
THE DISCIPLINE OF DE

by

William S Burroughs

A cold dry windy day clouds blowing through the sky sunshine and shadow. A dead leaf brushes my face. The streets remind me of St Louis ... red brick houses, trees, vacant lots. Bright and windy back in a cab through empty streets. When I reach the fourth floor it looks completely unfamiliar as if seen through someone else's eyes.

"I hope you find your way ... red brick houses, trees ... the address in empty streets."

Colonel Sutton-Smith, 65, retired not uncomfortably on a supplementary private income ... flat in Bury Street St James ... cottage in Wales ... could not resign himself to the discovery of Roman coins under the grounds of his cottage interesting theory the Colonel has about those coins over two sherries never a third no matter how nakedly his guest may leer at the adamant decanter. He can of course complete his memoirs ... extensive notes over a period of years, invitations, newspaper clippings, photographs, stretching into the past on yellowing dates. Objects go with the clippings, the notes, the photos, the dates ... A kris on the wall to remember Ali who ran amok in the marketplace of Lampipur thirty years ago, a crown of emerald quartz, a jade head representing a reptilian youth with opal eyes, a little white horse delicately carved in ivory, a Webley .455 automatic revolver ... (Only automatic revolver ever made the cylinder turns on

ratchets stabilizing like a gyroscope the heavy recoil.) Memories, objects stuck in an old calendar. The Colonel decides to make his own time. He opens a school notebook with lined papers and constructs a simple calendar consisting of ten months with 28 days in each month to begin on this day Febrary 21, 1970, Raton Pass 14 in the new calendar. The months have names like old Pullman cars in America where the Colonel had lived until his 18th year ... names like Beauacres, Bonneterre, Watford Junction, Sioux Falls, Pikes Peak, Yellowstone, Bellevue, Cold Springs, Lands End dated from the beginning Raton Pass 14 a mild grey day. Smell of soot and steam and iron and cigar smoke as the train jolts away into the past. The train is stopped now red brick buildings a deep blue canal outside the train window a mild grey day long ago. The Colonel is jolted back to THE NOW by a plate streaked with egg yolk, a bacon rind, toast crumbs on the table, a jumble of morning papers, cigarette butt in cold coffee right where you are sitting now. The Colonel decides, on this mild grey day, to bring his time into present time. He looks at the objects on the breakfast table calculating the moves to clear it. He measures the distance of his chair to the table how to push chair back and stand up without hitting the table with his legs. He pushes chair back and stands up. With smooth precise movements he scrapes his plate into

The Business News of *The Times*, folds the paper into a neat triangular packet, sweeps up plate, knife, fork, spoon and coffee cup out to the kitchen with no fumbling or wasted movements washed and put away. Before he made the first move he has planned a whole series of moves ahead. He has discovered the simple and basic Discipline of DE. DO EASY. It is simply to do everything you do in the *easiest* and most relaxed manner you can achieve at the time you do it. He becomes an assiduous student of DE. Cleaning the flat is a problem in logistics. He knows every paper every object and many of them now have names. He has perfected the art of "casting" sheets and blankets so they fall just so. And the gentle silent spoon or cup on a table ... He practices for a year before he is ready to reveal the mysteries of DE ...

As the Colonel washes up and tidies his small kitchen the television audience catches its breath in front of the little screen. Knives forks and spoons flash through his fingers and tinkle into drawers. Plates dance onto the shelf. He touches the water taps with gentle precise fingers and just enough pressure considering the rubber washers inside. Towels fold themselves and fall softly into place. As he moves he tosses crumpled papers and empty cigarette packages over his shoulder and under his arms and they land unerringly in the wastebasket as a Zen master can hit the target with his arrow in the dark. He moves through the sitting room a puff of air from his cupped hand delicately lifts a cigarette ash from the table and wafts it into a wastebasket. Into the bedroom smooth movements cleaning the sink and arranging the toilet articles into a *nature morte* different each day. With one fluid rippling cast the sheets

crinkle into place and the blankets follow tucked in with fingers that feel the cloth and mattress. In two minutes the flat is dazzling ...

