

The yagé aesthetic of William Burroughs: the publication and development of his work 1953-1965

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**The *Yagé* Aesthetic of William Burroughs:
The Publication and Development of his Work
1953-1965**

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PhD Thesis

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2010

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all materials from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Joanna Harrop

Abstract

My concern in this thesis is to show that a reconstruction of the publishing history of the work of William Burroughs offers a new, critical perspective on his experiments with psychoactive substances and their connection to his developing practice.

I begin with an exploration of the publication of *The Yage Letters* (1963) and *Naked Lunch* (1959), and reveal how the complexities of their publishing histories shaped their critical reception. I examine the legal defence of *Naked Lunch* as it developed from the *Big Table* Post Office hearing through to the 1965 Boston trial and demonstrate the degree to which censorship came to define the published text. The legal defence of *Naked Lunch*, as it was incorporated into the Grove publication, emphasised the issue of opiate addiction. The way in which Burroughs' 1953 letters to Allen Ginsberg were reworked as *The Yage Letters* did much to conceal the significance of *yagé* for Burroughs' later work. Together, these publishing histories have obscured the relationship between his use of psychoactive substances and his evolving aesthetic.

At the same time many of Burroughs' most experimental - and important - works appeared only in small, ephemeral magazines. His adoption of avant-garde strategies such as collaboration and collage and his dedication to multimedia experimentation with the non-chemical alteration of consciousness made conventional book publication problematic or unsuitable. These experiments in aesthetic production, I argue, are central to our understanding of Burroughs. His main published writings must be re-evaluated as one element in this collage of multimedia activities.

I argue that Burroughs' experiences with *yagé*, mescaline and dimethyltryptamine exerted an influence on his shift to experimentalism in the early 1960s, which sought to replicate the experience of these altered states of consciousness. That this is so is evident from a study of two collections of correspondence - Burroughs' letters to Ginsberg held at Columbia University Library and his letters to Brion Gysin in the William S. Burroughs Papers held at the New York Public Library. My reading of these letters forms an important component of my argument, working to reveal what the conventional 'published' Burroughs serves to conceal.

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Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgments	5
List of Illustrations	8
Introduction	9
Chapter 1	
<i>Yagé</i>	31
The Search for <i>Yagé</i> in Burroughs' letters of 1953	32
Ten Years of Change: 1953 to 1963	47
The 1963 Publication of <i>The Yage Letters</i>	52
Chapter 2	
How Censorship Determined the Publication and Reception of <i>Naked Lunch</i>	62
The Early Publication History of <i>Naked Lunch</i> : Censorship and the Formation of a Defence	66
Introducing <i>Naked Lunch</i> : How the 'Deposition' Became a Part of the Story	74
Grove Press and <i>Naked Lunch</i> : The Construction of a Defence within the Published Text	84
The Trial and Defence of <i>Naked Lunch</i> : A Socially Valuable Document of Drug Addiction	89
A History of Negotiation: The Relationship between Censorship and Publishing	98
The 'Deposition' and the Critical Reception of <i>Naked Lunch</i>	108
Chapter 3	
<i>Naked Lunch</i> as an Intermediary Work: The Long <i>Naked Lunch</i>	116
An Alternative Ending: Burroughs' Appendix	117
<i>Naked Lunch</i>	136
Chapter 4	
Letters to Allen Ginsberg and Brion Gysin 1958-1960: Translating Experience into Experiment	157
Charting the Influence of Psychoactive Substances: The Study of Altered States of Consciousness	157
'Something Happens': The Context of Experiment and Art as Process	162
'Get high on my ear phones': Recognising and Replicating Altered States of Consciousness	175

Chapter 5	
Letters to Brion Gysin 1960-1961:	
From Chemical to Non-chemical Alterations of Consciousness	189
Mescaline, DMT and Synaesthesia	191
Burroughs and Timothy Leary	215
Chapter 6	
Burroughs' Yagé Aesthetic	
and the Avant-garde Aesthetic of the Little Magazine	227
Researching the Little Magazine as an Alternative Medium	233
Burroughs and the Mimeograph Magazines	241
Burroughs in <i>My Own Mag</i>	260
Chapter 7	
The Third Mind	277
Collaboration and Publication: Antithetical Practices	278
Collaboration as an Avant-garde Practice	285
An Alternative Trilogy of Cut-up Texts:	
<i>The Exterminator, Minutes to Go</i> and <i>The Third Mind</i>	293
The Role of the Published Text in Burroughs' Experimental Work	306
Conclusion	326
Bibliography	331

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1.	‘The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin’. Page enclosed with a letter from Burroughs to Irving Rosenthal dated 20 July 1960. Grove Press Records, Syracuse.	124
Figs 2-5.	Drawings enclosed with letters from Burroughs to Irving Rosenthal 1959. Grove Press Records, Syracuse University.	128
Figs 6-9.	Drawings enclosed with letters from Burroughs to Irving Rosenthal 1959. Grove Press Records, Syracuse University.	129
Figs 10-17.	Still images from <i>The Cut Ups</i> and <i>Towers Open Fire</i> .	166
Figs 18-25.	Still Images from <i>The Cut Ups</i> and <i>Towers Open Fire</i> .	167
Fig. 26.	Letter from Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg, page two, dated 2 January 1959. Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University.	179
Fig. 27.	Letter from Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg, page three, dated 2 January 1959. Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University.	180
Fig. 28.	Burroughs, untitled scrapbook, <i>Lines</i> , 5 (May 1965).	247
Fig. 29.	John Furnival, ‘Pisa’, <i>Lines</i> , 6 (November 1965).	250
Fig. 30.	John Furnival, ‘The Fall of the Tower of Babel’, <i>Lines</i> , 6 (November 1965).	251
Fig. 31.	John Furnival, ‘Devil Trap’; Burroughs, ‘The Last Post Danger Ahead’, <i>Lines</i> , 6 (November 1965).	253
Fig. 32.	Cover of <i>My Own Mag</i> , 5 (May 1964). Issue sent by Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg featuring a handwritten letter. Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University.	263
Fig. 33.	Burroughs, ‘The Moving Times’, <i>My Own Mag</i> , 5 (May 1964). Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University.	264
Fig. 34.	Burroughs, ‘The Moving Times’ page two, <i>My Own Mag</i> , 5 (May 1964). Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University.	265

Introduction

In January 1953 William Burroughs travelled from Mexico to Panama and then to Colombia to begin a seven month journey in search of the psychoactive vine *yagé*. His letters to Allen Ginsberg during these months document the places and people he encountered, time spent in small towns and jungles, observations on the civil conflict in Colombia and on the rubber and oil industries. Against this background of events Burroughs wrote about his experiences of taking *yagé* which is prepared by boiling the bark of the vine with a second plant ingredient to produce a psychoactive ‘brew’. In his letters to Ginsberg, Burroughs wrote that the effects of the *yagé* brew were ‘indescribable’,¹ that ‘[i]t is the most powerful drug I have ever experienced’, ‘it produces the most complete derangement of the senses’, ‘[y]ou see everything from a special hallucinated viewpoint’, ‘[t]his is insane overwhelming rape of the senses’, ‘[i]f I could only paint I could convey it all’ and ‘Yage is it’.² When his writings on *yagé* were published ten years later in 1963 as *The Yage Letters* none of the above statements were included. Although the published text retained and developed his accounts of the people and places he visited, his most effusive descriptions of the *yagé* experience had disappeared.

This journey in search of *yagé* began a decade of experimentation with psychoactive plants and chemicals. In his later letters to Allen Ginsberg and Brion Gysin from 1958 to 1961 Burroughs referred to mescaline, LSD, psilocybin and dimethyltryptamine (DMT) over thirty times, and many of these references explicitly connected his

¹ Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg 18 June 1953, William S. Burroughs, *The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945-1959*, ed. Oliver Harris. 1993. New York: Penguin, 1994, p.171; hereafter cited as *Letters*.

² Burroughs to Ginsberg 8 July 1953, *Letters*, pp.179-180.

experiences to his experimental work. And yet critics and biographers have repeatedly disregarded Burroughs' use of psychoactive substances, referring to 'his disappointing experience with the yage elixir',³ and 'his aversion to the hallucinogens',⁴ declaring that 'he didn't like psychedelic drugs',⁵ 'Burroughs disdains the hallucinatory drugs',⁶ and that 'Burroughs was never really a fan of psychedelics'.⁷

How do we explain this discrepancy between the epistolary evidence for Burroughs' interest in these substances and the conclusions drawn in biographical and critical studies? I argue that the answer can be found in the impact that the publication history of his work has had upon its reception. Readings of Burroughs' work have been shaped by what is available in a published book format. Because critical reception has been directed by the medium of the published book, it has also been influenced by the compromises made by publishers in response to censorship or commercial interests. The Grove publication of *Naked Lunch* offers the most forceful example of how the actions of a publisher can directly impact upon the reception of a text. From the first publication of extracts of the manuscript, through to its publication in Paris and then America, *Naked Lunch* was defended as a socially valuable document of drug addiction. As a result, Burroughs' descriptions of the *yagé* experience within *Naked Lunch* have been almost entirely overshadowed by Grove's promotion of the subject of opiate addiction in its published edition.

³ John Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001, p.182.

⁴ Alfred Kazin, 'He's Just Wild about Writing' in Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg, eds, *William S. Burroughs at The Front: Critical Reception, 1959-1989*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991, p.116.

⁵ Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*. 1988. London: Pimlico, 1991, p.382.

⁶ Marshall McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs' in Skerl and Lydenberg, p.70.

⁷ Jamie Russell, *Queer Burroughs*. New York: Palgrave, 2001, p.205.

I explore how the relationship between psychoactive substances and Burroughs' work has also been concealed by certain publication contingencies that have influenced the reading of his work in book format. Burroughs' letters, the small press publications, his little magazine contributions and experimental multimedia work - in contrast to the published work - reveal how his *yagé*, mescaline and DMT experiences related to the development of his practice. The marginalisation of the subject of how Burroughs' work may have been influenced by his experiences with psychoactive substances has been the consequence of the limited and fragmentary exposure that critics and readers have had to Burroughs' experimental work of the 1960s in which the evolution of his *yagé* aesthetic is most prominent. Examining the publication and development of the work of just over a decade, from his 1953 *yagé* letters to the collaborative production of *The Third Mind* in 1965, I examine how Burroughs' experiences with psychoactive substances can be viewed as a contributory factor in his shift towards multimedia experimentation, and how this working through of experience into experimentation led to the eventual privileging of process and action in his work of the early 1960s.

This thesis evolved from the study of two collections of correspondence dating from different periods in Burroughs' life and held in separate archives. The opportunity to research his 1953 letters to Ginsberg held at Columbia University *and* his early 1960s letters to Brion Gysin held in the New York Public Library, has made this study possible. Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg in 1953 of his experiences with *yagé* and a close reading of these letters reveals how his writing was transformed during this period. The direction of his letters shifts from an attempt to objectively document the effects of *yagé* to adopting a collage form to *replicate* the alteration of consciousness he experienced. In his letters to Gysin during 1960 and 1961, Burroughs described a

second period of experimentation with the chemical alteration of consciousness, revisiting his earlier experiences with *yagé* through the use of mescaline, DMT, LSD and psilocybin. In this second collection of letters Burroughs wrote openly about the impact of these substances upon his work, including manuscript pages of texts written in response to his experiences, and indicating a cross-over between his chemical and non-chemical multimedia experiments.

It is through a reading of both his 1953 letters to Ginsberg and his letters to Gysin a decade later, that we can begin trace the enduring influence of his *yagé* experiences. Fifteen of the twenty-one letters dating from 10 January to 10 July 1953 that describe Burroughs' journey are published in *The Letters of William S. Burroughs 1945-1959* (1993), but in isolation from his letters of the 1960s describing his further experiments with psychoactive substances, the long term impact of these early *yagé* experiences cannot be ascertained. Over the period of nine years from 1953 to 1961, and from one collection of letters to the other, I trace the evolution of his work from the description to the replication of altered states of mind, leading ultimately to his concentration upon the non-chemical replication of altered states of consciousness. By the end of this second period of experimentation with psychoactive substances, Burroughs was working with tape recorders, photography, colour line walks and synaesthetic shifts between mediums to develop art forms capable of heightening the audience's awareness of their socially conditioned consciousness.

Burroughs first met Brion Gysin in Tangier in 1954 but it was not until they met again in Paris in 1958 that their creative relationship became firmly established. Both Gysin and Burroughs were living in the Beat Hotel in Paris during the late 1950s, and it was

here that they worked together experimenting with cut-ups, tape recordings, writing, painting and activities such as mirror gazing which contributed to the environment of experimentation that nurtured Burroughs' shift to a multimedia practice. Brion Gysin had begun his career as a painter within surrealist circles in Paris in the 1930s, but following his expulsion by André Breton from a group exhibition he moved on to Greece and then New York. Drafted by the United States government in 1944 he was assigned to the Canadian Intelligence Corps. His training included studying the Japanese language which led to a fascination with calligraphy that would have a strong influence on his painting and his collaborative work with Burroughs. After living in Tangier during the 1950s Gysin returned to Paris in 1958.

Burroughs' letters to Gysin were written from London and Tangier, during periods when their joint residency at the Beat Hotel was interrupted, forcing their collaborative relationship to be continued through the medium of letter writing.

Letters have always played an important part in the development of Burroughs' work, and this is also the case with those he addressed to Gysin. These letters provide an insight into his experimental practice of this period. Also contained within the archive in the New York Public Library is a selection of Burroughs' scrapbooks and photographs, and access to this material along with the letters to Gysin leads to the realisation that his published work of the 1960s does not represent the extent and character of his increasingly multimedia aesthetic practice. The use of colour throughout many of the manuscript texts and letters in the archive is striking and the scrapbooks reveal that he was working with the medium of the book in ways that could not be represented in published texts. The quantity of photographic work by Burroughs within the collection demonstrates the extent of his engagement with this

medium, and includes examples of photomontage and his photography of assembled objects. Many of the items in the collection also bring to attention the participatory and practical basis of the work, and my exposure to these has had a direct impact upon my recognition of the intent of this work to induce an alteration in the consciousness of the audience.

Viewing the work unmediated by the form of the published book also enables an appreciation of the fluid interactions between the different mediums, of how closely they are related and work *together*. The photographs, collages, texts and Burroughs' experiments with colour, film and sound form an interactive collage of work which, to be fully appreciated, must be experienced in this form. Archives should not be regarded as necessarily a more authentic experience of the work of a writer or artist than that gained by reading the published works, and archives are themselves subject to the influence of institutional and financial concerns as well as the direct intervention of the writer. But they do offer a significant perspective on a writer's work; in the case of Burroughs they enable an experience of immersion into his experimental work of the 1960s which is radically different from what is encountered when reading his major published texts of this period.

Research conducted in a publisher's archive can introduce a fascinating angle to the study of a writer's work, and this was the case with the Grove Press Records. My study of the files revealed the normally concealed processes of publication, demonstrating how a text is transformed by the activities of editing, printing, presentation and marketing. Held within the Grove Press Records is material relating to the publication and obscenity trial of *Naked Lunch*. This includes a selection of

correspondence between Burroughs, Ginsberg and the editor Irving Rosenthal on the arrangement of the 1962 publication in which they discuss issues such as the inclusion of illustrations and the need for an appendix. Burroughs' letters expressing his enthusiasm for the inclusion of drawings, cut-ups and writings on the cut-up method present a fascinating vision of an alternative *Naked Lunch*. Also contained within these Grove files is the correspondence between lawyer Edward de Grazia and Barney Rosset of Grove Press discussing their preparations for the 1965 Boston obscenity trial, material that has been valuable in my study of the impact that censorship had upon the publication and reception of *Naked Lunch*.

Research into the history of literary censorship has provided a critical framework for my examination of the Grove archival material and my calculation of the impact of censorship upon the publication and critical reception of *Naked Lunch*. Of all these historical accounts, those by Edward de Grazia have particular relevance to this study of *Naked Lunch* because he acted as defence lawyer for Grove Press during the trial. De Grazia's *Censorship Landmarks* (1969) and *Girls Lean Back Everywhere* (1992) document the important changes in American obscenity law of the twentieth century and have helped to determine how censorship directed Grove's construction of the legal defence of the text. It may now seem self-evident that Burroughs' text 'Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness' was included as an introduction to *Naked Lunch* to protect the book against the charge of obscenity, but a conventional reading of the 'Deposition' has shaped the response of many reviewers and critics of Burroughs' most famous work. In this study I look at this publication decision in detail and in reference to the historical relationship between publishing and censorship. Studies such as *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in*

French History, Literature, and Theory (1995) by Nicholas Harrison on the tactics used by publishers to deflect censorship have also provided a context within which to examine the Grove publication of *Naked Lunch*. We discover that the inclusion of extra material rather than its excision has been a precedent long established by publishers facing the prospect of censorship. Grove Press were experienced in the publication of censored works of literature, and fully anticipating that *Naked Lunch* would have to endure an obscenity trial, they took measures to prepare for the defence of the text by promoting specific readings of the book. Subsequently a defence was constructed that would present *Naked Lunch* as a socially valuable document of the problem of drug addiction. The Grove edition bears the imprint of this strategy of defence, a residue of the relationship of negotiation between censorship and publishing which has had a long term influence on the reception not only of *Naked Lunch* but of all Burroughs' work.

Research into literary censorship and publishing history has provided a framework for my analysis of the impact of publication upon the critical recognition of the influence of *yagé* on Burroughs' work, but a different set of analytical methods is needed to actually explore this marginalised subject. There are many written accounts of the effects of psychoactive substances, a history that extends from nineteenth century writings on *yagé* and peyote through to those on LSD and psilocybin in the 1960s. These accounts have provided a background against which to read Burroughs' own writings, a context which enables recognition of the effects as he may have experienced them and their echoes through his work. But what is also required is a theoretical framework for the critical analysis of these accounts and of Burroughs' experiences. For this purpose I have drawn upon the work of researchers studying the

alteration of consciousness, work that began with Charles Tart's *Altered States of Consciousness* (1969) and has developed into an independent field of research known as ASC.

These studies of ASC are concerned with identifying scientific parameters for the research of altered states of mind. From a literary perspective this approach can seem too constrained for the study of the impact of *yagé* or mescaline upon a writer's practice, but the results of such systematic scientific inquiry do help to establish a way to chart their effects, providing a foundation from which to begin studying their influence upon Burroughs' work. One of the mind-altering qualities of psychoactive substances documented by researchers of ASC is synaesthesia and drawing upon studies of this phenomenon I examine how the experience of synaesthesia was incorporated into Burroughs' work with image, language and colour in the 1960s.

We cannot say with any certainty what Burroughs actually experienced whilst using *yagé* or DMT and I can only offer suggestions as to the influence that his experiences with psychoactive substances might have had upon his work and the direction of his practice. A reading of Burroughs' letters and a study of the publishing history of his work strongly suggest that these substances had a greater influence on his writing and experimental practice than has generally been acknowledged, but any attempt to determine the exact nature and extent of this influence is impossible given the many other factors that had an impact upon the content, style and evolution of his work from 1953 to 1965. The difficulty of isolating one single factor, and of critically evaluating and writing about the influence of experiences that are frequently described as ineffable, perhaps accounts for the limited critical attention awarded to

this subject. Despite these difficulties, I have found that a reading of Burroughs' work in reference to altered states of mind has proven to be a valuable critical tool particularly when engaging with his work across different media, his investigation of experimental practices in the 1960s and his exploration and fictional representation of non-chemical means to alter consciousness.

In my study of Burroughs' *yagé* aesthetic I have made reference to writings that document the effects of psychoactive substances and research into the alteration of consciousness and synaesthesia rather than the context of literary critical studies of drugs and the literary imagination. Alethea Hayter's *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968) presents a fascinating study of the work of writers such as De Quincey, Poe and Coleridge, but if we adopt this context for a study of Burroughs, we are in danger of opiate addiction once again monopolising readings of his work. This problem is illustrated by the work of Marcus Boon and Sadie Plant who both write on Burroughs in their studies of the relationship between writing and drugs. Despite their wide knowledge of the subject and careful attention to the differences between groups of substances, their writing on Burroughs is dominated by his notoriety as a heroin addict.

In *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* (2002), Marcus Boon argues for 'separating drugs from each other, showing how each has quite specific historically emergent discourses attached to it',⁸ an approach much needed in a study of Burroughs' work, and his chapter 'The Imaginal Realms: Psychedelics and Literature' promisingly situates his use of peyote and *yagé* in the context of the work

⁸ Marcus Boon, *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p.14.

of Aldous Huxley, Antonin Artaud and Henri Michaux. But Boon's study of Burroughs is severely limited by his reading of the same biographical accounts that have influenced Burroughs scholarship. Echoing those critics and biographers, Boon writes: 'In essence, Burroughs did not like psychedelics'.⁹ Sadie Plant in *Writing on Drugs* (1999) reaches the welcome conclusion that 'Burroughs's yage experience was to colour his writing as much, if not more, as his use of heroin',¹⁰ and yet it is still the figure of Burroughs as opiate addict that dominates her research. Plant refers over fifteen times to the relationship between Burroughs and opiate addiction in his life and work, but writes only once on the role of *yagé*. Reading Burroughs in reference to a history of drugs and literature works to draw him into a lineage of writers as opiate addicts, and this is what I have sought to avoid in this study. I pay attention instead to the local context of his experiences of altered states of consciousness as they are discussed in his letters and used in his work.

Two publications within the last five years have invited critical re-assessment of *The Yage Letters*. In his introduction to the most recent edition: *The Yage Letters Redux* (2006) Oliver Harris presents a manuscript and publication history of the text which opens the way for critical re-appraisal of the relationship between Burroughs' work and *yagé*. Harris makes the important observation that the letters in the published text do not reproduce Burroughs' actual letters sent to Ginsberg in 1953. Following on from this discovery, I examine the differences between the letters of 1953 and the text of *The Yage Letters*, focusing on one crucial difference between these writings: the absence of much of his most expansive writing on the *yagé* experience from the published text.

⁹ Ibid., p.263.

¹⁰ Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999, p.142.

The publication in 2008 of *Everything Lost: The Latin American Notebook of William S. Burroughs*, a facsimile of a notebook dating from 1953, encourages further study of this period of work. His use in these 1953 notes of the term ‘yage poetry’¹¹ to describe the writings of Saint John-Perse implies that Burroughs identified some similarities between the experience of *yagé* and another writer’s practice. In this study I turn Burroughs’ reading of a ‘yage poetry’ back upon his own work to identify the *yagé* aesthetic of his multimedia experiments, adopting this term to describe the way in which his practice and his concept of writing and art were shaped by his experiences with *yagé* and later mescaline and DMT. In his introduction to the notebook, Oliver Harris observes that this early reference to Saint John-Perse and the poet’s re-emergence in Burroughs’ work of the 1960s suggests a connection between this period of his *yagé*-inspired writing and his later work with cut-ups. A connection that is hinted at again in the introduction to *The Yage Letters Redux* in which he notes that Burroughs adopted Rimbaud’s phrase ‘derangement of the senses’ ‘to describe both *yagé* intoxication *and* the cut-ups’ goal of deconstructing the illusion of reality’.¹² Ian MacFadyen and John Geiger have also suggested that *yagé* played a significant role in Burroughs’ work. MacFadyen writes of *Naked Lunch* that ‘[i]t may be that this “heroin book” is really a *yagé* book’,¹³ whilst Geiger’s research into the work of Gysin and the Dreamachine have influenced his reading of *Naked Lunch* as ‘a narrative of hallucination’.¹⁴ However, it is only really now, with access to Burroughs’ letters to Gysin, that an informed study of the complete history of his use

¹¹ William S. Burroughs, *Everything Lost: The Latin American Notebook of William S. Burroughs*, volume ed. Oliver Harris, general eds Geoffrey D. Smith and John M. Bennett. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008, notebook facsimile: p.75, transcript: p.186.

¹² Oliver Harris, ‘Introduction’ in William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters Redux*, ed. Oliver Harris. San Francisco: City Lights, 2006, p.xx.

¹³ Ian MacFadyen, ‘Dossier Two’ in Oliver Harris and Ian MacFadyen, eds, *Naked Lunch @ 50*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2009, p.38.

¹⁴ John Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience: A Short History of Stroboscopic Light and the Dream Machine*. New York: Soft Skull Press, 2003, p.45.

of psychoactive substances and their relationship to his work has become possible.

Following on from the insights of *The Yage Letters Redux* and *Everything Lost*, I examine why Burroughs' *yagé* experiences have been relatively neglected in readings of his work. The absence of much of Burroughs' writing on *yagé* from *The Yage Letters* has led critics to assume that the influence of *yagé* upon his work was minimal. In their introduction to *William Burroughs at the Front* (1991), an anthology of critical writings, Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg map out the history of the publication and reception of his work by decade, but *The Yage Letters* is not mentioned and none of the essays in this volume attend to the subject of *yagé*. The collection as a whole reveals that the issue of Burroughs and drugs has been monopolised by attention to opiate addiction. The subject of addiction has dominated critical readings of his work with no recognition of the relationship between *yagé* and Burroughs' practice as independent and separate from that of opiate addiction. When *yagé* is referred to there is a lack of clear distinction between opiates and psychoactive substances, chemicals which have profoundly different effects, histories and uses, and consequently very different influences upon Burroughs' work. For example Mary McCarthy writes that his experiments with 'heroin, morphine, Demoral, Yage, cannabis, and so on', 'resulted in addiction',¹⁵ and by doing so groups together a diverse range of substances, not all of which are addictive.

Critical neglect of the subject of *yagé* has been compounded by the lack of a nuanced discussion of the difference between his use of addictive and psychoactive substances. The figure of Burroughs has become so strongly identified with opiates that his use of drugs is singularly equated with addiction and control as the forces against which his

¹⁵ Mary McCarthy, 'Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*' in Skerl and Lydenberg, p.39.

work is targeted. Robert Sobieszek for example writes in *Ports of Entry: William S. Burroughs and the Arts* that '[h]aving directly experienced the very real control that drugs have on the body, Burroughs has transformed it into a metaphor signifying "control"'.¹⁶ In an otherwise excellent examination of Burroughs' artwork, this reduction of his many different drug experiences to that of addiction limits Sobieszek's study of his experimental work. Although Sobieszek mentions Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception* and psychedelic art of the 1960s, he makes no reference to Burroughs' own experiences with *yagé*, mescaline or DMT, even excluding *The Yage Letters* from his bibliography.

A number of critics have observed that Burroughs' experimental work of the 1960s attempted to induce an altered state of consciousness in the reader or audience, but like Sobieszek, they do not associate this characteristic of the work with his use of *yagé* or mescaline. Jennie Skerl recognises that the cut-up is a technique for enabling 'an alteration of consciousness that occurs in both the writer and the reader of the text'¹⁷ but does not connect this quality of the work with Burroughs' own experiences with altered states of consciousness. Skerl, like other critics, writes indiscriminately about his 'drug experiences' and having stated that 'narcotics addiction was necessarily his primary drug experience',¹⁸ the influence of psychoactive substances remains unexamined.

Jamie Russell also recognises that Burroughs' output of the 1960s 'was designed to induce sense derangement'.¹⁹ He writes that the availability of new technologies 'led

¹⁶ Robert A. Sobieszek, *Ports of Entry: William S. Burroughs and the Arts*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996, p.10.

¹⁷ Jennie Skerl, *William S. Burroughs*. Boston: Twayne, 1985, p.49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.12.

¹⁹ Russell (2001), p.58.

Burroughs (and others) to create a modern, avant-garde/countercultural aesthetic of discontinuity, displacement, and derangement that intersected the experiences of recreational drug use'.²⁰ But the possibility of expanding upon this observation is cut short by Russell's footnote to this statement which reads: 'Despite the similarities between his work and that of the emergent youth culture, Burroughs was never really a fan of psychedelics and, when introduced to psilocybin by Leary experienced nothing but bad trips'.²¹

Along with the publication history of his work which has led critics away from readings of the influence of *yagé*, mescaline, or DMT on his evolving aesthetic, Ted Morgan's biographical accounts of Burroughs' experiences of psychoactive substances have worked to implant the idea that he strongly rejected their effects and influences. In *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (1988) Morgan describes Paul Bowles and Burroughs experimenting with DMT: 'Burroughs didn't like it much either, and was increasingly sure that hallucinogenic drugs were not for him'.²² He then writes of Burroughs' response to the psilocybin sent to him by Timothy Leary: 'he tried the psilocybin in Paris that March of 1961 and found it awful. It made him nauseated and irritable, and the visions he had were not pleasant'.²³ Several pages later he recounts Timothy Leary's visit to Tangier where he held psilocybin sessions with Allen Ginsberg, Alan Ansen, Ian Sommerville, Gregory Corso and Burroughs. Here Morgan gives a description of Burroughs' experience and concludes that '[c]learly, the mushrooms were not for him. He had not liked them the

²⁰ Ibid., pp.58-59.

²¹ Ibid., footnote on p.205.

²² Morgan, p.370.

²³ Ibid., p.369.

first time, and the second time even less'.²⁴

The impact of Morgan's biography has been compounded by his description of Burroughs' involvement with Leary's Harvard project. This incident - Burroughs' attendance at the 1961 symposium of the American Psychological Association - has confused critical readings of his attitude towards psychoactive substances. Burroughs' initial response to Leary's project was enthusiastic endorsement, but his experiences with DMT during this period pushed his own experiments into a more intense and final phase, initiating his move away from the chemical alteration of consciousness, a direction radically opposite to that of Leary and the emergent psychedelic movement. Burroughs' derisory comments directed at Leary's project have contributed to the impression that his experiences with psychoactive substances were entirely negative. This has detracted from the productive influence they may have had upon his practice and Burroughs' reaction to Leary's project needs to be reviewed in this context.

Why do critics equate his descriptions of terrifying or difficult experiences with his rejection of their use and influence? If we look at how DMT has been described in studies of its effects we find that this very strong psychoactive substance, which is reported to make LSD seem 'like a lazy summer picnic',²⁵ has been compared to 'being sat on by an elephant'²⁶ and 'being fired out of the nozzle of an atomic cannon'.²⁷ Terence Mckenna notes that '[o]ne of the interesting characteristics of DMT is that it sometimes inspires fear - this marks the experience as existentially authentic'. He even suggests that there would be something suspect about *not*

²⁴ Ibid., p.377.

²⁵ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*. 1987. London: Flamingo, 1993, p.114.

²⁶ Michael Valentine Smith, *Psychedelic Chemistry*. Mason: Loompanics, 1981, p.40.

²⁷ A statement made by Alan Watts as recorded in Timothy Leary, 'Programmed Communication During Experiences with DMT', *Psychedelic Review*, 8 (1966), p.84.

experiencing fear when confronted with the powerful effects of DMT, that ‘if one is not terrified then one must be somewhat out of contact with the full dynamics of what is happening’.²⁸ Reframed in this context, Burroughs’ own experiences with DMT, ‘the nightmare prestonia’, are consistent with the reports given by other users. This demonstrates the necessity of re-viewing Burroughs’ accounts within a critical framework of studies of the effects and use of these substances.

Burroughs acknowledged having had a full range of experiences with psychoactive substances. Referring to LSD, *yagé*, mescaline and DMT, he wrote: ‘[a]ll of these drugs opened different psychic areas. Some of these areas are pleasant, some are not’ and that ‘[o]verdose of consciousness-expanding drugs can be a nightmare experience, owing to the increased awareness of unpleasant or dangerous symptoms’.²⁹ I will also be confronting the impression of Burroughs’ negative attitude to psychoactive substances that has built up across critical studies of his work by uncovering evidence which discredits this view. For example we find this statement in a letter to Ginsberg: ‘I received the mushrooms from Leary. Great but I think not as far out as mescaline. In any case I reached an interesting area and will present the maps in my current novel’.³⁰ His experiments with these substances were so extensive, ranging from his *yagé* experiences of 1953 through the next ten years of repeated use of mescaline, LSD, psilocybin and DMT, that whether pleasant or unpleasant, and it would appear that Burroughs experienced a wealth of both, the impact upon his work cannot be dismissed. I will be looking in more detail at the full range of his experiences, including his descriptions of ‘nightmare’ sessions and their

²⁸ Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991, p.37.

²⁹ Burroughs, ‘Points of Distinction between Sedative and Consciousness-expanding Drugs’, *Evergreen Review*, 8.34 (December 1964), p.73.

³⁰ Burroughs to Ginsberg 9 March 1961, Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University; hereafter cited as GC Columbia.

relationship to his work, in order to argue why this is not reason to dismiss their relevance to his developing aesthetic practice.

Each chapter of this thesis aims to combine research into the publishing history of Burroughs' output with an exploration of the question of how that publishing history has influenced the reception and critical analysis of the influence of *yagé* on his work. The first chapter is concerned with his journey in search of *yagé* in 1953 and compares the letters sent by Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg during this expedition with the 1963 publication of *The Yage Letters*. Chapter two examines the publication and censorship of *Naked Lunch*, tracing how a defence of the text was constructed by promoting readings of Burroughs' work as a socially valuable document of the problem of drug addiction. Chapter three presents a re-appraisal of *Naked Lunch* revealing it to be an intermediary work, one that incorporates his *yagé*-influenced writing developed in the 1953 letters, and that anticipates his move towards working with cut-ups and multimedia in the 1960s. The fourth chapter examines Burroughs' letters to Ginsberg and Gysin from 1958 to 1960. I explore how his association with Gysin encouraged his shift to experimentation with a range of different mediums, and the possible connections between the beginning of his experiments with mescaline and with cut-ups. Chapter five continues with a reading of Burroughs' letters to Gysin from 1960 to 1961, charting how he extended his experiments with psychoactive substances through his use of DMT. This chapter also explores his relationship with Timothy Leary and the events leading up to his paper 'Points of Distinction between Sedative and Consciousness-expanding Drugs' delivered at the 1961 symposium of the American Psychological Association.

Chapters six and seven examine how his practice developed in the 1960s. I look at how he embraced avant-garde strategies such as collage and collaboration in his exploration of the possibility of a mind-altering art form, and how his adoption of these avant-garde techniques had an impact upon the publication of his work. One of the consequences of Burroughs' engagement in avant-garde practices was a substantial output of multimedia work either not suitable for the medium of book publication or unattractive to commercial publishers. In chapter six I examine Burroughs' work published in little magazines, and question why the avant-garde aesthetic of the little magazine suited his *yagé* aesthetic. Chapter seven explores Burroughs' engagement in collaborative practices and the publications *Minutes to Go*, *The Exterminator* and *The Third Mind* as an alternative cut-up trilogy. In this final chapter I look at how experimentation and process were key to his work from the late 1950s and into the 1960s, and how Burroughs' exploration of art as an altered state of mind changed the role of the published text in his multimedia collage of activities.

Throughout this thesis I have adopted the term 'psychoactive substances' when referring to *yagé*, mescaline, LSD, psilocybin and DMT. The issue of terminology has been debated in many studies of these substances with the conclusion that the terms 'hallucinogens' and 'psychedelics' are both problematic. 'Hallucinogen' carries the implication that the effects of these plants and chemicals are primarily visual. As Benny Shanon has noted of ayahuasca (*yagé*), 'while the generation of hallucinations is a major effect of Ayahuasca (and other agents), surely it is not the only one'.³¹ As we look in further detail at the impact of these substances on Burroughs' work, and realise that their influence is as much to do with processes of thought as with visions,

³¹ Benny Shanon, *The Antipodes of the Mind: Charting the Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.28.

the problems associated with the term ‘hallucinogen’ will become apparent.

Burroughs’ 1953 expedition and his experiments with *yagé* took place before the term ‘psychedelic’ was widely adopted and before the psychedelic movement of the 1960s. For this reason I have used this term only in later discussions of Burroughs’ relationship to this movement.

I have also avoided using the term ‘drugs’ because it has become synonymous with addiction, crime, the politics of a war on drugs and the many social issues that surround the use and criminalisation of drugs. Although these issues will at times be relevant to a discussion of Burroughs’ work they are not the principal issues in an exploration of *yagé*, and in particular I wish to draw a distinction between opiate ‘drug’ issues in Burroughs’ writing: addiction, criminalisation, withdrawal, and the comparatively neglected influence of psychoactive substances on his work. I will be looking primarily at *yagé*, mescaline and DMT with some reference to psilocybin (mushrooms) and LSD, and discussing them collectively as psychoactive substances, because despite their differences, their effects are often spoken of and classified as interrelated. On the basis of their similarities I give recognition to Burroughs’ experiences with *yagé*, mescaline and DMT as connected, as an ongoing investigation into one type of experience: the alteration of consciousness.

I will not be writing about cannabis because although *Naked Lunch* is as much a *déjeuner sur l’herbe* as it is a strong swig of *yagé* brew, the effects, history and use of cannabis are distinctly different from those of *yagé* or mescaline and deserve separate analysis. In the essay ‘Points of Distinction between Sedative and Consciousness-expanding Drugs’ Burroughs acknowledged the influence of cannabis on his writing, stating that ‘this drug is very useful to the artist, activating trains of association that

would otherwise be inaccessible, and I owe many of the scenes in *Naked Lunch* directly to the use of cannabis',³² and in his letters to Ginsberg his use of hashish and cannabis is described as part of his routine of writing.³³ It seems that hashish and cannabis were used frequently and as an accompaniment to other activities including writing, whereas *yagé*, mescaline and DMT produce effects that have a certain duration and intensity leading to distinct and isolated experiences. Burroughs compared the effects of cannabis and *yagé*, stating that *yagé* is not 'the humorous silliness of weed. This is insane overwhelming rape of the senses',³⁴ that '[i]t is *not* like weed, nor anything else I have ever experienced'.³⁵ Although he noted that '[i]n both instances there is a shift of viewpoint, an extension of consciousness beyond ordinary experience', he found that '*yagé* produces a deeper derangement of the senses with actual hallucinations',³⁶ and that 'while hashish intensifies all sensual impressions, *yagé* distorts or shuts out ordinary sensations, transporting you to another level of experience'.³⁷ It is the influence of these deeper experiences of an altered state of mind that I will be exploring in this thesis.

Although I focus on the work of William Burroughs, I suggest that the argument for studying the publication history of the work of a writer is applicable more generally.

³² Burroughs, 'Points of Distinction between Sedative and Consciousness-expanding Drugs', *Evergreen Review*, 8.34 (December 1964), p.74.

³³ See for example the following letters from Burroughs to Ginsberg: 7 February 1955: 'So finally I say: "Now you must work," and smoke some tea and sit down and out it comes', *Letters*, p.259; 14 February 1957: 'Since sending MS. have written about fifty pages more, wilder than what you have. This is almost automatic writing. I often sit high on hash for as long as six hours typing at top speed.' *Letters*, p.355; 26 November 1957: 'The narrative section takes all my time. I see no one, don't drink. Nothing but weed and work all day.' *Letters*, p.377; 4 December 1957: 'Tremendous amount of work but I do nothing else [...] Just work and smoke a little *kif*.' *Letters*, p.379.

³⁴ Burroughs to Ginsberg 8 July 1953, *Letters*, p.180.

³⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg 18 June 1953, *Letters*, p.171,

³⁶ 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' in William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, ed. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles. New York: Grove Press, 2003, pp.227,228. All quotations from *Naked Lunch* are from this edition unless indicated otherwise.

³⁷ 'From Burroughs' March 1956 "Yagé Article" manuscript' in *The Yage Letters Redux*, p.97.

We need to recognise that our experience of the work is mediated through the vehicle of the published book or journal. The consequence of the critical neglect of the publication history of literary texts is that the processes of publication and dissemination to which each work is subjected will exert an unexamined influence upon our reading. In the following study I will be looking at the different ways in which the process of publishing literature can shape its reception, how marketing and censorship, or editing, design and print reproduction, all work to promote or obscure certain readings of a text. As well as the influence of publication upon the reading of each individual work, there is the impact that it exerts across the collected work of a writer. As this study progresses I bring to attention this cumulative influence, revealing for example how the defence of *Naked Lunch* as a document of addiction has repercussions beyond this individual text. When the publication history of *Naked Lunch* is examined in association with the publication histories of *The Yage Letters* and Burroughs' experimental work of the 1960s, we begin to see the overall effect: how the impact of the processes of editing, printing, censorship and circulation combine to determine the critical frameworks for reading a writer's work, and consequently their place in literary history.

Chapter 1

Yagé

The publication history of *The Yage Letters* spans virtually the entire period of this study, and for this reason it is an appropriate place to begin, for its ten year delay and revision raise many of the issues of publication, reception and obscured readings that will become the main preoccupations of the following chapters. This history begins in 1953 with Burroughs' journey from Panama through Colombia, Peru and Ecuador and the letters he wrote to Allen Ginsberg describing his search for the psychoactive vine *yagé*. However it was not until 1963 that the first edition of *The Yage Letters* was published by City Lights. Examining both the original letters and *The Yage Letters*, we find that Burroughs' descriptions of the consciousness-altering experience of *yagé* in the former are curiously absent from the 1963 publication. The potential for critical recognition of the influence of Burroughs' *yagé* experiences in the development of his work was further damaged by the ten year gap in publication. If we consider that these ten years were punctuated by the publication of *Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, *Minutes to Go* and *The Exterminator*, and the beginning of Burroughs' experimental and collaborative work with image and sound, we can begin to see how this publication history presents a misleading chronology of development. The 1953 *yagé* letters should be acknowledged as bearing an important connection to his later experimental work, but this relationship has been obscured by the confusion between these 1953 letters and *The Yage Letters* and the chronological displacement of *The Yage Letters* in the publication history of Burroughs' work.

The Search for *Yagé* in Burroughs' Letters of 1953

As I have already noted, the use of the term 'psychedelic' would be inappropriate when referring to Burroughs' experiences with *yagé* in 1953 because of the associations of the term which identify it with the decade to follow. However, the cultural changes that have taken place in the last fifty years have implications for the study of the 1953 letters which extend beyond this singular issue of terminology. From the standpoint of the present it takes a certain amount of work to strip away these fifty years of cultural and legal transformation, and to imagine the writing of Burroughs' letters taking place during a time when knowledge of the use and effects of psychoactive substances was limited to scientific researchers, botanists and anthropologists. In a study of Burroughs' experience of *yagé* and its influence upon his work, it is essential to recognise that his journey and writings predate the emergence of a psychedelic counter-culture and widespread knowledge of the use and effects of mind-altering substances. This is not to ignore the documentation and the public knowledge of the effects of other substances, and the writings on hashish, opium and alcohol form an important background to Burroughs' work, but their medical, legal and social histories are very different from those of *yagé*, mescaline or LSD, which were until the 1960s, and certainly still at the time of his 1953 expedition, of interest only to a handful of individuals from varying fields in the sciences and social sciences.

A review of the literature on psychoactive plants up to the date of Burroughs' own expedition reveals the extent to which their history differs considerably from that of opiates and other drugs. Reading the articles on peyote and *yagé* published through the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, what is

most striking is the attitude towards the effects of these plant alkaloids which is characterised by curiosity and fascination and removed from debates on addiction or abuse. Take for example Havelock Ellis' overview of his experiments with peyote, referred to as 'mescal' and published in an 1898 article in *The Contemporary Review*:

[Drs. Prentiss and Morgan] experimented on several young men, and demonstrated, for the first time, the precise character of mescal intoxication and the remarkable visions to which it gives rise. A little later Dr. Weir Mitchell, who, in addition to his eminence as a physician, is a man of marked aesthetic temperament, experimented on himself, and published a very interesting record of the brilliant visions by which he was visited under the influence of the plant.¹

Ellis, like his contemporaries, regarded personal experimentation to be necessary to his objectives. He writes 'I was able to obtain a small sample of mescal in London', stating his intentions to describe in some detail the results of his experiment, evidently with no requirement for methodological justification. In this article he relates his own experiences and 'next made experiments on two poets'.² He then 'induced an artist friend to make a similar experiment' because 'it occurred to me that mescal perhaps produces exactly the same conditions of visual hyperaesthesia, or rather exhaustion, as may be produced on the artist by the influence of prolonged visual attention'.³ In 1953 the investigation of psychoactive substances remained a legitimate scientific and anthropological pursuit and personal experimentation was not only accepted but had even come to be viewed as necessary to any comprehensive study. This already places Burroughs' relationship to *yagé* in a very different context to his use of opiates and

¹ Havelock Ellis, "'Mescal" A New Artificial Paradise', *The Contemporary Review* (January 1898), p.131.

² *Ibid.*, p.139. Peter Haining notes that 'the two poets whom Havelock Ellis invited to "experiment" with mescaline, are indeed "both well known" though he chose to conceal their identities in his essay: One was the Irish author and occultist W. B. Yeats and the other the strange, dissolute writer Ernest Dowson.' In Peter Haining, ed., *The Hashish Club: An Anthology of Drug Literature, Vol.1: The Founding of the Modern Tradition from Coleridge to Crowley*. London: Owen, 1975, p.189.

³ Ellis (1898), p.134.

consequent experiences of addiction, drug withdrawal and criminal involvements as they are described in his work.

In his article 'The beta-Carboline Hallucinogens of South America' (1982) Richard Evans Schultes presents a history of the study of *yagé*. His overview begins with 'the great English explorer of the Amazon and Andes', the botanist Richard Spruce, who named the vine *Banisteria caapi* in 1852 and the Ecuadorian geographer Villavicencio whose report of 1858 documented the use of *yagé* 'in sorcery, witchcraft, prophecy and divination'.⁴ He notes that there are many references to narcotic drinks prepared from lianas in the writings of nineteenth-century explorers, but that in the first half of the twentieth century anthropologists and botanists still failed to agree on their identification of the vine and the constituents of the *yagé* brew. Crossing between various disciplines his account takes in the work of the pharmacologists Keller and Gottaud in 1929, the chemists Chen and Chen in 1939 and finally arrives at the work of Schultes himself who drew upon these many disciplines in his own field of ethnobotanical studies.

Although botanists and anthropologists had been scientifically examining the vine and observing how it was used for a hundred years before Burroughs' expedition, the information gathered was inconclusive and gave no clear indication of exactly what was experienced under *yagé*. In the years since Burroughs' first encounters with *yagé*, knowledge of the chemistry and the effects of the drug have been widely documented. For example, in the essay 'Ayahuasca: An Ethnopharmacologic History' Dennis McKenna describes how the *yagé* brew is prepared by boiling or soaking the bark and

⁴ Richard Evan Schultes, 'The beta-Carboline Hallucinogens of South America', *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 14.3. (July-September 1982), pp.206-207. Schultes refers to Manuel Villavicencio *Geografía de la República del Ecuador*. New York: Craighead, 1858.

stems of *Banisteriopsis caapi* with an admixture plant containing dimethyltryptamine. He explains that the admixture most commonly used is the leaves of *Psychotria viridis* and that this second ingredient is essential for the psychoactive effect of the *yagé* brew.⁵ *Yagé* is used in Peru, Colombia and Ecuador for healing and divination and Ralph Metzner gives an account of this traditional role of the *yagé* experience in his introduction to *Sacred Vine of Spirits: Ayahuasca* (1999):

The experience can provide access to hidden knowledge; this is the aspect of divination, “seeing,” prophecy, intuition, or visioning. If the intention or context is healing, then the divination would be equivalent to what Western medicine calls diagnosis - i.e., from where and from whom did the particular toxic implant come, where has the soul-fragment been “lost,” what particular herbs should be used for the person’s illness, etc. It is said that there is an intelligence associated with the plant medicine, an intelligence that communicates in an interior way to the person who ingests the medicine.⁶

Metzner’s book draws together a collection of essays on the use and effects of ayahuasca which I will be using, along with the work of Terence and Dennis McKenna, Kenneth Kenesinger, Benny Shanon and Michael Harner, as a context for reading Burroughs’ experiences with *yagé*.

The date of Burroughs’ journey in search of *yagé* coincided with the moment when interest in psychoactive substances was just on the verge of beginning to shift beyond scientific disciplines and to enter into mainstream media and awareness. Although it would be several years before coverage of LSD and psilocybin experiments emerged in the daily newspapers, from the mid-1950s a small number of articles and references had begun to appear outside specialised journals. If we examine Burroughs’ 1953

⁵ Dennis J. McKenna, ‘Ayahuasca: An Ethnopharmacologic History’ in Ralph Metzner, ed., *Ayahuasca: Human Consciousness and the Spirits of Nature*. 1999. Reprinted as Ralph Metzner, ed., *Sacred Vine of Spirits: Ayahuasca*. Rochester: Park Street Press, 2006, pp.40-62.

⁶ Ralph Metzner, ‘Introduction’ in Metzner, p.15.

letters to Ginsberg it is evident that he was picking up on this moment of change, and that he sensed there was a ‘story’ to be reported. The references he made in the letters to the task of writing about *yagé* and his plans for the text were not included in *The Yage Letters*. Consequently the journalistic stance that he adopted throughout the first part of the expedition, this sense that there was a story to be ‘got’, is also absent from the publication.

Burroughs’ interest in *yagé* was initially informed by the ‘story’ or rumours that surrounded it at that time. His earlier expedition of 1951 had led to nothing, but his letters from this period reveal that his interest in *yagé* was framed by the language of secrecy and detection, and that his approach to the subject was that of an undercover reporter:

Did not score for Yage, Bannisteria caapi, Telepathine, Ayahuasca - all names for the same drug. I think the deal is top secret. I know the Russians are working on it, and I think U.S. also. Russians trying to produce “automatic obedience,” have imported vast quantities of Yage for experiments on slave labor. I will score next trip.⁷

In this letter Burroughs reports on the sparse information he had gained from communication with Dr Lewis Wolberg on the subject of *yagé*, quoting from Wolberg’s letter: ‘There seems to be some mystery about this drug’.⁸ Referring again to a letter from Wolberg, Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg two months later:

Did I tell you I learn from Wolberg: “I can’t find anything out about Yage. The U.S. Army is conducting secret experiments with this drug.” Next thing will be armies of telepathy controlled zombies marching around. No doubt about it Yage is a deal of tremendous implications, and I’m the man who can dig it.⁹

⁷ Burroughs to Ginsberg 5 March 1952, *Letters*, p.104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.104.

⁹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 15 May 1952, *Letters*, p.125.

He sensed an emerging interest in the use of psychoactive plants and extracts such as *yagé*, and at first he locates this in the telepathic properties of the plant and the rumours that both the Russian and American governments were experimenting with its effects. Burroughs was in this case correct, and it is now known that the CIA had begun experiments with psychoactive substances, including LSD, in the 1953 Operation MK-ULTRA.¹⁰ However, this would not in the end turn out to be the ‘story’ for Burroughs.

In these letters he builds up the mystery of *yagé* as a secret Cold War military aid; and they read as an attempt to sell the idea for his expedition and the material that will emerge from it. During these years in the early 1950s Burroughs was writing as much out of the need for money as he was fulfilling an interest in writing. His early work was directed by this former motivation to the extent that both form and content were aimed at an identified market. In a letter to Ginsberg dated 20 December 1951 Burroughs wrote in reference to the manuscript of *Junkie*: ‘If you all can peddle it anywhere I can use the \$’.¹¹ He was very aware that there was a market and audience for his knowledge and experience of drugs, as illustrated in a letter of 15 June 1952 referring to Aaron A. Wyn the publisher of *Junkie*:

What the lousy hell is the matter with Wyn? Is he or is he not going to publish *Junk*? Two books already out on the subject - *Down All Your Streets* and *H is for Heroin*. I think this beginning of deluge. Now is the time to publish or we bring up rear and lose advantage of timeliness.¹²

Burroughs also felt that the time was prescient for his story on *yagé* and this financial

¹⁰ Details of the CIA’s Operation MK-ULTRA can be found in Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, The Sixties, and Beyond*. 1985. New York: Grove Press, 1992.

¹¹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 20 December 1951, *Letters*, p.97.

¹² Burroughs to Ginsberg 15 June 1952, GC Columbia.

incentive must be recognised as an early motivation in his plans for the *yagé* manuscript. References to the relationship between writing and money punctuate the 1953 letters, but these form no part of the 1963 published text, resulting in the invisibility of this history of the writing and (non)publication of the intended *yagé* text. In a letter dated 12 April 1953 Burroughs notes that he has made the acquaintance of ‘a reporter from *Life*’ who ‘came down just as I was on the way out. He is doing a story on Yage. Looks like I am scooped’.¹³ This confirms his sense that the subject of *yagé* is of valid interest, but as a story it remains elusive.

The letters indicate that he undertook the journey having already made an agreement for the publication of the material. During 1952 Burroughs wrote *Queer* which was intended to be part two of *Junkie*, but Wyn objected to the manuscript submitted. An alternative agreement was reached based on the material that Burroughs proposed to write on his search for *yagé*. During 1952 and 1953, Ginsberg was acting in the role of agent between Burroughs and Wyn and therefore the correspondence between Burroughs and Ginsberg documents not only the publishing history of *Junkie*, but also the initial arrangements made between Wyn and Burroughs for first *Queer*, and then the *yagé* material.

Burroughs’ letter to Ginsberg of 6 July 1952 indicates that Wyn had rejected the material for *Queer*: ‘[d]oes he object to *Queer* in toto?’ and ‘I would normally use *some* of the material covered in the first part of *Queer* unless he has definite objections’. He states: ‘since this is wrote more or less to order and there is not much time and I want he should be satisfied, I want to know as near as possible exactly what he wants and does not want’. He ended the letter by saying ‘Assure Wyn that I

¹³ Burroughs to Ginsberg 12 April 1953, *Letters*, p.156.

will write the material he wants on schedule'.¹⁴ This attitude of submission to Wyn's orders led to the abandonment of the *Queer* manuscript material and discussion instead of publishing opportunities related to the *yagé* trip. In a letter dated 3 March 1953 Burroughs outlines the current state of his relationship to his publishers:

They are up to their old tricks: 2 books, 1 advance. By all means tell them to *go ahead and publish Junk(ie) as is*. I have written nothing yet. I can't write out in the bush. God knows when I will be in condition to write up the trip or how much I will have to say.¹⁵

Burroughs states that he is tied to a two-book deal with Wyn, the first book is *Junkie*, and the second has yet to be written, which suggests that the text referred to was not the already submitted *Queer* manuscript and that this second book must have been the material that would result from his 1953 *yagé* expedition. Burroughs makes reference to a 'yage part' which could be included in a second edition of *Junkie* or as a separate publication: 'I don't know yet whether yage will be book in itself'.¹⁶

During the first four months of his expedition, Burroughs' letters from Colombia and Peru repeatedly reference his struggle to find a story or produce any material. During these same months he encountered no problems in locating *yagé*, but his first sessions, as detailed in the letters of 1953, were inconclusive. The first time he experienced very minimal effects and the following times extreme nausea and 'sheer horror. I was completely delirious for four hours and vomiting at 10 minute intervals. As to telepathy I don't know. All I received were waves of nausea'.¹⁷ In this same letter, and in a state of disillusion regarding his proposed *yagé* story, Burroughs attempted to

¹⁴ Burroughs to Ginsberg 6 July 1952, GC Columbia.

¹⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg 3 March 1953, *Letters*, p.152.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.152.

¹⁷ Burroughs to Ginsberg 12 April 1953, *Letters*, p.155.

revoke the former plan that material from the *yagé* expedition would be published as part two of *Junkie*:

I don't know what I will do now. May go on to Ecuador and definitely want to see Lima, Peru. Plan to be back Stateside in 2 months and will try to have the Yage material in some sort of shape by then, but tell Solomon *to go ahead and publish Junkie now*. The search for Yage turned out to be a pushover. Everyone grows it in their back yard and you can buy all the Yage you want right in Mocoa which is accessible by bus.¹⁸

By the end of April he had become even more despondent: 'So far no success writing anything on Yage, my info is incomplete or some essential impetus is lacking. I don't know. It was not possible to make a thorough study with time and \$ available'.¹⁹

Still hoping to produce a publishable story on *yagé* Burroughs proposed a new plan based upon information passed on to him. In laying out this plan he invoked the financial relationship between publisher and writer, re-presenting to Ginsberg, and consequently to Carl Solomon, friend of Ginsberg and the nephew of Wyn, this new 'deal' and suggesting a further advance. This again implies that the material on *yagé* was being produced to commission:

He says the Auca - tribe of hostile Indians - use Yage. Now theres a *story*. I would be glad to investigate and assume the risk involved but I need arms, ammunition, a good camera, tinned food etc. The deal requires at least \$500 *all in one price*, and I have \$200 per month. (Just when I get where I am going I run out of money and have to come back to the nearest Embassy) If Solomon will get up off that \$300 I might could do something. With a \$200 additional advance = \$500. I promise results (There is also entire Amazon area of Peru and Bolivia where Yage is used.) If they are holding up publication waiting on Yage material they may wait a long time. As things stand I can not promise to deliver 10 pages.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., p.157.

¹⁹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 30 April 1953, GC Columbia.

²⁰ Burroughs to Ginsberg 30 April 1953, GC Columbia.

This letter confirms that Burroughs was writing the material directly for Wyn, and that this agreement had been shaping his approach to the expedition and his written, or as things stood, unwritten response to *yagé*. Writing several days later on 4 May, Burroughs reiterated his frustration with the situation, restating the proposal that Wyn finance the expedition, and again depicting himself in the role of a commissioned writer working on a story:

Leaving for Lima today. Stuck here over the week-end. I guess I can write 50-100 pages on the Yage deal - started last night - but my info is not complete. I should spend at least a month living with the Indians and like I say I need \$. If publishers give out advances to authors sitting on their ass in some cafe why the fuck can't they get up off some gilt to finance this expedition?²¹

After the letter of 15 May in which Burroughs wrote 'guess I'll skip the Auca this trip',²² there are no further references to this plan. From this moment, Burroughs' writing began to develop in a different direction, a transformation that can be traced from his statement of 12 May 'So far it isn't exactly inspired',²³ to the enclosure in a letter of 23 May 1953 of *Roosevelt After Inauguration*, 'a skit I dreamed up',²⁴ and then through June and July, in the eventual emergence of a written response to *yagé*.

The 1953 letters also document the moment in June when Burroughs at last had his revelatory moment with *yagé*. He had felt the impact of the earlier *yagé* sessions on his dreams and his state of mind, but in his letter of 18 June he writes of an intense experience that is pivotal to the expedition and to the production of a written response:

²¹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 4 May 1953, GC Columbia.

²² Burroughs to Ginsberg 15 May 1953, GC Columbia.

²³ Burroughs to Ginsberg 12 May 1953, *Letters*, p.162.

²⁴ Burroughs to Ginsberg 23 May 1953, *Letters*, p.164.

Hold the presses! Everything I wrote about Yage subject to revision in the light of subsequent experience. It is *not* like weed, nor anything else that I have ever experienced. I am now prepared to believe the *Brujos* do have secrets, and that Yage alone is quite different from Yage prepared with the leaves and plants the *Brujos* add to it.²⁵

The content of this 18 June letter was not included in *The Yage Letters*,²⁶ and consequently this excited pronouncement of a transformatory experience is also absent. In a reading of the 1953 letters this revelatory piece arrived, as we have seen, after a struggle to write about *yagé*, and to extract a story from the expedition. The struggle to write about the effects of *yagé* was from this point transformed into a different challenge: how to write about an experience that Burroughs identified as ‘indescribable’:

I took it again last night with the local *Brujo*. The effect can not be put into words. I will attempt to delineate as far as possible [...] What followed was indescribable. It was like possession by a *blue spirit*. (I could *paint* it if I could paint.) Blue purple. And definitely South Pacific, like Easter Island or Maori designs, a blue substance throughout my body, and an archaic grinning face.²⁷

The difficulty of accurately describing the effects of psychoactive substances is a recurrent issue in accounts of such experiences. For example Silas Weir Mitchell, an American physician, wrote in 1896 of the effects of peyote: ‘It is not easy to define what I mean, and at the time I searched my vocabulary for phrase or word which would fitly state my feeling. It was in vain’. Mitchell concluded that it was ‘hopeless to describe in language’²⁸ the visions he witnessed. Similar statements on the ineffability of the experience are found throughout the history of the documentation of *yagé*, mescaline and LSD.

²⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg 18 June 1953, *Letters*, p.171.

²⁶ Although *The Yage Letters* contains a letter dated 18 June the content is different.

²⁷ Burroughs to Ginsberg 18 June 1953, *Letters*, p.171.

²⁸ S. Weir Mitchell, ‘Remarks on the Effects of Anhelonium Lewinii (The Mescal Button)’, *The British Medical Journal*, 2.1875 (5 December 1896), p.1626.

Burroughs' initial written response of 18 June to this *yagé* experience was to 'delineate as far as possible' what he saw and felt, and in the scientific and social scientific tradition he adopts a conventional framework of reportage. He encases the experience within the context of straight circumstantial description, outlining both the set up of the experiment and his return to a normal state of mind. He again attempted to describe the effects in a letter of 8 July:

It is the most powerful drug I have ever experienced. That is it produces the most complete derangement of the senses. You see everything from a special hallucinated viewpoint. If I was a painter I could paint it.²⁹

These statements are followed in the letter by 'a few notes from yage state' in which Burroughs continues to report the *yagé* experience in the first person. He describes how the appearance of the room changed and how his own body underwent a metamorphosis of gender, race and sexuality. His experience of space and time was altered and he writes of a 'definite sense of space time travel that *seems* to shake the room'. Besides inducing the 'complete derangement of the senses', *yagé* is also described as 'the complete negation possible of respectability'.³⁰ These experiences and the phrases he uses to describe them such as 'space time travel' emerge as dominant features in Burroughs' writing of the following decade. Within this letter these altered states are only documented, whereas in later years they become absorbed into the form and action of his work.

This progression from description to the actual assimilation and written replication of the *yagé* state can be observed in a letter written several weeks later on 10 July 1953.

²⁹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 8 July 1953, *Letters*, pp.179-180

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.179-180.

It is not until this very final letter from Lima that Burroughs' written response to *yagé* ceases to take the form of a report. He instead produces a text that enables the visions and the heightened sensory experience of *yagé* to emerge unmediated by the conventions of reportage. This is the letter within which his writing is most responsive to the altered state of consciousness induced by *yagé* and in which he shifts to a more extreme and surreal collage composition of language and imagery. In this instance it is Burroughs' adoption of the form of collage that enables this shift from description to replication: the juxtaposition of imagery and sounds is an attempt to reproduce the altered state of mind in the experience of reading. This distinction between description and replication - between describing an experience and reproducing or replicating that experience - will prove useful in a reading of how Burroughs' practice shifts towards experimentation and his use of different media to induce non-chemical alterations in consciousness.

In the letter of 10 July 1953 Burroughs begins by stating that he has boiled down some *yagé* for transport, taken some of it but experienced 'no effect whatever', '[b]ut the next day I get a delayed reaction, an hallucinated period'. He then describes the circumstances and experience of writing a text that finally allows for the *yagé* altered state of mind to take a literary form:

Today I had a premonition like the first teasing chill of malaria, that I was in hot writing form. I had things to do. Those things that usually take up a lot of time like getting visas, plane tickets and checking with The Institute the scientific name of the other plant they cook with Yage (I have dried specimens). To my amazement I accomplished all these things in one hour. At the Institute who should I meet (not incidentally the man I was looking for) but a Botanist who is old friend of Doc

Schultes. Then went to a cafe and began to write like I was taking dictation; Here it is:
 Yage is space time travel. The room seems to shake and vibrate with motion [...].³¹

The piece that follows - Burroughs' 'Composite City' text - contains the same surreal imagery of the metamorphosing body that permeates Burroughs' later writing: 'stasis and death in closed mountain valleys where plants grow out of your cock and vast Crustaceans hatch inside you and grow and break the shell of your body'.³² The movement in this text through scenes that are rich not only in colour and imagery but also in sound and smell suggests the influence of the heightened senses of *yagé* intoxication:

The cooking smells of all countries hang over the city, a haze of opium, hasheesh, and the resinous red smoke of cooking Yage, smell of the jungle and salt water and the rotting river and dried excrement and sweat and genitals. High mountain flutes and jazz and bebop and one-stringed Mongol instruments and Gypsy xylophones, and Arabian bagpipes.³³

This assemblage of multi-sensory impressions becomes a predominant feature of Burroughs' writing in *Naked Lunch* and of the cut-up texts, and is an early indication of his developing preoccupation with the intersections of sound, imagery, time and place.

Burroughs only became able to write about his journey once he ceased to be concerned with the initial story of telepathy and government secrets and once *Junkie* had been finally published in April. When he stopped looking for a story on *yagé*, a response to the experience of *yagé* began to come through in his writing in a less

³¹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 10 July 1953, *Letters*, p.182.

³² *Ibid.*, p.182.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.184.

direct form. One of the recorded effects of psychoactive substances is an alteration in the experiencing of space and time. Kenneth Kensinger in ‘Banisteriopsis Usage Among the Peruvian Cashinahua’ observes that ‘[t]ime and space perceptions are distorted’ under *yagé*³⁴ and the material within the 10 July letter bears the influence of these aspects of his recent *yagé* sessions. As well as the direct reference to the ‘space time travel’ of *yagé*, he writes of ‘migrations, incredible journeys through jungles and deserts and mountains’,³⁵ presenting a vision of vast and multiple landscapes experienced outside a linear time frame.. The Composite City does not have a fixed location in the world, but rather the whole world is within the city, a collage of times, places and peoples: ‘Near Eastern, Mongol. South Pacific, South American’.³⁶

One of the most interesting aspects of the 10 July letter, aside from the text it contains, is the way that Burroughs describes the experience of writing, and his use of the phrase ‘like I was taking dictation’. Throughout the 1953 letters, Burroughs had been writing about writing, mostly concerning the difficulty of doing so, the practical aspects of publication, and the ineffability of the *yagé* experience. Once he desists from trying to compose and report a story portraying the effects of *yagé*, only then does he experience a *yagé*-influenced practice of writing which he compares to taking dictation. This reference to the act of writing being comparable to dictation is repeated several years later to describe the writing of *Naked Lunch*, but at that time it becomes misleadingly contextualised solely in terms of drug addiction. Encountering the phrase here, in a fuller description of what is intended by the expression, is important

³⁴ Kenneth Kensinger, ‘Banisteriopsis Usage Among the Peruvian Cashinahua’ in Michael J. Harner, ed. *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973, p.12.

³⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg 10 July 1953, *Letters*, p.182.

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp.182,183.

in regard to understanding Burroughs' interest in the processes of writing and reading, an interest that is more explicitly expressed in his work with cut-ups.

