

# INTERTEXTUAL AND BOUNDARY-CROSSING MONSTROSITY IN WILLIAM BURROUGHS' *NAKED LUNCH*

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## Abstract

The new orientations set by the late 50s American writers have marked new features and peculiarities in the definition of what can be considered as "monstrous". It would appear that such writers realized how enigmatic monstrosity is, since it is a "fluid" and "slippery" entity and it hides everywhere. Among the different forms of monstrosity that criticism has pinpointed and defined up-to-date, my paper means to analyze the subtle relationships between inner and outer monstrosity in W. Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch* (1959). Such inner/outer relationships will be discussed through the consideration of the intertextual and topological characteristics of monstrosity in the novel. Not only do I intend to emphasize the monstrous entity represented by drugs in the book, but I also mean to locate the role of spatial and linguistic elements in the postmodern definition of monstrosity. I will focus on the connections between the protagonists' changing personalities and the borders they cross, as an inverse Dantesque journey into the underworld. The crossing process of Interzone, as well as the "camouflaging" course of changing personalities, will be revisited by taking into account Derrida's theories about anarchy and deconstructionism, as well as his concept of the "impossible possibility" of the events, which will analyze the visceral meanings of the "cut-up" images in the book. As to the boundary-crossing process, the paper means to interpret, by using Lotman's spatial theories, the crossing of the different spaces as deconstructing and reassembling moments of further meanings in the narrative architecture of the book itself.

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**Keywords:** Boundary, monstrosity, deconstructionism, Beat Generation

## Introduction

As one of the most famous Beat Generation writers, Burroughs is the symbol of a new American spirit, which rebels against the spiritually stultifying conformity and materialism of the post-war period, through experiments with sexuality (several of the beats including Burroughs and Ginsberg were gay) and "mind-expanding substances", as well as openness to the influence of non-Western cultures. As a consequence, criticism has often considered Burroughs' works as chaotic narrative spaces, "affected" by their author's flows of thoughts and by the frightening and alienating mixture of objects and concepts, which common people may not be familiar with. According to McClure, "Burroughs deals with this issue of word and image in *Naked Lunch* in a complex and ultimately terrifying way"<sup>74</sup>. Whereas Bliss says that "His [Burroughs'] method in *Naked Lunch* is thus nothing less than the orchestration of chaos"<sup>75</sup>. Moreover, as Wilson writes, "*Naked Lunch* is a difficult text to follow; it takes its reader through a labyrinth of incoherent narrative fragments. To complicate its arrangement,

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. McClure, Andrew S. "The Word, Image, and Addiction: Language and the JunkEquation in William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*", *Dyonisos*, 6, 2 (1996), 7.

<sup>75</sup> Bliss, Michael. "The Orchestration of Chaos: Verbal Technique in William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*", *Enclitic*, 1, 1 (1977), 61.

the book is littered with graphic language, sexual violence and drug abuse”<sup>76</sup>. The list of the critical comments could go on and on, but I will stop with Hilfer’s, who says that “*Naked Lunch* is not a novel of characters or action but of voices, voices cajoling, seducing, and warning. [...] The action of *Naked Lunch* is, quite simply, the moment by moment relation of narrator and reader”<sup>77</sup>. Having considered the main perspective of criticism on Burroughs’ work, I would like to examine *Naked Lunch* (1958) from a slightly different hermeneutical approach. Owing to the author’s use of numerous signs, clues, places and identities, criticism has considered the novel as a precious source of new and original meanings, deriving from the assembling process of apparently isolated literary fragments. It lends itself to a multiple range of interpretations if one takes into account the para-textual and social elements, surrounding the enigmatic and non-linear narrative scaffold of the novel. Although the title of this paper suggests a rather interesting but, at the same time, expected theme such as monstrosity in Burroughs’ novel, as a result of the numerous rapes, tortures, sexual and even cannibalistic scenes characterizing the text, what I mean to analyze goes further beyond the simple meaning that the word monstrosity may suggest. Besides being a chaotic “collection” of thoughts, ideas and vulgar representations of (homo)sexual tortures and drug abuse, *Naked Lunch* is a work of art which discusses and decomposes the function of language and narrative patterns<sup>78</sup>. As Burroughs writes in a letter to Irving Rosenthal, “THIS [*Naked Lunch*] IS NOT A NOVEL. And should not appear looking like one”<sup>79</sup>. However, the deconstructing elements of the language, which have already been discussed by some critics, generate a further deconstructing process, namely the destruction of those spatial borders that mark every single part of the book.