The Colonel Issues Beginners DE

DE is a way of *doing*. It is a way of doing everything you do. DE simply means doing whatever you do in the *easiest* most relaxed way you can manage which is also the quickest and most efficient way as you will find as you advance in DE.

You can start right now tidying up your flat, moving furniture or books, washing dishes, making tea, sorting papers. Consider the weight of objects exactly how much force is needed to get the object from here to there. Consider its shape and texture and function where exactly does it belong. Use just the amount of force necessary to get the object from here to there. Don't fumble jerk grab an object. Drop cool possessive fingers onto it like a gentle old cop making a soft arrest. Guide a dustpan lightly to the floor as if you were landing a plane. When you touch an object weigh it with your fingers feel your fingers on the object the skin blood muscles tendons of your hand and arm. Consider these extensions of yourself as precision instruments to perform every movement smoothly and well. Handle objects with consideration and they will show you all their little tricks. Don't tug or pull at a zipper. Guide the little metal teeth smoothly along feeling the sinuous ripples of cloth and flexible metal. Replacing the cap on a tube of tooth paste ... (and this should always be done at once few things are worse than an uncapped tube maladroitley squeezed twisting up out of the bathroom glass drooling paste unless it be a tube with the cap barbarously forced on all

askew against the threads). Replacing the cap let the very tips of your fingers protrude beyond the cap contacting the end of the tube guiding the cap into place. Using your finger tips as a landing gear will enable you to drop any light object silently and surely into its place. Remember every object has its place. If you don't find that place and put that thing there it will jump out at you and trip you or rap you painfully across the knuckles. It will nudge you and clutch at you and get in your way. Often such objects belong to the wastebasket but often it's just that they are out of place. Learn to place an object firmly and quietly in its place and do not let your fingers move that object as they leave it there. When you put down a cup separate your fingers cleanly from the cup. Do not let them catch in the handle and if they do repeat movement until fingers separate clean. If you don't catch that nervous finger that won't let go of that handle you may twitch hot tea across the Duchess. Never let a poorly executed sequence pass. If you throw a match at a wastebasket and miss get right up and put that match in the wastebasket. If you have time repeat the cast that failed. There is always a reason for missing an easy toss. Repeat toss and you will find it. If you rap your knuckles against a window jamb or door, if you brush your leg against a desk or a bed, if you catch your feet in the curled-up corner of a rug, or strike a toe against a desk or chair go back and repeat the sequence. You will be surprised to find how far off course you were to hit that window jamb that door that chair. Get back on course and do it again. How can you pilot a spacecraft if you can't find your way around your own apartment? It's just like retaking a movie shot until you get it right. And you will begin

to feel yourself in a film moving with ease and speed. But don't try for speed at first. Try for relaxed smoothness taking as much time as you need to perform action. If you drop an object, break an object, spill anything, knock painfully against anything, galvanically clutch an object pay particular attention to retake. You may find out why and forestall a repeat performance. If the object is broken sweep up pieces and remove from the room at once. If object is intact or you have duplicate object repeat sequence. You may experience a strange feeling as if the objects are alive and hostile trying to twist out of your fingers, slam noisily down on a table, jump out at you and stub your toe or trip you. Repeat sequence until objects are brought to order.

Here is student at work. At two feet he tosses red plastic milk cap at the orange garbage bucket. The cap sails over the bucket like a flying saucer. He tries again. Same result. He examines the cap and finds that one edge is crushed down. He pries the edge back into place. Now the cap will drop obediently into the bucket. Every object you touch is alive with your life and your will.