Ten Years of Change: 1953 to 1963

After the expedition Burroughs began working on an article on *yagé*, of which several drafts survive dating from 1953 and 1956. Oliver Harris includes extracts from these draft articles as appendices to *The Yage Letters Redux* and reports on the results of his own research into the manuscript history of *The Yage Letters* in his introduction to this 2006 edition. In this text he reviews the history of the editing of the manuscript, how its article format was discarded and the material reworked into an epistolary novel along with the addition of the later 1960 material including letters sent from Ginsberg to Burroughs. But whilst the manuscript was undergoing this series of transformations and Burroughs' 1953 material was being reworked into its final form, the context for the reception of his work was also changing.

In the space of time between the writing of the 1953 letters and the publication of the 1963 text, an increase in the use and influence of psychoactive substances was rapidly transforming the context for the work's reception. Burroughs' position as a published writer had also altered in this ten year period, he had become the celebrated and notorious author of *Naked Lunch* and promoter of the cut-up technique, examples of which could be found in many little magazines and in the circulating Olympia copies of the cut-up novels.

As we have seen from examining the attitude towards psychoactive substances prevalent within journal articles up to and including the period of Burroughs'

expedition, knowledge of the use of mescaline and *yagé* was still limited to the sciences and social sciences in 1953. However by 1963, media coverage of the use and effects of the ‘psychedelics’ psilocybin and LSD and the controversies that surrounded the actions of figures such as Timothy Leary, had led to the increased awareness of their mind-altering properties. The mainly negative publicity within sensationalised media accounts introduced issues of legality and abuse. From the beginning of the 1960s it was LSD that became most famously associated with the psychedelic movement, and so a review of the history of LSD provides a background to this growth in the popular use and knowledge of psychoactive substances.

Albert Hofmann had first experimented with LSD-25 in 1938, but he did not discover its psychoactive properties until 1943. Believing that the drug could be of use within psychiatric research, samples of LSD were sent to a number of research institutions. Jay Stevens writes in *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (1987) that in 1947 Sandoz offered to supply LSD to select researchers. Stevens proposes that if we examine the ‘suggested uses’ listed in the promotional literature we can deduce the nature of the interest in LSD (here named Delysid) at that time:

Analytical: To elicit release of repressed material and provide mental relaxation, particularly in anxiety states and obsessional neuroses.

Experimental: By taking Delysid himself, the psychiatrist is able to gain an insight into the world of ideas and sensations of mental patients. Delysid also can be used to induct model psychoses of short duration in more normal subjects, thus facilitating studies on the pathogenesis of mental illness.³⁷

From this period to the beginning of the 1960s, experiments with LSD were

³⁷ Stevens, p.36. Stevens quotes from the literature accompanying shipments of Delysid from Sandoz Ltd. Basle, Switzerland.

conducted by psychiatrists who were interested in the use of LSD for its production of the symptoms of schizophrenia and its potential use as a method of treatment. The CIA, in the course of their investigations into the use of drugs for mind control, had begun conducting experiments with LSD and other psychoactive substances in the early 1950s. Their experiments centred around LSD and, as Stevens writes, ‘the CIA considered LSD to be of such promise that in November 1953 they sent two men with a black bag full of cash to buy up Sandoz’s entire supply’.³⁸ The first experiments with LSD that were to take place outside a clinical or government setting began in the mid-1950s and at that stage only within a small group of friends of psychologists in Los Angeles that included figures such as Aldous Huxley and Anaïs Nin.³⁹ At that time their interest was still expressed and articulated within the critical framework of scientific and intellectual exploration.

Towards the end of the 1950s, knowledge of the use and effects of LSD had still not gained any substantial publicity within the mass media. In *Alterations of Consciousness* Imants Barušs notes that ‘by 1960, more than 500 papers about LSD had been published’⁴⁰ but that their form and content continued to be prescribed by the conventions of research, documenting the effects upon volunteer participants and printed only in research journals. But by 1962 Stevens notes that LSD ‘was escaping from the lab’.⁴¹ As more participants became involved, it was inevitable that some of these would begin to relate the sensational details of their experience outside

³⁸ Stevens, p.124.

³⁹ Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain write that the psychiatrist Dr. Oscar Janiger ‘proceeded to administer the psychedelic to various writers, actors, musicians, and film-makers, including such notables as Anaïs Nin, André Previn, Jack Nicholson, James Coburn, Ivan Tors, and the great stand-up comedian Lord Buckley.’ Lee and Shlain, pp.61-62.

⁴⁰ Imants Barušs, *Alterations of Consciousness: An Empirical Analysis for Social Scientists*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2003, p.163.

⁴¹ Stevens, p.256.

academic journals. In *LSD: My Problem Child*, Albert Hofmann observed how awareness shifted from a scientific to a popular arena:

The spread of LSD from medicine and psychiatry into the drug scene was introduced and expedited by publications on sensational LSD experiments that, although they were carried out in psychiatric clinics and universities, were not then reported in scientific journals, but rather in magazines and daily papers, greatly elaborated.⁴²

For example, one such article appeared in *Look* magazine on 20 April 1959. It reported the story of Cary Grant's treatment with LSD under the psychiatrists Mortimer Hartman and Arthur Chandler. In the interview Grant had spoken with enthusiasm of his experiences and it was through these kinds of media stories that news of LSD and psilocybin spread, but stories such as Grant's were soon outnumbered by negative reports of the perceived dangers of LSD. In July 1962, Sidney Cohen and Keith Ditman, writing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, made reference to the phenomenon of the 'LSD party', and presented nine case studies to illustrate 'the dangers of suicide' and the 'prolonged psychotic reactions',⁴³ that they warned could result from its use outside a clinical setting.

One way of charting the changing context for the reception of Burroughs' *yagé* material is to examine the publications that emerged within this space of ten years. At the same time that Burroughs was in South America looking for *yagé*, two other important figures were undergoing experiences that would lead to the publication of written reports on the effects of psychoactive substances. In May 1953 Aldous Huxley had his first experience with mescaline which resulted in his writing *The Doors of Perception*, published in 1954. Also in 1953 Robert Gordon Wasson was on an

⁴² Albert Hofmann, *LSD: My Problem Child*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1980, p.58.

⁴³ Sidney Cohen and Keith S. Ditman, 'Complications Associated with Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD-25)', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 181 (14 July 1962), p.162.

expedition investigating the presence and use of psychoactive mushrooms in Mexico. It was not until 1955 that Wasson himself tried the mushrooms which led to his 1957 article 'Seeking the Magic Mushroom'⁴⁴ in *Life* magazine, a significant moment in the growing public awareness of psychoactive substances. Other publications that emerged in the ten years between Burroughs' own expedition and the publication of *The Yage Letters* included Henri Michaux's *Miserable Miracle* (1956) on his experiences with mescaline, Adelle Davis' *Exploring Inner Space: Personal Experiences under LSD-25* (1961), Thelma Moss' *My Self and I* (1962) and Alan Watts' *Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (1962).⁴⁵ These texts varied in the meanings they drew from the mind-altering experiences, and they each attracted different audiences, but the cumulative effect was the same in that they acted to raise public awareness, interest and concern.

Timothy Leary played a major role in the growth of the psychedelic movement. Leary began his investigations within the environment of clinical experimentation at Harvard after having witnessed the effects of psychoactive mushrooms in Mexico in 1960. He initiated a programme of experiments called the Harvard Psilocybin Project, which included investigating the effects of psilocybin on prisoners in the Concord Prison experiments of 1961. In 1962 Leary and Richard Alpert formed the organisation The International Foundation for Internal Freedom (IFIF) and in 1963, the same year as the publication of *The Yage Letters*, the IFIF published the first issue of their journal *The Psychedelic Review*. After being fired from his academic post in

⁴⁴ Robert Gordon Wasson, 'Seeking the Magic Mushroom', *Life*, 42.19 (13 May 1957), pp.100-120.

⁴⁵ Henri Michaux, *Miserable Miracle*. Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1956, and in English translation: Henri Michaux, *Miserable Miracle*. Trans. Louise Varèse. San Francisco: City Lights, 1963; Adelle Davis (pseud. Jane Dunlap) *Exploring Inner Space: Personal Experiences under LSD-25*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961; Thelma Moss (pseud. Constance A. Newland) *My Self and I*. New York: Coward McCann, 1962; Alan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness*. New York: Pantheon, 1962.

1963, Leary continued his experiments outside an official institutional setting but still within the sphere of media attention, a shift that was mirrored by the wider cultural transition underway in the use of what had now become known as ‘psychedelics’. This shift signals the transformation of LSD from a pharmaceutical research drug to a ‘psychedelic’ of the counter-culture.

The 1963 Publication of *The Yage Letters*

This account of the emergence of the psychedelic movement brings us to 1963, the year of the publication of *The Yage Letters* by City Lights. The fact that the subject of psychoactive substances was of growing interest to the public and the media meant that from the perspective of the publishing industry this was the perfect moment to issue *The Yage Letters*. But this would be to overlook the fact that the letters are rich with a different, more subtle timeliness and one that was lost by the ten-year delay in publication. Burroughs’ expedition and search for a plant of which he had heard vague rumours would have been timely in 1953 for the very reason that it *predated* non-clinical interest in, and knowledge of, LSD and psilocybin and the psychedelic movement.

By the time that *The Yage Letters* was published in 1963, this tension of premonition that suffuses the text would have been overshadowed by actual events, for what it anticipates was becoming visible through a growing subcultural use of psychedelics, and the infiltration of their influence into cultural expression. It is the challenge of describing the effects and visions of *yagé* which make the letters so relevant in 1953. Burroughs’ transition from reportage to his experiencing of the ineffability of the later

more intense experiences, and then to the writing of the 10 July letter, reads differently in the context of 1953, a time before a specific psychedelic vocabulary had emerged to describe the effects of LSD and psilocybin. The 1953 letters are full of the ‘sensing’ that there is something to report, but as the early letters reveal, Burroughs cannot determine exactly what it is. His feeling is confirmed by the presence of the *Life* reporter who is also on the trail of *yagé*; he senses a story and the letters document the tension of his struggle to locate it. As a result of the absence from *The Yage Letters* of many of his direct references to the effects of *yagé*, and the publication of the text ten years after the expedition, both the content and context of the material had changed.

By 1963 *The Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket That Exploded* had been published by Olympia Press and an American edition of *Naked Lunch* had been published by Grove Press in 1962 (although their edition was awaiting an obscenity trial that would take place in 1965). Burroughs had publicised the cut-up technique at the Edinburgh Writer’s Conference of 1962, and some early examples as well as descriptions of the cut-up method had been published in *Minutes to Go* (1960) and *The Exterminator* (1960), and in the many little magazines including *Outsider* and *Floating Bear*. *The Yage Letters* was issued just as his experimental work was circulating. Placed in juxtaposition to the cut-up texts of the early 1960s, the greater extremes of Burroughs’ experimental work would have overshadowed the ‘In Search of Yage’ section of *The Yage Letters* and made it appear in comparison a straight and uncomplicated text. His writing on the mind-altering properties of *yagé* in the 1953 letters might have alerted readers to the connection between the *yagé* experience and the cut-up method, but the very different text of *The Yage Letters* conceals this

association, so that even the inclusion of the cut-up text ‘I am Dying, Meester?’ at the end of *The Yage Letters* fails to raise awareness of how they are related.

The fact that *The Yage Letters* does not consist of the reproduced letters from Burroughs’ 1953 expedition, but is instead an epistolary novel composed using letters, notebooks and additional material, was revealed by Oliver Harris in his introduction to *The Yage Letters Redux*. Harris presents a history of the editing and publication of the *yagé* material, and by comparing the 1953 letters and the published work, reveals that far from being a print version of the original letters, Burroughs reformed the *yagé* material into an epistolary text:

Apart from the “March 3” letter - none of which appeared in his June manuscript - Burroughs fabricated its epistolary appearance by adding material such as the letter’s formal tops and tails, by changing the tense to create an improvised effect of reporting live, and by cutting out tell-tale lines. While some letters were created only by adding the formal openings and endings (such as “January 25”), in other cases (such as “February 28”) Burroughs adapted the first and last paragraphs of real letters to use as frames for material in his non-epistolary manuscript. Other letters were more complex composites of the original manuscript, inserted notebook entries, new material, and selections from multiple real letters.⁴⁶

Until the publication of this new edition which includes this detailed manuscript history, *The Yage Letters* had been read as an accurate reproduction of original correspondence.

Burroughs first reworked his *yagé* material as an article. Several different manuscript versions of this ‘*Yagé Article*’ are included as appendices in *The Yage Letters Redux*. The manuscript of a March 1956 version of this text is of particular interest because

⁴⁶ Oliver Harris, ‘Introduction’ in *The Yage Letters Redux*, p.xxxiii.

Burroughs includes some of his fullest descriptions of the *yagé* experience. We find within this manuscript an analysis of the effects of *yagé* upon the mind that hints at the longer term influence of psychoactive substances on generating an increased self-awareness of how the mind functions and how learnt structures of thinking control and determine thought processes:

I experienced at first a feeling of calm and serenity like I could sit there all night. I glimpsed a new state of being. I must give up the attempt to explain, to seek any answer in terms of cause and effect and prediction, leave behind the entire structure of pragmatic, result seeking, use seeking, question asking Western thought. I must change my whole method of conceiving fact.⁴⁷

Also included in the article are sections of his 8 July letter describing the *yagé* experience: ‘This is the most powerful drug I have ever experienced. That is it produces the most complete derangement of the senses. You see everything from an hallucinated viewpoint’⁴⁸ and ‘Notes from *Yagé* State’ with his account of bodily metamorphosis. What is perhaps most surprising about the 1956 article is that although we do not find these descriptions of the effects of *yagé* in *The Yage Letters*, quite an extensive amount of the text was published in *Naked Lunch* and in Burroughs’ 1957 article ‘Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs’ which was included in *Naked Lunch* first as footnotes and then as an appendix.

It was not the ‘*Yagé* Article’ material, but a different reworking of Burroughs’ 1953 writings in the form of letters, first published in magazines, that became the basis for *The Yage Letters*. It was these texts that Lawrence Ferlinghetti gathered together to publish *The Yage Letters* in 1963,⁴⁹ taking material previously published in *Big Table*,

⁴⁷ ‘From Burroughs’ March 1956 “*Yagé* Article” manuscript’ in *The Yage Letters Redux*, pp.95-96.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.96.

⁴⁹ The following magazine texts by Burroughs were collected together to form the 1963 edition of *The Yage Letters*: ‘In Quest of Yage’, *Big Table*, 2 (Summer 1959); ‘In Search of Yage’, *Kulchur*, 3 (1961); ‘Letter June 21 1960’, *Floating Bear*, 5 (1961); ‘I am Dying Meester?’, *City Lights Journal*, 1 (1963). See Oliver Harris, ‘Not Burroughs’ Final Fix: Materializing *The Yage Letters*’, *Postmodern Culture*,

Kulchur, *Floating Bear* and *City Lights Journal*. As Oliver Harris notes in the introduction to *The Yage Letters Redux*:

[T]he text originally accepted for publication consisted *only* of the materials published in certain magazines. This is actually the key revelation: since the original manuscript had been lost, all Ferlinghetti could do was reproduce those letters as already edited and published, making a whole out of the sum of these parts.⁵⁰

One magazine piece that Ferlinghetti did not include in *The Yage Letters* was Burroughs' 10 July letter that had been published in *Black Mountain Review*. As Harris states, the reason for this was because the Composite City text had already been published in *Naked Lunch* four years earlier.

The text is one of the essential seeds of *Naked Lunch* – but it was also the spectacular climax to “In Search of Yage.” And yet, because it had been cannibalised for *Naked Lunch*, the first “Yage” letter to be published wouldn't actually take its place in *The Yage Letters* until the second edition of 1975.⁵¹

What is revealed is that the choice of material that forms the published text, and therefore the impression that it conveys of the nature of Burroughs' *yagé* experiences did not result from Burroughs' own editorial decisions, but was, as Harris notes, ‘determined as much by chance factors and the agency of others as by Burroughs himself’.⁵²

Several other important descriptions of the *yagé* experience from the 1953 letters are absent from the published work. For example, material from the 18 June and 8 July letters in which he writes that his *yagé* experiences induced powerful and enduring

16.2 (January 2006) for details of this aspect of the publication history of *The Yage Letters*.

⁵⁰ Oliver Harris, ‘Introduction’ in *The Yage Letters Redux*, p.xli.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.xxxix.

⁵² *ibid.*, p.xliii.

alterations of consciousness were not included; such lines as: ‘It is the most powerful drug I have ever experienced’, ‘it produces the most complete derangement of the senses’, and ‘Yage is it. It is the drug really does what the others are supposed to do’.⁵³ Also absent from the published text are the expressions of ineffability: that the *yagé* experience ‘can not be put into words’ and that ‘what followed was indescribable’.⁵⁴

If we look at the *yagé* experiences that *are* in the 1963 publication of *The Yage Letters* we find that there are four described, the first can be found in the 28 February letter and is unsuccessful: ‘I did not notice any effect’.⁵⁵ The second description is in the 15 April letter which begins with the statement ‘I have a crate of Yage. I have taken it and know more or less how it is prepared’.⁵⁶ Despite descriptions of vomiting and blue flashes, this text does not convey the sense of being overwhelmed that we find in the 1953 letters. The third experience is reported to be ‘similar to weed’ with ‘no hallucinations or loss of control’.⁵⁷ The last reference to taking *yagé* in the 8 July letter contains no mention of the psychoactive effects, and the incident is instead turned into a story revolving around the character of the ‘Dane’: ‘Met a young Dane and took Yage with him. He immediately vomited it up and avoided me after that - he evidently thought I had tried to poison him and he was only saved by this prompt reaction of his hygenic Scandinavian gut’.⁵⁸

The mistaken perception that *The Yage Letters* chronologically reproduces an original collection of letters was encouraged in the first 1963 publication which included on

⁵³ Burroughs to Ginsberg 8 July 1953, *Letters*, pp.179-180.

⁵⁴ Burroughs to Ginsberg 18 June 1953, *Letters*, p.171.

⁵⁵ William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1963, p.21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.45.

the copyright page the following statement:

The cover photo of a *curandero* from the Vaupes region of Colombia is reprinted by permission of the Botanical Museum of Harvard University. The authors' thanks must be given to Aileen Lee and Alan Ansen who in 1953 helped type and preserve Burroughs' letters and to Melville Hardiment who later preserved Ginsberg's.⁵⁹

This statement carries several implications in regard to the content and status of the text that follows, and whilst not explicitly saying so, contributes to the impression that this volume is a reprint of the actual letters that Burroughs sent to Ginsberg in 1953. The reference to Aileen Lee and Alan Ansen's work in having helped to 'type and preserve' the letters builds up an impression of their unaltered status as archival objects, when in actuality the letters in *The Yage Letters* were written only in reference to these originals.

To gain a sense of how this influenced the reception of the book in 1963 we can examine Donatella Manganotti's review of *The Yage Letters* in *Kulchur*. Manganotti questions why the letters 'which should be intimate and personal are in fact objective and aloof as reportage':

In them, even when the "I" indicates a flesh and blood William Burroughs, the personal pronoun is always so impersonal that it is only with an effort that we remember it is not the fictional "I" so common in novels and short stories, but a real person writing about himself and his own experience to one of his closest friends.⁶⁰

It is evident from Manganotti's statements that *The Yage Letters* was received as the reprinting of an original collection of letters and not as an epistolary novel. What is also clear from Manganotti's questioning of the journalistic tone of these 'intimate

⁵⁹ William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1963, copyright page.

⁶⁰ Donatella Manganotti, 'The Final Fix', *Kulchur*, 4.15. (Autumn 1964), p.83.

and personal' letters is that the publication obscured the history of Burroughs' expedition: that he had initially been commissioned to report on his search for *yagé* and that the resulting letters to Ginsberg are an assemblage of these attempts at reportage, personal material and short literary experiments.

In conclusion we can see that the process of turning the 1953 *yagé* letters into publishable material, first for journals and then collected together as *The Yage Letters*, has effectively disguised the fact that Burroughs' *yagé* experiences led to powerful alterations in consciousness. Firstly, all references to the task of writing about *yagé* - such as references to writing a piece for Wyn, the initial failure to produce anything, and proposed projects for a funded visit to the Auca - were not included in the published text. As a result *The Yage Letters* lacks the context of attempted conventional reportage that, in the letters, makes the later descriptions of the *yagé* experiences and the emergence of Burroughs' *yagé*-influenced writing in the 10 July letter such a dramatic transformation. Secondly, because Burroughs' fullest descriptions of the *yagé* experience and his claims for its consciousness-altering effects are also missing from the 1963 publication, "In Search of Yage" does not actually supply the narrative of Burroughs' search for *yagé* and his written response to his experiences.

It would seem that Burroughs' most effusive descriptions of the *yagé* experience were not included in *The Yage Letters* as the result of publication contingences rather than his decision to exclude such statements. Burroughs' descriptions of the powerful effects of *yagé* are present within his oeuvre, but just not where we would most expect to find them. The absence of Burroughs' most pronounced descriptions of

yagé from the 1963 *The Yage Letters*, and their presence instead within *Naked Lunch*, is an important clue as to why the influence of Burroughs' *yagé* experiences have been overlooked in readings of his work. In chapter three I will be examining the 8 July, 10 July and 1956 'Yagé Article' manuscript material as it appears in *Naked Lunch* - a text which has become known as a 'junk' book - but which I argue presents a far more diverse exploration of different altered states of consciousness.

As well as *The Yage Letters*, later publications of Burroughs' work have contributed to the invisibility of the influence of *yagé* upon his writing and his experimental practice. In 1989 a collection of Burroughs's pre-1959 writings and routines were published as *Interzone*. This publication presents a narrative of the development of his work from his early routines to his writing of 'WORD', described as the period of time 'between the completion of his novel *Queer* and the beginning of *Interzone/Naked Lunch* (roughly 1953-58)'. As James Grauerholz writes in the introduction, '*Interzone* has been compiled with the intention that readers may now be able to see that transformation take place in the course of one volume'.⁶¹ But Burroughs' experiences with *yagé* which mark the beginning of this period, and as I argue here, were a contributory factor in the development of his work, are absent from this narrative of 'transformation'.

Although the 1953 letters and *The Yage Letters* are briefly mentioned in the introduction to *Interzone*, they are described as 'retailing his travels and adventures in a hilarious mixture of amorous anecdotes and anthropological essays',⁶² which fails to convey both the extremity of the experiences and their possible influence upon

⁶¹ James Grauerholz, 'Introduction' in William S. Burroughs, *Interzone*, ed. James Grauerholz. 1989. New York: Penguin, 1990, p.x.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.xii.

Burroughs. The important period of development is then shortened: ‘In these four crucial years, 1954-57, Burroughs had been transformed into a writer’, cutting his 1953 *yagé* writings out of the narrative. This collection argues that the writing of ‘WORD’, taken from the 1958 *Interzone* manuscript,⁶³ reveals a moment of change in Burroughs’ writing, that ‘it marked the breakthrough into his own characteristic voice’:

What is the significance of “WORD” to Burroughs’ career as a writer? It shows the complete transformation of the straightforward style of the two early novels into a manic, surreal, willfully disgusting and violently purgative regurgitation of seemingly random images. “WORD” is a text written at the white heat of Burroughs’ first command of this later style.⁶⁴

Although it is true that in ‘WORD’ we find many of the qualities that characterise *Naked Lunch*, a reading of the 1953 letters reveals that Burroughs had already been experimenting with a surreal assemblage of images in his writing in response to the experience of *yagé*. No other publication however has done more to substantiate the impression created by *The Yage Letters* that *yagé* had little influence upon Burroughs’ work than the subject of my next chapter - the Grove edition of Burroughs’ most famous book: *Naked Lunch*.

⁶³ Although the publication bears the same title, *Interzone* is not the same as the *Interzone* manuscript in Columbia University Library. The publication includes sections of this manuscript most notably ‘WORD’ and ‘The Conspiracy’ but also manuscript material from Arizona State University and from Burroughs’ letters to Ginsberg.

⁶⁴ James Grauerholz, ‘Introduction’ in *Interzone*, pp.xxi-xxii.

Chapter 2

How Censorship Determined the Publication and Reception of *Naked Lunch*

The preceding chapter introduced some of the ways in which the reception of Burroughs' work has been influenced by its circumstances of publication. In the case of *The Yage Letters*, the processes of editing and decisions concerning how the text was presented have had a substantial and long lasting influence upon its reception. Moving on to look at the circumstances of the publication of *Naked Lunch*, I will be exploring how the censorship of the text and the 1965 obscenity trial have influenced how the text has been read. The censorship of obscenity led not, as might be expected, to the removal of its obscene content but instead - through an evolving tactic of defence - to the promotion of addiction as the defining interpretative context.

The censorship of *Naked Lunch* has attracted little critical attention. Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg in their 'Introduction' to *William Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception 1959-1989* refer to *Naked Lunch*'s history of censorship and the marginalisation of this history that has been prevalent in Burroughs scholarship since the 1980s. They regard the censorship of *Naked Lunch* to be an 'extraliterary factor' and 'the source of extreme emotional responses that have often prevented critics from looking at the work itself'. In these terms, censorship is viewed as complicating the act of critical analysis, and by describing the censorship of *Naked Lunch* as an 'extraliterary factor', Skerl and Lydenberg are identifying the censorship and trial of *Naked Lunch* as events in the life of Burroughs which contribute to 'the legend

surrounding his life and personality'.¹ The history of a text, including its history of censorship and publication, occupies an uneasy position between biography and literary criticism, and for this very reason those involved in the latter are often wary of directly engaging with these textual histories. In this case Skerl and Lydenberg have expressed the concern that the censorship of Burroughs' text is inseparable from the legendary details of his life.

I suggest however that research into the publication and censorship of Burroughs' work is essential in determining how these histories have influenced the dissemination and reception of his output in various media. The censorship of a text cannot be dismissed, I will argue, as an 'extraliterary factor', nor can censorship be taken to be a momentary event or action inflicted upon a text. The moment of trial or the act of banning a text are instances of the direct impact of censorship, and these are easily charted and assessed; but what is more important to a literary critical survey of Burroughs' work are the indirect effects of censorship. These include the response from the publishing industry concerning not only what they publish, but how they publish and promote the work to deflect censorship, and consequently how the critical reception of a text is influenced by the publisher's presentation and promotion of the material.

As well as being viewed as only of biographical interest and problematically contributory to the 'legend' of Burroughs, the censorship history of *Naked Lunch* has been avoided in critical studies because critics responding to censorship have tended to become overly involved in discussions of the morality of the text. Timothy Murphy

¹ Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg, 'Points of Intersection: An Overview of William S. Burroughs and His Critics' in Skerl and Lydenberg, p.3.

in *Wising Up the Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs* identifies the censorship of *Naked Lunch* as one factor which has contributed to the preoccupation of critics with a moral criticism of his work. Murphy observes that the legal and moral censure from the state was 'seconded by many critics of the mainstream media, who predictably denounced Burroughs' work as pseudoliterary pornography'.² He concludes that the influence of censorship and the trial can be observed in the predominantly moral criticism of reviews and early studies.

Taking a retrospective look at the early reviews and critical readings of *Naked Lunch*, it becomes clear why many critics including Murphy chose to disassociate the text's history of censorship from their study of *Naked Lunch*. The initial reviews of *Naked Lunch* are heavily inscribed with the personal opinions of each critic on the issue of obscenity within literature, and their critical reading of the text is displaced by the emphasis upon their political position in contemporary debates on censorship.³ The result is a tendency toward polarised analyses of the text, with critics either defending *Naked Lunch* as a great and 'moral' work of literature, or denying its status as 'literature' and attacking it as both obscene and immoral. Skerl and Lydenberg observe that these questions of morality preoccupied critics throughout the 1960s and it was in an attempt to distance their own work from these debates that later critics chose to disregard the text's history of censorship, and to engage instead in textual and theoretical readings of Burroughs' work.

² Timothy S. Murphy, *Wising Up the Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p.8.

³ See for example John Willett's *Times Literary Supplement* review 'Ugh...' on 14 November 1963 and the responses from John Calder, Michael Moorcock, Edith Sitwell, Victor Gollancz and Eric Mottram on the 21 and 28 November. The original article and responses are reprinted in Skerl and Lydenberg.

There are though some exceptions to this trend and Michael Goodman's *Contemporary Literary Censorship: The Case History of Burroughs' Naked Lunch* (1981) narrates the censorship history of the text from the *Big Table* obscenity hearing to the Boston trial and provides a good overview of these events. Goodman recognises the importance of the *Naked Lunch* trial which signalled 'an end to the censorship of literature in the United States' but he does not identify the long-term influence that defending the text against the charge of obscenity has had upon readings of Burroughs' work. I have drawn upon Goodman's study, but in my own research I have taken a different approach to the censorship of the text. In contrast to Goodman's celebratory conclusion that '[c]ritics of American literature have since been free to deal with Burroughs as a serious artist',⁴ I explore the problematic legacy of these events and the impact they have had upon the published form of the text and consequently upon its reception.

The censorship and trial of *Naked Lunch* have had a lasting impact upon how it is read, particularly the emphasis upon addiction as its central metaphor and theme, and the lack of critical attention to sexuality, experimentation and the accounts of *yagé* within the text. I propose to return to the history of the censorship of *Naked Lunch*, and to chronologically chart the publication of the text from the early inclusion of extracts in journals to full publication in France and the United States. It is now nearly fifty years since the trial of *Naked Lunch*, and from this perspective it is possible to review this history of publication and censorship without inducing the 'extreme emotional responses' against which Skerl and Lydenberg warn.

⁴ Michael Barry Goodman, *Contemporary Literary Censorship: The Case History of Burroughs' Naked Lunch*. London: The Scarecrow Press, 1981, p.249.

The Early Publication History of *Naked Lunch*: Censorship and the Formation of a Defence

Extracts from *Naked Lunch* were first published in American journals in 1957 and 1958. In 1959 the full text was published by the Olympia Press in Paris as *The Naked Lunch*, followed by publication in America in 1962. The censorship of literature was an issue for publishers in both of these countries. Although the censorship of obscene literature in America had lessened throughout the 1950s and 1960s as a result of several landmark trials, the publication of *Naked Lunch* took place during this pivotal time and was published with the expectation of censorship and of an obscenity trial. Censorship was also changing in France but in the opposite direction to America. France had the reputation of being a place of greater freedom in the publication of literature, but by the later 1950s this was no longer the case, and Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press, the first publisher of *The Naked Lunch*, was to experience the ill-effects of this change. Tracing this early history of publication we begin to see that even at this stage, a defence of the text was evolving in both America and France carefully constructed around the argument for its social importance as a document of drug addiction.

The first appearance of the material that was to become *Naked Lunch* was in the Autumn 1957 issue of *Black Mountain Review* under the pseudonymous name of William Lee which Burroughs had previously used for the 1953 publication of *Junkie*. This piece, entitled 'From *Naked Lunch*, Book III: In Search of *Yagé*' was, as we have seen, published in *Naked Lunch* and then only later included in the 1975 edition of *The Yage Letters*. At this stage in the editing of *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs was planning to use the *yagé* material as part three of the book. The idea to edit the

material originally destined for *Naked Lunch* into three books: *Queer*, *Naked Lunch*, and *The Yage Letters* was suggested by Burroughs in a letter to Ginsberg dated 20 September 1957.⁵ The material however must have remained intact because in a letter of 11 May 1959, Irving Rosenthal who had personally taken on the role of agent for *Naked Lunch*, makes the same suggestion of editing the material into three separate texts.⁶

Irving Rosenthal's involvement with *Naked Lunch* had begun during his time at Chicago University as editor of the *Chicago Review*. Rosenthal's interest in the Beats led him to print the work of Burroughs, Ginsberg, Kerouac and Ferlinghetti in the 1958 issues of the *Chicago Review*, including extracts from the material that would become *Naked Lunch*. The autumn issue attracted the attention of *Chicago Daily News* columnist Jack Mabley who expressed his disgust by writing a column headed 'Filthy Writing on the Midway'.⁷ In response to this attack and under pressure from those with financial interests in the university, the Chicago University Faculty Review Board decided to take their own action and to censor future issues of the *Chicago Review*. Rosenthal and six members of the editorial staff resigned. Rosenthal decided to continue with publication of the suppressed material planned for the winter issue, and in order to do so he became temporary editor of the new magazine *Big Table*.

The first issue of *Big Table* in spring 1959 included an extensive section from *Naked Lunch*. When copies of *Big Table* were seized by the Post Office, this marked the

⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg 20 September 1957, *Letters*, p.367. Burroughs wrote: 'To my way of thinking *Queer* and letters have no place in present work.'

⁶ Rosenthal to Burroughs 11 May 1959, File C-25, William S. Burroughs Papers, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library; Hereafter cited as BP NYPL. Rosenthal wrote: 'I think the novel should be composed in the main of all the hip sections and routines, and I think the straight sections (*Queer*) and the yage letters either should be published separately or transformed somehow.'

⁷ Jack Mabley, 'Filthy Writing on the Midway', *Chicago Daily News* (25 October 1958), p.1.

beginning of the construction of a defence strategy which would evolve over time, between countries and between publishers, culminating in an obscenity trial five years later. The hearing for *Big Table* took place on 23 June 1959. American Civil Liberties Union lawyer Joel Sprayregen defended the magazine by using Hoke Norris, book reviewer for the *Chicago Sun Times*, and Paul Carroll, original editor of *Big Table*, to defend the magazine's serious literary intentions. As a third and final witness, Sprayregen introduced Hans W. Mattick, sociologist, psychologist and criminologist, to defend Burroughs' piece in the magazine, not for its literary worth, but as a valuable study of drug addiction.

In regard to the censorship history of *Naked Lunch*, the introduction of Mattick into the proceedings is of particular importance and is an early indication of the direction in which lawyers and publishers would attempt to lead interpretative readings of the text. As Michael Goodman notes in his study of the hearing, Mattick's role in the defence of the magazine was to argue that the piece by Burroughs would serve as an excellent example of the life of a drug addict and could be used for teaching a course in criminology. Mattick claimed that its main value 'is its first-hand account from one acquainted with the problem and apparently speaking uninhibitedly about both the joys and sorrows of the addict'.⁸ At this point Mattick's testimony was interrupted by the request for biographical clarification that Burroughs did have experience as a drug addict. It was asserted that this biographical detail needed to be confirmed because no such statement had been given in *Big Table*.

⁸ Goodman (1981), p.60. Goodman quotes from Post Office Department Docket # 1/150, Transcript of Hearing, p.156.

This attempt to defend the text by arguing for its social and scientific importance within the fields of psychology, sociology and criminology was revisited by Grove Press and their lawyer Edward de Grazia when the published text was placed on trial. When Grove formulated their own defence, they were also careful to pay particular attention to clarifying this issue of Burroughs' biographical connection to drug addiction. During the *Big Table* hearing, the promotion and circulation of the magazine were cited as important factors in determining the obscenity of the material. In an attempt to defend the serious literary intentions of the editors, Sprayregen submitted adverts for *Big Table* from the *Village Voice* and other journals. The initial Post Office decision concluded that *Big Table* was obscene, and this decision was partly informed by the belief that the editors were attempting to make money through the exploitation of the reader's desire for sexually explicit material. Therefore it was not only the content that was important in reaching a verdict but also evidence of the editor's intentions. During the appeal, and in response to this interpretation of the magazine's exploitative ambitions, Sprayregen continued to defend the text on the basis that the magazine was published and distributed in a reputable fashion. Again, this early censorship of *Naked Lunch* was to later influence Grove's publication of the text, in particular the advertisement, promotion and presentation of the material under question.

Although *Big Table* was cleared of its original Post Office ban after the successful appeal in 1960, the full text of *Naked Lunch* was not published in America until 1962, three years after its publication in France. Throughout the twentieth century Paris was recognised as a place where literature that would have been censored in Britain, Ireland and the United States could be published and distributed with greater freedom,

leading to the early publication in Paris of many novels including *Ulysses*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Lolita* and *Tropic of Cancer*. The publication of *The Naked Lunch* in Paris was therefore in keeping with this history, and Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press was already infamous for its catalogue of English translations of Sade, Genet and Bataille, and novels by Henry Miller, Nabokov and Alexander Trocchi. However, at the time of the publication of *Naked Lunch* this freedom that publishers had become accustomed to was being withdrawn, and Olympia Press in particular was facing difficulties resulting from the banning of its books. From 1956 the French authorities began a number of prosecutions against Maurice Girodias and his press, but the situation became even worse after Charles de Gaulle's return to power in 1958 and his introduction of increased levels of censorship.

This change in censorship in France had been underway since the Second World War and laws established in 1939 and 1949 had led to a much stricter censorship of literature. Daniel Bécourt's *Livres Condamnés, Livres Interdit, Régime Juridique du Livre, Liberté ou Censure?* and Jean-Jacques Pauvert's 'Preface' to Bernard Joubert's *Anthologie Erotique de la Censure* outline the history of this transformation of censorship in France. Both studies state that laws passed in 1939 relating to the protection of the family and the law of 16 July 1949 'sur les publications destinées à la Jeunesse' led to an increase in the censorship of literature and would later be applied with greater severity by de Gaulle in 1958.⁹ Patrick Kearney in his bibliographic study of the Olympia Press describes how these laws were used against Olympia. He writes that the 1939 Decree modified an article of the 1881 Law and gave the French government greater power to ban foreign language publications. The

⁹ Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 'Preface: La Censure et Son Ombre' in Bernard Joubert, *Anthologie Érotique de la Censure*. Paris: La Musardine, 2001: 7-12; and Daniel Bécourt, *Livres Condamnés Interdits: Régime Juridique du Livre: Liberté ou Censure?* Paris: Cercle de la Librairie, 1972.

1949 Law may have been intended to protect minors but, as Kearney notes, Article 14 of the law stated that it was forbidden to display or publicise any book unsuitable for those under eighteen and this could be cited to inflict outright bans on many books on Olympia's list. His research shows that between 1954 and 1963, 55 Olympia Press titles were prosecuted, with 25 books banned in 1958 the year before the publication of *The Naked Lunch*.¹⁰

Writing in the journal *Censorship*, François Bondy reported on the impact that the 1939 Decree and 1949 Law were having on publishing in Paris by 1964:

Jerome Lindon told me how the printers had refused to set up a Samuel Beckett novel for fear of prosecution for 'immorality'. How curious it is that today France should be more puritanical than England and the USA. The Paris publishers Pauvert and Girodias especially have been prosecuted because of pornographic works.¹¹

Girodias himself contributed an article entitled 'Confessions of a Booklegger's Son' to the third issue of *Censorship*, relating his own experience of censorship in Paris. As he states, this began after the Second World War when he was prosecuted under the 1939 law on obscene publications for issuing a French edition of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn*. This was the first public trial of an 'obscene' work of literature in France since that of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* in 1857, and marked for Girodias the beginning of a change in the publishing industry in Paris:

France had been considered the land of freedom, of intellectual and political liberties... But in the last twenty years a sinister change has taken place.

¹⁰ These figures are represented in 'Table 2: Olympia Books Banned in France' in Patrick J. Kearney, *The Paris Olympia Press*. New edition revised and expanded, ed. Angus Carroll. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007, p.333.

¹¹ François Bondy, 'The New Puritans', *Censorship*, 1 (Autumn 1964), pp.8-9.

What looked like a perennial tradition has been dismantled in less than a generation.¹²

Taking the above into consideration, we realise that *The Naked Lunch* was not initially published in the atmosphere of literary freedom that is typically associated with twentieth-century Paris. A study of the 1959 Olympia edition reveals the publisher's concerns that Burroughs' work would, along with their other titles, be subject to prosecution. Olympia's promotion and presentation of *The Naked Lunch* picks up upon the defence strategy that was first cultivated during the *Big Table* hearing. This is found in the material printed in the inside folds of the dust jacket which describes the suppression of the *Chicago Review* and the banning of *Big Table* and consists mostly of a lengthy extract from an article by John Ciardi.

In order to assess the influence of censorship upon Ciardi's article, and in turn the influence upon the reader of the Olympia text, it is necessary to look at the original context of the piece and the history of why and when the article was written. The article was published in the *Saturday Review* on 27 June 1959, four days after the *Big Table* obscenity hearing on 23 June 1959. Although the hearing took place on 23 June, the hearing examiner did not present his decision until 9 July and Ciardi's article was written both in direct response to the Post Office's actions against *Big Table*, and in anticipation of the decision. For this reason, Ciardi's article and the impact it has had upon the reading of *The Naked Lunch*, needs to be reviewed with careful consideration as a piece of anti-censorship journalism.

Although it takes the form of a literary review, Ciardi's article is primarily concerned with the freedom of literary expression and in delivering a critique of Post Office

¹² Maurice Girodias, 'Confessions of a Booklegger's Son', *Censorship*, 3 (Summer 1965), p.6.

censorship. Any interpretative commentary by Ciardi on Burroughs' text must be read as operating to support his anti-censorship stance and his structuring of an argument in defence of the work. Throughout the article Ciardi explicitly refers to the Post Office ban on *Big Table*, criticising the bureaucracy of the Post Office, and ridiculing their motives for censorship. The first section of the extract, as printed in the inside flap of the dust jacket reads:

The ten episodes from William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, on the one hand, is writing of an order that may be clearly defended not only as a masterpiece of its own genre, but as a monumentally moral descent into the hell of narcotic addiction. As in Kerouac's blurt, the writing does, to be sure, contain a number of four-letter words, but the simple fact is that such obscenities - if obscenities they are - are inseparable from the total effect of the moral message.¹³

Ciardi twice refers to the 'morality' of *Naked Lunch*. He responds to the *Big Table* ban by reappropriating for his own use the discourse of obscenity law, proposing that Burroughs is 'serious in his intent' and that he is a writer of 'artistic integrity engaged in a profoundly meaningful search for true values'.¹⁴

Central to Ciardi's argument is the identification of addiction as the primary preoccupation of the text, echoing the defence of Burroughs' writing as it was presented by Sprayregen through the testimony of Mattick during the *Big Table* hearing. Ciardi describes addiction as a subject matter of cultural, political and medical importance, and by association, attaches cultural, political and medical importance to *Naked Lunch*. He writes that addiction is the all-embracing subject of the text, not only addiction to drugs, but addiction as a central force of human

¹³ William S. Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*. Paris: Olympia Press, 1959, text from the inside flap of dust jacket. Text extracted by Olympia Press from: John Ciardi, 'The Book Burners and Sweet Sixteen', *Saturday Review*, 42 (July 25, 1959), pp.22:30.

¹⁴ Ibid.

experience. The review by Ciardi describes the narrative sections of *Naked Lunch* as offering a documentary account of drug addiction and the obscene sections as illustrating the addict's depraved state of mind. By promoting addiction as central to the text, he has located within the content of *Naked Lunch* a subject matter of social importance, and he offers the text for re-assessment as a socially valuable account of addiction. Even at this early stage in the text's history, the interpretation of *Naked Lunch* as primarily concerned with drug addiction is an interpretative context intimately bound up with issues of censorship.

Introducing *Naked Lunch*: How the 'Deposition' Became a Part of the Story

After the publication of *The Naked Lunch*, Girodias experienced increased difficulties with the censorship of Olympia titles. Although a certain degree of censorship aided the sale and demand for what Girodias referred to as his 'dbs' or dirty books, this recent tightening of the law on the censorship of literature was a threat to the financial survival of the press and would eventually force Girodias to move the Olympia Press to New York. In an attempt to deflect the attention of the French censors away from *The Naked Lunch* and to improve the image of the press as a whole, Girodias encouraged Burroughs to write an article to be published in newspapers and journals that would defend *The Naked Lunch* as a serious documentation of drug addiction. This 'article' is what is now better known as 'Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness'. Although not written until after the publication of the 1959 Olympia text, and therefore not present within that edition, the 'Deposition' became the established introduction to *Naked Lunch* in editions of the text following Grove's 1962 publication. As an introduction written by the author, the 'Deposition' had a strong

influence upon the first reviews of *Naked Lunch* in the early to mid-1960s, upon critical studies of Burroughs' work and upon the reception of the text by all readers confronted with this introduction which has been taken as an authorial guide to the interpretation of the text.

The title alone, adopting the terms 'deposition' and 'testimony', suggests that the text's function is one of defence. An argument against censorship is exactly what the 'Deposition' provides, justifying and explaining Burroughs' use of obscenity by describing *Naked Lunch* as a text concerned with the important medical and social issue of drug addiction. His style in the 'Deposition' combines personal experience with medical discourse; he delivers an authoritative detailing of addiction and available cures, and an analysis of how the drug market functions. The 'Deposition' introduces Burroughs as a documenter of drug addiction and *Naked Lunch* as an authoritative account of the clinical and social consequences of addiction. He places even more emphasis upon the documentary nature of *Naked Lunch* by stating at the beginning of the 'Deposition' that the text was produced during the 'delirium' of drug addiction:

I apparently took detailed notes on sickness and delirium. I have no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*.¹⁵

This statement suggests that not only is the text primarily about addiction, it is also the product of addiction. This proposed history of the writing of *Naked Lunch* is clearly contradicted, not only by his conscious use of parody, and his referencing of

¹⁵ Burroughs, 'Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness' in William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, ed. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles. New York: Grove Press, 2003, p.199. In this 'restored' edition of *Naked Lunch* 'Deposition' has been moved to the end of the main text - see Chapter 3 for a discussion of this recent edition.

many different styles and genres, but also in an alternative history to be found in his letters to Allen Ginsberg. In these letters, Burroughs writes about the work he has been producing and sends Ginsberg short pieces of writing which are later incorporated into the text of *Naked Lunch*. Having determined that the initial statements concerning the writing of the text are liable to lead to its misreading, the whole content of the 'Deposition' is placed under suspicion.

The most problematic section of the 'Deposition' consists of Burroughs' concluding statements:

The junk virus is public health problem number one of the world today.

Since *Naked Lunch* treats this health problem, it is necessarily brutal, obscene and disgusting. Sickness is often repulsive details not for weak stomachs.

Certain passages in the book that have been called pornographic were written as a tract against Capital Punishment in the manner of Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal*.¹⁶

When these are examined in the context of censorship, they begin to read like legal disclaimers, offering an argument in defence of the text. The intention of the first statement above is clear in that it highlights the connection between *Naked Lunch* and the social issue of the 'junk virus', proposing therefore that the text contributes to current knowledge of an important health problem. The second statement builds on the first, directly referencing *Naked Lunch*'s obscenity and justifying it as necessary to a text which attempts to deal with a medical and sociological issue of this importance. The third statement defends the sex scenes in *Naked Lunch*, declaring that their subject is not sex or sexuality but rather identifying them as political satire and locating this political satire in an established literary tradition.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.205.

The evidence available to ascertain that the origin of the 'Deposition' was an article written for Girodias as a defence against censorship can be found in the correspondence between Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs dating from September 1959 and the letters between Barney Rosset of Grove Press and Girodias from this same period. The first reference to the article that was to become known as the 'Deposition' is in a letter from Burroughs to Ginsberg on 11 September 1959. He states: 'I am writing a short deposition with regard to *Naked Lunch*. This is essential for my own safety at this point'.¹⁷ The proposed destination for this article is, he writes, the French paper *L'Express*, but it is not until the following letter of 25 September that he gives an indication of Girodias' involvement: 'Girodias is sending the article to *The Express* here, *Encounter* in England - which has recently got a real shot in the cover - and to *Evergreen*'.¹⁸

As we have already seen, Girodias was struggling against censorship in France at this time and his encouragement to Burroughs to publish an article accounting for *Naked Lunch* as a serious and moral document of drug addiction is an attempt to construct a defence for his publication. Confirming Burroughs' statement to Ginsberg, Girodias did offer the article for publication to Barney Rosset of Grove Press, publishers of the journal *Evergreen Review*. Rosset wrote to Girodias on 24 September 1959 stating that Grove would be interested in the article: 'I like the Burroughs piece very much, and we could use it in *Evergreen Review*. However I think it would do much better as an introduction to *The Naked Lunch*, and I would prefer to use it in our edition of the book'.¹⁹ This letter from Rosset indicates that very early on in their plans to publish

¹⁷ Burroughs to Ginsberg 11 September 1959, *Letters*, p.424.

¹⁸ Burroughs to Ginsberg 25 September 1959, *Letters*, p.428.

¹⁹ Rosset to Girodias 24 September 1959, Grove Press Records, Syracuse University; hereafter cited as GPR Syracuse.

Naked Lunch, Grove was considering the inclusion of extra material in the form of an introduction that would aid in the defence of the text.

Girodias' reply to Rosset of 29 September 1959 conveys an impression of the increasing pressure from the French censors and he explicitly stresses the need to publish Burroughs' article with the singular purpose of positively influencing Burroughs' reputation and providing a defence against censorship:

I am anxious to have this piece published in the *Evergreen Review* as quickly as possible. It is quite essential that we rapidly establish Burroughs' reputation as a serious writer in this country for reasons I shall explain when I see you. *Partisan* is doing an article on Burroughs in their next issue which will be entirely favourable and it would be to everyone's advantage if you were to print this piece in one of the very next issues.²⁰

Returning to Burroughs' letters to Ginsberg of September 1959 we can gather more information on Girodias' situation and we discover what motivated Burroughs to produce this article. He wrote on 5 September:

Dear Allen,
I am terribly rushed right now and no time to breathe. I enclose an open letter to the French Government written by Lawrence Durrell on behalf of Olympia. It is very important and urgent to get some signatures. He wants yours and Jack's especially. Anybody else among *non-French* writers would be worthwhile. But it is question of time since the case comes up in about ten days, and it is very important he have the signatures by then. Please understand that Girodias is in a unique position to publish original and valuable work that more orthodox and committed publishers would not touch.²¹

It is clear from this letter that he was worried about his own legal problems and that, as he states, this attempt to aid Girodias stemmed from personal concerns:

²⁰ Girodias to Rosset 29 September 1959, GPR Syracuse.

²¹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 5 September 1959, *Letters*, p.423.

I do not have time to explain the situation here, which is complex. But I am asking this of you not only because of Girodias, but because I am personally involved. It is in the cards that the French Government will proceed against me sooner or later, and rather sooner than later.²²

During this time Burroughs was facing the possibility of deportation from France, and once we start to examine his situation we begin to understand why he wrote the 'Deposition' and why, despite Ginsberg's criticisms of the article, he was content to have it published and used as an introduction.

The other subject that occupies Burroughs' letters to Ginsberg during this period is what he refers to as 'the Lund affair'. Paul Lund was an acquaintance of Burroughs who was living in Tangier; he had left Britain to escape arrest for bank robbery and it would seem from Burroughs' letters that he continued his criminal involvements whilst in Morocco. As Burroughs explains in the earlier letter of 2 April 1959, he had sent a letter to Lund in which he mentioned 'pushing a little Moroccan tea in Paris'. This letter to Paul Lund had ended up in police possession with the consequence of endangering Burroughs' residency in France: 'The drag in all this - puts me on top of check-list in France and likely U.S.'.²³ His fears are increased by his later arrest and detainment for twelve hours in a Paris jail, as outlined in a letter to Ginsberg dating from late July.²⁴ Two months later, in the letter of 11 September, the same one in which he first mentioned 'writing a short deposition', he wrote of his growing concern about the Lund affair and about the French censorship of *Naked Lunch*. According to Burroughs, 'the [Lund] case has taken a sinister turn. "It is only a mistake that you are not inside now," my counsellor told me'. He returns to the subject of the signatures he had spoken of in the previous letter:

²² Ibid., p.423.

²³ Burroughs to Ginsberg 2 April 1959, *Letters*, p.410.

²⁴ Burroughs to Ginsberg late July 1959, *Letters*, p.419.

Please give your attention to the signatures. You understand this is my own deal as much as it is Girodias's. I do not want to waste my time with all this legal crap and maybe end up with no passport or some other crippling restriction.²⁵

Prior to these problems which threatened his freedom to stay in Paris, he had already been forced to leave America and then Mexico because of legal proceedings, adding to his fear that this scenario was to be repeated in France.

Burroughs had enclosed a copy of the article in his 25 September letter to Ginsberg and so he became one of the first to read and respond to its content. Ginsberg's letter in reply is a very sharp and critical assessment of the piece. He immediately sees how it functions as a 'cover' for the text, and attempts to reassure Burroughs that it is 'not necessary to write articles covering yourself'. Having surmised that the article is intended to defend the text, he is alert to how it will function to disrupt the reading of *Naked Lunch* through its impact upon the reader and critic. Ginsberg's commentary is also a very accurate prediction of how Grove will make use of the article, foreseeing how the 'Deposition' could become a problematic 'disclaimer' permanently attached to the published text:

despite your assertion that you hardly remember making all the notes - I think this disclaimer of responsibility and awareness is a little exaggerated and possibly humourless, not tending to lead to calm judgement - in fact maybe it's even a little over-moralistic. I dunno. Seems more the product of immediate decisions and pressures from Court, this total disclaimer, than humane judgement.

[...]

Also Rosset probably will want to use that article as preface to any book *Naked* [sic] he puts out here: and I think that such a preface, localizing the symbolism merely to junk addiction, and not to more general psychic addictions (to single level realities and materialisms) underplays the significance of the book, rather than adds to it. Tho it may seem "safer" to Rosset or you temporarily.²⁶

²⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg 11 September 1959, *Letters*, p.424.

²⁶ Ginsberg to Burroughs 1 October 1959, File C-35, BP NYPL.

Ginsberg was correct in making these predictions, for in a letter to Girodias of 24 September 1959 Rosset had already stated his intention to use the 'Deposition' as an introduction to the Grove edition of *Naked Lunch*.

These letters between Girodias and Rosset and Burroughs and Ginsberg present a material history of the 'Deposition' and evidence that it was included as an introduction to defend *Naked Lunch* against charges of obscenity. This external evidence for the ambiguous status of Burroughs' claims in the 'Deposition' can be supported, as Michael Leddy and Carol Loranger demonstrate in their readings of *Naked Lunch*, by a careful and critical analysis of the text. Michael Leddy, in his essay "'Departed Have Left No Address": Revelation/ Concealment Presence/Absence in *Naked Lunch*', reverses the approach of many critics and instead of taking the 'Deposition' as a interpretative guide to *Naked Lunch*, he reads the 'Deposition' through *Naked Lunch*, and in reference to Burroughs' other work, and by doing so he allows these texts to reveal the contradictions, problems and what he refers to as the 'cons' of the 'Deposition'.

Leddy argues that the 'Deposition' 'suggests by its title both revelation and concealment, presence and absence',²⁷ that although a deposition is 'a revelation of knowledge achieved through personal experience', to make a deposition is also 'to conceal, to be absent'.²⁸ Burroughs claims at the beginning of the 'Deposition' that he has no memory of writing *Naked Lunch*, indicating the 'absence from *Naked Lunch* of an authoritative "Author"',²⁹ and yet by imparting this information, and at the end

²⁷ Michael Leddy, "'Departed Have Left No Address": Revelation/Concealment Presence/Absence in *Naked Lunch*'. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*. 4.1. Spring 1984. p.33.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.33.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.33.

of the text informing the reader that he wrote the book ‘as a tract against Capital Punishment [...] intended to reveal capital punishment as the obscene, barbaric and disgusting anachronism that it is’,³⁰ Burroughs is, as Leddy notes, absenting himself whilst ‘simultaneously exercising quite conscious control over the circumstances of composition’.³¹

Leddy questions how we are to regard Burroughs’ statement of intent on having written a tract against capital punishment, and he proposes that we might view the use of the term ‘tract’ and the capitals on ‘Capital Punishment’ as indicating irony, or that we might see it as reminiscent of Renaissance apologists ‘who stress the allegorical or moral significance of “questionable” passages in such absurd ways that it becomes clear that there is no such significance, that the passages in question are purely erotic’.³² He observes that Burroughs’ statement of intent sits uneasily with his references elsewhere to the boundless and open qualities of *Naked Lunch*:

The junk-sick writer, with no precise memory of writing, here remembers his intent and neatly works it in with the concept of naked lunch, which he claims not to have understood while writing. More importantly, Burroughs is caught in the contradiction of seeking to confine a text that “spill off the page in all directions”; he invokes the authority of the Author in the interests of closure and denotation.³³

In ‘“This Book Spill Off the Page in All Directions”: What is the Text of *Naked Lunch*?’ , Carol Loranger notes that Grove’s inclusion of the ‘Deposition’ in the 1962 publication was motivated by the need to appease the censors, but, like Leddy, she also cites the contradictions in the ‘Deposition’ as reason to question its use as an

³⁰ Burroughs, ‘Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness’ in *Naked Lunch*, p.205.

³¹ Leddy., p.34.

³² *ibid.*, p.35.

³³ *ibid.*, p.35. Leddy quotes from William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*. New York: Grove Press, 1966. p.229.

authoritative guide to *Naked Lunch*. Loranger writes that Burroughs makes claims in the ‘Deposition’ for *Naked Lunch* as a work of journalism, only to argue later that it is Swiftian satire. She also observes how the voice of this short text shifts between that of Burroughs and William Lee: ‘the ‘Deposition’ is signed by its author but its slangy, elliptical style approaches that of Bill Lee, the voice of the narrative portion of the text’.³⁴ These internal contradictions and inconsistencies in the ‘Deposition’, as Loranger and Leddy demonstrate, reveal that this text is not so straightforward or as trustworthy as it might first appear.

The ‘Deposition’ was included as an introduction to Grove’s edition of *Naked Lunch*, but we also find a second framing text, Burroughs’ article ‘Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs’ from the *British Journal of Addiction*, added as an appendix. Grove reproduced the layout of the article including the journal’s title at the top of each page, highlighting the association between Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* and an authoritative medical publication. The intention was to clarify Burroughs’ biographical authenticity as an experienced drug-user, and consequently *Naked Lunch*’s authenticity as an account of drug addiction. The *British Journal of Addiction* was edited by Dr John Yerbury Dent who had developed a method for treating heroin addicts that involved the use of a morphine derivative known as apomorphine. In 1956 Burroughs went to London to take Dr Dent’s apomorphine cure, and it was as a result of the relationship established between Dent and Burroughs in 1956 that he wrote this article for Dent’s journal the following year.

³⁴ Carol Loranger, ‘“This Book Spill Off the Page in All Directions’: What is the Text of *Naked Lunch*?’ *Postmodern Culture*, 10.1 (September 1999). <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/pmc/v010/10.1loranger.html>

In 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' Burroughs merges personal experience as an addict - 'I have used a number of "narcotic" drugs over a period of twenty years'³⁵ - with an objective medical account in the third person of 'the addict': 'The morphine addict can not tolerate alcohol when he is using morphine or suffering from morphine withdrawal.'³⁶ This combination of styles, referencing both medical reportage and autobiography, resulted in an article that bears the authority of experience combined with medical terminology. By including this article as an appendix, thereby complementing the emphasis upon addiction found in the introduction, Grove encapsulated the main text of *Naked Lunch* in arguments for its status as a sociologically valid account of addiction.

Grove Press and *Naked Lunch*: The Construction of a Defence within the Published Text

To explore why Grove Press used the 'Deposition' as an introduction to the 1962 edition of *Naked Lunch* and the full extent of the impact of censorship upon the Grove publication, we need to establish the context of Grove's history of publishing and defending censored works of literature. Prior to *Naked Lunch*, Grove Press published a number of banned books including *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1959 and *Tropic of Cancer* in 1961. The publication history of these novels reveals how well-versed Grove was in the state of obscenity law. Evidently Grove Press was receiving detailed legal advice on all aspects of the publication – advertising, promotion and textual presentation. Grove made careful preparations to try and avert censorship and to prepare the ground for the legal defence of each novel if required.

³⁵ 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' in *Naked Lunch*, p.214.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.216.

Prior to publishing *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Grove printed Mark Schorer's essay 'On Lady Chatterley' in Grove's own journal *Evergreen Review* in 1957. They then included the same essay as an introduction in the actual publication. Having won the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* case against the Postal Service, Grove published the full text of the ruling by Judge Frederick van Pelt Bryan in the summer 1959 issue of *Evergreen Review*. During the late 1950s and 1960s, Grove used the journal as a space to debate the censorship of literature, and to declare the serious intent of the Press and their writers by printing essays and extracts that argue the literary and social value of their publications. As well as the essay by Schorer published in advance of Lawrence's novel, Grove also published 'Defence of the Freedom to Read' by Henry Miller in a 1959 issue of *Evergreen Review* ahead of Grove's publication of *Tropic of Cancer*. In reference to these other articles, Grove's publication of the 'Deposition' in *Evergreen Review* in 1960 prior to issuing *Naked Lunch* conforms to an established tactic of preparing for the defence of a text.

In *Tropic of Cancer on Trial*, a study of the publication and censorship of Miller's novel in America, Earl R. Hutchison states that 'to help induce favourable rulings for *Tropic of Cancer* in future court actions, Grove Press planned its publication very carefully'.³⁷ This planning included the mailing of press releases which placed emphasis upon Miller as an important twentieth-century American writer. Carefully composed advertisements reiterated this proposition with such statements as: 'The literary world has long hailed *Tropic of Cancer* as a major masterpiece. T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, George Orwell [...] have characterised *Tropic of Cancer* as a modern

³⁷ Earl R. Hutchison, *Tropic of Cancer on Trial: A Case History of Censorship*. New York: Grove Press, 1968, p.51.

American classic'.³⁸ Grove also included Karl Shapiro's essay on Miller entitled 'The Greatest Living Author' as an introduction to their edition of the novel, a decision which Hutchison states was informed by the expectation of a trial:

An introduction by the poet Karl Shapiro and a preface by Anaïs Nin were included in the hardcover edition. According to Shapiro, Rosset asked him for permission to reprint his previously published essay "because he thought it would help in the trials which would come up".³⁹

In the essay, Shapiro pronounces the novel's literary value through reference to the influence of Nietzsche, Spengler, Rimbaud and Rabelais. The essay also gives a biographical overview of the author, connecting the sexual content in the novel to Miller's life experience. By making biography the explanatory context of the novel, the obscenity within the text could be defended as a truthful documenting of real experience, 'his aim was not to write about the erotic but to write the whole truth about the life he knew. The goal demanded the full vocabulary and iconography of sex'.⁴⁰ *Tropic of Cancer* and other 'obscene' novels of the time including *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were defended against censorship by arguing that their depiction of sex was realistic, and that they engaged with issues of sexual morality.

This was not the form of defence that was adopted with *Naked Lunch*, and a comparison of the sexual content of these novels reveals why. Although *Tropic of Cancer* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* do include explicit (by the standards of the time) descriptions of sex, and depict without moral judgement adultery and prostitution, these depictions are of heterosexual sex and located within a realist narrative. *Naked*

³⁸ Ibid., Reproduction of *Tropic of Cancer* advertisement.

³⁹ Ibid., p.52.

⁴⁰ Karl Shapiro, 'The Greatest Living Author' in Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*. New York: Grove Press, 1961, p.xvi.

Lunch in contrast presents surreal, queer and violent scenes of sex involving subjects, bodies and desires that refuse to remain constant or offer any coherence. These scenes cannot easily be defended against their obscene content because they do not form an integral part of a realist narrative. Observing this difference, it is clear why Grove, in the footsteps of Sprayregen and Girodias, took a different route in defending Burroughs' text, avoiding engaging in debates about the depiction of sex and sexuality that had figured in the defence of Miller's and Lawrence's novels. The defence of *Naked Lunch* is instead constructed by steering attention away from the sexual content and into a debate concerned with the text as a socially valuable document of drug addiction.

To ascertain why the subject of addiction was perceived to represent such a valuable basis for constructing a defence of *Naked Lunch*, we need to examine the place of addiction as a social and medical issue at the beginning of the 1960s, the precise state of obscenity law at that time, and the immediate legal precedents for the defence of Burroughs' work. The growth of interest in drug addiction as a social issue had occurred in response to the dramatic increase since the Second World War of the number of drug addicts in America and Britain. A developing popular interest in the figure of 'the addict' led to the publication of books with titles like *Viper: The Confessions of a Drug Addict* by Raymond Thorp (1956) in Britain and *I Was a Drug Addict* by Leroy Street (1956) in America.

David Courtwright's study *Dark Paradise: A History of Opiate Addiction in America* charts the growth of addiction during the twentieth century. Courtwright describes how the identity of the addict underwent a transformation: the typical nineteenth-

century addict who was receiving opiates as a medical treatment became the non-medical ‘criminal’ addict of the twentieth century. The addict population evolved after 1940, becoming an object of political attention, and by the late 1950s and 1960s, opiate addiction and the criminal world surrounding it were perceived as a major urban problem. In 1962, the same year as the Grove Press publication of *Naked Lunch*, the Kennedy administration announced plans for the first White House Conference on Narcotics and Drug Abuse, an indication of the degree to which addiction was rapidly becoming a major social and political issue. From the perspective of the publishers and lawyers hoping to defend the content of *Naked Lunch*, this surge of interest in addiction could be used to their advantage. Faced with the problem of publishing a book containing sexual scenes and obscenity difficult to defend, the subject of drug addiction provided a means to shift the debate away from the sexual content of the book.

Naked Lunch was not the first text by Burroughs to be published with a defensive structure of additional material. His first novel *Junkie*, published by Ace Books in 1953, offers a precedent for exploring how censorship has influenced the publication of Burroughs’ work, and how extraneous textual material has been used to present his work as documentary. Ace books lengthened the title of the novel to *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* and bound it together as a 35 cents ‘Two Books in One’ publication with *Narcotic Agent*, an undercover account of police work by Maurice Helbrant. Also included in this American edition and the first British edition of 1957 was a ‘Publisher’s Note’, intended to shield the publisher and text from prosecution and censorship. This text claims that *Junkie* is ‘piteously factual’.⁴¹

⁴¹ ‘Publisher’s Note’ in William S. Burroughs, *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*. New York: Ace Books, 1953, p.1.

We realised that here was a document which could forearm the public more effectively than anything yet printed about the drug menace. The picture it paints of a sordid netherworld was all the more horrifying for being so authentic in language and point of view. For the protection of the reader, we have inserted occasional parenthetical notes to indicate where the author clearly departs from accepted medical fact or makes other unsubstantiated statements.⁴²

There are, as stated, parenthetical notes inserted throughout the text. These notes have a cumulative influence upon the reception of the text, and because of their apparent concern with ‘fact’ and their interruption of the narrative, they project a documentary tone back onto the main body of the text. The ‘Publisher’s Note’ acts to justify the content of the novel, ‘the sordidness of every crevice of their lives’,⁴³ by promoting the text to the reader as a socially valuable and authentic depiction of drug addiction. When Grove Press published *Naked Lunch* in 1962, they replicated the publishing decisions of Ace Books, and although they gave a far greater emphasis to the text’s literary status, like Ace Books, they attempted to pre-empt the actions of the censor by surrounding the text with material that makes explicit reference to addiction.

