor, The Exterminator, Andrew Keif, 'Fats' Terminal, Doc Benway, 'Fingers' Schafer are subject to say the same thing in the

> same words, to occupy, at that intersection point, the same position in space-time. (186)

Certainly, the cover stories of the characters in the narrative—some of which are introduced in the 15th vignette "*islam incorporated and the parties of interzone*"—are different from each other; yet, the expressed personalities of the named characters seem nearly indistinguishable: all of the named characters seem comical, extreme, and amoral. Just as the individual components of an acentered system,[2] every character—including the structurally designated narrator Lee and the fictional version of the author Burroughs—is interchangeable according to the given occasion. In this regards, every character is a mere agent, through whom the narrative is delivered. By making these revealing remarks—which seem to hit the mark—, the narrator guides readers to construct their own "logical" picture of the postmodern narrative of *Naked Lunch*: that is, the author Burroughs' compositions about "*what is in front of his sense at the moment of writing*" are temporally translated and presented to readers as a series of fragmented verbal representations of Lee's junk consciousness. Here, the two possible narrators of *Naked Lunch*—the character, Lee The Agent, and the author, William Seward—are integrated and duplicated, and this very condition surely gives a certain sense of unity to the novel: the narrative of *Naked Lunch* as the representation of the *unfixed* narrator(s)'s *temporal* consciousnesses.

The 25th vignette, "*quick,*" apparently keeps the frame of the integrated/duplicated narrator(s)—Burroughs and Lee—and seems to sustain a sense of unity. The vignette begins with the first-person narrative probably by the author "William Seward" or perhaps by Lee The Agent (readers never know): "white flash

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[2] Deleuze and Guattari note, "[a]ll individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their *state* at a given moment" within an acentered system (*A Thousand Plateau*, 17).

… mangled insect screams… *I* woke up with the taste of metal in my mouth back from the dead" (195, emphasis added); then, with several sudden leaps, the narrative shifts point of view to that of the third-person narrative: "He stood there in a 1920 straw hat somebody gave him" (196). After this shift, just as in the 8th vignette ("*lazarus go home*"), the character Lee gets incorporated in the narrated world: "'They are rebuilding the City.' *Lee* nodded absently … 'Yes … Always …'" (196, emphasis added). The apparent switch between first and third person in the narrative in the very last vignette of the novel foregrounds the probability of the coherent frame of the integrated/duplicated narrator(s)—Burroughs and Lee—, which is obliquely suggested by the confessional remarks in "*Atrophied Preface.*" This self-rationalization of the frame of the integrated/duplicated narrator(s), which operates through the three concluding vignettes, guides readers to see a certain sense of unity in the a-logical, jumpy narrative of *Naked Lunch*.

With an acceptable conclusion—which guides readers to make sense of the nature of fragmented writing in the novel as the representation of the *unfixed* narrator(s)'s *temporal* consciousnesses—the narrative of *Naked Lunch* seems to achieve a certain sense of unity. However, the unity doesn't assume any absolute, internal meaning of the text due to the radical breakdown of the chains of causality (the very basis of Aristotelian narrative logic). Therefore, there still remains great instability and openness in the process of meaning-making in the postmodern narrative of *Naked Lunch.* A certain narrative configuration, which can be taken as a whole, surely exists; however this sense of wholeness in the text is never attained by the text itself, without any collaboration on the part of readers. In other words, the readers' operation of emplotment—"the temporal synthesis of the heterogeneous" (Ricoeur, *Vol. II*, 158)—and meaning-making in the text of *Naked Lunch* is not

conducted quasi-automatically through the *universal* narrative logic (with the chains of causality) but consciously through their own efforts of synthesizing parts into a whole. On this topic, Oliver Harris clearly states the necessity of readers' involvement for completing the temporal meaning of the narrative of *Naked Lunch*:

> What completes the picture is the presence of our *own* gaze, which searches the inscrutable image to figure out its secret mystery, to penetrate and decrypt its hieroglyphic puzzle. […] The picture is posed therefore like a question, and since it presents us with a riddle to which Burroughs has no solution, it constitutes a truly "enigmatic signifier." (*Secret of Fascination* 245)

Deprived of the chains of causality in the text, the postmodern narrative of *Naked Lunch* (and its enigmatic signifier) is always in motion and requires readers' "gaze" upon it, in order to attain the temporal unity, which makes the narrative scrutable, measurable, and explainable. Otherwise, the novel "shlups"[3] (assimilates or digests) itself into the unrestricted flow of junkies' unintelligible utterances.

[3] "Shlupping" is a Burroughsian concept developed in an episode of the surreal, monstrous character named Bradley the Buyer (*Naked Lunch* 14-17).

CHAPTER II

Logical Construction of a Logic of Simulation:

Postmodern Narrative Logic in *The Exquisite Corpse*

A logical bridge between William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959) and Alfred Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse* (1967) emerges from an investigation of a particular historical/geographical context in which the two unconventional novels were mostly composed, namely Tangier in the 1950s and early 1960s. Although Burroughs and Chester resided in Tangier at different historical points—Burroughs settled and wrote in Tangier from 1954 to 1958, witnessing the struggle for and attaining of Moroccan independence, and Chester resided and wrote in Tangier from 1963 to 1965, when the city had become reabsorbed into the Kingdom of Morocco—the two homosexual, expatriate writers experienced (or rather enjoyed) in similar ways their expanded freedom in Tangier, such as "the freedom to have sex with men and to experiment with drugs with little chance of official police harassment" (Mullins 16). Postwar Tangier in the 50s and early 60s (regardless of whether before or after Moroccan independence in 1956) was known for its fluid character, in which the boundaries of language, culture, nationality, and sexuality were blurred. In *Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester Write Tangier* (2002), Greg Mullins notes, "not Europe, but not exactly Morocco; nor the West, but not exactly the East; a place where sex between men could take place, but not exactly a place free of sexual constraint, Tangier provided the site for a productive confusion of binary logics and preconceptions" (5). Similarly, the two Tangier-novels that embody anti-Aristotelian narrative logic—*Naked Lunch* and *The Exquisite Corpse*—seem to serve

as unique textual sites for a productive confusion of binary logics and readers' preconceptions.

From Tangier in 1964, Alfred Chester wrote in a letter to his friend Norman Glass: "I realized last night, how curious that [Paul] Bowles, [William S.] Burroughs and I should be in the same city. One the past, the other the present, and the third, me, the future" (qtd. in Mullins 86). Greg Mullins observes that this interesting alignment expressed in the letter are based on Chester's assessment of the three writers' different ways of representing their homosexuality:

> Chester obliquely elaborated upon the terms of this imagined chronology by declaring that "dark black death" [seen in Burroughs' and Bowles' representations] is "a fake" and that "I am really the prophet of joy." His letter dismissed the negativity of Bowles's and Burroughs's literary visions as fraudulent, in contradistinction to his own more ecstatic expressions. […] If Bowles represents an old-fashioned way of being homosexual (don't ask, don't tell) and Burroughs represents a radical way of being queer (declaring and celebrating marginalization, persecution, abjection), Chester represents the hope that exuberant campiness will set us free. (86)

Mullins' interpretation hits the nail on the head. In Burroughs' *Naked Lunch,* the scenes of homosexual intercourse are often associated with the image of death or abuse taking place in the closet. The scene of the Mugwump sodomizing a slender blond youth and snapping his neck (64-65) and the surrealistic vision of "Boys [hanged] by the hundred plummets through the roof" (67) in "*hassan's rumpus room*" are clear cases in point. By contrast, in Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse*, homosexuality is represented as a general medium for juicy romance, which causes

lively emotions—joyful pain or painful joy—for the characters. For instance, John Doe's story of sex with Dickie seems to stir up James Madison's emotions and make him feel "human" (118). Also, a cinematic scene of Christmas night—where Xavier and John Anthony march on the street with their arms linked tightly, singing "Joy to the World" in the snow and in the moonlight (236-37)—is especially illuminating, among many examples of joyful representation of being homosexual in the novel.