The student tosses cigarette box at wastebasket and it bounces out from the cardboard cover from a metal coat hanger which is resting diagonally across the wastebasket and never should be there at all. If an ash tray is emptied into that wastebasket the cardboard triangle will split the ashes and the butts scattering both on the floor. Student takes a box of matches from his coat pocket preparatory to lighting cigarette from new package on table. With the matches in one hand he makes another toss and misses of course his fingers are in future time lighting a

cigarette. He retrieves package puts the matches down and now stopping slightly legs bent hop skip over the washstand and into the wastebasket, miracle of the Zen master who hits a target in the dark these little miracles will occur more and more often as you advance in DE ... the ball of paper tossed over a shoulder into the wastebasket, the blanket flipped and settled just into place that seems to fold itself under the brown satin fingers of an old Persian merchant. Objects move into place at your lightest touch. You slip into it like a film moving with such ease you hardly know you are doing it. You'd come into the kitchen expecting to find a sink full of dirty dishes and instead every dish is put away and the kitchen shines. The Little People have been there and done your work fingers light and cold as spring wind through the rooms.

The student considers heavy objects. Tape recorder on the desk taking up too much space and he doesn't use it very often. So put it under the washstand. Weigh it with the hands. First attempt the cord and socket leaps across the desk like a frightened snake. He bumps his back on the washstand putting the recorder under it. Try again lift with legs not back. He hits the lamp. He looks at that lamp. It is a horrible disjointed object the joints tightened with cellophane tape disconnected when not in use the cord leaps out and wraps around his feet sometimes jerking the lamp off the desk. Remove that lamp from the room and buy a new one. Now try again lifting shifting pivoting dropping on the legs just so and right under the washstand.

You will discover clumsy things you've been doing for years until you think that is just the way things are. Here is an

American student who for years has clawed at the red plastic cap on English milk bottle you see American caps have a little tab and he has been looking for that old tab all these years. Then one day in a friend's kitchen he saw a cap depressed at the center. Next morning he tries it and the miracle occurs. Just the right pressure in the center and he lifts the cap off with deft fingers and replaces it. He does this several times in wonder and in awe and well he might him a college professor and very technical too planarium worms learn quicker than that for years he has been putting on his socks after he puts on his pants so he has to roll up pants and pants and socks get clawed in together so why not put on the socks *before* the pants? He is learning the simple miracles ... The Miracle of the Washstand Glass ... we all know the glass there on a rusty razor blade streaked with pink tooth paste a decapitated tube writhing up out of it ... quick fingers go to work and the Glass sparkles like The Holy Grail in morning sunlight. Now he does a wallet drill. For years he has carried his money in the left side pocket of his pants reaching down to fish out the naked money ... bumping his fingers against the sharp edges of notes. Often the notes were in two stacks and pulling out the one could drop the other on the floor. The left side pocket of the pants is most difficult to pick but worse things can happen than a picked pocket one can dine out on that for a season. Two manicured fingers sliding into the well-cut suit wafted into the waiting hand an engraved message from the Queen. Surely this is the easy way. Besides no student of DE would have his pocket picked applying DE on the street, picking his route through slower walkers, don't get stuck behind that baby carriage, *careful* when you round a corner

don't bump into somebody coming round the other way. He takes the wallet out in front of a mirror, removes notes, counts notes, replaces notes as rapidly as he can with no fumbling, catching note edges on wallet, or other errors. That is a basic principle which must be repeated. When speed is crucial to the operation you must find your speed the fastest you can perform the operation without error. Don't try for speed at first it will come his fingers will rustle through the wallet with a touch light as dead leaves and crinkle discreetly the note that will bribe a South American customs official into overlooking a shrunk-down head. The customs agent smiles a collector's smile the smile of a connoisseur. Such a crinkle he has not heard since a French jewel thief with crudely forged papers made a crinkling sound over them with his hands and there is the note neatly folded into a false passport.

Now some one will say ... "But if I have to *think* about every move I make" ... You only have to think and break down movement into a series of still pictures to be studied and corrected because you have not found the easy way. Once you find the easy way you don't have to think about it. It will almost do itself.

