

Writing landscape. On the tecno<sup>1</sup> political background radiation in Antarctica.

Alejandra Pérez Núñez

pueblo@mail.ljudmila.org

I want to apply the concept of background radiation, to a constant, permanent imperceptible materiality, accountable in extension and intensity emanating from words, being those enunciated by people while talking and thinking, or words from laws, the words of science, and all the hidden circuits that words trace among themselves as autonomous agents in a densely populated world system.

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<sup>1</sup> Tecno as tecnopolítica, left deliberately in spanish to address the fact of a different history of technology (tecnología) and the urgency coming from non-western world territories to look into different paradigms distinct from the scientific western methods to access and produce knowledge.

Three authors are analyzed in the paper, William S. Burroughs, Fredric Jameson and Maurice Blanchot. I will read some excerpts from *The ticket that exploded* (1967) of William S. Burroughs, *the Space of Literature* (1955) of Maurice Blanchot, *The geopolitical aesthetics* (1992) and *the Political Unconscious* (1981) of Fredric Jameson.

Some important references had to be left outside of the presentation for reasons of time.

These references come mainly in relation to the question of autonomy of words and to semantic and protocological formations. In this respect I refer to the work from authors such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as to media theorist, Alexander Galloway.

The presentation contends that there is a permanent vibration of words that can be compared to background radiation

In the narrative universe of William S. Burroughs, words dominate the human race by contagion. According to him word is a virus and various kinds of queer mechanistic systems are to be found, systems that are ensembles of various natures, bodies, flesh, industrial, computerized, human, alien, electromagnetic, ghost. From “The Ticket that exploded: “The room was on the roof of a ruined warehouse swept by winds of time through the open window trailing grey veils of curtain sounds and ectoplasmic flakes of old newspapers and newsreels swirling over the smooth concrete floor and under the bare iron frame of the dusty bed- the mattress twisted and molded by absent tenants – ghost rectums, spectral masturbating afternoons reflected in the tarnished mirror - The boy who owned this room stood naked, remote mineral silence like a blue mist in his eyes – sound and image flakes swirled round him and dusted his metal skin with grey powder – the other green boy dropped his pants and moved in swires of poisonous color vapor, breathing the alien medium through sensitive purple gills lined with erectile hairs pulsing telepathic communications”.<sup>2</sup>

Burroughs universe is populated by agents, techniques and methods related to word infestation and control. The process of virus word infestation can be compared to a process of indoctrination for promoting an ideology. Fredric Jameson points out Althusser's concept of ideology as “a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of history”<sup>3</sup>

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3 Jameson, F (1981)“The political unconscious” Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. p.30

The parasitism of the virus word described by Burroughs may be seen as a correlate to the scripture operations performed in late antiquity in relation to the Old and New testament, that Fredric Jameson uses as evidence of a large project of indoctrination, the medieval and patristic system known as the four levels of scripture, and used “as a strategy for assimilating the Old Testament to the New, for rewriting the Jewish textual and cultural heritage in a form usable for Gentiles” (...) <sup>4</sup>

These operations of rewriting - the Life of Christ as a re-writing of the Old testament seems to Jameson to have been based on a system of categories that was used in the process of transcription of the New testament. A technology was applied to scripture, a kind of software, known as the 4 levels or senses, where, the first level is the literal historical or textual level, the second level, allegorical key or interpretive code. the third level, of moral psychological reading (individual subject); the fourth level , anagogical, political reading (the collective “meaning” of history).

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<sup>4</sup> op. cit. p. 29

The system of the four levels wanted to achieve a transformation, from the life of earthly people (the people of Israel) and from one particular life (the life of Christ) into a universal history “and the destiny of humankind as a whole”.<sup>5</sup> Jameson concludes , “It is precisely by way of the moral and anagogical interpretation that the textual apparatus is transformed into a libidinal apparatus” a machinery for ideological investment.