Besides the representations of ways of being homosexual, we are able to make another connection from Chester's imagined chronology—Bowles the past, Burroughs the present, and himself the future—within the discussion about the three writers' different forms and styles of their novels. In "Tangier and the Making of *Naked Lunch*" (2009), Allen Hibbard attributes *Naked Lunch*'s aesthetic and style—"its dream-like quality, its syncopated rhythms, its fractured structure" (61)—to Burroughs' sojourn in postwar Tangier and makes a brief comparison of Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and the two other Tangier-writers' novels:

> Clearly, [*Naked Lunch*] does not attempt to represent the city realistically as in Paul Bowles' novel *Let It Come Down* (1952), where the landscape of the novel is neatly and recognizably aligned with the physical geography of the place. Burroughs' fragmented, surreal vision of the city in some more oblique yet central way captures its intrinsic qualities and responds to its rhythms and feelings rather like Alfred Chester's novel *The Exquisite Corpse*, also written in Tangier, in the early sixties. (62)

Hibbard's comparison of the three writers' aesthetics and styles surely hits the mark, and this is the very path that I would like to follow and extend in my discussion of postmodern narrative logic in *The Exquisite Corpse,* continuing the discussion of the

preceding chapter's focus on narrative logic in *Naked Lunch*. "While Bowles, in the tradition of nineteenth-century realists, constructed a linear, orderly progression of events, neatly and rationally plotted" (Hibbard, "Tangier" 62), Burroughs obviously refused to construct any pre-established "logical" story, plot, and continuity in the narrative of *Naked Lunch.* With *The Exquisite Corpse*, Chester heads in the same direction as Burroughs, yet his narrative politics seem less radical than those of *Naked Lunch*. The narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse* breaks down the chains of causality and liberates the text's potential as assemblage (the great openness to multiple and alternative readings), while exerting a certain control over each narrative fragment and constructing a unique narrative succession (succession with little logical connection) throughout the novel. This second chapter of my thesis explains the mechanics at work in the unique narrative configuration employed in *The Exquisite Corpse*, which are certainly different from the ones employed in *Naked Lunch*, and examines the effect of Chester's unique narrative style on our reading experiences.

The narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse* consists of forty-nine brief vignettes. Each of the vignettes is well constructed in Chester's clear prose, and most deliver an intelligible episode narrated from a third-person point of view.[1] Although each vignette constructs a linear progression of characters' actions, the narrative frequently makes an abrupt turn from one scene (a certain character and setting) to another over the gap between vignettes. Some vignettes continue the preceding storylines, and others start seemingly unrelated episodes. Uniquely ordered surrealistic episodes construct projections of an amorphous narrative universe, which refuses to be sorted

[1] Since the novel's 12th, 17th, and 38th vignettes take an epistolary form, the three vignettes have a first-person point of view. The 12th and 38th vignettes present a letter from Ismael, under the pseudonym of (Miss) Isobel Rosa, to a newspaper columnist, Dr. Franzblau, and the 17th vignette presents a letter from Tommy to Ismael.

into any definitive landscape and dynamics. On this topic, Hibbard in "An Anatomy of Alfred Chester's *Exquisite Corpse,*" accurately notes,

> The novel thus presents us with a multifaceted fantasy landscape, difficult to fix in time or space, in which identities are fluid and even names seem unable to attach themselves permanently to particular characters. In purposeful defiance of Aristotelian logic, the novel supplies no tidy conclusions; its actions largely remain unresolved. (146)

Storylines, which are intelligible by themselves, ramify, collide, deadend, and paradoxically conjoin into a conclusion as a blank signifier. In the narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse*, the combination of two features—the inability to define the temporal locality of each scene in the narrative and the inability to fix a character's identity by his/her name—causes a lethal disjuncture in the chains of causality and transforms Chester's clear prose into a captivating textual labyrinth. In "Alfred Chester Redivivus" (1999), Hibbard describes the quality of indeterminacy that swallows up the world of *The Exquisite Corpse*: "All categories here are in flux. Boundaries between real and imaginary, male and female, one character and the next, one continent and another are indistinct" (389).

The first feature—the inability to define the temporal locality of each scene in the narrative—produces a serious challenge in the process of making logical connections between each narrative fragment. Several vignettes in *The Exquisite Corpse* feature a particular character and construct a tentative narrative thread that follows the character's stories. Although the narrative thread seems to construct a certain progression of events, the temporal locality of each event (when each of the events happens) is barely graspable even within the same narrative thread. Therefore,

readers are unable to construct a definitive chronological order of and causal connections between events, in order to picture a unified story of a featured character with a certain degree of probability.

To demonstrate, I would like to investigate a narrative thread that follows the stories of a character named Mary Poorpoor. The trajectory of Mary Poorpoor's journey is narrated throughout the novel in the 10th, 13th, 14th, 21st, 23rd, 24th, 36th, 37th, 42nd, and 46th vignettes. The 10th vignette functions as a starting-point for multiple surrealistic and fairytale-like storylines of Mary Poorpoor's journey. "One hot spring morning," Mary gives a birth to her "Baby," whose father is unknown; yet she believes it would be Emily, a "kindly fat social worker who befriend[s] her a few months after she [becomes] pregnant," because "she and Emily [have] played with the frankfurters" (38-39).[2] One week later, two winged creatures suddenly come flying through the window to Mary's apartment and force her to exchange her brownish Baby for the fairies' pale baby. Later, in the 13th and 14th vignettes, the narrative finds Mary, who is in search of her missing "Baby," within two different settings. On one hand, the 13th vignette depicts a scene where Mary encounters a character named Tomtom Jim in a fairyland-like forest—"where antelope and lion, wolf and peacock lived in friendship and peace" (62). Attracted by "Mary's pretty little bosom" Tomtom Jim, who has longed for a human mate, decides to accompany Mary on the pilgrimage (65). On the other hand, the 14th vignette depicts a scene where Mary encounters a character called Miss Emily in the middle of a strange, beautiful garden—where ladies wheel empty baby-carriages (or with their invisible infants in them)—and names the changeling "Emilio" in order to "make [Miss Emily] happy"

[2] In this brief episode, Chester plays with a notion of gender: in the narrative, Emily is referred in a female pronoun (she / her); however, Mary Poorpoor still believes Emily would be the father of her baby and assigns her a role of father/husband.

(68). Miss Emily has mercy on Mary and Emilio and gives them shelter in her strange garden.

From these two vignettes, the storyline seems to split into two branches. The first branch—the 21st, 23rd, 24th, and 42nd vignettes, succeeding the setting given in the 13th vignette—follows the trajectory of Mary Poorpoor and Tomtom Jim's adventurous journey through fairyland-like natural landscapes. This branch of the narrative seems to create a narrative that strongly implies a certain temporal progression from the episode in the 13th vignette (through the episodes in the 21st, 23rd, and 24th vignettes) to the episode in the 42nd vignette. For instance, Mary and Tomtom Jim are given three more children throughout their pilgrimage: another baby called "pretty little Bijou"—whose father seems to be Tomtom Jim—suddenly shows up in the 21st vignette (92), and in the beginning of the 42nd vignette, the parties (Mary, Tomtom Jim, Bijou, and the changeling) are given two more perfectly tan babies in a tropical jangle, where a big wooden sign near them reads "EQUATOR" (202). At the end of 42nd vignette, however, the certain footsteps of narrative development are washed off. Right after the birth of the twins, the happy family separates in an instant: Tomtom Jim sets off to search for missing Bijou and never comes back, and the newborn twins are found drowned in the river when Mary returns from a search for food. Then, Mary and her pale changeling are left exhausted, just as they are in the beginning of her pilgrimage. Mary's pilgrimage depicted in this branch seems to trace a circular pattern.

The second branch—the 36th, 37th, and 46th vignettes—succeeding the setting given in the 14th vignette, follows stories of Mary Poorpoor and Emilio. The 36th and 37th vignettes seem to maintain a reasonable continuity of storyline within a particular spatial narrative frame introduced in the 14th vignette—Miss Emily's

beautiful garden in "the cold indifferent city" (66). However, the transition between the 37th and 46th vignettes seems illogical. The 46th vignette relates an episode that seems just like the episode related in the 14th vignette. In the 46th vignette, Mary with Emilio—who falls from the parapet of Miss Emily's residence and turns into "a pile of bloody meat" in the end of the 37th vignette (173)—wanders around midtown Manhattan "aimless and alone" (224) and encounters a gentleman also named "Emilio," alongside the building where "a masked ball [is] in progress" (225-26). Just as Miss Emily in the 14th vignette, Emilio (the gentleman), surprised at the coincidence of the name, has mercy on Mary and Emilio (the changeling) and takes them to his "home." In the limousine driven by his chauffeur Johnson (this is also the same name as "the guard Johnson" in Miss Emily's beautiful garden), Emilio puts Mary's hand to his crotch, which is "empty and wet," and says "Ah, yes, my dear, […] You are entering a strange new world" (227-28). Thus, a narrative succession in this branch also seems to trace a circular pattern. The end becomes an alternate version of the beginning.

