

William S. Burroughs

John Vernon

The world of William S. Burroughs is not a world of fantasy; it is real, it is "reality." But "reality" is defined by Western culture; it is insane, schizophrenic, and more fantastic than fantasy could ever be. It is Martin's reality film, Luce's *Time-Life-Fortune* monopoly, the machinery of visual and auditory control—"encephalographic and calculating machines film and TV studios, batteries of tape recorders." It is a reality in which the environment is objective and mechanical, and it is a reality whose machinery has come to life, like the kitchen gadgets that assault the housewife in *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs' world is one whose objects (as in Sartre's *La Nausée*) "stir with a writhing furtive life."

This is schizophrenia; objects are self-activating and living beings are inert. On a wider scale, this schizophrenia is manifest in the absolute polarization of the mechanical and the organic in Burroughs. Burroughs' vision is one in which the world has flown into two opposing principles, a labyrinthine, external, mechanical structure and a reified "organic" content. I use the word "content" in the same sense as it is used by McLuhan, who rightly sees Burroughs' origins in the Industrial Age, when "Nature" became a vessel of aesthetic and spiritual values, that is, a content. The underlying roots of this condition lie in the schizophrenic structures of thought in the West, which can only comprehend "Nature" by siphoning it off into a pure, separate space. The romantic movement, by emphasizing the "inner," the "creative," the "vital," the "natural," against the "outer," the "mechanical," the "static," etc. (see Carlyle's *Characteristics*, for example), reinforced rather than challenged those structures of thought. Its result can be seen in Burroughs, for whom the "natural" and "organic" are always shaped by the repressive nature of the "mechanical," so that their manifestations are always stained by violence and evil. The most common image of the "mechanical" and "external" in Burroughs is the City, "a labyrinth of lockers, tier on tier of wire mesh and steel cubicles joined by catwalks and ladders and moving cable cars." Maps, bureaucracies, I.B.M. punch cards, and machines are also common images of this principle, as is the recurring notion of the real world as a movie film. The most common image of the other polarity, of organic content, is protoplasm, the blob, jelly: "Some way he makes himself all soft like a blob of jelly and surround me so nasty. Then he gets wet all over like with green slime. So I guess he come to some kinda awful climax." At times this organic content is given the traditional name of "Garden," for example, the Garden of Delights (G.O.D.), or the Amusement Gardens, both pure areas into which "Nature" as a reified entity has been channeled by the structures of the "real" world:

The Amusement Gardens cover a continent—There are areas of canals and lagoons where giant gold fish and salamanders with purple gills stir in clear black water and gondolas piloted by translucent green fish boys—Under vast revolving flicker lamps along the canals spill The Biologic Merging Tanks sense withdrawal capsules light and sound-proof water at blood temperature pulsing in and out where two life forms slip in and merge to a composite being often with deplorable results slated for Biologic Skid Row on the outskirts: (Sewage delta and rubbish heaps—terminal addicts of SOS muttering down to water worms and floating vegetables—Paralyzed Orgasm Addicts eaten alive by crab men with white hot eyes or languidly tortured in charades by The Green Boys of young crystal cruelty)

Structurally, the mechanical and the organic in Burroughs are exact opposites. A machine is comprised of discrete movable parts, each confined to its location, in *no other* location, and each related according to its border areas to other parts. All of these parts are brought together one by one to perform an action, the coordination of which is not a “synthesis,” but rather a reified object itself, with its own space: a circuit, a map, or in an extended sense, a program, or punch card. The “organic,” on the other hand, reverses the tendency of the machine to unfold and separate into isolated, discrete spaces. As in the Amusement Gardens, objects structured as organic content *merge* with each other, they become a diabolical parody of the romantic “All” and of the fluid life of the original garden. Of course, mergence in this sense approaches the same condition as the mechanical, that of isolation and confinement. This is seen most clearly in the plan of the Liquefactionists in *Naked Lunch*. They propose that everyone merge by protoplasmic absorption into one person—who would then, of course, be totally alone, as confined in his space as any discrete mechanical part in its space. Thus, although the mechanical and organic in Burroughs are exact opposites, there is an underlying sameness to them, a kind of inert, imprisoned objectivity; this is why the mechanical and organic are themselves often merged, for example in the recurring image of “metal excrement.”

