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**‘THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE’: RE-READING WILLIAM BURROUGHS,
FROM JUNKY TO NOVA EXPRESS**

Joan Didion, 1966

Rona Cran

Abstract

When William Burroughs first emerged on the literary scene in the early 1960s, his writing was subject to numerous subjective and emotional responses which focussed too strongly on the content of his novels and not strongly enough on their compositional style. As a result, many readers have since approached his work with misleading expectations, finding themselves at best confused or disappointed, and at worst disgusted and nauseated. This paper proposes a reassessment of the way we read Burroughs’ novels of the 1950s and 1960s. Arguing that our approach to his work must be informed by an understanding of his compositional techniques and setbacks, it specifically shows how and why he came to use the collage (or cut-up) technique in his writing. My paper will chart the development of Burroughs’ writing, from the linear narrative of his first novel to the transformation of his writing into the calculated collage style which makes up the majority of his later works.

Burroughs’ novels are arguably what David Trotter would call ‘bad messes’, figuring ‘the world’s opacity in and through the disgust they provoke [...] [They] do not irritate us, or frighten us; they make us sick’. I propose that we reassess the squeamishness they provoke: our nauseated response to them may be a kind of kinetosis, or motion sickness, caused not by textual obscenity but by textual mess, which obstructs and problematizes the traditional processes of reading and interpretation. If readers are to focus on Burroughs’ medium, which was chiefly collage, they will find it possible to think of his writing less as a sequence of words which must signify meaning, and re-imagine it as a collection of images, over which one’s eyes may roam.

Key words: William Burroughs’s letters, cut-up novels, collage, cut-ups, *Naked Lunch*, mosaic.

‘maybe he wants us to be sick’: responding to Burroughs’ writing

William Burroughs, during the 1960s, was a man obsessed. In September 1959 he had made a discovery in Paris, where, to quote Henry Miller, ‘at the very hub of the wheel, one can embrace the most fantastic, the most impossible theories, without finding them in the least strange’.¹ His discovery – fantastic, impossible – made in collaboration with the former restaurateur and Surrealist artist Brion Gysin, was that of the ‘cut-up’ technique, whereby existing texts, from Shakespeare to scientific journals, were cut up and rearranged in a random order. The aim was ‘to form new combinations of word and image’, and to avail to writers a version of ‘the collage used in painting for fifty years’.² He proceeded to take his experiments with collage further, and more seriously, than any other artist working in the twentieth century. Burroughs’ letters throughout the 1960s delineate his passion for the method. He enthusiastically extols the ‘spectacular’ nature of the photo-collages he was experimenting with, and hails Gysin as his ‘first Master’.³ He produced hundreds of cut-up texts in addition to the novels this paper will discuss, and lamented the failure of Surrealist collagists to ‘develop the formula further’.⁴ Collage enabled Burroughs to set himself up as an original, to distance himself from the other Beat writers, and to explore the sense he had of himself as being unique, powerful, independent, revolutionary, and Olympian, which the troubled process of writing his first two novels *Junky* (1953) and *Queer* (written 1952,

published 1985) had severely undermined. His fortuitous encounter with collage during the writing of *Naked Lunch* (1959) anticipated his later use of the cut-up technique, typified by his cut-up trilogy – *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), and *Nova Express* (1964). The cut-up technique brought him out from under Allen Ginsberg's protective wing, freed him temporarily from the 'highly irritating'⁵ demands of book publishers, and simultaneously endeared him to the editors of numerous little magazines. It also gave him, for the first time, total control over his writing, and solved, to a certain extent, the formal, organisational problems with writing linear narrative that had plagued him since he first began to write *Junky* in the early 1950s.⁶

Throughout the 1960s, Burroughs fostered a deep, paranoiac mistrust of the written word, which he had come to view as a parasitic entity that was fundamentally unreliable as a means of communication. His cut-up trilogy was an incarnation of his nightmarish vision of the word as parasite, a sustained experiment in killing the word, using collage to decondition and disorient his readers, forcing a reassessment of the rules of reading by compelling the reader to confront pages of text and admit that they did not make sense. Burroughs' theme throughout the trilogy, embodied in its seemingly chaotic structure, is the insidious, viral nature of the word. He came to believe it was at the heart of all human transgression, feeding off systems of thought, facilitating systems of control, and transforming 'the life energy of sex and sensory experience into the mindless mechanical responses of pure need'.⁷ His aim, in the cut-up trilogy, was to achieve for himself 'even ten seconds of inner silence',⁸ or even, somehow, to 'rub out the word forever'.⁹

When his collaged and cut-up writing first emerged on the literary scene in the early 1960s, it was greeted with strong visceral and emotional responses, generated primarily by the explicit subject-matter of his writing, which distracted readers from his work's formal collage assault. His work has an emetic effect which operates on two levels: as revulsion at what he says, and as a kind of motion sickness caused primarily by the form and structure he uses. Ultimately, though it has received less critical attention, the latter is more compelling and important in the context of literary and art history, and is certainly as responsible for the nauseating effects of his writing as is his subject-matter.

Naked Lunch and the cut-up trilogy had 'horrified censors, professors and policemen arrayed in mortal combat',¹⁰ with Burroughs' detractors accusing his work of being 'spiritually as well as physically disgusting',¹¹ and his advocates insisting that he was 'possessed by genius'.¹² The unifying trait amongst reactions to his work could perhaps be labelled gastric criticism, pivoting as it did (and still does) around evocations of strong nausea and physical disgust, as well as allegories of consumption, perpetuated to a certain extent by the title of Burroughs' best-known work – *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs himself described his work as 'sickeningly painful to read'.¹³ Raymond Walters of the *New York Times* highlighted the book's 'spicy content'¹⁴; 'Glug, glug', wrote John Willett of the *Times Literary Supplement*, likening Burroughs' writing to 'grey porridge' and envisioning vomiting jurors at the anticipated obscenity trial. Various contributors to the *Times Literary Supplement* continued in this vein, remarking that 'no one has yet claimed one good dinner to be worth half a dozen naked lunches',¹⁵ that Burroughs' writing 'certainly smells very poisonous',¹⁶ and that perhaps 'American stomachs [are] stronger than ours'.¹⁷ Anthony Burgess, writing for the *Guardian*, observed of *Naked Lunch*:

We are all sitting grinning at a ghastly meat which he suddenly shows us to be cannibalistic. The meat on the end of every fork is revealed as the guts and blood of our fellow-men. It is a revelation which will please nobody and may spoil a few appetites.¹⁸

In 2009 Kurt Hemmer suggested that Burroughs 'is showing us the naked truth on the end of the fork – and maybe he wants us to be sick',¹⁹ and in early 2012 James Campbell showed that the allegory of ingestion still holds today, endorsing *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket That Exploded* as 'good reading if taken in small doses'.²⁰

Such responses – even the positive ones – clearly indicate the notably anacathartic effect of Burroughs' writing, an effect which has discouraged and distracted many readers from fully understanding Burroughs' decade-long compositional experiment. Whilst *Naked Lunch* ultimately weathered the critical reaction to it, perhaps because the power of the writing transcends its alienating form, the cut-up trilogy has, as far as a general readership is concerned, sunk almost without trace. So what is it about Burroughs' work that makes readers feel sick enough not to want to continue reading it? Certainly the subject-matter of these novels is disturbing: hangings, surgical carnage, explicit sex, and graphic depictions of drug-taking are relayed with potentially nauseating frequency. But the subject-matter is arguably no more disturbing than that of many other novels. During the same decade, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* was published in America for the first time, whilst Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, Hubert Selby Jr.'s *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and Pauline Réage's *The Story of O* were also released, to similar outrage, but have continued to thrive. Similarly, novels written since (by writers who seem to be actively emulating Burroughs' iconoclastic persona), such as Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, J.G. Ballard's *Cocaine Nights*, Will Self's *My Idea of Fun*, and Stewart Home's *69 Things To Do With A Dead Princess*, have largely met with critical approval and a modicum of success amongst readers. In defence of Burroughs' writing, the publisher John Calder noted that while many novels provoke nausea (he cites Beckett's *Trilogy* as 'deal[ing] almost entirely in matter that is sordid, unpleasant, nauseamaking and frightening') this fact does not necessarily render them 'without value, beauty, poetry and truth'.²¹ Burgess asserted that 'too many people who should know better protract a squeamishness about subject-matter that sickens their capacity to make purely literary judgments'.²² Burgess, along with Jack Kerouac and Burroughs himself, attempted to present *Naked Lunch* and the cut-up trilogy as deliberately extreme, hyperbolic satire in the vein of Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* or *Gulliver's Travels*, but many critics remained unconvinced – as have subsequent generations of readers, who generally eschew the cut-up trilogy in favour of Burroughs' earlier, linear novel *Junky*, and his later, also more linear, *Red Night Trilogy* (1981-1987).

The answer seems to lie in the ways in which the novels were written – and, correspondingly, in the ways in which the novels are read. The *Red Night Trilogy* and Burroughs' early writing, as well as the work of the other writers noted above,²³ whilst equally nauseating in terms of content, are formally and stylistically relatively straightforward to read. Conversely, the cut-up trilogy, and *Naked Lunch* to a certain extent, read – if they can be said to read at all – like the uncontrolled spewings of an ailing machine. David Trotter might describe them as 'bad messes', figuring 'the world's opacity in and through the disgust they provoke [...] [They] do not irritate us, or frighten us; they make us sick'.²⁴ Due to Burroughs' numerous, simultaneous revisions, the novels cannot be said to begin or end, or even to run in sequence, arguably making the appellation of 'trilogy' something of a misnomer. Furthermore, as Alan Ansen argues, 'to sketch a progression is pointless, since the work is conceived as a total presence',²⁵ or, as Burroughs put it, 'this novel is *happening*'.²⁶ A kind of twisted anti-logic emerges as the novels progress, as sections of text replicate and permute from one novel to the next. The texts imply that in some alternate universe the narrative may once have been fully functional, but now it trails only the ghost of familiarity. Robin Lydenberg warns that Burroughs 'deliberately redirects the very process of reading away from any expectation of continued action', subverting the use of sequential refrains and arbitrarily substituting pronouns in a sustained act of wilful 'disorientation which renders

everything defamiliarized, shifting and uncertain'.²⁷ Motifs recur, textually unanchored and unexplained. Characters are inserted into the text unannounced and fully formed, with Burroughs himself asserting that 'you don't know where they came from or how they got to be where they are'.²⁸ He discards any prescribed transitions or contrived links. Characters vanish inexplicably from the action, or 'walk in and out of the screen'.²⁹ The reader is frequently addressed in a disembodied but oddly intimate voice – 'remember strange bed?' it asks, in *The Ticket That Exploded*, and, sarcastically, in *The Soft Machine*: 'fun and games what?'.³⁰ The elusive, quasi-narrator plays no role in guiding the reader through the linguistic mire in which the action takes place. The reader may gather that there is some kind of a journey taking place, and some kind of a battle, but the whole thing occurs entirely without judgment and, seemingly, without organisation, in locations that are real, imagined or hallucinatory, primarily in a state of anarchic flux and always on the very brink of catastrophe, both in terms of style, form, and content. The cut-up novels are, in Burroughs' words: 'pure abstract literature'.³¹

These are not novels in the traditional sense, and it is essential, therefore, that we reassess the squeamishness they provoke: our nauseated response to them seems to be caused more by textual mess than by textual obscenity. Rather than being straightforward ideological revulsion, it may be a kind of kinetosis, or motion sickness, which obstructs and problematizes the traditional processes of reading and interpretation. Joan Didion, reviewing *The Soft Machine* for *Bookweek* in 1966, argued convincingly that Burroughs' subject matter was 'in no sense the point'. Instead, she suggested, it was the sound of his voice – 'hard, inventive, free, funny, serious, poetic, indelibly American' – that was important:

The medium is the message: the point is not what the voice says but the voice itself, a voice so direct and original as to disarm close scrutiny of what it is saying. Burroughs is less a writer than a sound, and to listen to the lyric may be to miss the beat.³²