## I.

In this first part of the paper, I intend to focus on the concept of frontier, as a spatial and physical border which is continually crossed all over the text and, as a consequence, tends to fade out as the narrative goes by. Borders constitute both the time-space dimension of the book, with its numerous geographical references, and its linguistic structure, as lines of frontiers among the different narrator voices. The dissolution of the borders is primarily evident in the fragmentation of the spatial and geographical dimension<sup>80</sup>. There are various references to geographical spaces all over the text, but the readers are denied the sense of a precise time-space collocation and never grasp the narrator’s spatial perspective. The impression that the author is in different places at once stands out in the very first pages. From Chicago, a “[...] rancid magic of slot machines and roadhouses” (11), to New Orleans, depicted as “[...] a dead museum” (13). From Mexico, “In Cuernavaca or was it Taxco?” (18) to Tangiers, where, talking about a woman, Jane, and a “pimp trombone player”, the writer says “A year later in Tangier I heard she was dead” (18, 19). According to Lotman, a frontier is obviously strictly connected to the space that it limits<sup>81</sup>. However, the book seems to question the rigid linearity which delimits any spatial entity. The intercrossing process of the

<sup>76</sup> Wilson, Meagan. “Your Reputation Precedes You: A Reception Study of *Naked Lunch*”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 35, 2 (2012), 98.

<sup>77</sup> Hilfer, Anthony Channel. “Mariner and Wedding Guest in William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*”, *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 22 (1980), 253.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Bliss, Michael. *op. cit.*, 59.

<sup>79</sup> Burroughs, William B. *Naked Lunch*. Grauerholz, James, Miles, Barry (eds.), Ballard J.G.(intr.). London: Harper Perennial, 2010, 249. All subsequent quotations are from this edition with the page number in parenthesis.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Johnson, Rob. “William S. Burroughs as ‘Good Ol’ Boy’: *Naked Lunch* in East Texas”, in Harris, Oliver, MacFadyen Ian (eds.). *Naked Lunch @50: Anniversary Essays*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2009, 43.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Lotman, Jurij Michajlovic, Uspenskij, Boris Andreevic. *Tipologia della cultura*. Milano: Bompiani, 1975, 164.

borders, the continual spatial shifting and the non-linear narrative generate smaller spaces, whose existence does not depend on the other geographical areas mentioned in the text, because each single space is “[...] an anarchist self-governing community” or a “temporary autonomous zone”<sup>82</sup>. The whole text is composed of numerous events and facts which are not apparently tied to one another, since they read like single and “isolated” descriptions of everyday moments of life. It seems that the author simply combines different accounts of people from different parts of the world, without caring for any logical interconnection.