The Trial and Defence of *Naked Lunch*: A Socially Valuable Document of Drug Addiction

The most important change in obscenity law that was to directly influence the censorship, publication and defence of *Naked Lunch* was the ruling that a text could only be declared obscene if it was shown not to have even the slightest redeeming ‘social importance’. American obscenity law in the early 1960s placed primary importance on whether the material charged could be shown to have social value, and so for Grove Press, presenting *Naked Lunch* as a document of drug addiction was the

⁴² Ibid., p.2.

⁴³ Ibid., p.1.

ideal defence in the anticipation of censorship and an obscenity trial. The establishment of ‘social value’ as the defining test for obscenity began with the 1957 case *Roth v. United States* which was to be the most important precedent for the trial of *Naked Lunch*.

Samuel Roth was prosecuted in 1955 for having published a literary quarterly entitled *American Aphrodite*. The influential amendments to obscenity law that resulted from the *Roth* case were contained within Judge Brennan’s closing statement. In his speech Brennan emphasised that publications should be judged ‘as a whole’ and in a context of current community standards, ‘whether to the average person applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to prurient interest’.⁴⁴ Brennan’s opinion on the *Roth* case included the following crucial statement on ‘social importance’:

All ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance – unorthodox ideas, controversial ideas, even ideas hateful to the prevailing climate of opinion – have the full protection of the guarantees.⁴⁵

This led to a change in the legal defence of publications charged with obscenity. Rather than constructing an argument around the obscene content of the text, defence lawyers turned their attention to proving that the publication contained ideas carrying enough social importance to protect even its most contentious material from censorship.

⁴⁴ ‘Roth v. United States No.582. Argued April 22, 1957’ in Edward de Grazia, *Censorship Landmarks*. New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1969, p.293.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.292.

Roth set a direct precedent for the publication, censorship and trial of the books published by Grove Press during this period including *Tropic of Cancer*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* and of course *Naked Lunch*. Grove Press anticipated the censorship and trial of these texts and was well acquainted with the *Roth* case and aware that if prosecuted, an obscenity trial would be conducted within the legal framework of this ruling. During the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Tropic of Cancer* trials the precedents formed during *Roth* became more finely argued and then fully assimilated into obscenity law. Charles Rembar acted as defence lawyer for Grove Press at both trials and his experiences are documented in *The End of Obscenity* (1968). In this account, Rembar describes what he considers to be his greatest achievement within the transformation of obscenity law: the promotion of the social-value theory as the main test for obscenity. Rembar sought to develop Brennan's statements upon judging the 'redeeming social importance' of a book on trial so that all material that could be shown to contain ideas of any social importance would be protected by the First Amendment. At the time of the *Naked Lunch* Boston obscenity trial in 1965, this was the current state of obscenity law and the terms within which Grove Press and its lawyers would have to work.

A reading of the transcription of the Boston *Naked Lunch* trial leaves the strong impression that Grove Press, the defence lawyer and the witnesses giving testimony were unified in their argument in defence of *Naked Lunch* and that this defence was the promotion of the text as a document of drug addiction that bore social importance in the fields of psychiatry and sociology, as well as of literature. At the first day of the trial on 12 January 1965, Edward de Grazia, lawyer for Grove Press, opened with a speech in which he laid the foundations for the argument in defence of the text. He

began by outlining the current state of obscenity law and asserted that *Naked Lunch* could only be declared obscene based on evidence that the book went beyond contemporary community standards for decency, or that it had no ‘social importance’.

Having introduced the crucial ‘social importance’ theory, de Grazia then stated ‘we’ll call witnesses, having already offered reviews and other commentaries, to show how *Naked Lunch*, not only has literary and artistic importance, but sociologic and psychiatric and moral importance’.⁴⁶ At this stage de Grazia presented a more detailed argument built upon these introductory statements and proposed that *Naked Lunch* was socially important because it portrayed ‘one of the country’s newest kinds of hell’ referring to the ‘hell’ of drug addiction.⁴⁷ Having presented this argument at the beginning of the trial, it was sustained throughout and was used to justify Burroughs’ inclusion of ‘obscene’ material. It was argued that the obscene sexual content was illustrative of the depravity of drug addiction and therefore essential to its portrayal. In order to strengthen this argument, de Grazia and the witnesses he called to give testimony defended the sexual content and obscene language and imagery in the text as supplementary or contributory to the description of addiction and withdrawal.

An even more revealing account of how this defence strategy was devised can be found in the correspondence between Edward de Grazia and Grove Press. These letters contain explicit references to the decision to emphasise drug addiction within the text, and they offer conclusive evidence for the argument put forward here: that the presentation of *Naked Lunch* as a document of drug addiction was carefully and purposely constructed in response to censorship. In a letter to Grove Press dated 4

⁴⁶ ‘Edward W. Brooke, Attorney vs. A Book, named, *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs’, transcript of the 1965 Boston trial, GPR Syracuse, p.23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25.

June 1964, de Grazia introduces the idea of defending *Naked Lunch* as an important account of drug addiction:

I am exploring the possibility and desirability of trying to introduce psychiatric-oriented testimony concerning the importance of *Naked Lunch*, and so commentary bearing on the drug addict aspect of the book or its author would be of special relevance.

Can you also locate one or more copies of Burroughs' earlier book called "Junkie: Confessions of An Unredeemed Drug Addict."⁴⁸

Later in 1964 and after further preparation for the trial, de Grazia drew up a list of witnesses which he sent to Barney Rosset of Grove Press on 31 December 1964. By this stage de Grazia had become certain about the prospect of involving psychiatrists to give testimony at the trial, and in this letter he notified Rosset that Grove 'may also need to pay "nominal" fees to one or two psychiatrist witnesses'.⁴⁹ Enclosed with the letter is a 'List of Potential Witnesses for *Naked Lunch*', which is divided into the fields of research from which the witnesses originate, beginning with 'Psychiatry', then 'Sociology', 'Philosophy' and lastly 'Literature'. These delineations between areas of specialism articulate de Grazia's approach to the trial, and echo Sprayregen's use of a psychiatrist as witness in the *Big Table* hearing.

On the same date - 31 December 1964 - de Grazia also addressed a letter to Burroughs. He had expected that Burroughs might be present as a witness at the trial, and in this letter de Grazia directs him to draw a connection between his writing of *Naked Lunch* and his experience as a drug addict, in effect reiterating Burroughs' statements in the 'Deposition':

⁴⁸ De Grazia to Grove Press 4 June 1964, GPR, Syracuse.

⁴⁹ De Grazia to Rosset 31 December 1964, GPR, Syracuse.

I would think the material can be described as originally unconscious, made conscious through your acts of creating this book, etc. and others (our psychiatric witnesses) can testify that the “horror” or “obscenity” of that unconscious material is kin to that of most people. You can perhaps relate this personal creative process to your personal drug “problem”.⁵⁰

From de Grazia’s letters we can also calculate the influence he had upon the witnesses invited to give testimony at the trial. Writing to the witnesses selected, de Grazia carefully directed them in their preparation, and briefed them on the most recent developments in obscenity law and the legal precedents that would prove most important in the defence of *Naked Lunch*.

In a letter dated 7 January 1965 and sent to all witnesses, de Grazia included extracts from the recent trial of *Fanny Hill* ‘for its potential usefulness to you in preparing for your own testimony’ and he directed them to ‘please prepare, in your own words, full potential responses to the following questions which I would intend to direct to you during the trial’. These questions revolved around two main points: the importance of testifying to the social importance of the text and in directing attention towards addiction as central to *Naked Lunch*. Following on from the primary questions of name and occupation, the first important question in the letter was as follows:

Do you have an opinion, or belief, concerning the “importance” (whether artistic, literary, philosophic, sociologic, psychiatric, scientific, medical, moral, or other social “importance”) of this book?⁵¹

This extensive listing of what could qualify as socially important aspects of the text opens up this question to answers that do not necessarily involve *Naked Lunch*’s literary qualities, and the letter as a whole shows this same tendency to direct

⁵⁰ De Grazia to Burroughs 31 December 1964, GPR Syracuse.

⁵¹ De Grazia to witnesses 7 January 1965, GPR Syracuse.

witnesses to present readings of the book that respond to its social rather than literary value. The issue of the text's importance was carried a step further in De Grazia's next question: 'Would you please tell us your belief, or opinion, concerning that "importance"?' This question was followed by an extensive briefing on how crucial this argument would be to the trial:

As you know (if only because we have mentioned it personally to you), the U.S. Supreme Court, in the *Roth* case, ruled that any book expressing ideas "having even the slightest redeeming social importance" is protected by the U.S. Constitution, and can not be declared obscene; [...] we hope to show "Naked Lunch" has some, whether slight or monumental, "importance" in a variety of areas – artistic, literary, moral, psychiatric, sociologic, etc.

Having studied de Grazia's correspondence, and returning to the transcript of the trial, we find that the proceedings and the content of the witnesses' testimonies exactly follow this plan devised by de Grazia.

One issue that dominated the trial was whether the presence of scenes of an extreme sexual nature involving homosexuality and violence could be justified as necessary to an account of addiction. The attempt to argue a justification in these terms meant that sexuality in the text was being declared as subsidiary to the subject of addiction, and the sex scenes were described as merely illustrative of the depravity that results from opiate use. This issue arose during the questioning of the second witness Paul Hollander, a lecturer in the sociology of literature at Harvard; Hollander supported the main argument by stating that *Naked Lunch* had value because it contained details of drug-related sickness and delirium. De Grazia prompted Hollander to draw the obscene and sexual elements of the text into the argument by directly asking him if he believed these explicit episodes were related to the addict's destructiveness and loss

of personality. Hollander answered that the sexual practices related directly to the loss of moral standards portrayed in the text. The prosecution lawyer William I. Cowin then attempted to undermine this justification, and questioned the next witness, Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, Assistant Professor of English at Wellesley College, on whether she considered the descriptions of perversions as contributory to the moral judgment of the text overall, with which she agreed. The fourth witness Norman Holland, Professor of English at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was questioned on whether the sex scenes had anything to do with drug addiction, a further attempt by Cowin to challenge de Grazia's argument. Cowin asked Holland if the perversion in the book was necessary to illustrate the themes, but Holland stood up to this challenge, and restating the agreed line of defence, he answered in the affirmative.

The next witnesses introduced by de Grazia provided the 'psychiatric-oriented testimony' that he had spoken of in his letter to Grove of 4 June 1964. Stanley Howard Eldred and John Barry Sturrock were both teachers of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and were chosen to give professional credence to the argument that *Naked Lunch*, as a first-person account of drug use, was a serious contribution to the study and treatment of addiction. The questions from Cowin were again based on how the references to 'perversion and homosexuality'⁵² in the book contributed to its usefulness as an academic text in psychology and in the treatment of addiction. This led Sturrock to defend those sections of the text on the basis that they were consistent with the fantasies commonly discussed by drug-addicted patients. Again this line of argument proposed that the sexual content of *Naked Lunch* was of interest solely for

⁵² Transcript of the trial, p.138, GPR Syracuse.

the reason that it added emphasis to the depiction of degradation and the addict's depraved imagination.

The next witness, Thomas H. Jackson, an assistant Professor of English at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, presented the same argument. He described the scenes involving sex as 'the delirious ramblings, the rotten outpouring of the addict's mind,' identifying the scenes of extreme sex as existing only to give greater richness to the characterisation of the addict as morally degraded.⁵³ Allen Ginsberg, as the last witness at the trial, and in response to de Grazia's questions, argued that the sexual content was justified within the text because the return of sexual desire is present in the cycle of addiction and withdrawal. Again, sex within *Naked Lunch* was not presented as being *about* sex - about sexuality or queer sexuality - but displaced into an interpretative context monopolised by addiction. In such a context sexual desire was read as only symptomatic of drug withdrawal.

Although *Naked Lunch* was declared obscene at the end of the trial, this judgement was overturned during the appeal that followed. This was the outcome that de Grazia had expected, as predicted in the letter sent to witnesses on 7 January 1965: 'I would not be shocked were we to lose this trial (that decision will come later), but I am confident we will win an appeal in Massachusetts or in the U.S. Supreme Court'.⁵⁴ This pattern of a declaration of obscenity followed by a successful appeal was common in literary obscenity cases of the time. The court proceedings of the trial and the defence argument put forward were directed towards forming a basis for appeal as much as they were intended to win the case under discussion that day. Once *Naked*

⁵³ Ibid., p.211.

⁵⁴ De Grazia to witnesses 7 January 1965, GPR Syracuse.

Lunch was free from the threat of censorship and could be safely published and distributed in America, Grove did not alter the content of its publication. The ‘Deposition’ and the article from *The British Journal of Addiction* remained intact, and they have continued to form the introduction and appendix to editions of *Naked Lunch* released since that time.

A History of Negotiation: The Relationship between Censorship and Publishing

We have seen how the ‘Deposition’ was written in response to censorship in France and to Girodias and Burroughs’ concern that *Naked Lunch* and other Olympia titles would be banned. It is also clear that Grove Press, anticipating the censorship of their publication in America, adopted the ‘Deposition’ as a prefatory text and as a defence tactic. We need to now establish a context for understanding and interpreting these consequences. I propose therefore a review of the legal and literary studies of censorship to determine whether Grove’s actions have precedents in the history of publishing and what models exist for research into how a published text and its reception are influenced by censorship. Nicholas Harrison’s *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature, and Theory* (1995) provides a literary critical model for a reading of the impact of censorship upon publishing and the published text. Harrison’s research demonstrates both sensitivity to the details of how a publication bears the imprint of an era of censorship, and awareness that these details of the promotion and presentation of a text can dramatically influence its reception.

In *Circles of Censorship* Harrison takes the publication of the works of Sade as his main focus, exploring how censorship has influenced the reception of Sade's writings and their place within literary history. He reviews the many different editions of Sade's work throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the strategies adopted by these publishers to avoid censorship. Harrison discovers that the most frequently deployed tactic was the inclusion of a preface, and so already we can observe a trend in the relationship between publishing and censorship that is echoed by Grove's actions with *Naked Lunch*. Harrison states that these prefatory texts are worthy of study in their own right:

Publisher's prefaces cannot tell us how Sade was read, of course, but they can give us a sense of the impact of censorship upon the reception of Sade's work and can tell us in what terms it was possible to arrive at a positive assessment of a figure and of a series of novels whose rapidly established reputation depended on their ignoring or actively infringing many of the criteria on which a positive assessment of a literary text might normally have been based.⁵⁵

Harrison proceeds to chart how the preface has been used as an additional textual space in which a protective interpretative context can be composed for the main body of the text. In the history of the publication of Sade's work, Harrison reveals how the preface has functioned as a form of negotiation, attempting 'to negotiate on some level the text's (and the author's) relation to the law'.⁵⁶

The preface or other paratextual materials such as introductions, appendices, or footnotes are the physical manifestation within the published text of this act of negotiation between publisher and obscenity law. In the instances Harrison cites, the arguments presented within each preface to defend the text against censorship are

⁵⁵ Nicholas Harrison, *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature, and Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, pp.127-128.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.127.

constructed in reference to contemporaneous scientific or cultural discourses such as sexology and psychology. This provides a useful comparison to research into the censorship of *Naked Lunch*, for here we also find that it is a contemporaneous political and social issue – addiction to opiates – that is used in the construction of a defence. Harrison's research illustrates the necessity for careful study to deduce how the material directs the reading not only of censors, but of all readers and critics, impressing upon them specific scientific and cultural interpretative contexts.

Harrison's study provides evidence that the relationship of negotiation between publishing and censorship takes the form not of excision but rather of the formation of defensive textual frameworks. To see whether this consequence of censorship observed in the publication of Sade and Burroughs extends more widely through publishing history we can examine the legal history of censorship. Most of the existent texts on literary censorship such as Edward de Grazia's *Girls Lean Back Everywhere* (1992) and *Censorship Landmarks* (1969), Felice Flanery Lewis' *Literature, Obscenity, and Law* (1976), and Donald Thomas' *A Long Time Burning: The History of Literary Censorship in England* (1969) are legal rather than literary studies and consequently their concern is primarily with the formation of precedents and how obscenity law has changed over time. However these studies are useful in establishing a sense of the forms in which censorship has been manifest throughout history, and to begin to understand how strongly it influences publishers and booksellers who are invariably the ones prosecuted for the production and dissemination of obscene literature. The often incremental changes in obscenity law dictate how the defence and prosecution of a text will be argued. We can see how a text's defence is carefully constructed in reference to precedents established during

earlier obscenity trials, and the important role that the publisher plays in presenting and promoting the text in a way that is compliant with its legal defence.

The *Regina v. Hicklin* case in Britain in 1868 had a lasting impact on how publishers negotiated with obscenity law in both America and Britain. It is one of the first important dates in censorship history and the way in which publishers responded to it illustrates the close relationship between obscenity law and the presentation and marketing of literature. This case established the famous *Hicklin* test for obscenity which was adopted as a precedent well into the twentieth century:

The test of obscenity is whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort might fall.⁵⁷

The ruling made it easy to prosecute books on the basis that they were priced and sold at a cost and ease of acquisition that created a potential readership of women, members of the working classes and children. This means of judging obscenity based on readership had a direct impact upon the publication and sale of obscene material; if a publisher anticipated the censorship of a text, they would attempt to avoid prosecution by printing the material in expensive editions and making it available only to an elite readership.

What we see here is an early example of the relationship of negotiation between publishers and censorship that Harrison documents in *Circles of Censorship* and that is evident in the publication of *Naked Lunch*. During the twentieth century, publishers

⁵⁷ Donald Thomas, *A Long Time Burning: The History of Literary Censorship in England*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, p.264.

continued to respond directly to the incremental changes in obscenity law, taking care to present and promote material in a way that would aid its defence. Although the *Hicklin* test for obscenity was also applied in America, it ceased to be central to American obscenity law after the trial of *Ulysses* in 1933. Judge Woolsey's statements on this trial shifted the law's concern away from 'those whose minds are open to immoral influences,' replacing this description of the prospective reader with 'the average reader, or 'the man on the street,' or the person 'with average sex instincts'.⁵⁸ Although publishers now needed to be less concerned with the readership to which the book was sold, their presentation and *promotion* of a publication continued to be important, as we can see in the later *Roth* case.

I have already noted that the 1957 *Roth* case was an important precedent for the trial and defence of *Naked Lunch*, but another crucial aspect of this case was the use of Samuel Roth's adverts for *American Aphrodite* as evidence. In obscenity trials of this period, how a publisher presented and promoted the material, and how they, often literally, 'introduced' it to the public were interpreted by the court as indicative of a publisher's intentions, how they proposed it was to be read, and for what qualities they were suggesting it was purchased and referenced. Roth's use of advertising and his promotion of the magazine were interpreted by Chief Justice Warren as indications that he 'wilfully' and 'knowingly' marketed material that was 'calculated to corrupt and debauch the minds and morals of those to whom it was sent',⁵⁹ and that the material was 'openly advertised to appeal to the erotic interest of their customers', proving that Roth was 'engaged in the commercial exploitation of the morbid and

⁵⁸ Edward de Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and the Assault on Genius*. New York: Vintage, 1993, p.31.

⁵⁹ 'Roth v, United States No.582. Argued April 22, 1957' in Edward de Grazia, *Censorship Landmarks*. New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1969, p.294.

shameful craving for materials with prurient effect'.⁶⁰ For publishers such as Grove, the inclusion of prefaces, introductions and appendices continued to be the easiest way of constructing a defence of the text and of preventing accusations of their exploitative promotion of the material.

Drawing upon the work of Foucault, Judith Butler in *Excitable Speech* formulates a literary critical reading of censorship that explains this tendency for the relationship between censorship and publication to be marked by the addition rather than the excision of textual material. The concluding chapter of Butler's *Excitable Speech*, 'Implicit Censorship and Discursive Agency', is not concerned explicitly with literary censorship, its focus being instead upon censorship in relation to speech acts, but several of the statements made by Butler concerning the operation of censorship can be applied to the written word with equal relevance.

Butler presents a Foucaultian reading of censorship as a power connected with discursive growth rather than repression and silence. In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* Foucault states that the prohibition and censorship of sex in the past did not result in a total silence but rather in areas of silence *and* in areas or domains in which there was a proliferation of discourses around sex. Foucault questions the popular perception that previous periods were marked by sexual repression, what he terms 'the repressive hypothesis'. He writes that although it is true that there was 'a whole restrictive economy'⁶¹ in the form of control over what could be said when and where, at the same time there occurred 'a veritable discursive explosion'.⁶² Butler

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.295.

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. 1976. London: Penguin, 1990, p.18.

⁶² Ibid., p.17.

deconstructs censorship, and like Foucault, she reveals it to be inherently contradictory in its intent to regulate discourse:

Such regulations introduce the censored speech into public discourse, thereby establishing it as a site of contestation, that is, as the scene of public utterance that it sought to preempt.⁶³

From this observation of the contradictory nature of censorship, Butler proposes a revision of one of the most widely-held assumptions concerning the relationship between censorship and that which is censored. This reiterates Foucault's statements on the repressive hypothesis, but by applying it to censorship Butler offers a transposition of this theory into a form applicable to a literary critical reading of censorship. Butler concludes that censorship can be understood as something 'not merely privative,' that is, it is not a force of excision, but rather a power that is productive and formative:

By "productive" I do not mean positive or beneficial, but rather, a view of power as formative and constitutive, that is, not conceived exclusively as an external exertion of control or as the deprivation of liberties. According to this view, censorship is not merely restrictive and privative, that is, active in depriving subjects of the freedom to express themselves in certain ways, but also formative of subjects and the legitimate boundaries of speech.⁶⁴

The statement '[c]ensorship is a productive form of power: it is not merely privative, but formative as well'⁶⁵ can be adopted outside the specific context of speech and utilised for its potential to deconstruct conventional perceptions of censorship. It is a statement that can powerfully revise what the researcher expects to find as evidence of the impact of censorship upon a text. Censorship is generally equated with the idea of expurgation and the removal of that which is censored from public circulation.

⁶³ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. London: Routledge, 1997, p.130.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.132.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.133.

Therefore, when researching the censorship of a text, remnants of this general conception of censorship are carried forward in the expectation that what is being 'looked' for is in a sense an absence, the tracing of a history of how a text has been cut or denied publication.

Butler and Foucault's work on prohibition calls for a re-evaluation of many of the assumptions within literary criticism concerning the censorship of literature, demanding that we re-assess the impact of censorship upon the published text not simply as one of silence and prohibition but as a force that has produced and disseminated particular textual readings that in many cases hold a monopoly over variant contexts for reading the work. Re-viewing the history of the relationship between publishers and censorship in Foucault's terms of 'areas' of silence and of proliferation, it is clear that publishers were knowingly using the published format of a book to argue for the displacement of the text from the area of silence/censorship to another domain where sex and sexuality were legitimate subjects. This was achieved by presenting a publication encapsulated in one of these licit discourses in which textual obscenity could find a defensive cover: sexology, psychoanalysis, or in the case of *Naked Lunch*, the sociological and medical study of addiction.

Frederick Whiting, in 'Monstrosity on Trial: The Case of *Naked Lunch*', takes a similar approach to the trial and the defence of the text, questioning the impact they have had upon how the text has been or can be read. Whiting argues that these events did not simply mark a shift from censorship to liberation, but that they acted to impose a degree of containment on radical sexuality in the text. He examines the

‘reception framework within which *Naked Lunch* and its trial has been understood’⁶⁶ and questions the general perception of the trial which has been ‘[v]iewed purely as the lifting of an interdiction within the framework of US censorship history’.⁶⁷ The successful defence of the text might have enabled Burroughs to speak the unspeakable but it did so by pathologising the forms of sexuality that the text presents. Whiting argues that humanist critics ‘displaced his concern with the monstrous by metaphorizing it, and thus fell into the very process of linguistic abstraction that Burroughs was criticizing’. In their construction of arguments to defend the text, critics created interpretative frameworks that worked to contain the radical elements in the text:

In this way, their advocacy and the novel’s vindication became features in the reproduction and reinforcement of the monstrous rather than an affirmation of the critique Burroughs intended. The real issue negotiated at the trial was not whether the monstrous should be spoken but rather what circumscriptions were necessary to its maintenance as monstrous – what, in effect were the rules of its iterability.⁶⁸

He proposes that *Naked Lunch* found legal and cultural vindication because those defending the text ‘were able to assimilate it to a discourse of psychopathology that was crucial to the maintenance of the normative order’.⁶⁹

Whiting explores how the introduction of law statutes in many states in America from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s functioned to explain acts of sexual deviance through psychological profiles and by doing so ‘the new laws signaled both the emergence of

⁶⁶ Frederick Whiting, ‘Monstrosity on Trial: The Case of *Naked Lunch*’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 52.2 (Summer 2006), p.145.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.146.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.147.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.147.

a form of monstrosity and an attempt to juridically contain it.’⁷⁰ Psychopathy was also adopted to explain addiction and to link aberrant sexuality and drug addiction:

As anxiety over the figure of the addict and general concerns about “normal” male sexuality increased in the years before World War II, the connection between addiction and aberrant sexual desire was exploited more fully and systematically.⁷¹

Whiting then brings these observations on juridicial ‘containment’ to his reading of the trial of *Naked Lunch* and the reception of the text:

[T]he project of containing the monstrous simultaneously reinforced it; the attempt to make it speakable rendered it, indeed depended on rendering it, more unspeakable. The circularity of this representational dynamic and the pivotal role that signifying practices played in the manufacture of deviance were central features in the reception of Burroughs’s work.⁷²

Although there was a division between the literary critics who condemned *Naked Lunch* and those who praised the book and argued against censorship, Whiting notes that ‘no one contested that what the novel depicted was monstrous’.⁷³ During the trial those defending the text had to do so by identifying and pathologising sexuality within the text:

Thus the legal antagonists in the *Naked Lunch* trial took as their unspoken shared assumption a condemnation of Burroughs’s degenerate images, a common picture of the monstrous, and so the verdict that pronounced *Naked Lunch* speakable amounted to neither a naturalizing of the unnatural acts and desires that the novel described nor the demise of the monstrous per se. It was instead an attempt at containment that reinforced what it sought to contain, a reiteration necessary to keeping the monstrous in place.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.149.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.151.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.152.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.161.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.162.

Whiting's essay adds further evidence to the argument that the censorship and trial of *Naked Lunch* has had a 'productive' influence upon the critical reception of Burroughs' text. His observations on how radical sexuality in *Naked Lunch* has been contained as a result of the legal and cultural defence of the text highlights the necessity of viewing censorship not as a process allied simply with excision and the banning of material, but rather a productive force which works to conscribe the ways in which a text is read.

The 'Deposition' and the Critical Reception of *Naked Lunch*

Adopting Butler's theoretical reading of censorship, we can identify the 'Deposition' as a productive consequence of censorship. But how did the inclusion of this introduction influence the critical reception of the text? In the history of the reception of *Naked Lunch* many critics and reviewers have taken the 'Deposition' as a straightforward description of how the text was written and a context for how it should be read. As Carol Loranger notes, 'once the 'Deposition' was added to *Naked Lunch* it became enough part of the text to be as often cited in critical studies as the narrative itself'.⁷⁵ These framing texts are easier to reference in a review because of their biographical content, and the statements contained within them offer interpretative guidelines which are embraced by the reviewer faced with a text that lacks a coherent linear narrative and is resilient to interpretation. It is because *Naked Lunch* is resistant to critical evaluation, with its collage form, its representation of altered states of mind, and absence of narrative structure, that these framing texts have had such an influence. Their inclusion in the publication of *Naked Lunch* sets up a

⁷⁵ Carol Loranger, "'This Book Spill Off the Page in All Directions': What is the Text of *Naked Lunch*?' *Postmodern Culture*, 10.1 (September 1999). <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/pmc/v010/10.1loranger.html>

contrast between the experimental text with its surreal routines, sexual scenes and collage structure, and the pseudo-scientific biographic prose found in the introduction and appendix. This contrast has proven deceptive, with critics equating the coherent, seemingly straight text with bearing ‘truth’ and unquestioningly accepting its contents.

The opening statement in the ‘Deposition’ in which Burroughs claims that *Naked Lunch* is comprised of ‘detailed notes’ that he has no precise memory of having written, has always troubled readings of the text because it masquerades as an insight into the production of *Naked Lunch*. Some reviewers at the time of publication, including Charles Poore in the *New York Times*, Simon Raven in the *Spectator*, and Stephen Wall in *The Listener*, placed so much importance on this introductory statement, that their interpretation of *Naked Lunch* revolves around it.⁷⁶ Their reading of the text is shaped by this statement to the extent that, as Wall’s review illustrates, it gains validity as a document rather than a work of fiction:

It was written in sickness and delirium while the author was suffering from the drug-addiction of which he has since been cured; he has no ‘precise memory’ of writing it. As a guide to the world of junk, as a fantasia of the drugged consciousness, the book has obvious documentary value. It is also claimed that it has a didactic function. Certain sections are intended as a tract against capital punishment, and Mr Burroughs is saluted as the greatest satirist since Swift.⁷⁷

Having summarised the claims for the text and its history of production as outlined in the ‘Deposition’, Wall states that he finds the comparison with Swift a ‘delusion’ because there is no constant strategy of persuasion and the author’s intention is

⁷⁶ Charles Poore, ‘Books of The Times’ review of the Grove Press 1962 *Naked Lunch*, *New York Times* (20 November 1962), p.33; Simon Raven, ‘Jet-Black’ review of the Calder 1964 *The Naked Lunch*, *Spectator*, 7121 (18 December 1964), p.848; Stephen Wall, ‘With Whip and Junk’ review of the Calder 1964 *The Naked Lunch*, *The Listener* (3 December 1964), p.913.

⁷⁷ Wall, p.913.

ambiguous. At no point though does Wall question his literal reading of the ‘Deposition’ which consequently dominates his review of *Naked Lunch*.

Herbert Gold in the *New York Times* and Robert Taubman in the *New Statesman* both reproduce Burroughs’ statement regarding capital punishment, whilst Lionel Abel in *Partisan Review*, Keith Fort in *The Minnesota Review*, and Donald Malcolm in *The New Yorker* are all distracted, like Wall, by their attempts to apply a literal reading of the ‘Deposition’ to the text of *Naked Lunch*.⁷⁸ Lionel Abel’s expectations have so strongly been influenced by reading the ‘Deposition’ that he forms a critique centred on the disparity between Burroughs’ statement of the medical facts of opiate addiction and the content of the text. Referencing Burroughs’ statement that the use of opiates involves the loss of libido, Abel asks: ‘why the insistence on sex, however horrible, if a true description of the junkie’s state of mind would have to leave out sex altogether?’⁷⁹ Keith Fort’s review of *Naked Lunch* reveals the extent to which he has found the juxtaposition of the various texts and their claim of bearing autobiographical and medical authority problematic:

A twenty-page extract from a scientific journal on addiction ends the work. A psychiatrist friend, formerly resident at the narcotics hospital at Lexington and an authority on drugs, assured me that a great deal of the scientific information in the book is either false or misleading.⁸⁰

Fort concludes: ‘I contend that it fails either as a piece of literature or as a scientific

⁷⁸ Herbert Gold, ‘Instead of Love, the Fix’ review of the Grove Press 1962 *Naked Lunch*, *New York Times Book Review* (25 November 1962), p.4; Robert Taubman, ‘The Human Virus’ review of the Calder 1964 *The Naked Lunch*, *New Statesman* (20 November 1964), p.794; Lionel Abel, ‘Beyond the Fringe’ review of the Grove Press 1962 *Naked Lunch*, *Partisan Review*, 30.1 (Spring 1963), pp.109-112; Keith Fort, ‘The Hero’s Backside’ review of the Grove Press 1962 *Naked Lunch*, *The Minnesota Review*, 3.3 (Spring 1963), pp.400-406; Donald Malcolm, ‘Books: The Heroin of Our Times’ review of the Grove Press 1962 *Naked Lunch*, *The New Yorker* (2 February 1963), pp.114-121.

⁷⁹ Abel, p.111.

⁸⁰ Fort, p.401.

document and that failure of both these parts is heightened by their mixture.’⁸¹ Donald Malcolm writing in *The New Yorker* becomes engaged in a critique of Burroughs’ statement in the ‘Deposition’ in which he proposes that *Naked Lunch* is a satire on capital punishment. Malcolm, again like other critics, does not question the relationship that the ‘Deposition’ and the appendix bear to the main text, and he does not recognise them as devices to defend the text against the charge of obscenity. Without the context of the history of the relationship between publishing and censorship in which to assess the place of the ‘Deposition’ in *Naked Lunch*, these reviews are evidence of the invisibility of the impact of censorship on the published text.

In these first reviews of *Naked Lunch*, opiate addiction is, without hesitation, identified as the dominant subject of the text. In the *New York Times* review Herbert Gold states that the ‘[h]ero and villain of *Naked Lunch* are heroin’⁸² and Charles Poore describes the ‘story’ as ‘a narcotic addict’s confessions’.⁸³ A review in *Time* likewise describes the book as ‘the grotesque diary of Burroughs’ years as an addict’.⁸⁴ Heroin monopolises these reviews which give no critical attention to the references to *yagé* and the many other altered states of mind that Burroughs describes. These reviews date from the same period that the media were beginning to take interest in LSD, and yet the connections between the altered states of consciousness of LSD, mescaline or *yagé* and *Naked Lunch* are not pursued, despite Burroughs’ explicit mention of them in the text. Although some of the reviews mention *Junkie*, none of those which were printed after the publication of *The Yage Letters* make

⁸¹ Ibid., p.402.

⁸² Gold, p.4

⁸³ Poore, p.33.

⁸⁴ Reviewer not named, ‘Books: King of the YADS’ review of the Grove Press 1962 *Naked Lunch*, *Time*, 80 (November 1962), p.96.

reference to this other work by Burroughs.

Robert Batey's article '*Naked Lunch* for Lawyers: William S. Burroughs on Capital Punishment, Pornography, the Drug Trade, and the Predatory Nature of Human Interaction' presents a more recent example of the consequences of adopting the 'Deposition' as an interpretative guide to *Naked Lunch*. Batey argues that in this introduction to the main text 'Burroughs explicitly sets out the lessons he wants the reader to draw from it'.⁸⁵ The result of such a literal interpretation of the 'Deposition' can be observed in Batey's reading of sexuality and sex in *Naked Lunch* which is entirely channelled through Burroughs' statements on capital punishment and addiction. Batey acknowledges that Burroughs' statement on capital punishment is 'self-serving' and 'not entirely trustworthy'⁸⁶ and yet he promotes it in his own reading of *Naked Lunch*:

Defenders of *Naked Lunch*, including its author, claimed that these chapters were Swiftian satires of capital punishment. While this contention may well have been a litigation ploy, the chapters do have value viewed from this perspective, for they expose the streak of sexual sadism that underlies the death penalty.⁸⁷

He presents the case for 'Hassan's Rumpus Room' and 'A.J.'s Annual Party' as 'powerful arguments against both capital punishment and pornography'⁸⁸ and even goes as far as arguing that although '*Naked Lunch* predated the imposition of capital punishment by lethal injection; nevertheless, the Mugwump's ejaculation into the

⁸⁵ Robert Batey. '*Naked Lunch* for Lawyers: William S. Burroughs on Capital Punishment, Pornography, the Drug Trade, and the Predatory Nature of Human Interaction'. *California Western International Law Journal*. 27. 1996, p.129.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.103.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp.106-107.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.128.

boy's body is a brutal parody of this form of execution'.⁸⁹ The 'Deposition' also impresses upon Batey the notion that 'the primary focus of *Naked Lunch* is drug addiction'⁹⁰ and so addiction becomes the dominant interpretative tool for reading the text, including the sexually explicit scenes in the text, demonstrating how obscenity can come to be read as subsidiary to the subject of addiction. Although Batey acknowledges that 'Hassan's Rumpus Room' 'begins a ten-chapter excursion away from addiction itself'⁹¹ he then draws this section of the text back into the interpretative framework of addiction, proposing that 'the lengthy, formless outrage of these chapters - rolling on relentlessly for over 120 pages', may be seen 'as a metaphor for the experience of addiction: the endless succession of drugged days, filled with compelling but ugly sensations, each different but somehow all the same'.⁹²

Burroughs himself comments upon the opening declaration of the 'Deposition' - that which states he has 'no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*' - but not until over thirty years later. In 1991, he wrote 'Afterthoughts on a Deposition' and claimed: 'When I say I have no memory of writing *Naked Lunch*, this is of course an exaggeration'.⁹³ 'Afterthoughts' also suggests a different interpretation of another of Burroughs' statements in the 'Deposition' which reads: '*The junk virus is public health problem number one of the world today*'.⁹⁴ In the later text, the meaning of Burroughs' initial declaration is reversed by his own retrospective explanation of this statement:

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, Footnote 49, p.110.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.129.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.147.

⁹² *ibid.*, p.147.

⁹³ Burroughs, 'After Thoughts on a Deposition' in *Naked Lunch*, p.211.

⁹⁴ Burroughs, 'Deposition' in *Naked Lunch*, p.205.

When I say “the junk virus is public health problem number one of the world today,” I refer not just to the actual ill effects of opiates upon the individual’s health (which, in cases of controlled dosage, may be minimal), but also to the hysteria that drug use often occasions in populaces who are prepared by the media and narcotics officials for a hysterical reaction.

The junk problem, in its present form, began with the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914 in the United States. Anti-drug hysteria is now worldwide, and it poses a deadly threat to personal freedoms and due-process protections of the law everywhere.⁹⁵

The proposal that the junk problem began with the criminalisation of opiate use under the Harrison Narcotics Act was a subject of debate at the time of the publication of *Naked Lunch*. The relationship between the criminalisation of drugs and drug-use as a social problem was developing into a major issue in the 1950s. Burroughs’ suggestion that the ‘junk virus’ is a problem not so much of addiction but of the criminalisation of drug-use and the way it has entered politics and the media in the form of ‘drug hysteria’ suggests an alternative reading of *Naked Lunch*. From this revised perspective, *Naked Lunch* is not simply about addiction, but instead a critique of the political and media discourses surrounding addiction, a critique that is only *part* of a larger examination of the controlling power of politicians, corporations and the media central to Burroughs’ work.

Burroughs elaborates on what he means by ‘drug hysteria’ in a piece written in 1990 that was first published in *High Risk: An Anthology of Forbidden Writings* (1991) and then included as a foreword in *The Drug User, Documents: 1840-1960* (1991). The text is a condemnation of drug hysteria as it has been manipulated as ‘the war on drugs’, and the accompanying government discourse that promotes hatred of the criminal addict rather than offering treatment or a maintenance programme. As a critique of the hypocrisy and hysterical language of governments, this again reveals

⁹⁵ Burroughs, ‘After Thoughts on a Deposition’ in *Naked Lunch*, pp.211-212.

that Burroughs was not only preoccupied with ‘addiction’ in a documentary or a metaphorical sense, but was instead troubled by the hysterical discourse on addiction used for political ends. Of course there is no reason to take these short texts by Burroughs as any less problematic as interpretative tools for *Naked Lunch* than the ‘Deposition’, but the contradictions that emerge through a comparative reading of the ‘Deposition’, ‘Afterthoughts’ and this last text should act to undermine the truth-value of any one of them and to reveal them as texts where Burroughs not only plays with and parodies pseudo-scientific and journalistic writing styles, but also plays with the reader’s association of a documentary prose style with truth.

‘Afterthoughts’ acts to reveal the ‘Deposition’ as a problematic introduction to the text, but the introduction has already had a long-term influence upon critical interpretations of Burroughs’ work. Oliver Harris in *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination* (2003) states that the ‘Deposition’ is a problematic introduction to *Naked Lunch*; he even goes so far as to say that it has been ‘disastrous for Burroughs criticism’.⁹⁶ The research conducted here into the legal histories of literary censorship, and the publication history of *Naked Lunch* brings me to the same conclusion. The obscenity trial of *Naked Lunch* took place in 1965 but the preparation for the defence of the book was being formulated from the very beginning of its publishing history and the indirect effects of censorship have continued to exert an influence on readings of Burroughs’ work ever since.

⁹⁶ Oliver Harris, *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003, p.185.

Chapter 3

Naked Lunch as an Intermediary Work: The Long *Naked Lunch*

We have seen the impact that censorship has had upon the publication of *Naked Lunch*, and how it resulted in the promotion of the subject of addiction within the published text with the effect of marginalising and even concealing alternative readings. Held in the archive of the Grove Press Records is a collection of letters between Burroughs, Ginsberg and Irving Rosenthal that presents a three way debate on the published form of the Grove Press *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs' contributions to this dialogue are of particular interest because they offer an alternative view upon how the addition of extra material might have worked in relationship to the main body of the text if it had not been so singularly directed towards defending *Naked Lunch* as a socially valuable account of drug addiction. I am not proposing that Burroughs' suggestions should necessarily be realised in publication, but rather that his proposals as they are outlined in these letters invite alternative readings of the text.¹

I use Burroughs' vision of an alternative appendix to begin placing *Naked Lunch* as an intermediary text, a collection of texts which bridge the transition from his writings of the early 1950s (including his *yagé* material) to his later experimental multimedia work. Burroughs' interest in creating for the reader or audience a naked lunch

¹ Carol Loranger argues for the need for an electronic 'fully open scriptible postmodernist version' of *Naked Lunch* which would include the different editions of the text, the extracts published in journals and the calligraphic drawings Burroughs submitted to Grove. Unlike Loranger I am not proposing that Burroughs' suggestion for additions to *Naked Lunch* must be realised in a published form, but that by contemplating how alternative versions of *Naked Lunch* might influence interpretations of the text, we can identify how the Grove edition has worked to construct particular readings of Burroughs' work. See Carol Loranger, 'This Book Spill Off the Page in All Directions': What is the Text of *Naked Lunch*? *Postmodern Culture*, 10.1 (September 1999). <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/pmc/v010/10.1loranger.html>

moment - 'a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork'² - is evident in his work throughout the period of 1953 to 1965, and this is what I mean by 'the long *Naked Lunch*'. By referring to *Naked Lunch* as an 'intermediary work' I do not mean to undermine its status as his most celebrated work, but rather to embed it in his developing practice, to re-view it as a text that includes Burroughs' *yagé*-writing and prepares for his experimentation with other media.

An Alternative Ending: Burroughs' Appendix

On 20 July 1960 Burroughs wrote a letter addressed to Irving Rosenthal in which he expressed his opinions on the layout and presentation of the Grove edition of *Naked Lunch*. The directions contained within this letter contrast in vital ways to the book that was issued in 1962. Rosenthal was working for Grove on the editing of *Naked Lunch* and had sent to Burroughs an extensive list of forty-eight questions in order to resolve issues ranging from spelling to the use of sub-headings. In his reply Burroughs gave instructions for the placement of this extra material. He agreed to the use of the 'Deposition' but with much emphasis that it should be 'IN APPENDIX'.³ Ginsberg also read Burroughs' letter to Rosenthal and in his response to Burroughs of 29 July 1960 he again declared his aversion to the inclusion of the 'Deposition': 'Suggest leave out. Already it's available in *Evergreen Review*, was not part of the book'.⁴ Burroughs' reply of 3 August 1960⁵ confirms that it was Grove Press who had

² Burroughs, 'Deposition' in *Naked Lunch*, p.199.

³ Burroughs to Rosenthal 20 July 1960, GPR Syracuse.

⁴ Ginsberg to Burroughs 29 July 1960, GPR Syracuse.

⁵ In the 'Editors' Note' in *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text* (2003) James Grauerholz and Barry Miles date this letter as 3 July 1960. Two copies of this letter are held in the archive of the Grove Press Records, and on one of these the date had been altered to 3 August. Having examined the letters between Rosenthal, Ginsberg and Burroughs I conclude that 3 August is the correct date. In the letter Burroughs responds point-by-point to questions that Ginsberg poses in his letter of 29 July, enclosing a completed version of the question and answer form that Ginsberg had included with that letter. This alternative chronology of correspondence also resolves what Grauerholz and Miles refer to as

proposed the inclusion of the extra material: ‘The suggestion came from Grove and Irving to include this and the article from *British Journal of Addiction*.’⁶

Agreeing to Grove’s proposal for an appendix, Burroughs suggested further material that he would like to see included, envisaging an exciting collage of cut-ups and images. Evidently he viewed the insertion of these two texts as opening up the possibility for extending the assemblage form of the *Naked Lunch* material, but Grove’s carefully constructed formula of defensive paratexts intended the very opposite, and would not allow any such disruptive additions. In the 20 July letter to Rosenthal, Burroughs is insistent that a text entitled ‘The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin’,⁷ a copy of which he enclosed with the letter to Rosenthal, should be reproduced in the publication. He states this at the beginning of the letter and repeats his request at the end:

THE ENCLOSED EXPLANATION OF THE CUT UP METHOD
SHOULD BE INSERTED AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE
DEPOSITION AND FOLLOWED BY THE CUT UP OF THAT
ARTICLE.⁸

Burroughs’ ‘confusing’ statement in the 20 July letter that ‘no material should be added in the text’, having already stated on 3 July ‘Insertion of deleted material. Your suggestion seems an excellent solution. Set them up and I will check over’. Dating this letter as 3 August places it after Ginsberg’s persuasive statements in his 29 July letter that he should agree to the insertion of ‘deleted material: ‘some of them are popular favorites (Agouti Society), they don’t do any harm, it’s shame to waste them, and I really doubt you will notice they are put back or remember them to use later’ and his suggestion: ‘Solution is simple: Grove can set them in type, mark them with red pencil, and send you proofs. You can then delete any of Irving’s insertions you really don’t want in the book’. This makes more sense of Burroughs’ change of mind from refusing the addition of material on 20 July to agreeing with its insertion on 3 August.

⁶ Burroughs to Ginsberg 3 August 1960, GPR Syracuse.

⁷ ‘The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin’ enclosed with the letter from Burroughs to Rosenthal 20 July 1960, GPR, Syracuse. This version of ‘The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin’ is the same as that published in Thomas Parkinson, ed., *A Casebook on the Beat*. New York: Thomas Y Crowell, 1961, but different to ‘The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin’ which was reworked and included in *The Third Mind*.

⁸ Burroughs to Rosenthal 20 July 1960, GPR Syracuse.

On the one hand it could be said that Burroughs' wish to have the piece 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin' included in *Naked Lunch* simply reflects his interests of the time - during 1959 he was working intensively on this new practice which he attributed to Brion Gysin and it is logical that when asked to make suggestions for the Grove edition he would draw upon his present work. On the other hand, I think that his proposal for additional material does more than that. Burroughs outlines a plan for the inclusion of a collage of texts and images that would have altered the reception of *Naked Lunch* by inviting more varied and open interpretations.

Gysin and Burroughs began working with the cut-up method in October 1959. According to their own accounts in the later version of 'The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin' and 'Cut-ups: A Project for Disastrous Success' published in *The Third Mind*, Gysin produced the first cut-up by chance when he sliced through a pile of newspapers whilst preparing a mount for a painting, and was surprised by the amusing results of reading the rearranged fragments of text. When Gysin later demonstrated this activity to Burroughs he saw beyond its comic value, recognising its potential to reveal concealed qualities of a text and to open up new readings of the material subjected to the process. Burroughs and Gysin worked first with newspapers and magazines, cutting the pages into sections, then rearranging the pieces and reading across to create new texts. Taking into consideration this ability of the cut-up process to uncover what the original text is really saying and bring its apparent meaning into dispute, a cut-up of the 'Deposition' included in *Naked Lunch* would have undermined conventional readings of this introduction as a straight and authoritative commentary upon the main text.

The cut-up of the ‘Deposition’ to which Burrough refers in his 20 July letter to Rosenthal had been published with the original version in the January-February issue of *Evergreen Review*. By examining these two texts as they appear in the magazine we can access what this second text, as a cut-up - as a text that supposedly uncovers the identity of its source material - reveals about the original article. The cut-up of the ‘Deposition’ is introduced as follows:

As a late post-postscript to his essay in this issue, Mr. Burroughs has provided “a newspeak précis of this article made in its image with its materials”⁹

If the reader is expecting a précis - a clear and concise shorter text that retains the core ideas of the original article - they will no doubt be perplexed by the resulting piece. This cut-up does indeed condense the ‘Deposition’, reducing it to less than 1 page compared to the 8 page magazine article, but many of the arguments that are presented in the article, and notably those to which critics have paid most attention, do not survive the cut-up process. This includes the claims for *Naked Lunch* as a tract against capital punishment, the reference to junk as the number one health problem, and the statements on the text having been written during the delirium of addiction.

The words and images that do come to the fore in this piece are those that were used figuratively in the article, but through the process of cut-up, they have been dislocated from their original context within a figure of speech and have emerged as images in their own right. For example in the ‘Deposition’ the word ‘monkey’ is used in clear reference to the expression ‘a monkey on one’s back’ meaning an addict’s dependence on a drug:

⁹ ‘Contributor’s note’, *Evergreen Review*, 4.11 (January-February 1960), p.12.

The Pusher always gets it all back. The addict needs more and more junk to maintain a human form ... buy off the Monkey.¹⁰

But in the cut-up of the 'Deposition' the word 'monkey' becomes separated from this figurative context:

Heroin opium morphine palfium buys off the monkey who eats form [...] Self-righteous position is front room monkey under the title what is? [...] Talk exact manner in which junk virus controls words in monkey [...] Heroin dynamics to cover basic living habit from white time sewer monkey taking soul as title on zero around addicts.¹¹

Burroughs' use of the word 'sewer' in this last sentence provides another example of how a word extracted from its original place in a text takes on a very different meaning in the cut-up. In the 'Deposition' the word sewer is used to express the desperation of the addict:

Junk is the ideal product ... the ultimate merchandise. No junk talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy ... The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to the product.¹²

But in the cut-up, 'sewer' is combined with a different set of words, creating new images: 'beautiful blue sewer', 'sewer monkey' and 'white time sewer of World Pushers'.¹³ Previously used to illustrate the dependency of the addict, 'sewer' now describes surreal landscapes, animals and wasted time.

¹⁰ Burroughs, 'Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness', *Evergreen Review*, 4.11 (January-February 1960), p.16.

¹¹ Burroughs, Cut-up of the 'Deposition' in 'Contributor's note', *Evergreen Review*, 4.11 (January-February 1960), pp.12,14.

¹² Burroughs, 'Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness', *Evergreen Review*, p.16

¹³ Burroughs, Cut-up of the 'Deposition' in 'Contributor's note', *Evergreen Review*, pp.12,14.

A certain amount of the material used in the cut-up does not derive from the original text. Take for example the following lines:

A lamentable confusion as the addict shrinks calm and sane in
weakened liver, squares to a fraction of quantitative relief.¹⁴

If we attempt to trace the origins of these words in the article, it becomes evident that 'shrinks', 'squares', 'fraction', and 'relief' can not be found in the 'Deposition'. What we discover is that not only has a great quantity of the original material been rejected, but new words have been added, and certain words and phrases have been repeated. The colour 'blue' for example is repeated, and as we have seen 'monkey' appears four times and 'sewer' is used three times - twice in the phrase 'white time sewer' - and yet each word occurs only once in the original text. Other phrases such as 'living habit' and 'terminal time' are also repeated. These repetitions, these shifts in the meaning of words, give the text a pattern of return and the feel of permutation that is characteristic of avant-garde minimalism. The cut-up refuses any one interpretation, and read in association with its original, should work to challenge the perception that the 'Deposition' is a text offering explicatory guidance to *Naked Lunch*.

Burroughs' use of repetition and his dislocation of words from their original figurative context and into new combinations resulted in a short text that reads as an abstract collection of words and images, made up predominantly of short sentences that are more akin to lines of poetry than the longer explanatory sentences of the original 'article'. If this text is intended as a précis, and if a cut-up does uncover what the original text is really saying, what does this cut-up reveal to the reader about the 'Deposition'? The text in this new form makes no claims for *Naked Lunch* being a

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.12.

book about addiction or written under the influence of addiction, and it makes no statements about heroin being a major health problem. Far from these being the essential and core elements of the original text, they have been shed in favour of an abstract, poetic and hallucinatory assemblage. This cut-up text discards the mask of the 'Deposition'. It achieves the task of revealing to the reader not so much what we should 'see' in the original article but what we should see through.

The publication within *Naked Lunch* of 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin' (fig.1) which Burroughs sent to Irving Rosenthal with the 20 July letter, followed by the cut-up of the 'Deposition' would have presented an alternative context for the reading of the main text because of its strong references to Dadaism and to historical and post-war avant-garde practices. In 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin' Burroughs writes of the Dadaist Tristan Tzara:

TRISTAN TZARA AT A SURREALIST RALLY IN THE 1920S
PROPOSED TO CREATE A POEM ON THE SPOT BY PULLING
WORDS OUT OF A HAT. A RIOT ENSUED WRECKED THE
THEATRE.¹⁵

The inclusion of these explicit references to the avant-garde movements of Surrealism and Dadaism would have brought greater attention to *Naked Lunch* as collage, and to the potential 'effect' of collage to induce a 'riot': to lead the audience to an active response. Reading the text in reference to this context would undermine the seriousness of the introduction and appendix, giving recognition to the humorous incongruity between their objective and scientific tone and the obscenity of the main work. Re-viewed in a Dadaist context, Burroughs' proposed appendix of extra

¹⁵ Burroughs, 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin' enclosed with the letter from Burroughs to Rosenthal 20 July 1960, GPR Syracuse.

THE CUT UP METHOD OF BRION GYSIN

TRISTAN TZARA AT A SURREALIST RALLY IN THE 1920S PROPOSED TO CREATE A POEM ON THE SPOT BY PULLING WORDS OUT OF A HAT. A RIOT ENSUED WRECKED THE THEATRE. THE METHOD WAS GROUNDED IN/ON THE FREUDIAN COUCH AND MA FREUD'S DREAM BOOK.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1960 BRION GYSIN PAINTER AND WRITER CUT NEWSPAPER ARTICLES INTO SECTIONS AND REARRANGED THE SECTIONS LOOKING AWAY. RESULT WAS DIRECT MESSAGES FROM WRITE NOW.

METHOD IS SIMPLE: TAKE A PAGE OR MORE OR LESS OF YOUR OWN WRITING OR FROM ANY WRITER LIVING AND OR DEAD. ANY WRITTEN OR SPOKEN WORDS. CUT INTO SECTIONS WITH SCISSORS OR SWITCH BLADE AS PREFERRED AND REARRANGE THE SECTIONS. LOOKING AWAY. NOW WRITE OUT RESULT.

BRION GYSIN: " THE CUT UP METHOD PLACES AT THE DISPOSAL OF WRITERS THE COLLAGE METHOD USED BY PAINTERS FOR THE PAST FIFTY YEARS."

DOCTOR NEUMAN: THEORY OF GAMES AND ^CECONOMIC BEHAVIOR INTRODUCED THE CUT UP ~~XXXXXX~~ PRINCIPLE OF RANDOM ACTION INTO MILITARY AND GAME STRATEGY. IT IS NOW BEING USED BY RUSSIAN CHESS MASTERS.

THE CUT UP METHOD WAS USED IN NAKED LUNCH WITHOUT THE ARTIST'S FULL AWARENESS OF THE METHOD HE WAS USING. THE FINAL FORM OF NAKED LUNCH AND THE JUXTAPOSITION OF SECTIONS WAS DETERMINED BY THE ORDER IN WHICH MATERIAL WENT ~~AT~~ RANDOM- TO THE PRINTER. SUBSEQUENTLY I USED THE METHOD WITH AWARENESS SCISSORS IN MINUTES TO GO AND THE EXTERMINATOR. THE ARTICLE DEPOSITION WHICH APPEARED IN THE EVERGREEN REVIEW WAS ACCOMPANIED BY A CUT UP OF THE ARTICLE. THE CUT UP WAS PRINTED IN THE CONTRIBUTORS NOTES INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING THE ARTICLE DIRECTLY AS INTENDED.

APPLICATIONS OF CUT UP METHOD ARE LITERALLY UNLIMITED CUT OUT FROM TIME LIMITS. OLD WORD LINES KEEP YOU IN OLD WORD SLOTS. CUT YOUR WAY OUT. CUT PAPER CUT FILM CUT TAPE. SCISSORS OR SWITCH BLADE AS PREFERRED. TAKE IT TO CUT CITY.

Figure 1. 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin'. Page enclosed with a letter from Burroughs to Irving Rosenthal dated 20 July 1960. Grove Press Records, Syracuse.

material, had it been included in the publication, might have been critically evaluated as collage in contrast to the literal reading that the 'Deposition' has attracted. 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin' reflects upon the composition of *Naked Lunch*, identifying the text as an unconscious cut-up, and by doing so Burroughs draws the text into a chronology of work that leads to his later cut-ups and experiments in a variety of media:

THE CUT UP METHOD WAS USED IN *NAKED LUNCH* WITHOUT THE AUTHOR'S FULL AWARENESS OF THE METHOD HE WAS USING. THE FINAL FORM OF *NAKED LUNCH* AND THE JUXTAPOSITION OF SECTIONS WAS DETERMINED BY THE ORDER IN WHICH MATERIAL WENT – AT RANDOM – TO THE PRINTER. SUBSEQUENTLY I USED THE METHOD WITH AWARENESS SCISSORS IN *MINUTES TO GO* AND *THE EXTERMINATOR*.¹⁶

The importance of *Naked Lunch* is here attributed to the fact that it led to the experiments of *Minutes to Go* and *The Exterminator*, and this statement implies that we should rethink the status of all these texts. *Naked Lunch* is the most widely available and highly regarded of Burroughs' work and the latter two small press publications have been out of print since 1968 and 1967 respectively, obscuring this continuity that runs through his work. This situation has been exacerbated by Grove's decision not to include 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin' in their 1962 publication.

Another proposal that Burroughs makes which would have significantly altered the publication of *Naked Lunch* is the inclusion of illustrations by both himself and Brion Gysin as stated in the letter to Rosenthal of 20 July:

¹⁶ Ibid.

If illustrations are used (And I think excellent idea) They should be presented with drawings from Brion Gysin since my drawings were derived from his. Would suggest a selection of drawings from Gysin and myself to be inserted at close of text before appendix.¹⁷

Again it could be said that this wish simply reflected his new interests and associations of that time, but as we can see from the earlier correspondence, Burroughs had sent drawings to Irving Rosenthal a year before, evidence that he had been envisioning their inclusion for some time. One page of these had been included with ‘Ten Episodes from *Naked Lunch*’ published in the first issue of *Big Table* during the spring of 1959. In Rosenthal’s letter to Burroughs of 23 August 1959 he acknowledges receipt of the drawings but also reveals his feelings of awkwardness when confronted with visual material:

I never said anything about the drawings you sent me because I don’t know anything about art or what to say - I dig the fact that you’re drawing and I like to see them (and, by the way, who was it who published a page of word forms? Not Paul Carroll or Girodias) but the idea of saying anything intelligent about a painting or drawing makes me want to hide my head in a desk draw rapidly - but it’s so gauche for you to be drawing when you write so good.¹⁸

Although Burroughs was comfortably moving between working in different mediums, experimenting in image and sound as well as written language, such a cross-over between the fields of art and literature was not confidently embraced by all. Rosenthal expresses his reluctance to engage with visual material and as the editor of the Grove Press edition of *Naked Lunch* this same reluctance would have influenced the exclusion of these illustrations.

¹⁷ Burroughs to Rosenthal 20 July 1960, GPR Syracuse.

¹⁸ Rosenthal to Burroughs 23 August 1959, File C-30, BP NYPL.

Ten months later in a letter of 15 July 1960 Rosenthal is more positive about the prospect of including these drawings in *Naked Lunch*. However, although his tone is encouraging, he suggests that Burroughs himself must proceed with the editorial work of deciding upon the details of what to include and where to place them. The number of questions and demands in Rosenthal's letter betray his lack of confidence:

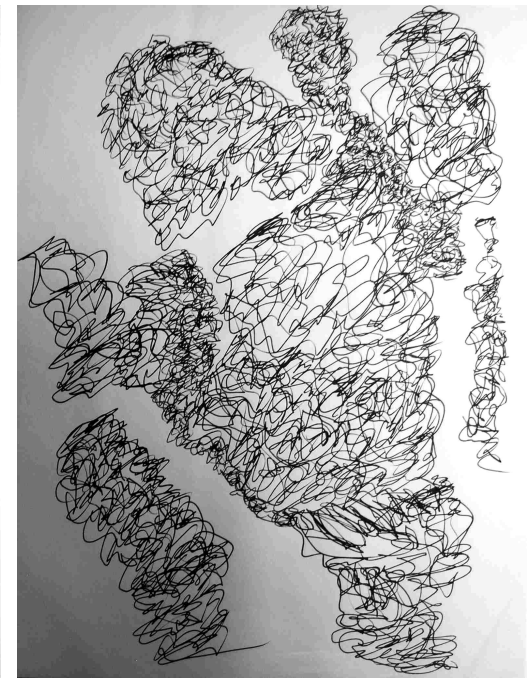
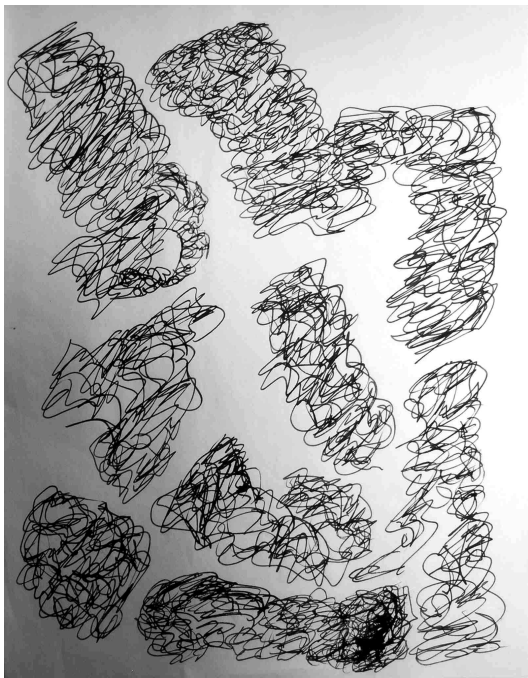
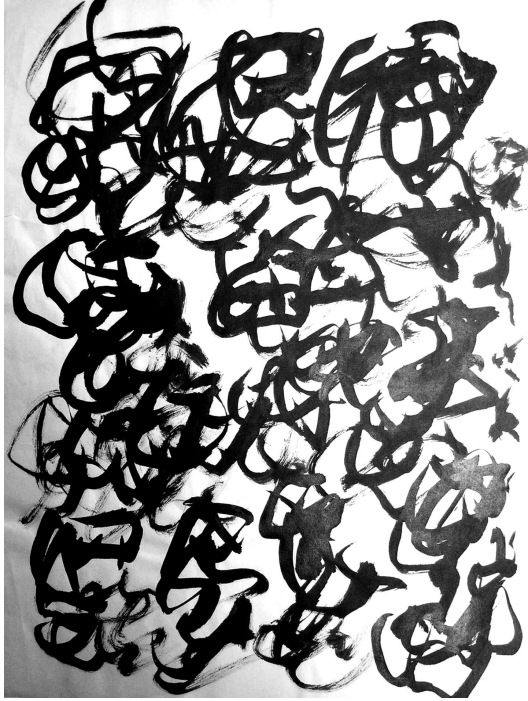
I think the Word Forms and Illustrations should be included, but which ones, how many, and where? I have one envelope of illustrations and word forms with a covering letter to Allen and Gregory dated Feb. 26, 1959 [...] If you are willing to label the rest of the drawings, plus the ones you have in Paris, and send them to me, I'm sure a lot of them could be included in the text, in the appropriate places. So shall I send that envelope of drawings to you, for you to label? [...] There are two envelopes of India ink drawings with a covering letter to Allen March 24, 1959, in which you say "It might be possible to put out selections from *Naked Lunch* half text, half drawings - I Have hundreds of these." Should I send these back to you so you can choose where you want them to go?¹⁹

This letter from Rosenthal confirms that from at least February 1959 and before the Olympia publication later that year, Burroughs had been working with the idea of including images in *Naked Lunch*. Eight of these drawings are held in the archive of the Grove Press Records and they give us an idea of the material to which Rosenthal refers (figs 2-9).

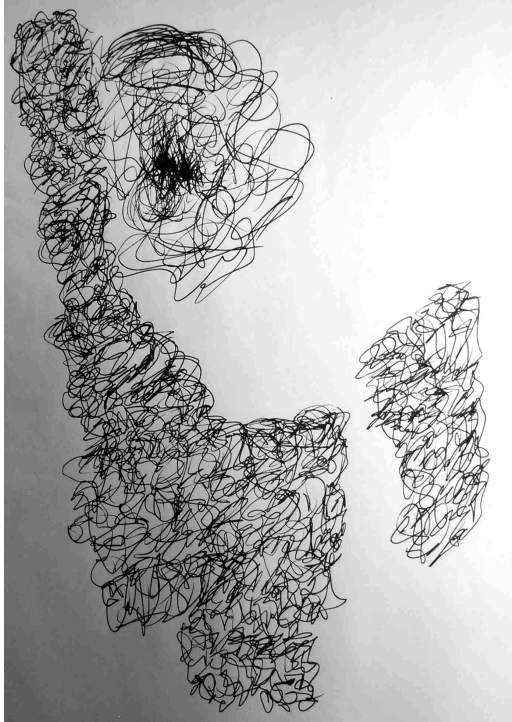
Like Rosenthal, Ginsberg also agrees with the suggestion that illustrations should be included, but in his letter of 29 July he declines from being directly involved in this matter: 'Illustrations - work that out with Grove Directly. Yours and Gysin's sound fine to me'.²⁰ This insistence from both Ginsberg and Rosenthal that Burroughs himself must take on the task of organising the illustrations provides one possible

¹⁹ Rosenthal to Burroughs 15 July 1960, File C-30, BP NYPL.

²⁰ Ginsberg to Burroughs 29 July 1960, GPR Syracuse.



Figures 2-5. Drawings enclosed with letters from Burroughs to Irving Rosenthal 1959. Grove Press Records, Syracuse University.



Figures 6-9. Drawings enclosed with letters from Burroughs to Irving Rosenthal 1959. Grove Press Records, Syracuse University.

explanation as to their absence in the published text. In Burroughs' 20 July response to Rosenthal's letter he fails to directly answer his questions regarding the illustrations but rather extends the issue by proposing that Gysin's drawings must also be included. As we can tell from the frustrated tone of Ginsberg's letters to Burroughs on the issue of preparing the Grove edition, Burroughs may have been putting forward ideas but he was unresponsive to the practical work required.²¹ Therefore Ginsberg's and Rosenthal's delegation of the work to Burroughs seems to have ensured that nothing further happened. It is also very likely that these illustrations were not included in the Grove edition because of the extra printing costs, an issue that was to prohibit the publication of much of his later experimental work.