Again, all of this is schizophrenia. It is a making explicit of the schizophrenic nature of “reality” in our culture by a man diagnosed as schizophrenic (Burroughs mentions this fact in the preface to *Junkie*, an early realistic novel), in ways that are appropriately schizophrenic, that is, hallucinatory. Burroughs’ world is structured upon either-or polarities—the organic and the mechanical, consciousness and the body, the self and the Other. This is most apparent in the image of the body in his novels. The body is variously seen as a machine (a tape recorder, a camera, a programmed computer, a robot, etc.), and as a soft, amorphous mass, transparent, wet, penetrable, and finally as a combination of the two, a “soft machine.” As a “soft machine,” the body’s shape, skin, or surface is the external, mechanical principle which contains its soft, amorphous content (a view which derives ultimately from the reification of shape and form as properties of objects in Aristotelian thought). Thus, bodies are “boneless mummies,” and people wear uniforms of human skin, their own skin, which they can discard

for the purpose of merging their soft skinless “content” with someone else’s. This combination of a kind of dismemberment and merging is seen most explicitly in an incident that occurs repeatedly in the two later novels, *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*: the merging of two homosexuals by means of the dismemberment and flaying of their “external” bodies in a film.

The screen shifted into a movie—Bradley was lying naked with the attendant on the cot—The divide line of his body burned with silver flash fire shifting in and out of the other body—rectal and pubic hairs slipping through composite flesh—penis and rectums merged on screen and bed as Bradley ejaculated—He woke up with other thoughts and memories in Cockney accent of that attendant standing there with a plate of food—saw himself eating on screen composite picture tasting food in the other mouth intestines moving and excrement squirming down to the divide line of another body—

Many significant features of the schizophrenic experience are expressed by Burroughs in this passage. There is a subject-object split, a polarization between one’s self and one’s “image” on the movie screen; and this split, coupled with the experience of being controlled or persecuted by an external power, coupled also with the experiences of dismemberment and merging, are common elements of schizophrenia. Compare the passage by Burroughs, for example, with the following letter of a hospitalized schizophrenic patient to a television station, in which she accuses television personalities and fellow patients of stealing parts of her body:

Dear Sir,

This is not my shape or face Mary..... has given me her glass eye and she has my noise. Bob Hope. Crooked mouth Peter Lin Hayes, has given me his lop sided shoulder. & terrible mans figure. He sold his shape to Mr. Albright, I want my own things

Frances....., Pinky tongue. She has my noise.

Cathy Crosby has most of my things I want them. I have little Reds Kork leg, from theHotel he lives most of the time & a few other bad features I cant mention he gave me. I guess knowing him you must know what it is.

Dolores..... club finger & two other fingers she had smashed in a defense plant Ruth..... one finger she had off in a defense plant.

Peggy..... or Hildegard has my hands & has gave me her large lump in the back of the neck & her large head:

Ida.....

Jeanette..... has my eyes & hair & other things so make her give them back. I don’t want these things any more the Contest is over.

I want my own things back & also my daughter.

Dr..... has patricia & I want her back immediately Im going to

the police. I know all her markings & I have all hers & my pictures with my attorney. Patricia took 3 screen test I have proof for these I took one also.