Like multifaceted mosaics, the “temporary autonomous zones” coexist in the novel as independent spatial entities, whose casual interaction conditions the deepest aspects of human beings. The geographical setting within which the author includes real places, from the U.S.A. through Mexico to North Africa, develops itself towards the frontiers of the unreal, since Burroughs goes beyond the geographical areas of this world. He crosses their frontiers and creates new imaginary lands. As the narrative goes by, the readers suddenly find themselves in the middle of nowhere. On describing doctor Benway, we “run into” a state called Freeland, “[...] a place given over to free love and continual bathing” (19). Benway then dwells on his previous life in the land of Annexia as a “Total Demoralizer”, and describes the different methods of torture. Furthermore, we are given an account of the four parties of Interzone (the Liquefactionists, the Senders, the Factualists and the Divisionists), an imaginary land whose name suggests its border-crossing entity. Being inhabited by people who “[...] are based on incompatible totalitarian projects for the human body”, Interzone represents an ironic utopic place, where rules and norms manage every single man’s life<sup>83</sup>. The borders marking the different areas where the actions take place are gradually abolished and the author “migrates” to unreal places. The description of the social context and organization of the imaginary lands must clearly respond to the necessity to ridicule and condemn totalitarian regimes, on the wake of such dystopic works as *1984* and *Animal Farm*. Burroughs must have been aware of the steady dangers and threat of the dictatorial regimes in the world, even after the Second World War, which left a deep border on the planet separating the West and East countries, as two “parties” of opposite political orientation. Borders, therefore, are everywhere in the novel. Each event and situation marks its own specific “topographic” space, but each of these fragments forms a complex structure of signs and meanings, which, on crossing their own borders, constitute the paradigmatic and diegetic setting of the text.

Such a remarkable spatial fragmentation obviously reflects itself on the linguistic level, owing to the confusing “sounds” of the different narrative voices throughout the text. The book has “[...] two main characters: (1) the narrative voice in its numerous guises, [...] called, for convenience sake, the narrator, and (2) the target of that voice’s persuasions, a character variously known as ‘you,’ ‘The Reader,’ and ‘Gentle reader.’<sup>84</sup>” After an attentive reading of the book, it emerges that Burroughs operates a disintegration of the language and that every word, on the wake of certain 20<sup>th</sup> century literary movements, is deprived of its real “content”, of its symbolical and allegorical import<sup>85</sup>. Different voices mingle and clash to cross the linguistic borders and generate further explosions of senses and meanings, to quote Lotman’s principle. The presence of different and autonomous narrative spaces explains the polyphonic import of the narrative voice, which is apparently fragmented into mysterious and

<sup>82</sup> Cf. DiMaggio, Kenneth. “Seceding from the Narrative: How the Criminal Underworlds in William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* Map out a Non-Linear Narrative through the Creation of ‘Temporary Autonomous Zones’”, *International Journal of the Book*, 8, 1 (2011), 11-12.

<sup>83</sup> Murphy, Timothy S. “Intersection Points: Teaching William Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*”, *College Literature*, 27, 1 (2000), 93.

<sup>84</sup> Hilfer, Anthony Channel. *Op. cit.*, 253.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. McClure. Andrew S. *Op. cit.*, 15-16.

unrecognizable voices, but accounts, at the same time, of a multi perspective view of the world. One of the most important aspects of this polyphony is embodied by the “interior polyphony” of the Liquefactionist Salvador Hassan, who has twenty-three passports and a fragmented identity: “Salvador Hassan O’Leary, alias The Shoe Store Kid, alias Wrong Way Marv, alias After Birth Leary, alias Slunky Pete, alias Placenta Juan, alias K.Y. Ahmed, alias El Chinche, alias El Culito etc., etc. [...]” (131). Likewise, the multitude of images, representations and perspectives in the book stand out in the chapter about Hassan: “Pictures of men and women, boys and girls, animals, fish, birds, the copulating rhythm of the universe flows through the room, a great blue tide of life” (69). The explosions of senses and meanings generate new moments of unpredictability, as they put into question and deconstruct the feeble axiological structure of the book<sup>86</sup>. As soon as new stable senses are created, the linguistic explosions decompose the semiotic structure and the readers are asked to re-contextualize the social and the diegetic elements of the text. Such moments of unpredictability embody a narrative “Big Bang”. The novel reads like a collection of narrative galaxies and universes, whose “entropic” effects symbolize the caducity of life and man’s certainties. The readers may think that they have grasped the meanings of the events and situations in the book but, afterwards, it emerges that they have to relinquish their temporary beliefs and certainties and look for new unpredictable senses and meanings. The steady fragmentation of the linguistic borders is characterized by “carnavalesque” and bizarre images and phrases, whose frantic development always questions the truthfulness of the different voices.