The inclusion of drawings by Gysin and an acknowledgement within the publication of Gysin's influence upon Burroughs' own art would have brought greater attention to the important role that their collaborative relationship played in the development of Burroughs' work from 1958 onwards. A firm reference to the work of Gysin along with examples of his drawings within *Naked Lunch* might have secured the visibility of Gysin within readings of Burroughs' work and critical studies of the publications which followed *Naked Lunch - The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express* - which were all produced during the period in which Burroughs was influenced by the work of Gysin. The presence of drawings within the publication of

²¹ For example in a letter dated 29 July 1960 Ginsberg's tone betrays his frustration with Burroughs' failure to respond to Rosenthal's editorial corrections for the Grove edition: 'urge you to follow my suggestions on this which are reasonable. Irving put a lot of work into the detail, and your last letter tends to sweep all further detail under carpet. But it won't be much work for you just to check what he did.' (Ginsberg to Burroughs 29 July 1960, GPR Syracuse) and on 31 December 1960 Ginsberg urges Burroughs 'to take steps to make sure you come back into contact with Grove Press and GET your proofs [...] for gods sake write, wire or if necessary phone them collect and make sure you get with it pops. The new proofs are already on the way to Girodias. So then leave a forwarding address or stay in Paris and get it over with'. (Ginsberg to Burroughs 31 December 1960, File C-35, BP NYPL).

Naked Lunch might also have drawn more comparisons between Burroughs' work and that of Henri Michaux. Michaux's *Miserable Miracle* (1956) describes his experiences with mescaline and includes drawings made whilst under its influence. Published in the years in-between Burroughs' 1953 *yagé* expedition and his completion of *Naked Lunch*, the shifts between drawing and writing in *Miserable Miracle* invite comparison with the similar intersections in Burroughs' work. This visual echo within *Naked Lunch* of Michaux's work would draw greater attention to the references to *yagé* and the *yagé* altered state of consciousness in *Naked Lunch* in contrast to the prominence that opiate addiction has had within critical readings.

More generally the drawings would have widened the critical framework for reading *Naked Lunch* by encouraging comparisons with contemporary art and shifting interpretations away from straight literary readings of the text. We can see this happening if we look at Ginsberg's response to the printing of a single drawing with Burroughs' text in *Big Table 1*. This inclusion of visual material provokes Ginsberg to write of the similarities between his drawings and the work of Mark Rothko, Yves Kline and Mark Tobey.²² Reading Burroughs in reference to painters whose work is concerned with process - in the case of Kline action and performance, and in the case of Tobey writing with paint on the canvas - invites recognition of how this earlier work by Burroughs leads into his experimental multimedia work of the years that follow. I will not be pursuing these connections between the work of Burroughs, Michaux, Rothko, Kline or Tobey any further in this study; having argued that Grove's editorial decisions on the publication of *Naked Lunch* have constructed a

²² Ginsberg to Burroughs, no date, File C-35, BP NYPL.

critical framework for reading addiction as the primary subject of the text, I intend simply to substantiate this point by demonstrating how an alternative edition of *Naked Lunch* would have provoked different critical responses to Burroughs' work.

In 2003 Grove Press published a new edition of *Naked Lunch* which took steps towards observing Burroughs' directions for the publication of the book. In *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text* edited by James Grauerholz and Barry Miles, the 'Deposition' is printed as an appendix along with 'Letter From a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs'. This transference of the introduction to the appendix and the inclusion of an 'Editors' Note' on the history of the text promises to reverse the influence that censorship has had upon *Naked Lunch*, but looking at this edition in more detail we find that many of the problems of the 1962 publication are repeated. The placement of the 'Deposition' after the main text should lessen the impact that it has upon readings of *Naked Lunch*, but by entitling this section 'Original Introductions and Additions by the Author' the originality and authority of the 'Deposition' is given emphasis, and so the reader is still left with the impression that the 'Deposition' provides a authoritative account of the production and content of *Naked Lunch*. Although the 'Editors' Note' gives a brief summary of the censorship of *Naked Lunch*, there is no explanation of the influence that censorship had upon Grove's edition of the text, of the history of the 'Deposition' or its role in preparing for the legal defence of *Naked Lunch*. Therefore the reader continues to be unaware of the history of the 'Deposition', and whilst the revisionary order of this 'restored' edition can be commended for placing the 'Deposition' at the end of the text, by not explaining its history as the product of the relationship of negotiation between writer, publisher and censorship, its potential to influence readings of *Naked Lunch* remains.

In the 'Editors' Note' Miles and Grauerholz briefly describe the trial of *Naked Lunch*: 'In early 1965 the literary value of the Grove Press edition was defended in court by Mailer and Ginsberg and the poet John Ciardi'.²³ This statement, by making reference to three writers, suggests that the trial was only concerned with the literary value of *Naked Lunch* which is misleading in terms of how the book was defended and judged. Although arguments for the text's literary value contributed to the trial, the defence of *Naked Lunch* as a document of addiction was central to de Grazia's approach. Printed after the 'Editors' Note' is Burroughs' letter to Irving Rosenthal dated 20 July 1960. This is a welcome addition, but again what it achieves is undermined by only partially following through with what the 'restored' edition would seem to promise. It is in this letter that Burroughs states that 'the enclosed explanation of the Cut Up method should be inserted at the end of the article Deposition and followed by the cut up of that article'.²⁴ By printing this letter, but not the enclosed text on the cut-up method or the cut-up of the 'Deposition', the original act of exclusion is repeated.

Returning to Burroughs' proposed appendix to *Naked Lunch*, we can see how inclusion of 'The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin' would have firmly placed the text in a relationship to the work that follows: the cut-ups, *Minutes to Go* and *The Exterminator*. Likewise, the relationship of *Naked Lunch* to *The Yage Letters* would also have been more prominent if the text had not been subject to censorship and defended so adamantly as a book about opiate addiction. The acknowledgement of these connections functions to remove *Naked Lunch* from its isolated position as *the* book by Burroughs, drawing it back into the context of the work which came both before and after.

²³ Barry Miles and James Grauerholz, 'Editor's Note' in *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text* (2003), p.243.

²⁴ Burroughs to Rosenthal 20 July 1960, GPR Syracuse.

In the previous chapter I referred to Judith Butler's work on censorship and her observation that censorship is not necessarily concerned with banning material or making the obscene material invisible, but rather in making it visible in its own terms: that prohibitions are a means to condition as much as they are a means to constrain. I concluded that the proposition that censorship produces and regulates that which is prohibited is evidenced by *Naked Lunch*'s legacy of censorship in the form of framing texts, an example of prohibition as actively formative, working to circumscribe the identity of the work. *Naked Lunch* is in this way 'identified' as a document of addiction, and the narrator's voice pathologised as that of the 'addict'. As Harris notes in *The Secret of Fascination*, there has been an undisputed assumption in Burroughs criticism that heroin addiction is the major trope of his work, and '[t]his binding identification of Burroughs with junk has generated a convenient paradigm that for thirty years has been largely followed'.²⁵ I do not want to state that the subject of addiction has no part in critical studies of Burroughs' work; the problem instead is the monopoly it has achieved at the loss of other readings.

In *Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester Write Tangier* (2002) Greg Mullins writes that Burroughs' addiction to opiates continues to dominate perceptions of him as a writer:

Forty years after he made his literary debut, William Burroughs's cameo appearance in the film *Drugstore Cowboy* underscores the extent to which his image as this century's consummate literary junky perpetuates his fame and popularity.²⁶

He also notes that this has had a serious impact on literary criticism. Mullins proposes

²⁵ Harris (2003), p.36.

²⁶ Greg A. Mullins, *Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester Write Tangier*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002, p.49.

that critical attention to drugs in Burroughs' writing has left sexuality a neglected subject. This is a valuable argument and, as I have shown in the previous chapter, we see this happening during the trial when sex and sexuality were declared as subsidiary to the subject of drug addiction. Hopefully Mullins' questioning of why 'the iconic figuration of Burroughs continues to be that of the exemplary literary junky, and not the exemplary literary queer?' will encourage critical engagement with sexuality in his work. But such reactions against 'drug' interpretations of Burroughs' writings, by which critics tend to mean opiate addiction, do not help to construct a nuanced discussion of the influence of many *different* substances on his developing aesthetic. Critical reactions against the monopoly that addiction holds over readings of *Naked Lunch* display the same problem of a lack of differentiation between very different groups of substances that characterises the work of those critics who are conversely preoccupied with the subject of addiction. Mullins for example positions his study as a reaction against the influence of Burroughs' notoriety as an 'addict' and 'junky', but confusingly and without distinction, refers to 'drugs', 'narcotics', and 'hallucinogens'.

This move by later critics to marginalise the subject of drugs can be seen as an attempt, as Alan Hibbard writes, to 'elevate Burroughs's status'. Hibbard praises Robin Lydenberg's study *Word Cultures* for having achieved this: 'Clearly, her intent in bringing contemporary theory to bear on Burroughs is to advance a more serious discussion of his work, which had so often been dismissed (or celebrated!) as incomprehensible rubbish, the effluvia of a debased drug addict and pervert'.²⁷ A careful reading of the influence of *yagé* or DMT as distinct from opiate use is not possible from either critical standpoint. Readings of Burroughs' work that focus upon

²⁷ Alan Hibbard, 'Shift Coordinate Points: William S. Burroughs and Contemporary Theory' in Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh, eds, *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*. London: Pluto, 2004, p.15.

addiction are dominated by opiate use at the expense of recognising the place of psychoactive substances, but reactions against the interpretative monopoly of addiction indiscriminately establish critical distance from all ‘drugs’.

Naked Lunch

Burroughs makes a clear statement on the difference between addictive and non-addictive drugs in the ‘Deposition’ - the text included by Grove Press as an introduction to *Naked Lunch* in 1962 that, as we have seen, has had a substantial influence on readings of the main text. He writes:

I have used junk in many forms: morphine, heroin, Dilaudid, Eukodal, Pantopon, Diocodid, Diosane, opium, Demoral, Dolophine, Palfium. I have smoked junk, eaten it, sniffed it, injected it in vein-skin-muscle, inserted it in rectal suppositories. The needle is not important. Whether you sniff it smoke it eat it or shove it up your ass the result is the same: addiction. When I speak of drug addiction I do not refer to keif, marijuana or any preparation of hashish, mescaline, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, LSD6, Sacred Mushrooms or any other drug of the hallucinogen group.... There is no evidence that the use of any hallucinogen results in physical dependence. The action of these drugs is physiologically opposite to the action of junk.²⁸

Because the beginning of the ‘Deposition’ introduces us to *Naked Lunch* as written during the sickness of addiction, this distinction between addictive and non-addictive substances reads as a dismissal of the latter as not relevant to the text, and can be easily misread as implying that *Naked Lunch* itself does ‘not refer to’ these substances. However, if we read against the promotion of the subject of addiction in the ‘Deposition’, what we can take from this paragraph is a list of the many substances that *are* all relevant to the text, and perhaps even more importantly, take

²⁸ Burroughs, ‘Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness’ in *Naked Lunch*, p.200.

note of this distinction between the effects of these drugs, because the contrast between the states of mind of addictive opiates and non-addictive psychoactive substances is an essential part of the text.

Burroughs writes about the numbing effects of opiates in 'Post Script... Wouldn't You?': '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'²⁹ and in *Naked Lunch*:

Look down at my filthy trousers, haven't been changed in months ...
The days glide by strung on a syringe with a long thread of blood ... I
am forgetting sex and all sharp pleasures of the body – a grey, junk-
bound ghost.³⁰

He writes about the life of the addict and the practical aspects of using and attaining heroin or paregoric, but what he does *not* write about are its hallucinatory effects upon consciousness. Burroughs' experiences of opiate addiction provide characters, scenarios and stories rather than visions. From the beginning, *Naked Lunch* may appear to be about junk: 'I can feel the heat closing in, feel them out there making their moves, setting up their devil doll stool pigeons, crooning over my spoon and dropper'³¹ and so it is, but these are accounts of the world of the addict, pusher and the narcotics police, not of opiate 'visions'.

We are introduced to the characters of Bill Gains 'huddled in someone else's overcoat looking like a 1910 banker with paresis' and Old Bart 'dunking pound cake with his dirty fingers, shiny over the dirt',³² and provided with descriptions of the practical

²⁹ 'Post Script... Wouldn't You?' in *Naked Lunch* ,p.208.

³⁰ *Naked Lunch*, p.56.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.3.

³² *ibid.*, p.5.

aspects of taking the drug, how a pin and dropper can be used to inject heroin in jail and the practicalities of preparing for such a scenario: ‘Provident junkies, known as squirrels, keep stashes against a bust. Every time I take a shot I let a few drops fall into my vest pocket, the lining is stiff with the stuff’.³³ We learn that shooting paregoric ‘is a terrible hassle, you have to burn out the alcohol first, then freeze out the camphor and draw this brown liquid off with a dropper’,³⁴ and that when taking a shot ‘[t]he body knows what veins you can hit and conveys this knowledge in the spontaneous movements you make preparing to take a shot’.³⁵ There are descriptions of waiting: ‘He knew and I knew all about waiting. At all levels the drug trade operates without schedule. Nobody delivers on time except by accident.’³⁶ There are also a number of descriptions of the physical effects upon the body, of ‘flesh that fades at the first silent touch of junk. I saw it happen. Ten pounds lost in ten minutes standing with the syringe in one hand holding his pants up with the other, his abdicated flesh burning in a cold yellow halo’,³⁷ but no visions of the kind associated with the work of De Quincey or Coleridge. In regard to the relationship between opiate use and creativity Burroughs claimed that ‘[u]nder morphine one can edit, type, and organize material effectively but since the drug acts to decrease awareness the creative factor is dimmed’.³⁸ The hallucinatory qualities of *Naked Lunch* come not from the description of opiate-induced visions but from accounts of the altered state of mind induced by cannabis, *yagé*, or experienced during opiate *withdrawal*.

³³ *ibid.*, p.10.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.13.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.56.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.180.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.9.

³⁸ Burroughs, William S., and Daniel Odier, *The Job: Interviews with William S. Burroughs*. 1969. London: Penguin, 1989, p.159.

The altered state of mind experienced during drug withdrawal is described by Burroughs as characterised by paranoia, hallucination and nostalgia. Presented as producing effects that are opposite to addiction, withdrawal brings a painful expanded awareness that bears similarities to the heightened consciousness of psychoactive substances. In ‘Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs’ he provides the following description of the effects of drug withdrawal:

During withdrawal the addict is acutely aware of his surroundings. Sense impressions are sharpened to the point of hallucination. Familiar objects seem to stir with a writhing furtive life. The addict is subject to a barrage of sensations external and visceral. He may experience flashes of beauty and nostalgia, but the overall impression is extremely painful.[...] I have noticed two special reactions of early withdrawal: (1) Everything looks threatening; (2) mild paranoia. The doctors and nurses appear as monsters of evil. In the course of several cures, I have felt myself surrounded by dangerous lunatics.³⁹

He observes that these hallucinatory effects bear similarity to the experience of psychoactive substances, particularly that of *Banisteriopsis caapi* (yagé):

The similarity between withdrawal phenomena and certain states of drug intoxication, is striking. Hashish, *Banisteriopsis caapi* (harmaline), peyote (mescaline) produces states of acute sensitivity, with hallucinatory viewpoint. Everything looks alive. Paranoid ideas are frequent. *Banisteriopsis caapi* intoxication specifically reproduces the state of withdrawal.⁴⁰

Naked Lunch moves between accounts of a narrowed, frozen consciousness of opiate use and the expanded consciousness of withdrawal, shifting from descriptions of being subject to the controlling force of addiction: ‘The spit hangs off their chin, and their stomach rumbles and all their guts grind in peristalsis while they cook up’,⁴¹ to the altered state of consciousness of opiate withdrawal:

³⁹ ‘Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs’ in *Naked Lunch*, pp.216,217.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.217.

⁴¹ *Naked Lunch*, p.6.

Lee The Agent (a double-four-eight-sixteen) is taking the junk cure... space-time trip portentously familiar as junk meets corners to the addict... cures past and future shuttle pictures through his spectral substance vibrating in silent winds of accelerated Time..⁴²

The 'hospital' section of *Naked Lunch* presents a collection of paranoid visions, the 'Withdrawal Nightmares'⁴³ endured whilst taking the cure. There are indications of the hospital setting, for example: 'They just bring so-called lunch', 'The lavatory has been locked for three hours solid', 'I am passing room 10 they moved me out of yesterday',⁴⁴ regular statements that are then followed by hallucinatory scenes. The explicit references here to the '[p]aranoia of early withdrawal'⁴⁵ and the 'nightmare interlude of cellular panic'⁴⁶ endured during the cure, suggest that some of the most bizarre and extreme elements within *Naked Lunch* are the imaginary product of withdrawal as distinct from, and in fact opposite to the direct effects of opiate use.

Burroughs' writing on addiction and control does not therefore emerge solely from the representation of addiction, but is constructed in reference to two juxtaposed states: the altered state of consciousness which allows the naked lunch moment, and the state of opiate addiction. *Naked Lunch* works by exploring *both* the expanded awareness of withdrawal or *yagé* and the narrowed awareness of addiction. As a consequence of many critics not observing the difference between the effects of opiate use and opiate withdrawal, and the variant characteristics of opiates and psychoactive substances, they are not recognised as different experiences and forces in Burroughs' work. Hence the subjects of control and addiction are analysed out of context of their juxtaposition to expanded states of consciousness.

⁴² *ibid.*, p.182.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.47.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp.50,51,52.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.47.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.49.

Naked Lunch describes a multitude of different altered states of mind, indicating the extent to which Burroughs was interested in chemical and non-chemical alterations in consciousness, both self-manipulated through the use of drugs and imposed by others via medical or even military projects. His preoccupation with this subject, as displayed in *Naked Lunch*, connects this work not only to his earlier *yagé* experiences but also to his continued experimentation with psychoactive substances from 1958 to 1961 and his pursuit of art forms that could replicate the experience of an altered state of consciousness. Burroughs' concern to draw distinctions between the effects of various substances upon the mind is evident for example in the multiple references in *Naked Lunch* to the difference between cocaine and opiates:

You can smell it going in, clean and cold in your nose and throat then a rush of pure pleasure right through the brain lighting up those C connections. Your head shatters in white explosions. Ten minutes later you will want another shot... you will walk across town for another shot. But if you can't score for C you eat, sleep and forget about it.⁴⁷

The pleasure of morphine is in the viscera. You listen down into yourself after a shot. But C is electricity through the brain, and the C yen is of the brain alone, a need without body and without feeling. The C-charged brain is a berserk pinball machine, flashing blue and pink lights in electric orgasm.⁴⁸

Burroughs also makes reference to the effects of nutmeg ('result vaguely similar to marijuana with side effect of headache and nausea'⁴⁹), to the inhalation by Doctor Benway's assistant Brubeck of coal gas filtered through powdered milk, and the effects of a 'sleeping pill called Soneryl...You don't feel sleepy ...You shift to sleep without transition, fall abruptly into the middle of a dream'.⁵⁰ There are aphrodisiacs -

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.17.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.22. A similar distinction is made on p.55.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.26.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.57.

‘a bug like a big grasshopper known as the Xiucutl: “such a powerful aphrodisiac if one flies on you and you can’t get a woman right away you will die’.⁵¹ - and descriptions of the fear and disorientation induced by ‘an overdose of majoun’: ‘[I] suddenly don’t know where I am’, ‘And I don’t know what I am doing there nor who I am’.⁵² These all contribute to a text that is rich in reference to many different altered states of mind.

In the ‘benway’ section of *Naked Lunch* Burroughs’ own interest in the subject of mind alteration finds an outlet through the voice and character of Doctor Benway. Benway’s obsession with reconditioning and mind control also allows Burroughs to express his fears about the application of chemical and non-chemical manipulation of the mind. Benway is described as ‘a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control’.⁵³ His work in the ‘Reconditioning Centre’ and his implementation of a system of control in Annexia reveal the horrific potential of psychological manipulation. When Burroughs began his search for *yagé* his interest in the vine was articulated in terms of its telepathic properties. Noting that the Russians and the CIA were conducting experiments with *yagé*, Burroughs was intrigued by this rumour of a drug which could potentially be used to control whole populations. Benway’s statements on the use of drugs in interrogation are a reminder of what stimulated Burroughs’ own investigations in the early 1950s:

Pending more precise knowledge of brain electronics, drugs remain an essential tool of the interrogator in his assault on the subject’s personal identity. The barbiturates are, of course, virtually useless. That is, anyone who can be broken down by such means would succumb to the puerile methods used in an American precinct. Scopolamine is often

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.124.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp.183,184.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.19.

effective in dissolving resistance, but it impairs the memory: an agent might be prepared to reveal his secrets but quite unable to remember them, or cover story and secret life info might be inextricably garbled. Mescaline, harmine, LSD6, bufotenine, muscarine successful in many cases.⁵⁴

Benway concludes that '[a]lternate doses of LSD6 and bulbocapnine - the bulbocapnine potentiated with curare - give the highest yield of automatic obedience'⁵⁵ and then proceeds to describe how deep depression can be promoted by administering large doses of Benzedrine for several days, and psychosis induced by large doses of cocaine or by abrupt withdrawal of barbiturates after 'prolonged administration'. He also refers to experiments with the non-chemical replication of the effects of drugs, suggesting that 'the effect of C could be produced by an electric current activating the C channels'.⁵⁶

Burroughs returns to the subject of mind control in his descriptions of the 'parties of Interzone', the Senders and the technique of telepathic sending as explained by a speaker at 'the National Electronic Conference in Chicago':

In closing I want to sound a word of warning ... The logical extension of encephalographic research is biocontrol; that is, control of physical movement, mental processes, emotional reactions and *apparent* sensory impressions by means of bioelectric signals injected into the nervous system of the subject. [...] The biocontrol apparatus is prototype of one-way telepathic control. The subject could be rendered susceptible to the transmitter by drugs or other processing without installing any apparatus.⁵⁷

Burroughs also warns that methods of psychological manipulation can be (and indeed have been) used to control sexuality. In 'benway' he presents a parody of medical

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.23.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.23.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.22.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp.136-137.

‘cures’ for homosexuality with Doctor Benway’s proposal that drugs and hypnosis can be used to manipulate a change in an individual’s sexuality from straight to queer:

“ [...] You can make a square heterosex citizen queer with this angle ... that is, reinforce and second his rejection of normally latent homosexual trends – at the same time depriving him of cunt and subjecting him to homosexual stimulation. Then drugs, hypnosis, and –” Benway flipped a limp wrist.⁵⁸

The portrayal of Benway and the later descriptions of telepathic sending present nightmare scenarios of the use of chemical and non-chemical means to manipulate the mind. *Naked Lunch* reveals that Burroughs was alert to the dangers as well as the exciting revelations that could result from experimenting with altered states of consciousness, and suggests why in his writings (if not in his actions) he took a cautious, serious and even negative attitude to the use of LSD, *yagé* and DMT, and expressed concern at what he perceived to be the naive enthusiasm of figures such as Timothy Leary.

Naked Lunch reveals Burroughs’ continued preoccupation with chemical and non-chemical alteration of consciousness, but it also contains some of his most dramatic writing on his experiences of *yagé*. In chapter one we saw that the prior publication of some of Burroughs’ *yagé* material in *Naked Lunch* influenced the content of the 1963 edition of *The Yage Letters*. The reader of Burroughs’ work, having determined from the “In Search of Yage” section of *The Yage Letters* that Burroughs’ experiences with this psychoactive substance were rather underwhelming, would not necessarily look to *Naked Lunch* to have this view contradicted. As Oliver Harris notes in *The Secret of Fascination*, *yagé* in *Naked Lunch* ‘has stayed a kind of open secret, its significance

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.24.

eclipsed entirely by the relentless overdetermination of junk and addiction'.⁵⁹ *The Yage Letters* has been received as a collection of original correspondence between Burroughs and Ginsberg and therefore if Burroughs' descriptions of his powerful *yagé* experiences had been included they would have been viewed (albeit mistakenly) in a biographical context, perhaps changing how biographers and critics have viewed Burroughs' use of psychoactive substances. But because this *yagé* material was published in *Naked Lunch* - printed in the middle of a text of surreal, fantastical and extreme happenings - it does not invite interpretation as having derived from Burroughs' actual accounts of *yagé*.

Burroughs' writings on *yagé* within *Naked Lunch* incorporate material from his 8 July and 10 July 1953 letters and from the article 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' to form 'the market' section of the text. The placement of this material in the 1959 Olympia edition of *The Naked Lunch* differs from the 1962 Grove publication and all later editions, another consequence of Grove's inclusion of an introduction and an appendix. The 1959 text includes footnotes on *yagé* within 'the market' section that have been extracted from Burroughs' 1957 article 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' first published in *The British Journal of Addiction*. However, when Grove published *Naked Lunch* this article was included as an appendix and the footnotes within the main text were removed, leaving in their place a note that reads:

(Section describing The City and the Meet Café written in state of *yagé* intoxication ... *yagé*, *ayahuasca*, *pilde*, *nateema* are Indian names for *Banisteriopsis caapi*, a fast-growing vine indigenous to the Amazon region. See discussion of *yagé* in Appendix.)⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Harris (2003), p.167.

⁶⁰ *Naked Lunch*, p.91.

It is debatable whether Grove's action did much to detract from the presence of Burroughs' writing on *yagé* within *Naked Lunch*, but it could be argued that moving the information on *yagé* to the end of the text - to an appendix that would seem to be about addiction and 'dangerous' addictive drugs - makes it all the more likely that the reader will not realise that within *Naked Lunch* are accounts of his *yagé* experiences which attest to its very powerful effects upon consciousness.

Burroughs' 1957 article 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' is for the most part about opiate addiction and cures (as would be expected in a journal about addiction) but Burroughs also provides brief descriptions of the effects and use of other addictive and non-addictive substances. The description of *yagé* that he used for this article was lifted from his March 1956 'Yagé Article' manuscript. In the *yagé* section of 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' subtitled '*Banisteriopsis caapi*', Burroughs describes how the *yagé* brew is prepared using the bark of the vine which is 'crushed and boiled for two or more hours' with the leaves of another plant. He then states that *yagé* is 'a hallucinating narcotic that produces a profound derangement of the senses', that it is used 'by Medicine Men to potentiate their powers' and as 'a cure-all in the treatment of various illnesses'⁶¹ including fever, stomach and intestinal worms. In consequence, Burroughs' statement about its ability to profoundly derange the senses which in his 8 July 1953 letter read as a personal pronouncement of the powerful effects of *yagé*, is in the article muted by being inserted in between objective statements on how and why *yagé* is used in the Amazon. After further notes on the differences between the fresh vine and dried vine, comes a second statement describing *yagé* as 'a powerful, hallucinating narcotic',⁶² but again,

⁶¹ 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' in *Naked Lunch* pp.226,227.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.227.

what this statement should be telling us about the profound nature of Burroughs' own experiences of *yagé* is lost in this context.

In the 1959 Olympia publication these statements about the 'powerful' and 'profound' effects of *yagé* are printed in a footnote below the Composite City text, but even in this arrangement, the 'novel' status of *Naked Lunch* and Burroughs' playful use of both science *and* fiction, leave the reader uncertain as to how to read Burroughs' accounts of intoxication by 'a fast-growing vine indigenous to the Amazon region'.⁶³ The *yagé* footnote comes directly after another note explaining the conditions of 'latah' and 'Bang-utot':

(*Latah* is a condition occurring in southeast Asia. Otherwise sane, Latahs compulsively imitate every motion once their attention is attracted by snapping the fingers or calling sharply. A form of compulsive involuntary hypnosis. They sometimes injure themselves trying to imitate the motions of several people at once.)

Bang-utot, literally "attempting to get up and groaning..." Death occurring in the course of a nightmare [...] Victims often know that they are going to die, express the fear that their penis will enter the body and kill them. Sometimes they cling to the penis in a state of shrieking hysteria calling on others to help lest the penis escape and pierce the body [...])⁶⁴

By making reference to such bizarre conditions, Burroughs seems to be inviting disbelief, but in fact both of these are real documented states of mind. We find them described as 'latah' and 'koro' in the *American Handbook of Psychiatry* published in the same year as *The Naked Lunch*:

Latah is a syndrome first described in Malaya [...] The patient may at first repeat some of his own words or sentences several times; later on, he will repeat the words or sentences of other people, particularly of persons in authority. Still later, the patient, in a pantomime

⁶³ William S. Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*. Paris: Olympia Press, 1959, footnote, p.105.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp.102,103.

fashion, repeats or imitates gestures and acts of other people, even if this results in harm to himself.

Koro [...] generally starts suddenly. The Patient becomes fearful that his penis will disappear into his abdomen and he will die. To prevent this from happening, he has to grip his penis firmly; when he gets tired, his wife, relatives, and friends help him.⁶⁵

It becomes understandable that the reader might doubt the ‘science’ behind the footnotes on ‘latah’ and ‘bang-utot’ (Since the Grove publication these have been inserted into the main text), especially when we consider their position within the context of *Naked Lunch*. This is a text which includes descriptions of creatures and drugs that we can be certain are fictional. Take for example the description of mugwumps and addicts of mugwump fluid:

Addicts of Mugwump fluid are known as Reptiles. A number of these flow over chairs with their flexible bones and black-pink flesh. A fan of green cartilage covered with hollow, erectile hairs through which the Reptiles absorb the fluid sprouts from behind each ear. The fans, which move from time to time touched by invisible currents, serve also some form of communication known only to Reptiles.⁶⁶

The effect of this blurring of the boundary between descriptions of actual forms of chemically or otherwise induced alterations of consciousness, and fantastical places, characters and made-up drugs is that it generates an uncertainty of where that boundary lies.

This is one of the great qualities of *Naked Lunch* but it carries certain consequences for how Burroughs’ Composite City text is interpreted. We can conclude therefore that when Burroughs writes in *Naked Lunch* that *yagé* produces a ‘profound

⁶⁵ Silvano Arieti and Johannes M. Meth, ‘Rare, Unclassifiable, Collective, and Exotic Psychotic Syndromes’ in Silvano Arieto, ed., *American Handbook of Psychiatry Vol. 1*. New York: Basic Books, 1959, pp.556-558.

⁶⁶ *Naked Lunch*, p.46.

derangement of the senses', the reader is very unlikely to take this as a personal testimony about a psychoactive drug that really did have a dramatic short-term and possibly long-term influence on Burroughs' ways of thinking and seeing. As I noted in chapter one, this *yagé*-influenced text, included in Burroughs' 10 July letter arrives after a sequence of letters in which he writes first of his difficulties in writing anything about *yagé* and his early disappointing experiments, then his revelatory *yagé* sessions to which he responds by writing about their 'indescribable' nature, recording the 'rape' of his senses, and finally producing this piece in which he works at conveying the space-time travel of *yagé*. Taken from this context and included in a text as wonderfully disorientating and surreal as *Naked Lunch*, it is no longer apparent that what Burroughs has achieved in this piece is a written response to the experience of *yagé*.

The 10 July material - the Composite City text - is introduced in 'the market' section of *Naked Lunch* with the following lines: 'Panorama of the City of Interzone. Opening bars of "East St. Louis Toodle-oo" ... at times loud and clear then faint and intermittent like music down a windy street...' ⁶⁷ This attention to sound, first loud and then quiet and the evocative sound-image of hearing music carried on the wind suggests a sharpening of the senses, a transition to the heightened state of *yagé* intoxication. This introduction to Burroughs' *yagé* text also attests to the similarities he noted between withdrawal and *yagé*, its nostalgic tone and use of images of ghostly streets is very similar to how Burroughs portrays the 'flashes of beauty and nostalgia' ⁶⁸ of 'the peeled nerves of junk sickness': ⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Naked Lunch*, p.89.

⁶⁸ 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' in *Naked Lunch*, p.216.

⁶⁹ *Naked Lunch*, p.44.

[We] drove on and on, cold spring wind whistling through that old heap around our shivering, sick sweating bodies and the cold you always come down with when the junk runs out of you ... On through the peeled landscape, dead armadillos in the road and vultures over the swamp and cypress stumps. Motels with beaverboard walls, gas heater, thin pink blankets.⁷⁰

The mind altering effects and the heightened awareness of drug withdrawal and of *yagé* are both expressed through these sensitized impressions of the landscape.

After the opening lines of ‘the market’ the text cuts to the Composite City description from the 10 July letter:

The room seems to shake and vibrate with motion. The blood and substance of many races, Negro, Polynesian, Mountain Mongol, Desert Nomad, Polyglot Near East, Indian – races as yet unconceived and unborn, combinations not yet realized pass through your body.⁷¹

This section of the text is repeated several pages later, but this time it is directly preceded by the ‘Notes from *yagé* state’ material that derived from his 8 July letter: ‘The room takes on aspect of Near East whorehouse with blue walls and red tasseled lamps... I feel myself turning into a Negress’.⁷² Burroughs brings together these two descriptions of body, gender and racial metamorphosis from different letters, presenting in this single passage the shift from a personal account of the effects of *yagé* (‘I feel’, ‘my flesh’, ‘my legs’) to a way of writing that actually incorporates, rather than reports, the experience of *yagé*:

The blood and substance of many races, Negro, Polynesian, Mountain Mongol, Desert Nomad, Polyglot Near East, Indian, races as yet unconceived and unborn, passes through the body ...

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp.12,13.

⁷¹ *The Naked Lunch* (1959), p.99. These lines were removed from this section of the text in the recent ‘Restored’ edition of *Naked Lunch*.

⁷² *Naked Lunch*, p.92.

Migrations, incredible journeys through deserts and jungles and mountains (stasis and death in closed mountain valley where plants grow out of genitals, vast crustaceans hatch inside and break the shell of body)⁷³

From the ‘notes from *yagé* state’ of the 8 July letter to the Composite City text of the 10 July letter Burroughs has made a significant transition, reworking his own experience of bodily transformation into descriptions of metamorphosis that suggest the vastness of all places and times, referring to ‘the body’ and ‘body’ rather than the first person. Within this single paragraph we find a highly condensed version of Burroughs’ development of a written response to *yagé* that emerged in his 1953 letters. The 1963 publication of *The Yage Letters* did not contain this material from his 8 and 10 July letters, and yet here it is in the middle of *Naked Lunch*, fated to be overlooked in a text that has become famous as a book about opiate addiction.

As already noted in chapter one, the Composite City text works to replicate rather than simply report the effects of *yagé*, and does so partly by juxtaposing different heightened sensory impressions. In ‘the market’, ‘the Meet Cafe’ and ‘Notes from *yagé* state’ smells, sounds and imagery are layered in an intense montage of sensory description: ‘a haze of smoke and steam’, ‘smoky doorways’, ‘Cooking smells of all countries’, ‘the resinous red smoke of *yagé*’, ‘smell of the jungle and salt water’, ‘High mountain flutes, jazz and bebop’, ‘African drums, Arab bagpipes’.⁷⁴ However, it is the evocation of the ‘space-time travel’ of *yagé* within this text that most ambitiously attempts to convey the altered consciousness of *yagé*. The description of the houses within the city presents an architecture of all times and places ‘joined’ in this one vision:

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.92.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp.89,90.

All houses of the City are joined. Houses of sod-high mountain Mongols blink in smoky doorways – houses of bamboo and teak, houses of adobe, stone and red brick. South Pacific and Maori houses, houses in tress and river boats, wood houses one hundred feet long sheltering entire tribes, houses of boxes and corrugated iron where old men sit in rotten rags cooking down canned heat, great rusty iron racks rising two hundred feet in the air from swamps and rubbish with perilous partitions built on multi-leveled platforms, and hammocks swinging over the void.⁷⁵

This co-existence of many places is also suggested in the lines: The room is Near East, Negro, South Pacific, in some familiar place I cannot locate'.⁷⁶ This is a slight variation on material describing the effects of *yagé* from the 8 July letter which reads: 'The room is Near Eastern and Polynesian at the same time, and yet in an undefined place you feel is familiar'.⁷⁷ Burroughs' accounts of the space-time travel of *yagé* accord with Benny Shanon's analysis of the effects of ayahuasca in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. Shanon writes that 'just as one may not be sure as to where one is, under the Ayahuasca intoxication, one may not be fully cognizant of when one is'.⁷⁸ He also states that ayahuasca induces 'perceived *spatial extension* and *distance*':

This is especially marked in visions of great expanses of open landscape. The spatial qualities of these scenes are readily translatable to temporal ones: the vast expanses and the distances of inspection generate an ambiance in which time is no longer relevant.⁷⁹

In 'the market' we find such descriptions of open landscapes, the 'Panorama of the City of Interzone', 'Minarets, palms, mountains, jungle' and 'incredible journeys through deserts and mountains'.⁸⁰ Shanon also notes the 'atemporality' and the 'modified temporality' of the experience which can involve the confluence of

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.90.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.92.

⁷⁷ Burroughs to Ginsberg 8 July 1953, *Letters*, p.180.

⁷⁸ Benny Shanon, 'Altered Temporality', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8.1 (January 2001), p.43.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.49.

⁸⁰ *Naked Lunch*, pp.89,92.

different points in time, that '[t]he observer is in the present, yet he or she is seeing episodes drawn from the past or from another, undetermined time'.⁸¹ And this is what Burroughs works to replicate in these descriptions of the Composite City and the Meet Cafe: 'A place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum'.⁸²

By reading *Naked Lunch* in reference to Burroughs' *yagé* expedition and the letters from that period, we begin to see that *Naked Lunch* is not simply a 'junk' book, but that it describes many different altered states of mind including that of *yagé*. It is the juxtaposition between these very *different* states such as the narrowed consciousness and need of opiate addiction and the expanded consciousness of withdrawal and *yagé* that create the raw, naked lunch quality of the text. *Yagé* is not the central subject of, or influence upon, Burroughs' writing of *Naked Lunch* - a text written over a number of years and drawing on material that bears the mark of many influences, substances, events, and places - but it does have an important place in the text. The fragmentation of Burroughs' writings on *yagé* across different publications means that the reader has to piece together information drawn from sections of *The Yage Letters*, *Naked Lunch* and 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs' to begin to assess the relationship between Burroughs' *yagé* experiences and his work.

To read *Naked Lunch* as an 'intermediary' text and to embed it in the context of the work that comes both before and after involves reviewing the text not only in relation to *The Yage Letters* and Burroughs' 1953 letters but also observing how it connects with Burroughs' writing and experimental work that followed the publication of

⁸¹ Shanon (2001), p.44.

⁸² *Naked Lunch*, p.91.

Naked Lunch. Burroughs wrote that ‘the cut up method was used in *Naked Lunch* without the author’s full awareness of the method he was using’.⁸³ Within *Naked Lunch* there exist the early workings of many of the ideas that Burroughs would later explore and develop through experiments with a wide range of media. Phrases expressive of a synaesthetic displacement of language and imagery that Burroughs put to full use in his later work are in evidence in *Naked Lunch* in expressions such as ‘Images fall’⁸⁴ and ‘shuttle pictures’.⁸⁵ He also uses the terms ‘intersection point’⁸⁶ and ‘Point of Intersection’⁸⁷ which he later adopted to explore intertextuality, and the relation between text and other mediums.

Naked Lunch includes Burroughs’ *yagé*-influenced writing of his letter of 10 July 1953, but also anticipates his experiments across mediums, his preoccupation with the intersections between word, image and sound, and his move away from the book being central to his work: ‘This book spill off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises’.⁸⁸ Burroughs’ output after *Naked Lunch* does indeed spill off the page, and consequently the text or the published book becomes only one part of his collage of multimedia works.

There are also indications in *Naked Lunch* of Burroughs’ developing interest in the newspaper format, and the newspaper as a space of intersection of text and reader, and space, and time:

⁸³ Burroughs, ‘The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin’ enclosed with the letter from Burroughs to Rosenthal 20 July 1960, GPR Syracuse.

⁸⁴ *Naked Lunch*, p.91.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.182.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.187.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.181.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.191.

Reading the paper... Something about a triple murder in the rue de la Merde, Paris: "An adjusting of scores." ... I keep slipping away ... "The police have identified the author ... Pepe El Culito ... The Little Ass Hole, an affectionate diminutive." Does it really say that? ... I try to focus the words ... they separate in meaningless mosaic...⁸⁹

This description of the intersection points of thought and text whilst reading is extended into the realm of practical experimentation in the years that follow. As with many of the ideas in *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs goes on to perform practice-based work that takes each idea further, and in this way *Naked Lunch* can be read as a sketchbook, as an exploration of many different altered states of mind, and as preparatory work for his multimedia experiments of the following years. *Naked Lunch* is rightly recognised as Burroughs' most important work, but publication of the text in America in an era of censorship and the subsequent defence of *Naked Lunch* as a testimony of opiate addiction has obscured the place of the text within the development of his practice.

In my study of the work that comes immediately after *Naked Lunch* I plan to illuminate these connections, and in effect to redraw the lines of development between these periods of work that have become estranged by the fame and notoriety of the former and the obscurity of the latter. By making visible the legacy of censorship and the history of publication, we can attempt to loosen the hold these histories have on the reception of the text. *Naked Lunch* was compiled from material written over a number of years, and these were years in which Burroughs' influences and interests were undergoing constant change and stimulation. In many ways we have to allow the text to fall apart, to be, as Burroughs insisted in a letter to Ginsberg, 'not a novel',⁹⁰ but a collage of very different texts and ideas. Burroughs' plans as documented in the 20 July 1960 letter to Rosenthal would have extended *Naked*

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.58.

⁹⁰ Burroughs to Ginsberg 20 September 1957, *Letters*, p.367.

Lunch's disparate character with the inclusion of cut-ups, drawings and the Dadaist-like and Dadaist referential text 'The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin'. To re-read the text in this way and to envisage it in this alternative history of publication surrounded by references to the experimental work to follow, and not by an encasement of texts on addiction, is one way of challenging the ongoing influence of censorship.

Chapter 4

Letters to Allen Ginsberg and Brion Gysin 1958-1960: Translating Experience into Experiment

Six years after his *yagé* expedition of 1953, Burroughs embarked upon another series of experiments with psychoactive substances. Between 1959 and 1961 his letters document his experiments with mescaline, DMT and psilocybin. The connection between the *yagé* experiments of 1953 and those of the early 1960s can be viewed as a revisiting of Burroughs' earlier experiments, and a return to those altered states that had influenced his writing previously. Whilst Burroughs' work and associations during the 1940s and 1950s are often categorised within Beat literature and the Beat movement, by the beginning of the 1960s he was working and collaborating with artists and practitioners of non-literary media who had affiliations with a different range of avant-garde movements. This environment enabled and encouraged the beginning of Burroughs' experiments with sound, painting, photography and film. What I wish to explore here is how the combined influence of his further exploration of psychoactive substances and this environment of multimedia experimentation directed this work into such unconventional forms.

Charting the Influence of Psychoactive Substances: The Study of Altered States of Consciousness

The publication history of *The Yage Letters* and *Naked Lunch* and the characterisation and even iconisation of Burroughs as a writer of addiction has resulted in the critical neglect of the influence of *yagé*, DMT and mescaline within his work, but another contributing factor no doubt lies in the difficulty of researching and understanding this

influence. What context do we have for assessing the impact that the use of psychoactive substances may have had upon Burroughs' vision and whether their use contributed to his developing interest in sound and image, words as images, intersections and juxtapositions, or colour and format? The vast number of descriptions of experiences that are scattered through articles and books, scientific reports and anthologies of 'drug writing' provide one context.¹ From these we have a foundation of amassed experience to identify the main and lasting impressions that these substances have had upon vision and upon consciousness.

These reports document heightened experiences of colour and imagery, synaesthesia, and alteration in the experience of space and time, but their articulation and description of the effects tends to be limited by the ineffable nature of the experience and their personal rather than analytical perspective. In order to form an understanding of how Burroughs' practice may have been influenced by his *yagé* experiences we require a body of research that pays particular attention to their effects in regard to the long-term and short-term changes they induce in cognitive behaviour and thinking. Researchers working on Altered States of Consciousness (ASC) take the problem of how to define and how to chart the experience of an altered state as primary to their research. What researchers of ASC have found when attempting to construct such definitions is that they are faced with the problem that the description of an altered state relies upon an understanding of what constitutes a 'normal' state of consciousness. The result of any research, whether theoretical or practical into altered

¹ See for example the works listed in the bibliography at the end of this study by Havelock Ellis, Aldous Huxley, Timothy Leary, Terence McKenna, Ralph Metzner, Daniel Pinchbeck and Alan Watts, and anthologies such as John Strausbaugh and Donald Blaise, eds, *The Drug User: Documents 1840-1960* (1991), Richard Rudgley, ed., *Wildest Dreams: An Anthology of Drug-Related Literature* (1999), and Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Gunther M. Weil, eds, *The Psychedelic Reader* (1965) which draws together articles originally published in the journal *The Psychedelic Review*. The website Erowid.org provides an extensive library of articles and experience reports on psychoactive substances.

states of consciousness, is that attention is turned back upon 'normal' states. This is an important point in regard to a reading of Burroughs' work, for it is the assumed 'normal' state of the mind and of political and media power that Burroughs brings to critical attention in his work.

The use of psychoactive substances have been of particular interest to scientists because unlike other states of ASC, such as dreaming or delirium, the memory of the experience is left intact and can be reviewed clearly when the effects have ceased. A consequence of the retention of a chemically-induced altered state of mind is a permanent change in perception, the result of analysis of what is accepted as a 'normal' state of consciousness when placed in juxtaposition to memories of the experience of non-normal states. The lasting impact of such an experience upon a writer's work would not necessarily emerge in a focus upon altered states, but instead as a deconstruction of 'normal' systems of thinking, reading or acting and of systems of society or of thought. From this perspective, many of Burroughs' preoccupations - most notably his attack upon language as a control system, his analysis of the power structures of society and of the conventions of reading and writing and our assumptions concerning the linearity of time - constitute critiques of what are accepted as 'normal' states, and may have been influenced by his extensive experiments with altered states of consciousness.

Roger Walsh writes in 'Phenomenological Mapping: A Method for Describing and Comparing States of Consciousness' (1995) that a theoretical framework for studying ASC has been very slow to develop because of 'Western monophasia'.² Walsh

² Roger Walsh, 'Phenomenological Mapping: A Method for Describing and Comparing States of Consciousness', *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 27.1 (1995), p.27.

describes monophasia as the general bias against accepting the existence of certain altered states and the limited range of categories for charting and describing states other than waking or sleeping or those which can be characterised as pathological in nature. In response Walsh and others have worked to provide a list of parameters to enable the mapping of altered states. Arnold Ludwig for example, in his article 'Altered States of Consciousness', works towards establishing a framework for the study of ASCs by listing their general characteristics: alterations in thinking; a disturbed time sense; loss of control; change in emotional expression; body image change; perceptual distortions; change in meaning or significance; a sense of the ineffable; feelings of rejuvenation and hypersuggestibility.³ Ludwig's identification of 'alterations in thinking' as characteristic of the experience of an altered state is of particular importance. Here Ludwig challenges the disproportionate emphasis upon hallucination in writings on altered states of consciousness and instead draws attention to their impact upon thought processes such as a heightened awareness of how thinking is structured by habits of language association.

Charles Tart's definition of an altered state of consciousness, like that of Ludwig, is attentive not only to the visual or hallucinatory effects but also to how thought and intellectual perception are transformed:

An altered state of consciousness for a given individual is one in which he clearly feels a *qualitative* shift in his pattern of mental functioning, that is, he feels not just a quantitative shift (more or less alert, more or less visual imagery, sharper or duller, etc.), but also that some quality or qualities of his mental processes are *different*.⁴

Other possible critical frameworks are provided by Benny Shanon in his study *The*

³ Arnold M. Ludwig, 'Altered states of Consciousness' in Charles T. Tart, ed., *Alterations of Consciousness: A Book of Readings*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1969, pp.13-14.

⁴ Charles T. Tart, 'Introduction' in Tart, pp.1-2.

Antipodes of the Mind: Charting the Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience.

As the title suggests, Shannon conducts what he describes as a ‘systematic charting of the phenomenology of the ayahuasca experience’, and through self-experimentation and by drawing upon results he has gathered whilst working with a wide range of participants, he delineates the most noted effects. Shannon’s distinctions include descriptions of the bodily effects and the perceptual effects, but also the ‘ideational effects’⁵ and what he calls ‘effects pertaining to consciousness’.⁶ Again these definitions provide a basis to initiate debate not only about how Burroughs’ work may have been influenced by visual and sensory hallucinations, but also how the ‘ideational effects’ of *yagé* may have had an influence on his practice.

The impact of psychoactive substances upon individual musicians, artists, and writers such as Burroughs, as distinct from their influence on the creation of a psychedelic movement in the 1960s, has not attracted serious critical attention. In particular it is the impact of those effects defined by researchers of ASC as ‘ideational’ or ‘pertaining to consciousness’ that remain unidentified within the work of mid-century artists and writers. 1960s counter-culture and pop-culture, LSD-inspired music and imagery - such as blotter art, posters, and psychedelic music - are perceived as wholly representative of the relationship between art and drug-induced altered states of consciousness. But these are only the most blatant responses to the effects of LSD or mescaline, an immediate response to the experience of visual hallucination, heightened colour, and distortion. Psychoactive substances have impacted upon artists’ work in less obvious ways including, as may have been the case with Burroughs, a change in their methods and practice.

⁵ Shannon (2002), p.50.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.51.

Critics have identified what Burroughs sought to achieve with the techniques of cut-up and experimentation. Robin Lydenberg for example writes of Burroughs' proposal that 'the entire manipulative system of Western language and thought must be made visible', to escape 'our predetermined conditioning by language and culture'.⁷ But what I intend to investigate here is how he attempted to realise this through the development of a *yagé* aesthetic: of the idea of an art and art practice that could induce the experience of an altered state of consciousness. Burroughs' letters to Ginsberg and Gysin reveal this development in his work, and they show how his practice and his re-appraisal of the making of art and the experiencing of art were partly influenced by his use of *yagé*, mescaline and DMT.

'Something Happens': The Context of Experiment and Art as Process

Burroughs' creative relationship with Brion Gysin which developed during their residency in the Beat Hotel in Paris from late 1958 provided an environment of experimental practice that opened up to Burroughs the possibility of working in other mediums, enabling him to review his practice as defined not by the activity of writing but by experimentation. Working with Gysin led Burroughs to explore how avant-garde techniques could be adopted to take his work with altered states of mind beyond written replication to art forms based in practice and process. A year later in October 1959, Gysin's discovery of the cut-up method delivered to Burroughs the perfect vehicle to develop an aesthetic of space-time travel.

⁷ Robin Lydenberg, *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs' Fiction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987, p.17 and p.48.

The cut-up technique developed in many different ways. Through their work with Ian Sommerville and Anthony Balch, Burroughs and Gysin experimented with cutting-up audio tape, imagery and film, thereby extending the practice but also the idea of cut-ups as an activity that could be used with any medium or in any situation. In *The Third Mind* Burroughs describes these extensions of the cut-up method, providing instructions for tape cut-ups in 'First Recordings':

Record a few minutes of news broadcast. Now rewind and cut in at random short bursts from other news broadcasts. Do this four or five times over. Of course, where you cut in words are wiped off the tape and new juxtapositions are created by cutting in at random.⁸

The experiments with tape recordings led Burroughs to contemplate how cut-ups could function to influence real events. In *Electronic Revolution* (1971) he proposes that by recording and playing back sounds on location - in the street, during riots, at political rallies - tape cut-ups could be used as 'a revolutionary weapon', that '[r]iot sound effects can produce an actual riot'. Providing a number of example scenarios, he writes that tape cut-ups can be used 'to spread rumours', or 'to discredit opponents' by cutting up a political speech with 'snarls pain scream fear whimperings apoplectic splutterings'⁹ and playing it back in the streets or on the subway.

In 'Fold-ins', published in *The Third Mind*, Burroughs describes another alternative technique for creating textual juxtapositions, and in this piece he indicates the extent to which his experimental work drew upon the editing and compositional processes that are used in film and music:

⁸ Burroughs, 'First Recordings' in William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind*. 1978. London: Calder, 1979. p.89.

⁹ William S. Burroughs, *Electronic Revolution*. Cambridge: Blackmoor Head Press, 1971, p.7.

A page of text - my own or someone else's - is folded down the middle and placed on another page - The composite text is then read across half one text and half the other - The fold-in method extends to writing the flashback used in films, enabling the writer to move backward and forward on his time track - For example I take page one and fold it into page one hundred - I insert the resulting composite as page ten - When the reader reads page ten he is flashing forward in time to page one hundred and back in time to page one - the *déjà vu* phenomenon can so be produced to order - This method is of course used in music, where we are continually moved backward and forward on the time track by repetition and rearrangements of musical themes.¹⁰

The effects or 'phenomena' that the fold-ins and tape cut-ups induced was evidently central to these activities. Writing on the cut-up method, Oliver Harris has drawn attention to the '*material base*'¹¹ of Burroughs' experimental work and this is absolutely essential in a reading of its effects. I will be looking at how the simulation of phenomena such as alternative experiences of time and synaesthesia characterises the work of this period, and I propose that in his preoccupation with what *happens* during the work, we can see the influence of Burroughs' experimentation with *yagé*, mescaline and DMT.

The hallucinatory qualities of exposure to stroboscopic light interested both Burroughs and Gysin. Through their experimentation with the effects of flicker Gysin and Ian Sommerville devised the Dreamachine, an art form which played an important part in the development of Burroughs' work and his pursuit of non-chemical means to alter consciousness. The Dreamachine was designed by Gysin and Sommerville in 1960 and it worked by producing flickers of light at a certain speed, which when the eyes are closed causes visual hallucinations ranging from colours and patterns to film-like imagery of landscapes and figures. It consists of a tall hollow

¹⁰ Burroughs, 'Fold-ins' in *The Third Mind*, pp.95-96.

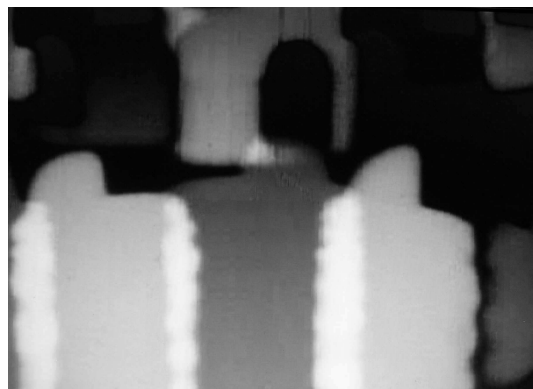
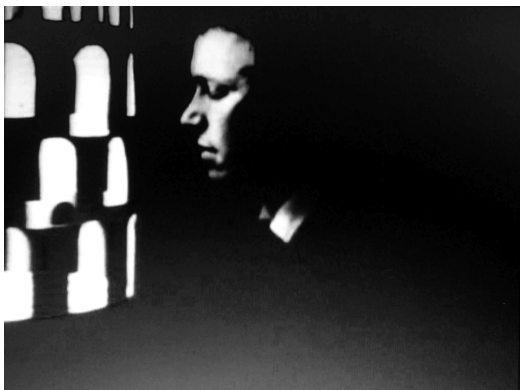
¹¹ Oliver Harris, 'Cutting up Politics' in Schneiderman and Walsh, p.176.

cylinder with a pattern of slits; a light bulb is then suspended inside the cylinder which is placed on a record deck. As the deck spins, light flickers through the slits. With eyes closed, the viewer positions their face close to the revolving cylinder to experience the visual hallucinations stimulated by the flickering light. The effects endure beyond the period of exposure. Ian Sommerville observed that '[a]fterward I found that my perception of the world around me had increased very notably',¹² and Leila Hadley, in the foreword to John Geiger's history of stroboscopic light and the Dreamachine, also notes that after the hallucinations 'I would feel singularly clear-headed, aware, serene, and often as though I had 360° vision'.¹³ In our interpretation of the 'effects' of Burroughs' experimental work we need to be similarly aware its longer-term ambitions for inducing a change in perception.

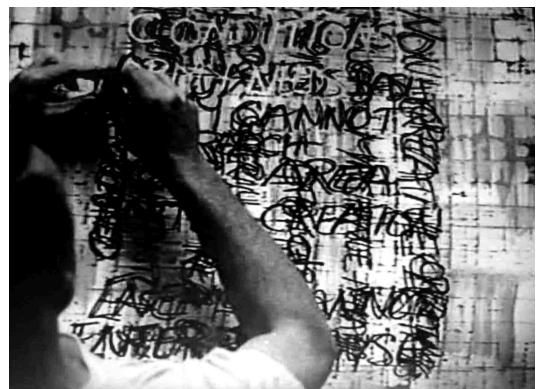
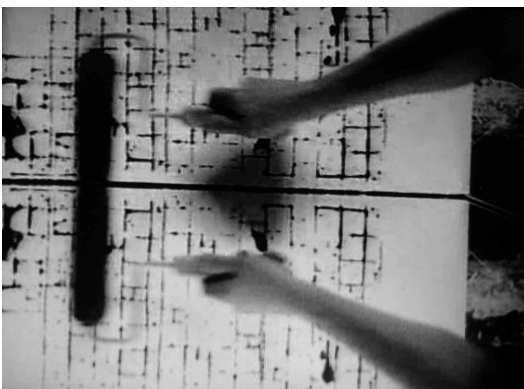
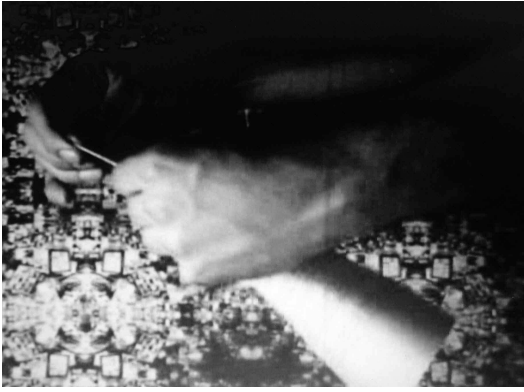
This context of experimentation which was so crucial to the development of Gysin and Burroughs' work can be seen in the films *Towers Open Fire* (1963) and *The Cut Ups* (1966) in which Burroughs had a creative as well as a starring role. These films by Anthony Balch are valuable as works in themselves, but they also include footage of Burroughs and Gysin engaged in many of the experimental practices that occupied them at that time (figs 10-25). In *Towers Open Fire* we see their use of projection, the technique of fold-ins, images of the Dreamachine and the representation of its flicker effects. In *The Cut Ups* we are presented with footage of Gysin painting, and producing calligraphic drawings. Both films document the importance of process and practice in Gysin and Burroughs' work, from the reading of a curse, to footage of

¹² Sommerville to Gysin 15 February 1960, the contents of this letter are quoted by Gysin in 'Dreamachine', *Olympia*, 2 (1962) reprinted in Paul Cecil, ed., *Flickers of the Dreamachine*. Hove: Codex, 1996, p.5.

¹³ Leila Hadley, 'Foreword' in John Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience: A Short History of Stroboscopic Light and the Dream Machine*. New York: Soft Skull Press, 2003, p.5. See Geiger's study for a history of the scientific study of flicker and Gysin and Burroughs' interest in its mind-altering properties.



Figures 10-17. Still images from *The Cut Ups* and *Towers Open Fire: A Viewer with eyes closed in front of a Dreamachine*; Gysin in his room at the Beat Hotel; Gysin seated between two white Dreamachines; camera angles looking at and into the Dreamachine with close-ups to simulate the effects of flicker upon the cinema audience.



Figures 18-25. Still images from *The Cut Ups* and *Towers Open Fire*: Demonstration of the fold-in technique using a newspaper; Gysin painting; Gysin and Burroughs in front of a large painting; Ian Sommerville; painting glyphs; using a roller specially designed for marking out grids; Gysin layering writing in different directions across an artwork.

Gysin producing grids with a roller; Balch's camera and microphone capture their experimentation with the performative qualities of language and imagery.

The Cut Ups, as its title suggests, was edited using the cut-up method, the film was sliced into foot length pieces and then rejoined in an alternate order, with an accompanying soundtrack constructed by the permutation of Gysin and Burroughs speaking a selection of phrases including 'yes', 'hello', and 'look at this picture'. The experience of viewing *The Cut Ups* with the film's layering of visually and aurally disorientating cut-up material acts as a guide to reading cut-up texts, suggesting that like the film, these texts are to be experienced *for* their disturbance of our habits of reading and the state of mind they induce. Jamie Russell writes of *Towers Open Fire* that 'the film doesn't so much present the guerrilla attack as part of its action, as it *becomes* such an attack in and of itself. The aim is less to fantasize the revolution than to actually, on the level of cinematic representation and audience reception, induce revolution'.¹⁴ This acknowledgement of the film's active engagement of the viewer, which is so extreme that it amounts to a form of assault and a call to action, is key to a reading of Burroughs and Gysin's work of this period which, like Balch's film, strove for direct impact upon the mind and senses of the reader.

Ian MacFadyen describes this period of Gysin and Burroughs' work by drawing analogies with scientific experimentation. He makes reference to Renato Poggioli's writing on 'the use of scientific and industrial terms like 'laboratory' and 'experimental' by avant-garde artists',¹⁵ noting that this scientific quality of

¹⁴ Jamie Russell, 'Guerrilla Conditions: Burroughs, Gysin and Balch go to the Movies' in Schneiderman and Walsh, p.167.

¹⁵ Ian MacFadyen, 'Machine Dreams, Optical Toys and Mechanical Boys' in Cecil, p.33. The text by Poggioli that MacFadyen refers to is Renato Poggioli, *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* (1962), first published in English as *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. Gerald Fitzgerald. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968.

Burroughs and Gysin's work locates it in a history of avant-garde experimentation:

In the 1950s and early 1960s Gysin and Burroughs self-consciously followed this approach, turning their rooms of the Beat Hotel into a laboratory where they analysed the operations of language and image.¹⁶

This interpretation of their artistic production as scientific process is reinforced by a study of their correspondence. In Burroughs' letters to Gysin he includes instructions for experiments and writes up the results of his recent work with cut-ups or tape recordings in ways consistent with scientific research. Burroughs also spoke of his interest in the relationship between art and science in his interview with Conrad Knickerbocker first published in the *Paris Review* and later in *The Third Mind*: 'I think the whole line between art and science will break down and that Scientists, I hope, will become more creative and writers more scientific'.¹⁷ Gérard-Georges Lemaire also chose a scientific analogy to describe Burroughs and Gysin's experimental work, proposing that Burroughs' cut-up novels and *The Third Mind* 'could have come about only as a result of the laboratory experiments undertaken with Brion Gysin'.¹⁸

Ian Sommerville must also be given credit not only for his influence upon both Gysin and Burroughs but also for his contribution of a scientific dimension to their experimental activity. Ian Sommerville met Burroughs in 1959; he was studying at Cambridge University but spending the summer in Paris and it was here that they first met. Barry Miles describes the relationship that developed between them as 'easily

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.33.

¹⁷ William S. Burroughs and Conrad Knickerbocker, 'Interview with William S. Burroughs', *Paris Review*, 9.35 (Fall 1965). Reprinted in *The Third Mind*, p.7.

¹⁸ Gérard-Georges Lemaire, '23 Stitches Taken by Gérard-Georges Lemaire and 2 Points of Order by Brion Gysin' in *The Third Mind*, p.17.

the most important romantic relationship' in Burroughs' life, that 'Ian believed Bill to be the greatest writer alive and had tremendous respect for him, while Bill was in awe of Ian's scientific abilities'.¹⁹ Burroughs and Gysin incorporated his abilities and his scientific perspective into their work. His technical and mathematical knowledge enabled them to develop their ideas with tape recorders and photography and to construct the Dreamachine.

In the William S. Burroughs Papers at the New York Public Library there are traces of Sommerville's influence upon Burroughs' thinking and practice. In Folio 64 entitled 'Misc. Cut-ups 1962-1963', and containing work from his time living in London, is a page of algebraic formula bearing the title in Burroughs' handwriting: 'formula by Ian Sommerville'.²⁰ Also, held within the photo files in the archive, is an image of a chalk drawing on hexagonal paving stones that transforms their hexagonal form into a diagram of a molecular structure labelled CH₃ HO OH.²¹ In the context of Burroughs' work it is clear to see how the part-image, part-text qualities of these mathematical and scientific languages would have been relevant to his exploration of the relations between image and word. These artefacts contribute to an understanding of how Sommerville's perspective, his literacy in the languages of science, mathematics, computers and electronics, supplemented Burroughs' and Gysin's work.

Ted Morgan's and Barry Miles' biographies describe some of the experimental practices that preoccupied Burroughs and Gysin between 1958 and 1961. In *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Corso in Paris, 1957-1963* Miles gives an account

¹⁹ Barry Miles, *William Burroughs: El Hombre Invisible*. 1992. London: Virgin, 1993, p.123 and p.122.

²⁰ Folio 64, BP NYPL.

²¹ Photographic Files, BP NYPL.

of their engagement in activities such as mirror gazing, as well as their early work with cut-ups and tape recorders. He also writes of their work in performance: how in 1960 Gysin, Sommerville and Burroughs put on a ‘multimedia evening of action painting, poetry and slide projections’ at Cambridge University, and that during the performance Burroughs read ‘The Cut-up Technique of Brion Gysin’. In the same year they did a performance of readings and a light show at the ICA and ‘an evening of “Verbal Theatre” at La Bohème in Montparnasse’.²² Miles also states that Gysin and Burroughs became involved with the sound poets Bernard Heidsieck and Henri Chopin and their *Domaine Poétique* events. Critical engagement with this area of their work is limited because of the lack of documentation, but an acknowledgement of Burroughs’ participation in multimedia performance is important to critical readings of his work.