As I have demonstrated above, the narrative thread of Mary Poorpoor's journey is composed of two different branches, each of which seems to have a continuous narrative development (which traces a circular pattern though). However, since the temporal locality of each episode is barely graspable, readers are unable to combine the two branches into one unified "logical" story. Here, the chains of causality break down between the two branches. Some readers may conclude that the two storylines depict two different versions of Mary's journey that takes place in multiple realities—"strange new world[s]"; conversely, others may conclude that the two storylines depict one successive story of Mary's pilgrimage, if they are aligned in a certain order, because both of the two branches end up at the point from which

either of them starts its storyline. Either interpretation would be reasonable; yet, there is no absolute answer.

In what follows, I would like to discuss the second feature—the inability to fix characters by their names, focusing on the novel's thematic preoccupation with the dynamic nature of identity. Throughout the novel, Chester plays with names of characters and breaks the conventional notion that characters' identities are coherent and fixed by their assigned names. In *The Exquisite Corpse*, some characters seem to construct their new subjective realities by simulating alternative, temporal identities, which they take on according to particular occasions. On this topic, Mullins writes, "[i]n the world of *The Exquisite Corpse*, identity is superficial, rather than essential, and subjectivity is susceptible to sudden shifts and splits" (Mullins 109). The presupposed connection between a proper name and identity is broken down in the world of *The Exquisite Corpse*.

To demonstrate, I would like to investigate a narrative thread that follows the stories of a character named Baby Poorpoor and/or a character named James Madison. (Readers may not be sure whether they are different characters or the same character.) A number of vignettes throughout the novel—the 2nd, 7th, 8th, 15th, 16th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 43rd, 44th, 47th vignettes[3]—seem to focalize on Baby Poorpoor and/or James Madison. Interestingly, before a character Baby Poorpoor comes into play, a character named John Anthony pronounces his name "Baby poor poor" in the novel's opening vignette. John Anthony anguishes over the image of his face reflected in "a bit of looking glass" and groans "with a burst of ferocious anger": "'Poor baby, poor. Poor poor baby. Baby poor poor. […] Why? Why must I suffer your destiny?'" (8).

[3] Baby Poorpoor seems to be featured in the 2nd, 7th, 26th, 27th vignettes, and James Madison is featured on in the 8th, 15th, 16th, 25th, 43rd, 44th, and 47th vignettes.

In the subsequent (2nd) vignette, as though John Anthony's desperate longing for transformation morphs into a character, the narrative introduces a character named Baby Poorpoor, who also desperately longs to transform into anything other than unloved Baby. The 7th vignette depicts a scene where Baby Poorpoor wanders around under the boardwalk, hoping to find "[a]nything […] [a] thread he could follow into a new life" (28), and encounters a character named T.S. Ferguson, who "condemn[s] [Baby Poorpoor] to be James Madison" (29). The lines at the end of this vignette anticipate that Baby Poorpoor would start "a new life" with T.S. Ferguson: "To be anything other than Baby is such a relief that Baby smiled and relaxed. He took his glasses off and squinted at the blurred man in the business suit who he knew could mean him nothing but harm" (29). The subsequent (8th) vignette depicts a scene where a character named John Doe (who is actually T.S. Ferguson under the pseudonym) visits his sex-slave called James Madison confined in the vacant apartment, two days after their first encounter. This transition between the 7th and 8th vignettes illuminates a possibility that Baby accepts T.S. Ferguson's condemnation and starts "a new life" as John Doe's (T.S. Ferguson's) sex-slave called James Madison. The possibility seems plausible, because the expressed personality of James Madison seems nearly indistinguishable from the one of Baby Poorpoor: both characters are timid, sentimental, and in desperate need of someone's affection. The latter vignettes that trace the stories of James Madison (the 15th, 16th, 25th, 43rd, 44th, and 47th vignettes) seem to maintain this possible narrative frame and construct a certain narrative development. James Madison (performed by Baby Poorpoor) serves for John Doe in order to anchor himself in the world, where "it [is] against the law to be, to look like Baby Poorpoor" (27). After the days of (voluntary/involuntary) confinement, James Madison (/Baby Poorpoor) leaves John Doe's apartment and

visits T.S. Ferguson's house. For transgressing implicit boundaries by visiting John Doe in the house of T.S. Ferguson, James Madison (a.k.a. Baby Poorpoor) is expelled from T.S. Ferguson's/John Doe's life, and impales himself alone in "the beginning of the world—a silvery evergreen forest filled with smoky gray light" (229).

As we have just seen (although a reading of the text demonstrated above is just a tentative possibility), Chester plays with names of characters in the narrative thread of Baby Poorpoor and/or James Madison. Both characters—Baby Poorpoor and James Madison—are summoned into play by the other characters' verbal utterances of their names: John Anthony's desperate utterance transforms into a character, Baby Poorpoor, and T.S. Ferguson's condemnation turns Baby Poorpoor into James Madison. This two-stage transformation (which seems rather like baptism) strongly suggests a radical way of character/identity formation pervasive in the world of *The Exquisite Corpse*—that is, one's name and role assigned on an occasion will embody his/her character/identity. The notion seems similar to Jean Baudrillard's conception of "Precession of Simulacra." It is the map that engenders the territory. In other words, it is a model that engenders a fact. Baby Poorpoor overwrites a new character/identity on himself, by simulating an alternative model—James Madison—in order to forge a relationship with John Doe. However, as Baudrillard proclaims, what exists behind the mask of a model/signifier/map is the absence of the fundamental fact/signified/territory.

On this topic, Chester in his posthumously published essay "Looking for Genet" (1992)[4] prefigures Baudrillard: "the individual and the institution, the man and

[4] *Looking for Genet* was published in 1992 by Black Sparrow, but the contents were actually written before Chester's death in 1971; so the material I cited above dates earlier than the original publication of Baudrillard's "The Precession of Simulacra," which is included in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981).

the role he plays, become more and more separate. But who is the man? Behind the mask that he still forces himself to believe in, there is an eyeless, noseless face, barely anything at all, a guilty blob without identity" (104). In the course of the narrative thread, James Madison gradually realizes the absence of a certain reference point for his identity. His feeling of loss culminates in the 25th vignette: "It's a lie. […] I'm pretending to be a human being. I'm not one and never have been one. […] All I know is that I'm no one, no one at all, nameless and faceless" (115-16). The absence of any fundamental origin for the character James Madison reveals himself as a mere blank signifier.

Baudrillard also writes, "simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false,' between 'real' and 'imaginary.' Since the simulator produces 'true' symptoms, is he ill or not?" (344). A character James Madison/Baby Poorpoor seems to display true symptoms. Although James Madison is a mere model overwritten on a character Baby Poorpoor, he registers both physical and mental symptoms—such as tears and an emotional turbulence. This is especially obvious when his tentative lover John Doe recounts a story of having sex with the other character named Dickie in the 25th vignette. Here, the difference between "true" and "false," between "real" and "performance," disappears. Simulation turns into transformation. These whole processes—transforming into a different character by simulating a tentative model assigned on an occasion—highlight the notion of "what [Chester] called the 'situational I,' in which a person's or character's identity was formed primarily by the surrounding context" (Hibbard, "Anatomy," 151). In the narrative universe of *The Exquisite Corpse*, this notion of dynamic nature of identity is a pervasive theme and introduces a radical notion of character as a blank signifier—what Chester might call

"the creature of the situation" (qtd. in Mullins, 88)—instead of the conventional notion of character as a unified signified.

There actually lies another complexity in the narrative thread of Baby Poorpoor/James Madison. A close look at the narrative reveals that Chester crafts a much more complex narrative maze in *The Exquisite Corpse* by implying another possibility: that James Madison and Baby Poorpoor might be two different characters. The 9th vignette, which focalizes on T.S. Ferguson, depicts a surrealistic scene where T.S. Ferguson visits the apartment and finds James Madison with his throat cut open. Since, in the latter part of the tentative narrative thread readers will see that James Madison ends his life in a different way (he is expelled from John Doe's apartment and impales himself alone in a fairyland like forest), the death of James Madison depicted here causes a logical contradiction in the world of *The Exquisite Corpse*.