Operations performed on your person ... brushing teeth, washing, etc. can lead you to correct a defect before it develops. Here is student with a light case of bleeding gums. His dentist has instructed him to massage gums by placing little splinters of wood called Inter Dens between the teeth and massaging gum with seesaw motion. He snatches an Inter Dens, opens his mouth in a stiff grimace and jabs at a gum with a shaking hand. Now he remembers his DE. Start over. Take out

the little splinters of wood like small chopsticks joined at the base and separate them gently. Now find where the bleeding is. Relax face and move Inter Dens up and down gently firmly gums relaxed direct your attention to that spot. No not "getting better and better" just let the attention of your whole body flow there and all the healing power of your body flow with it. A soapy hand on your lower back feeling the muscles and vertebrae can catch a dislocation right there and save you a visit to the osteopath. Illness and disability is largely a matter of neglect. You ignore something because it is painful and it becomes more uncomfortable through neglect and you neglect it further. Everyday tasks become painful and boring because you think of them as WORK something solid and heavy to be fumbled and stumbled over. Overcome this block and you will find that DE can be applied to anything you do even to the final discipline of doing nothing. The easier you do it the less you have to do. He who has learned to do nothing with his whole mind and body will have everything done for him.

Let us now apply DE to a simple test: the old Western quick draw gun fight. Only one gun fighter really grasped the principle of DE and that one was Wyatt Earp. Nobody ever beat him. Wyatt Earp said: "It's not the first shot that counts. It's the first shot that hits. Point is to draw aim and fire and deliver the slug an inch above the belt buckle."

That's DE. How fast can you do it and get it done?

It is related that a young boy once incurred the wrath of Two Gun McGee. McGee has sworn to kill him and is even now preparing himself in a series of saloons. The boy has never been in a gun fight and Wyatt Earp

advises him to leave town while McGee is still two saloons away. The boy refuses to leave.

"All right" Earp tells him "You can hit a circle four inches square at six feet can't you? All right *take your time and hit it.*" Wyatt flattens himself against a wall calling out once more "*Take your time, kid.*"

(How fast can you take your time, kid?)

At this moment McGee bursts through the door a .45 in each hand aspittin lead all over the town. A drummer from St Louis is a bit slow hitting the floor and catches a slug in the forehead. A boy peacefully eating chop suey in the Chinese restaurant next door stops a slug with his thigh.

Now the kid draws his gun steadies it in both hands aims and fires at six feet hitting Two Gun McGee squarely in the stomach. The heavy slug knocks him back against the wall. He manages to get off one last shot and bring down the chandelier. The boy fires again and sends a bullet ripping through McGee's liver and another through his chest.

The beginner can think of DE as a game. You are running an obstacle course the obstacles set up by your opponent. As soon as you attempt to put DE into practice you will find that you have an opponent very clever and persistent and resourceful with detailed knowledge of your weaknesses and above all expert in diverting your attention for the moment necessary to drop a plate on the kitchen floor. Who or what is this opponent that makes you spill drop and fumble

slip and fall? Groddeck and Freud called it the IT a built in self-destructive mechanism. Mr Hubbard calls it the Reactive Mind. You will disconnect IT as you advance in the discipline of DE. DE brings you into direct conflict with the IT in present time where you can control your moves. You can beat the IT in present time.

Take the inverse skill of the IT back into your own hands. These skills belong to you. Make them yours. You *know* where the wastebasket is. You can land an object in that wastebasket over your shoulder. You *know* how to touch and move and pick up things. Regaining these physical skills is of course simply a prelude to regaining other skills and other knowledge that you have but cannot make available for your use. You *know* your entire past history just what year month day and hour everything happened. If you have heard a language for any length of time you *know* that language. You have a computer in your brain. DE will show you how to use it. But that's another chapter.

DE applies to ALL operations carried out inside the body ... brain waves, digestion, blood pressure and rate of heart beats ... And that's another chapter ...

"And now I have stray cats to feed and my class at the Leprosarium."

Lady Sutton Smith raises a distant umbrella ...

"I hope you find your way ... The address in empty streets ..."

from *Exterminator!* by William S. Burroughs.