Indeed, close scrutiny of *what* Burroughs is saying rarely proves rewarding. His writing is generally unconvincing in moral terms. Satire or not, it fails to argue for anything that has not been argued for more convincingly elsewhere – but this is not its point. His work is too fragmented and too frenetic compositionally to be able to embed within itself a singular message or meaning – there is no victory for the critic here. Certainly many messages and many meanings can be located within the tissue of the texts, some originating with the author, some by accident, and the majority with his readership, the 'one place where this multiplicity is focused',³³ to quote Barthes, or in Burroughs' own words, 'departed have left spectators involved'.³⁴ But by listening to his voice – to the sound that it makes rather than the words it enunciates – the reader is able to focus on the one thing which is recognisably Burroughs': his compositional style. This style, comprising his use of mosaic and of collage, the cannibalisation of his letters, and his cut-ups and his fold-ins, is something which we as readers can grasp and which legitimises the nature of his subject matter. His methods of composition are significantly more momentous in relation to both the history and the future of the novel than his subject matter or any dubious moral message that he may have been attempting to convey. If readers are to succeed in *not* 'listen[ing] to the lyric', focussing instead on Burroughs' collaged medium, they will find it possible to think of his writing less as a sequence of words which must signify meaning (with its attendant feelings of revulsion and disgust), than as a collection of images over which one's eyes may roam, and which embodies Burroughs' larger, central idea about the tyranny of the written word. Burroughs was attempting to show that if we take words – any words, including his – at face value, then we are submitting unquestioningly to their power. But by refusing to allow meaning to take

over, we can negate this power. Readers who responded to his work on an emotional, visceral level proved his point: finding themselves nauseated by the subject-matter of his work (i.e. by what his words were *saying*) they were looking for meaning in the wrong place. They were picking through verbal garbage and trying to find a moral message which would redeem the obscenity, whilst failing to see what was right in front of their eyes, namely that ‘the medium is the message’.

Burroughs’ cut-ups are works of literature aspiring to the conditions of plastic art, attempting to posit the linguistic sign as a visual image and to equate the novels’ textual architecture to grammatical substance and etymological meaning. His overarching intent was to decondition the kind of automatic, emotional readerly response which had so characterised the negative reviews of his work. The ostentatious embedding of the collage practice within his work advocated and, to a certain extent, legitimised the concept that a text is as much a composition of heterogeneous elements, or ‘graphical ensemble’,³⁵ as it is a sequence of signs denoting narrative meaning. Thomas Brockelman, who posits collage as a feature of postmodernism imbricated with modernism, advocates a view of ‘painting and sculpture as writing’.³⁶ Equally, then, writing could be viewed as a form of painting. Considered in this way, Burroughs’ seemingly impenetrable cut-up novels should be approached not as novels, but as a series of interrelated pieces of art, consisting of found objects, montages, and simulated and actual collages. In the absence of grammatical logic, discernible characters, or plot, the reader is required to participate in the text, moving ‘beyond the limits of conventional seeing’.³⁷ If the reader can disregard their expectations of verbal linearity and plot, they will experience a kind of cinematic weightlessness, in which the words on the page appear as a composition of moving images, silent but vivid, a mental landscape in which, as Tony Tanner observes, ‘images crowd in on all sides and from the past, predetermining the present and pre-empting it of its own reality’.³⁸

‘a medium suitable for me does not yet exist, unless I invent it’

To appreciate Burroughs’ mistrust of the written word, and his awareness of the potency of cutting up texts, an understanding of his experience of writing the three novels preceding the cut-up trilogy is required. Burroughs recalled that whilst writing *Junky* he felt confined to linear narrative, ‘like a soldier to the boredom of the barracks’.³⁹ He felt bullied by publishers into writing words he did not want to – the Preface to the novel, for instance, was written under duress, whilst a significant part of the text was actually culled from the manuscript of his second novel, *Queer*, in order, as his publishers insisted, to make *Junky* longer.⁴⁰ His publishers also requested that he write about the death of his wife in *Queer*, which he refused to do. The novel is an anguished, unsettling, ultimately unfinished semi-autobiography which Burroughs suppressed voluntarily on account of what he perceived to be its mawkishness and ‘emotional excesses’,⁴¹ particularly in a homosexual context. He only allowed it to be published in 1985 in order to revive his flagging career.

The editorial demands placed on him whilst writing these two novels made him deeply uncomfortable. He resented cutting up his own manuscripts at the behest of strangers, deriding their ideas as ‘appalling’, and ‘highly irritating’, lamenting that being ‘completely unknown’ left him powerless.⁴² Tellingly, given Burroughs’ later turn to collage, he advised his friend Allen Ginsberg that he alone was permitted to cut up and edit the novels on Burroughs’ behalf, and that he was ‘free to choose, add, subtract, rearrange’.⁴³ But the role of his friends and publishers in the production of *Junky* and *Queer* was ultimately too great for Burroughs to be able to feel that they were truly his own work. Through these texts he realised that if he was to make his own mark on the canon, he would have to cut up the work that had already been done, partly by him, but partly only in his name. *Queer* in particular

reveals a writer tussling with his demons, forcing himself to the realisation that ‘a medium suitable for me does not yet exist, unless I invent it’.⁴⁴

Naked Lunch was a crucial step toward the invention of Burroughs’ own medium. Although ultimately a success, the novel had proved almost impossible to write; the requirement that he impose some kind of order on his manuscript caused him such distress that it almost manifested itself physically. Once again, he had to have significant help with finalising the manuscript. Burroughs, Sinclair Beiles, and Brion Gysin typed up, re-edited, and delivered the first edition by hand to the printers in haphazard sections over a period of less than two weeks, so its juxtapositional form came about partly by accident. But Burroughs had been considering ‘the cryptic significance of juxtaposition, like objects abandoned in a hotel drawer’ for some time,⁴⁵ and, therefore, it is more accurate to posit the structure and style of *Naked Lunch* as partly deliberate and partly naturally-occurring collage (as opposed to the highly calculated, quasi-scientific make-up of the cut-up trilogy, which was designed with the intention of alienating readers and diverting their attention from the author). As early as 1955 he was coming to terms with the idea that his ‘chapters form a sort of mosaic’,⁴⁶ accepting that his writing’s ‘fragmentary quality [...] is *inherent* in the method and will resolve itself so far as necessary’.⁴⁷

Oliver Harris posits a ‘new sense of readership’ in *Naked Lunch*, which is marked by a ‘nakedly motivated performance’ on the part of the narrator, in order to establish a new reader-relationship based on ‘hostile terms of seduction and exploitation’.⁴⁸ Burroughs’ narrator no longer panders to his audience. Instead he is psychopathic and mocking, forcing the narrator-reader relationship to pivot on a knife-edge, and appending his depictions of unconscionable acts with the malevolent, nonchalant challenge to the reader: ‘Wouldn’t you?’⁴⁹ Gone are the linguistic signposts, the brightly lit stylistic paths and the formal map of *Junky* – the reader must now follow a dangerously deceptive trail of breadcrumbs through a murky, protean jungle, at the heart of which lies the sinister gingerbread cottage, or our ‘feast of a novel’.