The point to be made is that the schizophrenic delusions expressed by both Burroughs' passage and this letter are expressions of the schizophrenia that is the realistic and objective world. In both, the "reality" which consciousness relates to exists as an image on a screen, either a movie screen or a television set. "Reality" has taken on the condition of machinery, it is a movable representation of what we are familiar with, only more focused; it exists in a frame which delineates it from its surroundings and gives it an authenticity and potency that the world it "copies" lacks. This is the classical image of the "real" carried to its full technological embodiment, it is the structure of mirror objectivity in the realistic novel become what it always implicitly was, mechanical. The camera metaphor of human perception, the one subscribed to by Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Leibnitz, and others, becomes literal in Burroughs, and the object-world exists as an "image," that is, it is something we face, something we see or have, not something we *are*. Thus, the dismemberment that is virtual, for example, in Fielding's mechanical descriptions of the actions of the body in objective space, becomes actual in Burroughs, in a space that is itself an object, a movie screen.

This dismemberment in space in Burroughs is pushed to the extreme condition of a total atomization of all things. Burroughs' world is the Newtonian world of discrete objects and entities existing in objective space, confined to their own locations, and it is this world carried to such an extreme that space explodes, and each object wraps its own space around itself. Or more accurately, space is polarized into the totally frozen map-space of administration on the one hand (maps, punch cards, bureaucracies), and the atomistic space of objects overflowing their administration on the other ("This book spill off the page in all directions."). This kind of polarization cuts across many of the features of Burroughs' novels. One the one hand there is immobility and catatonia, a condition made possible (as in Beckett's *Unnamable*) by the diffusion of space into total objectivity, into a void, to the extent that one exists anywhere, and hence one cannot move. "I lived in one room in the Native Quarter of Tangier. I had not taken a bath in a year nor changed my clothes or removed them except to stick a needle every hour in the fibrous grey flesh of terminal addiction." And on the other hand there is frenzied activity, frantic action, a salad of actions that increase to maximum intensity as their space shrinks: "Diamonds and fur pieces, evening dresses, orchids, suits and underwear litter the floor covered by a writhing, frenzied, heaving mass of naked bodies." In any world, space always exists as the relationship between objects; in Newton's universe, objects are impenetrable, they can only stand outside each other, and this relationship of exclusive juxtaposition generates absolute, objective space, space as a container. The space of Burroughs' world encompasses at one polarity this Newtonian space: objects are juxtaposed, they clash and bounce off of each other, and penetration is impossible. But the space of Burroughs' world also shrinks to the skin of objects and bodies themselves, and this is why, as we have seen, things *don't*

always stand outside each other, they can merge. In objective space, the "shape" or "skin" of an object represents its absolute boundary, since that shape is made possible by space as an absolute ground. This is why, carried to its logical conclusion, Newtonian science (and the structures of Western thought in general) posits shape as a thing-in-itself. And this is why the rigid split between the external shape or surface of the human body and its internal "content" exists also for *any* object in objective space. Burroughs clearly sees that when shape is a thing-in-itself, it can be torn off, and objects (or human bodies) can merge.

Thus, there are two spaces in Burroughs; as well as being contained by external, objective space, objects and bodies are able to contain each other, to merge, to *be* their own space. This is the significance of the mergence of the two homosexuals in the passage quoted above, and also the significance of such an image as "metal excrement." The rhythm of isolation and merging which, according to R. D. Laing is the final stage of schizophrenia, is in Burroughs a rhythm of the expansion and contraction of space. All objects and bodies exist sometimes in a space whose ideal condition is fragmentation and atomic isolation, and sometimes in a space whose ideal condition is mergence, the eradication of boundaries, the running together of everything and everyone: "The Vigilante, The Rube, Lee the Agent, A. J., Clem and Jody the Ergot Twins, Hasson O'Leary the After Birth Tycoon, The Sailor, The Exterminator, Andrew Keif, "Fats" Terminal, Doc Benway, "Fingers" Schafer are subject to say the same thing in the same words, to occupy, at that intersection point, the same position in space-time." The space of Burroughs' world, all told, is the space of objectivity and subjectivity laid over each other, the juxtaposed experience of an external map-space with its "intersection points," and of a mythic space by which bodies are not subject to the limitations of a map; and it is the mutually exclusive presence of *both*, of "external" and of "mythic" space, that Merleau-Ponty calls the basis of schizophrenia.

