

# The Algebra of Need

David Watson

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"Junk yields a basic formula of 'evil' virus: The Algebra of Need. The face of 'evil' is always the face of total need. A dope fiend is a man in total need of dope. Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control. In the words of total need: 'Wouldn't you?' Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do anything to satisfy total need. Because you would be in a state of total sickness, total possession, and not in a position to act in any other way. Dope fiends are sick people who cannot act other than they do. A rabid dog cannot choose but bite. Assuming a self-righteous position is nothing to the purpose unless your purpose be to keep the junk virus in operation. And junk is a big industry... I lived in one room in the Native Quarter of Tangier. I had not taken a bath in a year nor changed my clothes or removed them except to stick a needle every hour in the fibrous grey wooden flesh of terminal addiction. I never cleaned or dusted the room. Empty ampule boxes and garbage piled to the ceiling. Light and water long since turned off for non-payment. I did absolutely nothing. I could look at the end of my shoe for eight hours. I was only roused to action when the hourglass of junk ran out. If a friend came to visit—and they rarely did since who or what was left to visit—I sat there not caring that he had entered my field of vision—a grey screen always blanker and fainter—and not caring when he walked out of it. If he had died on the spot I would have sat there looking at my shoe waiting to go through his pockets. Wouldn't you? Because I never had enough junk—no one does."

—William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*

Bill and I met Ray on the Woodward bus during the long, hot, junk-infested summer of 1969. Bill had some sides which he had copped downtown—Mingus, Archie Shepp—Ray had commented on the fine jams, then invited us to his place to get high. "I'd walk a mile for a joint," we laughed, and followed him to a decrepit rooming house on Blaine.

At his door sat an old black dude, bent over with sickness and pain. His face was lined with the misery of junk sickness, his eyes were coals hidden at the back of his skull, peering out with little interest except Need. "Ray," he moaned softly, "I got to borrow some money, man, I'm uptight. Honest, I'll pay you tomorrow." Ray got us inside the door fast. "Look, Willy, I ain't got no money at all—now split." The old man left, defeated. For all transactions, all relationships in the junk world narrow down to a lowest common denominator: a set of dichotomies: who is the least sick/ who is the strongest; who has junk/ who is In Need.

Once inside, Ray regained his Cool, felt our pockets with his eyes, the mosquito eyes observing virgin flesh, and said, "You wanta cop some jones, man?" What had been a pleasant high was to become an experiment with scag. We were amicable to his suggestions, and soon were waiting for Ray to return with the junk, which we paid for. He returned shortly with twelve dollars worth of junk—twelve caps, and proceeded to prepare for the circus. Taking a coffee cup from a dusty shelf, he sat at the kitchen table and prepared the spike, a tiny needle on the end of a murine eye dropper. I tied up nervously, and he stood over me, two dollars worth of junk in the eyedropper. Cradling me

in his arms from behind the chair, he found a vein and mainlined. It went in with a little jerk and a tiny red cloud of blood mushroomed at the bottom of the dropper. He had put it in and out in no time.

Then the feeling of weightlessness, the flickering stark grey images of a crazed movie machine, the warm rush of death up my spine exploding furiously in my brain, the sick churning storm in my stomach. Now nothing mattered except that I was going to be sick very soon. I watched the movie in front of me, Bill doing three dollars worth, Ray tying up hungrily and pushing the same needed into a five inch scab on top of a vein on his inner arm. Seven dollars worth of junk, I watched him let the blood come all the way into the dropper and finally push the fluid into his arm, lie back in his chair, eyes rolled upward towards heaven in relief, rigor mortis grin of temporary junk-escape.

I couldn't move. Bill was immobilized. We lay on the floor of Ray's room listening to a cheap AM radio, watching the images on our eyelids, wrapped snugly in our junk coma. Ray was rarin' to go, and got us somehow to walk him to the corner store and buy him a sodapop. He was light on his feet, free from his Master. All we could do was stumble and puke.