However, chaotic as the reading of *Naked Lunch* may be, it never trails into total abstraction as the cut-up novels do, and the reading experience is rendered all the more visceral for its anchoring in an identifiable version of reality. *Naked Lunch* is a collage of Burroughs’ surroundings and experiences at the time of writing, his narcotised sensations, letters from his friends, and encounters in Tangier with ‘that pure, uncut boy stuff’.⁵⁰ Much of *Naked Lunch* was written in epistolary fragments, with many of the routines in the novel occurring first in his letters, in the form of excerpts included verbatim for critiquing, but also, more interestingly, as half-formed ideas, snippets of news, or transient remarks that Burroughs shared with his correspondent almost in passing, resulting in ‘the fusions and reversals of past and future, fact and fantasy that came about from transcribing, cutting, and selecting from a mass of fragmentary material drawn from his letters’.⁵¹

His letters also make clear, however, that the organising of his manuscript was, as he wrote to Ginsberg, ‘more painful than anything I ever experienced’.⁵² He frequently refers to his formal mess as hopeless and horrible, and despairs: ‘the novel form is completely inadequate for what I have to say. I don’t know if I can find a form. I am very gloomy as to prospects of publication’.⁵³ In February 1955, Burroughs confessed that the pressure of attempting to ‘impose some form on material, or even to follow a line (like continuation of novel) [...] catapults me into a sort of madness’.⁵⁴ In October of the same year, however, he decided to use his letters as part of the novel, planning an epistolary second chapter which would enable him to evade narrative responsibility. Crucially, although this section of the novel never materialised, Burroughs had begun to capitalise on the notions of cutting and collage. His description of his methodology (‘Of course I am not using anywhere near all the letters. I will often sort through 100 pages to concoct 1 page’) is indicative of the mechanical

manner in which he later described selecting his cut-ups, when he asserted: ‘someone has to programme the machine. Remember that I first made selections. Out of hundreds of possible sentences that I might have used, I chose one’.⁵⁵ It is also a key indication that he was actively attempting to resolve his deep frustration with the written word, which seemed to have been developing into a pathological fear of textual organisation, rather than succumbing miserably and unprofitably to it. By October 1957 he qualified his bid for freedom from the controlling forces of narrative, asserting:

if anyone finds this form confusing, it is because they are accustomed to the historical novel form, which is a three-dimensional chronology of events happening to someone already, for the purposes of the novel, dead. That is the usual novel *has happened*. This novel *is happening*.⁵⁶

His idea of using letters as part of the make-up of what would become *Naked Lunch* enabled him to create an overarching schema operating on the principles of cutting and collage, which in turn ameliorated his dread of organisation and his distrust of words that evaded his requirements. In the long term, having written and published *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs realised that the collage practice could be very deliberately manipulated, enabling him to launch his calculated ‘physical assault on the very medium of written communication’.⁵⁷

‘cut the word lines. And step out into silence’: from emotional to literal acts of mutilation

Burroughs had for some time been fascinated by the thematic notions of cutting and surgery, a fascination which informed the zeal with which he embraced collage, whose key tenet is the act of cutting. His interest in notions of cutting evolved from the visceral violence manifested in the pages of *Naked Lunch*, particularly relating to the character of Dr Benway, to the literal, physical cutting of his novels typified by the cut-up trilogy. The word ‘cut’ itself appears thirty-three times in *Naked Lunch* alone – forty-eight times if the subsidiary additions of the Miles/Grauerholz edition (2001) are included. In 1940 Burroughs had cut off the last joint of his left little finger in a skewed romantic gesture. In 1947 Allen Ginsberg, aged just twenty-one, had authorised the performance of a lobotomy on his mother Naomi, an action which resonated with many of the Beat writers for years to come. The character of Dr Benway in *Naked Lunch* appears to be based, to a certain extent, on the real-life ‘lobotomy king’, Dr Walter Freeman, who may or may not have carried out the lobotomy on Ginsberg’s mother, but who had certainly operated on many occasions at Pilgrim State Hospital in New York, where Naomi resided. Famous for his advocacy of lobotomy as a means of control for psychiatric patients (particularly for homosexuals), Freeman developed a technique known as the transorbital, or ‘icepick’, lobotomy, designed to enable psychiatrists untrained in surgical procedures to perform lobotomies in overcrowded institutions, by inserting a metal pick into the corner of a patient’s eye in order to sever nerve connections to and from the frontal cortex. The transorbital lobotomy could be performed without the need for an operating theatre, using electroconvulsive therapy instead of anaesthesia. Freeman himself, in spite of having no surgical training and in the face of extensive criticism, toured the U.S. in order to train other non-medical staff in the procedure, performing over 3400 lobotomies (at just \$25 each) during the four decades of his career. Many of these were performed on homosexual men, in an attempt to ‘cure’ them. It seems likely that Burroughs had Freeman in mind when he wrote the routine in *Naked Lunch* featuring the Salesman with the ‘M.D.’s Can Do Kit for busy practitioners’.⁵⁸ Certainly his crafting of Dr Benway’s casual refusal to allow his own demonstrable incompetence, not to mention brutal insanity, to stand in the way of his medical

experiments, seems to be the direct satirical response of a gay man to the quasi-surgical outrages perpetuated by Freeman.