One of the underlying structural characteristics of this dual space is the concept of "image," which Burroughs refers to repeatedly. The "image" refers primarily to the camera metaphor of perception, and hence to the space of reality as a movie, but it also refers to the discrete, atomistic entities which wrap space around themselves. "The human body is an image on screen talking." "Word begets image and image is virus." "Junk is concentrated image." Image, as in the last statement, is always a concentration, a focus, a fixation. This is why "image" is a datum of consciousness as well as an "external" visual presence. Indeed, "image" is the discrete entity which spatializes consciousness itself, which gives consciousness the same structure as external space. "Images" in Burroughs are like James's "states of consciousness," which are *things*, or like Locke's "ideas," which exist as atomistic objects in the mind. Hence, Burroughs frequently refers to conditioning processes that depend upon the theory of association of ideas, and he even asserts, not entirely ironically, that a movie and sound track of sexual activity is as good as the "real thing." In this respect, Burroughs' world is firmly anchored in the structures of classical Western thought, in such figures as Locke and Pavlov (he refers to Pavlov now and then).

His world is anchored, in other words, in structures of *control*. "The scanning

pattern we accept as 'reality' has been imposed by the controlling power on this planet, a power oriented toward total control." "Image" is a discrete entity, and the only organization that discrete entities can have, since internal synthesis is impossible, is one of external control—that is, a map, a circuit, or a punch card. Because "image" is both a datum of consciousness and an object of the public world, all organization is by necessity control; indeed, the condition of the world is one of total map-like administration:

The point at which the criminal controller intersects a three-dimensional human agent is known as 'a coordinate point' . . . Now a single controller can operate through thousands of human agents, but he must have a line of coordinate points—Some move on junk lines through addicts of the earth, others move on lines of certain sexual practices and so forth.

The counterpart of the map, which administers control of the society, is the I.B.M. punch card, a virus which administers control over the body:

Transparent sheets with virus perforations like punch cards passed through the host on the soft machine feeling for a point of intersection—The virus attack is primarily directed against affective animal life—Virus of rage hate fear ugliness swirling round you waiting for a point of intersection and once in immediately perpetrates in your name some ugly noxious or disgusting act sharply photographed and recorded becomes now part of the virus sheets constantly presented and represented before your mind screen to produce more virus word and image around and around it's all around you the invisible hail of bring down word and image.

The obsessive reproduction of images that Burroughs refers to is of course his own literature: an orbit of snapshots of "ugly noxious or disgusting" acts, a camera that can't be shut off.

Control imposes violence. In Burroughs, the act of contact itself is a violent act, for it is always a seizing, a taking over, and the body, since it is a mere object, is easily seized. In *Naked Lunch* the Latah attaches himself to a person and "imitates all his expressions and simply sucks all the persona right out of him like a sinister ventriloquist's dummy." Burroughs' apprehension of the world is one of frightening relevance: a society organized and administered by the map structures of control is necessarily a sadistic one, since everything exists by virtue of the fact that it is organized, that is, by virtue of being an object, something to be used. The use of human beings as objects accounts for the most obsessively recurring action in Burroughs' novels, what he calls the "orgasm death": homosexual rape coupled with murder by hanging or strangling of the passive partner at the moment of climax. For Burroughs, violence is an absolute space into which one enters—it is like madness or sex, it is the "Other Half" which our culture has repressed, that is, has siphoned off into a pure, separate

area. The recurring association of sex and death is due to their mutual occupation of this separate area, and that area is specifically flesh, the body, "the 'Other Half,' a separate organism attached to your nervous system." In one respect, the concept of "Other Half" is an expression of the internal-external split of the body we have already seen; the "Other Half" is the body as an outer mechanical structure attached to an organism. But the "Other Half" is the bottom half of the body as well, the seat of sexual energies and anal violence, which has become anal and violent, that is, regressive, *because* it has been made Other. On top, the body exists as a "consciousness" and a mental structure, but beneath it is a private space which the schizophrenic forms of realism and objectivity have repressed.