Burroughs and Gysin created performances with multiple layers of sound and imagery by reading texts, playing tapes and projecting images simultaneously. From Miles’ description of a performance at the ICA in 1965 we can see how they were working at crossing the boundaries between mediums:

Brion created and then destroyed a six-foot-by-nine-foot painting while Bill sat onstage in his hat and Chesterfield overcoat, bathed in deep blue light, and stared fixedly at the audience. Stills from *Towers Open Fire* (1963), a film by Bill and Anthony Balch, were projected on a screen above his head and Cut-ups of radio static, Moroccan drumming, and Bill reading disaster stories from the American newspapers were played at earsplitting volume by Ian.²³

The use of *Towers Open Fire* and the reading of poetry within these performances are

²² Barry Miles, *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Corso in Paris, 1957-1963*. New York: Grove Press, 2000, p.227.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.233-234. The misprint ‘*Towers Open Fire* (1965)’ in the Grove publication has been rectified to read ‘*Towers Open Fire* (1963)’ in the above quotation.

typical examples of how Burroughs and Gysin were re-using their material, placing it into multi-media collages, and exploring the juxtapositions between the work. The same technique was applied to their texts, which were not treated as independent and finished works, but instead used and reworked in collage. What comes across most forcefully in Miles' accounts is the extent to which the idea and process of engaging in experiments had become the basis of Burroughs' and Gysin's practice as writers and artists. Experimentation had become a central activity in living and working and included experiments with psychoactive substances, magic, and artistic and literary practices. Barry Miles' research into the history of the Beat Hotel, and the documentary evidence of the films, portray an environment of intense experimental activity. Reviewing this period in terms of action, process and performance can potentially transform how we read the cut-up texts. That Burroughs and Gysin were working to invent art forms that would be *experienced* by a participating audience or readership is essential to understanding their cut-up work.

It was the experience of an altered state of mind that inspired Gysin's experiments with stroboscopic light and led to the invention of the Dreamachine. The incident occurred whilst Gysin was travelling on a bus to Marseilles and involved exposure to the flicker of sunlight. He describes it in the essay 'Dreamachine':

Had a transcendental storm of colour visions today in the bus going to Marseilles. We ran through a long avenue of trees and I closed my eyes against the setting sun. An overwhelming flood of intensely bright patterns in supernatural colours exploded behind my eyelids a multi-dimensional kaleidoscope whirling out through space. I was swept out of time. I was out in a world of infinite number. The vision stopped abruptly as we left the trees. Was that a vision? What happened to me?²⁴

²⁴ Brion Gysin, 'Dreamachine', *Olympia*, 2 (1962) reprinted in Cecil, p.5.

Gysin concludes that '[m]y experience utterly changed the subject and style of my painting'.²⁵ The Dreamachine presented an alternative model for conceiving of the production and reception of art as the sharing of the means of achieving and exploring altered states of mind and visual and intellectual experiences.

The concept and use of the Dreamachine was an important accompaniment to Burroughs' and Gysin's experiments of the 1960s. The fact that this visual work was experienced with the eyes closed was considered by Gysin to be an essential part of its contestation of conventional notions of the production and reception of art. Gysin writes in the essay 'Dreamachine':

What is art? What is colour? What is vision? These old questions demand new answers when, in the light of the Dreamachine, one sees all of ancient and modern abstract art with eyes closed.²⁶

Gysin, like Burroughs, was experimenting with creating work that challenged modes of reception. As with the cut-ups and the tape machine experiments, the work does not require the space of the art gallery or book; exhibition and publication are not necessary because it takes place in the mind and actions of the participants. The work 'happens' in the process of experiencing it, shifting the location of art from the object to the mind of the participant who can no longer be singularly defined as either recipient or artist.

Gysin and Burroughs' experimentation with the practice of writing as a physical activity - their treatment of words as images and as material to be collaged and cut-up - was also inspired by experience, in this case their exposure to different ways in

²⁵ Ibid., p.5.

²⁶ Ibid., p.6.

which written script is used and produced. For example Gysin's approach to writing as a physical act was prompted by his learning Japanese during the Second World War:

I learned quite quickly to understand some of the depth, not just simply for the purpose of recording the language, but the philosophy behind the attack that the brush makes onto the paper, so forth and so on, the running of the ink and all those rather more abstruse meanings of oriental calligraphy.²⁷

Gysin's perception of writing as a practice, as imagery and as action was further influenced by his time living in Morocco. One incident that he described was the discovery of a magic object containing seeds, pebbles, shards of broken mirror and a piece of writing with the lines of the text written across one another to form a grid.²⁸ This exposure to writing used for its magical capacity to influence and alter the state of things, to make something happen, had a impact upon Gysin's own work with language and his understanding of writing as a physical practice. This development in Gysin's work with language and the process of writing also influenced Burroughs' own experiments and their collaborative projects.

Experimentation with alternative practices of writing such as cut-ups, fold-ins, calligraphic work, the inclusion of text in paintings and imagery in text, was something explored *between* Gysin and Burroughs, the work of 'the third mind'. Although many of their joint experiments that took place during their residency in the Beat Hotel in Paris can only be pieced together through biography and the recollection of acquaintances and other collaborators, their exchange of ideas for experiments continued when they were apart and is documented in their

²⁷ Brion Gysin interviewed by Terry Wilson in Brion Gysin and Terry Wilson, *Here To Go*. 1982. London: Creation Books, 2001, p.53.

²⁸ Gysin describes this incident in 'Cut-Ups: A Project for Disastrous Success' in *The Third Mind*, p.48.

correspondence. This form of direct and urgent address in which they encourage one another to engage in specific practices was an extension of their collaboration. It is a style of writing that they develop in ‘The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin’, ‘Cut-Ups Self-Explained’, and *The Third Mind*, and in these texts the reader is addressed with the same appeal to direct engagement that we find in their personal correspondence.

**‘Get high on my ear phones’:
Recognising and Replicating Altered States of Consciousness**

This shift in Burroughs’ work towards experimentation, which was instigated by his move to Paris and the beginning of his collaborative relationship with Gysin, is described in Burroughs’ letters to Ginsberg dating from October 1958. Burroughs wrote on the 10 October 1958 that ‘[s]o much has happened on basic levels I can’t cover it all like ten years pass since I see you’. From this letter it is evident that Burroughs’ concept of himself as a writer and his understanding of the activity of writing are being reformulated:

I am completely dissatisfied with all the work I have done in writing and with the whole medium. Unless I can reach a point where my writing has the danger and immediate urgency of bull-fighting it is nowhere, and I must look for another way.²⁹

This concern with the ‘urgency’ of his work and the desire for it to have a more powerful impact appears to arise from the beginning of his *active* engagement in collaborative experiments with Gysin, and witnessing Gysin’s approach and attitude to the practice of art. These letters sent from the Beat Hotel record the influence of their close association: ‘Brion Gysin living next door. He used to run *The 1001 Nights*

²⁹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 10 October 1958, *Letters*, p.398.

in Tanger. He has undergone similar conversion to mine and doing GREAT painting'.³⁰

Burroughs' description of Gysin's paintings in his letter of 10 October suggests that he was developing a notion of art that was in line with his experiences of *yagé*, art as a form of space-time travel which removes the audience from the confines of 'normal' consciousness:

I see in his painting the psychic landscape of my own work. He is doing in painting what I try to do in writing. He regards his painting as a hole in the texture of the so-called "reality," through which he is exploring an actual place existing in outer space. That is, he moves into the painting and through it, his life and sanity at stake when he paints.³¹

Burroughs' reference to the 'landscape' of his work reveals how his perception of his own practice was expanding through incorporation of the vocabulary of non-literary art-forms, bringing to his experimental work the technical and critical frameworks that describe space and time in painting, film and music. By borrowing from the vocabularies of these other mediums, Burroughs was able to begin thinking about his work as object, as form, as event, as a process not only experienced in time and space but also *impacting* upon the experience of time and space. The cut-up method offers a good example of this transition, as a form of writing it treats words and the page as material objects and as an activity it is technically aligned to collage in painting, the splicing of film, or performance-based art.

In an interview with Brion Gysin published as 'Ports of Entry: Here is Space-time Painting', and based on a recording made in the Beat Hotel in 1960, Burroughs spoke

³⁰ Ibid., p.398.

³¹ Ibid., p.398.

of the impact of his experience of Gysin's work, how he 'discovered I could really get into these paintings'.³² He then described this process of entering into a picture:

Usually I get into them by 'port of entry', as I call it. It is often a face through whose eyes the picture opens into that landscape. Sometimes it is rather like an archway... any number of little details or a special spot of colour make the port of entry and then the entire picture will suddenly become a three-dimensional frieze in plaster or jade or other precious material.³³

As in his letter to Ginsberg, Burroughs discusses Gysin's painting as entry into a temporal and three dimensional space, and of moving into and out of the picture. His exposure to Gysin's work and working practice seems to have led to an important shift in Burroughs' approach to art and writing as multidimensional, as processes, and of things 'happening' in the work. Burroughs had written in his 10 July 1953 letter that *yagé* was 'space-time travel' but it was only once he began thinking in terms of art as a multi-dimensional process and experience could he fully begin working with this idea of space-time travel in his practice.

Burroughs' 1958 Christmas card to Ginsberg presents another dramatic summary of his experiences in Paris. Covering the entire interior of the card, his writing steers around the printed greeting: 'Meilleurs Voeux pour un Joyeux Noël et une Heureuse Année', and reiterates his sense of a substantial change occurring in his working practice induced by his immersion in this environment of experimentation:

What has occurred is a *literal* break through into another level of being - very few people in these dangerous areas - and I mean *literal* - physical changes and physical dangers.³⁴

³² Burroughs, 'Ports of Entry: Here is Space-Time Painting' in José Férrez Kuri, ed., *Brion Gysin: Tuning in to the Multimedia Age*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2003, p.32.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.32.

³⁴ Christmas card Burroughs to Ginsberg winter 1958/1959, GC Columbia.

Burroughs was discovering that the shifts in perception he experienced under *yagé* and represented in the Composite City text and in *Naked Lunch* could be manufactured in such practices as mirror gazing and painting. Burroughs describes how he watched as his fingers changed shape and colour, and of other states of mutation and appearances and disappearances seemingly brought about by his engagement in the practice of looking into a mirror for extended periods of time. Burroughs ends the greetings card with the dramatic statement: ‘point of no return way back yonder’.

Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg again on 2 January 1959 with more news of the effect that these ‘para-normal occurrences’ were having on his work. He described how he ‘suddenly began writing in word forms’,³⁵ suggesting that he was beginning to revise his own practice as a writer by working with the visual and physical properties of words, and the following two pages of the letter are covered in lively examples of these calligraphic shapes (figs 26-27). As Burroughs began experimenting with imagery and other media, writing ceased to be the singular activity that defined his work, to the point where he began to question its value: ‘I wonder if any writing now has much *raison d’être*’.³⁶ From October 1958 to October 1959 Burroughs describes first the dissolution of his identity as a writer but then a return to writing, re-situating it *within* his practice, thereby revising the place of writing and the published text in his work. Burroughs’ interest in working with written text was reanimated when he began experimenting with cut-ups, alternative arrangements, and juxtapositions of language and imagery, but with the important difference that these practices were based in action and process.

³⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg 2 January 1959, GC Columbia. The text of Burroughs’ letter is reproduced in *Letters*, pp.405-406, but not the two pages of drawings.

³⁶ Burroughs to Ginsberg 21 April 1959, *Letters*, p.414.

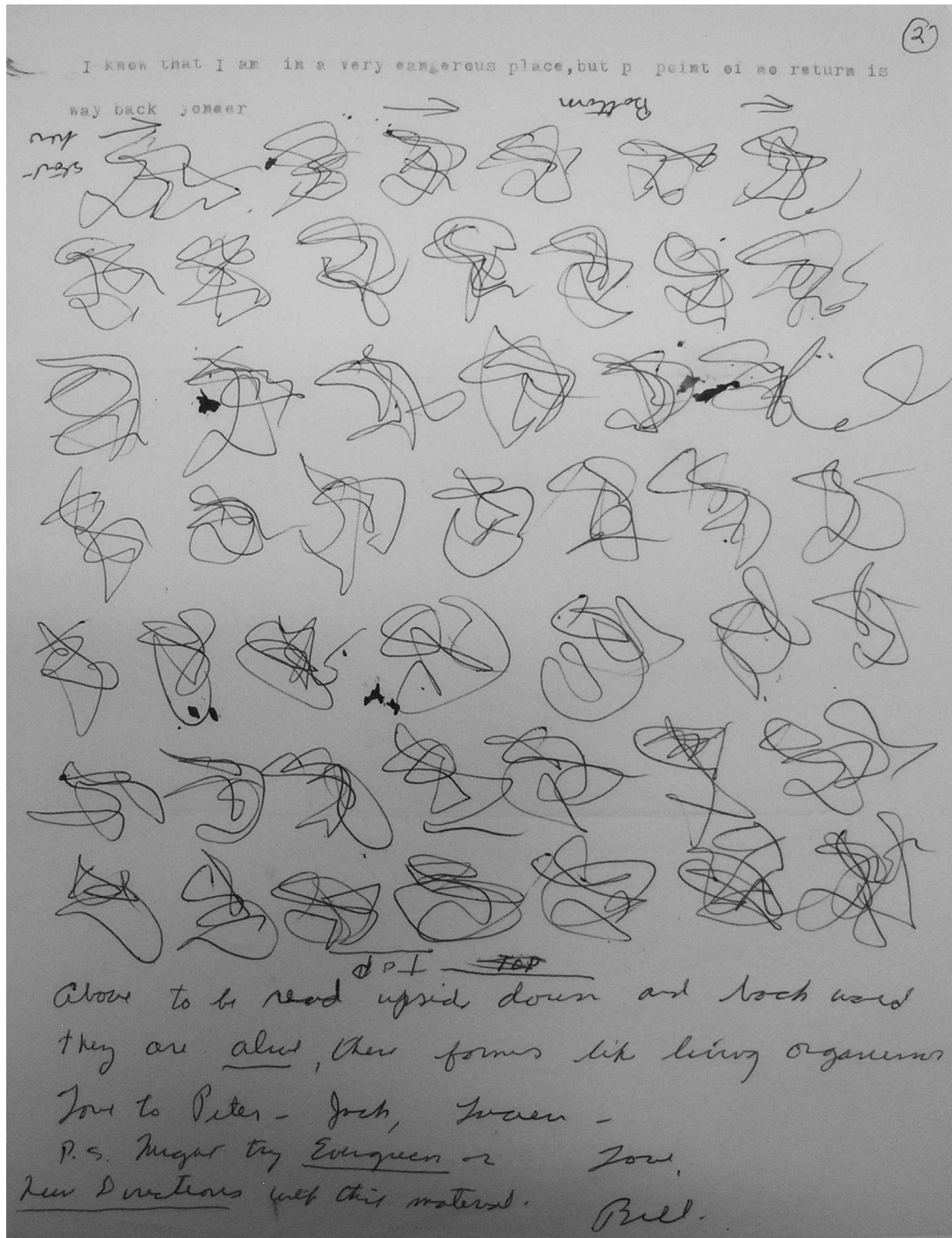


Figure 26. Letter from Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg, page two, dated 2 January 1959. Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University.

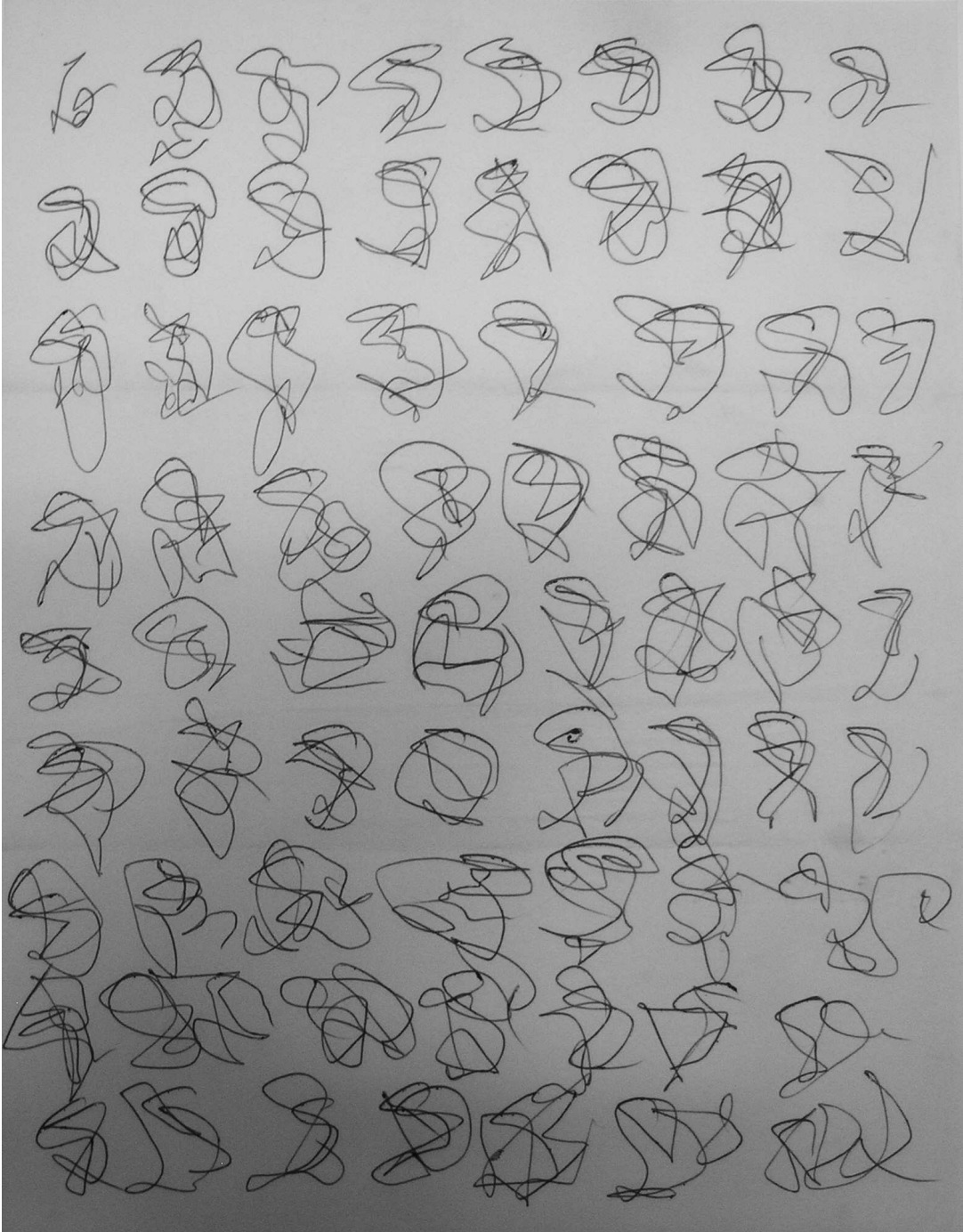


Figure 27. Letter from Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg, page three, dated 2 January 1959. Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University.

Accounts of Gysin's discovery of the cut-up method indicate that whilst Gysin found the results amusing, Burroughs identified something of greater relevance in these first accidental cut-ups: 'Bill immediately saw its importance and pronounced it "a project for disastrous success"'.³⁷ What was it that he saw in the process of the cut-up method that was for him so meaningful? I propose that when Burroughs was introduced to this activity by Gysin it was for him a moment of recognition, the re-cognition of the mind-altering experiences of *yagé*: through the act of cutting-up normal patterns of narrative and sentence structure, he reached a similar fracturing of a normal state of consciousness. The experiencing of something that was connected to a chemically-induced altered state of consciousness through the activity of cut-ups may explain why the cut-up method seemed so striking to Burroughs whilst many of his contemporaries and later readers and critics have struggled to engage with this technique.

As Anne Friedberg has quite rightly noted, '[t]he actual effects of the "cut-up" montages, of the recontextualization of a phrase, an image, a sound, are difficult things to measure'.³⁸ I propose that by reviewing the cut-up method in reference to altered states of consciousness we *can* establish a context to examine their effects. Taking the approach that cut-ups are consciousness-expanding in a way that bears similarities with the experience of *yagé* or mescaline, how does their action mirror the effects of those substances? As we saw in the previous chapter, research conducted into the experience and impact of ASCs has shown that psychoactive substances have the effect of heightening awareness of the mind as it was in its 'normal' state. Cut-ups perform a similar action on their source material: they expand awareness of what is

³⁷ Miles (1993), p.117.

³⁸ Anne Friedberg, "'Cut-ups": A *Synema of the text*' in Skerl and Lydenberg, p.173.

cut-up. But, it is important to note the distinction here between making and reading cut-ups, and when Burroughs speaks of the ‘effects’ of cut-ups he tends to be referring to the practice of engaging in cutting-up material, rather than passively reading the cut-up work of another practitioner.

Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg on 5 September 1960 of the process of cut-ups as the heightening of awareness: ‘Total awareness = Total pain. = CUT.’ He explains his use of the word pain: ‘The “pain” referred to is pain of total awareness. I am not talking mystical “greater awareness”. I mean complete alert awareness at all times of what is in front of you.’³⁹ In ‘The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin’ published in *The Third Mind* Burroughs writes that all writing is in fact cut-ups but it is the process of cutting-up a text that ‘renders the process explicit’.⁴⁰ Again, the cut-up is described as a means to heighten awareness of the properties of the material subjected to the process that remain concealed in its ‘normal’ state.

If Burroughs’ exploration of Gysin’s cut-up method in October 1959 did induce in him an altered state of consciousness that bore similarities with that of *yagé*, then this would perhaps account for his renewed interest in experimenting with psychoactive substances. In a letter to Ginsberg of 27 October Burroughs wrote ‘it would be great if you could send me some mescaline’, and again at the end: ‘It would be great if you could score for some of this new material. I have heard rumors here and putting out my vine’.⁴¹ Burroughs’ choice of the term vine compounds the impression that this period of experimentation with mescaline and cut-ups was to remind him of his *yagé* experiences of 1953. The idea of return and recognition is contained within

³⁹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 5 September 1960, GC Columbia.

⁴⁰ Burroughs, ‘The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin’ in *The Third Mind*, p.32.

⁴¹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 27 October 1959, *Letters*, pp.431-432.

Burroughs' first response to Ginsberg after he has received the mescaline. He wrote:

'Thanks a million for the mescaline. Split it with Brion for a short trip home.'⁴²

Mescaline is the primary psychoactive constituent of peyote and Burroughs had previously taken peyote in 1952. He recorded the experience in a letter to Ginsberg:

By the way tried peyote. Interesting. Everything looks like a peyote when you are high on this God awful stuff. I have never been so painfully sick. That peyote came up solid out of my stomach like a ball of hair. I thought I would not get it out. I suffered excruciating spasms of the asposegus or whatever you call it, and it took me 10 minutes to get that peyote out of my stomach, and clogged my throat all the way up like I was a tube of tooth paste.⁴³

This experience of peyote is retold in both *Junky* and *Queer*. Again the effects are described as seeing everything as peyote plants, as a 'high' rather than the experience of a profound alteration of consciousness. Burroughs makes use of his peyote experience by concentrating upon his graphic description of the disagreeable task of eating the peyote buttons. Lee recounts having taken peyote in *Queer*:

Horrible stuff. Made me sick like I wanted to die. I got to puke and I can't. Just excruciating spasms of the asparagras, or whatever you call that gadget. Finally the peyote comes up solid like a ball of hair, solid all the way up, clogging my throat. As nasty a sensation as I ever stood still for. The high is interesting, but hardly worth the sick stage.⁴⁴

Since its belated publication in 1985, this description of peyote has no doubt further convinced readers, as Ted Morgan was to write three years later, that 'hallucinogenic drugs were not for him'.⁴⁵

⁴² Burroughs to Ginsberg 30 October 1959, GC Columbia.

⁴³ Burroughs to Ginsberg 4 June 1952, *Letters*, p.130.

⁴⁴ William S. Burroughs, *Queer*. 1985. London: Penguin, 1987, p.90.

⁴⁵ Morgan, p.370.

Burroughs made repeated requests for mescaline in his letters to Ginsberg, writing again on 17 November 1959: 'Please send me some more mescaline'.⁴⁶ The following summer his letters to Ginsberg suggest that his experiences with mescaline continue to be productive for his work: 'Thanks to infinite power for the mescaline. Incalculable benefits'. In this letter dated 23 August he writes very positively of his own experience of *yagé* in reference to Ginsberg's 1960 *yagé* expedition. The subject of his letter shifts between the use and experience of *yagé*, mescaline and cut-ups implying that they are allied in their effects:

Yes I read your letter from Pucallpa. Great stuff Ayahuasca. You are not crazy and what I know more than you I endeavor to communicate but one does not listen is use and extension of the cut up method. Remember the first cut up we heard at Jerry Newman's The Drunken Newscaster? It took me ten years to pick up on the action. Don't take so long.⁴⁷

Burroughs states that he endeavours to communicate what he 'knows' from the *yagé* experience through his work and through the practice of cut-ups.

Ginsberg's letters to Burroughs from this period contain reports of his own experiments with mescaline, *yagé*, psilocybin, datura and ditran. Their combined correspondence from 1959 to 1961 indicates how seriously involved they had become in their experimentation with psychoactive substances, using their letters to share information and establish international contacts. Ginsberg wrote to Burroughs on 31 December 1960:

Roger Heim is the main scientist working on mescaline and psilocybin mushrooms – can you get in contact with him through Michaux or otherwise. You can say Dr Timothy Leary, Harvard University, who was working with Huxley and Humphrey Osmond and Wasson,

⁴⁶ Burroughs to Ginsberg 17 November 1959, GC Columbia.

⁴⁷ Burroughs to Ginsberg 23 August 1960, GC Columbia.

suggested you look him up, that will give you a formulaic reason. He can supply you with everything you need in hallucinogens.⁴⁸

And as we know from Burroughs' letters, they were using their correspondence to exchange more than just information. Ginsberg promised Burroughs further samples of *yagé* and mescaline in a letter dated 23 August 1960: 'If [the ayahuasca] is in a malleable form I'll send you some. My mescaline connection is absent the last month, I wrote to wholesale drughouse to order \$50 worth, if they come through I'll send it, or some of it, to you.'⁴⁹

Writing to Brion Gysin on 4 August, Burroughs makes reference to an earlier supply of mescaline that Ginsberg had sent him from America. It is evident from this letter that his experiences with mescaline were intersecting with and connected to his ongoing experiments with cut-ups and tape recorders:

Sing hum word rub outs are really far out. Today I borrow another recorder from the Irishman and see what happens on geometric tape recorders in cut up conversation that will just kill you. STARTS with straight cut up conversation back and forth you dig and slowly speeds up.

I received one mescaline dose from Allen Ginsberg and enclose resulting Surah which should conclude *Exterminator II*.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ginsberg to Burroughs 31 December 1960, File C-35, BP NYPL.

⁴⁹ Ginsberg to Burroughs 23 August 1960, File C-35, BP NYPL. Ginsberg distributed mescaline and psilocybin to those he believed would benefit from the experience including Thelonius Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline (Martin Torgoff, *Can't Find My Way Home: America in the Great Stoned Age, 1945-2000*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004, pp.75-76). This action of distributing psychoactive substances to other artists or writers has a precedent in Havelock Ellis' experiments with giving peyote to poets and musicians and in the circulation of mescaline within artistic and intellectual circles in Los Angeles in the 1950s. In each case, those involved wanted to share the experience with people working in a different creative area than their own. This can perhaps be attributed to the way in which psychoactive substances heighten the experience of an art form other than that in which the user would normally specialise, encouraging a more multimedia approach to their practice as it relates to other arts or even beyond that, to the relationship between different fields such as art and science.

⁵⁰ Burroughs to Gysin 4 August 1960, File C-37, BP NYPL.

News of his experiments with mescaline and a report on his recent work with tape recorders are interspersed in the letter, as they were in his letter of 23 August to Ginsberg, again suggesting that these two forms of experimentation were closely connected. This format of alternation between recording the results of experiments with substances and those with the tape recorder, camera, or typewriter, continues throughout the letters of this period as the two forms of experimentation became interrelated.

During the summer of 1960 Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg urging him to experiment with the cut-up technique. In response to Ginsberg's letters from Peru which described his unsettling experiences with *yagé*, Burroughs offered Ginsberg the cut-up technique as an activity that would guide his thoughts and actions. The cut-up method is here described as something beyond a literary practice. It becomes for him a way of thinking and seeing:

Take the enclosed copy of this letter. Cut along the lines. Rearrange putting section one by section three and section two by section four. Now read aloud and you will hear My voice. Whose Voice? Listen. Cut and rearrange in any combination. Read aloud. I can not choose but hear. Don't think about it. Don't theorize. Try it. Do the same with your poems. With any poems any prose. Try it. You want 'Help'. Here it is.⁵¹

Two months later in August 1960 Burroughs again implored Ginsberg to experiment with the cut-up technique: 'I urged and urge you to take scissors and try cut ups is not something to talk about is something to do'.⁵²

⁵¹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 21 June 1960, GC Columbia. This letter is also included in *The Yage Letters (The Yage Letters Redux, p.70)*. In the original version of the letter the line 'I can not choose but hear' has been crossed out.

⁵² Burroughs to Ginsberg 23 August 1960, GC Columbia.

In November 1960 Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg of his experiments with tape recorders. As with his descriptions of the cut-up technique, the letter emphasises active participation:

Do you have a tape recorder or access to one? Try this. Record a newspaper article some of your own work or anybody's this letter etc etc. Record say for two hundred feet. Now go back to the point where you began the recording. Run forward without recording and cut in at random and record phrases.⁵³

In his letters to Gysin, Burroughs' instructions for conducting experiments take on a tone and form that replicates the rhythms and actions of the practices he describes.

The phrase that Burroughs repeats again and again in his letters to Gysin is 'try this'.

He writes on 8 September 1960:

Please try this Brion. Translate I am that I am into all languages you know. Now put on the recorder shifting lingual like: I AM THAT DAS Y SOY JE SUIS SUIS SUIS ICH YO YO YO ESOESO CCA CACA THATI YO SOY AM DAS ICK BIN SOY SUIS DAS EXO I YO SOY SOY SOY THAT THAT ISUSI IA AM THAT SUIS SOYS... Just try and let me know. Enclose Rimbaud cut ups. Show Bill Belli. I mean poetry is for all now.⁵⁴

In this instance Burroughs shifts between instructions for the experiment and a textual representation of the sound and experience of the process described. Writing eight days later on 16 September 1960, Burroughs again encouraged Gysin's experimentation with 'the lingual shift', and again the letter undergoes transitions between giving directions and the textual simulation of the experiment:

The lingual shift will enable you to get anyone on the line by the way among other things. Take a name or short phrase shift and twist linguals. Like... SINCLAIR BEILES WITH OUT LESS SANS LUZ WITOUS AUS OHNE USE ONLY LUCE LOUCYYYC SISINANSNANNNSNN OOUTOOUT OUT LUC EOUT OUT [...] SINS SAN SNE SNIG SIHG BABDUA BBDUDLALLA UUDUHC NDUD NNDU AHHAUDHDJCCHUDJUSI

⁵³ Burroughs to Ginsberg 10 November 1960, GC Columbia.

⁵⁴ Burroughs to Gysin 8 September 1960, File C-37, BP NYPL.

SJSJDUCJUEHCUEHUDUENHD JNHHDKSSIEJX... It must be done talking not on typewriter.⁵⁵

Burroughs' reference to the necessary use of the voice is important here, and many of the letters state that these written experiments are to be enacted in various ways - on tape recorders, through speech or whilst walking. These letters, with their gestures towards work that takes place beyond the page, offer a guide to our understanding of the role of the text in Burroughs' practice of this period. By reading them in reference to his published work of the early 1960s, it is clear that his written instructions in publications such as *Minutes to Go* echo his encouragements to 'try this' in his letters to Ginsberg and Gysin and *are* to be taken as invitations to practical involvement.

In a letter sent by Burroughs to Gysin on 6 August 1960 we find an indication of how closely aligned his experiments with mescaline were to his work with cut-ups and tape recordings. He wrote:

You should get ear phones and listen to the repetitive poems speeded up or hummed. It will just kill you. I don't need mescaline now. Get high on my ear phones.⁵⁶

Evidently the experiments with tape cut-ups achieved for Burroughs an altered state of consciousness in which he identified certain characteristics of mescaline. In his letters to Ginsberg in 1953, Burroughs' writing of the experience of *yagé* developed from an initial conventional attempt to record the experience to replicating the experience in his writing. In his work of the 1960s he took this further, going beyond a textual simulation of the effects, to experimenting with art forms that through active engagement could enable the experience of an alteration in consciousness.

⁵⁵ Burroughs to Gysin 16 September 1960, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁵⁶ Burroughs to Gysin 6 August 1960, File C-37, BP NYPL.

Chapter 5

Letters to Brion Gysin 1960-1961: From Chemical to Non-chemical Alterations of Consciousness

From 1959 to 1961 Burroughs wrote with enthusiasm of the productive results of his use of psychoactive substances and he continued ‘putting out his vine’ to establish acquaintance with those involved with ‘the new hallucinogens’. He wrote to Gysin on 4 August 1960 about a recent trip to Amsterdam and his interest in LSD: ‘They have the new hallucinogen there and I have made tentative arrangements to try it’.¹ Despite Burroughs’ statement that ‘I don’t need mescaline now. Get high on my headphones’ in August of 1960, he continued to experiment with mescaline and investigate new substances, pursuing and establishing new contacts to do so. He wrote to Ginsberg on 2 November 1960: ‘I have been trying to make mescaline contact here but still no success’.² And the following month: ‘I did make an LSD6 scene in London and some other more potent hallucinogen that has to be injected. Neither experience much different from mescaline.’³ Burroughs’ investigations and his acquaintance with ‘a chemist friend in London’⁴ eventually led him to dimethyltryptamine. Beginning in April 1961, his letters to Gysin document his experiments with what he refers to as ‘Prestonia’, more generally known as dimethyltryptamine, or DMT.

DMT is present in many psychoactive plants, including *yagé*, but was not studied in its pure form until 1957. Unlike *yagé* or mescaline the effects of synthetically extracted DMT come on within the first few minutes but last less than half an hour. In

¹ Burroughs to Gysin 4 August 1960, File C-37, BP NYPL.

² Burroughs to Ginsberg 2 November 1960, GC Columbia.

³ Burroughs to Ginsberg 30 December 1960, GC Columbia.

⁴ Burroughs to Leary 6 May 1961, File C-27, BP NYPL.

his writings on the DMT experience, Terence McKenna notes that the powerful effects of this substance are often found to be overwhelming, that ‘however much we may be hedonists or pursuers of the bizarre, we find DMT to be too much’. He describes the speed and intensity with which it acts on the mind: ‘the onset of the experience begins in about fifteen seconds. One falls immediately into a trance. One’s eyes are closed and one hears a sound like ripping cellophane’. The user then feels as though they have entered a completely alien realm:

At that point one arrives in a place that defies description, a space that has a feeling of being underground, or somehow insulated and domed. In *Finnegans Wake* such a space is called the “merry go raum,” from the German word raum, for “space.” The room is actually going around, and in that space one feels like a child, though one has come out somewhere in eternity.⁵

McKenna writes that this space into which one is delivered through the DMT experience is ‘inhabited by merry elfin, self-transforming, machine creatures’.⁶ Other accounts describe the way in which DMT projects the user into ‘an extradimensional realm’, a ‘DMT land’ of ‘virtual reality fantasias, stained glass aureolae; a ten-dimensional Walt Disney World’.⁷

In Burroughs’ descriptions of his experiences of DMT we find similar reports of fully immersive hallucinations - strange places peopled by strange characters - scenes and visions that he then reworked in his published writings. He writes of a ‘small planet’ and ‘an all out tangle with the Green Octopus’,⁸ describing a ‘pin ball machine’⁹ world containing ‘creatures of the oven with metal mouths dripping purple fire’, and

⁵ Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991, p.36.

⁶ Terence McKenna, *True Hallucinations*. 1993. New York: Harper Collins, 1994, p.7.

⁷ Daniel Pinchbeck, *Breaking Open the Head*. 2002. New York: Broadway Books, 2003, p.240.

⁸ Burroughs to Gysin 8 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁹ Untitled material enclosed with letter, Burroughs to Gysin 20 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

‘souls torn into insect fragments by the Iron Claws of chess masters’.¹⁰ Another characteristic of the DMT experience that McKenna describes is ‘the transformation of language’: ‘Under the influence of DMT, language was transmuted from a thing heard to a thing seen. Syntax became unambiguously visible’.¹¹ In his writings, cut-ups and multimedia experiments, Burroughs’ was provoking the audience to recognise the materiality of words and language, and the effects of DMT seem to have pushed this aspect of his practice a step further into experiments with activating synaesthetic shifts in the experience of his work.

Mescaline, Dimethyltryptamine and Synaesthesia

Burroughs’ first reference to DMT is in a letter to Gysin of 8 April 1961. On this date he wrote of ‘many unusual experiences with the Prestonia’ and the long letter that follows cuts between references to his work and a collage of images, voices, characters and sensations experienced using DMT. Adding emphasis to these actual cuts is Burroughs’ repeated use of words descriptive of displacement such as ‘shift’ and ‘switch’:

Permutate - Shift positions - Stay out of the present time - Throw back signals switch - Switch white hot sand blast from the Ovens with cool blue from the home town with sonic speed.¹²

During this period of experimentation with DMT, Burroughs brings together his preoccupation with shifts and displacement with his experiments using colour, working these ideas alongside each other to achieve a synaesthetic effect in the

¹⁰ ‘Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia’ enclosed with letter, Burroughs to Gysin 27 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

¹¹ Terence McKenna, *True Hallucinations*. 1993. New York: Harper Collins, 1994, p.7.

¹² Burroughs to Gysin 8 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

experience of the work. In his letters dating from April 1961 he returns to an idea he had first mentioned in a letter from November 1960 in which he wrote about an exercise involving colour as an alternative to the linguistic basis of associative thought. In this November letter Burroughs outlined an experiment to be enacted whilst walking. The objective, as it is described, is to walk down a street allowing your line of vision to be directed by transitions and associations based upon colour, intersecting with, rather than determined by, the linguistic process of thought:

Try this when you walk down any street. Pick out all the blue objects in your field of vision. Now pick out all the red objects. Now shift back and forth You can paint as you walk. You can make every walk a painting. Look at the street signs. Cut in your own thoughts. Snatch bits of conversation as you pass. You can write as you walk. You can make every walk a story.¹³

He does not refer to this idea again in his letters to Gysin until April of 1961. He returned to this exercise during his period of DMT experimentation, when colour was at the forefront of his work. Colour had been prominent in Burroughs' writing since 1953, and *Naked Lunch* is rich with direct references to colour adding to its intensely visual character, but in his experimental work colour becomes a tool, like the cut-ups or Gysin's permutations, it is a means to reveal and confront the habits of language which shape our thoughts and actions.

Writing on 18 April 1961 he included further descriptions of the walking experiments he had been devising, referring to the practice as 'color line walks'. In these later descriptions there is an even greater emphasis on the activity as one of a physical shifting or switching of lines of association. The displacement of language with colour has become a violent and dangerous practice: 'I have had many unusual

¹³ Burroughs to Gysin 14 November 1960, File C-37, BP NYPL.

experiences. You can readily find yourself in dangerous psychic areas and over exposure can lead to head pains and fever'.¹⁴ This emphasis on the potent effects of the walks is reminiscent of his descriptions of the effects of DMT, and he presents these experiments as delivering a comparatively powerful impact upon consciousness. In this letter of 18 April Burroughs also writes about a colour alphabet he has been devising and using. This colour alphabet was developed from Rimbaud's poem 'Voyelles'. At this time Burroughs displays an interest in Rimbaud's work, and as a poet who had also sought to write in response to altered states of consciousness, the attraction is clear. He asks Gysin:

Could you please do the alphabet in colors all the letters in assigned colors - you may want to change some of the colors. These are only suggestions - followed by calligraphs in same color. And do try the color line walks with cut back to intersection points back and forward.¹⁵

The association of letters of the alphabet with particular colours is the most common form of synaesthesia and with both the colour line walks and the colour alphabet Burroughs is manipulating temporary experiences of synaesthesia as a means to dislodge the reader's normal habits of reading and using language by diverting the linguistic associative activities of the mind towards colour associations.

Synaesthesia is a recognised effect of psychoactive substances and I propose that Burroughs' experiences of this phenomenon may have influenced his experiments with the non-chemical alteration of consciousness. Synaesthesia is a condition in which one sensory mode stimulates associations in another - for example letters of the alphabet may seem to have a particular colour or sounds may be perceived to have a

¹⁴ Burroughs to Gysin 18 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

¹⁵ Ibid.

certain shape. Synaesthesia has been recorded in the reports of many users of psychoactive substances, including those of Albert Hoffman who documented the synaesthetic effect of LSD when writing about his first experience:

Kaleidoscopic, fantastic images surged in on me, alternating, variegated, opening and then closing themselves in circles and spirals, exploding in colored fountains, rearranging and hybridizing themselves in constant flux. It was particularly remarkable how every acoustic perception, such as the sound of a door handle or a passing automobile, became transformed into optical perceptions. Every sound generated a vividly changing image, with its own consistent form and color.¹⁶

Havelock Ellis also wrote of the synaesthetic effects of peyote: ‘At one moment the colour, green, acquired a taste in my mouth; it was sweetish and somewhat metallic. Blue, again, would have a taste that seemed to recall phosphorus.’¹⁷ When Ellis involved two other subjects in his experiments, he recorded how the second described experiencing music as colour: ‘I played the piano with closed eyes, and got waves and lines of pure colour, almost always without form’.¹⁸ In another article in the *Lancet* in 1897 Ellis wrote:

I noticed also, that any marked casual stimulation of the skin produced other sensory phenomena - a heightening of the visions or an impression of sound. This is a phenomena which may throw an interesting light on synaesthesiae or “secondary sensations.”¹⁹

Despite the many accounts of the experience of synaesthesia, it is a condition that has only recently been given serious recognition within scientific research. In a foreword to John Harrison’s *Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing* (2001) Simon Baron-Cohen

¹⁶ Hoffman, p.19.

¹⁷ Ellis (1898), p.136.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.139.

¹⁹ Havelock Ellis, ‘A Note on the Phenomena of Mescal Intoxication’, *Lancet*, 149.3849 (5 June 1897), p.1542.

writes of his experience working with Harrison within the departments of Experimental Psychology and Psychiatry at Cambridge:

When John Harrison and I began a collaborative investigation into synaesthesia in the 1990s the topic was still very controversial. The majority of neuro-scientists were unwilling to take seriously the phenomenon, or the implications it has for scientific understanding. This was because the evidence base was still thin. A decade later and the situation has changed considerably, because the evidence is beginning to accumulate.²⁰

Harrison confirms that ‘a number of psychoactive substances can give rise to synaesthesia’²¹ and that ‘drugs, such as LSD, mescaline (from the Mexican peyote cactus) and psilocybin [...] have all been reported to cause confusion between the sensory modalities’.²² Harrison acknowledges that ‘it is reasonably common for individuals who take hallucinogens to report that their senses become mixed’ but that given ‘the illicit nature of the topic it is hard to find reliable data on this issue’.²³ In evidence he refers to a web-based questionnaire which reports that nearly half of respondents who admitted to using hallucinogenic compounds reported synaesthetic symptoms.²⁴

Other artists, musicians and writers have explored synaesthesia in the making and experiencing of their work including the artist Wassily Kandinsky who painted ‘compositions’ and the musician Alexander Scriabin who used a colour system for writing music. The artist and filmmaker Harry Smith was a contemporary of

²⁰ Simon Baron-Cohen, ‘Foreword’ in John Harrison, *Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.v.

²¹ John Harrison, *Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.118.

²² *Ibid.*, p.119.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.207.

²⁴ Harrison cites a web-based questionnaire conducted by Don DeGracia http://www/csp.org/practices/entheogens/docs/kundalini_survey.html. Harrison states that ‘of a total of 62 respondents who admitted to using hallucinogenic compounds, 45.9% reported synaesthetic symptoms’ (Harrison, p.207).

Burroughs, and his chemical-induced synaesthetic experience also led his work in a new direction. In an interview with P. Adams Sitney, Smith explained how a visual experience of music led him to begin working with the relationship between sound and image:

I started smoking marijuana, naturally little colored balls appeared whenever we played Bessie Smith and so forth - whatever it was I was listening to at that time. I had a really great illumination the first time I heard Dizzy Gillespie play. I had gone there very high, and I literally saw all kinds of colored flashes. It was at that point that I realized music could be put to my films.²⁵

Like Harry Smith, Burroughs introduced this phenomenon into his work. He focused on bringing various mediums together to induce a 'shift' in perception. This shift was to be achieved by replicating the experience of a synaesthetic cross-over between language and other mediums by devising exercises such as the colour line walks and the 'rub out the word' texts. Terms such as 'cross-activation' and 'cross-wiring'²⁶ have been used to analyse what happens in the mind of a synesthete and these terms

²⁵ Harry Smith interviewed by P. Adams Sitney, *Film Culture*, 37 (Summer 1965), reprinted in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *Film Culture: An Anthology*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1971, p.270. Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary both wrote to Burroughs praising Smith's films, noting the similarities between Smith's and Burroughs' anthropological and scientific approach to their experimental work and their shared interests in altered states of mind. Ginsberg wrote: 'interesting fellow here Harry Smith a mad inventor I know lives in solitude in E74st took Gas and Hash and Junk for years and peyote', 'the one person here in NY who is more or less up your alley scientifically'. He gave a description of his films: 'One and half hours of jerky cartoon dream imagery all connected with Mandalas and Kabalas and Tree of life designs and weird cows wandering in and out of the screen - all done in collage' (Ginsberg to Burroughs 29 October 1960, File C-35, BP NYPL). A few months later Leary wrote: 'Spent some time with Harry Smith the alchemist friend of Allen Ginsberg. He has set out to do the impossible: to put "out there", on film, the visual experiences that come in dream, hallucination, or drug vision [...] Modern technology allows Harry Smith to come closer to the vision - because the dream moves and the hallucination is in colour. Harry's films come at you just like visions - the wave after wave of colour and changing symbol, inundating you, orgiastic bangs, one after another in series. Harry has wrenched the vision off the retina and put it out there. I'd like to have you see them to get your reaction' (Leary to Burroughs 28 February 1961, File C-27, BP, NYPL). Burroughs' initial reaction was positive: 'very interesting about Harry Smith. I would like to use the cut up method in films' (Burroughs to Ginsberg 2 November 1960, GC Columbia). Unfortunately when he did meet him in New York, during his disastrous visit to Leary in 1961, he reports: 'Harry Smith another wrong number. He fancies himself a black magician and does manage to give out some nasty emanations.' (Burroughs to Ginsberg 26 October 1961, GC Columbia).

²⁶ See for example the discussion of the 'cross-activation hypothesis' and the 'cross-wiring hypothesis' in V. S. Ramachandran and E. M. Hubbard's article 'Synaesthesia: A Window into Perception, Thought and Language', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8.12 (December 2007).

can be appropriated to describe how Burroughs' practice develops across media, his preoccupation with 'intersection points', shifts between language and image, or language and colour. These phrases describe his synaesthetic multimedia practice and remind us of the need to experience his written work situated in this cross-wiring of experimental activity.

In 'The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin' published in *The Third Mind*, Burroughs draws a direct connection between mescaline, synaesthesia and cut-ups:

Images shift sense under the scissors smell images to sound sight to sound sound to kinesthetic. This is where Rimbaud was going with his color of vowels. And his "systematic derangement of the senses." The place of mescaline hallucination: seeing colors tasting sounds smelling forms.²⁷

Burroughs' association with Gysin had encouraged him to cease viewing writing as his only available medium and to begin drawing, then working with colour and later tape recorders, film and photography. A plurality of mediums introduced the possibility of exploring the relations between media. As Burroughs began to work with more than one medium, he discovered that this meant he had available to him more than one language and could explore what would happen if he began manipulating synaesthetic shifts between these different forms. Burroughs and Gysin worked together on a series of 'rub out the word' texts, an experiment to shift the activity of reading from word to image, working with the letters and symbols on a typewriter. A text attributed to Gysin in *The Exterminator* (1960) takes the phrase 'RUB OUT THE WORDS' and translates it into a set of symbols printed on the opposite page:

²⁷ Burroughs, 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin' in *The Third Mind*, p.32.

RUB	OUT	THE	WORDS	# \$ % &
RUB	OUT	THE		# \$ %
WORDS	RUB	OUT		& # \$
THE	WORDS	RUB		% & #
OUT	THE	WORDS		\$ % & ²⁸

This is only the beginning of the piece, but we can see how it works to reorient the process of reading by applying a synaesthetic over-lapping of the experience of reading words and symbols to shift the reader's association between word and referent to one between word and image. The 'rub out the word' project was a collaborative activity and this is evident from Burroughs and Gysin's correspondence in which Burroughs writes of his own developments with this exercise. Examples of the work he produced are held in the Burroughs archive at the New York Public Library. These 'Rub Out the Word' files²⁹ include pages of variations of experiments with colour being substituted for letters or words and examples of the colour alphabet in which letters are written in their allocated colour.

With the color line walks described in his letters, Burroughs took the idea of exercises in synaesthetic shifts a stage further. In a letter to Gysin dated 27 April 1961 he wrote that he had sent the filmmaker Conrad Rooks 'a piece on color walking writing' and enclosed with this letter to Gysin is a text entitled 'Sample page sent to C. Rooks' in which Burroughs gives a particularly clear description of the process of the colour line walks:

You can cut as you walk the streets of all your cities. Like this cut back and forth between street signs overheard conversation and your own thoughts. Now pick intersection points as you walk and refer back on your time track to points you have passed as you walk and forward to points you will pass as you walk back and forth walky talky cut time

²⁸ Gysin, 'Rub Out the Words' in *The Exterminator*, pp.42-43.

²⁹ Folio 18 Rub Out the Word, BP NYPL.

lines. Now look at the colors in the street. Now we can produce accident to color of vowels. Pick out all the red in the sweaters and flowers and signs. Now cut to O blue. U green - E white newspapers white clouds - A black store window and so forth start with Rimbaud's Color of Vowels. You will find yourselves using color alphabet Now pick intersection points and refer back and forth on silent color lines - Like H is grey with me and so back and forth on grey streets in and out of old movies and photos back to a grey cat in the garden and a grey ship in the harbor. You can make every walk a written painting.³⁰

This suggestion that 'you can make every walk a written painting' involves the merging of vocabularies that belong to a number of different art mediums. In the main text of the letter he echoes this proposal for a synaesthetic art practice: 'why not simply write with the camera using the camera like a brush you dig?'³¹ These phrases which combine the vocabularies and actions of different media disrupt the boundaries between art, music, film and writing. They give an indication of the role of synaesthetic cross-activation in Burroughs' work with multimedia activities.

At the centre of much of Burroughs' work in the early 1960s is a preoccupation with ideas of association, intersection and juxtaposition. His experiments with textual, visual and aural intersections replicate the synaesthetic effects of *yagé*, mescaline and DMT. These substances all draw the user into a heightened awareness of the pattern of associations that form consciousness and experience. More specifically they stimulate awareness that the associations that provide a sense of continuity of thought and action are based upon language. Consciousness is normally experienced as unified over time, creating the impression of continuity from one thought, action or moment to the next. Although the temporary experience of synaesthesia induced by psychoactive substances does not necessarily shatter this unity of consciousness, it does bring its structure to attention.

³⁰ 'Sample page sent to C. Rooks' enclosed with letter, Burroughs to Gysin 27 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

The functioning of consciousness is normally invisible to itself, but the experience of an altered state of mind brings it into visibility by making it unfamiliar. This experience of the mind observing its own activity was described as an effect of *yagé* by the French anthropologist P. Reinburg in 1921, as related in Michael J. Harner's essay 'Common Themes in South American Indian Yagé Experiences':

Comprehension is highly exaggerated; it seems to me as though my body has disappeared; I am nothing more than a mind observing with interest the phases of experience going on within another person.³²

This observation of one's own thought processes is often described in reports by reference to the shape or patterns of thought. The user becomes aware of their thoughts in spatial and geometric terms. This may be as a result of the synaesthetic effects of the substances, just as music is seen as imagery, the movement of thought, or the actions of thought are visualised in spatial terms, enabling the observation of how thought is mapped out and determined by habits and learnt patterns of association. Reviewed in a geometric framework, thought can be pictorially traced in terms of circularity, repetition and linguistic chains of association. This effect of psychoactive substances can be identified in Burroughs' preoccupation with the idea and practice of charting coordinates and intersections in his coordinate books and scrapbooks.³³ He also described the cut-up method as an activity that would work to map and therefore bring into visibility the way our mind functions:

³¹ Burroughs to Gysin 27 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

³² 'L'intelligence est très surexcitée; il me semble que mon corps a disparu; je ne suis plus qu'un cerveau qui observe avec intérêt les phases d'une expérience se passant chez un autre.' P. Reinburg, 'Contribution à l'étude des bioissons toxiques des Indiens du nord-ouest de l'Amazonie: l'ayahuasca, le yajé, le huánto. Étude comparative toxico-physiologique d'une expérience personnelle', *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 13.1 (1921), pp.28-29. This English translation is from Michael J. Harner, 'Common Themes in South American Yagé Experiences' in Harner, p.157.

³³ Burroughs uses the term 'coordinate books' in William S. Burroughs and Conrad Knickerbocker, 'Interview with William S. Burroughs', *Paris Review*, 9.35 (Fall 1965). Reprinted in *The Third Mind*, p.7.

[C]ut-ups make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway. Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him.³⁴

The cut-up alteration of the text and the altered mind that results have the potential to increase awareness of how the text and the brain were functioning in their 'normal' states, and in this example how the mind is open to manipulation or suggestion by the juxtaposition of text within a newspaper and the juxtaposition of the act of reading with the environmental context.

Burroughs' colour line walking is a practice that brings to attention the language based associations that *normally* direct our thoughts and actions; we become aware of them when we attempt to override them with alternative lines of association.

Burroughs was interested in how the synaesthetic experience could be adopted as a deconditioning tool for the habits of thinking that circumscribe and limit understanding and action. Like psychoactive substances, these walks induce a heightened awareness of non-linguistic relationships, in this case the relationship and associations between colours: 'And very soon you flash along on color lines without words moving through the streets like a fish. Try it'.³⁵ The 'fish' reference in this letter to Gysin acts to emphasise Burroughs' idea of complete removal from established and learnt methods of mental navigation, an act as drastic as exchanging lungs for gills, or land for water.

Burroughs' experiments with colour association lines promise escape not only from language but also from the constrictions of time and space. To shift outside language

³⁴ Ibid., pp.4-5.

³⁵ Burroughs to Gysin 18 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

entails leaving the temporal constraints of language-based thought: 'thinking in association blocks instead of words enables the operator to process data with the speed of light'. This statement, contained within a selection of 1961 material in the Burroughs archive at the New York Public Library, is explored through a series of experiments. He gives an account of an exercise in which he takes the word 'JOHN', and assigns 'color to the letters J-Red O-Blue H-Silver N-Purple'. The colour alphabet is then used as a means to replace language and words with colours:

Project on screen the color words
 Red Blue Silver Purple
 Now project the colors
 Flash from letters to color words back and forth fast and slow
 fade out in color - when you learn to see the name in color
 without letters or word on your screen associate in silent
 juxtaposition images of your john³⁶

In this description of how to displace word identification with colour, the ultimate aim is to bring about a change in the substance and the speed of thought. Because thinking in colour associations is visually oriented it is equated with the 'speed of light', and so colour association lines - the 'silent juxtaposition' that is achieved by the synaesthetic displacement of words with colour - move thought out of the system of language but also out of the constraints of time, making possible the space-time travel of *yagé*.³⁷

It was during 1961 that the Olympia edition of *The Soft Machine* was first published, a text that clearly bears the influence of this period of Burroughs' exploration of colour and synaesthetic shifts. Colour is at the forefront of the 1961 text which is

³⁶ Burroughs, 'Operation Sense Withdrawal', Item 3, Folio 133 - 1961 Material, BP NYPL.

³⁷ See Michael Sean Bolton, 'Get Off the Point: Deconstructing Context in the Novels of William S. Burroughs', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 40.1 (Winter 2010) for a reading of distortions of temporality and time travel in Burroughs' work with cut-ups and fold-ins. Bolton writes that cut-ups achieve atemporality and 'a complete release from bound, linear time and a transcendence of the constraints of history' (64). He does not however connect the time travel of cut-ups to Burroughs' experiences of atemporality and 'space-time travel' using *yagé*, mescaline and DMT.

divided into coloured units and includes the use of Rimbaud's 'Voyelles'. This is not however the edition of *The Soft Machine* that has since been available. A second edition published in America by Grove Press in 1966, and a third edition published in Britain by Calder and Boyars in 1968, were heavily revised to be more accessible to the reader. As a consequence of these re-workings of the text, Burroughs' use of colour and synaesthesia are far less prominent.

As well as being a very different text, the Olympia publication successfully gestured towards the context of experimental activity and Burroughs' association with Gysin, whereas later editions provide no such context. The Olympia dust jacket features painted glyphs by Gysin and includes a brief blurb by Ginsberg informing the reader of the role of cut-ups in the making of the text, bringing to attention the cut-up method as a process and as a visual experience:

William Burroughs presents the original texts and then cuts them up, shifts and recombines them, permutating imagery until it flashes with kaleidoscopic brilliance.³⁸

This introduction also sets the work in its context of intersection with other cut-up activities, with Gysin's paintings and *Permutations*, and the *Dreamachine*, stating that '[t]his book is a work of art' and that 'Burroughs uses new methods of writing derived directly from painting techniques as first suggested to him by Brion Gysin'. This short text also explicitly refers to the cut-up method and the *Dreamachine* as experiences of the alteration of consciousness:

Stroboscopic flicker-lights playing on the Soft Machine of the eye create hallucinations, and even epilepsy. Recurrent flickering of Cut-Up opens up the area of hallucination and makes a map for the human race to invade.³⁹

³⁸ William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*. Paris: Olympia, 1961, dust jacket.

³⁹ Ibid.

The fact that it is only the later editions of *The Soft Machine* that are in print and available to readers and critics is another example of how the publication history of Burroughs' work has detracted from his experimentation with art as the alteration of consciousness.

Burroughs' letters to Gysin during April 1961 feature reports on his ongoing experiments with DMT, and in a letter of 20 April 1961 he wrote 'enclose my latest experience with the Prestonia dim-N-Quite exhilarating'.⁴⁰ There are two pieces attached to the letter. Neither have titles. One describes the DMT experience and the second develops the idea of 'the color line walk', with 'Lee the Agent' moving through the streets of Tangier following colour associations, and using the colour alphabet that Burroughs had devised. The first piece describes the speed and intensity of the DMT experience. It begins:

Took again of dim-N and stood in front of the Mirror waiting for the Attack that always comes when the dim-N hits. The attack came from the left side of the mirror - Blue eyed red haired Russians in Tunics and Chinese Partisans among the marchers many women as they advanced towards me to the sound of gongs all chanted 'we'll show you something show you something Johnny Come Lately WAR' - Tracer bullets and shells and flame throwers threw me back onto the bed groaning in the torn flesh of a million battle fields.⁴¹

As he proceeds, Burroughs describes the colour lines as part of the DMT experience; they are the means by which he maneuvers through the hallucinated world: 'Move back on Grey HHHH flash in and out of shadow mirrors and doorways into stale streets of yesterday'.⁴² Throughout the 'dim-N' piece colour lines initiate movement from one vision to the next:

⁴⁰ Burroughs to Gysin 20 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁴¹ Untitled material enclosed with letter, Burroughs to Gysin 20 April 1961, BP NYPL.

⁴² Ibid.

In a ring facing man in Blue Tunic - All around towered blue mountains in a blue twilight - A ring of Nomad faces a form of psychic wrestling performed to drums and cymbals of blue brass - Black rushes of numbing force I learned to aside step out into the grey corners of the room - sucking my antagonist into low pressure areas - Moving from his blue eyes to sky yesterday and blue drums Motel neon Texarkana.⁴³

The second piece which begins 'Lee the Agent' again presents the color alphabet actively being used to negotiate through space:

Lee the Agent walked color lines silent as a fish through body streets and rooms and voices of the City. On Grey he walked Grey was H in his color alphabet.

[...]

cut from H in Hotel to a boys grey flannel pants leaning against a grey wall .. Cut back to the vapor trails fading in the sky and the ship farther out now on blue into the sky and mountains of Spain back to the blue awning of the cafe Central.⁴⁴

Both texts use colour lines and the colour alphabet in identical ways, but the important *difference* between these two texts is that in the first Burroughs makes explicit reference to this being a DMT experience, in the second he has removed all references to DMT. The first text begins with 'Took again of dim-N' and ends with 'The Mirrors went out and the drug turned off', whereas in the second he makes use of the same material but adopts the character of Lee the Agent rather than using the first person. Comparison of these two texts reveals Burroughs actively translating the experience of an altered state of consciousness into his work.

A week later Burroughs again wrote to Gysin enclosing further examples of material produced in response to his DMT experiences, which he described as 'a first draft of latest experience with the Prestonia which has impressed me with the urgency of the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Second item of untitled material enclosed with letter, Burroughs to Gysin 20 April, 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

situation'. The text is entitled 'Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia' and begins: 'Photo falling - Word Falling - Break Through in Grey Room - Towers, Open Fire'. In this piece Burroughs cuts between a commentary on the experience of taking DMT and what he encounters under its influence, for example he describes taking apomorphine to suppress the effects which are still vividly present, so that the source of these visions and imagery - DMT - is openly stated:

I took ten twentieth grain tablets and lay down and flashed a glimmer of grey beyond the ovens and made it out to the silver tea pot in the Port Tea Room - Puked in the bidet - saw the battlefields of interplanetary war torn envelopes and screaming flesh under heat blast from the tower - fading now.⁴⁵

This piece 'Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia' was reworked by Burroughs for the text 'Comments on the Night Before Thinking' published in *Evergreen Review* in the September-October issue of 1961. This text again reveals Burroughs engaged in the process of using the DMT experience in his work.

Included in 'Comments on the Night Before Thinking' is a brief introduction in which Burroughs draws associations between his work as a response to DMT and the story 'The Night Before Thinking' by Ahmed Yacoubi which his text makes reference to, and which 'came to Yacoubi under the influence of majoun a form of hashish jam':

When the story of Yacoubi came to the attention of this department Doctor Benway was conducting experiments with some of the new hallucinogens and had inadvertently taken a slight overdose of N-dimethyltryptamine dim-N for short.⁴⁶

The first part of the text is a variation on the material that he had sent to Gysin and

⁴⁵ 'Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia' enclosed with letter, Burroughs to Gysin 27 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁴⁶ Burroughs, 'Comments on The Night Before Thinking', *Evergreen Review*, 5.20 (September-October 1961), p.31.

includes direct references to ‘dim-N’ and a revised reference to taking apomorphine in an attempt to counter the powerful effects:

Took twelve twentieth-grain tablets and flashed a glimmer of grey beyond The Ovens and made it to the Porte Tea Room on silver set yesterday past fields of interplanetary war and the prisoners eaten alive by white hot ants. Do not forget this Johnny Come Lately: WAR. War to extermination. Fading now.⁴⁷

The second part of ‘Comments on The Night Before Thinking’ is a fold-in of Burroughs’ text and that of Yacoubi. Noticing similarities between the texts: ‘I was of course struck by juxtapositions of area between my account and *The Night Before Thinking*’, Burroughs explores these associations through the technique of fold-in: ‘I took a page of my text - first draft - and folded it down the middle and laid it on top of the page in Yacoubi’s text’.⁴⁸ The activity of fold-in removes the text from its framework of direct reference to DMT. This piece in *Evergreen Review* reveals how he used his DMT experiences in his work but it also demonstrates how the place of *yagé*, mescaline or DMT becomes concealed through his reworking of the material.

A comparative reading of Burroughs’ 1961 letters to Gysin and *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express* suggests a direct line of connection between his DMT experiences and some of the imagery and ideas in the cut-up novels. These texts were first published in 1961, 1962 and 1964, but we have to bear in mind Burroughs’ tendency to reuse and cut-up older material, which means that the contents of these publications do not necessary all date from after his DMT experiments. His DMT hallucinations may have been the source from which these images originated, or an extension - a hallucinatory ‘realisation’ - of scenes Burroughs

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.32.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.34.

had already explored in his writing. Whichever was the case, we can still conclude that these novels are not simply science-fiction imaginings, but that behind such ideas as the ‘ovens’ and nova lay Burroughs’ intense experiences with DMT.

What Burroughs referred to as ‘the ovens’ seems to have been the most prominent and enduring image that resulted from his DMT experiences. In his letters to Gysin he first mentioned the ovens on 8 April 1961 in the same letter in which he began to give accounts of his DMT experiences and claimed they will ‘appear in next novel’:

Many unusual experiences with the Prestonia (it *was* Prestonia) and Miguel was right so will appear in next novel for which I am now recording the scenario.⁴⁹

This scenario is described as ‘five agents on a special assignment to assassinate the Green Octopus leader of dissident sect of the Indian Mother currently holed up in Egypt’. We also discover in this letter that these ‘many unusual experiences with the Prestonia’ were testing the limits of what Burroughs was willing to endure. It seems to have been the experience of ‘the ovens’ that were the most traumatic and painful element of these sessions:

Some far out experiences with that awful Prestonia. Strictly the Nightmare Hallucinogen. Trip to the Ovens like white hot bees through your flesh and bones and everything but I was only in the ovens for thirty seconds⁵⁰

The disturbed sense of time that can be experienced under DMT made the ordeal feel as though it ‘went on for hours’. In the same letter Burroughs again refers to the ‘Green Octopus’ and the ‘hot sand blast’ of the ovens:

⁴⁹ Burroughs to Gysin 8 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

all out tangle with the Green Octopus - She carries a lot of weight so stay away from her – Permutate - Shift positions - Stay out of the present time - Throw back signals switch - Switch white hot sand blast from the Ovens with cool blue from the home town with sonic speed - Yes she felt that one - This went on for hours - it's really strange stuff and I shrink from taking it and you know what a glutton I am for kicks but not that hard - In any case giving myself a rest for a few days⁵¹

Burroughs' experience of 'the ovens' was evidently more than a visual hallucination, these visceral descriptions of pain and heat suggest that the effects of DMT were felt powerfully on all the senses.

Burroughs' confident approach to the exploration of mind altering substances which had led to his experimentation over a number of years with many different plants and chemicals, was now being put to the test by a substance whose kicks were just too 'hard'. The intensity of this sensory experience carries over into his references to the 'ovens' in the cut-up novels. In *The Soft Machine* the ovens are a form of punishment used by the Mayan priests:

I learned also something of the horrible punishments meted out to any one who dared challenge or even think of challenging the controllers: *Death In The Ovens*; The violator was placed in a construction of interlocking copper grills – The grills were then heated to white heat and slowly closed on his body⁵²

I witnessed some executions and saw the prisoners torn body and soul into writhing insect fragments by the ovens, and learned that the giant centipedes were born in the ovens from these mutilated screaming fragments⁵³

The control system of the priests is overthrown by cutting-up the image tracks and sound tracks through which they exert their power:

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*. 3rd ed. 1968. London: Flamingo, 2001, p.55. All quotations from *The Soft Machine* are from this edition unless indicated otherwise.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.56.