There seem at least two ways of reconciling this contradiction: first, to consider that an episode in the 9th vignette is just an imaginative fantasy of T.S. Ferguson (in this reading, Baby Poorpoor and James Madison would remain the same character); and second, to accept a radical possibility that T.S. Ferguson/John Doe has had another experience of having a sex-slave named "James Madison," who is found dead in the 9th vignette, before having the "James Madison" performed by Baby Poorpoor. The second possibility seems to be supported by the two details depicted in the 7th and 8th vignettes. Firstly, in the 7th vignette, when T.S. Ferguson first catches sight of Baby Poorpoor, "[i]t wasn't so much the bloated solitary figure on the beach that excited him as *the writing on the windbreaker*," namely "JAMES MADISON H.S." (29, emphasis added). This scene implies a unique reversal of causality pertaining to T.S. Ferguson's selection of Baby Poorpoor as his sex-slave. In brief, it is possible to infer that T.S. Ferguson gets excited by the writing of "James

Madison"—which might be the name of his old sex-slave, who is featured in the 9th vignette—and/so chooses Baby Poorpoor, who wears the windbreaker, as a successor of James Madison. Secondly, in the 8th vignette, when John Doe explains about the vacant apartment to a new James Madison, he implies that he has a pattern of having a sex-slave in that apartment: "[John Doe explains,] 'I never had the gas and electricity turned on, and I don't intend to now. And *no one ever complained before*'" (31, emphasis added). This possible reading of the two details above will split Baby Poorpoor and James Madison into two different characters. However, readers are still unable to identify which James Madison is Baby Poorpoor for the following two reasons: first, the fragmented narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse* doesn't allow readers to define the temporal locality of each scene; second, the setting surrounding a character called James Madison—in the vacant apartment in the company of John Doe—is the same (so, readers are unable to identify a character by the context surrounding him).

Thus, the narrative thread of Baby Poorpoor and/or James Madison introduces the notion of the dynamic nature of identity, which is a thematic obsession throughout the novel, and demonstrates a radical notion of character as a creature of the situation. The notion of character as a creature of the situation conspires with the novel's fragmented narrative structure—in which characters frequently leap from one situation to another without any transitional element—and creates an enormous multiplicity of possible connections between episodes. Although there are several other tentative narrative threads featuring characters (such as Ismael and Tommy, John Anthony, and Xavier) in *The Exquisite Corpse*, each narrative thread can be connected to others in a number of different ways. Since readers are not able to define a certain, absolute chronology for each episode, it is possible to consider that a

character named "A" in one vignette becomes an other character named "B" in an other vignette by somehow getting in a particular situation (which forms a particular identity of the character "B"). Readers never know whether they might be different characters or just different personas of the same character forged in different temporal/spatial frames. This is how the narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse* breaks down the chains of causality and opens the text to multiple and alternative readings.

Now, the question is: How does a text with such a multiplicity of possible meanings seem to preserve a sense of unity? In order to respond to this question, I would like to discuss the following three features of the narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse*: first, Chester's consistent writing style; second, the novel's thematic preoccupation with identity formation; and third, two common characters who appear and interact within several different narrative threads—John Anthony and Dickie.

As Hibbard writes, "the novel displays a strange and luminous sense of coherence, in large measure through its consistent, scintillating style" ("Anatomy" 144). Chester's consistent writing style in *The Exquisite Corpse* gives a sense of unity to the novel's narrative fragments. Compared to the narrative of *Naked Lunch* (which is highly fragmented and equivocal, delivered from a drifting point of view), the narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse* seems clear, smooth flowing, and consistent, delivered in the third-person limited omniscient narrative voice. Each of the forty-nine brief vignettes evenly depicts an individual, separate scene, which seems "always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end," like what Deleuze and Guattari call "a plateau" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 21-22). "There is nothing experimental about the syntax; you are not expected to pick up veiled references or make subtle associations; and there can never be a moment's doubt about what is happening to the characters," Diana Athill briefly notes in her afterword to the 2003 Black Sparrow edition of *The*

Exquisite Corpse (253). Throughout the novel, descriptions of scenes are consistently cinematic: visual and clear, vividly colorful and dramatic, and often erotic. However, interestingly, the clarity of description does not point toward certainty of interpretation, due to the disjointed chains of causality. From Tangier early in 1965, Chester wrote to Diana Athill, "The book is too simple […] It reads like a children's book and requires innocence of a reader" (qtd. in Athill 250). Exactly; yet, Athill warns the readers of the novel in her afterword: "you must read it as a child in that you must read it simply for what happens next, without trying to impose 'inner meanings' on it" (252). Chester's narrative voice in *The Exquisite Corpse* consistently gives readers clear descriptions of "what is happening to the character" but never allows readers to interpret the descriptions in a certain definitive manner. This strange slippage between the surface and what is underneath (there might be nothing underneath though) is seen everywhere in the text and gives a certain sense of unity to the novel.

The second feature—the novel's thematic preoccupation with the dynamic nature of identity—paradoxically both gives a sense of unity and breaks down the causal chains of the narrative. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, the narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse* doesn't allow readers to fix characters by their assigned names and constitute any definitive, logical story pertaining to the characters. However, at the same time, the notion of the dynamic nature of identity is thematized and seen in the characters' actions throughout the narrative, which gives a certain sense of unity to the novel. Other than the tentative narrative thread of Baby Poorpoor and/or James Madison, several main characters of the novel subjectively overwrite their identity/character for particular occasions: for example, T.S. Ferguson turns himself into John Doe for his closeted, abnormal sexual life; Ismael, when

writing a letter to a newspaper columnist in the 12th and 38th vignettes, invents a new name/identity—Isobel Rosa—for himself; and John Anthony, in the 41st vignette, turns himself into Veronica for a drag performance. Interestingly, in the episode of John Anthony's drag performance, the novel's unidentified third-person narrator assigns a female pronoun to Veronica—a female character disguised by a male character—and traces her actions as though she was a new female character:

> The first bar he passed had its doors open and John Anthony felt suddenly dry. The woman he was tonight had a taste for boilermakers of which he disapproved. Wasn't *she* going uptown after all? Even to Schrafft's? Even to Child's? *She* walked north on the east side of the street, teasing *herself* with the raw smell of beer and whiskey. (196, emphasis added)

Like these passages above, even gendered pronouns (she, he, her, him) in the narrative of *The Exquisite Corpse* are no longer reliable indicators for defining a particular character. The narrator of *The Exquisite Corpse* assigns a "real" (on the textual level) gender and name to characters simulated by the other characters in the novel, and this contributes to the generation of a radical notion: that if a simulated character becomes constituted as a new character, a character performed is indistinguishable from a character performing. This radical notion pervades the narrative universe of *The Exquisite Corpse* and preserves a sense of unity throughout the forty-nine brief vignettes of the novel by implying a possibility that a character named "A" and a character named "B" might be the same character.

The third feature—two common characters, John Anthony and Dickie, who appear and interact with characters in several different narrative threads—creates connected points, which may braid the separate narrative threads together, and implies

a possibility that the events occurring in each narrative thread may exist on the same level of reality. John Anthony, a mask-maker, appears in the 1st, 2nd, 22nd, 32nd, 39th, 41st, and 48th vignettes[5] and interacts with several of the main characters (who trace their own narrative threads in the other vignettes of the novel) within a certain, fixed spatial narrative frame: in New York City, often in a place called "the Aviary." In the 2nd vignette, a woman with red hair, who wears "a white picture hat and an orange dress" (apparel that exactly matches what John Anthony wears for transforming himself into Veronica in the 41st vignette), suddenly appears and talks to Baby Poorpoor in the garment district in New York:

> "Julie …" she whispered.
>
> [Baby Poorpoor] jumped in surprise, then turned his head cautiously to the left. A woman with red hair as coarse as wool had her bloodshot eyes close to him.
>
> "You better come back to me now, Julie." (20)

Since "Julie" is the name of a man Veronica encounters in the 41st vignette—"old Julie English" (196)—it is not unreasonable to consider that Veronica/John Anthony is the woman with red hair in the 2nd vignette. Moreover, the 32nd and 39th vignettes depict an interaction between Tommy and John Anthony—Tommy's visit to John Anthony in "the Aviary" (the 32nd vignette) and John Anthony's making a mask for Tommy (the 39th vignette); and the 48th vignette depicts an interaction between Xavier and John Anthony at "the Aviary." Thus, several of the main characters from different narrative threads share a certain level of reality within the narrative frame

[5] The 1st, 22nd, and 41st vignettes focalize on and depict only John Anthony himself; so, my discussion in this paragraph will not focus on these three vignettes.

where John Anthony exists—in New York City—and this surely gives a sense of unity to several of the separate narrative threads in *The Exquisite Corpse*.