Sex words evoke a dangerous that is to say *other* half of the body.
. . . You see the caustic layers of organic material? That is what they need from earth: Three other boys to make more marble flesh, ass and genitals vibrated by the iridescent attendant—Orgasm death is to other half of the body—

The phenomenon of violence in our culture is to a large degree due to this schizophrenia, to the repression of the "Other Half" of the body, its objectification, and its consequent association with evil. Burroughs says, "Sex and pain *form* flesh identity," that is, the body is the siphoned-off *object* of sex, the *object* of pain. Or at least the *form* of the body, its *surface* is the object of sex and pain, which implies that inside there is a content which experiences sex and pain, there is an "organism." Both dual structures of the body, its external-internal and its top-bottom schizophrenia, are perfectly suited to the sadist. The pleasure of sadism lies in the simultaneous knowledge that one treats the body as an object (that is, the "Other Half" of the body, its bottom half and its external half), yet that that object "contains" an organism and a consciousness that feels and experiences pain. The knowledge that the body contains such an organism is titillating to the highest degree, for it enables all organic aspects of experience to ally themselves with the hidden, with evil, with the obscene. This is the world Burroughs writes about: one in which sex has achieved the space of evil, by virtue of the objectification of both sex and evil, their mutual pre-disposal as Other:

Another instrument of these pain tourists is the *signal switch* sir . . . what they call the 'yes no' sir . . . 'I love you I hate you' at supersonic alternating speed . . . Take orgasm noises and cut them in with torture and accident groans and screams sir and operating-room jokes sir and flicker sex and torture film right with it sir.

Sex and torture are allied because they are subject to the same manipulative control that objectifies the world as "image," and that creates a pure separate "image" of violence. This is why Burroughs' roots are in the "underground" literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the literature of the Marquis

de Sade and of all the anonymous nineteenth century pornographers, the "Other Half" of the civilized Victorian era.

If control is the result of map structures (patterns, coded punch cards) applied to the content of reality, then one important means of control in a civilized society is the circulation of goods, the map which guarantees the distribution of movable objects. In Burroughs, movable objects control the body quite literally because they are junk. "Junk" means both waste objects and heroin, and the two are collapsed into one symbol in Burroughs' world. The civilized society is the consumer culture, it produces objects for instant consumption, and hence objects with their waste function built in, objects to be emptied of their use and thrown away. The object most repeatedly emptied of its use in Burroughs is the needle, and it is emptied into the body. The complements of sadism and its fantasy of control are masochism and passive homosexuality, and their fantasies of being controlled. The drug experience is the perfect image of these, for its act is totally receptive, an act that is not an act, but the object of one. Thus, the junkie is the perfect consumer, his body awaits the distribution of goods, it is totally controlled by the map of that distribution. "The world network of junkies, tuned on a cord of rancid jissom . . . tying up in furnished rooms . . . shivering in the sick morning." And junk, as Burroughs is careful to point out, is "the ideal product . . . the ultimate merchandise. No sales 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 his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. His degrades and simplifies the client." It is junk that seals the objectification of the body, for the junkie's life consists of a series of actions performed on himself for the purpose of fulfilling a need; the body becomes the medium of that need, the passive vessel of junk. "Passive" is the important word. The heroin experience is an offering oneself up to be penetrated, either by another or by one's own self as other. Junk satisfies the need to be passive, to be controlled, to be relieved of the burden of initiating any actions, to be fed, to incorporate, to consume. As Burroughs said in an interview, "if drugs weren't forbidden in America, they would be the perfect middle-class vice. Addicts would do their work and come home to consume the huge dose of images awaiting them in the mass media." The extent to which drugs, especially pills, have in fact become a middle-class institution, testifies to the truth of Burroughs' words.