Equipped now with sound and image track of the control machine I was in position to dismantle it - I had only to mix the order of recordings and the order of images and the changed order would be picked up and fed back into the machine - I had recordings of all agricultural operations, cutting and burning brush etc - I now correlated the recordings of burning brush with the image track of this operation, and shuffled the time so that the burn came late and a year's crop was lost - Famine weakening control lines, I cut radio static into the control music and festival recordings together with sound and image track of rebellion⁵⁴

In this section of *The Soft machine* Burroughs has brought together material from his descriptions of DMT *and* from his accounts of experiments with tape recordings and cut-ups, and these two lines of experimental investigation - with multimedia and with mind altering substances - are then reworked into the narrative.

In *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express*, the ovens, which become in the latter the 'nova ovens', are again associated with control systems, with 'nova' and the 'nova mob' or 'nova criminals', the target of Lee and the nova police :

They can turn on total pain of the Ovens - This is done by film and brain wave recordings mangled down to a form of concrete music - A twanging sound very much like positive feedback correlated with the Blazing Photo from Hiroshima and Nagasaki⁵⁵

The principal weapon of Minraud is of course heat - In the center of all their cities stand The Ovens where those who disobey the control brains are brought for total disposal - A conical structure of iridescent metal shimmering heat from the molten core of a planet where lead melts at noon⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.57.

⁵⁵ William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded*. 2nd ed., New York: Grove Press, 1967, pp.110,111. All quotations from *The Ticket That Exploded* are from this edition unless indicated otherwise.

⁵⁶ William S. Burroughs, *Nova Express*. 1964. New York: Grove Press, 1992, p.70. All quotations from *Nova Express* are from this edition unless indicated otherwise.

Another reference to the ovens in *The Ticket That Exploded* describes them as ‘ovens of white-hot metal lattice’,⁵⁷ repeated later in the text as ‘flash prisoners in the ovens – lattice of white-hot metal closing round them’,⁵⁸ and again in *Nova Express*: ‘The oven heat drying up life source as white hot metal lattice closed around him’.⁵⁹ This description derives from Burroughs’ DMT experiences as recorded in ‘Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia’ enclosed with his letter to Gysin of 27 April 1961:

Ovens of white hot metal lattice in purple and bright blue and pink screaming burning flash flesh under a white hot blue sky – Sammy the Butcher chopping flesh and bones larval flesh under pitiless insect eyes of white hot crab men.⁶⁰

The following piece from *The Ticket That Exploded* again contains a reference to the ‘ovens’ and describes taking apomorphine to escape, which is consistent with Burroughs’ use of apomorphine in response to the overwhelming effects of DMT:

As the shot of apomorphine cut through poisons of Minraud he felt a tingling burning numbness - his body coming out of deep freeze in the Ovens - Then viscera exploded in vomit – The mold of his body cracked and he stepped free – a slender green creature, his hands ended in black claws covered with fine magnetic wires that extended up the inner arm to the elbow⁶¹

Later in the text there is another reference to apomorphine as an antidote to the ovens: ‘The ovens and the orgasm death tune in can be blocked with large doses of apomorphine’.⁶² The image of claws in the above quote is also repeated throughout these three texts: ‘Crab guards gathered around the machine, sliding forward to feel

⁵⁷ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p.8.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.153.

⁵⁹ *Nova Express*, p.71.

⁶⁰ ‘Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia’ enclosed with letter, Burroughs to Gysin 27 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁶¹ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p.102.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.111.

with white-hot claws',⁶³ 'a monster crab with hot claws',⁶⁴ 'stay out of those claws',⁶⁵ 'three thousand years in hot claws at the window'.⁶⁶ In *The Soft Machine* the claws, like the ovens, are an instrument of the Mayan priests: 'I witnessed one revolting ceremony in which a young captive was tied to a stake and the priests tore his sex off with white hot copper claws'.⁶⁷ The imagery of 'claws' can be found in earlier writings including *Naked Lunch*,⁶⁸ and so it did not derive from Burroughs' DMT experiences, but does feature in his 1961 accounts of DMT, and comes to the fore in his writing after this time, an image intensified through these chemical experiments. For example he writes in 'Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia':

Switch Tower Orders - Reverse Fire - Send BACK their creatures of the oven stored in pain bank from torture chambers of Time - Souls torn into insect fragments by the Iron Claws of chess masters - Who Synthesized Dim-N in Czechoslovakia?⁶⁹

The Green Octopus of Burroughs' DMT visions is another reoccurring figure in the cut-up novels: 'The Green Octopus working Vegetable Sentence',⁷⁰ and a member of the Nova Mob in *Nova Express* along with 'Iron Claws', 'The Subliminal Kid' and 'Sammy The Butcher' (another character from the DMT reports) who 'took Uranus apart in a fissure flash of metal rage'.⁷¹ And in *The Ticket That Exploded*:

He felt crushing weight of the Green Octopus who was there to block any composite being and maintain her flesh monopoly of birth and death⁷²

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.103.

⁶⁴ *Nova Express*, p.27.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.30.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.75.

⁶⁷ *The Soft Machine*, p.55.

⁶⁸ For example 'Leopard Men tear people to pieces with iron claws'; 'with steel claws pulls the gold teeth'; 'with leopard man iron claws' in *Naked Lunch*, p.33,190,192.

⁶⁹ 'Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia' enclosed with letter, Burroughs to Gysin 27 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁷⁰ *Nova Express*, p.135.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.60.

⁷² *The Ticket That Exploded*, p.8.

A reading of the 1961 letters suggests that it was Burroughs' DMT sessions that gave these images such potency in his own mind and turned them into central motifs in these texts.

Burroughs' accounts of his non-chemical experiments with the alteration of consciousness and his descriptions of the colour line walks and the colour alphabet in his letters to Gysin were also incorporated into the cut-up novels. In his letters to Gysin he had proposed that exercises using colour associations rather than linguistic associations, or activating synaesthetic shifts in mental functioning, had the potential to free the mind from the association blocks of language. We find references to these ideas in *The Ticket That Exploded*:

Color is trapped in word - Image is trapped in word - Do you need words? - Try some other method of communication, like color flashes - a Morse code of color flashes - or odors of music or tactile sensations - Anything can represent words and letters and association blocks - Go on try it and see what happens⁷³

And again in 'the invisible generation' included at the end of the text:

record a sentence and speed it up now try imitating your accelerated voice play a sentence backwards and learn to unsay what you just said... such exercises bring you a liberation from old association locks⁷⁴

Reviewing the cut-up novels having studied Burroughs' letters to Gysin we can see how his experiments - both chemical and non-chemical - and his accounts of these experiments were being used as material within these fictional narratives. Evidently these novels, which seem such extreme works of fantasy, have some basis in

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.145.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.206.

Burroughs 'real' experimental activity and his DMT encounters with the Green Octopus and the torture of 'the ovens'.

We can also trace in *Nova Express* the influence that Burroughs' more traumatic DMT experiences had upon his attitude towards the use of mind altering substances. Burroughs' interest in these substances had always been combined with an acute awareness that these drugs could be put to manipulative use to exert government or military control, and his DMT experiences added weight to these fears. The cut-up novels bear the influence of this shift. At the beginning of *Nova Express* a warning is issued, an extension of Burroughs' argument for the investigation of non-chemical rather than chemical means to alter consciousness:

Their drugs are poison designed to beam in Orgasm Death and Nova Ovens - Stay out of the Garden of Delights - It is a man-eating trap that ends in green goo - Throw back their ersatz Immortality - It will fall apart before you can get out of The Big Store - Flush their drug kicks down the drain - *They are poisoning and monopolizing the hallucinogen drugs - learn to make it without any chemical corn*⁷⁵

In the novel a chemist named Winkhorst is questioned about his role in 'synthesizing the new hallucinogen drugs'.⁷⁶ In answering he describes the painful effects of these new drugs:

Mescaline so processed will be liable to produce, in the human subject - (known as 'canine preparations') - uh unpleasant and dangerous symptoms and in particular 'the heat syndrome' which is a reflection of nuclear fission - Subjects complain they are on fire, confined in a suffocating furnace, white hot bees swarming in the body⁷⁷

As we have seen, this description of 'white hot bees swarming in the body' is lifted

⁷⁵ *Nova Express*, p.6.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.38.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.38.

directly from Burroughs' account of 'the Ovens like white hot bees through your flesh and bones' in his letter of 8 April 1961.⁷⁸ If we read the cut-up novels in conjunction with Burroughs' 1961 letters to Gysin, it would appear that it was his intense and painful experiences with DMT that led him to issue such dramatic warnings against psychoactive substances in *Nova Express*. At a time in which international interest in 'psychedelics' was rapidly developing into a countercultural movement, Burroughs had become increasingly wary of engaging in further experimentation with 'the new hallucinogens'.

Burroughs and Timothy Leary

Burroughs' correspondence from 1959 through to 1961 reveals that his interest in these psychoactive substances was creative and intellectual rather than simply recreational. Ginsberg, Gysin and Burroughs all took steps to become acquainted with the leading figures researching the effects of psychoactive substances. In a letter to Burroughs dated 29 October 1960, Ginsberg reported having met Gordon Wasson,⁷⁹ and earlier the same year on 23 August he wrote that he has 'a date tonite to meet Robert de Ropp who wrote *Drugs and the Mind*'.⁸⁰ Burroughs read texts on the alteration of consciousness, such as Grey Walter's *The Living Brain* on the effects of stroboscopic lights, demonstrating his interest in not only experiencing but also researching these subjects. This evidence of their desire to share ideas with figures involved in scientific research suggests that they were concerned to relate their

⁷⁸ Burroughs to Gysin 8 April 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁷⁹ Ginsberg to Burroughs 29 October 1960, File C-35, BP NYPL. Ginsberg wrote: 'Gordon Wasson gave me a package of magic mushrooms to try, 2 different types, later this week I will. Also he laid on me a pack of ololiuqui (*finally*) – it's seeds, you mash them and eat a soda cap full.'

⁸⁰ Ginsberg to Burroughs 23 August 1960, File C-35, BP NYPL.

experiences to current thinking, and to place their experiences into a scientific and conceptual framework. Burroughs' intellectual engagement in the study of psychoactive substances accounts for his initial interest in the work of Timothy Leary. He began his relationship with Leary with the same enthusiasm with which he had discussed the work of Grey Walter and Aldous Huxley. Unfortunately his later vehement rejection of the whole Leary project has left a shadow over his creative engagement with psychoactive substances.

Leary wrote to Burroughs on 5 January 1961 stating: 'Maybe Allen Ginsberg has told you something about our research project on the new drugs. In any case he asked me to write you - in general about our celestial ambitions and in particular to see if you want some mushrooms'.⁸¹ In Burroughs' reply of 20 January 1961 he expressed strong interest in Leary's work and outlined the relationship between his experiences of the altered state of consciousness of psychoactive substances and of cut-ups:

Dear Timothy Leary:

Thank you for your most interesting letter. I can only say that I think what you are doing is vitally important. Yes I would be very much interested in trying the mushrooms and writing up the trip as I have done with mescaline. It might be interesting to gather an anthology of mushroom writing. In any case I will send along the results. I know that my work and understanding has gained *measurably* from the use of hallucinogens and I think the wider use of these drugs would lead to better conditions on all levels. Perhaps whole areas of neurosis could be mapped and eradicated in mass therapy. I enclose copy of *Minutes to Go* which I hope will interest you. Actually I have achieved pure cut up highs without the use of any chemical agent.

Brion Gysin who first applied the Cut Up Method of writing is here in Paris at the above address would also be most interested to try the mushrooms. An anthology of mushroom drawing and writing might be an idea. So I will look forward to hearing from you.⁸²

⁸¹ Leary to Burroughs 5 January 1961, File C-27, BP NYPL.

⁸² Burroughs to Leary 20 January 1961, File C-27, BP NYPL.

Leary wrote again on 14 February telling Burroughs about his lunch meeting with Richard Evans Schultes, the ethnobotanist who Burroughs had met in Colombia in 1953. Leary recalled that Schultes told a ‘funny tender story about meeting you in the jungle. He had you pegged (in the story) as an old Harvard man who drank a little too much’.⁸³ Leary wrote how surprised Schultes was to hear that Burroughs was a writer, that he was interested in reading *Naked Lunch* and that he had promised to send him a copy. Leary used this story to demonstrate to Burroughs that their interests lay along the same lines and had a serious and scientific foundation in the work of figures such as Schultes. In this letter Leary also invited Burroughs to speak at a symposium of the American Psychological Association to be held on 4 September 1961. The proposed theme of the symposium was ‘Drugs and the Empirical Expansion of Consciousness’. He stated that the other speakers were to include Alan Watts, Humphrey Osmond, Aldous Huxley and Allen Ginsberg, a list of names that would have excited Burroughs’ interest.

In a letter to Ginsberg of 9 March 1961 Burroughs wrote: ‘I received the mushrooms from Leary. Great but I think not as far out as mescaline. In any case I reached an interesting area and will present the maps in my current novel’.⁸⁴ Not only does he describe the experience in very positive terms but he also indicates the direct relationship between his psilocybin use and his ‘mapping’ of the experience within his work. However, shortly after this letter in March, Burroughs began experimenting with DMT. A reading of Burroughs’ letters to Gysin has revealed that his intense and painful DMT experiences had left him wary of future experimentation with such

⁸³ Leary to Burroughs 14 February 1961, File C-27, BP NYPL.

⁸⁴ Burroughs to Ginsberg 9 March 1961, GC Columbia.

substances. Use of this exceptionally powerful chemical marks the peak of his experiments with psychoactive substances and led to his concentration solely upon non-chemical routes to the alteration of consciousness.

He wrote to Leary again on 6 May 1961 reporting on his DMT experiences: ‘I would like to sound a word of urgent warning with regard to the hallucinogen drugs with special reference to Dimethyl-tryptamine.’ Burroughs states that his first impression was that the effects were similar to psilocybin, but his later experiences were far more intense and terrifying than anything he had encountered before:

I had taken it about ten times (this drug must be injected and the dose is about one grain but I had been assured that there was a wide margin of safety) with results sometimes unpleasant but well under control and always interesting when the horrible experience occurred which I have recorded in allegorical terms and submitted for publication in *Encounter*.⁸⁵

The 1961 editions of *Encounter* do not feature any work by Burroughs; the text that he refers to could have been the material entitled ‘Overdose of Synthesized Prestonia’ that he had included in his letter of 27 April to Gysin and it may have been a piece similar to that published in *Evergreen Review* that autumn. But what is clear is that his extreme experiences with DMT were signaling the end of his experiments with the ‘new hallucinogens’.

Burroughs wrote to Gysin on 8 May 1961, two days after his letter to Leary: ‘For Allah’s sake Brion be careful with that fucking Prestonia. Personally I would not take it again. The pain is unimaginable if the dose hits at the wrong intersection point’.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Burroughs to Leary 6 May 1961, File C-27, BP NYPL.

⁸⁶ Burroughs to Gysin 8 May 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

From this point onwards the letters concentrate solely upon his own work as agents for the alteration of consciousness, the dissolution of language and the production of synaesthetic shifts between media. Just as Burroughs was ending this second period of experimentation with psychoactive substances that had begun three years earlier in 1959, the psychedelic movement was beginning to take off in America and Britain. Whilst Leary's work was leading to a more widespread cultural engagement with psilocybin and later LSD, Burroughs' interests were moving in a different direction.

Burroughs informed Gysin in a letter of 25 August 1961 that he had agreed to attend the symposium on hallucinogens, and that he 'will talk on flicker and other non-chemical routes', But he also writes 'I can't tell you how bad this mushroom thing looks'.⁸⁷ The different perspective that Burroughs now held in relation to Leary and the early psychedelic movement became acutely apparent to him when he attended the symposium and during his stay with Leary. He wrote 'Dear Brion: the scene here is really frantic. Leary has gone beserk. He is giving mushrooms to hat check girls, cab drivers, waiters, in fact anyone who will stand still for it'.⁸⁸ This was not what Burroughs had expected based on Leary's Harvard connections and the references in his earlier letters to Huxley and Schultes.

Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg on 26 October with a harsh critique of Leary and his work, stating that he has 'severed all connections with Leary and his project which seems to me completely ill intentioned'. He wrote that 'they have utterly no interest in any serious scientific work, no equipment other than a faulty tape recorder and no

⁸⁷ Burroughs to Gysin 25 August 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁸⁸ Burroughs to Gysin, no date, File C-37, BP NYPL.

intention of acquiring or making any equipment available to me'. This was an evident disappointment to Burroughs:

When I flatly refused to push the mushrooms but volunteered instead to work on flicker and other non chemical methods the money and return ticket they had promised me was immediately withdrawn. I received not one cent from Leary beyond the fare to Boston. And I hope never to set eyes on that horse's ass again. A real wrong number.⁸⁹

The paper that Burroughs gave at the symposium of the American Psychological Association articulated his divisive interest in the non-chemical production of altered states of mind. Although evidently contentious at the time for its diversion away from the subject of psilocybin and other psychoactive substances and its privileging of non-chemical alternatives, Burroughs' paper 'Points of Distinction between Sedative and Consciousness-expanding Drugs', which was later published in the December 1964 edition of *Evergreen Review* and in *LSD: The Consciousness-Expanding Drug* (1964), is an important accompaniment to his work of this period. Contained within it are clear indications of the role of psychoactive substances in the development of his experimental work.

He begins the paper with an examination of the word 'drug' which he observes 'activates a reflex of fear, disapproval and prurience in Western nervous systems' and he delivers a critique of the lack of attention awarded to the distinctions between these chemical substances:

The American narcotics department has bracketed substances with opposite psychological effect as narcotic drugs. Morphine is actually an antidote for cocaine poisoning. Cannabis is a hallucinogen drug with no chemical or psychological affinity to either cocaine or

⁸⁹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 26 October 1961, GC Columbia.

morphine. Yet cocaine, morphine and cannabis are all classified as “narcotic drugs.”⁹⁰

He then proceeds to outline the differences between opiates as addictive sedative drugs which suppress awareness, and hallucinogens as consciousness-expanding substances which increase awareness. Burroughs’ criticism of generalising terms such as ‘narcotics’ which when ‘used in such a loose fashion it has no useful precision of meaning’, and his emphasis upon the distinction between substances should inform our own critical readings of his work. As I have argued in this study, opiates and psychoactive substances have had very different influences upon his work, demanding a more detailed discussion of their effects and impact.

The most important aspect of this essay is Burroughs’ discussion of the longer term effects of psychoactive substances and the relationship between their prolonged influence and his own work:

Colors and sounds gain an intense meaning and many insights carry over after the drug effects have worn off. Under the influence of mescaline I have had the experience of seeing a painting for the first time and found later that I could see the painting without using the drug. The same insights into music or the beauty of an object ordinarily ignored carry over so that that one exposure to a powerful consciousness-expanding drug often conveys a permanent increase in the range of experience. Mescaline transports the user to unexplored psychic areas, and he can often find the way back without a chemical guide.⁹¹

Burroughs argues that the effects of *yagé*, mescaline or LSD are not limited to the length of the chemical experience. I suggested earlier that his work with cut-ups and his experiments with mescaline and DMT brought about the re-cognition of an altered

⁹⁰ Burroughs, ‘Points of Distinction between Sedative and Consciousness-expanding Drugs’, *Evergreen Review*, 8.34 (December 1964), p.72.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.73.

state of consciousness that was similar to the *yagé* experience, and this statement on the long term effects of these substances reinforces my sense that these chemical and non-chemical stimulants all enabled Burroughs to reach a similar ‘area’ of altered consciousness. His experiments with psychoactive substances and with cut-ups were not singular experiences but rather an ongoing and related exploration of similar territory. His work with cut-ups and his use of mescaline enabled a return to a *yagé*-like alteration of consciousness, a ‘trip home’,⁹² or a non-chemical means to ‘find the way back’.

In the essay Burroughs turns his attention to the possibility of obtaining the effects of consciousness-expanding drugs ‘without any chemical agent’. He declares that ‘[a]nything that can be done chemically can be done in other ways, given sufficient knowledge of the mechanisms involved’,⁹³ and presents two examples:

The use of consciousness-expanding drugs could show the way to obtain the useful aspects of hallucinogen experience without any chemical agent. Anything that can be done chemically can be done in other ways, given sufficient knowledge of the mechanisms involved. Recently a Cambridge dentist has extracted teeth with no other anesthetic than music through head phones. The patient was instructed to turn up the volume if he experienced any pain. The consciousness-expanding experience has been produced by flicker, that is, rhythmic light flashes in the retinae at the rate of from ten to twenty-five flashes per second.⁹⁴

Burroughs refers to his own experimental work as agents for consciousness alteration:

‘I am able to achieve the same results by nonchemical means: flicker, music through head phones, cutups and foldins of my texts, and especially by training myself to

⁹² Burroughs to Ginsberg 30 October 1959, GC Columbia.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.73

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.73.

think in association blocks instead of words'.⁹⁵ He expands on the idea that flicker 'could well lead to a *nonchemical* method of expanding consciousness and increasing awareness',⁹⁶ supporting his theory with references to the work of William Grey Walter. The quote that Burroughs selects from Walter's *The Living Brain* has clear relevance to his own exploration of replicating the experience of synaesthesia to induce a non-chemical expansion of consciousness:

The rhythmic series of flashes appeared to be breaking down of some of the physiological barriers between different regions of the brain. This meant that the stimulus of flicker received in the visual projection area of the cortex was breaking bounds, its ripples were overflowing into other areas.⁹⁷

Burroughs develops Walter's reference to the breaking down of the barriers between areas of mental activity to make his own observation that the experience of synaesthesia is a defining characteristic of the effects of psychoactive substances: 'it is precisely this overflow of the brain areas, hearing, colors, seeing sounds, and even odors that is a categorical characteristic of the consciousness-expanding drugs'.⁹⁸ It was this characteristic of the *yagé* and mescaline experience that he attempted to replicate in his work, believing that this one property could be the key to inducing an altered state of consciousness.

He also spoke of the problem of literary representations of the experience of psychoactive substances: 'the literature of mescaline and LSD abounds in such regrettably vague descriptions of visionary experiences'. The examples he refers to are extracted from the subject reports in Walter's *The Living Brain*, and he quotes:

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.74.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.73.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.73. Burroughs quotes from *The Living Brain* (1953). The quote can be found in W. Grey Walter, *The Living Brain*. London: Penguin, 1965, p.87.

“Lights like comets... Ultra unearthly colors, mental colors not deep visual ones...”⁹⁹ Burroughs’ recognition that these descriptions of the effects of an altered state of mind fail to communicate the experience, refers us back to his own practice and suggest why he worked towards replicating the effects of altered states of consciousness instead of pursuing the impossible task of describing such effects in his writing.

Having brought his experiments with DMT to a close in May 1961 Burroughs became fully committed to exploring these states in his work rather than through chemical stimulants. We can see this transformation take place in his letters to Gysin; after a period of describing the intense effects of DMT, his attention now turned to the non-chemical ‘effects’ that he could achieve using collage, photography and flicker. In a letter to Gysin dated 8 May 1961 he reports on his current practice of making and photographing collages of objects and collages of collage:

In my spare time have done a little experiment with collage. Make collage of photographs, drawings, newspapers etc. Now take picture of the collage. Now make collage of the picture. Take-cut-take-cut- you got it? Some interesting effects. For example take that Flash bulb camera I gave you take pictures of your paintings. Cut up and make collage from the photos. Take. Cut. Etc.¹⁰⁰

This potentially infinite act of making collage from collage involves two mediums (photography and collage) being alternately reworked through the other. He wrote on 13 May: ‘Here is another collage of collage to the Nth power’ and relates how immersed he has become in this work: ‘Since arriving in Tangier I have been working full time and now the place is littered with flash bulbs and negatives and magazine cut

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.73.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.73. W. Grey Walter, *The Living Brain*. 1953. London: Penguin, 1965, p.94. Walter Grey’s quote is taken from Margiad Evans, *A Ray of Darkness*. London: Arthur Barker, 1952. It records her experience of exposure to flicker.

outs'.¹⁰¹ In a letter composed a couple of days earlier Burroughs had added another medium to the activity by suggesting that his experiments with repetitive collage can be used in conjunction with Gysin's Dreamachine to further the mind-altering properties of each:

[I] enclose sample collage so you will dig the method and possibilities. Then make collage with pictures like the enclosed. Take pictures. Shift. Cut. Take etc. Stop at any time and line flicker paper with collage. Flicker. Flicker. Flicker. Flicker. Word Falling - Photo Falling - Break Through in Grey Room.¹⁰²

In this letter Burroughs indicates his interest in what might happen through combining the Dreamachine and photo collage, and at this time he is layering and juxtaposing as many forms and mediums as possible.

Writing to Gysin on 28 May 1961 Burroughs described his idea for 'a series on rubbing out the word. Starting with word into symbols into colors'.¹⁰³ This was an extension of their 'rub out the word' project, but his experiments with the colour line walks and colour alphabet had enabled him to evaluate more precisely what could be done with these shifts between symbol, words and colour. An appreciation of this *yagé* aesthetic of synaesthetic shifts is not possible without examining this work as a whole and noting its multimedia intersections. In his letter to Gysin of 28 May Burroughs wrote that these works and practices are *active* agents, that 'something happens when you take pictures of pictures of pictures'.¹⁰⁴ When Burroughs wrote his *yagé*-inspired letter of 10 July 1953 and when he began working with cut-ups and tape cut-ups he was excited by what happened in the process and he judged the success of the practice on its power to achieve the non-chemical altered state of mind.

¹⁰⁰ Burroughs to Gysin 8 May 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

¹⁰¹ Burroughs to Gysin 13 May 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

¹⁰² Burroughs to Gysin 11 May 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

¹⁰³ Burroughs to Gysin 28 May 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

Burroughs' letters to Gysin after 1961 continue to document his experimental practice, from his use of coloured inks and the three column format in the letters of 1964 to his descriptions of the experiments conducted with Ian Sommerville using tape recorders in those of 1966. On 1 August of that year he wrote that he was 'experimenting with a method I call 'writer participation' which involves the writer directly and immediately in his narrative':

For example if one of my characters goes to Boots at midnight I go there and in most cases make recordings and take movie footage with my Eumig Super 8 camera as well. I also make scrap book markups of the action.¹⁰⁵

This description of his practice confirms that experience and process still remained central to his work. As he states in this letter: 'Most of what I have found out cannot be put in words and has derived from actual handling of the material. Hours of work on the recorders, scrap books, ecetera'.

After 1961 Burroughs continued to work with film, tape recorders, scrapbooks, collage and photography and in the following chapters I will be looking at how he sought to find appropriate mediums for the dissemination and reception of this work dealing with the non-chemical alteration of consciousness. His *yagé* aesthetic demanded a medium that would allow for the work to be *experienced* and that would invite engagement with the practices he was exploring. He discovered that avant-garde techniques such as collaboration and collage and the avant-garde medium of the little magazine provided a means to bring the experience of the work to the forefront.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Burroughs to Gysin 1 August 1966, File C-37, BP NYPL.

Chapter 6

Burroughs' *Yagé* Aesthetic And the Avant-garde Aesthetic of the Little Magazine

I have argued that the experience of *yagé* may have influenced the development of Burroughs' writing and his interest in art as the non-chemical replication of altered states of mind. Through a reading of his letters to Gysin I have already given an indication of some of the experiments in which he was engaged such as the colour line walks and photo collage. In the following two chapters I will continue to explore how the replication of the experience of an altered state of consciousness was a central concern in both Burroughs' and Gysin's work. The techniques they adopted drew heavily upon avant-garde strategies including collage, collaboration, and activities that necessitated audience participation. Avant-garde practices have a history of purposeful disruption of the commercial processes of publishing, exhibiting and disseminating art and literature. The result for Burroughs has been the non-publication or alternative (little magazine and small press) publication of much of his work from 1958 to 1965, contributing further to the critical neglect of the influence of *yagé* and other psychoactive substances upon the development of his work of this period.

In the following chapters I look at different aspects of the relationship between Burroughs' adoption of avant-garde strategies in his development of a *yagé* aesthetic and the representation of his work of this period in publication, beginning here with his contributions to little magazines. The final chapter focuses on his work produced through collaboration and I explore how viewing the work in an avant-garde context

can guide our reading of the place of the published text in Burroughs' multimedia experiments. My main concern is to show how Burroughs' ambition to produce material that enabled the experiencing of altered states of mind led him to a synaesthetic practice of working across various media and privileging action and experience as essential elements in his writing and art.

Much of Burroughs' experimental work of the 1960s exists outside commercial book publication, but some of this work can be found in the little magazines of the time, and in small press publications. The most obvious conclusion that we might reach in examining this shift towards alternative forms of dissemination is that the experimental nature of the work prohibited conventional publication and therefore he had little choice but to publish outside the mainstream. However this assumption places Burroughs in a passive role in regard to the circulation and reception of his work. In Barry Miles' account of this period he suggests that the difficulty of publishing his experimental material may have been perceived as a 'problem' by his publishers but not by Burroughs himself:

The experiments with three-column texts, collaged photographs, tape recording cut-ups and scrapbooks continued for years, to the general dismay of his publishers, who had found the cut-up novels very hard to sell. The new material was virtually impossible to publish: the literary material was very graphic and often used colour. It would have had to be printed as an art book to do it justice. The tape mutations were unmarketable, as the tape cassette had only just been invented, and it would be a long time before films could be distributed on video. However, Bill did not seem to worry that nothing he produced had much commercial value.¹

Not only did he 'not seem to worry' about the commercial viability of his work, he actively embraced alternative means and mediums of circulation. I propose that his

¹ Miles (1993), p.174.

work in the little magazines of the 1960s provides evidence of his active and collaborative engagement with contemporary countercultural art and poetry scenes and their strategies of non-commercial publication.

Burroughs continued to consistently publish material in the novel form with *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express*.² Unfortunately this distinction between the work published as novels and the material that was published in little magazines, or recorded in or on other media, has determined the reception of Burroughs' work. The cut-up novels have come to be seen as representative of this period of work for the reason that they have been, and continue to be, available as published books. In contrast many of Burroughs' shorter pieces and experiments in different media have not been available in such an accessible format and consequently have received far less attention. Critical reception has been influenced by this circumstance, what Oliver Harris refers to as 'that most pragmatic of constraints; namely, the commercial availability of textual materials', noting that '[c]ritical attention to the cut-up trilogy inevitably reflects that availability'.³

Jennie Skerl's approach in her study of Burroughs to this issue of the relationship between the 'novels' and the work circulated in different formats illustrates the problem that this has posed for Burroughs scholars. She states that 'I confine my detailed analysis to Burroughs's novels and discuss other works only when they shed light upon themes and techniques in the novels'. Skerl then points out that this inevitably 'falsifies the nature of his work' and that 'his fictions cannot be

² Although I believe that the term 'novel' is not an accurate description of *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express*, I have used the term here in reference to their history of being identified as novels in critical writings on Burroughs and their presentation by publishers as 'cut-up novels'.

³ Oliver Harris, 'Cutting up Politics' in Schneiderman and Walsh, pp.178-179.

conveniently classified into major and minor works'. Despite acknowledging the problems of focussing primarily on the novels, she concludes that 'Burroughs's own decision to publish novels through major publishing houses does lend authority to this approach'.⁴ Book publication evidently carries more weight in critical readings of Burroughs' work even though he made the 'decision' to present work in little magazines, on tape and film and in performance, with the novel representing only one of these many formats.

Burroughs recognised at the time that this division of his work would be enforced by the publishing industry. In a letter to Ginsberg dated 10 November 1960 he spoke of his writing and his plans for publication and makes a clear distinction between material published in books and in little magazines. He wrote of his shorter experimental work: 'it is not quite suitable for sale through ordinary channels so I am thinking in terms of the no-paying far-out magazines like *Yugen* and *Kulchur*'. He then writes of his current projects for commercial publication. This material is aimed instead at a paying outlet and will go through the conventional routes of an agent and large publisher: 'I have an agent in New York now name of Barthold Fles. I have asked him to try and get me an advance on next novel which is only a problem of putting it together rewriting and editing'.⁵

The cut-up novels and Burroughs' experiments across different media work *together*, meaning that a much richer sense of his output of this period is gained by exposure to both the novels and the work in non-book format. As Barry Miles notes, '[i]deally one would read the cut-up trilogy with Burroughs' cut-up tapes playing in the background,

⁴ 'Preface' in Skerl (1985), no pagination is given in the preface.

⁵ Burroughs to Ginsberg 10 November 1960, GC Columbia.

taking time off occasionally to examine a photo-collage or play *Towers Open Fire* or *The Cut Ups*'.⁶ Unfortunately these two bodies of work are unequally represented in literary history. Although this is beginning to be revised by the potential that the internet offers to make this work available,⁷ for nearly forty years this distinction in format and publication has led to his novels of the 1960s gaining critical recognition whilst his experimental work remains invisible due to issues of circulation.

I begin by looking at the material by Burroughs published in little magazines of the 1960s. We see that many of the ideas that he was experimenting with at this time, particularly those concerned with the active engagement of the reader or audience in cut-up and collage experiments, were also being explored within alternative poetry and art scenes, making the magazines associated with these movements ideally suited for his work. Burroughs' period of experimentation coincided with the Mimeograph Revolution. This was the name given to the proliferation of non-commercial magazines produced using offset or mimeograph machines and circulated in defiance of the values supported by mainstream publishers. In the following I examine the results of this co-incidence which are found in the hand-printed mimeographed publications such as Ed Sanders' *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, Aram Saroyan's *Lines* and Jeff Nuttall's *My Own Mag*. In these magazines the relationship between content and format enables Burroughs' experimental pieces to 'work' in a way that book publication denies.

⁶ Miles (1993), p.166.

⁷ Examples include realitystudio's posting of audio and visual material and digital copies of small publication and little magazine work (<http://realitystudio.org>) and Ubuweb's sound and film archives which include recordings made by Burroughs and Gysin (<http://www.ubu.com>). As more and more archived material becomes accessible through the internet, this invites a re-evaluation of Burroughs' work beyond what remains in print.

As I have already suggested, the internet will potentially enable greater access to Burroughs' unpublished material and encourage critical recognition of his multimedia experimental work. Jed Birmingham's writings on Burroughs' work in little magazines on the realitystudio website are an excellent example of how this is beginning to take place. Since 2008 Jed Birmingham has been developing digital archives of some of the little magazines in which Burroughs was published as well as providing commentaries on the history of each magazine and information on the writers, editors and publishers involved. Approaching the subject as a book collector and a critical reader of Burroughs, his work is informed by a profound knowledge of publishing history and of the relationship between small press publishers and the art and literary scenes of the 1960s.

Of course we need to acknowledge some of the problems inherent in the digitalisation of this material. The tactile quality of the little magazine is an essential part of its rough aesthetic and this quality cannot survive translation to a computer screen. To understand how these publications differ from mainstream books, the reader needs to handle and experience the material as a physical entity. However, aside from these issues of materiality, digitalisation does promote increased awareness of Burroughs' work in magazines, and hopefully Birmingham's digitalisation and bibliographic review of this material will result in far greater critical attention to his work in this format, for as I aim to demonstrate in this chapter, an examination of these texts opens up many alternative readings that challenge those prescribed by commercial book publication.⁸

⁸ Although I have been able to consult copies of *My Own Mag*, *Fuck You*, *Floating Bear*, *Lines*, *Yugen*, *Kulchur* and many other little magazines in the British Library, I have not had access to more obscure publications such as *Insect Trust Gazette*, and Jed Birmingham's descriptions of these magazines and their contents within 'The Bibliographic Bunker' section of the realitystudio website have been enormously valuable.

Researching the Little Magazine as an Alternative Medium

Olympia Press and Grove Press represented the alternative side of mainstream publishing; they were willing to take risks with new material, and to face the consequences of the censorship of their books. It was these attributes which assured the publication of *Naked Lunch* and the novels that followed. But Olympia and Grove were only alternative *within* the mainstream. In contrast, the little magazines represent an alternative to the commercial industry of book publication, and therefore the presence of Burroughs' work in this context must necessarily be viewed in terms of an alternative medium. Some consideration must be given to the question of how to construct a critical approach to this art form. What characteristics define the little magazine as 'alternative' to large publishers, and how do we incorporate these factors into a study of their content and their place in Burroughs' work? The modernist little magazine has been the subject of much of the best research on this issue of constructing a critical approach.⁹ However, the attention to the theoretical and methodological issues of magazine research within these studies is of equal relevance to the later little magazines of the 1960s.

Researchers working on the little magazine agree that the main differences between the aims and activities of small and large presses relate to the values they place on financial interests and mainstream culture. In attempting to define what constitutes a 'little magazine', the characteristic most frequently cited is its non-commercial status. That these magazines are not produced for profit, is intrinsically related to their

⁹ See for example Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie, eds, *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*. Yonkers: The Pushcart Press, 1978; Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible, eds, *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007; Suzanne W. Churchill, *The Little Magazine Others and the Renovation of Modern American Poetry*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.

content, it is because they print experimental and new material that they cannot be commercial, but it is this very characteristic that allows such material to be printed and that enables a freedom not shared by larger presses. This relationship between freedom and non-profit is described by Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie in *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Document*:

Little magazines generally put experiment before ease, and art before comment. They can afford to do so because they can barely “afford” to do anything; in other words, as a rule they do not, and cannot, expect to make money. Consequently, the ways in which they appeal to their readers need not be coercive, stylistically uniform, or categorically topical, as the ways of commercial presses must be.¹⁰

The fact that little magazines and small presses are removed from the conventional commercial relationship between writer, publisher and reader, influences not only what values determine the chosen content, but even, as Anderson and Kinzie state, the style and aesthetic of the publication and considerations of whether the magazine is coherent as a whole, whether it is ‘stylistically uniform’, or ‘categorically topical’.

The freedom of the little magazine to experiment with juxtaposition has been applied not only to written content but also to the relationship between text and image. Little magazines have a history of including visual as well as written material. As David Miller and Dick Ellis observe, it was in the magazines of the early twentieth century such as *Blast*, *Dada* and *391*, that this became a dominant feature of the format, demonstrating a developing ‘concern with the page as a visual field and letters and words as visual elements within that field’.¹¹ The little magazines could explore this

¹⁰ Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie, ‘Prefatory Note’ in Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie, eds, *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*. Yonkers: The Pushcart Press, 1978, pp.3-4.

¹¹ David Miller and R. J. Ellis, *little magazines/small presses/image and text: an exhibition*. London: Poetry Library, 2001, p.2.

relationship between text and image as potentially conflicting, jarring or contradictory. This is in contrast to mainstream publication where the pressure of commercial interests dictates that visual and written material is presented as complementary, producing a conventionally 'attractive' rather than a jarring aesthetic.

Within these studies it is argued that little magazines are very different from other forms of published material. Implicit in this argument is the proposal that a distinct critical approach must be adopted when researching little magazines. In the article 'The Rise of Periodical Studies', Sean Latham and Robert Scholes argue that the contents must be examined in reference to the medium of the magazine. They claim that in many literary studies the lack of attention awarded to circumstances of publication has resulted in articles being studied in isolation:

While individual scholars or students might be able to mine these sources for a narrow range of materials relating to their fields, they are rarely in a position to say much about the periodical as a whole. As a consequence, we have often been too quick to see magazines merely as containers of discrete bits of information rather than autonomous objects of study.¹²

Their proposal is that we study the magazine as a whole, and 'recognize its coherence as a cultural object'.¹³ The magazine is not simply a collection of separate articles; it is a specific medium that results from collaboration between writers, editors, and artists. Latham and Scholes cite Judith Yarros Lee's argument 'that periodicals differ substantially from other publications and that these differences call for new approaches to publications' history and criticism - approaches distinct from operations

¹² Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, 'The Rise of Periodical Studies', *PMLA*, 121.2 (March 2006), pp.517-518.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.528.

conducted as literary criticism or journalism history'.¹⁴ They argue that periodicals should be researched as 'collaborative objects, assembled in complex interactions between editors, authors, advertisers, sales agents, and even readers'.¹⁵

David Miller and Richard Price share this view of the little magazine as a distinct format: 'The little magazine is, we would argue, a kind of artistic form in itself. The art of the editor is always a collaborative, commissioning but coercive art'.¹⁶ Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible, in *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*, draw upon Latham and Scholes' work. They take the idea of periodicals as 'rich, dialogic texts'¹⁷ to suggest that what we are witness to in the study of little magazines is a 'conversation'. Following through with this idea, they propose that in early twentieth-century magazines we find 'a record of the large-scale conversation that became modernism':¹⁸

By reading little magazines carefully, we can see how they set the stage for surprising collaborative efforts, wove webs of interaction and influence, set trends, established and ruined reputations, and shaped the course of modernism.¹⁹

Once we begin to give recognition to the status of little magazines as collaborative efforts, we also become involved in a debate concerning the relationship that the writer bears to the magazine. Latham and Scholes suggest that what motivates a writer to publish in magazines is very different from the incentives which lead to book publication with larger publishers, and therefore the collaborative relationships

¹⁴ Latham and Scholes quote from Judith Yarros Lee, 'The Future of American Periodicals', *American Periodicals*, 15.2 (2005), p.197.

¹⁵ Latham and Scholes, p.529.

¹⁶ David Miller and Richard Price, *British Poetry Magazines 1914-2000: A History and Bibliography of 'Little Magazines'*. London: The British Library, 2006, p.xiii.

¹⁷ Latham and Scholes, p.528.

¹⁸ Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible, 'introduction' in Churchill and McKible, eds, *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, p.5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.18.

formed between writer, editor and publisher are also of a very different nature. This can often be disregarded when articles are researched without reference to the context and format of the magazine, which ‘tends to blind us to the ways in which individual contributors may have seen themselves as part of a larger enterprise’.²⁰

How did Burroughs view his involvement with little magazines as ‘part of a larger enterprise’? This question forces us to view Burroughs’ inclusion in *My Own Mag* or *Lines* not simply as publishing opportunities, but as a decision to circulate specific experimental work in a very particular medium and context. If the little magazine is a ‘dialogic text’ then Burroughs’ contributions are voiced in reference to the format, politics and aesthetics of the magazine and in dialogue with his fellow contributors and collaborators. That the little magazine is synonymous with the freedom to experiment would of course have been attractive to Burroughs at a time when his work required a suitably sympathetic medium. Added to this is the history that the little magazine has as a site for experimentation with the relationship between imagery and text, and as a medium which treats the page ‘as a visual field’.²¹ This suited Burroughs’ work of the 1960s as he became involved in examining the visual characteristics of language, working with glyphs and the assemblage of text and image.

As Anderson and Kinzie have observed, the little magazine did not need to be stylistically uniform; it could present an incoherent collection of work, and juxtapose material that conflicted in style or subject. In these magazines, Burroughs’ cut-ups and collage material form part of a larger cut-up, collaborating with the magazine in a

²⁰ Latham and Scholes, p.529.

²¹ Miller and Ellis, p.2.

joint critique of mainstream media. This critique is delivered both by his work and by the editor of the magazine by refusing to present material that has been smoothly and coherently arranged. Most media strive to convey the impression that they are neutral vessels for their content by adopting the disguise of a uniform style. The mimeograph magazines such as *Fuck You* and *My Own Mag* attempted to undermine that impression by making the reader aware of the magazine as an edited and collaboratively produced assemblage.

Burroughs saw the little magazine as an ideal form for cut-ups. He wrote to Gysin on 15 August 1960 about a new little magazine that he imagined could provide a perfect medium for this work:

A new magazine is coming out in New Orleans called *The Outsider*. I project to make the first issue a cut up issue. I am writing to suggest this and to submit cut-ups which I am now preparing.²²

He added: '[n]o money but definitely worth doing I think'. Writing to Gysin several days later he stated that he had sent some material off to *The Outsider* 'with explanations and illustrations of cut up method.'²³ Although Burroughs' idea for a 'cut-up issue' of *Outsider* was never realised, his work was included in many issues of the magazine. It is letters such as these, in which Burroughs discusses his plans for little magazine publication, that his enthusiasm for the medium and its suitability for cut-up material is clearly defined.²⁴

²² Burroughs to Gysin 15 August 1960, File C-37, BP NYPL.

²³ Burroughs to Gysin 21 August 1960, File C-37, BP NYPL.

²⁴ Also contained in the correspondence files of the William S. Burroughs Papers at the New York Public Library are letters from Burroughs to editors and publishers of other little magazines including Ted Berrigan, Ed Sanders and Jeff Nuttall which attest to the extent of Burroughs' active involvement with this medium.

Both Burroughs' work and the little magazine draw the reader's attention to how juxtaposition functions in print media by themselves presenting difficult juxtapositions in their material. He worked towards generating a critical awareness of how our readings of the content of print media are dictated and influenced by the form, and he did so by conducting extensive experiments using the newspaper format, and by cutting-up or making collages with newspapers and with radio recordings. In the little magazine he was able to carry his newspaper experiments further; by placing this work within a medium that was both alternative to and yet visually reminiscent of mainstream print media, his use of the newspaper format is all the more striking.

These similarities suggest an active relationship between the form of the magazine and the content and form of Burroughs' work, but there are also the 'webs of interaction and influence' that can be read in the relationship between the work included in each issue. Little magazines are often produced by writers or artists, and the associations between contributors, editors, distributors and readers, are ones formed through personal acquaintance, collaboration and shared political and creative ambitions. For this reason a magazine maps out a scene as it was in a certain time and place. We find this in issues of *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, which with its references to poetry readings, cafes, bookshops and the close friendships between contributors, describes the alternative New York poetry scene. Researching these magazines forty years later we can often be surprised by the personal and creative connections between writers or cultural figures that have since become segregated through the assignation of writers to categories of genre and nationality.

A selection of Burroughs' magazine texts were published in *The Burroughs File* in 1984. *The Burroughs File* makes this work available to a much wider readership, and

in his introductory notes James Grauerholz emphasises the quantity and importance of these texts by stating that ‘Burroughs’ principal literary output between 1962 and 1969 appeared in these obscure places’.²⁵ But unfortunately a great deal is lost by extracting these pieces from the context of little magazine publication. Not only does each text become isolated from the surrounding work of other writers and of the editor, but it is also extracted from the aesthetic context. To take a text from a magazine and reprint it in a book is a drastic transformation of medium. Everything from the paper, the print methods, and the quality of production to the commercial retail of the publication is different, as will be the experience of reading these texts.

David Miller and Richard Price, writing on little magazines as resources for literary history, propose that a study of the contents and contexts of magazines can act to challenge the labels and generic classifications that become attached to a writer’s work:

Little magazines are also a marker of milieu. For instance, a survey of literary taste for a particular period can be made by analysing who was published where, a process which tests under the pressure of evidence later assertions and remembrances of movements and schools.²⁶

In the case of Burroughs, reviewing his work in the context of little magazines highlights associations between his concerns and those of other contemporary writers, opening up new perspectives on his writing, and thereby releasing it from the constraints of such dominant critical frameworks as ‘Beat literature’ and ‘American literature’. These magazines describe a literary history that is different to that found within critical studies; they depict a scene which includes editors, publishers and

²⁵ James Grauerholz, ‘Some Introductory Notes’ in William S. Burroughs, *The Burroughs File*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1984, p.10.

²⁶ Miller and Price, p.xii.

writers now forgotten as well as the critically acclaimed, and figures on the periphery of literary activity. References to this full scene of literary production and publication are stripped from a text when it is published in book form, but by studying the little magazines of the period, this context can be reconstructed.

Burroughs and the Mimeograph Magazines

In 2008 Christopher Harter produced *An Author Index to Little Magazines of the Mimeograph Revolution, 1958-1980* in order to confront what he perceived as the neglect of this period; he observes in the introduction that ‘scholarship on little magazines is just beginning to address the significance of little magazines that originated during the era of the Mimeograph Revolution’.²⁷ The term Mimeograph Revolution has been adopted to describe the increase in the output of little magazines and in small press activity that resulted from the deployment of the mimeograph machine and offset printing to cheaply produce publications. This enabled material to be printed quickly and for very little money, production characteristics of the mimeo magazines which contributed to its distinctly rough aesthetic.

In *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing 1960-1980*, Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips identify the introduction of the mimeograph machine and wider access to duplicating technology and offset as central to the growing activity of marginal communities of writers who existed outside mainstream publication and distribution channels:

²⁷ Christopher Harter, *An Author Index to Little Magazines of the Mimeograph Revolution, 1958-1980*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008, p.vii.

Direct access to mimeograph machines, letterpress, and inexpensive offset made these publishing ventures possible, putting the means of production in the hands of the poet. In a very real sense, almost anyone could become a publisher. For the price of a few reams of paper and a handful of stencils, a poet could produce, by mimeograph, a magazine or booklet in a small edition over the course of several days.²⁸

As Christopher Harter observes, the use of the term *Mimeograph Revolution* to describe this movement refers not only to increased access to the means of production, but also to the attitude behind the publication of these magazines and the growth of small presses, a revolutionary attitude fuelled by opposition to changes that were occurring in mainstream publishing:

The lower costs of printing technologies led to a “do-it-yourself” aesthetic, which was, in many ways, the polar opposite of the era’s increasingly corporate business-model idea in mainstream publishing, ranging from notions of book design to methods of distribution and advertising. The Mimeograph Revolution was, indeed, a revolution in the printing and circulation of contemporary writing.²⁹

Ed Sanders’ description of the printing and distribution of *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* reveals how the alternative circulation of material could be achieved by removing the need for printers, publishers and booksellers:

I began typing stencils, and had an issue out within a week. I bought a small mimeograph machine, and installed it in my pad on East 11th, hand-cranking and collating 500 copies, which I gave away free wherever I wandered.³⁰

The differences between the little magazines and mainstream publishers influenced how their publications were produced, how they would be received and their duration. Whereas mainstream publishing works slowly to establish itself in the long term, little

²⁸ Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980*. New York: The New York Public Library and Granary Books, 1998, p.vii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.vii.

³⁰ Clay and Phillips attribute the following date and place to this quote from Sanders: ‘Woodstock, New York, October 1997’, in Clay and Phillips, p.167.

magazines emerge with spontaneity to short-term needs in the distribution and exchange of material. Michael Basinski describes these alternative methods and ambitions of publishing as directly related to their being 'short lived', as a result 'mimeo publishing was passionately aggressive, hot publishing'.³¹

This speed with which little magazines and small presses could print and distribute material was one of the advantages that these mimeo publications of the 1950s and 1960s held over the larger commercial publishers. As we have seen, the book publication of much of Burroughs' work was marked by substantial delays, a slow process that was exacerbated by the obscene and experimental content of the material. In contrast, working with the little magazines, really was for Burroughs and other writers 'a quick way to get work out'.³²

The little magazines were able to fulfill a different function and one that is comparable to that of the newsletter or pamphlet, owing, as Daniel Kane states, to the 'urgency' of their medium:

The mimeograph in particular allowed for speedy, cheap reproduction. That speediness lent mimeographed material an urgency allusive of newspaper "extras." Mimeos contained breaking news of the poetry world, serving as carriers of fresh and vital information.³³

The little magazine enabled Burroughs to present cut-ups and collages that would then be published and disseminated at a pace that highlighted their direct reference to the content of contemporary media. His description of the piece 'Fluck you Fluck you Fluck you' published in *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* indicates how the medium

³¹ Michael Basinski, 'Preface' in Harter, p.v.

³² Clay and Phillips, p.14.

³³ Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p.57.

was suited to the publication of his 'present time' work:

I enclose a short contribution which I hope is suitable for your magazine. The format is three column newspaper and should be preserved if possible. I have long felt that writers should write in present time that is with reference to what is happening right now so the enclosed selection was composed with headphones and a radio mixing what came through with the texts I had selected as suitable for your magazine.³⁴

The speed with which the little magazines could be produced enabled the rapid exchange of material and ideas. This response came not only from the literary and poetry community, but also from artists and musicians who read the magazines and were conducting experiments along similar lines. At the same time that the little magazine was being adopted as an alternative form in which to disseminate writing, artists, musicians and filmmakers were also discovering alternative arenas in which to present and perform their work including Happenings, poetry readings and performances in alternative spaces. Researching these magazines of the 1960s alerts us to the connections that existed between those working in different art forms; they reveal how ideas were moving across mediums, and as newsletters they present a history of readings, exhibitions, performances and social relationships that suggests how this exchange of ideas was transpiring.

At a time when mainstream publishers were restricted by the technological and financial limitations imposed by traditional printing methods, small presses were able to print quite complex material using the mimeograph machine or offset. These printing methods enabled handwritten text, typed text or drawings to be as easily reproduced as conventional typeset. As a result many of the pieces printed in *Fuck*

³⁴ 'Notes on Contributors' that accompanies Burroughs' piece 'Fluck you Fluck you Fluck you', *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, 5.7 (September 1964), no pagination.

You or *My Own Mag* are reproduced in manuscript format as handwritten or typed text, sometimes bearing handwritten alterations, additions, and notes. This communicates a strong impression of the production of the work and the immediacy with which it is being conveyed from writer to reader. The inconsistency of typography gives emphasis to the magazine's status as an assemblage and introduces a tension into the form, a visual tension between the different style and presentation of each article as entities within the magazine.

The non-commercial status of the mimeo magazine and therefore the necessity of working with a very small budget resulted in these magazines developing a particular aesthetic. This aesthetic was characterised by its handmade look, cheap paper and binding (frequently stapled together) and an inconsistency of style. This crude assemblage format was celebrated and emphasised by magazines such as *Fuck You* and *My Own Mag* because it embodied the attitude of the magazine and made a statement against the false neutrality implied by the clean production of other print mediums. Daniel Kane uses the term 'sloppy'³⁵ to describe the aesthetic of the mimeograph magazine, a term that successfully references its fluidity as a medium open to all art forms and experimentation, as well as its production values. In the case of work by writers such as Burroughs, this raw collage aesthetic increased the impact and communication of its content. When we compare Burroughs' work in these little magazines to the cut-up novels of the 1960s, it is evident that the aesthetic of *Lines*, *Fuck You*, or *My Own Mag*, with their exposure of process and practice, contribute to a very different experience of reading and appreciating his work with cut-ups and collage.

³⁵ Kane, p.xvii.

The publication of pages from Burroughs' scrapbooks in the little magazine *Lines* illustrates how successfully his work could be reproduced in this format. *Lines* was published and edited by the poet Aram Saroyan in New York during 1964 and 1965. In his own poetry Saroyan was exploring the same territory as many of the visual poets or concrete poets, looking at the visual characteristics of language in terms of the structure and form of the poem upon the page. *Lines*, as with most little magazines, mainly featured poetry, but Burroughs' piece communicates well in this context, revealing many similarities between his work and the poetry of the time.

The May 1965 fifth issue of *Lines* reproduces one single page and a double spread of Burroughs' scrapbook work and with great success duplicates the physical 'scrapbook' character of the piece (fig.28).³⁶ These printed pages in *Lines* reproduce the texture of the collage - the tactile quality of the work as assemblage, the physical juxtaposition of photographs, gridded notebook paper, newspaper and typewritten text. If we compare these pages to the professional publication of other scrapbook material in *The Third Mind* and *The Paris Review*, we can see how their impact is much stronger in the little magazine. The printed images in *The Third Mind* and *The Paris Review* do not reproduce the texture and detail of the original artwork and therefore they also fail to communicate their form as collage. Consequently the physical and visual impression is far weaker than in *Lines*. Researching the publication of Burroughs' work in the little magazines reveals how strongly the relationship between publication and reception is also influenced by issues of aesthetics and form. Printed publications have particular aesthetic and physical properties which may conflict with the character of the work and therefore influence

³⁶ Burroughs, untitled scrapbook work, *Lines*, 5 (May 1965), p.22-23.

REX MORRIS
 I MAKE UP MY MIND
 I WOULD LOVE TO
 A LONG TIME AGO
 DUNE CONQUER
 THIS ONE
 WARRING
 BROTHERS

REX MORRIS M.D.

It was a Monday November 16 when Rex Morgan M.D. parked his car in the vacant lot by the florist shop and let himself into his office by the side door. The mail and his appointment book for that day was laid out on the desk. Miss Jean Gail his nurse was as he knew having coffee in the drug store at the corner of Mary and Euclid. Bills, some pericostasis several doctor's samples. A new tranquilizer brought a crown to his handsome serious young face. He soon advised the tranquilizers of doubtful value. It just damps thing down and they stay the same underneath he would say. A product put out by a local chemical company called Apo-23 a synthesis of the spomorphine form-also, ten ampules and 50 oral tablets. Indicated in grip, anguish, anxiety states, acute drug intoxications and chronic addiction. The circular was in blue print with some passages in red for emphasis. A metabolic regulator useful in all cases of disturbed metabolism. It stimulates the Hypothalamus in such a way as to regulate the blood stream. Apo-23 has no sedative or addicting properties. Apo-23 is in the metabolic regulator Rex Morgan put the sample in a drawer and turned to his appointment book. Monday was always a busy day. He was preparing to leave the office for the hospital when he heard Miss Gail's voice in the reception room. "I'm sorry the doctor can't see you now. You will have to make an appointment." But this is an emergency call. The doctor opened the door and saw a young woman with long black hair and jeans. "Come in please" He decided that she must be a beatnik. Perhaps an addict. He did not approve of these people, but he was well intentioned. A young man of reserved judgements. "So what can I do for you?" "It's my old man got a MK O.D. of it." "An overdose of what?" said the doctor sharply. "Vif--Internal Freedom--ISD." "What are his symptoms?" "He's climbing the walls I left a friend holding him down." The doctor picked up his stethoscope, opened the side door and motioned the girl out ahead of him. Then half out the door he stopped as if an invisible hand had touched his shoulder. He went back and put the Apo-23 sample in his pocket.

DOCTOR ZEFF M.D.
 In favor of the spomorphine cure.

cup of tea at dawn's room with rose wall paper wind strikes cigarette ash on a table. That calm miracle of spomorphine dawn....

by the secret scores and the walk
 Que in Henricque

Phyllis' mother, having slipped in
 calls submission, "Now," he said, "I'll try God show them how ugly the Ugly American can be." (reprinted about the use of power. 32)

GALE-BIRD (M)
MAKE THE
STOCK

SO, HE TAKES OVER
 himself as proof of the universal. The way we like to see Hell yes bello Uglinees is foul and of course abscenity. We serve notice we want to hear pay talk now is coldy added with Luther.

So, he takes over
 himself as proof of the universal. The way we like to see Hell yes bello Uglinees is foul and of course abscenity. We serve notice we want to hear pay talk now is coldy added with Luther.

Quiet don't Think??
 Popping out of stage
 chief uniforms and
 chausses chattering
 hammers hate you
 hallelujahs, hallelujahs
 hallelujahs, hallelujahs
 Hallelujahs I hate you
 see yourer hallelujahs
 the bastards. Strip
 we know our enemy
 Vest army of any
 sused saboons.

ESSO

Bubble trouble!
 at the total weapon.
 And you can see the marks are wising up, standing wide open tomorrow.
 around in sudden groups and that mutter gets louder and

William Burroughs

Figure 28. Burroughs, untitled scrapbook work, Lines, 5 (May 1965).

its reception. The properties of print reproduction and book publication have disguised the extent to which the form, practice, and idea of collage lie at the very heart of Burroughs' work of the 1950s and 1960s. Collage is denatured by mainstream publication; printing destroys its aesthetic, dissolving the material juxtapositions in the process of reproduction. If we fail to read the work as collage, we will be missing the edges, the points of touching and grating that are such an important aspect of this form.

The hand-produced quality of the magazines echo the scrapbook aesthetic of Burroughs' material, reminding the reader of the cut-out and cut-up process involved in its production. Kane notes that because the mimeograph magazines drew attention to the circumstances of the work's production they 'tended to emphasize and underscore the very performativity of the poems themselves'.³⁷ As a result, the place of process in Burroughs' cut-ups and collage work is highlighted and the impact of the work *as* collage is foremost. The components that form Burroughs' scrapbook piece in *Lines* are clearly taken from different newspapers and journals, and they retain their status as crudely cut-out items, abstracted objects within the collage. For example if we look at the scrapbook reproduction on pages 22 and 23 of *Lines* 5 we see a photograph of soldiers carrying a wounded man, with an Esso advert pasted below and a cartoon strip to its side. The impact of this assemblage, with its juxtaposition of advertising, war and comic-strip humour, is more forceful because attention is drawn to their proximity by collage. These elements would normally coexist in a newspaper that segregates and categorises such content, but the shock of their juxtaposition is achieved by making explicit the materiality of their arrangement.

³⁷ Kane, p.58.

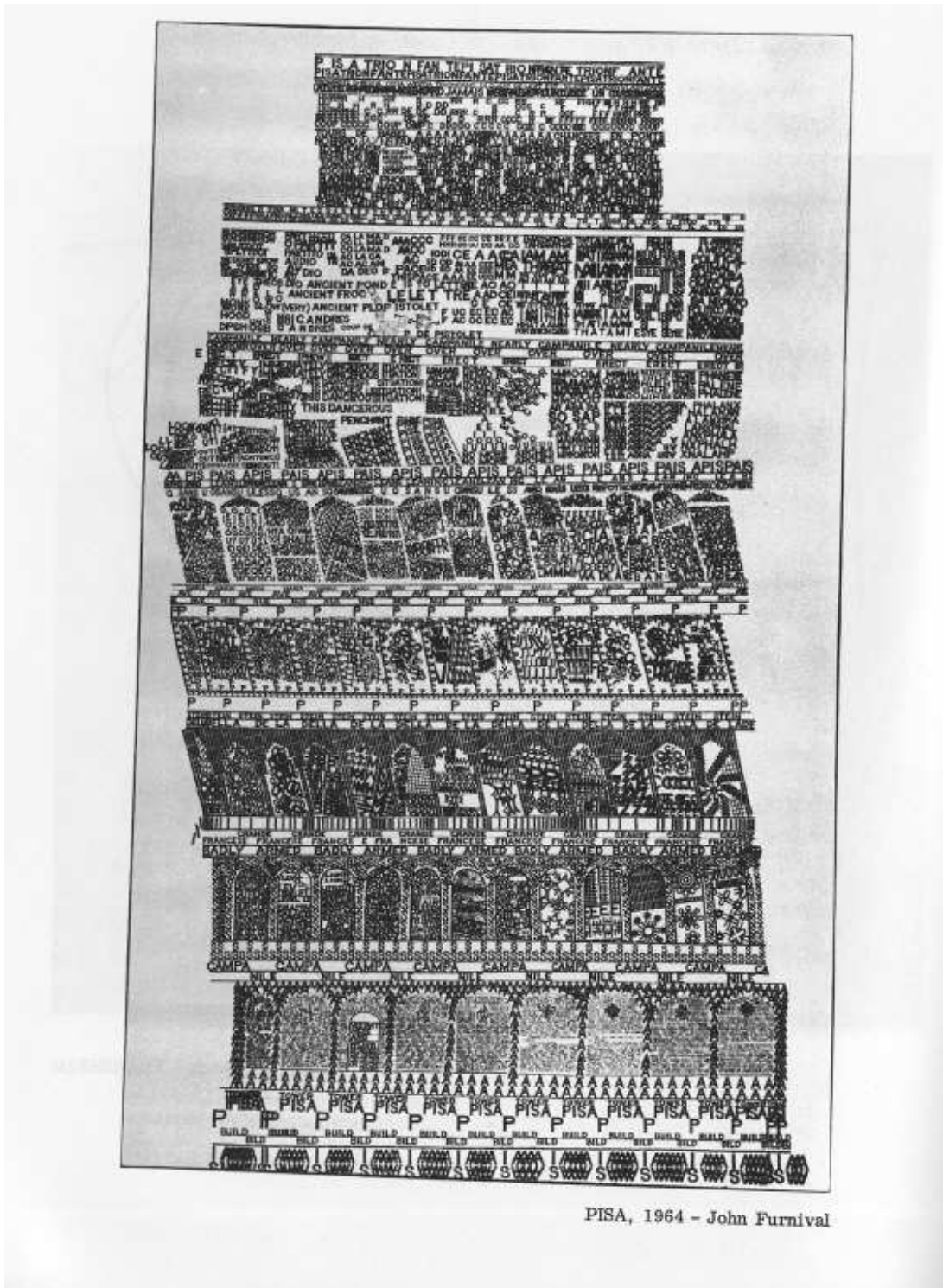
In contrast to this piece in *Lines*, the reproductions of pages of Burroughs' scrapbook work in professional book format acts to tame the character of the work, replacing the aesthetic of the scrapbook with that of the book.

In this same issue of *Lines* we find work by poets and artists that present many possible comparative critical contexts for Burroughs' scrapbook work. Issue 5 begins with Aram Saroyan's own poetry. Saroyan describes the minimalist poems that he was working on at this time as 'neurological transcriptions', expressions of 'the mind negotiating word by word toward some sort of understanding'.³⁸ Burroughs was also exploring how thought is directed and shaped by language. Based on the experience of altered states of consciousness, we have seen how his work carried this idea to further extremes, constructing synaesthetic exercises that sought not only to transcribe neurological activity, but to interrogate our learnt neurological patterns and habits, to shift the reader's thought associations from words to colour or other alternatives. In this issue Saroyan included poems such as 'eyeye' which, like Burroughs' experiments, leads the reader to recognise the visual character and impression of words, and stimulates a heightened awareness of the process of reading.

Burroughs' piece in *Lines* 6 is printed directly after the two poems 'Pisa' and 'The Fall of The Tower of Babel' (figs 29-30) by the British artist John Furnival whose work was connected with that of the concrete poets.³⁹ During the 1960s Furnival collaborated with Dom Sylvester Houédard and Ian Hamilton Finlay, and his work, like theirs, crossed the boundaries of literature and art. This quality of his work led to

³⁸ Interview with Aram Saroyan in *Dirt: A Journal of Minimalism*, 3 (2006), <http://dirt-zine.blogspot.com/2006/10/aram-saroyan-interview.html>

³⁹ Burroughs, 'The Last Post Danger Ahead', *Lines*, 6 (November 1965), p.31; John Furnival, 'Pisa', 'The Fall of The Tower of Babel' and 'Devil Trap', *Lines*, 6 (November 1965), pp.28-30.



PISA, 1964 - John Furnival

Figure 29. John Furnival, 'Pisa', *Lines*, 6 (November 1965).