Later Ray wanted more money to go to the dope-house for a boost, but we could not function and it had become obvious that our associate was strung out. His history was unique, but similar to other junkies. He had spent a total of eighteen months of the last nine years out of jail. Did time in Texas for armed robbery. Had killed a man. He'd gone through five or six separate habits, had overdosed and almost died more than once. He was over thirty and had no friends, only junk connections. He spent much of his time hustling homosexuals, and owned little but the clothes on his back and scarred and scabbed arms.

Through Ray we met Jimmy—"A dope fiend can be your friend," he'd tell us. "If he's tight with you he'll never rip you off. All the propaganda, man—it's bullshit—dopefiends can control their habits." Later he ripped us off for forty-five dollars on a phony dope deal. This was about the time when Michael was in the hospital. He was the first of our crowd to use a needle. Now he was in the hospital he'd been shooting mainly coke and smack, then started shooting "mescaline" and "THC" until he was in the hospital for injecting animal tranquilizer, with three separate types of blood poisoning. Every day his doctor came in asking a nurse, "Is Brown dead yet?" The morbidity of all this somehow excited us and we all started mainlining—but stuff was bad that summer and at one point our arms actually turned green. Mike was worried about us, tubes up his nose, I.V.s in his arms, he'd rage about us fooling around with stuff. But as soon as he was out, he joined the lineup in our kitchen for his share. Later I heard his wife was strung out, that he was in jail for possession. I was doing about three times a week, sometimes every other day, and Bill was doing every day with Ray. Suddenly I realized I hadn't eaten in three days, hadn't had a meal in a month.

Ray's next habit was progressing. One time his was really hurting, was so anxious he kept missing, the scab on his arm aching. He got more and more agitated as Jimmy teased him—finally he retreated to the john to fix in solitude. With five dollars worth of junk pounding through his veins he could breathe a little easier, the screaming of junk cells, like thirsty hounds, momentarily subdued. It was my five dollars, so I asked how it was. "It took the edge off," he replied. "Can you spare another five until tomorrow?" he pleaded, but I had no money, so he left to call some friend on the east side.

"It is clear that junk is a Round-the-World-Push-an-Opium-Pellet-with-Your-Nose-Route. Strictly for Scarabs-stumble bum-junk heap... TERMINAL addicts often go two months without a bowel move and the intestines make with sit-down-adhesions—Wouldn't you?—requiring the intervention of an apple corer or surgical equivalent... Such is life in The Old Ice House. Why move around and waste TIME?

"Room for One More Inside, Sir."

Insure the loss of your soul with barbiturates and heroin. The day after doing up no one could even approach me. I was interested in no one's welfare. I was rude, indifferent, cruel to those who were concerned about me or who needed me. It was as if the smack had stolen a part of me, my sensitivity and humanity, as if I was already dead. And I never even had a habit. Because that is what smack is—it epitomizes capitalist culture. This culture is bent on its own annihilation. Bombs float around on satellites, germs wait to be unleashed. The biosphere becomes polluted, genocidal wars are perpetrated worse than the nazis ever gleefully imagined. Capitalism: the people are convinced that they are in need so many times that they believe and suddenly they've got habits. Alcohol, pills, scag, television, money, prestige, power all addictive capitalist JUNK. Racism, sexism, national chauvinism—spoon-fed junk from our earliest training from addict-teachers, parents, authorities, already strung out on backward dehumanizing

amerikan kulture. It's interesting that every junkie is a small time pusher. By supplying others he can take care of his or her Need.

Junk addiction is the sigh of impotence and frustration. It is capitulation. When people can decide their own destinies, they have no desire to block out the world around them. It affirms them instead of crushing their spirit. Junk attracts those who want to block it all out, quite justifiably. It is alienating, sick from top to bottom and must be remolded by all of us. But the junkies only get caught deeper in the trap. Soon life revolves around the needle—everything concerns getting money, copping, doing, getting more money—the perfect consumer in a consumer culture. The Man's got you exactly where he wants you—running in circles, jumping through hoops in Need. The Politics of Need—the unfortunate final conclusions to the vampire culture.

“Paregoric Babies of the World Unite. We have nothing to lose but Our Pushers. And THEY are NOT NECESSARY.

“Look down, LOOK DOWN along that junk road before you travel there and get in with the Wrong Mob...

“A word to the wise guy.”



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