Benway is introduced to the reader as ‘a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control’. His assignment is ‘T.D. – Total Demoralization’, which he brings about by applying his Freeman-esque philosophy that

the subject must not realize that the mistreatment is a deliberate attack of an anti-human enemy on his personal identity. He must be made to feel that he deserves *any* treatment he receives because there is something (never specified) horribly wrong with him.⁵⁹

Benway wields his unsterilized scalpel with a terrifying degree of imprecision. Regardless of appalled onlookers, he treats operations, as Freeman also seems to have done, as medical circus acts or public spectacles. He brags about performing ‘an appendectomy with a rusty sardine can’, and recounts tales involving ‘scalpel fight[s] with a colleague in the operating room’ in which the patient, being the ‘weakest party’, always comes off worst. He performs operations which, he boasts, have ‘absolutely no medical value’, in front of packed auditoriums, describing them as ‘pure artistic creation [...] the surgeon deliberately endangers his patient, and then, with incredible speed and celerity, rescues him from death at the last possible split second’. Benway also makes note of a colleague who

would start by throwing a scalpel across the room into the patient and then make his entrance like a ballet dancer. His speed was incredible: ‘I don’t give them time to die’, he would say. Tumors put him in a frenzy of rage. ‘Fucking undisciplined cells!’ he would snarl, advancing on the tumor like a knife-fighter.⁶⁰

Although Benway’s lack of self-discipline is at once hilarious and grotesque, his purpose in Burroughs’ writing is to represent the ghoulish ‘impulse of the scientific mind to improve or correct human nature’,⁶¹ stemming from a basic contempt inherent in Burroughs’ own mind for the body’s weaknesses and the mind’s tyranny. Burroughs enacts this contempt through language, turning his disgust onto words. His notion that the human creature is essentially a binary structure, bound in conflict with itself, is depicted and ridiculed in the novel, as verbal function is disabled and the body (or ‘the soft machine’) debilitated. His obsession with the anatomy of the body, with medical attempts to control it, and with its helpless role as the focus of widespread societal urges to judge and punish,⁶² is explored in his tendency to depict humans as truncated body parts, defined, as Robin Lydenberg has observed,⁶³ by their mouths, their asses, and their ectoplasms, and castigated for being ‘scandalously inefficient’.⁶⁴

The word ‘anatomy’ derives from the Greek for ‘cut up’. It is, as Jonathan Sawday observes in *Emblazoned on the Body*, ‘an act of partition or reduction [...] associated primarily with medicine’, in which, nevertheless, ‘there lurks [...] a constant potential for violence’.⁶⁵ In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs deliberately uses language to perform a metonymical autopsy on the idea of the body, cutting it up with all the flair of a surgeon performing a public dissection in the style of Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp* (1632). The self-reflexivity inherent in this act of literary self-harm, as Burroughs performatively carves into the body of his own text, exposes ‘the violence and domination inherent in the dualism of body/mind; the use of language as a basic weapon in that struggle for supremacy; and the inevitable outcome of the struggle in silence and death’.⁶⁶

The cut-up trilogy is also a performance of this kind, but in reverse. Where *Naked Lunch* chiefly used language to cut up the body, the cut-ups instead use the body (hands holding scissors) to cut up language. In this sense, regarding his earlier work, they enact both of the Oxford English Dictionary's definitions of the word 'autopsy':

1. Seeing with one's own eyes, eye-witnessing; personal observation or inspection.
2. Inspection of a dead body, so as to ascertain by actual inspection its internal structure, and *esp.* to find out the cause or seat of disease.

In creating the cut-ups Burroughs transformed himself into a Benway figure. In front of the audience attracted by *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs turned to cut-ups to enable himself to cross the cultural divide between the subjectivity of art (as characterised by *Naked Lunch*) and the objectivity of science (as seen in the cut-ups), with which to diagnose, improve on, and ultimately correct the more resolutely 'human' internal structures of his earlier work.

Elizabeth Klaver's *Sites of Autopsy in Contemporary Culture* establishes that

performing an autopsy in the West has meant surgical mutilation, penetration to the interior's most private parts by cleaving phallic instruments, combining *ana-tomē* (to cut up) and *auto-opsis* (to see with one's own eyes) to produce a 'piercing gaze'.⁶⁷

The cut-up novels are precisely this: a public act of mutilation dependent on a pair of scissors or a knife for both the destruction of one accepted body of meaning and the creation of another. But within the internal dynamics of the cut-up trilogy, the incision is rendered harmless, and is transformed instead into an attempt to facilitate a new way of reading. In *Naked Lunch*, negative instances of cutting up and cutting off – basic, conceptual dissection – would have resulted in wilful truncation and amputation. In the cut-up trilogy such instances extend into the positive ideals of cutting loose, cutting free, and cutting out, as in this example of verbal collage from *The Ticket That Exploded*:

Film flakes drift adiós – Showed you your air – the Doctor on stage – the pipes are calling – September left no address – For i have known last air – The days grow short – [...] A street boy's courage exploded the word – last round into air – like good bye then – story of absent dreamer'.⁶⁸

Readers are encouraged to see with their own eyes, not with the author's, as Burroughs attempts to reduce himself to the purity and abstraction of the disembodied hand, writing: 'I do not subscribe to any of the sentiments expressed necessarily. Are not personal opinions. Only a transcription of voices'.⁶⁹

Dismemberment in the cut-up novels is rendered as a form of escape, as a reaffirmation that, to paraphrase Klaver's assessment of the emotional difficulties of dissection, the corpse occupies space/time but does not suffer in it. The severed limbs and physical lacerations of *Queer*, and the *Macbeth*-inflected hacking and gouging of *Naked Lunch*, are tempered and ultimately replaced by a more deliberate, constructive sort of violence. Burroughs' encounter, through Gysin, with the more artistically-minded, positivistic cuts associated with collage, facilitated a new way of approaching his expressive dilemmas, allowing him to cut them up whilst preventing them from breaking him down. Burroughs performs a quasi-medical act of anatomisation, whereby in lieu of a formerly complete 'body', a new 'body of knowledge and understanding can be created'.⁷⁰ Dissection, in the cut-up novels, is a means of encounter

rather than a means of separation; or, at least, the separations necessitated by the cut-up method release powerful non-verbal messages, according to Burroughs, decipherable only by those versed in the technique:

Cut the words and see how they fall [...] Cut the word lines and you will hear their voices. Cut ups often come through as code messages with special meaning for the cutter. Table tapping? Perhaps.⁷¹

Writing to Ginsberg in June 1960, Burroughs advised, 'Don't theorize. Try it', suggesting that if Ginsberg were to cut up the letter 'you will hear My Voice'.⁷² This urge to engage others with the physical processes of the cut-up technique, ostensibly to help them reach an understanding of the texts, indicates a desire on Burroughs' part to present his methods as a form of co-operative public spectacle. Much as Dr Freeman had attempted to do with his lobotomies, Burroughs' simultaneously affects his cuts upon his readers and endeavours to force them into complicity with his systematic violations of narrative, in order to 'cut the word lines. And step out into silence'.⁷³

'writing must always remain an attempt': cut-up failure?