Another common character—Dickie—never appears as a character in the action yet is referred to in the following five vignettes of five narrative threads: the 5th (a thread of Xavier), 22nd (a thread of John Anthony), 25th (a thread of James Madison), 26th (a thread of Baby Poorpoor), and 38th (a thread of Ismael/Isobel Rosa). Other than these vignettes, a shadow of Dickie (a character who seems to be Dickie) seems to appear in the 30th vignette as "a sailor" (135) and in the 43rd vignettes as "a man in a sailor suit" (210).[6] Since all these Dickies appear in multiple different temporal/spatial narrative frames, readers may not be sure whether they are the same character or not. Regardless, the recurrent appearance of Dickie surely gives a possible sense of unity to several separate narrative threads. On this topic, Greg Mullins observes:

> All these Dickies are different characters, and yet simultaneously they are all the same: they are all Dickie, and, by association, they all "dick." Like a dream, they fade in and out of focus and slide in and out of one another, not in order to build up any sort of heavy-handed symbolism but rather to link various parts of the novel together as if by chance, as if any mutation is possible and all mutations are senseless, absurd, and anarchic. (108)

Regardless of whether the connection seems plausible or not, the two common characters—John Anthony and Dickie—certainly create possible connected points, which may braid the separate narrative threads together, throughout *The Exquisite Corpse*.

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[6] "Dickie" referred in the 38th vignette is a sailor.

Through the clarity of language and consistent, linear narrative form, Chester obviously exerts closer control over each of the narrative fragments in *The Exquisite Corpse*. The certain control over the narrative on the vignette level greatly contributes to the distribution of the novel's strong thematic impulses—the dynamic nature of identity: a journey of performative identity driven by desire, and its accompanying pain and joy—to its readers. However, as I have discussed throughout this chapter, such a distribution of the primary theme leads to the disjuncture of the chains of causality and creates a unique textual condition, where the clarity of language does not point toward any certainty of interpretation. A key expression for *The Exquisite Corpse*'s disjointed narrative is noted in Chester's letter to his friend Edward Field dated November 30, 1964. Chester writes, "Thank God *it doesn't matter whether there's any logic in the book at all*" (qtd. in Hibbard, "Anatomy," 144, emphasis added). In the amorphous narrative universe of *The Exquisite Corpse*—where the distinction between a character disguised and a character disguising disappears—the distinction of the surface (description) and what is underneath (meaning) also "does not matter." When he observes the world, which is taken over by simulacrum, Baudrillard writes: "All this is equally true, and the search for proof, indeed the objectivity of the fact does not check this vertigo of interpretation. We are in a logic of simulation which has nothing to do with a logic of facts and an order of reasons" (355). *The Exquisite Corpse*'s postmodern narrative logic of simulation traps readers in "a strange new world" (*The Exquisite Corpse* 228), in which there is nothing definitive under the mask of signifier, which sends us into the vertigo of interpretation.

CHAPTER III

An Unreasonable Myth (an Intertwined Dialectic of Discipline and Anarchy): Postmodern Narrative Logic in *Empire of the Senseless*

The two novels that I have examined in the previous chapters, William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959) and Alfred Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse* (1967), resist linear and logical development of narrative lines and liberate the text's potential as open assemblage. The two novels' narrative politics surely embody one of the key characteristics of postmodernism, decentralization, in the sphere of the text. Without any doubt, the quality of decentered-ness (instability and openness to multiple readings/interpretations) is also seen in the narrative of Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988). However, notably, Acker's narrative politics in *Empire of the Senseless* is slightly different from those of Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse.* While *Naked Lunch* and *The Exquisite Corpse* do not constitute any unified, meaningful narrative progression taken as a whole (without assistance of readers' active operation of creating meanings) and defy the impositional and hegemonic functions of the conventional, linear narrative, Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* exerts a closer control over the novel's structure and outlines a certain meaningful narrative progression taken as a whole in broad strokes. In brief, in *Empire of the Senseless*, Acker constructs a conventional, linear narrative progression, while employing a fragmented, multi-voiced narrative style, which surely serves to break down Aristotelian narrative logic. This third (and last) chapter of my exploration of postmodern narrative logic explains the mechanics at work in the unique narrative configuration employed in *Empire of the Senseless* and examines the effect and objectives of Acker's unique narrative style.

The narrative of *Empire of the Senseless* is delivered by two nomadic outlaws—Abhor and Thivai—whose consciousnesses wander around between physical landscapes of a devastated Paris and dreamscapes constructed from their memories and imaginations. Their first-person narratives, interjecting the other narratives of several existing texts, are jumbled, equivocal, transgressive, and frequently seem illogical and discursive. However, while displaying a certain quality of fragmentation, the narrative of *Empire of the Senseless* surely constitutes a certain, orderly progression of events, which allegorically envisions the corruption of the pre-existing patriarchal social order. Employing the fragmented narratives which are embraced in a certain structure, Acker "denounces and slashes apart the repressing machine [of the pre-existing institutions] at the level of the signified" (*Empire of the Senseless* 12), exposes the unsolvable fundamental dilemma that people in the postmodern world of uncertainty may face—the dilemma between reason and desire, order and freedom, discipline and anarchy—and ultimately, calls attention to the fair placement of both freedom and responsibility on decision makers in a certain rational structure, namely readers in the sphere of the text.

Firstly, I would like to examine how Acker slashes apart the institutionalized syntagmatic/logical chains of written text. The fragmented narrative of *Empire of the Senseless* can be termed "schizophrenic writing," which Frederic Jameson in *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) characterizes as "anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory," exemplifying the narrative in Samuel Beckett's *Watt,* "where a primacy of the present sentence in time ruthlessly disintegrates the narrative fabric that attempts of reform around it" (25-28). For the usage of the word "schizophrenic," Jameson relies on Jacques Lacan's account of schizophrenia that

highlights the relationship between the linguistic malfunction and the psyche of the schizophrenic: "Lacan describes schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning" (26). Considering the following twofold proposition—"first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one's present; and, second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time," Jameson observes that "[w]ith the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or in other words, *a series of pure and unrelated presents in time*" (26-27 emphasis added). One's malfunction in unifying the past, present, and future of the sentence similarly leads to one's malfunction in unifying "the past, present, and future of one's own biographical experience or psychic life" (Jameson 27).

Most of the narratives rendered by Abhor and Thivai are certainly nothing but heaps of fragments of "a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (Jameson 27). Their narrations embrace lots of abrupt turns (and leaps) and/so rarely construct a linear progression of the narrators' actions.[1] The two narrators suddenly move from one scene (temporal and spatial location) to another without explaining the means of and the reason for their relocations / "re"-settings. A new scene that depicts the narrator's waking action likely begins with a line that suggests the narrator abruptly steers his/her attention to the present situation, in which he/she is physically involved; for example, "Memories of identity flowed through my head. I [Abhor] got up slowly,

[1] Exceptionally, the third section of the novel, "Pirate Night" (173-227), displays a linear progression of the narrators' actions, since the primary part of the narrative in "Pirate Night" is composed of the text plagiarized from Mark Twain's novel *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

my eyes fixed on the muzzle of a black automatic pistol" (65), and "But, I [Thivai] found, for I'm consistently losing myself, myself seated in the middle of the fur of white wolves" (90), etc. Questions such as: "How much time has passed between the new scene and the previous scene?" and "What has happened between them?" will not be answered; therefore, readers never know the causal and chronological relationship between the new action of the narrator and the previous scene.