“The rewriting of the bondage of the people of Israel in Egypt as the descent of Christ into hell after his death on the cross – comes less as a technique for closing the text off and for repressing aleatory or aberrant readings and senses, than as a mechanism for preparing such a text for further ideological investment”.<sup>6</sup>

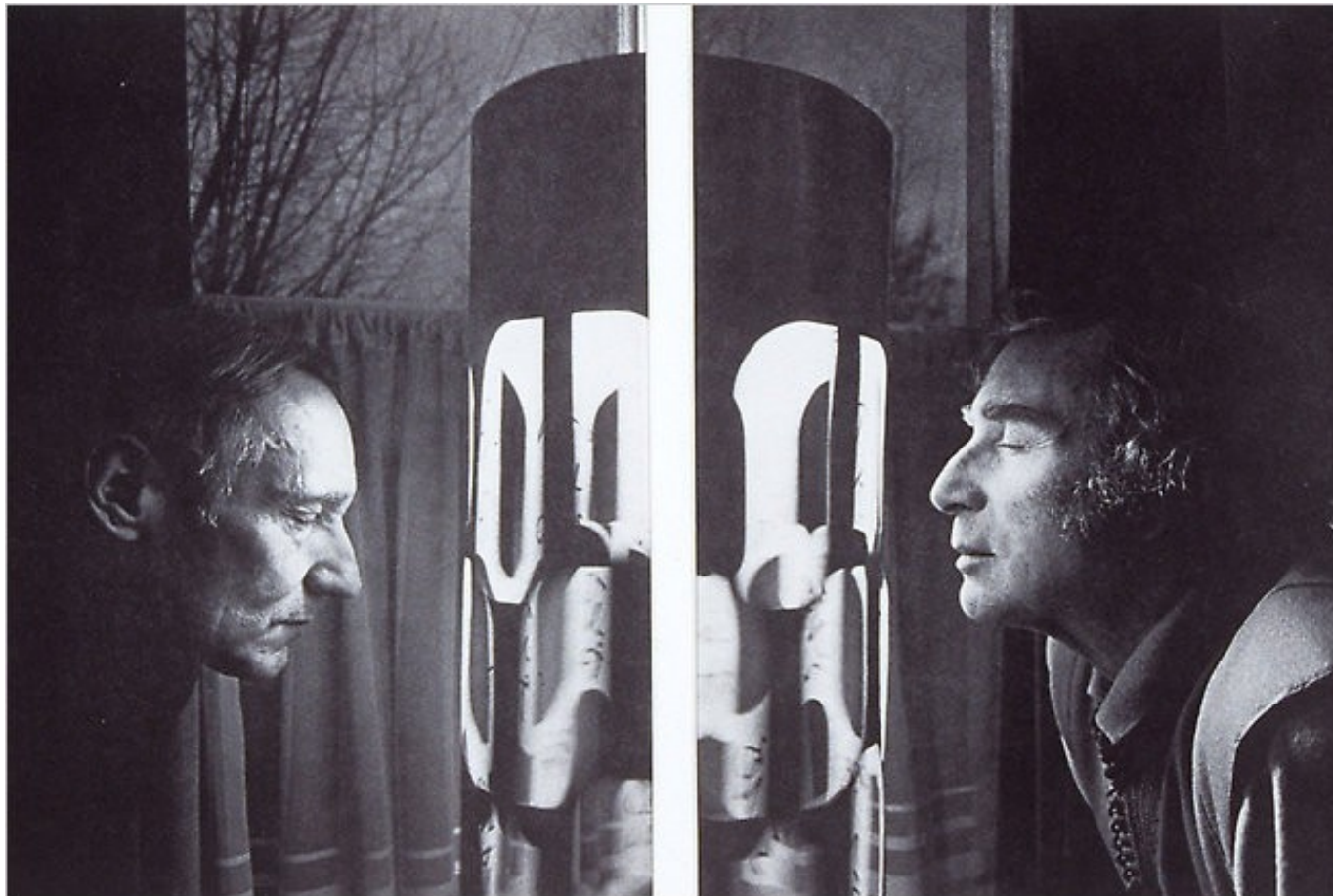
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<sup>6</sup> Jameson, F. (1981) *The political unconscious* p.30



Burroughs describes virus contagion as vibrating photos, flicker ghost, spliced recordings, engram tapes, juxtapositions, the other half, permutations, pattern pulsing, remote mineral silence, writing machines. The sequences of relations, established by the method of the four senses, convert the particular into the universal, daily life into human universal history. It is an algorithm performed over words that were repeated over the centuries and those words, the scriptures, transported a logic, a virus as Burroughs named it.