However, the real meaning of the frontier in the novel, both on a physical and a linguistic level, needs to be integrated with the teratological aspects, in order to obtain a more complete and uniform perspective. The structure of the novel itself has a “monstrous” organization, because it constantly draws the readers’ attention on the changeable appearances of every single element, be it one of the characters or a geographical reference. Every single event or situation in the book is monstrous: rapes, tortures, cannibalistic scenes and strange surgeries such as lobotomies, which may recall the mysterious events in Williams’ *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958). The consequence of the monstrous features of the book is linked to a strict relationship between language and drug addiction. The latter, by affecting the biological state, is the source of the numerous linguistic and narrative anomalies in the novel. Addiction belongs to the characters’ inner dimensions, to their biological state, and it establishes a constant flux of social and interpersonal exchanges with the outer dimension, represented by language. Language is the outer expression of man’s inner universe and, as such, is subject to the capsizing process of linguistic hierarchies generated by the pernicious effects of drug addiction. The inner implications of drug addiction makes, therefore, monstrosity a very complex scope of discussion, since its aspect has deeply changed over the last few years. Monstrosity is not a material entity, nor a well-visible being. It is rather a “fluid”, “magmatic”, “slippery” element, whose identity steadily changes and turns into mutable beings<sup>87</sup>. The book is characterized by a number of differentiated episodes and situations marked by teratological effects, which may easily recall such monstrous symbols as Frankenstein. The description at the hospital reads as follows: “Ho-Hum Dept.: Willy The agent taking the cure in Hassan’s Hospital...Hassan’s Hospital adjoining cemetery...[...] Professional mourners solicit relatives in the waiting room and corridor” (47). The hospital seems to represent a no man’s place, where people are doomed to lose their identity and to end up in the adjacent cemetery. Moreover, Doctor Benway’s dialogue with

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Lotman, Jurij Michajlovic. *La cultura e l’esplosione. Prevedibilità e imprevedibilità*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1993, 155.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Ettore Emanuela, Gasparro Rosalba, Micks Gabriella (eds.). *Il corpo del mostro. Metamorfosi letterarie tra classicismo e modernità*. Napoli: Liguori, 2002, 1-3.

the nurse seems to be uttered by two automatons when the former describes Doctor Tetrizzini: “He 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, [...]” (52).

Although the novel abounds in descriptions and references to scaring surgeries, human organs and parts of the body, thus merging the real and the unreal, monstrosity needs to be searched beyond the appearances of such Frankenstein-like descriptions. The author takes the readers into the most secret dimensions of the text, by drawing their attention on the inner parts of the human body. It seems that even the clearest symbols of monstrosity are slippery and changeable. Before trying to identify the real monsters in the novel, I would like, once again, to dwell on what we have previously identified as “temporary autonomous zones”, namely topological entities of the book which, as independent parts, interact among one another, thus getting over the limits that separate them. The presence of these “isolated” zones is justified by the use of painterly techniques, such as the “cut-up” technique, which tends to put together different images to form a sort of a collage, thus removing the rigid frontiers separating each part of this huge mosaic. The apparently casual presence of facts and accounts which are randomly depicted generates a new vision of life, according to which both the living and the not animated elements in the text are included in narrative spaces, and whose chaotic mutual interaction, in their turn, reflects the chaotic and impulsive state of the writer’s state of mind. As regards the use of the cut-up technique, Burroughs states in an interview that “The point about cut-ups is that life is a *cut-up*. Every time you look out the window or walk down the street, your consciousness is being intruded upon by all these random factors”<sup>88</sup>.