In a sense, Abhor's and Thivai's fragmented narrations on their waking actions can be interpreted as the representation of their short-term memories. Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand of Plateaus* (1980) explain a "rhizomatic" aspect of short-term memory: "[the rhizome] is a short-term memory, or antimemory. […] the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight " (21). Short-term memory can only hold a limited amount of information in active status for a short period of time. Therefore, in the mind of those who have short-term memory loss, one succeeding event will be recorded as a series of various different short-term memories that hold "pure and unrelated presents in time" (Jameson 27). In this way, the representation of short-term memory becomes "rhizomatic." The relationship between signifier and signified within a sequence of short-term memories will vary and differ for each version, just like a territory can be translated into multiple different maps in different formats. These kinds of semiotic slippages (break down of the signifying chain) seem to be seen at many points in the narrative of *Empire of the Senseless*. One interesting example is that the seemingly same character is often referred to by different names: for instance, in "III. In Honour of The Arabs" (the third subsection of the novel's first section, "Elegy for the World

of the Fathers"[2]), a character named Dr. Schreber seems to be referred by the narrator (Abhor) in three different ways—such as "the doctor"(50), "the doctor of zombies" (56), and "Death" (60)—as though she does not perceive Dr. Schreber as a pre-existing, continuous character, but as three different new characters.

Moreover, in the narrative of *Empire of the Senseless* (in other words, in a flow of Abhor's or Thivai's short-term memories), different kinds of narrations—such as the description of the narrator's waking actions, a flashback, the presentation of the narrator's thoughts, and the description of other characters' actions and of the scene that surrounds the narrator—come in and out with little transitional tissue. Their descriptions of scenes are very equivocal (often to the extent that readers are not able to pin them down with a certain degree of probability), so it is hardly discernible whether the event taking place is the narrator's actual experience or merely his/her imaginary fantasy. On this topic, Abhor, a part-robot and part-black narrator, self-reflexively recounts, "I can't distinguish between my memories of dreams, waking actions, and what I've read and been told. For they're all memories" (53). Abhor's narration in "III. In Honour of The Arabs"—where the quotation I mentioned above appears—seems to exemplify this key characteristic of "schizophrenic writing." The section starts with the subsection, "*Dead*," which is a short biographical episode of Abhor's boss, Dr. Schreber. (Interestingly, this character seems to be modeled after Daniel Paul Schreber (1842-1911), a German jurist, who suffered from what was diagnosed as dementia praecox, which was, later on, redefined as schizophrenia.) Then, the narrative makes an abrupt turn to the following subsection, "*Me Equals*

[2] The novel, *Empire of the Senseless,* is structured as a triptych with the following three sections: "Elegy for the World of the Fathers," "Alone," and "Pirate Night."

Dead Cunt," which includes six sub-subsections—"1. Algeria," a poem-like prose seemingly on Abhor's production, induced by the vision or idea (we never know which) of "cat" (47-48); "2. Algeria's Cock," a narrative of Abhor's waking action, which seems to follow the novel's primary storyline; "3. The Memory Of Childhood," a narrative of Abhor's thoughts, which is seemingly unrelated to the preceding storyline; "4. Personal History Or Memory," a narrative of Abhor's thoughts, which seems to continue the preceding sub-subsection; "5. Primitive/Before," a narrative of Abhor's waking action which follows the scene depicted in "2. Algeria's Cock"; "6. A Memory of Pleasure," a fragmented narrative of four different kinds of subjects, such as Abhor's flashback of a scene at the bazaar (49-51), Abhor's thoughts on a traumatic experience that she has had in adolescence: "When I was fourteen years old they shut me up in an attic […]" (51), another flashback of scenes related to "a huge green ocean" (52), and (seemingly) Abhor's waking action which seems to follow the novel's primary storyline: "When I regained consciousness, unlike the old cashew nut, I lifted up the first public phone receiver I could find […]" (52). Thus, Abhor's narrative in this section is radically jumbled with several different kinds of narrations: "[her] memories of dreams, waking actions, and what [she's] read and been told" (53).

This unique narrative style of *Empire of the Senseless* seems to display a similar aesthetic to the one seen in the fragmented narrative of William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*. Of this narrative aesthetic, the narrator Burroughs gives an interesting explanation in *Naked Lunch*: "There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing" (*Naked Lunch* 184). In a sense, we can view the narrative of *Empire of the Senseless* as a mere enumeration of narrative particles that project what is in front of the narrator's senses (regardless of physically or mentally) at the moment of narrating. The narrative particles have little transitional

tissue at the sudden leaps; and also, even within each narrative particle, the relationship between signifier and signified seems to be tentatively defined at the narrator's disposal. Consequently, readers hardly grasp the definitive causal relation, or even the relevance, of each narrative-fragment. Aristotelian logic based on the sense of causality has little efficacy in emplotting these fragments into a certain, definitive and intelligible story.

These kinds of narratives—which are extremely hard to trace—exert less control over the reader's interpretation of the text and invite multiple interpretations of the text, compared with some well-crafted, more conventional narratives of modernist fictions. The well-crafted, more conventional narrative provides a clear temporal/spatial setting and coherent causality of each event and assigns a consistent name to each character; in doing so, the narrative constructs a rigid, logical development of narrative lines, which locks readers into interpreting the text in a certain manner. In such a narrative, meanings of the text are carefully delivered, from the author to readers, on the one-directional assembly line rolling with the syntagmatic/logical chains. Therefore, readers' interpretations of the text are likely to be manipulated and homogenized by the author. By contrast, the "schizophrenic" narrative in *Empire of the Senseless* purposefully breaks down the syntagmatic/logical chains and emancipates the text's meanings from the author-controlled assembly line. The text of *Empire of the Senseless* requires readers to participate in the process of meaning-making.

"Schizophrenic" narratives in *Empire of the Senseless* drastically depart from the syntagmatic/logical narrative flow, which seems universally persuasive and therefore can be manipulative. Fragmented configurations of the narrative move the text into the new arena of creating meanings, where readers subjectively synthesize a

diversity of narrative fragments into one comprehensible unit, according to their own logic and value system. According to Jameson, the postmodernist experience of form—like this new arena—can be characterized by "what will seem a paradoxical slogan: namely, the proposition that 'difference relates'" (31). Jameson continues: "[t]he theories of difference, however, have tended to stress disjunction to the point at which materials of the text, including its words and sentences, tend to fall apart into random and inert passivity, into a set of elements which entertains separations from one another" (31).

This dissolution of the text into "random and inert passivity" illuminates the fundamental dynamics surrounding the relationship between the text and readers that Roland Barthes proposes in his famous essay "The Death of the Author" (1977). Deconstructing the mythic authority of the "Author" over meanings of his/her text, Barthes redefines the essence of written text:

> a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. […]
>
> a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader. (146-48)

To sum up, the "schizophrenic" narrative in *Empire of the Senseless*—which is a paradigmatic consequence of a variety of writings (the narrators' short-term memories of waking actions, of dreams, and of what they read and have been told)—slashes

apart the syntagmatic/logical chains and highlights the notion of "the death of the author" and its accompanying "birth of the reader," that is, the placement of freedom and responsibility on the reader.

Secondly, I would like to discuss how Acker breaks down the repressive chains of pre-existing cultural institutions—which have a great influence on people's standards of morality and reasonability. In several places in the novel, Acker explains her tactics of breaking down the chains of cultural institutions. The very first subsection of the novel, "I. Rape by the Father," narrated by Abhor (through Thivai), presents a theoretical discourse on the possible breakdown of hegemonic ideologies through literature, which is one of the objectives that Acker's narrative practice attempts to achieve:

> Logocentricism and Idealism, theology, all supports of the repressive society. […] Reason which always homogenizes and reduces, represses and unifies phenomena or actuality into what can be perceived and so controlled. […] Reason is always in the service of the political and economic masters. It is here the literature strikes, at this base, where the concepts and acting of order impose themselves. Literature is that which denounces and slashes apart the repressing machine at the level of signified. (12)

Although the target of attack for Acker's writing would be the great heritage of rationalization ("Logocentricism and Idealism, theology"), or more precisely, its accompanying institutionalization of "reasonable-ness," Acker seems conscious of an interesting dilemma that the simple opposition—irrationalization versus rationalization—is no longer effective within the context of contemporary cultural tendencies, i.e., postmodernism. In "II. The Beginning of Criminality / The

Beginning of Morning," which is the second subsection in "Alone" (the second section of the novel), Abhor introduces another theoretical discourse on the relationship between language and the contemporary cultural institution:

> Ten years ago it seemed possible to destroy language through language: to destroy language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prison of meaning.
>
> But this nonsense, since it depended on sense, simply pointed back to the normalizing institutions. (134)

As Frederic Jameson observes, the flowing tide of "a kind of aesthetic populism" (2) in postmodern capitalism—or in what Daniel Bell terms "postindustrial society"—makes every kind of expression "depthless" and susceptible to rationalization and commodification. Consequently, verbal expressions that have been considered as irrational/nonsense end up being encoded into either a new aspect of "the empire-making (empirical) empire of language" or just incomprehensible noise.