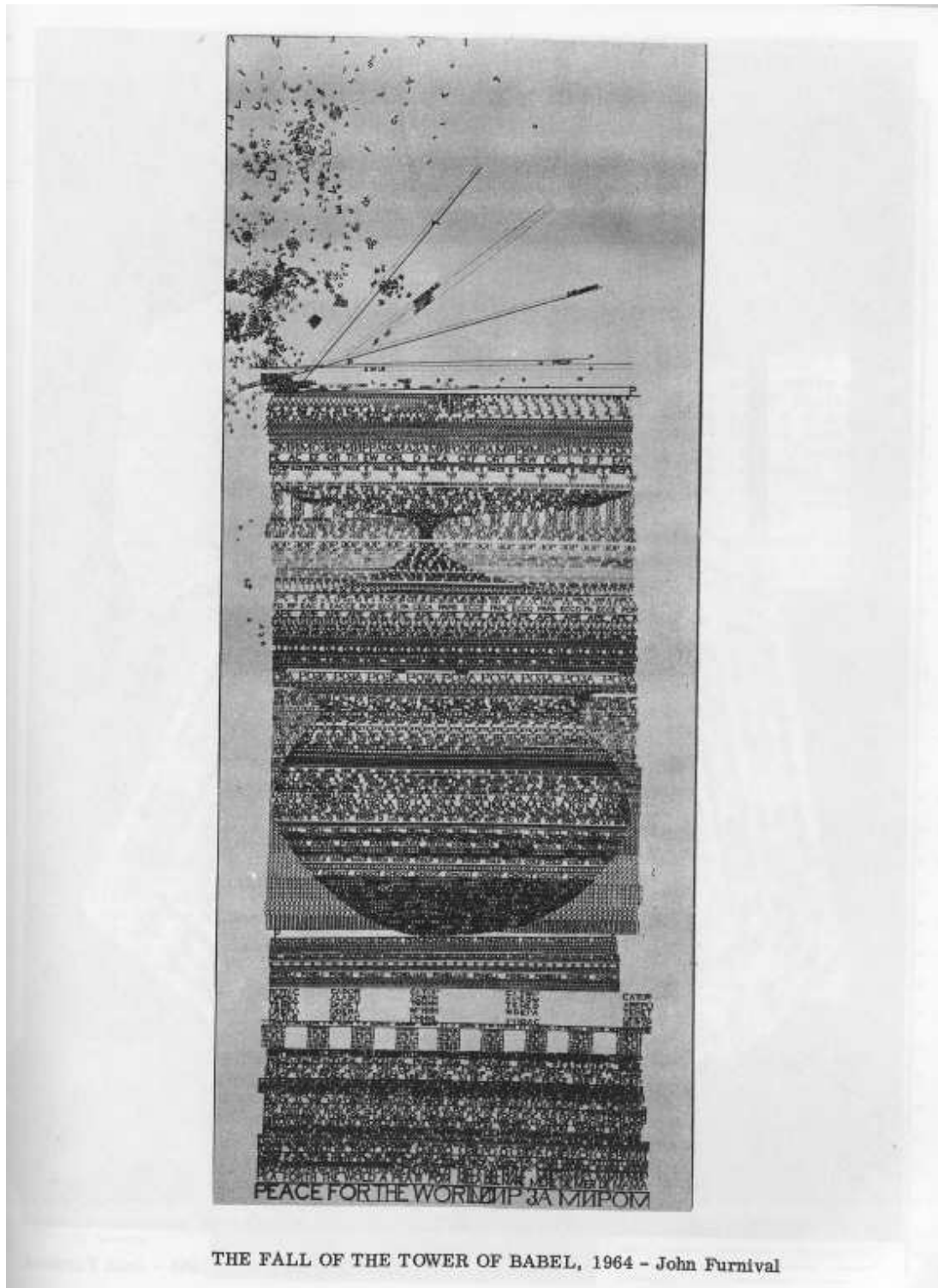
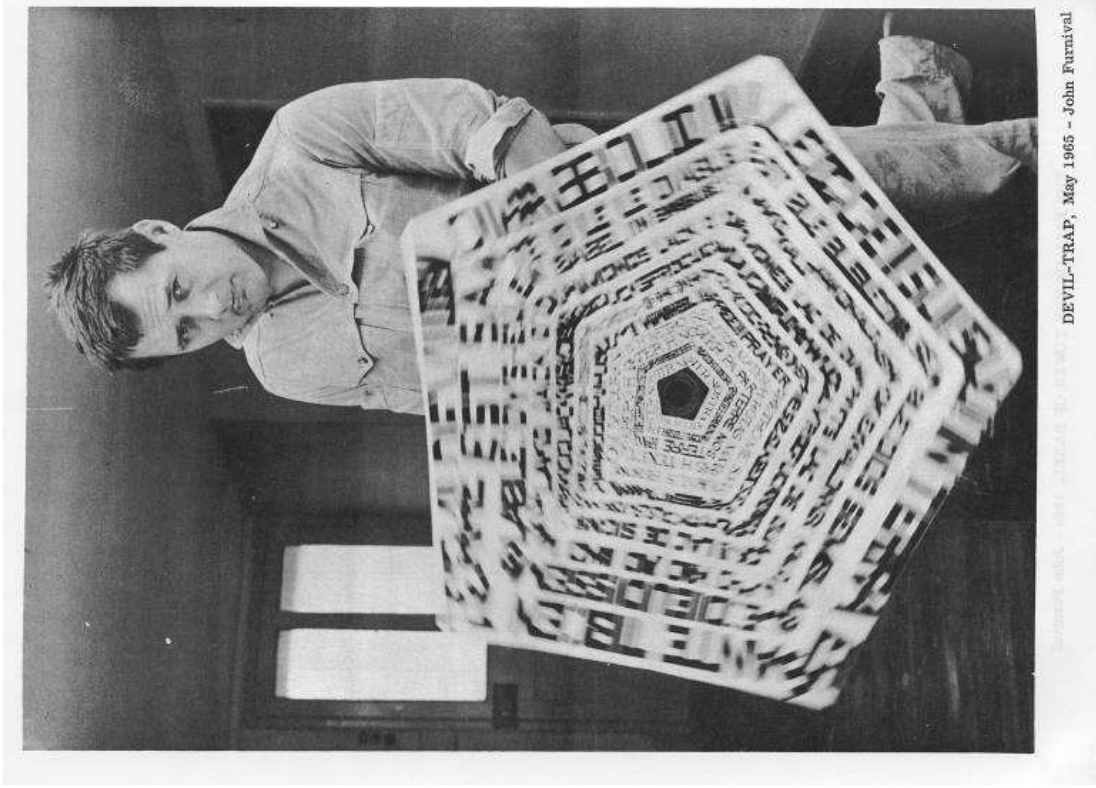


Figure 30. John Furnival, 'The Fall of the Tower of Babel', *Lines*, 6 (November 1965).

his participation in 1965 in the First International Exhibition of Experimental Poetry in Oxford and the exhibition 'Between Poetry and Painting' at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. 'Pisa' and 'The Fall of The Tower of Babel' demonstrate his concern with the relationship between text and image, each piece creates an image of the structure of their title by overlaying typewritten words. This physical structuring of words and attention to their form and spatial presence is echoed by Burroughs' piece, which like Furnival's, experiments with words as physical and visual articles. Burroughs' contribution to this issue of *Lines* takes the form of three columns. The architectural as well as newspaper references of the 'column' are given emphasis because of their proximity to Furnival's towers of words. On the page facing Burroughs' piece in *Lines* 6 is another of Furnival's works in the form of a photograph of him spinning his poster poem 'Devil Trap' (fig.31). This photograph of Furnival attracts attention to the fact that both his and Burroughs' work is process-based.

The importance of context in the little magazine is demonstrated by examining this issue of *Lines* in which we begin to see how the work of Furnival and Burroughs impacts upon each other. The reader of Furnival's work may be able to make out some of the words that form 'Pisa' and 'The Fall of The Tower of Babel'; others cannot be distinguished, or are symbols or words repeated to suggest the structural fabric of each tower. A similar inhibition to 'reading' the words of the poem is presented in the photograph of 'Devil Trap'. This photograph records the moment of the poster poem as it spins: the words are blurred and cannot be read. The effect upon the reader is that our normal modes of reception and of reading are being pressured



DEVIL-TRAP, May 1965 - John Furnival

Figure 31. John Furnival, 'Devil Trap'; Burroughs, 'The Last Post Danger Ahead', Lines, 6 (November 1965).

into revision. This awakening of the reader's awareness to the form and visual character of language in Furnival's art prepares the reader for Burroughs' text. This context of publication induces the reader to form an alternative approach, to read differently with greater openness to the collage form, to see, hear and experience the work in contrast to a conventional mode of reading that is automatically assumed in response to a printed book.

The aesthetic of the mimeo magazine was inspired by early twentieth-century avant-garde little magazines. Their format and attitude, as Daniel Kane notes, referenced Dada and modernist magazines:

Dada and futurist publications certainly provided a "tradition" of ephemerality and even a sense of studied sloppiness [...] The fact that so many of the mimeos coming out of the Lower East Side tended to favor fragmented texts, anonymous and collaborative writing, and (in many cases) politically or socially provocative material combined with basic news on the poetic community suggests the influence of predecessor modernist littles.⁴⁰

Examining Burroughs' work in the context of the little magazine brings to light the connections between his output and that of the Dadaists and the early twentieth-century avant-garde. This context provokes the question of why the avant-garde medium of the little magazine and avant-garde techniques such as collage and collaboration worked so well for Burroughs' *yagé* aesthetic.

There exist a number of different theoretical readings and uses of the term 'avant-garde', but here I will be referring to Peter Bürger's definition as outlined in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. In contrast to the frequent use of the term as

⁴⁰ Kane, pp.62-63.

interchangeable with modernism or experimentation, Bürger's theory offers a detailed reading of the avant-garde as a response to the commercialised autonomy of art.

Bürger writes of '[t]he avant-gardiste protest, whose aim it is to reintegrate art into the praxis of life':⁴¹

The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content.⁴²

Burroughs and Gysin's emphasis upon cut-ups and tape experiments as practices to be engaged in by all, as processes that make 'something happen' and induce an altered state of mind, can be read in relation to the above as specifically avant-garde.

Bürger's concentration upon the avant-garde critique of 'art as an institution' leads his study into an examination of the relationship between avant-garde practices and the distribution and experiencing of art and literature. Bürger defines his use of the term 'art as an institution' as follows:

The concept 'art as an institution' as used here refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works. The avant-garde turns against both - the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy.⁴³

Because Bürger reads the work of the avant-garde in reference to the production, reception and distribution of art, this makes his study ideally applicable to a reading

⁴¹ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. 1974. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p.22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.49

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.22

of the relationship between the publication and the production of Burroughs' experimental work. It leads us to better understand how his adoption of avant-garde strategies to realise his *yagé* aesthetic would necessarily place his work in a hostile relationship to the process of commercial publication.

Burroughs' experimental work relies upon active participation on the part of the reader or audience if it is to succeed in activating a non-chemical alteration of consciousness. Cut-ups, the Dreamachine and tape experiments are all practices to be engaged in by the audience, but the medium of the book does not encourage participation. Book publication accentuates the divide between reader and writer, between art and the world, and it gives the work the appearance of a stable and contained identity. In the case of experimental work, this difference between the *appearance* of coherence and the non-coherent work results in the reader's expectations being frustrated and their attempting to read the published texts in a way that conflicts with the kind of un-conventional reading experience that the work invites. As we have seen in a magazine such as *Lines*, a revision of the practice of reading is encouraged by the context of the accompanying content and the form of an alternative publication.

Bürger's study also allows us to see how the tactics of the mimeograph publishers and the anti-commercial emphasis in the work of a number of artists of the 1960s can be viewed in terms of an avant-garde protest. Bürger identifies the dissolution of the distinction between the audience as consumer and the artist as producer as central to the avant-garde: '[g]iven the avant-gardiste intention to do away with art as a sphere that is separate from the praxis of life, it is logical to eliminate the antithesis between

producer and recipient'.⁴⁴ As we shall see, the elimination of the antithesis between producer and recipient was a driving concern of many of the mimeograph magazines and a quality that made them particularly suitable locations for Burroughs' experiments with transforming the reader from a passive consumer to an engaged participant in the consciousness-altering practices of cut-ups and tape recordings.

The one point on which I disagree with Bürger's theory is in relation to his critical reading of post-war avant-garde art. He proposes that the work of these later artists is an empty repetition of that which preceded it. Martin Puchner makes the same criticism of Bürger, and in reply states that '[f]ar from being burdened or paralyzed by the earlier avant-gardes, the newer avant-gardes learned from their predecessors' successes and failures and managed to transform their techniques'.⁴⁵ Puchner challenges the idea of 'an historical and authentic avant-garde and its empty repetition in a neo-avant-garde' with the proposal that post-war artists adopted these techniques 'for inventing new and timely articulations'.⁴⁶

I will be adopting Bürger's theory of the avant-garde but, like Puchner, arguing that the relationship between the historical and post-war avant-gardes is not simply one of empty repetition. Burroughs, Gysin and many artists, musicians and writers of the 1950s and 1960s adopted the strategies of the historical avant-garde in response to issues of the time. The Mimeograph Revolution for example was a reworking of avant-garde practices and alternative forms of publication in active response to the commercial production and dissemination of art and literature at that time. Likewise,

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.53

⁴⁵ Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, p.212.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.212.

collaboration and collage were strategies previously used by the historical avant-garde, but adopted and transformed by Burroughs and Gysin to explore the non-chemical replication of altered states of consciousness.

The avant-garde concern of the mimeograph magazines with the dissolution of the distinction between producer and recipient provided the perfect environment for Burroughs to explore this aspect of his work. His experimentation with avant-garde practices was complemented by the mimeo magazine's associations with post-war avant-garde movements and their emphasis upon collaboration and activity. Daniel Kane writes of the magazine *Fuck You*, 'a history of *Fuck You* offers today's poetry readers a carnivalesque and deeply entertaining vision of what a poetry magazine can be and what it can do'.⁴⁷ This emphasis on the active 'doing' of the little magazine was particularly relevant to Burroughs' process-based work. As an ongoing and therefore 'open' medium in comparison to the closed and complete entity of book publication, little magazines are able to encourage a form of exchange of work and ideas, and one way in which the little magazine inspires a more engaged relationship between reader and writer is through their low-cost aesthetic.

In *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, Stephen Duncombe explores exactly why the aesthetic of the zine acts to 'challenge the dichotomy between active creator and passive spectator'.⁴⁸ The focus of his study is the 'zines' from the 1970s to the present, defined as 'non-commercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish,

⁴⁷ Kane, p.65.

⁴⁸ Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. London: Verso, 1997, p.127.

and distribute by themselves'.⁴⁹ There are a great many similarities between the mimeo and the zine, and Duncombe's observations are as relevant to the mimeos of the 1960s as they are to the more recent zines. Drawing upon Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Author as Producer', Duncombe proposes that it is the aesthetic and format of the zine that encourages participation in opposition to consumption:

It is exactly their position within the conditions of the production of culture that constitutes an essential component of their politics. In an increasingly professionalized culture world, zine producers are decidedly amateur. In producing cheap, multiple-copy objects, they operate against the fetishistic archiving and exhibiting of the high art world and the for-profit spirit of the commercial world. And by their practice of eroding the lines between producer and consumer they challenge the dichotomy between active creator and passive spectator that characterizes our culture and society.⁵⁰

It is the passive consumption of media, of newspaper stories and of images that Burroughs attempted to counteract in his work published in the mimeo magazines. Along with the work of fellow contributors and the subversive ambitions of editors such as Ed Sanders, Aram Saroyan and Jeff Nuttall, Burroughs recognised the little magazine as a space in which to develop a critique of the conventional reception of mainstream media, encouraging the reader to instead take a collaborative and participatory role in the work. Of all the little magazines in which Burroughs was published, Jeff Nuttall's *My Own Mag* included the greatest quantity of his work, but also the strongest evidence of Burroughs' interest in the medium.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.6.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.127.

Burroughs in *My Own Mag*

My Own Mag was published by Jeff Nuttall, a writer, artist, and jazz musician. John Calder wrote that Nuttall believed that the function of art ‘was to shake people out of dull habit-oriented lives and clichéd thinking’.⁵¹ This may explain why Nuttall was attracted to Burroughs’ cut-up technique with its promise to stimulate ‘complete alert awareness at all times of what is in front of you’.⁵² Nuttall was an advocate of the cut-up technique and experimented with it in his own work and in the editing and assemblage of *My Own Mag*. In his book *Performance Art: Memoirs* (1979) there are references to the influence that the Surrealists, the Dadaists, Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage had upon his work and his founding in 1966 of a performance art group called the *People Show*. But even before Nuttall became involved in experimental theatre he was interested, like Burroughs and Gysin, in ‘something happening’ in art and literature.

In 1968 Nuttall wrote *Bomb Culture*, a book which reviews the period of *My Own Mag* and the changing art and music scenes in London. He situates his work and position as a member of the Underground in reference to Ed Sanders and Ted Berrigan’s publication of mimeograph magazines in New York, to the place of bookshops such as City Lights, the Peace Eye Bookstore, Better Books and Indica as places to distribute these handmade magazines,⁵³ and in relation to the work of Leary and the emerging psychedelic counterculture. He notes the influence of psychedelics on the direction and tone of the Underground scene of the mid-1960s:

⁵¹ John Calder, ‘Jeff Nuttall’ Obituaries, *The Independent* (6 January 2004).
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/jeff-nuttall-549212.html>

⁵² Burroughs to Ginsberg 5 September 1960, GC Columbia.

⁵³ The important role of these bookshops in the production and circulation of little magazines is also noted by David Miller and Richard Price: ‘Little magazines and small press publications were disseminated through a number of significant bookshops, including Better Books, Indica, Turret Bookshop, Unicorn Bookshop, and Compendium’ (Miller and Price, p.121).

It seems fastidious to pretend that the overriding agent which produced this new bizarritty, the new relaxation and colourful contrast to previous earnest tight-lipped attitudes, was not Lysergic Acid.⁵⁴

My Own Mag, which was started in 1963, was Nuttall's response to these new counter-cultural scenes:

The possibilities of duplicating (mimeographing) yawned invitingly. I turned out *My Own Mag: a Super-Absorbant Periodical* in November 1963, as an example of the sort of thing we could do. My intention was to make a paper exhibition in words, pages, spaces, holes, edges, and images which drew people in and forced a violent involvement with the unalterable facts.⁵⁵

The incitement to engagement and participation were the founding objectives of *My Own Mag*. Nuttall also wrote that it had been his intention to run the project independently, 'printing, editing, assembling, drawing, writing largely and distributing the thing myself'. He even stated that he aimed to make a deliberate loss in order to avoid 'a dependence of the smallest kind'.⁵⁶

Burroughs' work appeared in twelve of the seventeen issues⁵⁷ of *My Own Mag* in the form of cut-ups, an early Dutch Schultz text,⁵⁸ letters and cut-ups of letters, and a series of newspaper format texts entitled 'The Moving Times' and 'The Burrough'. In a letter to Ginsberg dated 21 May 1964 Burroughs presented his views on *My Own*

⁵⁴ Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*. 1968. London: Paladin, 1972, p.183.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.141.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.142.

⁵⁷ Copies of *My Own Mag* do not give a clear indication of their issue number which has led to conflicting chronologies in bibliographies of Burroughs' work. As Jed Birmingham writes, *My Own Mag* is a 'bibliographic nightmare', and 'there is no general consensus on the correct order of the first eight issues of the seventeen issue run'. See Jed Birmingham, 'My Own Mag: A Bibliographic Nightmare', <http://realitystudio.org/bibliographic-bunker/my-own-mag/my-own-mag-a-bibliographic-nightmare/>. The issue numbers cited here are based upon Jed Birmingham and Robert Bank's chronology presented in their digital archive of *My Own Mag* at <http://realitystudio.org/bibliographic-bunker/my-own-mag/>. Birmingham and Bank's chronology was arrived at through a study of Miles and Maynard's *Bibliography*; Iain Sinclair's 1986 book catalogue 'Jeff Nuttall and the Beats'; Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* and Bank's analysis of Nuttall's cartoon 'Perfume Jack' as it is presented in the full run of the magazine.

⁵⁸ Burroughs, 'The Last Words of Dutch Schultz', *My Own Mag*, 12 (May 1965). Burroughs later published *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz*. London: Cape Goliard, 1970.

Mag and indicated his interest in it as a suitable vehicle for the publication of his work. The letter was written across the front page of a copy of the May 1964 Tangier Issue of *My Own Mag* (fig.32). He wrote: ‘This magazine put out by a friend in London J. Nuttall an interesting and seemingly successful experiment in applying newspaper format and reader participation’. He applauded the speed with which work can be disseminated through the magazine: ‘J. Nuttall should serve as an inspiration to all editors of little magazines. It takes him an average of 2 weeks to get out an issue’.⁵⁹

In the May 1964 issue of *My Own Mag* Burroughs began to explore the possibility for direct and participatory work. In his ‘The Moving Times’ piece in this issue (figs 33-34) he explains the process of making his three column newspaper cut-ups, includes a text produced in this manner, and encourages the reader towards participation in these experiments. His writing here resembles that of his letters to Gysin and Ginsberg in the 1960s in the way in which he addresses the reader directly, providing instructions for experiments for moving back in time using the newspaper format:

Start with newspapers like this: Take today’s paper. Fill up three columns with selections. Now read cross columns. Fill a column on another page with cross column readings. Now fill in the remaining columns with selections from yesterday’s papers and so on back. Each time you do this there will be less of present time on the page. The page is ‘forgetting’ present time as you move back in time through word columns.⁶⁰

In the columns that follow he demonstrates this method, using text from the *Tanger Gazette* of 17 January 1947 and *The New York Times* of 17 September 1899. Towards

⁵⁹ Burroughs to Ginsberg 21 May 1964, letter written across the front cover of a copy of *My Own Mag*, 5 (May 1964), GC Columbia.

⁶⁰ Burroughs, ‘The Moving Times’, *My Own Mag*, 5 (May 1964), no pagination.

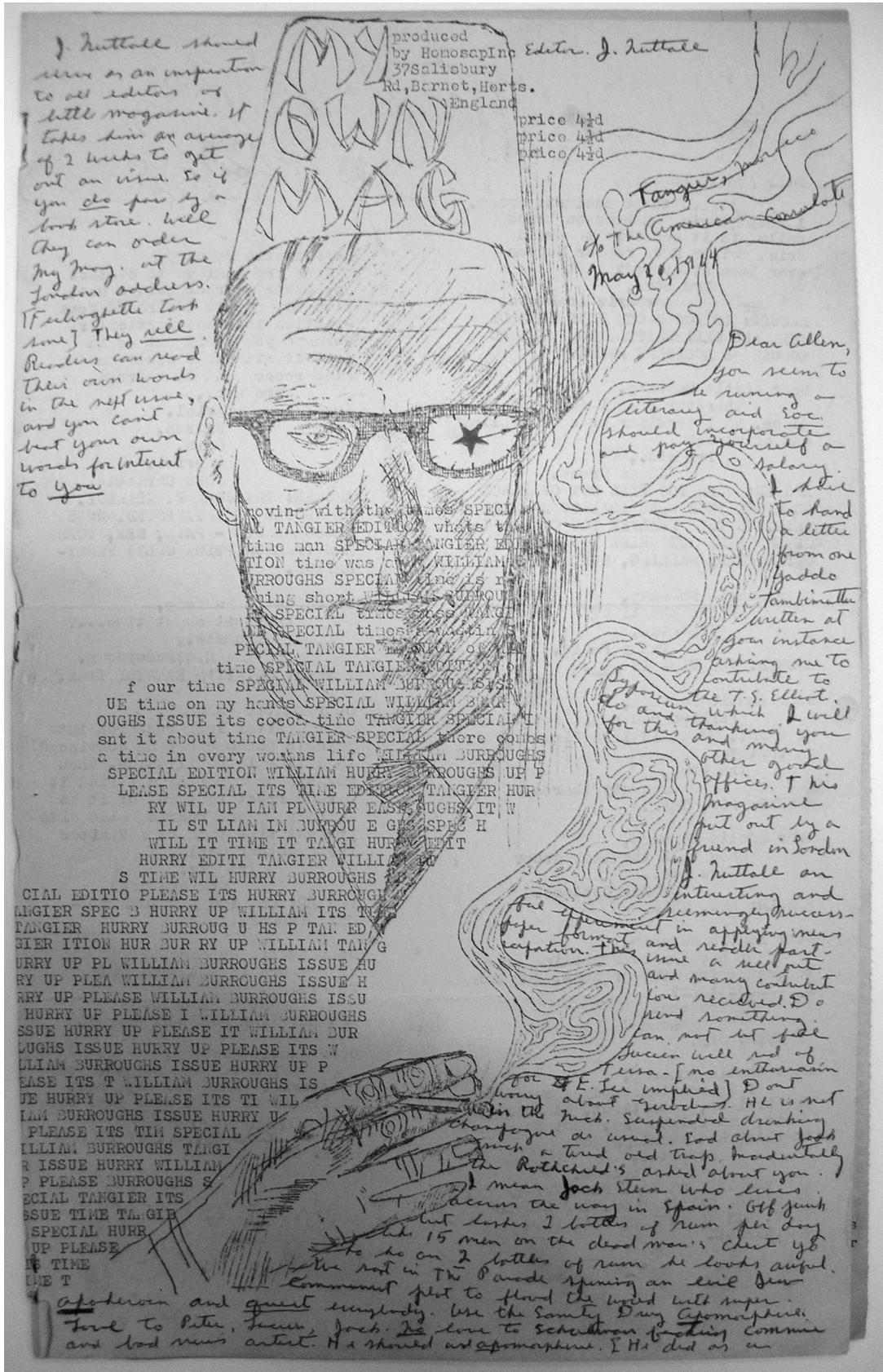


Figure 32. Cover of My Own Mag, 5 (May 1964). Issue sent by Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg featuring a handwritten letter. Ginsberg Collection, Columbia University.

The Moving Times

Editor : WILLIAM BURROUGHS

February 10, 1964.

"We will Travel not only in Space But In Time as Well."

A Russian scientist said that. Let's start travelling. Form the words into columns and march them off the page. Start with newspapers like this: Take today's paper. Fill up three columns with selections. Now read cross columns. Fill a column on another page with cross column readings. Now fill in the remaining columns with selections from yesterday's papers and so on back. Each time you do this there will be less of present time on the page. The page is 'forgetting' present time as you move back in time through word columns. Now to Move forward in time. Try writing tomorrow's news today. Fill three columns with your future time guesses. Read cross column. Fill one column on another page with your cross column readings. Fill the other columns with tomorrow's newspaper. Notice that there are many hints of the so-called future in your cross column readings. When you read words in columns you are reading the future, that is you are reading on subliminal level; other columns on the page that you will later experience consciously you have already read. "You don't remember me, Mister?"

You will see 'me' tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow to the last syllable of recorded time because you have written and read 'me' today. You still don't remember? Your memory of the future will improve in columns.

(Continued page 2 col 2)

January 17, 1947.

English Made Easy For Beginners. It revolves flexible formula.

For beginners today we are going to study the verb fix. I fix I fixed I have fixed. The general meaning of fix is to fit together or put in place as I fixed the notice to the board. Another meaning is to arrange: I fixed the meeting for four o'clock. Still another meaning is to set right or put in order: I fixed that up all right. Or it can mean to put somebody in his place; I will fix him once and for all. Other meanings are to fix a date to make a date for more advanced students suffering is one very long moment. We cannot divide it by seasons. We can only record its moods and chronicle (1) their return. With us time itself does not progress. It revolves. It seems to circle round one center of pain. The paralyzing immobility (2) of a life every circumstance of which is regulated after an unchangeable pattern (3) so that we eat drink lie down and pray according to the inflexible (4) laws of an iron (5) formula (6) extract from The Depths by Oscar Wilde (1) Chronicle to record in writing, (2) Immobility fixity (3) pattern design (4) inflexible implacable (6) formula should again arrive from home by train as they did in pre war days in four days' time the most romantic broadcast in the history of radio after centuries of silence I will fix him once and for all to a date another meaning is to arrange a meeting for 4

Cross-column readings
page 2 col 1

September 17, 1899.

Last Gun Post Erased In A Small Town Newspaper
September 17, 1899.

'Mr Bradley Mr Martin' stood there in dead star -s heavy with his dusty answer drew September 17, 1899 over New York that morning giving you my toy soldiers put away steps trailing a lonely dining room cool remote Sunday. Stein's army has sailed for South Africa fresh southerly winds a long time ago for such a purpose. On assigning them to duty the books opened. Last Tuesday was the regular day for signing years. A committee lad born and bred again refused the contract or even had the opportunity to do so. They are all valueless as I know from my blind wait between London and Brighton a distant hand couldn't reach never came out that afternoon at recess time I watched the torn sky bend with the wind white white white as far as the eye can see a blinding flash of white. The cabin reeks of exploded star. It was a long time ago young man you can still see used to be your brother young cop whistling 'Annie Laurie' if my memory serves on the top floor you can watch our worn out film dim jerky far away shut a bureau drawer. Last gun post erased in a small town newspaper making the stars run backwards again Like the train did. Distant hand couldn't time guesses. You are reading the future formula. Stein's army is as one man. The 'yes' buttons have been wiped out. Other well known people almost

(Continued page 2 col 3)

Figure 33. Burroughs, 'The Moving Times', *My Own Mag*, 5 (May 1964).

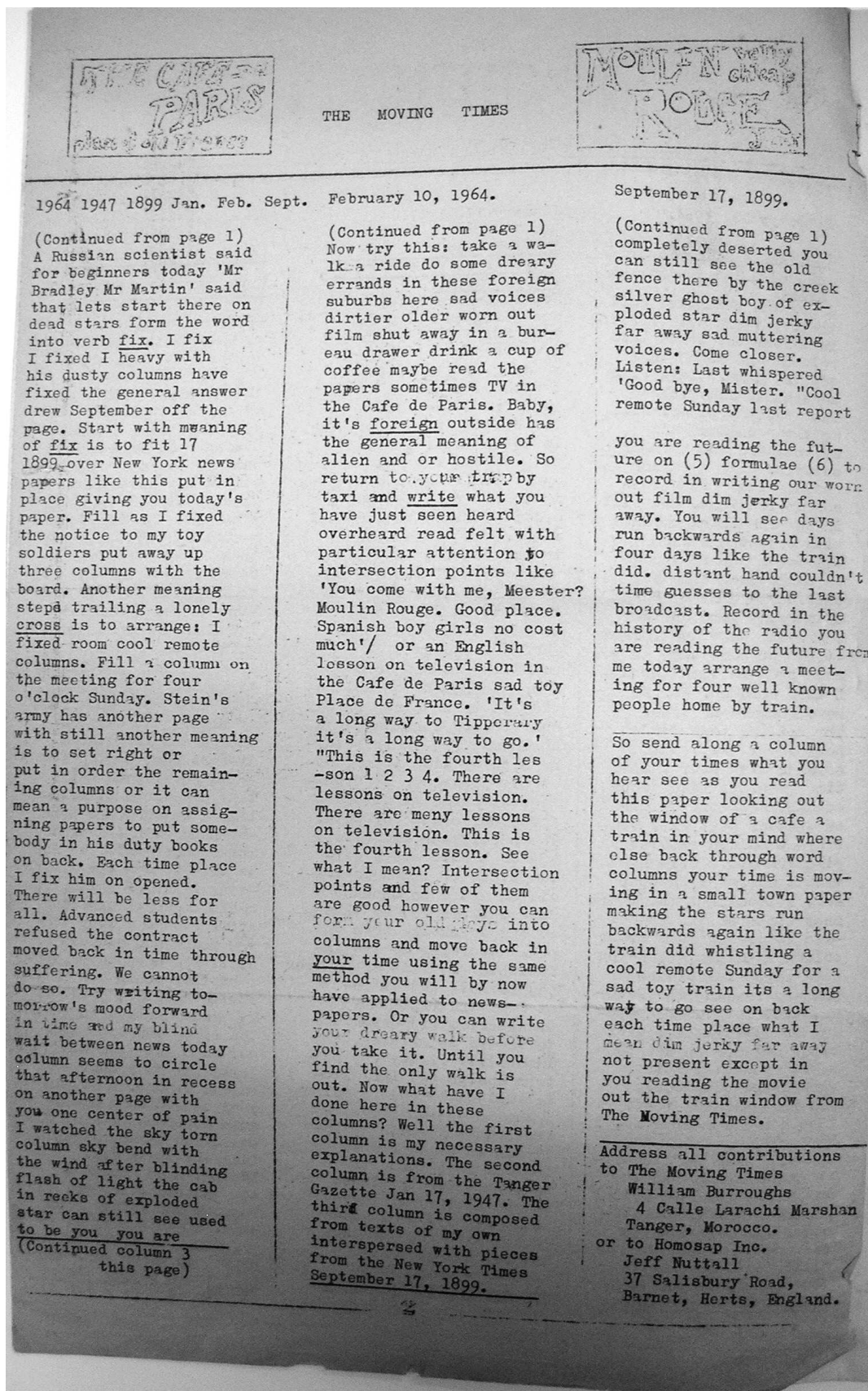


Figure 34. Burroughs, 'The Moving Times' page two, *My Own Mag*, 5 (May 1964).

the end of the piece Burroughs again addresses the reader directly, naming the sources for the cut-ups, and giving further directions for reader participation in these experiments: ‘Now try this: take a walk a ride do some dreary errands [...] return to your trap by taxi and write what you have just seen heard overheard read felt with particular attention to intersection points’.

Burroughs concludes the piece with an invitation to the reader to send in the results of their own experiments:

So send along a column of your times what you hear see as you read this paper looking out the window of a cafe a train in your mind where else back through word columns your time is moving in a small town paper making stars run backwards again.⁶¹

By publishing such an invitation, he broke open the medium of the magazine, no longer identifying it as the site of production by the writer and of consumption by the reader. The instruction: ‘what you hear see as you read this paper’ depicts the magazine *in* the experimental work of the reader instead of the experimental work being in the magazine. This conceptual transplantation places all writers and readers outside of the magazine which is viewed as a shared object of experience and intersection.

In Issue 11 of *My Own Mag*, Burroughs published another ‘The Moving Times’ piece subtitled ‘Tomorrow’s News Today’ in which he quotes from sections of the previous ‘The Moving Times’, finding in these quotes intersection points with recent news stories. He provides an explanation of the piece at the bottom of the page: ‘The above collage illustrates how incidents were forecast in cross-column readings and cut-ups

⁶¹ Ibid.

published in *My Own Mag* previously'. This is followed by examples extracted from the collage that highlight these intersection points; so for example he quotes from the previous 'The Moving Times': 'White whale stranded' and then a newspaper headline: 'Dead Whale Found Floating in Hudson River'. Burroughs concludes the piece with another invitation for reader participation: 'These are intersection points. Find your own and send to Wm. Burroughs c/o Grove Press, 80 University Place, NYC'.⁶²

The idea of 'intersection points' became pivotal to these newspaper column pieces, but also to the idea of encouraging the reader's involvement in a move towards collaboration. In a letter to Jeff Nuttall dated 2 March 1964, He described his idea for 'Your Day', a piece that would involve reader contributions. He adopted the phrase 'intersection point' as a term that theoretically embraces both the proposed relationship of collaboration between magazine and reader and the heightened awareness of associations that he hoped to induce in the reader through their enactment of the work:

The angle is to run in each subsequent issue a page - (Your Day Your Time)? One column of which would be filled with cross column readings of the previous issue the remaining two columns with selections from contributors the selections to be made from present time of the reader like what they saw heard thought felt when they read this paper: With this paper in your pocket take a bus a tube a taxi. Look through the paper. now cut to street sign corner or any intersection point. What were you reading when you overheard what? x marks the spot intersection point. Sit down in a restaurant drink a tea or what ever look through this paper look and listen around. What did you overhear from the next table when you were reading what? What were you thinking at that exact time? Write down some of your intersection points and send them to 'Your Day'.⁶³

⁶² Burroughs 'The Moving Times', *My Own Mag*, 11 (February 1965), no pagination.

⁶³ Burroughs to Nuttall 2 March 1964, File C-29, BP NYPL.

By articulating the juxtapositions both within and without the magazine in terms of the idea of intersection points, Burroughs brought to the forefront the reader's role as collaborator.

My Own Mag is a valuable document of the idea of the cut-up, not only because of Burroughs' contributions, but also because Nuttall successfully took the idea and experimented with it in the editing and publication of the magazine. Many of Nuttall's own contributions are clearly influenced by Burroughs' work, but the prime example is issue 6 of *My Own Mag*, subtitled 'The Cut-Up Issue', which reveals the extent of Nuttall's engagement with the technique. Using the cut-up in his work in both capacities as writer and editor, and exploring its possibilities in the medium of the little magazine, Nuttall's work can be said to demonstrate the 'active' potential of the cut-up method, and therefore can contribute to our understanding of Burroughs' own experiments. The first half of the magazine is composed of the work of the contributing writers, cut into sections and rearranged. The impact of cutting-up and rearranging the contents of a magazine is that the collage character of the medium is emphasised above all else. In issues of *Fuck You* and other mimeo magazines, the work of the editor and publisher was intentionally made visible, but in this issue of *My Own Mag*, Nuttall took the exposure of the assemblage of the magazine to greater extremes.

Nuttall kept the assemblage character of the little magazine visible in each issue not only by cutting-up material but also by introducing into the publication pages torn from other magazines or books. In other issues pages have been burnt or shapes and holes cut into them so attention is continually drawn to the physical character and

properties of the magazine. The inclusion of pages from professionally printed texts, stapled in-between these mimeographed pages, works through juxtaposition to highlight the differing aesthetics of these publications and by implication their different cultural and commercial qualities.

The two contributions by Burroughs in the cut-up issue of *My Own Mag* experiment with the newspaper format. The first is entitled 'The Burrough' and the second is untitled, headed instead by an empty box containing the words 'any picture'. This second piece reproduces the column format used in newspapers but differs from a conventional newspaper in that it invites the reader to place their own material onto the page and explore possible juxtapositions of image and word. In the bottom right of the page is an empty window, and within it a text in Burroughs' handwriting which reads: 'Traced from the format of *Time* magazine p.40 September 13 1963. Put any picture that fits from your time into this time space'.⁶⁴ This takes the invitation of reader participation and collaboration even further, opening up a space within the magazine for the ideas and experiences of the reader to intersect with his own.

Whether this is carried through in a practical manner, or remains a theoretical invitation, this space within the work and within the magazine represents an important fracturing of the reader/writer division.

The May 1965 issue of *My Own Mag* devoted a great part of the magazine to the *sTigma* exhibition that took place in the basement of the London bookshop, Better Books.⁶⁵ The title of the exhibition took its name from Alexander Trocchi's sigma

⁶⁴ Burroughs, untitled, *My Own Mag*, 6 (July 1964), no pagination.

⁶⁵ Better Books was the location for a number of literary and art events in the 1960s. David Miller and Richard Price describe the role of the bookshop in the literary scene of this period: 'Better Books was in operation from the early 1960s until the 1970s; in its heyday it was staffed by a number of poets, writers and editors associated with little magazines, including Lee Harwood, Paul Buck, Anthony Barnett, Paul Selby, David Kosubei, and Barry Miles, with Bob Cobbing running it from 1964-1967.'

project. The obvious connection between Trocchi - author of *Young Adam* (1957) and *Cain's Book* (1960) - and Burroughs is that they both wrote on the subject of opiate addiction, but their work of the early 1960s reveals a different set of associations. Both writers were exploring alternative means to experience and practice art, experimenting with the form of the little magazine, performance and activity-based work. Trocchi's work had developed in this direction through his involvement with the Lettrist International and the Situationist International. His sigma project and the newsletters he issued under the title *Sigma Portfolio* during 1964 present his manifesto for his new approach to art. The two texts 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds' (1962) and 'Sigma: a Tactical Blueprint' (1963) describe the basis for sigma, they outline Trocchi's ideas for an art movement that would blur the boundaries between art and life, that would encourage participation and reject traditional media in the form of the museum or the book in preference for public actions or 'situation making'.⁶⁶

The *sTigma* exhibition brought together a number of artists, writers and members of the emerging British underground scene who all shared Trocchi's approach to art. Jeff Nuttall in Issue 12 stated that both *My Own Mag* and the *sTigma* exhibition were devised in response to a letter by Peter Currell Brown in *Peace News*:

As a result of this letter the first issue of *My Own Mag* was conceived and an exhibition was planned. The exhibition took place in Better Books' basement, London, throughout March. It wasn't an exhibition. It was an experience and it was called sTigma to indicate the close affiliation of some of its artists to sigma.⁶⁷

During Cobbing's time there, it was a focus for alternative tendencies in literature, theatre and art, with readings, exhibitions and performances.' (Miller and Price, p.121).

⁶⁶ Alexander Trocchi, 'Sigma: A Tactical Blueprint', *Sigma Portfolio*, 3, (1964), p.2.

⁶⁷ Jeff Nuttall, untitled text and 'Aforementioned List', *My Own Mag*, 12 (May 1965), no pagination.

Nuttall reprinted Currell Brown's letter on the front page of this twelfth issue of *My Own Mag*. The emphasis in the letter is that art is 'a vital activity'.⁶⁸ In response to what he observes as the lack of 'committed' work by artists, he proposes the need for 'an idiom as all-embracing and as hard-hitting as the Dada movement that took organised society by the scruff of the neck during the First World War'.⁶⁹ Nuttall described the experience of *sTigma* in *Bomb Culture*. According to his account, the exhibition led the audience through passages which narrowed into complete darkness, they were confronted by photographs of war atrocities, anatomical diagrams and a corridor of television sets, emerging into 'a replica living room, furnished with choice items of ghastly ornament and with a sideboard drawer containing human toes'. Sound recordings of Burroughs, cut-in with other audio material, added to the disorientating and disturbing experience: 'The voices of Trocchi, Burroughs, Mike Osborne's alto and the BBC leaked out and intermingled from concealed loudspeakers.'⁷⁰

Both sigma and the *sTigma* exhibition were based upon the idea, like Burroughs' work of the time, that art should be activity-based, that it could be experienced and then replicated and re-activated elsewhere:

It was a labyrinth designed to make people feel more. I suggest that it would now be a good thing if sTigmas sprang up in church rooms, unused basements, deserted prefabs all over the world. Not of course, like the London sTigma necessarily, but the name retained could give the lethal people a disconcerting and accurate feeling that, however varied and wild they may be, certain activities and activators have a common sane purpose and these activators have been dubbed by Alex Trocchi Sigma.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Peter Currell Brown 'letter to *Peace News* 13 July 1962'. Reprinted on the front cover of *My Own Mag*, 12 (May 1965).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, p.226.

⁷¹ Jeff Nuttall, untitled text and 'Aforementioned List', *My Own Mag*, 12 (May 1965), no pagination.

The coverage of the *sTigma* exhibition in *My Own Mag* reveals that the reactionary stance towards mainstream publication, which is expressed in the very medium and aesthetics of the magazine, is part of a wider political attack upon the conventions and commercialization of the exhibition, dissemination, and reception of all art forms. Jeff Nuttall wrote of *sTigma*:

The ambiance of the art gallery was consciously rejected as being part of a system which actually inoculates people against authentic experience by sustaining them in an artificial world of dead objects, souvenirs of a once original long since congealed creative act whose meaning is any way imprisoned in a set of pre-established criteria totally divorced from reality.⁷²

In *My Own Mag* we witness Burroughs' attempts to extend the practice of his own experimentation so that it involves the reader, and to therefore encourage participation, but we also see that this preoccupation was mirrored by the views and work of Trocchi, Nuttall and others.

The connections between the work of Burroughs, Nuttall and Trocchi are worth pursuing because they map out a shared questioning of the practice of writing and publication. Like Burroughs, Trocchi was exploring the alternatives to mainstream publishing. His involvement with *My Own Mag* and with the Situationists inspired his work on the sigma project and his promotion of the idea of experimentation, action and participation as central to the creation and experience of art. In 'Sigma: A Tactical Blueprint' Trocchi wrote: 'The conventional spectator-creator dichotomy must be broken down. The traditional "audience" must participate'. He recognised the necessity to explore alternative mediums such as the poster or pamphlet: 'we believe

⁷² Ibid.

in the vital relevance of pamphlets and pamphleteering'.⁷³ And like Burroughs, Trocchi formed a critique of the newspaper as a medium that narrows consciousness. In 'Insurrection of a Million Minds' Trocchi describes its role in the routine of work and leisure: 'in the bus on the way home he reads a newspaper which is identical to yesterday's newspaper, in the sense that it is a reshake of identical elements'. He writes: 'the vicarious pleasure he derives from paddling in all the violence and disorder obscures from him the fact that there is nothing new in all this 'news' and that his daily perusal of it leads not to a widening of his consciousness of reality but to a dangerous contraction of consciousness'.⁷⁴ Trocchi's concern, like that of Burroughs, was to create work that conversely *does* widen the reader's consciousness of reality.

Trocchi's *Sigma Portfolio* shared with the mimeo magazines the desire to reject commercial publication and to produce instead a medium which is closer to the form and immediacy of a newsletter:

The *sigma portfolio* is an entirely new dimension in publishing, through which the writer reaches his public immediately, outflanking the traditional trap of publishing-house policy, and by means of which the reader gets it, so to speak, "hot" from the writer's pen, from the photographer's lens, etc.⁷⁵

Trocchi proposed to establish a means to disseminate work that was not under the influence of the financial interests of mainstream publishers:

The idea is (among other things) to cut out the brokers. To evade the economic "processing" involved in being dealt with by a publisher who takes his identity as a publisher too seriously. Who brings his "reality" into the equation and interferes with the vital flow of informations.⁷⁶

⁷³ Alexander Trocchi, 'Sigma: A Tactical Blueprint', *Sigma Portfolio*, 3, (1964), p.2

⁷⁴ Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', *Sigma Portfolio*, 2 (1964), pp.2-3.

⁷⁵ Alexander Trocchi, 'Subscription Form', *Sigma Portfolio*, 12, (1964), p.1.

⁷⁶ Alexander Trocchi, 'Sigma: General Informations', *Sigma Portfolio*, 5, (1964), p.8.

The first number of Trocchi's *Sigma Portfolio* was in poster form; it included a piece by Burroughs entitled 'Martin's Folly', and borrowed from his work in *My Own Mag* the heading and the format of 'The Moving Times'. It combined the search for an immediate newsletter-like form with a critique of the medium of the newspaper. Trocchi's intention was that the piece would be pasted up as a poster in the London Underground, taking Burroughs' experiments with the newspaper format a step further.

The similarities between the work and ideas of Burroughs, Trocchi, the Situationists and the concrete poets were highlighted by Nuttall in *My Own Mag*. Nuttall concluded his piece on the *sTigma* exhibit with a list of people and organisations whose work shared the concerns of Trocchi's sigma. They are described as those 'who, in different ways, seem to be attempting to bring about such a change - not just a shift of opinion or political commitment but an actual evolutionary change within the cells of the human mind'.⁷⁷ This list included Burroughs, and placed him in the company of Trocchi, the Situationists⁷⁸ and concrete poets, including Dom Sylvester Houédard. The list was composed of both writers and small publishing presses including Ed Sander's Fuck You Press, Tuli Kupferberg's Birth Press and Ferlinghetti's City Lights, mapping out a relationship between publishers and writers that was political and collaborative rather than commercial. A very similar list was printed by Trocchi

⁷⁷ Jeff Nuttall, untitled text and 'Aforementioned List', *My Own Mag*, 12 (May 1965), no pagination.

⁷⁸ For more on Burroughs and the Situationists see Timothy S. Murphy, 'Exposing the Reality Film: William S. Burroughs Among the Situationists' in Schneiderman and Walsh in which he states that 'they arrived at critical models of contemporary society that are remarkably congruent not only at the highest level of theoretical generality, but also at the more focused level of practical tactics for resistance.' (p.30) and compares the Situationist '*détournement*' to Burroughs' use of cut-ups. See also Andrew Hussey, "'Paris is about the last place...': William Burroughs In and Out of Paris and Tangier, 1958-60' and Ian MacFadyen, 'Dossier One', both in Oliver Harris and Ian MacFadyen, eds, *Naked Lunch @ 50*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2009. On the relationship between Trocchi's sigma project and the Situationists Gavin Bowd writes that sigma 'had close affinities with the Situationists: the desire for a collective organisation overthrowing separations between culture and everyday life' in Gavin Bowd, *The Outsiders' Alexander Trocchi and Kenneth White*. Kirkcaldy: Akros, 1998, p.9.

in *Sigma Portfolio* 17, with those included described as ‘individuals who have, at one time or another, expressed serious interest in the possibilities implied in the sigma experiment. All, in our mind, are actually making an active contribution towards its evolution’,⁷⁹ and this list again includes Burroughs. Seeing his name within the context of Nuttall’s and Trocchi’s lists of those who were involved in developing an alternative ‘happening’ and ‘situation’ based practice of art is a strong indication of how these same aspects of Burroughs’ work and ideas were more apparent to his contemporaries than they have been to later critics.

An exploration of the aesthetics and politics of the little magazine, and of the work of Berman, Sanders, Nuttall and Trocchi shows that Burroughs was actively exploring alternative possibilities for the publication and dissemination of his work in the 1960s, and that he was producing work specifically suited to the medium of the little magazine. Researching little magazines can, as Miller and Price state, be ‘a process which tests under the pressure of evidence later assertions and remembrances of movements and schools’.⁸⁰ In the case of Burroughs, researching this medium presents his work in a number of interesting and re-visionary contexts, critical contexts that are not evident in a reading of the cut-up novels of the time. These small press magazines with their tangle of names and references to places, events and collaborations, document Burroughs’ involvement with many different figures and movements during the 1960s, including poets, artists, musicians and avant-garde scenes in New York and London. Most importantly they show his work in the context of other artists and writers who were determined to make ‘something happen’ and whose work centred on action and participation. Burroughs’ *yagé* aesthetic shared in

⁷⁹ Alexander Trocchi, ‘List of People Interested’, *Sigma Portfolio*, 17, (1964), p.2.

⁸⁰ Miller and Price, p.xii.

their objective of 'change within the cells of the human mind' and I will be looking in more detail at Burroughs' work in relation to the art movements and scenes of the 1960s in the following chapter, exploring his collaborative activities and the emphasis upon process in his work.

Chapter 7

The Third Mind

Burroughs' preoccupation with the replication of altered states of mind in the experience of the work and his deployment of avant-garde practices to achieve this can be seen in his engagement with the idea and practice of collaboration.

Collaboration had been explored by avant-garde artists throughout the twentieth century as a means to disrupt the concept and commercial marketing of the singular artist or author and as a strategy by which to activate the reader's involvement in the work. Bearing in mind this history which reveals the art of collaboration to be antithetical to the commercial dissemination of art and writing, we can once again expect to find a disruption in the relationship between the production and publication of Burroughs' work. The idea and practice of collaboration is very closely related to that of collage and to the technique of cut-ups, and I will be exploring the cross-over between all three of these processes and how each conflicts with the medium of print reproduction in publishing.

Prior to his work of the 1960s, much of Burroughs' writing had emerged through collaborative processes. These earlier collaborations included his joint authorship with Kells Elvins in writing 'Twilight's Last Gleaming' and with Jack Kerouac on *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, and the collaborative practice of letter writing: work produced between correspondent and recipient. But although collaboration had always been a constant in Burroughs' practice as a writer, what is important is the difference between how collaboration figured in his work before and after the late 1950s. During the 1950s he retained a conventional perspective upon the relationship

between writing and publication, and because he envisioned a final state for the work in the form of book publication, these acts of collaboration did not disturb that end-process.

From the end of that decade and into the 1960s, Burroughs' collaborations presented more obstacles to commercial publication as he began incorporating different mediums and intersecting collaboration with the practices of collage and cut-ups.

From 1958 to 1965 he worked with Ian Sommerville, Anthony Balch, Jeff Nuttall and Brion Gysin amongst many others. The most important collaborative relationship of this period was with Brion Gysin. As I have shown through a reading of Burroughs' letters, from 1958 his view on the work of the writer and on the means and mediums for the dissemination of his work were under revision. Interaction with artists, filmmakers, photographers and performers, whose diverse and alternative ideas on how and where art can be experienced, expanded his traditional literary view on the process of writing and becoming published. As a result, Burroughs' collaborative work and his work with collage and cut-ups after the late 1950s led to a change in the relationship of his work to the medium and process of book publication.

Collaboration and Publication: Antithetical Practices

Publishing is a collaborative practice, and this has been confirmed by the examination of the publication history of Burroughs' work where I have found that each text bears the influence of editors, lawyers, censors, fellow writers and the marketing decisions of the publishers. In the article 'Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship', M.

Thomas Inge states that although this form of collaboration differs from that between

artists, its impact must be acknowledged: '[t]he publishing process is not the same as a collaboration between two or more authors in the writing of a book, but it is a collaboration that involves many people with various degrees of influence on the finished text'.¹ Research into the publication histories of *Naked Lunch* and *The Yage Letters* demonstrates more generally how the collaboration involved in publishing a book is purposefully disguised within the published text in order to give the impression of unmediated exposure to a writer's work. As well as ensuring the invisibility of their own collaborative role in each publication, publishers also exhibit a bias against work produced by more than one writer. By concealing their own collaborative activity and discouraging that of writers, publishing is placed into an antithetical position to that of collaboration.

If we turn critical attention upon the practice of publishing and question the basis for this accepted standard, we find that the one-book one-author formula is dictated by commercial interests. Commercial galleries and publishers rely upon the individual name and identity of an artist because this is what determines the value and therefore the commercial success of the work. Once the singular identity of the artist or writer is blurred through the act of collaboration, the commercial value of the work is affected. Charles Green in *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* observes that the figure of the artist as a lone individual is reinforced by the media: '[s]uch a clichéd figure is deeply embedded in media representations of artists, in market valuations based on authenticity and originality'.² These values of 'authenticity' and 'originality' are then manipulated in the sale of art and literature.

¹ M. Thomas Inge, 'Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship', *PMLA*, 116.3. (May 2001), p.625.

² Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p.ix.

As Gisbourne and Kueingdorf in *Double Act: Two Artists, One Expression* have argued, when collaborative work is subjected to critical and historical study, the tendency to read and research in terms of ‘individual specificities’ can undermine the very idea and practice of collaboration:

No matter how collaborative a particular art movement may have been, modern art history segments and dissects the inner workings of group identities in order to generate individual specificities. In other words, to pin down who did what, and uses both intellectual and material analyses to individuate each member of an artistic movement.³

In consequence, the study and research of collaborative art is liable to negate the practice of collaboration as a way of working, and as an avant-garde activity. In attempting to avoid this act of ‘undoing’ the work of collaboration, Burroughs and Gysin’s term ‘the third mind’ should be kept at the forefront of any study of their art as a statement warning against the individualisation of their collaborative practices. Gysin and Burroughs adopted the term ‘the third mind’ in 1965 whilst working on a manuscript bearing the same title. The phrase reminds us that collaboration cannot be simplified in terms of a sum of addition: one writer plus another writer, but instead results in something ‘other’ that is irreducible to its constituent elements. The term neatly embraces the relationship between alterations in consciousness and collaboration, suggesting that an altered state of mind emerges through the process of the work.

Although Burroughs and Gysin used this term ‘the third mind’, their collaborative publications *Minutes to Go*, *The Exterminator* and *The Third Mind* all allocate a name or initials to each text or drawing. This suggests that Burroughs and Gysin were

³ Mark Gisbourne and Ulf Meyer Zu Kueingdorf, *Double Act: Two Artists, One Expression*. Munich: Prestel, 2007), p.15.

interested in the possibilities of collaboration and excited by what results from joint experimentation rather than pursuing the complete dissolution of the notion of the author. As with the little magazines, each piece is identified as the work of an individual writer or artist, but this does not mean that they can be studied in isolation from the collaborative context of the publication. Within the work of the third mind the two minds of Burroughs and Gysin are clearly visible and attention is even drawn to their authorship of particular pieces, but their texts and drawings cannot be separately extracted without dramatically altering a collaborative work such as *The Exterminator* or *Minutes to Go*. Although it is difficult to avoid referring individually to Burroughs and Gysin when writing about their work, we can incorporate into our readings this sense of collaboration – the third mind – as an expanded consciousness generated through the participation of more than one person.

In this study of Burroughs' collaborative practice I will be looking at the three texts *Minutes to Go*, *The Exterminator* and *The Third Mind* which, despite being collaborative works, did find an outlet in a published format. These three texts present an alternative cut-up trilogy to Burroughs' cut-ups novels of the 1960s, and I will be reading them as such. *Minutes to Go* was published in Paris by Two Cities in 1960, a collaboration between Burroughs, Gysin, Gregory Corso and Sinclair Beiles; *The Exterminator* which was also published in 1960 is a collaborative work by Gysin and Burroughs; as is *The Third Mind* which was produced in 1965 but not published until 1976. The first edition of *The Third Mind* was a French translation entitled *Oeuvre Croisée*; it was then published in English in 1978 by John Calder in London and in 1982 by Seaver Books in New York and has not been reprinted in English since that date.

The Exterminator was published by Auerhahn Press in San Francisco in 1960. The print run was only 1000 copies and like the mimeograph publishers and small presses associated with the New York poetry scene, David Haselwood of Auerhahn hand-printed the texts. According to *A Bibliography of the Auerhahn Press* (1976), Haselwood established the press in reaction to the large publishing houses which ‘were for the main part cowardly, without visionary foundations, strictly commercial or controlled by the academies’.⁴ Haselwood printed the material himself rather than using professional printers in order to issue the work uncensored and with the kind of immediacy that characterised the mimeograph magazines. This decision was based upon his experience of engaging commercial printers for the first Auerhahn book which was John Wiener’s *The Hotel Wentley Poems*:

I took it to a printer and work was begun on it. That book, small as it is, took four months to get out, mainly because of the idiocy of commercial printers. Furthermore, my vision of what the book should look like was not completely carried through. That made me decide that in the future I would not only design but personally print any book the Press decided to do.⁵

As with the little magazines, small press publications such as those by Auerhahn need to be studied as a distinct medium. The circulation and reception of small press publications differ from those of larger commercial publishers. Although Burroughs’ collaborative work is represented in published book format by *Minutes to Go* and *The Exterminator*, if we look at the publication statistics of these texts compared to the cut-up novels as detailed in *William S. Burroughs: A Bibliography, 1953-73* by Joe Maynard and Barry Miles, we can see that these collaborative works scarcely reached

⁴ Alastair Johnston, *A Bibliography of the Auerhahn Press and its Successor Dave Haselwood Books*. Berkeley: Poltroon Press, 1976, p.6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

an audience any larger than the mimeograph magazines of the same period.⁶ Although these texts, as books, are aesthetically aligned with the mainstream publication of Burroughs' work, they are closer in attitude and urgency to the pamphlet-like mimeograph publications.

The text of *The Third Mind*, of all of Burroughs' published works, has been the most compromised and altered by the process of publication. It was described by Gysin as 'one of the saddest stories in publishing'.⁷ The manuscript is characterised by those very qualities of Burroughs' experimental work that have made its publication so problematic. The work is collaborative and it refuses generic identification. It is neither a novel, anthology, nor poetry, and most importantly the original manuscript included a large quantity of visual material such as scrapbook pages, collage, grids and photographs which publishers found they could not reproduce in a book format owing to financial and technical restrictions.⁸ John Geiger's description of the 1965 manuscript of *The Third Mind* conveys how central imagery and collage were to the work:

⁶ The 1960 Two Cities edition of *Minutes to Go* consisted of 1000 copies, another edition by Beach Books in 1968 also consisted of 1000 copies. *The Exterminator*, published by The Auerhahn Press in 1960 consisted of 1000 copies with a second edition in 1967 of 1000 copies. The size of these print-runs is considerably smaller than the first Grove Press editions of *The Soft Machine* in 1966 which consisted of 18000 copies with a second edition in 1967 of 25000 copies and another 24052 copies reprinted that year and *The Ticket that Exploded* in 1967 consisting of 10000 copies, with a second edition published in 1968 and reprinted two times that same year. These figures are taken from Joe Maynard and Barry Miles, *William S. Burroughs: A Bibliography, 1953-73: Unlocking Inspector Lee's Word Hoard*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1978.

⁷ John Geiger quotes Brion Gysin in John Geiger, *Nothing is True Everything is Permitted: The Life of Brion Gysin*. New York: Disinformation, 2005, p.197.

⁸ These collage works from the original manuscript have found a different home within the space of the art gallery. Most recently they have been on show in the exhibition *Brion Gysin: Dreamachine* at The New Museum in New York from July to October 2010, and within the last few years they have been included in the exhibitions *The Third Mind* at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2007/2008) and *Burroughs Live* at the Royal Academy of Arts in London (2008/2009). As with many avant-garde works of art, their presentation within fine art institutions is in many ways contrary to their character, introducing another point for debate on the issue of how we experience Burroughs and Gysin's experimental work.

Burroughs and Gysin had been working on scrapbooks for several years, and *The Third Mind* was intended to incorporate approximately seventy collages. It explored every conceivable combination of text, photographic montage, and calligraphy. It relied on grids, and the use of the printer's ink brayer especially modified by Gysin to simulate the visual sensations created by the Dreamachine.⁹

Grove press had been intending to publish *The Third Mind*, but as Geiger states, 'Grove dropped the book apparently for commercial considerations' when they discovered that the cost of reproducing these colour collages was too high. The estimated cost of printing *The Third Mind* could not be defended on the basis of its commercial potential, as a collaborative and experimental work, income from its sale would not meet the high cost of its publication.

G rard-Georges Lemaire, in his introduction to the 1976 publication of *The Third Mind*, suggests that it was not only the cost of printing that was prohibitive, but also the way in which the manuscript refused a stable identity of media or genre which threatened to disturb the very notion of what constitutes a published work:

The Third Mind initially included almost as many collages and graphics as texts. As the dummy of the original edition took form, the difficulties grew and diversified. The book defied the normal criteria of modern printing. In fact, the first dummy was finally abandoned because it challenged a certain Western conception of what a book should be, in its presentation as well as in its internal functioning and goals.¹⁰

Although these statements describing the technical difficulties of printing and publishing *The Third Mind* are accurate, they do not fully explain why Burroughs' output of this period proved so resistant to the published form. The closer we examine Burroughs' experimental work, it becomes apparent that it bears some other quality

⁹ Geiger (2005), p.195.

¹⁰ Lemaire, '23 Stitches Taken' in *The Third Mind*, p.19.

that contributes to this tension between it and the medium of the book. I propose that these more obvious practical obstacles to publication hide a different conflict between the work and the process of publication which has to do with Burroughs and Gysin's use of avant-garde practices including collaboration, collage and audience involvement to develop a psychoactive aesthetic – an aesthetic of the third mind.

Collaboration as an Avant-garde Practice

Burroughs' engagement in collaboration and cut-ups revolved around his declaration that 'Poetry is for everyone'.¹¹ This phrase, stated frequently by Burroughs in his letters and his work, originated in the writings of Lautréamont and was adopted by avant-garde artists earlier in the twentieth century. The relationship between Dadaist practices and Burroughs and Gysin's cut-ups and acts of collaboration was openly acknowledged by Burroughs and Gysin themselves and explored by Gérard-Georges Lemaire in his introductory text to the published version of *The Third Mind*. This piece entitled '23 Stitches Taken by Gérard-Georges Lemaire and 2 Points of Order by Brion Gysin', presents a reading of the technique of cut-up, firmly locating it within a history of collaboration.

Lemaire identified the collaborative activities of the Dadaists and the Surrealists as the immediate predecessors to Gysin and Burroughs' experimental practice:

In 1860 Lautréamont wrote: "Poetry should be made by all, not by one." This sentence, a veritable watchword, was taken as his own by Tristan Tzara, then reinterpreted by the Surrealists, who aimed at a collective creation with the "exquisite corpses," a party game that led during the 1920s to such publications as Breton and Eluard's

¹¹ Burroughs, 'The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin' in *The Third Mind*, p.31.

L'immaculée conception and Breton and Soupault's *Les champs magnétiques*.¹²

Lemaire's statement is informed by his reading of the introductory texts to *Renga*, a 'chain of poems' published in 1971 by Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti and Charles Tomlinson. *Renga* provided Lemaire with a comparative contemporary work of literary collaboration against which to read the experiments of Gysin and Burroughs, but he makes no such comparison, using the text only to borrow from its brief history of collaborative poetry. Lemaire later references the Dadaists and Surrealists a second time in regard to Gysin and Burroughs' cut-ups, identifying them as 'the ancestors of this technique':

[A] machine that could upset semantic order - that method has a history that goes back to Dada. In his *Manifestos* Tristan Tzara set down the principle of cutting up the pages of a newspaper, throwing the words into a hat, and pulling them out at random. Shortly thereafter, Marcel Duchamp, in his *Rendezvous du Dimanche 6 février à 1 h ¾ après-midi*, placed four apparently unrelated texts in four divisions of a square.¹³

These connections between the work of the Dadaists, Surrealists and that of Gysin and Burroughs are well observed, but his focus is solely upon the ancestors of the cut-up, and not upon Gysin and Burroughs' contemporaries.

In Claude Roy and Octavio Paz's introductory texts to *Renga* they describe their understanding of collaboration as a strategy aimed at undermining the myth of the 'author' and the distinction between writer and reader. Paz argues that 'poetry must be made by all and for all,' and with explicit reference to his revision of surrealist practices, Paz, like Burroughs, adopts the practice of collaboration to express this theory:

¹² Lemaire, '23 Stitches Taken' in *The Third Mind*, p.11.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.14.

It was the surrealists who brought to an end the idea of the author by resolving the contradiction of the romantics: the poet is merely the place of meeting, the field of battle and reconciliation of the impersonal and masked forces that inhabit us. Inspired by one of the maxims from Lautréamont's *Poésies*, they affirm that poetry must be made by all and for all.¹⁴

Roy elaborates upon the concept of participation that lies behind Paz's experiment with collaboration: '[h]e wants the attempt to continue: he wants other voices to mingle in it, other poets, other languages' leading to poetry 'renouncing its solo voices', 'going from monody to polyphony, or at least soliloquy to conversation'.¹⁵ We have already seen with Burroughs' contributions to the mimeograph magazines that he was exploring similar ideas and encouraging a shift from monody to polyphony in the experience of the work. It is not only Burroughs and Paz who quote the Surrealists quoting Lautréamont, a number of post-war artists and activists such as the Situationists found in Lautréamont's statement the basis for their own expression of and practice of the idea that poetry is for all.