The protagonist of *The Soft Machine* experiences 'the crushing weight of evil insect control forcing [his] thoughts and feelings into prearranged moulds', and learns of 'the horrible punishments meted out to any one [sic] who dared challenge or even think of challenging the controllers: *Death in the Ovens*'.⁷⁴ Ultimately, escape from these kinds of control mechanisms lies in the fragmentary counter-tactic of Burroughs' pervasive refrain: 'Cut the word lines – Cut music lines – Smash control images – Smash the control machine – Burn the books'.⁷⁵ As the novels continue, the Nova Police (the force attacking the parasitical word virus) increases in strength, and the setting becomes increasingly galactic. The noisy features of an earthbound existence fade out of the texts, suggesting to Allen Ginsberg that the cut-up trilogy is 'a work of art fitting to the mutant movement of the human race as it prepares to leave the earth'.⁷⁶ The reader drifts further and further into the fissures between the cut-ups, increasingly unanchored by the weighty progression of text, until they are released, finally, into space and silence, articulated in the final line of *Nova Express* as 'fresh southerly winds a long time ago'.⁷⁷

This internal liberation, or freeing of the mind and the imagination (and silencing of 'sub-vocal speech'⁷⁸) is, as Tanner suggests, a 'two-way movement – out into reality, up or back into space'.⁷⁹ This kind of work has been referred to as a form of skywriting, in which a message diminishes even as it is given. Regarding Burroughs' skywriting in particular, Joan Didion perhaps puts it best:

To anyone who finds Burroughs readable at all, he is remarkably rereadable, if only because he is remarkably unmemorable. There are no 'stories' to wear thin, no 'characters' of whom one might tire. We are presented only with the fragmented record of certain fantasies, and our response to that record depends a good deal upon our own fantasies at the moment; in itself, a book by William Burroughs has about as much intrinsic 'meaning' as the actual inkblot in a Rorschach test.⁸⁰

Burroughs' writing is most significant at the moment in which it disappears, melting into the seams of the collage which has delivered it. Recurrent images of windows and sky permeate the cut-up trilogy, whilst words such as 'fading', 'melting', 'dwindling', and 'falling', are used repeatedly. *The Soft Machine* ends with 'dead fingers in smoke',⁸¹ *The*

Ticket That Exploded with a modified quotation from *The Tempest* (Act IV.1.150): ‘cut the prerecordings into air into thin air’⁸² – and *Nova Express* concludes as noted above, with ‘fresh southerly winds’, following an almost pathological repetition of the phrase ‘melted into air’.⁸³ Burroughs’ work has the potential for longevity not because, as he had hoped, it is either ‘spectacular’ to look at or to read, but because it is mutable, subjective, and elusive, with the source of its power located, to quote Barthes, ‘not in its origin but in its destination’. Ultimately, it is governed by no law other than that of the reader’s imagination.⁸⁴ His cut-up novels employ methods of disorientation and evasion which facilitate an ideal also sought after by the avant-garde composer John Cage, who also used collage, namely ‘the possibility of looking anywhere, not just where someone arranged you should’, so that ‘you are then free to deal with your freedom just as the artist dealt with his, not in the same way but, nevertheless, originally’.⁸⁵

For Burroughs, the act of withdrawal, of egress, was ‘the most subversive move to any establishment’,⁸⁶ because it rendered the imposition of law by any control mechanism obsolete. He proved this, not only by exiling himself in Europe and Africa following his varying transgressions in the U.S. and Mexico, but also by embodying it in his writing. Collage, which involves ‘both placing and ellipsis’,⁸⁷ is simultaneously the brazen avatar of vociferous protest and the apostle of silent resistance. Burroughs uses the medium to this end to create a sort of absent presence, ‘a speech beyond silence’,⁸⁸ a latticework through which glimpses of vision might penetrate. His cut-up technique ‘reveals those gaps, interstices, holes that are compulsively filled in and covered over by the conventional metaphoric text’.⁸⁹ Furthermore, his struggle to achieve silence using language can be understood as a writer’s quest for liberation from himself, in an experiment he had begun, but failed to complete, in the purgative writing of *Queer*, before his discovery that collage’s ‘silent language of juxtaposition [...] can be learned and used to ~~mask~~ make statements’.⁹⁰

Burroughs, ultimately, resides in the fissures between the fragments, as much a part of the collage architecture as the cut-ups themselves. Barry Miles notes the confessional nature of the cut-ups, which ‘make explicit the actual phenomenon of writing and show it to the reader, revealing the psychological process of what was going on – literally a map of the writer’s consciousness’.⁹¹ Whilst the cut-up trilogy does often lose contact with the reader, it provides a fascinating insight into Burroughs’ writing technique, whereby the aesthetics of the finished product are subordinated to the processes of creation – the cut-up trilogy is a narrative of its own conception, or a variation on John Ashbery’s notion of the poem remaining ‘the chronicle of the creative act that produces it’.⁹² With its revisions, repetitions, hallucinations, and inserted commentaries, the trilogy literally shows the writer’s mind at work. The unique form of the cut-ups also forces a reassessment of the rules of reading which reaches beyond the boundaries of these particular texts, facilitating not just an appreciation of Burroughs’ work (and providing a means by which to overcome its emetic effect), but also a re-evaluation of the ways in which we approach any text.