To be controlled by a world of movable objects, of consumer goods, is a very schizophrenic experience of the world—and again a kind of schizophrenia that reflects upon the nature of reality itself. Addiction in Burroughs is the natural outgrowth of the addiction to material goods found in, for example, *Moll Flanders*. The difference is that Burroughs *sees* this addiction, it is a part of the politics of his world, to the degree that material goods *threaten* the addict as well as fulfill his need. "Every object raw and hideous sharp edges that tear the uncovered flesh." The significance Burroughs invests in the material world is a paranoid one; objects spring to life and penetrate the body, the world exists as a threat. "In the beginning his flesh was simply soft, so soft that he was cut to the bone by dust particles, air currents and brushing overcoats." Burroughs'

characters are persecuted by the world of movable objects, objects to pick up and touch, to count, to handle. They are like a schizophrenic patient of Minkowski, who feared imminent punishment by a system called the "residue politics:"

Every leftover, all residue, would be put aside to be one day stuffed into his abdomen—and this, from all over the world. Everything would be included without exception. When one smoked, there would be the burnt match, the ashes, and the cigarette butt. At meals, he was preoccupied with the crumbs, the fruit pits, the chicken bones, the wine or water at the bottom of the glasses.

The subject-object split which produces the external-internal structure of the body also produces a split between the hard-edged objects of the world and the vulnerable, soft body, a split which gives the world the continual character of attack, of bombardment.

This bombardment of objects in Burroughs' novels is the visible manifestation of a world fragmenting itself, refining itself through the map of administration to the degree that it becomes total administration, and hence total clutter. Burroughs' world is one in which everything is on the verge of achieving complete separation and complete autonomy, it is a world in the state of explosion. "Explosion" is finally (and paradoxically) the most uniform quality of Burroughs' novels, the polarity toward which his world most consistently gravitates. Even administrative control and map-space cannot finally help objects to cohere, since administration and maps have their own separate space. This is why "context" and "landscape" in Burroughs always exist in pure states; they are the ground out of which objects fly and explode, but they are motionless and ideal, sealed-off from those objects. There is the landscape of the City, a mechanical labyrinth, and the landscape of "Nature," the Garden of Delights, a swamp, or a mud flat; and these are not so much environments in which actions occur, as pure spaces for themselves. Actions and incidents that have any continuity usually occur in ill-defined rooms or on an ill-defined plain. Between these, which become less frequent with each novel, the wanderings of consciousness describe objects in a constant state of permutation and explosion, objects deprived of their context, and hence each one in the context of itself, in its own exclusive space:

Lord Jim has turned bright yellow in the woe withered moon of morning like white smoke against the blue stuff, and shirts whip in a cold spring wind on limestone cliffs across the river, Mary, and the dawn is broken in two pieces like Dillinger on the lamster way to the Biograph. Smell of neon and atrophied gangsters, and the criminal manqué nerves himself to crack a pay toilet sniffing ammonia in a bucket. . . . 'A caper,' he says. 'I'll pull this capon I mean caper.'

Burroughs' solution to the repressive control that the image of reality imposes is to fragment it and mix it together, to erase all lines between things. If reality is a film, then you loosen its grip by submitting it to a state of explosion, by cutting it up and splicing all spaces and times randomly in together:

'The Subliminal Kid' moved in seas of disembodied sound—He then spaced here and there and instaff opposite mirrors and took movies each bar so that the music and talk is at arbitrary intervals and shifted bars—And he also had recorder in tracks and moving film mixing arbitrary intervals and agents moving with the word and image of tape recorders—So he set up waves and his agents with movie swirled through all the streets of image and brought back street in music from the city and poured Aztec Empire and Ancient Rome—Commuter or Chariot Driver could not control their word dust drifted from outer space—Air hammers word and image explosive bio-advance—A million drifting screens on the walls of his city projected mixing sound of any bar could be heard in all Westerns and film of all times played and recorded at the people back and forth with portable cameras and telescope lenses. . . .