As a result of a steady interchange between the inner dimension, represented by the human consciousness, and the outer world, that is what a human being perceives on looking out of the window, man experiences a stream of consciousness, a flux of separated and disordered impressions and ideas, which puts together the most hidden elements of the interior world. The osmotic interaction characterizing the relations between inner and outer spaces designs the topographic structure of the book, where each “temporary autonomous zone” exerts its influence over the characters’ lives. The abolition of spatial limits in the book is also represented by some crude descriptions illustrating the interchange between the inner and the outer parts of the human body: “Naked Mr America, [...], screams out: ‘My asshole confounds the Louvre! I fart ambrosia and shit pure gold turds! My cock spurts soft diamonds in the morning sunlight!’” (64). The organic parts and the biological liquids issued by the human body stand for the material symbol of this constant interchange between what is hidden in the bowels and what is visible outside them. After quoting such a passage, we could think that Burroughs is simply carrying out a process of sudden anarchy, by abolishing the traditional hierarchical patterns of life and narrative techniques. By following such an interpretative route, the monstrous aspects of the novel can be read from a derridian perspective, since, as Wood writes, “Through this mobile deconstruction, Derrida seeks to turn hierarchy into anarchy”<sup>89</sup>. However, the derridian reading of the novel does not only consist in analyzing the hierarchical deconstruction of old and traditional structures. I have previously stated how difficult is to identify the real teratological aspects of the book. The source of this statement lies in the falseness of appearances, which leads to what Derrida calls the “impossible possibility”. The French philosopher recognizes the importance of negative

<sup>88</sup> McCaffery, Larry, McMenam, Jim. “An Interview with William S. Burroughs”, in Hibbard, Allen. *Conversations with William S. Burroughs*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1999, 193.

<sup>89</sup> Wood, Brent. “William S. Burroughs and the Language of Cyberpunk”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 23, 1 (1968), 14.

elements and forces in the development and configuration of the events as such. According to him, for instance, a real promise is a promise that is likely to be broken, otherwise it is simply a forecast, a prediction, as well as forgiveness is forgiving what cannot be forgiven: “If I forgive because it’s forgivable, because it’s easy to forgive, I’m not forgiving. I can only forgive, if I do forgive, when there is something unforgivable, when it isn’t possible to forgive”<sup>90</sup>. Likewise, “If I give what I can give, if I give what I have and what I can give, I’m not giving. [...] you have to give what you don’t have”<sup>91</sup>. Therefore, any act, be it forgiving, giving something or helping someone must involve the concept of impossibility. A real event can happen only when the impossible, that is what prevents that event from happening, plays its role in the “construction” of the event itself. Derrida says that “The event, if there is one, consists in doing the impossible. [...] giving or forgiving, if there is any, must appear impossible”<sup>92</sup>.

What does all this have to do with Burroughs’ novel? Derrida’s discourse about the impossible possibility of a deed can explain the narrative architecture of the book. As discussed before, on using such deconstructive devices such as the “cut-up” and the “collage” techniques, Burroughs embodies an apparent realm of disorder, where changing personalities and places do not form a compact social context. The real entity of what can be defined monstrous in the novel is that invisible being which is hidden behind the masks of the changing characters and places. Such a being turns out to be difficult, or even impossible, to grasp and to perceive but, owing to this, it is monstrous. Monstrosity does not lie in what appears scaring or frightening at first sight. Otherwise, as Derrida has it, it would not be monstrous. Monstrosity “camouflages” in the different personal universes of the characters and things. It acquires new multiple appearances, new faces, which often elude our attention and analysis, in that it changes its peculiarities and places. It goes into and out of the human body, it can be both white dust (heroin) and viruses, such as the ones which are sexually transmitted among the different people mentioned in the novel and that eventually *kill* them. Therefore, the originality of Burroughs’ work does not lie in the “cut-up” technique, which partly may respond to the new frontiers of the twentieth century psychological studies, as well as Joyce’s stream of consciousness. On using such literary device, the writer means to make the readers aware of a new perspective of narrating facts and situations. As he states in an interview about the function of art, “I would say that the function of art or, in fact, of any creative thought is to make people aware of what they know and don’t know”<sup>93</sup>. Burroughs does not simply show the monstrous aspects of his work by means of violent and indecent deeds. The real essence of monstrosity lies, as mentioned before, in the inner parts of the human body, which are, in their turn, “fed” by the obscenity of everyday deeds, of outer events.