The cut-up trilogy was ultimately an experiment that culminated in what Theodore Solotaroff accurately describes as ‘a brilliantly lit dead end’.⁹³ The problem was, of course, in Burroughs’ own words, that many of the cut-ups were ‘interesting experimentally, but simply not readable’.⁹⁴ Burroughs repeatedly emphasised the experimental nature of his work, affirming that ‘any cut-up technique presupposes a great deal of experimentation’,⁹⁵ and that ‘writing must always remain an *attempt*’.⁹⁶ His British publisher, John Calder, also reiterated the image of Burroughs as a ‘scientist in literature’ who ‘must be allowed to experiment freely even if his experiments eventually lead nowhere’.⁹⁷

A further key problem is that, quite simply, the subject-matter does get in the way of the cut-up trilogy’s form. In spite of Burroughs’ attempts ‘to strangle his own voice’,⁹⁸ the scenes he conjures up are too visceral, and the expurgatory reflex too strong. As Brion Gysin joked,

Burroughs' texts would need to be 'wrapped in sheets of lead and sunk in the sea, disposed of like atomic waste'⁹⁹ before we can forget them. Ultimately Burroughs cannot adopt silence and continue to write, and he is unable, finally, to make that 'artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture'¹⁰⁰ – that is, to grow quiet and disappear. The hysterical, emotional response to his work simultaneously proved and disproved his theories, showing words to be precisely the controlling force he so feared, but also that regardless of the order in which they were placed they somehow retained their power. However, although he was unable to 'rub out the word' or even to achieve 'ten seconds of inner silence', the cut-ups remain significant experimental works, whose lasting value is as formal collage phenomena rather than literary texts.

Notes

¹ Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (London: Calder, 1963 (1934)), p. 181.

² Burroughs, quoted in Barry Miles, William Burroughs: *El Hombre Invisible* (London: Virgin, 1993), p. 119. Burroughs, 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin', in *A Casebook on the Beat*, ed. by Thomas Parkinson (New York: Crowell, 1961) pp. 105-6. See also Burroughs/Gysin, *The Third Mind* (London: Calder, 1979), p. 34: 'Writing is fifty years behind painting. I propose to apply the painters' techniques to writing: things as simple and immediate as collage or montage [...] The poets are supposed to liberate the words – not to chain them in phrases'.

³ Burroughs to Gysin, 16 May 1961 and 14 June 1961, (Burroughs Papers, Berg Collection; Series III, Box 85, fols 4-5), and Burroughs to Ginsberg, 2 December 1959, in *Rub Out The Words: The Letters of William S. Burroughs 1959-1974*, ed. by Bill Morgan (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 10.

⁴ 'The Photo Collage'. (Undated typescript found in the Burroughs Papers, Berg Collection; Series I, Box 10, fol. 6).

⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 22 April 1952 (Ginsberg Papers, Columbia Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Box 1, fol. 22).

⁶ *Naked Lunch* was not published in the U.S. until 1962 (Grove Press) and in the UK until 1963 (Calder).

⁷ Lydenberg, 'Notes from the Orifice: Language and the Body in William Burroughs', *Contemporary Literature* 26.1 (Spring 1985), 55-73, 60.

⁸ Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* (London: Paladin, 1987 (1962)), p. 43.

⁹ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p. 10, and Burroughs, *Nova Express* (London: Granada, 1978 (1964)), p. 10.

¹⁰ Herbert Gold, 'Instead of Love, the Fix', *Sunday New York Times Book Review*, 25 November 1962, 4.

¹¹ Victor Gollancz, *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 November 1963, 993.

¹² Norman Mailer, 'William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*', Grove Press publicity pamphlet, 1962, p. 4.

¹³ Brion Gysin, quoting Burroughs, in Miles, *El Hombre Invisible*, p. 126.

¹⁴ Raymond Walters, 'In and Out of Books', *New York Times Book Review*, 16 September 1962, 8.

¹⁵ Damian Grant, *TLS*, 23 January 1964, 73.

¹⁶ Dorothy Day, *TLS*, 9 January 1964, 27.

¹⁷ John Carter, *TLS*, 23 January 1964, 73.

¹⁸ Burgess, 'On the End of Every Fork', *Guardian*, 30 November 1964, 9.

¹⁹ "'the natives are getting uppity": Tangier and Naked Lunch', in *Naked Lunch@50*, ed. by Oliver Harris and Ian Macfadyen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), pp. 65-72, p. 70.

²⁰ Review of *Letters 1959-1974*, ed. by Bill Morgan, *Guardian*, 23 March 2012: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/mar/23/rub-out-words-william-burroughs-review?newsfeed=true> [accessed 29 March 2012]

²¹ Calder, *TLS*, 2 January 1964, 9.

²² Burgess, *TLS*, 2 January 1964, 9.

²³ Miller, Réage, Burgess, Selby Jr., Easton Ellis, Home, Self, and Ballard.

²⁴ David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 16.

²⁵ Ansen, 'Anyone Who Can Pick Up a Frying Pan Owns Death', in *The Burroughs File* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1991 (1984)), pp. 17-23, p. 22.

²⁶ Letter to Allen Ginsberg, 28 October 1957 (Ginsberg Papers, Columbia; Box 2, fol. 3).

²⁷ Lydenberg, *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs' Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 57-71.

²⁸ Miles, *El Hombre Invisible*, p. 157.

²⁹ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p. 53.