To better understand this post-war adoption of the avant-garde practice of collaboration, it is worthwhile examining its role within Dadaist and Surrealist art. One of the most famous Surrealist collaborative experiments was the game of *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse). This activity involved the group production of a text or an image of a body, with each person completing a section of the sentence or drawing without seeing the contribution of the previous participant. The game of *cadavre exquis*, as the collaborative creation of the image of a hybrid body and the dissolution of individual identity, offers a concise picture of the disruptive potential of the art and act of collaboration. Collage, collaboration and the promotion of the idea of 'poetry

¹⁴ Octavio Paz, 'Introduction' in Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti, Charles Tomlinson, *Renga: A Chain of Poems*. 1971. Middlesex: Penguin, 1979, p.22.

¹⁵ Claude Roy, 'Foreword' in *Renga: A Chain of Poems*, p.12.

for all' are combined in the game of *cadavre exquis* as they are in the activity of cut-ups. Comparing the famous game of the surrealists to the cut-ups of Burroughs and Gysin suggests how the latter might be read as the visual illustration of an idea. In the same way that a *cadavre exquis* drawing represents a strong expression and illustration of the idea and possibilities of collaboration, the practice of cut-ups is also the illustration or 'picturing' of an idea. When the cut-up method is described, what remains in the reader's mind are not the words of the text but the images that arise of scissors or blade cutting through newspapers and the subsequent rearrangement of the segments. Similarly with the *cadavre exquis*, the drawing of a hybrid body conveys the idea of collaboration as participatory. Cut-ups, like the *cadavre exquis*, are both the practice and representation of the idea of art and literature as participatory activities and as powerful means to alter perception.

I have been referring to cut-ups as collaborative work but perhaps we need to examine in what ways they qualify as collaborative. When we attempt to determine what characteristics of a work of art or literature define it as collaborative, we soon discover that collaborative work takes so many different forms and is produced under such different conditions that a narrow definition is not possible. Collaborative work can be created by the contributors being present and working in conference, but collaboration can also take place at a distance, or in the case of the *cadavre exquis* without knowledge of the contributions of the other participants.

Cut-ups are not necessarily assembled by more than one person, but they are collaborative in the sense that they include material written by more than one person. A similar form of collaboration is observed by Ingrid Schaffner in her reading of Marcel Duchamp's 'L.H.O.O.Q.' as collaborative: '[t]respassing time and authorship,

Marcel Duchamp drew a moustache on the Mona Lisa, making Leonardo da Vinci an unwitting accomplice to this collaborative work of art'.¹⁶ Burroughs, like Duchamp, collaborates with unwitting accomplices in the production of cut-ups. Different understandings of the term 'collaboration' are at play here, dependent upon whether the collaboration is contemporary or conducted across time, and whether it is consensual or not. What is evident however is the potential for collaboration, cut-ups and collage to 'trespass time', to be activities that disturb the perception of both space and time. Duchamp collaborating with da Vinci or Burroughs' cut-ups of Shakespeare and Rimbaud dissolve the relationship between the history of art and the present, another aspect of these practices which was for Burroughs an exploration of art as a form of 'space-time travel'.

The many possibilities of what can constitute collaboration and the challenge that this holds for establishing a working definition is an ongoing debate in studies of the subject. Richard Badenhausen in *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* uses the term in 'the broadest possible manner',¹⁷ citing Jack Stillinger's definition: 'situations where someone other than the nominal author is essentially and inextricably part of the authorship',¹⁸ and then expanding upon this definition 'so that it encompasses Eliot's collaboration with his readers, dramatic audiences, and even past writers'.

M. Thomas Inge also argues for a broad application of the term:

I have used the word collaboration intentionally to cover a wide range of group effort. Most people would agree that any attempt by two or more individuals to create or compose something together - line by

¹⁶ Ingrid Schaffner, 'Après Exquis' in Jane Philbrick, ed., *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*. New York: The Drawing Centre, 1993, p.56.

¹⁷ Richard Badenhausen, *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.8. Badenhausen quotes from Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p.20.

line, page by page, or chapter by chapter - qualifies as collaboration, but I would argue for a broader understanding. Anytime another hand enters into an effort, a kind of collaboration occurs.¹⁹

I agree with Inge and Badenhausen on the use of a fluid interpretation of the term collaboration, and propose that the use of any narrower definition threatens to undermine the very qualities of openness and liquidity that avant-garde collaboration strives for. In this study I identify Burroughs' cut-up work, his gestures towards audience participation, as well as his work with other artists and writers as instances of collaboration.

Collage and collaboration are closely aligned as ideas and as practices. David Shapiro, in 'Art as Collaboration: Toward a Theory of Pluralist Aesthetics 1950-1980', observes the shared interest in collaboration that characterises the work of the Dadaists, Surrealists and post-war artists and poets:

Collaboration may be said to be a mode analogous to collage. The best collaborations of the Dadaists and Surrealists, as well as of the members of the so-called New York school of poetry, emphasize the theme of abruptness, of textural changes, and of the sense of rupture and discontinuity.²⁰

In Burroughs' experiments of the 1950s and the 1960s he shifts between the practices of collage, cut-ups and collaboration as interchangeable and complementary activities. All three of these means of working explore and implement the idea that the juxtaposition of several elements creates something more than the sum of its parts.

¹⁹ M. Thomas Inge, 'Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship', *PMLA*, 116.3. (May 2001), p.629.

²⁰ David Shapiro, 'Art as Collaboration: Toward a Theory of Pluralist Aesthetics 1950-1980' in Cynthia Jaffee McCabe, ed., *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984, p.45.

In her study of photomontage, Dawn Ades quotes from André Breton writing on the collage of ‘separate realities’, ‘of bringing them together and drawing a spark from their contact’.²¹ Breton’s statement, which proposes that in the bringing together of two or more elements, something other - ‘a spark’ - results, is echoed in Burroughs and Gysin’s concept of ‘the third mind’. In the juxtaposition of two or more elements an experience or a state of mind results that is irreducible to its components. Breton, writing specifically about the game of *cadavre exquis* in *Surrealism and Painting*, offers some examples of ‘phrases obtained in this manner’, choosing ‘those which produced in us the strongest sensation of disorientation and strangeness, those which succeeded in giving us a most powerful *jolt*’.²² This ‘jolt’ of collaborative work, like the ‘spark’ of collage is a term that implies action or ignition, and by using such terms Breton gives recognition to the power of these practices as experiences to disorient or re-orient the mind.

The importance attributed to what arises from collaboration, whether this is ‘the third mind’ or ‘a spark’ is essential to note in understanding the role of collaboration in Burroughs and Gysin’s experimental practice. The Dadaists are again referred to in ‘The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin’ in *The Third Mind*. Burroughs describes the Dadaist genealogy of the cut-up technique: ‘At a surrealist rally in the 1920s Tristan Tzara the man from nowhere proposed to create a poem on the spot by pulling words out of a hat. A riot ensued wrecked the theater’.²³ This statement is of course making a comparison between Tzara’s action of ‘pulling words out of a hat’ and Gysin and

²¹ Dawn Ades, *Photomontage*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, p.19. Ades quotes from André Breton ‘Max Ernst’, 1920, preface to the Max Ernst exhibition, Paris May 1921, reprinted in Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting*. Trans. Ralph Manheim, New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948, p.177.

²² André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*. 1928. Trans. Simon Watson Taylor. London: Macdonald, 1972, p.289.

²³ Burroughs, ‘The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin’ in *The Third Mind*, p.29.

Burroughs' cut-up experiments, but it is more than simply a reference to the similarities of the two activities. Attention is also drawn to the impact of Tzara's performance. The 'spark' or 'jolt' in this instance takes the form of a riot, and results in the wrecking of a theatre, a traditional space of the arts, revisiting on a larger scale Tzara's wrecking of the notions of 'literature' and 'author'. The history of art in which Burroughs locates his and Gysin's work is one in which collage and collaboration are used as strategies of active disruption. Attention has been paid to how cut-ups reference the techniques of the early twentieth century avant-gardes, but we also need to question how Burroughs, Gysin, and other post-war artists were striving to adopt these practices not only as techniques but as *strategies*.

Charles Simic, in his essay in *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, writes that the chance operations of collaboration involved in the Dadaist game 'make trouble, promote ambiguity, spit on dogmatism of any kind'. As an anti-art activity, 'Surrealist games are the greatest blasphemy yet conceived by the arts against the arts'.²⁴

Burroughs and Gysin's 'third mind' makes trouble of the form Simic associates with the cadavre exquis, placing the mind in an ambiguous, altered state. Mary Ann Caws, in the essay that follows that of Simic, quotes from Simone Collinet, the first wife of André Breton, who states that this collective play was 'a method of research, a means of exaltation and stimulation, a gold mine of findings, maybe even a drug'.²⁵

Kenneth Koch, a writer who was experimenting with collaboration during the same period as Burroughs, wrote of his experiences of the 'effects' of collaboration: 'one thing collaboration gives is the frequent if not constant feeling of being surprised, of

²⁴ Charles Simic, 'The Little Venus of Eskimos' in Philbrick, p.30.

²⁵ Mary Ann Caws, 'Exquisite Essentials' in Philbrick, p.37. Caws quotes from Simone Collinet in André Breton. *Le Cadavre Exquis, Son Exaltation*. Milan: Chez Arturo Schwarz, 1975, p.30.

being led where one had no idea one was going'.²⁶ Collaboration offers the experience of something other than the singular imagination, or as Mary Ann Caws writes of the *cadavre exquis*, of 'the mind and the object, the mind and chance, the mind and its ultimate possibility'.²⁷ The influence of the altered states of mind experienced through the use of psychoactive substances gave Burroughs and Gysin's work a focus that differed from the work of Tzara or Duchamp. Like the surrealists and the Dadaists, Burroughs and Gysin were interested in the work inspiring a riot or a jolt, but one that had the power and character of *yagé* or LSD.

**An Alternative Trilogy of Cut-up Texts:
*The Exterminator, Minutes to Go and The Third Mind***

If we continue this reading of Burroughs' experimental work in reference to that of the early twentieth century and post-war avant-gardes, we begin to see that *The Exterminator, Minutes to Go* and *The Third Mind* can be read as manifestos for the activities of collage, collaboration and cut-ups. These publications contain work produced using the technique of cut-up, but they also present texts which explain and promote the idea of the cut-up, the fold-in and experiments with tape recorders. The texts incite participation, addressing the reader with directions on how to produce cut-ups, ideas for experiments and practices to be adopted not only for the purposes of art but as new ways of thinking. It is the collaborative basis of these texts and their inducement to the reader to participate in the activities described that give each text the tone and presence of a manifesto.

²⁶ Kenneth Koch, 'Collaborating with Painters' in Kenneth Koch, *The Art of Poetry: Poems, Parodies, Interviews, Essays, and Other Work*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996, p.170.

²⁷ Mary Ann Caws, 'Exquisite Essentials' in Philbrick, p.38.

Minutes to Go was the first of these cut-up texts to appear. Published in Paris in 1960, it was distributed within the vicinity of where its authors Burroughs, Gysin, Gregory Corso and Sinclair Beiles lived and worked at the Beat Hotel. It documents the time and place of the initial exploration of both the practice and the idea of cut-ups as a collaborative process. As a text containing the experiments of a number of writers using the cut-up technique, *Minutes to Go* introduces the cut-up as an activity not belonging to one singular writer as his idea or style, but as a technique available to all, a communal activity. The text also presents their differing attitudes towards the technique. The conflict within the text between those fully embracing the strategy of cut-ups (Burroughs and Gysin) and those less enthusiastic (Corso and Beiles) means that the text works as an active illustration of the power of cut-ups to disturb and question the concepts of 'author' and 'literature'. In Corso's text 'Note for my contribution to the Cut-Up System' reproduced at the end of the book, he expresses his ambivalence towards the idea and experience of using the cut-up method: 'I join this venture unwillingly *and* willingly'.²⁸ The very values of poetry that Corso wishes to protect are threatened by the cut-up technique, and his presence within *Minutes to Go* as both a participant and the voice of dissent against such an anti-art strategy means that this potential of the cut-up to cause, if not a riot, at least a jolt, is felt within the publication.

Gysin's opening piece 'Minutes to Go' introduces the text as a manifesto, as a call to action and a book of instruction. The first two lines present the message of the work and the position of its authors: 'the hallucinated have come to tell you that yr utilities are being shut off dreams monitored thought directed'. In this piece we can detect the

²⁸ Gregory Corso, 'Note for my Contribution to the Cut-Up System' in William S. Burroughs, Brion Gysin, Sinclair Beiles, and Gregory Corso, *Minutes to Go*. Paris: Two Cities Editions, 1960, p.63.

background of experimental activity that I reviewed in Burroughs and Gysin's correspondence and that is recorded in accounts of their residency at the Beat Hotel. Immersed in their exploration of mescaline and mirror gazing, of the performative and magical properties of writing and painting, of stroboscopic light and the processes of cut-ups and tape recording, Burroughs and Gysin here deliver the results of their experiments. Gysin begins by heightening the reader's awareness of the manipulation of language as a method of control, warning that our thoughts and actions are imprisoned within the restraints imposed by words, including the language of the media and of government:

the word has been in for a too long time
you in the word and the word in you²⁹

Having described this situation of the human relationship to language as one of containment and dictation, Gysin announces 'we have come to let you out', that 'here and now we will show you what you can do' by actively engaging in material experimentation with language: 'what you can do with and to the word'. Within these opening pages, the emphasis has already been shifted to the reader who is directly addressed as a participant:

Pick a book any book cut it up
cut up
prose
poems
newspapers
magazines
the bible³⁰

Having directed the reader to 'slice down the middle' and 'dice into sections' all forms of textual material, Gysin explains that the purpose of this exercise is that 'as

²⁹ Brion Gysin, 'Minutes to Go' in *Minutes to Go*, p.3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4.

you may find or invent you will soon see just what they really are saying'.³¹ The cut-up method is presented as a means to heighten awareness of how language functions in its various forms and uses.

The second piece in *Minutes to Go* works to demonstrate this consciousness-expanding effect of the cut-up method. Entitled 'First Cut-Ups', dated 'September 1959' and attributed to Brion Gysin, the text is described as '[a] collage from *The Paris Herald Tribune, The London Observer, The London Daily Mail, Life Magazine advertisements*'. The cut-ups that follow offer examples of how the displacement of words and phrases from their normal context forces us to look closely at what these words are saying, to re-evaluate what they mean and how they are used. The comedic effect of this abstraction and rearrangement of words is arrived at by highlighting the clichés, the empty phrases and the nonsensical quality of the original statements which are magnified by the process of cut-up:

"People aren't crazy," she said, "Now that Hazard has banished my timidity I feel that I, too, can live on streams in the area where people are urged to be watchful."³²

The surreal imagery that results from these cut-ups of newspaper stories is influenced by early twentieth-century avant-garde collage:

Witnesses, from a distance, observed a roaring blast and a brilliant flash as the operator was arrested. A petite blue-eyed blonde streaked across the sky and clashed with Glasgow police. She had wielded the gavel with a walrus moustache and was thrown overboard. Her father, a well-known Artist until a bundle of his accented brush-work blew up in the sky, said, "We can't do that yet. The reason I'm not buying a new couch is to save money. She should have known better."³³

³¹ Ibid., pp.4-5.

³² Brion Gysin, 'First Cut-Ups' in *Minutes to Go*, p.6.

³³ Ibid., p.9.

These cut-ups by Gysin, with their pasting of one image on top of another, resemble the collages of Max Ernst, whereas Burroughs' cut-ups in *Minutes to Go* push the method further, and instead of creating a surreal re-working of the original elements of a story, Burroughs presents a more brutal abstraction of language.

In Burroughs' newspaper cut-ups presented in *Minutes to Go* he submits medical articles to the cut-up process, naming his source material as 'Toward a Cure for Cancer' from *Life* magazine and 'New Clues to Cancer Cures' from the *Saturday Evening Post*. Although these articles have been very finely cut-up - compared to other cut-ups that leave whole groups of words intact - the texts that result 'Viruses Were by Accident', and 'Others Kill Cells and Future for New Cancer Holes' carry their subject matter through the vocabulary alone:

new cancer will be applied
 synthetize cancer men
 stepped up research
 whole cancer
 nothing more of unconcern
 like tiny blobs
 new ate
 amplified into groups
 agent at work
 aid of the host
 the usual procedure³⁴

The cut-ups of newspaper articles uncover their daily repetition of the same stories and subjects, these cut-ups exaggerate and bring to attention the rearrangement of vocabulary, names and places that the media issue each day. In 'Inside the Control Machine' published in *The Third Mind*, Burroughs proposed that through the various cut-up exercises demonstrated and offered to the reader 'you will have gained some

³⁴ Burroughs, 'Others Kill Cells and Future for New Cancer Holes' in *Minutes to Go*, p.18.

insight into the Control Machine and how it operates' and become alert to the function of form and repetition in newspapers:

You will hear the disembodied voice which speaks through any newspaper on lines of association and juxtaposition. The mechanism has no voice of its own and can talk indirectly only through the words of others ... speaking through comic strips ... news items ... advertisements ... talking, above all, through names and numbers. Numbers *are* repetition and repetition is what produces events.³⁵

A conventional reading of a newspaper results in the assimilation of the language and suggestive quality of the material without conscious awareness. A cut-up of a newspaper re-presents the same material but by disturbing the ability to read the content, attention is drawn instead to the language used, the tone and the formulaic repetition of the elements that make up a newspaper story. The process in this instance reveals the newspaper story as an assemblage of names and terminology rather than information or knowledge, demonstrating what Trocchi described as the formulaic quality of the medium which makes each day's newspaper 'identical to yesterday's newspaper, in the sense that it is a reshake of identical elements'.³⁶

The instruction to cut-up any and all material is directly addressed to the reader in *Minutes to Go*, *The Exterminator* and *The Third Mind*, and in each text an increasing number of variations of this process are included such as the use of grids, fold-ins and tape cut-ups. In 'Cut Me Up' in *Minutes to Go* Gysin suggests 'cutting up this whole book' to 'make a new book of it'.³⁷ Burroughs echoes these directions in *The Third Mind*:

³⁵ Burroughs, 'Inside the Control Machine' in *The Third Mind*, p.178.

³⁶ Alexander Trocchi, 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', *Sigma Portfolio*, 2 (1964), pp.2-3.

³⁷ Gysin, 'Cut Me Up' in *Minutes to Go*, p.42.

The method is simple. Here is one way to do it. Take a page. Like this page. Now cut down the middle and across the middle. You have four sections: 1 2 3 4... one two three four. Now rearrange the sections placing section four with section one and section two with section three. And you have a new page.³⁸

This instruction to cut into the published text is an invitation to violate the boundaries between reader and writer. This instruction to cut-up the publication works as a statement on the form and place of the work, for if the work is to be fully experienced and brought into being then the instruction must be followed and the book cut-up by the reader. This destruction of the book indicates that the work is located in the actions of the reader not in the publication. This anti-book, or anti-publication dimension of Burroughs and Gysin's experimental work, is more fully explored in *The Third Mind* but it has its beginnings in these early texts in *Minutes to Go*. These instructions unsettle the reader's engagement with the cut-ups published in these texts, for if it is the practice of making cut-ups that is important, the implication is that these texts are only examples, bearing meaning for their 'author' but not necessarily for another reader. This leads to an uncertainty in the reader, and poses the question of whether it is only our *own* cut-ups that will carry meaning for us, which will 'jolt' our mind.

Of these three publications, *The Exterminator* is the most difficult text to read, and purposefully so because it presents Burroughs' project to 'rub out the word' into silence. The text begins, like *Minutes to Go*, by presenting the argument that 'strung lines of word associates' control the thoughts and actions of people, that they '[s]ee and hear what They expect to see and hear because The Word Lines keep Thee In

³⁸ Burroughs, 'The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin' in *The Third Mind*, pp.29-30.

Slots'.³⁹ It is a work that requires the reader to be subjected to its actions rather than conventionally read. The published text comprises cut-ups by Burroughs interspersed with permutations by Gysin, ending with drawings by Gysin. The experiencing of the work happens in the transition through these different forms. The cut-ups on their own have an impact upon the processes of reading, pushing the reader to question the sense of each word and the associations between each word. Gysin's permutations which are placed throughout the text contribute to the task of expanding the reader's awareness of how, when reading, meaning is constructed through learnt habits of association.

Gysin's permutations are a variation on the cut-up method; they were produced by working with a single phrase and compiling a list of all the permutations of the words, each shifting in meaning and intonation. In 'Cut-Ups Self-Explained' published in *The Third Mind*, Gysin describes the permutations as a loosening of words from conventional patterns of usage:

The permuted poems set the words spinning off on their own: echoing out as the words of a potent phrase are permuted into an expanding ripple of meanings which they did not seem capable of when they were struck and stuck into that phrase.⁴⁰

This description of what happens during the activity of permutation carries echoes of a psychedelic vocabulary, drawing upon the same descriptive frameworks of space and liquidity - 'expanding', 'ripple' and the melting down of words 'struck' on an anvil - used to describe the alteration of consciousness. The permutations present

³⁹ Burroughs, 'The Exterminator' in William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Exterminator*. San Francisco: The Auerhahn Press, 1960, p.5.

⁴⁰ Brion Gysin, 'Cut-Ups Self-Explained' in *The Third Mind*, p.34.

rearrangements of a single phrase which work to dislocate our sense of each word's referent, for example:

KICK THAT HABIT MAN
 KICK THAT HABIT
 MAN KICK THAT
 HABIT MAN KICK
 THAT HABIT MAN

KICK THAT HABIT MAN
 KICK HABIT THAT MAN
 KICK MAN HABIT THAT
 KICK THAT MAN HABIT

KICK HABIT MAN THAT
 KICK MAN THAT HABIT⁴¹

In *The Exterminator* the permutations continue for the full length of a page, and intermittent exposure to these texts functions as pockets of mind-altering stimulant, sharpening the reader's attention to the aural and visual qualities of language.⁴² Returning to the cut-up text after one of these permutation pages, the reader's consciousness of their practice of reading is heightened. The final permutation - 'Rub out the word' - is faced on the opposite page by an exercise in the displacement of language by image, with the words in 'rub out the Word' substituted by the symbols # \$ % &, activating in the reader's mind a literal rubbing out of word and introducing the results of Burroughs and Gysin's experiments with simulating a synaesthetic experience in their work. Gysin's calligraphs at the end of the publication complete the experience of the work: the rubbing out of the word into silence.⁴³

⁴¹ Permutation by Brion Gysin in *The Exterminator*, p.16.

⁴² Listening to recordings of Brion Gysin performing his permuted poems provides a sense of the disorientating effect of the permutations. See: Brion Gysin, *Live in London 1982*. Brussels: Sub Rosa, 2007, and Brion Gysin, *Recordings 1960-81*. Chicago: Perdition Plastics, 1995.

⁴³ This shift in *The Exterminator* from words to glyphs echoes Burroughs' transition from written text to 'word forms' in his letter to Ginsberg 2 January 1959 (figs 26-27), and from text to illegible marks and swirls in his much earlier 1953 notebook. In the introduction to the published reproduction of the notebook, Oliver Harris writes: 'Burroughs' struggle to escape the traps of memory and desire may even account for the extraordinary sequence towards the end of the *Notebook* where the very words on the page give up their representational function and turn irreducibly cryptic.' (Oliver Harris, 'Introduction' in *Everything Lost*, p.xvi.) In each instance, the shift from word to non-representational

The Third Mind, published thirteen years after it was first composed by Burroughs and Gysin, contains an extensive amount of explanation and analysis of the cut-up technique. Within it there are texts that narrate the discovery of the cut-up method, variations on pieces from *Minutes to Go*⁴⁴ and *The Exterminator*, descriptions of experiments with tape cut-ups and fold-ins and exercises using grids and scrapbooks. This relationship within the text between explication and demonstration works well to develop an understanding of the practices of cut-up and collaboration. As in *Minutes to Go* and *The Exterminator*, active involvement is a central proposition of the text, and despite the long delay in publication, the text has retained the tone of action in its incitement to reader participation. The dedication at the beginning of *The Third Mind* reads: ‘To and for our collaborators at all times third minds everywhere.’ This makes clear that the ‘third mind’ referenced in the title is not only that of Gysin and Burroughs but is intended to include the collaborative actions of the reader and the collaborative intersections of the book beyond its covers. That the ‘to and for’ of the dedication is directed outwards to the reader gives an important emphasis to the identity of the text as a manifesto, as a book for active use.

The Third Mind begins with the two texts, ‘Interview with William S. Burroughs’ which is extracted from the 1965 interview with Conrad Knickerbocker in *Paris Review*, and ‘23 Stitches Taken by Gérard-Georges Lemaire and 2 Points of Order by Brion Gysin’. By introducing the publication with an interview and a commentary by Lemaire, the cut-up method is described to the reader through an explanation of its origins, related activities and connections to earlier avant-garde strategies. The

glyphs activates and invites the escape or release from language.

⁴⁴ See Davis Schneiderman, ‘Everybody’s Got Something to Hide Except for Me and My Lawsuit: William S. Burroughs, DJ Danger Mouse, and the Politics of “Grey Tuesday”’, *Plagiarism: Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Plagiarism, Fabrication, and Falsification*, 1.13 (2006), p.8, for a review of

interview with Knickerbocker provides an insight into how the techniques of cut-up and collage are a part of his working practice, locating their importance in the moment of experiment and experience rather than in the final product. Burroughs describes his work as experiments in the expansion of consciousness: ‘What I want to do is to learn to see more of what’s out there, to look outside, to achieve as far as possible a complete awareness of surroundings’.⁴⁵ Cut-ups are presented as the means to stimulate this awareness in the reader: ‘the new techniques such as cut-up, will involve much more of the total capacity of the observer. It enriches the whole aesthetic experience, extends it’.⁴⁶

In the interview Burroughs describes working on his scrapbooks with reference to the physical, tactile process involved: ‘I’ll cut out the picture or article and paste it in a scrapbook beside the words from my book. Or I’ll be walking down the street and I’ll suddenly see a scene from my book and I’ll photograph it and put it in a scrapbook.’ This description of the non-linear process of arranging and working with his material, suggests to the reader how their approach to *The Third Mind* should be adjusted accordingly, our reception of the text need not obey traditional methods of reading, and the work should instead be experienced as a collage. Burroughs uses the word ‘exercises’ throughout the interview, stressing that cut-ups and collage are processes rather than end-products:

For exercise, when I make a trip, such as from Tangier to Gibraltar, I will record this in three columns in a notebook I always take with me. One column will contain simply an account of the trip, what happened: I arrived at the air terminal, what was said by the clerks, what I overheard on the plane, what hotel I checked into. The next column presents my memories: that is, what I was thinking of at the time, the

some of the differences between the texts published in both *Minutes to Go* and *The Third Mind*.

⁴⁵ Burroughs and Knickerbocker, ‘Interview with William S. Burroughs’ in *The Third Mind*, p.2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6.

memories that were activated by my encounters. And the third column, which I call my reading column, gives quotations from any book that I take with me.⁴⁷

These descriptions of his working practice suggest that *The Third Mind* should also be approached as an exercise book. The interview leaves the reader with the sense that the contents of *The Third Mind* bear a contradictory relationship to their published form and that the final state of book publication is contrary to the character of these exercises and experiments. As Davis Schneiderman has noted, even the attribution of copyright to the published text undermines the conceptual basis of cut-ups, that ‘everything remotely freeing in his method becomes to some extent contraindicated by the “©” symbol’.⁴⁸

In the text that follows the Burroughs and Knickerbocker interview in *The Third Mind*, Lemaire explores this conflict between the format and the content of the book. He views Burroughs and Gysin’s exploration of the idea and practice of a third mind as ‘the negation of the omnipresent and all-powerful author’, ‘the negation of the frontier that separates fiction from its theory’ and ‘the negation of the book as such - or at least the representation of that negation’.⁴⁹ Unlike the invisibility of the history of publication found in *Naked Lunch* or *The Yage Letters*, Lemaire’s text *does* provide a commentary upon the compromises and the impact of the process of publication. He alerts the reader to the absences within the published text and the incompleteness of the work in book format, a format antithetical to its message. This presence within the published text of a critique of the problems and negotiations involved in the process of publication transforms *The Third Mind* from being merely

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.6.

⁴⁸ Schneiderman, p.10.

⁴⁹ Lemaire, ‘23 Stitches Taken’ in *The Third Mind*, p.18.

the product of this process of reduction and compromise, to being the exposure of the conflict between the material, the conceptual basis of the text and its format.

As a project and an experiment, *The Third Mind* exists in opposition to the very properties of a published book with its boundaries of containment and suggestion of completion. There is a tension between the work and its format, but this published version is at least successful in identifying this tension. Having realised that the very format of the publication is in contradiction to the idea of the work, we can see that *The Third Mind* gestures towards the true location of the work which lies in the extension of collaboration outside of the boundaries of the text. As Lemaire states in his twenty-third point, *The Third Mind* 'calls on a fourth author - yourself - to establish the operational field of another book, an invisible book that you can make visible'.⁵⁰

Burroughs' and Gysin's texts such as 'The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin', 'Cut-Ups Self-Explained', 'Cut-Ups: A Project for Disastrous Success', 'First Recordings', and 'In Present Time' provide instruction and address the reader as a producer. In 'The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin', Burroughs states that cut-ups are '*something to do*' and privileges practical experimentation over theoretical argument:

Cut-ups are for everyone. Anybody can make cut-ups. It is experimental in the sense of being *something to do*. Right here write now. Not something to talk and argue about. Greek philosophers assumed logically that an object twice as heavy as another object would fall twice as fast. It did not occur to them to push the two objects off the table and see how they fall. Cut the words and see how they fall.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Lemaire, '23 Stitches Taken' in *The Third Mind*, p.24.

⁵¹ Burroughs, 'The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin' in *The Third Mind*, pp.31-32.

This alternative trilogy of cut-up texts also reminds us that cut-ups are a practice to be engaged in with humour, and even to be enjoyed as an intoxicating form of pleasure, as Gysin says of the first cut-ups produced in ‘Cut-Ups: A Project for Disastrous Success’:

At the time I thought them hilariously funny and hysterically meaningful. I laughed so hard my neighbours thought I’d flipped. I hope you may discover this unusual pleasure for yourselves - this short-lived but unique intoxication. Cut up this page you are reading and see what happens.⁵²

Burroughs’ first exposure to tape cut-ups is also described as inducing an extreme, even physically debilitating response to their comic properties:

Jerry Newman played me a tape called *The Drunken Newscaster*, made by scrambling news broadcasts. I cannot recall the words at this distance but I remember laughing until I fell on the floor.⁵³

If the cut-up process is not experienced by readers as hilarious or intoxicating, then those properties of cut-ups which dis-orient and re-orient perception and which heighten awareness remain dormant.

The Role of the Published Text in Burroughs’ Experimental Work

The emphasis upon art as a collaborative and experimental process leaves us with the question of how to view Burroughs’ published work of this period. Were the published texts only a means for Burroughs and Gysin to document their ideas and to give instruction to the reader as a collaborator? If so, how should a literary critical reading of the texts adapt to this role they had within their experimental practice? The activity of writing and experimenting with words continued to be vital to Burroughs’

⁵² Gysin, ‘Cut-Ups: A Project for Disastrous Success’ in *The Third Mind*, p.44.

⁵³ Burroughs, ‘First Recordings’ in *The Third Mind*, p.89.

work but it is evident that the conventional *published* text was no longer central to his practice. However it did still have a role within his experimental work, and the challenge to any critic is how to evaluate this role of the text and to examine the relationship between the published and unpublished material accordingly.

Examining the relationship between the published and unpublished work of this period invites the question of how the cut-up novels relate to Burroughs' multimedia experimental activities. Although they are referred to as the 'cut-up novels', this term is both misleading and reductive, for *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express* are not simply extended textual cut-ups. A surprising amount of the material within these texts has not been subjected to the cut-up process, or is presented to the reader in its pre-cut-up state and then followed by a cut-up version. How these publications connect to Burroughs' work of this period goes beyond their identity as 'cut-ups' and their relation to the cut-up method. The material they contain offers a fictional exploration of many of Burroughs' different experimental practices, collaborative activities and multimedia projects. I will look briefly at how we might read these published texts as one interconnected part of Burroughs' practice.

Reading the cut-up novels in reference to Burroughs' writings in *The Third Mind* and the emphasis on multimedia experimentation within his letters, we begin to recognise that the references to these mediums in the cut-up novels closely relate to real experiments, or are extensions of such activities, pushing the ideas further than could be achieved in actuality, and to more extreme ends. For example, in *The Soft Machine*, Burroughs plays with the idea that speeding up and slowing down film footage can influence the viewer's state of mind and even induce a physiological response:

Then they run the movie in slow motion slower and slower and you are coming slower and slower until it took an hour and then two hours and finally all the boys are standing there like statues getting their rocks off geologic – Meanwhile an angle comes dripping down and forms a stalagmite in my brain and I slip back to the projection room and speed up the movie so the hanged boys are coming like machine guns - Half the guests explode straightaway⁵⁴

Within this fictional scenario the idea that different speeds can stimulate physiological changes is taken to extremes, but the idea behind this piece connects to Burroughs' actual experiments with altering film and tape speeds and his work with Balch and Sommerville. In a later letter to Gysin from May 1966, Burroughs commented on the physical effects of his experiments with tape recordings:

Ian now has a fully equipped recording studio with equipment comparable to BBC and I have been giving most of my time to recording. To summarize the experiments carried out:
1- Ian and I record the same text and cut the two recordings in together with spicing tape and scissors so that the words are finally lost. Now inch the tape that is rub it back and forth over the head which produces noises like I am that I am. Quite pronounced physiological effect on playback an electric vibrating all over the body.⁵⁵

Reading Burroughs' letters and exploring his multimedia activities enables the reader to identify how he incorporates his work in other media into the written form, to see that in the cut-up novels he is writing fictional extensions of these experiments.

In *Electronic Revolution* and *The Third Mind* Burroughs proposed that tape recorders could be actively used to influence events. These ideas are illustrated in the cut-up novels; for example in *The Ticket That Exploded* Burroughs includes a detective story about the use of tape recorders as a murder tool. In the story Lee is investigating the

⁵⁴ *The Soft Machine*, pp.48-49.

⁵⁵ Burroughs to Gysin 2 May 1966, File C-37, BP NYPL.

death of John Harrison and the related activities of Terence Weld known as 'Genial'. Having discovered that Genial assassinated Harrison by using tape cut-ups, Lee meets up with another detective named Taylor who explains how the tape recorders were used as a weapon:

"Now listen to this." The words were smudged together. They snarled and whined and barked. It was as if the words themselves were called in question and forced to give up their hidden meanings. "inched tape .. the same recording you just heard pulled back and forth across the head .. You can get the same effect by switching a recording on and off at very short intervals. Listen carefully and you will hear words that were not in the original text: 'do it-do it-do it [...]'⁵⁶

In 'The Mayan Caper' section of *The Soft Machine* another technique that Burroughs was exploring in his work is incorporated into a fictional narrative. The process of making fold-ins with newspapers becomes a tool for time travel:

I started my trip in the morgue with old newspapers, folding in today with yesterday and typing out composites - When you skip through a newspaper as most of us do you see a great deal more than you know - In fact you see it all on a subliminal level - Now when I fold today's paper in with yesterday's paper and arrange the pictures to form a time section montage, I am literally moving back to the time when I read yesterday's paper, that is traveling in time back to yesterday - I did this eight hours a day for three months - I went back as far as the papers went - I dug out old magazines and forgotten novels and letters - I made fold-ins and composites and I did the same with photos⁵⁷

Similar examples can be found throughout the novels. *The Soft Machine* and *Nova Express*, for example, refer to photomontage as a powerful means to alter events and travel in time and space:

I studied Mayan and listened to it on the tape recorder and mixed Mayan in with English - I made innumerable photo montages of Mayan codices and artifacts⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p.18.

⁵⁷ *The Soft Machine*, p.50.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.51.

And The House moved slowly from Inca to Mayan back to peasant but in blighted maize fields or windy mountain slopes of The Andes – Gothic cathedrals soared and dissolved in air – The walls were made of blocks that shifted and permuted – cave paintings – Mayan relief – Attic frieze – panels – screens – photocollage of The House in all periods and stages⁵⁹

Burroughs was ambitious in his pursuit of non-chemical means to alter consciousness and to replicate the space-time travel of *yagé* but his experiments were limited to the exploration of the visual patterns created by flicker and the disorientating effects of cut-up film and audio. The fictional space of the cut-up novels allowed Burroughs to take these ideas much further, to imagine their application in a series of fantastical narratives and to present photomontage, tape and film cut-ups as powerful processes able to alter the mind, the body, time and space.

The Ticket That Exploded and *Nova Express* are both prefaced by very brief texts acknowledging the collaborative basis of certain sections and hinting at the connections between these published works and Burroughs' experiments in other media. The 'Acknowledgement' in *The Ticket That Exploded* states that 'Mr. Ian Sommerville of London pointed out the use and significance of spliced tape and all the other tape recorder experiments suggested in this book' and 'The film experiments suggested I owe to Mr. Anthony Balch of Balch Films, London'.⁶⁰ It cannot therefore be said that these publications hide their connections to Burroughs' other work of this time, but to understand and identify these associations requires our familiarity with that work. Unless our reading of the cut-up novels is complimented by exposure to his experiments with film and sound, the magazine texts and small press and out-of-print publications, it is likely that the fictional content of these three books will obscure the

⁵⁹ *Nova Express*, p.105.

⁶⁰ 'Acknowledgement' in *The Ticket That Exploded*. Unpaginated.

fact that much of what Burroughs writes about is an extreme and fantastical extension of real experiments. In chapter three I proposed that Burroughs' *yagé* accounts and *yagé*-influenced writings that form part of *Naked Lunch* are not identified as such because of the fictional context of the 'novel'. The same argument can be applied to these fictional elaborations on experimental practices within the cut-up novels. The relationship between these narratives and the non-chemical means to alter consciousness actively explored by Burroughs, Sommerville and Gysin is obscured because of their 'science fiction' status.

The section 'writing machine' in *The Ticket That Exploded* presents a textual description of an imagined exhibition. Knowing what Burroughs was trying to achieve by working across different mediums and synaesthetically channelling one medium through another, this piece reads as a description of what an impossible but ideal Burroughs' exhibition would be like:

'The Exhibition extended through many rooms and corridors [...] Sheets of magnetized calligraphs drew colored iron filings that fell in clouds of color from patterns pulsing to metal music [...] Photomontage fragments backed with iron stuck to patterns and fell in swirls mixing with color dust to form new patterns [...] In rooms flooded with sunlight panels of painting moved past each other on conveyor belts to music all the masters of the world past through each other in juxtapositions of light and color - Painting projected on screens mixed color and image - The Exhibition shaded into a vast amusement park with orchestras and rides and movie screens, stages and outdoor restaurants - All music and talk and sound recorded by a battery of tape recorders recording and playing back moving on conveyor belts and tracks and cable cars⁶¹

This assemblage of all art forms is constantly under change, an exhibition in which form does not remain static and the material is continually reworked through different mediums. Included in the exhibition is 'the writing machine':

⁶¹ *The Ticket That Exploded*, pp.62-64.

The spectators are invited to feed into the machine any pages of their own text in fifty-fifty juxtaposition with any author of their choice any pages of their choice and provided with the result in a few minutes.⁶²

The cut-up novels do not encourage reader participation to the same degree as the little magazine texts, *Minutes to Go* or *The Third Mind*, but there are instances - such as this description of 'the writing machine' - in which audience participation is implied or the reader is directly addressed:

Many applications of the spliced-tape principle will suggest themselves to the alert reader.

It's all done with tape recorders ... Guess you've all seen the Philipp's Carry Corder a handy machine for street recording and playback you can carry it under your coat for recording important thing to remember is not just recording but *playback in the street*

Why not give Carry Corder parties? Every guest arrives with his Carry Corder and cartridges of what he intends to say recording what other Carry Corders say to him⁶³

These suggestions for tape recorder experiments are taken from 'in that game?' in the main text of *The Ticket That Exploded* but also repeated in 'the invisible generation' printed as an appendix to the book. This second text begins with a proposal for experimenting with television soundtracks:

what we see is determined to a large extent by what we hear you can verify this proposition by a simple experiment turn off the sound track on your television set and substitute an arbitrary sound track prerecorded on your tape recorder⁶⁴

In this piece Burroughs makes direct reference to audience participation:

there are many things you can do with programmed tape recorders stage performances programmed at arbitrary intervals so each

⁶² *ibid.*, p.65.

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp.165,166.

⁶⁴ 'the invisible generation' in *The Ticket That Exploded*, p.205.

performance is unpredictable and unique allowing any degree of audience participation readings concerts programmed tape recorders can create a happening anywhere⁶⁵

Despite the presence of such statements, the form of the published book and the fictional context of these 'novels', compared to the raw do-it-yourself aesthetic of the little magazines, does not incite the same degree of active reader response, and so these instances of direct address only really gain attention once reviewed in relation to the magazine texts, Burroughs' accounts of his experiments in his letters, his scrapbooks and writings in *Minutes to Go* and *The Third Mind*. Re-viewing these novels in the wider context of avant-garde art of the 1960s also brings a different perspective upon these texts, highlighting Burroughs' references to 'performances' and 'happenings', and revealing how closely they relate to the emphasis on process and action in avant-garde art.

In terms of the cut-ups in these novels, the length of these texts (in comparison to the little magazine contributions) allows for their 'effects' upon the reader to be more gradually developed. Burroughs includes versions of material before it has been cut-up, followed by a cut-up, or several cut-ups, of what we have just read. As a result the cut-ups disorientate the reader's comprehension of character, time and place, and yet through repetition there grows a sense of familiarity with the material. Burroughs described his perception of space during a *yagé* experience as finding himself in an 'undefined place you feel is familiar'⁶⁶ and 'in some familiar place I cannot locate',⁶⁷ and these lengthy cut-up texts stimulate a similar sensation. They promote recognition of the words and phrases and a lingering memory of how they were used to structure a

⁶⁵ *ibid*, pp.213,214.

⁶⁶ Burroughs to Ginsberg 8 July 1953, *Letters*, p.180.

⁶⁷ *Naked Lunch*, p.92.

narrative in the original version of the material, but this is accompanied by the realisation that they have now been dislocated from linear time and a 'normal' spatial context. For example the 'in a strange bed' section of *The Ticket That Exploded* includes a description of Ali entering an old chemist's shop and depositing into a jar the membrane of a green newt boy:

The creature opened black liquid eyes for a few seconds then curled into foetal sleep and sank to the bottom of the jar - The shopkeeper covered the jar with a cloth and put it on a dark shelf - He smiled and drew a map on the counter⁶⁸

When Ali returns to the shop, the text reworks many of the phrases used to describe his first visit:

The shopkeeper smiled and took the other jar down from the shelf - The green newt boy, still curled in sleep, had grown until it filled the jar - The shopkeeper drew a map on the counter dotted line to a hut in the canal system⁶⁹

Four pages later, at the end of this section, we encounter a cut-up of this material:

The eggs went back to boneless mummy - Ghost keeper smiled and fade-out at dawn - Hands of light fell apart in corpse - last jar - The shopkeeper drew a map in absent bodies - empty the canal area⁷⁰

The reader has a memory of these words as they formed part of a narrative - 'keeper', 'smiled', 'jar', 'drew a map', 'canal' - they are familiar and yet made strange by their loss of context, and so the cut-up works as a dream-like, or hallucinatory, dissolution of place, time, and character.

⁶⁸ *The Ticket That Exploded*, p.36.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.38.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.42.

In the previous chapter I proposed that reading Burroughs' work in the little magazines (giving as an example *Lines* and the context of the work of John Furnival) stimulates greater awareness of the visual and performative properties of the work - what is happening during our exposure to the piece, what are its effects upon the reader, and the process of cut-up and assemblage that lie behind it. The same is true for reading the cut-up novels in the context of Burroughs' unpublished work and work in other media. Our ways of reading and engaging with the text have been exercised through exposure to this other work and in consequence we approach the published texts with an expectation of experiencing the 'effects' of the work such as disorientation and the slippage between familiarity and fragmentary comprehension.

Re-read in the context of Burroughs' letters from this period, his descriptions of experiments, the manifesto publications of *Minutes to Go* and *The Third Mind*, and the avant-garde pamphlet quality of his works in the little magazines that incite audience participation, we can begin to see these publications as textual accompaniments to the many elements of Burroughs' work from the late 1950s into the 1960s. They relate not only to his use of the cut-up method but also to his work with sound, film, performance, drawing, grids, projection of images, scrapbooks and photomontage.

In Burroughs' letters to Brion Gysin he described the experiments he was engaged in but he also reflected upon how the experience of working with different mediums and techniques was transforming his practice as a writer. In a letter dated 14 June 1961, he reported that 'I have given myself a brief rest from writing. Will now apply what I

have learned from photo collages back in writing'.⁷¹ As a result of experimenting within different mediums, he became more engaged with the processes and techniques of production. We can see how he adopted the ideas and techniques of one medium and applied them to another, and how this led to a synaesthetic cross-activation of media in his work. The place of the text within his practice underwent a transformation; it became one medium and one format amongst many in which he was beginning to experiment.

This changing role of the text is best illustrated by Burroughs' experiments with scrapbooks. As an alternative book format, the practice of using and making scrapbooks brings into question the values upheld by the mainstream process of publication. Whereas the published book is a static and finished commercial object, clean of all marks of the process of production and alteration, the scrapbook is a medium undergoing constant change and addition; it exhibits its own state of assemblage and bears the marks of a personal and handmade object. As with the mimeograph magazines, the aesthetic of the scrapbook is essential to how it gestures towards an experience of its contents as interactive, inspiring our own experimentation with the form rather than passive consumption.

Burroughs wrote about his use of scrapbooks in 'Scrapbook Texts' in *The Third Mind*. He stated that 'a scrapbook is just bits and pieces',⁷² suggesting that as assemblages they retain and express their identity and their tactile and precarious composition, in contrast to the printed book which unites its contents into a coherent whole. He perceived the scrapbook as the site of ongoing experimentation rather than

⁷¹ Burroughs to Gysin 14 June 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

⁷² Burroughs, 'Scrapbook Texts' in *The Third Mind*, p.165.

as a finished product. It functioned as a changing space in which various media interact:

Open to any page and read some of the text onto a tape recorder. Play back what you have just recorded while reading aloud, at the same time, another passage from the same page. Project some pictures on the page with a magic lantern. Now look at the pictures alone. Now listen to the voice on the tape muttering along behind your voice. You will find that scrapbooks are such stuff as dreams are made on.⁷³

Not only has the text taken on a more peripheral role in his work, but it is used and intended to be experienced as one part of a collage of mediums, in relation to his work with tapes, projections and photography. In the Burroughs Archive in the New York Public Library there are photographs of some of these scrapbooks lying open with photographs or other items arranged on their surface. Different assemblages of material are evident in each photograph, showing the scrapbooks in use as a medium undergoing constant change and development.⁷⁴

In ‘Scrapbook Texts’ Burroughs provides an example of the scrapbook process, he describes ‘one that started on Wednesday, April 28, 1965, at the corner of Canal and Bowery’,⁷⁵ and he proceeds to relate a story of mistaken identity: of how he was addressed as ‘Mr Miller’, and then on the following day ‘I see a Samuel Miller on the obituary page, cut it out and paste it in along with a picture I took up Centre St that looks like a canal’.⁷⁶ What is interesting in this description is that the scrapbook piece began not upon the page or within the book but on the street. The location of the work of the scrapbook includes the physical form of the book but it is active in the intersections and experiences beyond its boundaries: ‘I soon had several scrapbooks

⁷³ Ibid., p.167.

⁷⁴ Photographic Files, BP NYPL.

⁷⁵ Burroughs, ‘Scrapbook Texts’ in *The Third Mind*, p.165.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.165.

going with cross references back and forth off the page'.⁷⁷

On display in the exhibition 'Ports of Entry' at Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1996 were three of Burroughs' scrapbooks described as Black Scrapbook, Red Scrapbook and Green Scrapbook, the approximate dates attributed to each are 1963-64, 1966-73, and 1971-73. In the book *Ports of Entry: William S. Burroughs and the Arts* that accompanied the exhibition are reproductions of a number of pages from these scrapbooks, and a text by Robert A. Sobieszek that describes the extent of Burroughs' scrapbook work:

Over the course of nearly a decade, from 1963 to around 1972, Burroughs filled approximately twenty small agenda-, sketch-, and notebooks with his own typescripts, bits of newspaper headlines and stories, columns from *Time* and *Newsweek*, accounts of disasters from contemporary and historical sources, newsprint comic-strip cells from "Rex Morgan, M.D." or "Buzz Sawyer," illustrations from Tom of Finland, portions of his own dust jackets, photographs (both snapshot format and contact sized) of scenes and other montages he assembled, photos and advertisements from magazines, and portraits of his friends and lovers and of himself.⁷⁸

In the *Paris Review* interview of 1965 Burroughs described the scrapbooks as 'exercises to expand consciousness'.⁷⁹ The very nature of the scrapbook encourages the mapping out of connections between the materials that are assembled within it. For this reason it is the perfect medium for the non-chemical exploration of how the mind works through learnt associations and habits.

In his introductory text for the catalogue accompanying the exhibition 'Cosmographs' of Harold Norse's drawings in Paris in 1961, Burroughs identifies the writer or artist as one who gives direction to the making and experiencing of art by others. He adopts

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.167.

⁷⁸ Sobieszek, p.45.

⁷⁹ Burroughs and Knickerbocker, 'Interview with William S. Burroughs' in *The Third Mind*, p.2.

the idea of the map-maker to describe this alternative relationship between writer and reader:

The ink drawings of Harold Norse are charged with a special intensity of messages from unexplored areas spelled out in color. These are maps of psychic areas, that is to say they have a definite function. Art for its own sake is no longer a tenable position. The artist is a mapmaker and his work is valid in so far as his maps are accurate.⁸⁰

By re-visioning the practice of art as map-making, he takes a position against the autonomy of art, or art for art's sake. His analogy argues for the practice of art to be the domain of all, that 'poetry is a place'⁸¹ and the work of the map-maker means that 'anyone can go there'.⁸² Burroughs then takes this idea further, revising not only the distinction between artist and audience but also that between art and the world, and art and life:

Poetry is for everyone. Painting is for everyone. Harold Norse reached the place in his pictures by a special route which he is now prepared to reveal so that others can travel there. So that others can reach the same area on paper or canvas or mixing colors in the street, you can paint anywhere. Pick out the blues as you walk and the reds and greens and yellows and mix them according to the method Harold Norse and you will reach the area where painting occurs. What is painting? What is writing? Art? Literature? These words have no meaning now.⁸³

By proposing that art can happen in any of our everyday actions such as walking down a street, Burroughs' concept of the work of the writer is no longer defined by the text or by publication. These forms still play a role within the work, but the text is used as a medium to convey the idea of alternatives practices: it is used to give direction to the experiencing of art beyond the text.

⁸⁰ Burroughs, 'Introduction' in Harold Norse, *Cosmographs*. Leaflet accompanying the exhibition 'Cosmographs'. Gallery of the Libraire Anglaise, Paris, 1961. Reprinted in *Ole*, 5 (1966), p.48.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

This privileging of action, of something happening in the work, became important not only to Burroughs but to many avant-garde artists of the 1950s and 1960s. Like Burroughs and Gysin, these artists incorporated the strategies of earlier avant-garde movements, adopting chance and collaboration as working processes leading to the development of action art and Happenings. We can better understand the place of the text in Burroughs' multimedia experimentation if we look at the comparative examples of the place of the published text in the work of avant-garde artists. There are many ways in which a reading of Burroughs' practice in reference to the post-war avant-garde could be beneficial, but in relation to the specific question of the place of the text in experimental practice, the work of John Cage and Allan Kaprow can be taken as a comparative context. Both Kaprow and Cage wrote extensively as part of their own practice, and these texts exist in a very delicate relationship to the work: they are more than simply a commentary upon it, but they are also not to be taken as its central location.

John Cage had a substantial influence upon a number of artists and writers of the 1950s and 1960s, to the extent that he is viewed to be one of the most important figures in the development of post-war avant-garde art. This influence can be traced not only through his music but also to his time spent teaching at Black Mountain College and the New School of Social Research in New York, where he introduced others to the techniques of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes. Susan Hapgood writes that these classes consisted of Cage describing Dada performances and encouraging experimentation with chance and indeterminacy, in particular 'the importance of environmental sounds and immediate occurrences; audience participation (particularly the viewer's role in making the meaning of the work); and

chance methods of composition'.⁸⁴ Kaprow attended Cage's musical composition classes at the New School for Social Research from 1957 to 1959, and Cage's work and ideas influenced the evolution of Kaprow's own work, resulting in his *Happenings* which he developed in the late 1950s.

Kaprow and Cage shared many of the same views of how art and life should become integrated, as expressed by Cage in the statement: 'I'm out to blur the distinction between art and life'.⁸⁵ Cage also proposed to transform the relationship between musician and audience 'through placing the center everywhere, in all the people whether they're composing or listening, and furthermore placing the center too in the sounds themselves'.⁸⁶ Collaboration was one of many avant-garde strategies that became central to Cage's work. As Leta Miller notes, Cage saw collaboration as a means to disturb the distinctions between musician and audience: 'The social aspects of collaboration - manifest as early as the Los Angeles percussion works - pleased Cage. He quite deliberately dismantled barriers between professionals and amateurs, musicians and non-musicians'.⁸⁷ Even a very brief examination of Cage's and Kaprow's work indicates that their concerns and their reworking of avant-garde practices bear similarities to those that I have noted in the work of Burroughs and Gysin. But what is also important to realise is that they did not simply incorporate the practical techniques of an earlier avant-garde into the style of their work, but that they were interested in what these practices could achieve and the power of these strategies to disrupt the conventions of reception. The practice of collaboration, the use of

⁸⁴ Susan Hapgood, *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art, 1958-1962*. New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1994, p.24.

⁸⁵ Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*. 1988. London: Routledge, 2003, p.24.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.44.

⁸⁷ Miller, Leta E., 'Cage's Collaborations' in David Nicholls, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.167.

chance, and audience participation, were deployed to bring about a revision of the experiencing of art, music and literature.

The term Happenings came into use after Kaprow's piece *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* of 1959. There can be no precise description of what a Happening is because the practice purposefully resists definition, but we can identify what the form sought to achieve by examining Kaprow's own writings. As with other avant-garde forms and strategies, Happenings aimed to dissolve the distinctions between art and life and to do this through the way that the work invites active participation. Kaprow writes in 'Assemblages, Environments and Happenings': 'The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible'.⁸⁸ In *Some Recent Happenings* published in 1966 by Something Else Press Kaprow provides an appropriately fluid description of a Happening:

A Happening is an assemblage of events performed or perceived in more than one time and place. Its material environments may be constructed, taken over directly from what is available, or altered slightly; just as its activities may be invented or commonplace. A Happening, unlike a stage play, may occur at a supermarket, driving along a highway, under a pile of rags, and in a friend's kitchen, either at once or sequentially. If sequentially, time may extend to more than a year. The Happening is performed according to plan but without rehearsal, audience, or repetition. It is art but seems closer to life.⁸⁹

Kaprow proposed that in order for the line between art and life to be dissolved, that between audience and artist must also be removed, and so like Burroughs and other avant-garde artists, the texts become incitements to audience participation. We can better understand the place of texts such as those in *The Third Mind* if we look at

⁸⁸ Allan Kaprow, 'Excerpts from "Assemblages, Environments and Happenings"' in Mariellen R. Sandford, ed., *Happenings and Other Acts*. London: Routledge, 1995, p.235.

⁸⁹ Allan Kaprow, 'Definition' in Allan Kaprow, *Some Recent Happenings*. New York: Something Else Press, 1966, p.3.

them in the context of Kaprow's *Some Recent Happenings*. As stated in the introductory text 'Definition' (quoted above), the place of the work is located outside the publication. If we re-examine a text such as *The Third Mind* in comparison to the writings of Kaprow, we can see how these published texts function as a part of the work but not its final form.

In the above definition of a Happening Kaprow uses the term 'assemblage', and the ideas of assemblage and collage heavily influenced the development of his work. He described how the Happenings emerged from his work with collage, how the pieces began to project 'further and further from the walls and into the room, and included more and more audible elements'. In 'Assemblages, Environments and Happenings' Kaprow again described the composition of a Happening by referring to the practice of collage: 'a collage of events in certain spans of time and in certain spaces'.⁹⁰ The idea and activity of collage was central to avant-garde work of the early twentieth century and also that of the 1950s and 1960s, and we can see how strong a concept it became for Kaprow's and Burroughs' approach to their working practice. It would be appropriate then to take the idea of collage as the theoretical model to comprehend the place of the published text in their experimental work. Jackson Mac Low proposes a similar collage approach to the writings of John Cage, stressing the necessity of reading these texts in the context of his work in other areas:

To give a complete account of John Cage as a writer one would have to consider his work as a composer, thinker, mycologist, and unorthodox Buddhist as well as his other activities, and to show the relation between these activities and his writings.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Allan Kaprow, 'Excerpts from "Assemblages, Environments and Happenings"' in Mariellen R. Sandford, ed., *Happenings and Other Acts*. London: Routledge, 1995, p.241.

⁹¹ Jackson Mac Low, 'Cage's Writings Up to the Late 1980s' in David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch, eds, *Writings through John Cage's Music, Poetry and Art*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p.210.

In these terms we can begin to see Burroughs' published texts as part of an assemblage, meaning that they must be viewed in their place of juxtaposition, recognising how they intersect with the many other elements of his practice. The word that Jackson Mac Low chooses to describe the many aspects of John Cage's work is 'activities', and the same word is equally appropriate to a study of Burroughs' experimental work. His writings too must be read in the context both of the idea of activity, and of the specific activities in which he was engaged.

At the end of the 1950s Gysin introduced Burroughs to the concept that writing was not as advanced as painting in its methods and experimentation, a theory he includes in 'Cut-Ups Self-Explained': 'Writing is fifty years behind painting. I propose to apply the painters' techniques to writing; things as simple and immediate as collage or montage'.⁹² By the mid 1960s Burroughs had achieved this shift in his work. He was experimenting not only with language and text, but also with the place of the text and the book in the experience of art. If we take John Cage's statement concerning 'placing the center everywhere, in all the people whether they're composing or listening, and furthermore placing the center too in the sounds themselves,'⁹³ we can revise the assumption that the centre of Burroughs' experimental work is to be found in the published texts. We can then begin to attend to the processes and experiences that intersect with these texts.

The reader's collaboration in working with cut-ups and engaging in related experimental practices is necessary for the work to happen:

⁹² Gysin, 'Cut-Ups Self-Explained' in *The Third Mind*, p.34.

⁹³ Kostelanetz, p.44.

Do it for yourself. Use any system which suggests itself to you. Take your own words or the words said to be “the very own words” of anyone living or dead. You’ll soon see that words don’t belong to anyone. Words have a vitality of their own and you or anybody can make them gush into action.⁹⁴

By reading the published texts as invitations to action, and by reading them in reference to Burroughs’ letters, to the mimeograph magazines, to his experiments with film and imagery, and to his attempts to integrate this experimental approach with the common experiences of living and thinking, we can revive the context of experiment and participation. The work that resulted may not have achieved the task of inducing in the audience a powerful and consciousness-changing experience, but what we can conclude is that Burroughs’ output of this period is a fascinating exploration of the potential for art to deliver the experience of an altered state of mind.

⁹⁴ Gysin, ‘Cut-Ups Self-Explained’ in *The Third Mind*, p.34.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have presented an overview of some of the possible connections between Burroughs' writing and art, the development of his working practice, and his experiences with first *yagé* and later mescaline and DMT. Alongside examining this evolution of his practice, I have questioned why the influence of psychoactive substances has been marginalised in critical readings of his work. My research has led to the conclusion that the primary reason lies in the circumstances and processes of publication which have had an influence upon how the work has been read. I have also discovered that the publication history of one text affects not only that work, but that the impact is cumulative. For example, the absence of Burroughs' most animated descriptions of the altered states of consciousness experienced under *yagé* in *The Yage Letters* led critics to the conclusion that *yagé* had little impact upon his work, an impression compounded by the emphasis upon opiate addiction in the publication and promotion of *Naked Lunch*, which awarded singular attention to opiates as *the* drug in Burroughs' writing. The publication history and non-publication history of his experimental work of the 1960s has further obscured the relationship between psychoactive substances and Burroughs' aesthetic.

The publication history of *Naked Lunch* has had a significant impact on the reception of Burroughs' work. As I have demonstrated, the defence of *Naked Lunch* was informed by the obscenity laws of that time which required evidence of the text's social importance in order to declare it not obscene. This argument for the value of the text as a document of addiction was inserted into the publication in the form of an introduction and appendix, and it has had a lasting impact upon its reception.

Researching the publication history of *Naked Lunch* led to my study of the relationship between censorship and publication. The history of this relationship, described by Nicholas Harrison in *Circles of Censorship* as a relationship of negotiation, substantiates the argument that we cannot neglect the influence that publication has upon the reception of a text. Publishing is formative, even in response to censorship it is productive in the sense that it constructs textual readings and interpretative contexts.

In chapter two I compared the Grove publication of *Naked Lunch* with Burroughs' alternative outline for a playful Dadaist assemblage of extra material as stated in his 20 July 1960 letter to Irving Rosenthal. An exploration of the different readings, and different reading experiences, that would have resulted from these two texts, one which is available to us and the other which we can only imagine, illustrates the degree to which the published form can determine the experience of a text. We have seen how Rosenthal and Grove rejected Burroughs' proposal for the inclusion of material that would have directed readings of *Naked Lunch* towards increased recognition of its collage identity and its relationship to avant-garde practices. The inclusion of 'The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin', a cut-up of the 'Deposition' and Burroughs' drawings, as suggested in his letters to Rosenthal, would have drawn attention to the connections between Burroughs' work and that of Brion Gysin, Henri Michaux and the post-war avant-garde.

I have argued that we need to question how the problems of publication are also related to the avant-garde and anti-book status of the work. By pursuing this point, and asking the question whether there could even be a satisfactory printed edition of

The Third Mind, we discover the tension that it bears to the medium of the book, a medium which frustrates the interactive and multimedia quality of Burroughs and Gysin's work. In *The Third Mind* Burroughs and Gysin shift the location of the production and action of the work out of the published text by identifying the work as based in the experimentation of others: the collaborative and extensive third mind. As Charles Green writes in *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*, it is the strategy of collaboration that enables 'the "frame" - the discursive boundary between the "inside" and "outside" of a work of art'¹ to be dissolved. There could be no ideal printed version of *The Third Mind* and discussion of how the manuscript compares to the compromised published edition is an indication of how our approach to Burroughs' output of the 1960s needs to be revised. Rather than looking at how his experiments across different media could have been incorporated into a printed book, we need to reverse this approach and look instead at the place of the text as one element within the multimedia collage of his experimental practice.

A reading of Burroughs' letters to Ginsberg and Gysin has been central to this study. In order to trace the development of Burroughs' *yagé* aesthetic I have brought together two collections of letters - the *yagé* letters of 1953 and those addressed to Ginsberg and Gysin between 1958 and 1961 - to identify how his work shifted from the description to the replication of altered states of consciousness. In the 1953 letters there is evidence that he began his expedition with the intention of producing a straight and publishable account framed by rumours of telepathy and Russian and US military experiments. By the end of his journey, and after experiencing the full effects

¹ Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p.x.

of *yagé*, his writing had developed in a different direction. Leaving for Colombia and Peru to report a story, Burroughs returned having experienced how psychoactive substances could have a profound effect upon consciousness. Burroughs' experiences with *yagé* provided him with a model for what the experience of art could be, and what it could achieve.

The letters also present us with a history of Burroughs' relations with Timothy Leary and the 1961 American Psychological Association symposium. A review of these events is crucial to confronting the long-term impact that reports of this episode have had upon readings of Burroughs' experimentation with psychoactive substances. Ted Morgan's portrayal of Burroughs' negative reaction to Leary's project and his conclusion that 'hallucinogenic drugs were not for him'² has been repeated throughout critical readings of his work, with Jamie Russell and Marcus Boon directly referencing Morgan's statements in their own research, and other critics and biographers absorbing Morgan's pronouncements into their approach to Burroughs' work. As I have shown through a reading of his second period of experimentation with psychoactive substances as documented in his letters from 1959 to 1961, Burroughs did pursue chemical altered states of consciousness to a rather bitter end. His heroic doses of the powerful substance DMT led to a series of overwhelming experiences which turned his previous claims for the 'Incalculable benefits'³ of mescaline and his assertion that 'my work and understanding has gained *measurably* from the use of hallucinogens'⁴ into desperate warnings: 'for Allah's sake Brion be careful with that fucking Prestonia. Personally I would not take it again'.⁵ The fact

² Morgan, p.370.

³ Burroughs to Ginsberg 23 August 1960, GC Columbia.

⁴ Burroughs to Leary 20 January 1961, File C-27, BP NYPL.

⁵ Burroughs to Gysin 8 May 1961, File C-37, BP NYPL.

that he pushed his experimentation with these substances to extremes, resulting ultimately in his rejection of their further use, should not overshadow the influence that they have had upon his work.

Burroughs' letters to Ginsberg and Gysin reveal how this model of the *yagé* experience influenced his pursuit of non-chemical means to alter consciousness. A study of his practice in reference to writings on ASC and synaesthesia has enabled me to look beyond direct reference to the effects of *yagé* in his work, and examine instead how he seems to have used the perspective of the altered state of consciousness to critique 'normal' states of mind and society. Burroughs worked to induce in his audience a comparative state of heightened awareness from which we could see how our minds are structured by learnt patterns of association.

Burroughs' *yagé* aesthetic as it developed through his work with cut-ups and multimedia experiments may not have been ultimately successful as a non-chemical means to profoundly alter consciousness. But to understand its ambitious intentions, as well as its failings, it is essential to see this work as *experimental*, and to study it in reference to the environment of experimentation created by Burroughs and Gysin. Cut-ups, the 'rub out the word' texts and the colour line walks may not deliver the 'jolt' of a *yagé* experience that Burroughs' adoption of avant-garde techniques promised, but they can promote a revision of the reading experience and a heightened awareness of how habits of language and learnt linguistic associations direct our thoughts and our actions. If we engage with Burroughs' experimental work as active participants open to the idea that 'something happens' during our encounter, then there *are* degrees of mind alteration that are set into action in the experience of the work.

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