The passage by Abhor, which follows the theoretical passage that I have quoted above, proposes a possible counterforce through language against the empowered hegemony of rationalization in postindustrial society:

> What is the language of the 'unconscious'? (If this ideal unconscious or freedom doesn't exist: pretend it does, use fiction, for the sake of survival, all of our survival.) *Its primary language must be taboo, all that is forbidden.* Thus, an attack on the institutions of prison via language would demand the use of a language or languages which aren't acceptable, which are forbidden. […] Nonsense doesn't per se

> break down the codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the codes. (134, emphasis added)

Speaking languages of the "unconscious" is forbidden by a set of pre-existing codes and social, historical, and cultural agreements, and/so it will rationally highlight what has been repressed within the hegemony of rationalization, and in doing so, will possibly modify the structural distortion of the pre-existing social order. On this topic, Nicola Pitchford, in her essay "Kathy Acker's Unreasonable Texts" (2002), shares an interesting insight. Pitchford applies the adjective "unreasonable" to Acker's novels and explains, "this word ['unreasonable'] offers a third term, a way out of the binary opposition between the rational and the irrational. […] The unreasonable person's position implies that rationality isn't everything, that other desires or even needs must also be taken into account" (103-04). In brief, Acker positions her text as "the unreasonable" by interjecting forbidden languages—such as narratives on violations of taboo and plagiarized texts—and launches an effective attack against the empire of cultural institutionalization from within.

Here, we can see a certain logical linkage between Acker's unique narrative style in *Empire of the Senseless* and the objectives that her narrative practice attempts to achieve. When questioned by Ellen G. Friedman in 1989, Acker explained her shift in approach with *Empire of the Senseless*, "*Empire* is a new direction, […] the search for a myth to live by […] I'm looking for a myth. I'm looking for it where no one else is looking […] The myth to me is pirates. […] people who are beginning to take their own sign-making into their own hands" (Friedman 17-18). Certainly, in *Empire of the Senseless,* Acker delivers a structured, meaningful narrative progression, which serves to construct a certain comprehensible myth. The "schizophrenic" narrative in the novel diminishes the institutionalized, logical chains between words

and, in doing so, liberates a great multiplicity of the text's meanings. Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) point out that the schizo has a potential of creating his/her own sign-making through breaking the conventional, syntagmatic chains: "The schizo has his own system of co-ordinates for situating himself at his disposal, because, first of all, he has at his disposal his very own recording code, which does not coincide with the social code, or coincides with it only in order to parody it" (15).

Following her aim of creating a new myth of "schizophrenic" pirates (unreasonable characters), Acker, in practice, contains crude and obscene descriptions on violations of taboo in the primary part of *Empire of the Senseless.* The narratives delivered by Abhor and Thivai exhibit scenes of violating taboos and examine a blurred line between "right" and "wrong" from the perspectives of transgressors. Such radical narrative operations disclose the complexities of taboo transgressors' perspectives that might illuminate the repressiveness of the pre-existing social rules and cultural norms. In the novel's opening section, "I. Rape by the Father," Acker designates one of her spokesmen as a natural heretic from social rules and cultural norms. Abhor, who "do[es] not know anything about the world" (9) as a result of the education that Daddy offers to her, recounts (through Thivai's narration) her lack of the sense of social order:

> Daddy left me no possibility of easiness. He forced me to live among nerves sharper than razor blades, to have no certainties. There was only roaming. My nerves hurt more and more. I despised those people, like my mother, who accepted easiness—morality, social rules. Daddy taught me to live in pain, to know there's nothing else. I trusted him for this complexity. (10)

For Abhor, social morality and rules are a mere disguised order for maintaining "the scheme of things. Which might or might not exist" (5). This heretical perspective of Abhor—whose perception of reality would be more painful but truthful without any "easiness" (therefore, more raw)—confers on her a so-called *unreasonable* (it is not irrational because it is based on her own heretical but rational standard) sensitivity and morality. The voice raised from such an *unreasonable* perception might become a destructive force that destabilizes the pre-existing social order and cultural norms; however, it is also justifiable as a revolutionary force that rationally attacks (and ultimately modifies) the system of society that maintains the power of certain *reasonable* members while repressing the *unreasonable* others.

One of the clearest examples of the *taboo* narratives in *Empire of the Senseless* would be Abhor's transgression of the incest taboo. Her traumatic experience of being raped by Daddy is recounted twice in the novel: first, through Thivai's narration in "I. Rape by the Father" (11-17), and second, through her own narration in "V. Let the Algerians Take Over Paris" (66-67). The repeated episodes reveal the complex sensitivities of Abhor, a taboo transgressor. Joseph M. Conte in his essay "Discipline and Anarchy: Disrupted Codes in Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*" (2002) observes, "Abhor's reaction to her violation of the incest taboo ["Part of me wanted him and part of me wanted to kill him" (*Empire* 12)] is typically complex" (sec 4). In fact, the complex desire of Abhor, who has transgressed the incest taboo, is about to violate the patricide taboo, but "Western culture has of course punished women for both responses—admitting desire for the father, and patricide" (Conte sec 4). As I have mentioned in the previous paragraph, Abhor's heretical impulse can be justifiable as a revolutionary impulse, which avoids any normalizing repression by social/cultural codes; therefore, it is also possible to see that her *unreasonable* (again,

not irrational) reaction expresses more raw human impulse in the circumstance. Considering this point, the predictable repression of Abhor's *unreasonable* double desire for incest and patricide—which is evoked as a response to Daddy's raping her—can be translated as the patriarchal society's repression of complex human emotion and desire (particularly women's ambivalent impulses against the patriarch's exploitation of her body in the case). This demonstrates that complex and *unreasonable* sensitivities of taboo transgressors—who are often labeled as aberrant and tucked in the underground of society—give us a fresh perspective on the system of contemporary normalizing institutions, which define the line separating the *reasonable* domain (a group of the norm) from the *unreasonable* domain (a group of the aberrant) in society. By exhibiting the complexities under the label of "taboo" or "aberrant," Acker challenges the normalizing force of the pre-existing cultural institutions that will wipe out the unrepressed and complex sensitivities of human beings.

The present codes and hierarchy are empowered through various kinds of cultural relics of the past. What Acker's violation of the literary taboo in the actual world—plagiarism—disturbs is this very connection. Acker's plagiarism does not simply highlight the different meanings of a given text for different readers, but breaks down the repressive chains of the dominant cultural relics and illuminates the view of individuals as active participants of their present culture. The primary target of Acker's tactics—plagiarism—is the capitalist logic surrounding the written text. In the capitalist logic, any published text tends to be regarded as private property under the authority of its owner (the author/editor/publisher of the text). This privatization of language distorts the essence of written text—that is, in Barthes words, "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the

Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146). The capitalist privatization of the text as the "message of the Author-God" impedes multiple interpretations of the text and, more deeply, multiple appropriations of words. The condition engendered by the capitalist logic surrounding the text serves to establish the conventional usage of written language—what and how we should or shouldn't write—and institutionalize certain preferable fashions (contents and forms) of the text. Such fashions inevitably accord with conventional logic and value systems, which tend to keep repressed groups repressed. Purposefully violating other authors' ownership of their texts (language), Acker vividly destabilizes the capitalistic logic of privatizing language expressions as authorized and unified commodities.