- ³⁰ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p. 82, and *The Soft Machine* (London: Paladin, 1986 (1961)), p. 17.
- ³¹ Burroughs to Dave Haselwood, 24 June 1960, *Letters 1959-1974*, p. 33.
- ³² Didion, 'Wired for Shock Treatments', *Bookweek*, 27 March 1966, 2-3.
- ³³ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, ed. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 148.
- ³⁴ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p. 56.
- ³⁵ Louis Marin, *Études Sémiologiques: Écritures, peintures* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972) p. 19.
- ³⁶ Brockelman, *The Frame and the Mirror: On Collage and the Post Modern* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001) pp. 4-6.
- ³⁷ Lydenberg, *Word Cultures*, p. 64.
- ³⁸ Tony Tanner, 'Rub Out the Word', in *William S. Burroughs at the Front*, ed. by Skerl/Lydenberg, pp. 105-13, p. 109.
- ³⁹ Harris, *The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945-1959* (New York: Viking, 1993), p. xxi.
- ⁴⁰ See Harris, Introduction to *The Yage Letters: Redux* by Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs (San Francisco, City Lights, 2006 (1963)); Introduction to *Junky: the Definitive Text of Junk*, by William Burroughs (London: Penguin, 2003 (1953)); 'Confusion's Masterpiece: Re-Editing William S. Burroughs' First Trilogy' (16/09/2010; <http://realitystudio.org/scholarship/confusions-masterpiece/>).
- ⁴¹ Burroughs, *Queer*, ed. by Oliver Harris (London: Penguin, 2011 (1985)), p. 27.
- ⁴² Burroughs to Ginsberg, 23 December 1952 (Ginsberg Papers, Columbia; Box 1, fol. 23); Burroughs to Ginsberg, 22 April 1952 (Ginsberg Papers, Columbia; Box 1, fol. 22); Burroughs to Kerouac, April 1952 (Kerouac Papers, Columbia; Box 1, fol. 4).
- ⁴³ Burroughs to Ginsberg and Kerouac, 23 October 1955, *Letters 1945-1959*, p. 295.
- ⁴⁴ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 23 May 1952 (Ginsberg Papers, Columbia; Box 1, fol. 22).
- ⁴⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 21 October 1955, in *Letters 1945-1959*, p. 289; see also *NL*, p. 97.
- ⁴⁶ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 21 October 1955, *Letters 1945-1959*, p. 289.
- ⁴⁷ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 6 January 1955 (Burroughs Papers, Columbia; Box 1, fol. 4).
- ⁴⁸ Harris, *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), pp. 50-51.
- ⁴⁹ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, ed. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles (London: Harper Perennial, 2005 (1959), p. 207.
- ⁵⁰ Tangier, as Harris notes, was itself a 'strange collage of histories and cultures', *Letters 1945-1959*, pp. xxxiv-xxxv. Quotation is from Burroughs to Ginsberg, 13 October 1956, *Letters 1945-1959*, p. 329.
- ⁵¹ Harris, *Letters 1945-1959*, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.
- ⁵² Burroughs to Ginsberg, 7 April 1954, *Letters 1945-1959*, p. 201.
- ⁵³ Burroughs to Kerouac, 18 August 1954, *Letters 1945-1959*, p. 227.
- ⁵⁴ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 7 February 1955, *Letters 1945-1959*, p. 262.
- ⁵⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 21 October 1955, *Letters 1945-1959*, p. 288. Burroughs, 'The Art of Fiction', *Paris Review* 9.35 (1965), 30.
- ⁵⁶ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 28 October 1957 (Ginsberg Papers, Columbia; Box 2, fol. 3).
- ⁵⁷ Harris, *Letters 1945-1959*, p. xl.
- ⁵⁸ *Naked Lunch*, p. 104.
- ⁵⁹ *Naked Lunch*, p. 19.
- ⁶⁰ *Naked Lunch*, p. 51, p. 26, and p. 52.
- ⁶¹ Lydenberg, 'Notes from the Orifice', 57.
- ⁶² For an extended treatise on the surveillance of the body and questions of control and power, see Michel Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).
- ⁶³ Lydenberg, 'Notes from the Orifice', 64.
- ⁶⁴ *Naked Lunch*, p. 110.
- ⁶⁵ Sawday, *Emblazoned on the Body: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 1.
- ⁶⁶ Lydenberg, 'Notes from the Orifice', 59.
- ⁶⁷ Elizabeth Klaver, *Sites of Autopsy in Contemporary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 19.
- ⁶⁸ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p. 103.
- ⁶⁹ Burroughs to Dave Haselwood, 24 June 1960, *Letters 1959-1974*, p. 33.
- ⁷⁰ Sawday, *Emblazoned on the Body*, p. 2.
- ⁷¹ Burroughs, 'The Cut Up Method', in *The Moderns: an Anthology of New Writing in America*, ed. by Leroi Jones (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965), pp. 345-348, p. 347.

- ⁷² Burroughs to Ginsberg, 21 June 1960, *Letters 1959-1974*, p. 31.
- ⁷³ Burroughs to Gysin, November 1960 (Burroughs Papers, Berg Collection; Series III, Box 85, fol. 2).
- ⁷⁴ *The Soft Machine*, p. 55.
- ⁷⁵ *The Soft Machine*, p. 57.
- ⁷⁶ Undated manuscript fragment found in the Burroughs Papers, Berg Collection; Series I, Box 5, fol. 37b.
- ⁷⁷ *Nova Express*, p. 157.
- ⁷⁸ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p. 43.
- ⁷⁹ Tanner, 'Rub Out the Word', p. 112.
- ⁸⁰ Didion, 'Wired for Shock Treatments', 2-3.
- ⁸¹ *The Soft Machine*, p. 129.
- ⁸² *The Ticket That Exploded*, p. 159.
- ⁸³ *Nova Express*, p. 157.
- ⁸⁴ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 148.
- ⁸⁵ Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, p. 100.
- ⁸⁶ Burroughs, 'Interview with Felix Scorpio, London 1969', in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960 – 1997*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), pp. 116-125, p. 117.
- ⁸⁷ Robert Motherwell, quoted in Brandon Taylor, *Collage: the Making of Modern Art* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p. 105.
- ⁸⁸ Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969), p. 18.
- ⁸⁹ Lydenberg, 'Notes from the Orifice', p. 70.
- ⁹⁰ Burroughs, 'The Photo Collage'. On the original typescript the word 'mask' is crossed out and followed by the word 'make' – I have retained the error here because it seems revealing, reiterating Burroughs' awareness of the multi-faceted nature of collage, which can simultaneously mask and make statements.
- ⁹¹ Miles, *El Hombre Invisible*, p. 131.
- ⁹² Ashbery, Introduction to *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. viii-ix.
- ⁹³ Theodore Solotaroff, 'The Algebra of Need', *New Republic*, 5 August 1967, 29-34, 34.
- ⁹⁴ Burroughs/Daniel Odier, *The Job: Interviews with William Burroughs* (London: Cape, 1970), p. 56.
- ⁹⁵ 'Interview with Felix Scorpio, London 1969', in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, p. 118.
- ⁹⁶ Burroughs to Ginsberg, 23 May 1952 (Ginsberg Papers, Columbia; Box 1, fol. 22).
- ⁹⁷ Calder, *TLS*, 21 November 1963, 947.
- ⁹⁸ Neal Oxenhandler, 'Listening to Burroughs' Voice', *Surfiction: Fiction Now ... and Tomorrow*, ed. by Raymond Federman (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975), pp. 181-201, p. 182.
- ⁹⁹ Brion Gysin and Terry Wilson, *Here To Go: Planet R-101* (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 1982), p. 191.
- ¹⁰⁰ Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', p. 6.

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