I want to consider this uninterrupted narrative of words as an endless stream of vibration or a semantic background radiation. The vibrancy of words is multiplied over written material and spoken words, newspapers, television news, advertising and laws as flickering objects in the mind, oscillating from conscience to unconscious as if part of the dream machine of Brion Gysin.



I suggest that we consider the uninterrupted unconscious narrative described by Jameson and Burroughs – in spite of their different orientations, as a form of Full Spectrum Dominance, a concept developed by the Pentagon in 2000 and brought to the reflection in the media arts by Steve Goodman in Sonic Warfare. A kind of full spectrum dominance is widely described in William S. Burroughs narrative universe where tape recorders and writing machines, as well as alien and non tridimensional agents spread over human affect and sexuality, encoding and decoding, writing and re-writing reality in an endless process of symbiosis and parasitism.

Burroughs, in *the ticket that exploded*, “You know about the logos group??...claimed to have reduced human behavior to a predictable science controlled by the appropriate word combos. They have a system of therapy they call “clearing”. You “run” traumatic material which they call “engrams” until it loses emotional connotations through repetition and is then refilled as neutral memory, when all the “engrams” have been run and deactivated, the subject becomes a “clear”. Would seem that a technique, a tool is good or bad according to who uses it and for what purposes. This tool is specially liable to abuse . In many cases they become “clear” by unloading their “engram” tapes on somebody else. Their “engram” tapes are living organisms, viruses in fact”<sup>7</sup>

I suggest to consider text as a mimetic interface to landscape and the operation of writing landscape as the exploration of systems of coordinates, present in juxtaposed and permuted text, as well as in other graphic representations of words i.g. Semantic analysis and word taxonomies.

The presentation contends the possibility of writing landscape through systems of coordinates and throughout this process, a method will be developed, one that leads to modulations on the degrees of separation between object and subject.

The concept of system of coordinates appears in *The Ticket that exploded* (1967), by William S. Burroughs with contributions from Brion Gysin, Ian Sommerville, Michael Portman and Anthony Balch. The book was developed mainly out of permutations and juxtapositions over written material.

From the Nova Police in *The Ticket that exploded*: “Let me explain how we make an arrest – nova criminals are not three-dimensional organisms – (though they are quite definite organisms as we shall see)- but they need three-dimensional human agents to operate – the point at which the criminal controller intersects a three-dimensional human agent is known as 'a coordinate point' – and if there is nothing that carries over from one human host to another and established identity of the controller it is habit idiosyncracies, vices, food preferences- (we were able to trace Hamburger Mary through her fondness for peanut butter)- a gesture, a special look, that is to say, the style of the controller – A chain smoker will always operate through chain smokers, an addict through addicts – Now a single controller can operate through thousands of human agents, but he must have a line of coordinate points – some move on junk lines through addicts of the earth, other move on line of certain sexual practices and so

forth – It is only when we can block the controller out of all coordinate points available to him and flush him out from host cover that we can make a definitive arrest – Otherwise the criminal escapes to other coordinate”

Question: “Inspector Lee. I don't quite understand what is meant by a coordinate point- Could you make that a little clearer?-

Answer: “Certainly- You see this criminal controllers occupy human bodies- ghosts? Phantoms? Not at all -very definite organisms indeed- True you can't see them – Can you see a virus?- well, the criminal controllers operate in very much the same manner as a virus – now a virus in order to invade , damage and occupy the human organism must have a gimmick to get in – Once in the virus invades damages and occupies a certain area or organ in the body – known as the tissue of predilection (...)”<sup>8</sup>

A system of coordinates takes the position of human addicts or sexual practices, a network of relations, in any case, a cognitive map, another key concept of Jameson, taken from the geographer Kevin Lynch in the Image of the city (1960) and used to describe the forms in which people make sense of their surroundings. Fredric Jameson speaks of the World's cognitive mapping, he writes “Since the world system of late capitalism (or postmodernity) is however inconceivable without the computerized media technology which eclipses its former spaces and faxes an unheard – of simultaneity across its branches (...)”



When arriving to the problem of detecting landscape, of sensing it in different frequency ranges through a combination of sensors and interfaces, one discovers the difficulty of detecting events as well as the limits of the sensing technologies used, as the practice aims at its best to sense a continuous reality whereas the instruments for detection operate in discrete terms over the samples of this continuum. The question remains open, on how to develop unitary tools for detecting unitary space.