On describing the biological functions of the human body and its reaction to drug-taking, the writer begins a “journey” into the biological functions of the human beings. By doing so, not only does he explore the mysterious interactions between the outer elements, such as drugs, and the inner ones of the human body, but he underlines man’s monstrous aspects. The latter are represented by the reactions generated by such outer substances as drugs on the deepest parts of man’s body. As Burroughs writes in the paragraph about Benway, “Some of my learned colleagues (nameless assholes) have suggested that junk derives its euphoric effect from direct stimulation of the orgasm center” (31). The euphoric effect of drugs is generated by their stimulation of the most intimate and reserved parts of the complex human biological world. The apparent monstrosity of the real, of the outer world,

<sup>90</sup> Derrida, Jacques. “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event”, *Critical Inquiry*, 33, 2 (2007), 449.

<sup>91</sup> *Ivi*, 450.

<sup>92</sup> *Ivi*, 449-450.

<sup>93</sup> Skerl, Jennie. *Op. cit.*, 124.

derives from the monstrosity of the combined effects of drugs on man's most sensitive parts. And this combination creates monstrous elements all over the narrative, which interact among one another like small atomic particles, thus forming a heterogeneous and fragmented world. The monstrous aspect of the human body takes its shape in the following description: "The addict regards his body impersonally as an instrument to absorb the medium in which he lives, evaluates his tissue with the cold hand of a horse trader" (57). The body does not represent a living organism, but it tends to become a mechanical object, which responds to the mechanical "operations" of everyday actions. Furthermore, Burroughs' exploration of the inner spaces in *Naked Lunch* "[...] was free of the restrictions of morality, society and direction that direct the flow of action in the real world"<sup>94</sup>. By entering the remotest "regions" of the human biological universe, the author gets rid of the outer conventions and rules, and gives vent to the primordial and instinctual elements of his interior feelings. He shows the monstrosity of man's neurological system, on the very moment the latter is stimulated by the action of such outer elements as drugs.

The novel offers a number of passages where the opposition and the interaction between the inner and the outer dimensions stand out<sup>95</sup>. In the appendix "Post Script...Wouldn't you?" (207), the author writes: "A junky does not want to be warm, he wants to be Cool-Cooler-COLD. But he wants The Cold like he wants His junk – NOT OUTSIDE where it does him no good but INSIDE so he can sit around with a spine like a frozen hydraulic jack...his metabolism approaching Absolute ZERO" (208). Burroughs points out the protective function of the inner space, where a junk can find a shelter and, as a result, a longer life. In addition, afterwards in the appendix, the author emphasizes the difference between the inner space of the tent, where a category of drug addicts is "protected", and the space surrounding the tent itself, which represents the place of coldness and *non-life*: "[...] How low the other junkies are whereas WE – WE have this tent and this lamp and this tent and this lamp and this tent and nice and warm in here nice and warm nice and IN HERE and nice and OUTSIDE IT'S COLD....IT'S COLD OUTSIDE [...]" (209). The steady repetition of *in* and *out* in the final pages of the novel proves to be meaningful, and it underscores the vital function of the inner space of the tent. The "Big Bang" of the whole narrative is generated by a steady process of interchange between the characters' inner dimensions and the outer world, through the skin holes that "convey" the drug they take. As Beales suggests "By drawing attention to the barrier between the real and inner space Burroughs may be seen to make literal the premise that the way beyond the real was through a hole in the skin made by a needle"<sup>96</sup>. This process of "bilateral communication" implies a constant process of physical and material crossing, which reproduces the crossing of different boundaries and frontiers of the author during his trip from the U.S.A. to North Africa.