In *Empire of the Senseless*, Acker challenges to one of the greatest normalizing forces—psychoanalytic diagnosis, more precisely, its authority to create knowledge and meaning—through re-writing (re-narrating) the text of Freudian psychoanalysis from the perspective of the *unreasonable*. Richard House in his essay "Informational Inheritance in Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*" (2005) points out an example of plagiarism in the narrative of *Empire of the Senseless*: "[t]he second subsection of *Empire*'s 'Nightmare City,' entitled 'Suicide' ([in Empire] 29-31), is basically a condensed version of Freud's chapter 'The Seduction and Its Immediate Consequences'" (466). House notes that Acker's version contains significant alterations from the Freud's original diagnosis on the suicide of the patient's sister. Freud's accounts rationalize the cause of the patient's sister's suicide as one of the proofs of neuropathic heredity in her family; conversely, Acker's Thivai (the narrator of this subsection) "recognizes the role played by gender politics in her demise" (467): "Even though her IQ was high, she couldn't understand how a high IQ

and *the desire to be loved as a female* could exist together in one body. […] [S]ince she was a freak, she was unlovable" (31). A significant difference between the two accounts is that Freud's diagnosis packages the problem of the sister's suicide with the label "the aberrance of her family's heredity" under the authority of psychiatry, while Thivai's mundane comment on her suicide leaves the problem open for multiple ways of reasoning by taking the case as a result of the complicated dynamics surrounding the sister, especially gender politics. Acker, in this subsection through Thivai's narrative on the cribbed case of Freud's patient (and throughout the novel, through the two outlaw wanderers' narratives depicting violations of taboo), attempts to peel the simplified label of "taboo/aberrant" off from the neglected raw human complexities underneath, and destabilizes the institutionalized value system of society.

The other thing that Acker seems to highlight through her plagiarism is, in Richard House's vocabulary, the possible "reversal of causality" (453) between the structure and its participants. In the earlier part of *Empire of the Senseless,* Abhor and Thivai are ordered to find a construct named *Kathy* in order to acquire the enzyme, which will renew their own blood. As this unique setting suggests, the text of *Empire of the Senseless* can be considered as a construct—mingled blood—which is collaged from a multiplicity of different voices plagiarized from the past's cultural relics such as Freud's psychoanalysis, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), and Mark Twain's *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), etc. On this topic, House notes, "Acker recognizes a need to rethink subjectivity to avoid recapitulating various myths underpinning present structures of domination, including the presumed autonomy of the liberal, bourgeois individual subject and the natural necessity of sexual difference" (453). Violating other authors' ownership rights, Acker rewrites and samples the past's dominant texts within the contexts different from the original one, and

subjectively creates the new text, just like changing old blood into new. In the novel, Abhor recounts: "The dominated classes' ideological structures, obviously, determine whether or not they'll continue to be dominated. After all, she could always say 'No'. The whore. Now: just as the situations: *my own new view of my position to my boss determines my relation to my boss*" (emphasis added, 125). No doubt; there is the intertwined correlation between the structure and its participants. The structure affects its participants' process of decision-making, and *vise versa*. Although individuals are affected by pre-existing cultural institutions, they can also subjectively re-create their relation to dominant ideologies by looking at and expressing the matter from different angles. Abhor's and Thivai's narratives exhibit violations of taboo from the perspectives of (and also with the language of) taboo transgressors and break down the chains of pre-existing cultural institutions, which has defined the border between the *reasonable* and the *unreasonable*.

The narrative of Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988) surely embodies and thematizes the intertwined tension between rational order (the structure) and the freeplay of local discourses (its participants) both in form and content. The "schizophrenic" narratives in the novel surely break down the chains of causality and emancipate the text's multiple meanings from the author-controlled assembly line. Moreover, the "taboo" contents in the two outlaws' narratives corrodes the repressive chains of pre-existing cultural institutions and illuminate the possible "reversal of causality" between the structure and its participants. Embracing these two revolutionary narrative practices in the format of a structured narrative progression, Acker's new myth calls attention to a significant notion engendered from the dynamics surrounding the intertwined tension between rational order (discipline) and the freeplay of local discourse (anarchy)—that is, the fair placement of both

freedom and responsibility on every individual decision maker within a certain rational structure. At the very end of the novel, Abhor—who had no narrative voice in the beginning of the novel: "I. Rape by the Father (Abhor speaks *through Thivai*)" (3 emphasis added)—decides to make up her own rules (system of co-ordinates for situating herself at her disposal) and tells a male character named Mark that "[she] [does] not want to be part of a motorcycle gang" (227), by her own choice, through her own voice.

CONCLUSION

"What Is It FOR ME?"

Throughout the previous three chapters, I have explored the three different "rhizomatic" narrative configurations—William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Alfred Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse*, and Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*—and delineated the interesting mechanics, which I would like to call postmodern narrative logic. Deprived of the chains of causality, the three "rhizomatic" narratives constitute dynamic, "acentered" systems, where a host of interchangeable grains of information construct no natural order and create a number of tentative connections between one another in various different ways at various different points, defined contingently at a given moment (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand of Plateaus* 17). This system of "*n* – 1"[1] at work in three select novels opens up the narrative's potential as "assemblage" (a great instability and openness to multiple and alternative readings) and highlights the notion of "the death of the author" and its accompanying "birth of the reader" (as I have discussed earlier, the degree of fluidity differ in each novel though). In order to *interpret* the text that embraces such fluid arrangements of fragmentary parts (which are liberated from the gravity of rigid causality), readers become strongly engaged in the process of creating a meaning and order of the narrative. Readers receive and decode a series of the narrative fragments brought in front of them, and also at the same time, imagine and encode a certain tentative meaning over / into each of the

[1] Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand of Plateaus* write, "[t]he multiple *must be made,* not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available—always *n* - 1 (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted)" (6). "Rhizomatic" narratives are deprived of the chains of causality, and that makes the condition of *n* – 1.

fragments at their own disposal, in order to synthesize them into a certain meaningful story. The transformation of the reader's role from *decipherer of the meaning* to *inventor of a meaning* and its accompanying placement of both freedom and responsibility on readers is always a key characteristic of the three select "rhizomatic" narratives that employs/embodies postmodern narrative logic.

Conventional narrative logic based on the principle of causality (in other words, a logic of root-thinking) mechanically points toward one certain, "*correct*" interpretation from the text and excludes any other interpretations as *errors*: the text never invites readers to participate in the process of meaning making. This closed, "logical," and mechanical process of meaning making obliquely yet severely serves to develop an outdated myth: that is, rational mind on its own reaches "The Absolute Truth" by going through a series of exclusive "either/or" binary oppositions. Certainly, the exclusive "either/or" root-thinking establishes a rigid hierarchy, orders, and regulations, which may shield us from our own destructive nature (the destructive side of our desire) by rationalizing/totalizing the entropy (complexity, multiplicity, and contradiction) of human behaviors with binary matrices (just like information processing in a computer); however, such a rigid rationalization/totalization may also castrate the positive side of our desire, rub out the beauty of uniqueness, and construct the un-neutral, homogenizing system of society that reinforces the hegemony of certain *reasonable* (and *functional*) members while repressing *unreasonable* (and *nonfunctional*) others.

In contrast to conventional narrative logic's exclusive "either/or" thinking, postmodern narrative logic embodies the inclusive "both/and" thinking: the text invites readers to create their own construction of order and meaning of the text, and there exists no hierarchy between one interpretation and another. Here, in the very

end, I would like to quote Roland Barthes' initial inquiry into the pleasure of reading the text:

> Imagine someone (a kind of Monsieur Teste in reverse) who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old specter: *logical contradiction;* who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity […]. Such a man would be the mockery of our society: court, school, asylum, polite conversation would cast him out: who endures contradiction without shame? Now this anti-hero exists: he is the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure. (*The Pleasure of the Text* 3)

Postmodern narrative logic is a logic of this anti-hero, who takes *his pleasure of reading* while ignoring anything but his own judgment and accepting its accompanying responsibility. Postmodern narrative logic is a means to construct one's own tentative version of truth (a tentative answer to the question: "*What Is It For Me?*") out of enormous numbers of *flat* possibilities floating in a purely neutral and free (yet both revolutionary and destructive) space—where any particular discourse and moral and logic system will never be legitimated, or effectively enacted to decrease entropy. The three select postmodern fictions I have discussed capture "[the] intrinsic qualities and response to [the] rhythms and feelings" of such an amorphous, timeless, depthless yet also bottomless space, which is surely both intriguing and disquieting (Hibbard, "Tangier and the Making of *Naked Lunch*" 61). Postmodern narrative logic provides us with a tentative, secluded exit from the textual maze of "[t]he world [which] swirl[s] and struggle[s], drowning" (*The Exquisite Corpse* 212).

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