I would like to suggest landscape writing as a performative practice of writing that operates establishing mimetic interfaces to sense landscape.

The function of cognitive mapping, described by Fredric Jameson is similar to the operations of rewriting described in Burroughs narrative. According to Jameson “Cognitive mapping is (...) the metaphor for the processes of the political unconscious. It is also, however, the model for how we might begin to articulate the local and the global. It provides a way of linking the most intimately local – our particular path through the world – and the most global -the crucial features of our political planet”<sup>9</sup>

The system of coordinates may be understood as a cognitive map to figure out a kind of geography that takes into consideration the *instantaneous multidimensional*. Knowing that space is unitary (Lefebvre, The production of Space), its perception is mediated by an apparent stratification that nevertheless belongs to a unitary phenomena. I plan to consider that the detection of the instantaneous multidimensional involves the deployment of varied techniques, and a combination of sampling and mimetic interfaces to access space as a unitary phenomena.

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9 Jameson, Fredric (1992)The geopolitical aesthetics. Preface p. xiv

In 2009 I started to explore Antarctic landscape where I was performing detection and sampling of inaudible frequencies. With this work I initiated the detection of the *instantaneous multidimensional*. In this particular case I used different electromagnetic technologies like a Very Low Frequency receiver , a hydrophone and a digital sound recorder. The conversations held with the marine, added another layer to the exploration that connected the physical space with a virtual space of territory claims and geopolitical latitudes. I was working as well with a book of abstracts from the latest antarctic symposium and performing taxonomy analysis over this material. Therefore the words of science and the words of the military were present in the explorations.

Text as the inner voice that disappears and emerges in landscape. There is a relation between the inner voice or text and landscape, as gazing is an act of perception that envelopes landscape. Is the sight in return enveloped by landscape?

Burroughs again, “Modern man have lost the option of silence. Try halting your subvocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk.

That organism is the word.”<sup>10</sup>. Jameson asserts, “information technology will become virtually the representational solution as well as the representational problem of this world's system's cognitive mapping whose allegories can now always be expected to include a communicational third term”.

The third term might be the network infrastructure, the system of coordinates, the cognitive map, the virus, as the system of scripture of the four senses was encrypted in religion.

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10 W.S. Burroughs (1967)“The ticket that exploded. p.49-50”

Antarctica is a tense space and a contested landscape, a place composed of different layers of biological, geopolitical, scientific, fictional, alien and military nature. Antarctic landscape belongs to the taxonomies of the remote and of the limits of civilization.

In the outskirts of civilized space, it is possible to see what is left of it and frequently it is the military or the waste land.







A system of coordinates may be regarded as a concept tool to study landscape in concordance with the wider analytic instrument of the Political Unconscious (Jameson). The landscape of Antarctica, in particular shows each coordinate belonging to a dimension of writing, of laws, geopolitical treaties, of winds, GIS coordinates, air masses, melting glaciers.

LATITUDE

NORTH

EQUATOR

TORRID ZONE

SOUTH POLE

MERIDIAN

EQUINOX

WEST

EAST

NORTH POLE

ZENITH

NADIR

LONGITUDE

.....

*Scale of Miles.*

**OCEAN-CHART.**

Landscape as interface.

Interface as a facade , as a face , as a dynamic arrangement of elements. An interface as a set of systems of coordinates that establish dynamics and trajectories. A system of triggers, as the face of the mother, the primal interface to the world. Deleuze and Guattari reflect, “The correlate of the face is landscape (paysage)”

Interface as a system of coordinates.

A definition of the interface is given by Brenda Laurel, as quoted by Matthew Fuller in *media Ecologies* “an interface is a contact surface. It reflects the physical properties of the interactors, the functions to be performed and the balance of power and control”<sup>11</sup> Fuller develops a speculative topology of the interface, where the interface is considered as “monitor and control of a reductive, indexical map of separate elements(...)”.<sup>12</sup> One more aspect of the interface, mentioned in software studies, a definition by Florian Cramer and Matthew Fuller: “Interface as specifications and protocols that determine relations between software and hardware, that is application programming interfaces (APIs)”. The relation between writing and landscape may be conceived as an API where landscape emerges as an interaction between topologies and taxonomies, the topologies being in the Antarctic case, vastly unknown and brought about through technologies of surveillance like satellite imaging.