Alongside the feeble boundaries separating man's world from reality, it needs to say that the scientific and fanta-scientific language makes the boundaries between the real and the unreal less and less perceptible and tangible, thus proving the development of the teratological elements generated by the frontier-crossing process. The "exterior" structure of the text is permeated by scientific definitions and acronyms of biological phenomena and effects, which read like pseudoscientific words and concepts. The author mentions the "un-D.T., "Undifferentiated Tissue" (111), a jelly-like substance growing on a man's mouth. And on talking about the addicts, he explains "The relation between an O.A. (Oblique Addict) and

<sup>94</sup> Beales, Brodie. " 'The Way OUT is the Way IN': Junk and the Subversion of the Nation/Symptom in William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*", *Transnational Literature*, 1, 1 (2008), 6.

<sup>95</sup> On talking about the monstrous and the New Wave, Pasquino writes that the New Wave means to explore the inner psychic space, thus opposing the survey of the outer space and the survey of the inner space (cf. Pasquino, Andrea, "Il mostruoso inteso come deformazione immaginaria dell'ipotesi scientifica", in *op. cit.*, 131-132.

<sup>96</sup> Beales, Brodie. *Op. cit.*, 4.

his R.C. (Recharge Connection) [...]” (58). In the chapter “Meeting of International Conference of Technological Psychiatry” (87), he refers to, by means of the doctor, “*The Complete All American De-anxietized Man*” (87) and to the “*forcible lobotomy*” (88). Not to mention the explanation of the “I.R.s-Identical Replicas” (138) when he talks about the Divisionists. The use of this alienating language generates an idiosyncratic context, which is characterized by the presence of numerous neologisms and phrases. This approach allows “[...] him [Burroughs] the freedom of radical estrangement while remaining cognitive”<sup>97</sup>. This sense of estrangement is supported by the use of a “pseudo-physical” language, expressing and analyzing the new frontiers of Burroughs’ pseudoscience. Traditional language is, in fact, the means by which totalitarian regimes express themselves and maintain their power. The anarchic language of *Naked Lunch* subverts social hierarchical structures and totalitarian systems and, by demolishing the geographical and linguistic boundaries, it gradually outlines the real monsters of the book<sup>98</sup>.

As the narration goes by, we soon realize that the book itself becomes an “empty body”, which vaguely recalls the title *Naked Lunch*. Like a mummy, it is emptied of its main organs, the words, in that the latter are deprived of their traditional function and meaning and always find a possible and a different collocation. Hence, the physical borders of the body and the linguistic borders of the words tend to merge. On depicting his chaotic narrative world, the author employs an emptying process to re-discuss the social and anthropological dynamics and create new deformed bodies, monstrous beings and even senseless phrases, which all act in a confused and ever self-dismantling context. From this perspective, *Naked Lunch* “[...] is intensely visceral in its imagery, relying heavily on descriptions of sexual interplay, deformed bodies, and especially olfactory experience”<sup>99</sup>. The title itself leads us to man’s primordial needs, nutrition, and, as such, it questions the most mysterious features of human addiction both to physiological needs and to drugs. The empty book thus becomes a metaphor and comes to represent a “hollow” body, deprived of its main organs and functions. The author goes beyond the main themes, such as drugs and homosexuality, and, on emphasizing both drug and sex addiction, “digs” into the human body and takes out its “content”, to reveal men’s “naked” parts, their deepest needs and most vulnerable aspects. Burroughs, like ancient civilizations, seems to reproduce human sacrifices on offering the organs to the greedy institutions of his time. His recall of such occult arts is represented by the hint at the Maya, who “[...] were limited by isolation” (137) and, at “Easter Island” (85). As Ballard puts it, he “[...] sees addiction as part of the global conspiracy by the presiding powers of our world – the media conglomerates, the vast political and commercial bureaucracies, and a profit-driven medical science” (V). The real monsters are addiction and the political and economic organizations which manipulate human life. The writer means to make mankind aware of this conspiracy by inviting the readers to this “naked lunch” of absurd stories of raped and enslaved people. He even offers the menu of this lunch, which is based on what he calls the “Transcendental Cuisine” (125).