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<sup>11</sup> Brenda Laurel, ed. *The art of human computer interface design* (Reading, MA Addison Wesley, 1990)

<sup>12</sup> Fuller, M. *Media Ecologies*, p.99

The idea I suggest to consider is that text can be used to interface landscape, placing text against landscape, or over it, becoming a mold of the real, being itself a system of coordinates that parallels the multidimensionality of each site. Text is a mold to the *instantaneous multidimensional*, a mold of a face, traces of landscape are left within the text, traces of text are left in the topographies, traces of history, and in the particular case of Antarctica and of many other remote inaccessible places, traces of empire.

The forms in the text, the systems of coordinates emergent in the cut-ups are evidences of a reduced subject-object distinction. The system of coordinates opens up an angle, a degree of deviation from the separation.

Blanchot, speaking of the essential solitude in the act of writing “When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of someone. Someone is there when I am alone. The fact of being alone my belonging to this dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but someone's time. Someone is what is still present when there is no one (...) Someone is the faceless third person, the they of which everybody and anybody is part, but who is part of it? Never anyone in particular, never you and I. Nobody is part of the They. “They” belongs to a region which cannot be brought to light , not because it hides some secret alien to any revelation or even because it is radically obscure, but because it transforms everything which have access to it (...)”.<sup>13</sup>

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13 Blanchot, M (1955) The literary space p.31



The separation between subject and object is a matter of relevance in the humanities, specially when thinking of alternative approaches to the scientific method and to aristotelian rationality.

I want to consider the other half, the word virus, as a vector in perception (an airline of words), an angle pertaining to a system of coordinates, a degree of separation between subject and object - 0 degree of separation, resonating with what Blanchot calls fascination in the experience of the vanishing time in the space of literature.

There is a relation between the space of literature and landscape. Landscape disappears and emerges, both aspects oscillating in and out of fascination. In what Blanchot qualifies as “the violent swiftness of active time, of the instant”<sup>14</sup> In this instantaneous multidimensional one angle or many angles can be explored, the angle of separation between the subject and the object, the writer and the writing, landscape and self, self and the other half or all of them in combination i.e. Landscape and the other half.

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14 Blanchot, M(1955) The literary space p. 27

Antarctica belongs to a taxonomy of the extreme, the remote, the universal, the electromagnetic polar as well as to the vulnerable. I will consider my work as an example of a performative text and a mimetic interface to the *instantaneous multidimensional* of Antarctic landscape. From the text *A common element* (2014), where I juxtaposed written material using three sources, two articles by Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal. Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts and The Military-Arts Nexus: Two cases in the United States, c. 1970.*<sup>15</sup> and Helliwell text on *Whistlers and Related Ionospheric Phenomena*<sup>16</sup>

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15 In *Studies in Material Thinking*. Vol 8.

16 <https://archive.org/stream/WhistlersAndRelatedIonosphericPhenomena/Helliwell-WhistlersRelatedIonosphericPhenomena#page/n15/mode/1up>

## From Sources of VLF emissions

The evidence is strong that VLF phenomena emissions in EM space are complex political geo messages remaining with no explanation. Various theories have brought up the presence of charged particles in the outer ionosphere.

Culture entails ways of existence devoid of itself.

Guided missiles, flee with amphibious submarines. North American Rockwell World War and the discovery of the magnetosphere was present during testing and in the way the sky lit up at night. (...)

Report in itself ) : the Garrett Corporation has designed the motors- They bounce between the earth and the ionosphere and occasionally they take a ride in military planes; General electric has its own think transcender in order to reach the earth again in the opposite hemisphere. Hewlett-Packard company "radar control" Jet propulsion Laboratory; Littleton Industries build arching over the equator, whistlers and globetrotting signals, signals of assault ships and orientation and fire control systems, from the initial explosion of a bolt of lightning they unfold, forming a glissando.

(...) Quasi-musical sounds with audible frequencies like a faint jumble to World War, North American Rockwell at 1500 cycles per second. It is the property of being directionally dependent or toisotropy of millions of U.S. Dollars. It has been observed in the high performance intercosmos satellites called TEMP running guided missiles and advanced amphibious submarines”.