Food becomes the means that totalitarian regimes and governments use to poison people’s life and to reduce them to a state of physical and psychological slavery. By crossing the physical borders of the body, with its emptying process, and the linguistic spaces of the common language, with the numerous senseless expressions, Burroughs gets to the teratological dimension of the world. The latter is populated by conceited statesmen, whose distorted and ambiguous language and actions dominate and enslave human conscience, thus increasing its alienated and monstrous dimension. In derridian words, the monstrosity of the

<sup>97</sup> Mathieson, Kenneth. “The Influence of Science Fiction in the Contemporary American Novel”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 12, 1 (1985), 28.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Wood, Brent. *Op. cit.*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> Wood, Brent. *Op. cit.*, 17.



totalitarian control is not exerted through the visible actions of everyday life. It is an invisible force, which aims at destroying men's personality by means of the dictators' meanness and sneakiness. The actual control is out of reach of human beings and pursues intangible aims, it overcomes the limits of human imagination, in that "[...] *control can never be a means to any practical end...It can never be a means to anything but more control...Like junk...*" (137).

## Conclusion

Notwithstanding the chaotic and "spiraling" impact of the narrative, Burroughs seems to convey not only the importance of freedom and literal expression, but he means to underline the vital impulse generated by the chaotic movement of his narrative<sup>100</sup>. In the apparently deadly dimensions, where people throw violent orgies and give vent to their rudest sexual drives, Burroughs builds a polyphonic reality which does not intend to be subdued by the injustice and the wrongs of a corrupted and flattening state<sup>101</sup>. By denouncing the state and its social order, Burroughs can live an alternative reality which, far from being fantastic, is Fanta-scientific and, therefore, closer to a real world, where supernatural forces and everyday elements interact.

The destroying effect of the "narrative explosion" turns out to be the source of a new order of the things, a new order of the world. The new world is depicted in the final pages of the book, where Burroughs seems to emerge from the underworld of a Dantesque journey across the different circles of his hellish dimension. After crossing the spatial and linguistic boundaries separating the circles, the scattered and confused fragments of the narrative are finally compacted into a sort of medical treatise, which reads like a scientific illustration of the harmful effects of the different types of drugs. The author seems to have come to a full possession of his own personality and, at the same time, gets rid of the ghosts and the elucubrations that have peopled his narrative. It seems that he finds more optimistic hopes for junks, by using less catastrophic and self-destructive overtones and making them aware of the pernicious effects of drugs. This is proved by the fact that the narrator provides the new generation of teenagers with some advice to avoid the negative experience of drugs. The lexical and physical movement finally converges into the "wise" explanations and descriptions of the drug effects in the close. Having crossed all the borders and thus reached a uniform perspective, the author can now accomplish the purpose to regenerate people's awareness and conscience, in order to oppose the governments' atrocities and their totalitarian control.

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. Goodman, Michael B. "The Customs' Censorship of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*", *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 22, 1 (1980), 92 *et passim*.

<sup>101</sup> Sheehan writes that "*Naked Lunch* is a text made up of numerous different narrative voices that play off each other, including detective, medicinal, pharmacological, carnival and legal narratives, and in such play formulate the satirical, polyphonic structure of this text" (Sheehan, Stephen. "The Written Off Beat: the Rewritten Text of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*", *Philament*, 3 (2004), no pagination.

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