Burroughs' explosion of the reality image, as this passage illustrates, is an explosion of language too, the very language he uses to *describe* that explosion. The flat space of the objective world exists as a page as well as a film. To break its regimental control over consciousness you "Shift linguals—Cut word lines," two phrases which occur over and over in the later novels, *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*.

This is the feature of Burroughs' novels that has won him a great deal of attention, the cutup method of writing, by which a text is cut into short phrases of six or seven words, shuffled around and pasted together. Burroughs claims that he used this method unconsciously in *Naked Lunch*, and later had it brought to his attention by Brion Gysin. Together with Gregory Corso and Sinclair Beiles, Burroughs and Gysin published *Minutes To Go*, a collection of cutup poems and articles, in 1960. Burroughs' novels subsequent to *Minutes To Go* have all displayed a rhythm of cohesion and fragmentation made possible by cutting up passages and printing the cut up text after the original. With each novel the lines between cohesive writing and cutups have been increasingly blurred, and Burroughs has shuffled in cutup newspaper articles and cutup literature as well (*Lord Jim*, *The Waste Land*, passages from Shakespeare and Rimbaud).

As Burroughs himself has indicated, the cutup method is not entirely new. "When you think of it, 'The Waste Land' was the first great cutup collage, and Tristan Tzara had done a bit along the same lines. Dos Passos used the same idea in 'The Camera Eye' sequences in *U.S.A.*" Of these three figures, the mention of Tristan Tzara is perhaps most important. Tzara founded the dada movement, out of which surrealism grew, and Burroughs' literary roots are deeply imbedded in dada and surrealism. The rationale for Burroughs' cutup method has been best expressed by Brion Gysin—"the poets are supposed to liberate the words . . . who told the poets they were supposed to think?"—and this rationale stems ultimately from that of dadaism. As the catalogue of a recent retrospective dada show put it, "Man Ray untiringly transformed his surroundings from the useful to the useless . . . setting them free, and us at the same time." Thus, the typical dada work of art wrenches an object out of the context of its use

and juxtaposes it with other such objects, a bicycle wheel upside down on top of a stool, for example, or a fur-lined tea cup. Burroughs accomplishes with words what the dadaists did with objects; he cuts them out of the context which defines their use and which consequently binds us to the "real" world.

At the bottom of dada and surrealism, and linking them both with Burroughs' use of words, is a sense of contradiction. In dada, objects become at once static and dynamic—static, that is, purely "objective," by virtue of their lack of function, and dynamic by virtue of the contradiction that strangles that function. Dada objects *impose* their inertness (as objects do in *La Nausée*) and they do it by the energy released through contradiction. In surrealism, not only is there a general atmosphere founded upon what in realistic terms is contradictory, that is, an atmosphere which merges fantasy and reality, dream life and waking life, but there is also a focused contradiction in every image. As one critic, Mary Ann Caws, has put it, "in order for the surrealist image to provoke us out of our passivity, it must have a strength greater than the mere comparison of two similar things. It gathers its peculiar intensity from an inner contradiction powerful enough to free the imaginer from banal ways of judging familiar phenomenon." Or, as Reverdy has said, the profundity of an image is in an exact ratio to the distance between its elements. This is why, according to Kenneth Burke, surrealist images are always violent ones; by bringing together objects of reality that don't "belong" together, surrealism rapes the order of reality.

Or more precisely, surrealism rapes the order of language, which *is*, for Burroughs, the order of reality. As Steven Koch puts it, "in literature, meaning and structure are virtually coextensive," and hence Burroughs gives words "their affect priority over their roles as signs quite simply: be de-structuring, by destruction." The extent to which this destruction is a natural extension of surrealism can be seen in Reverdy's formula for re-energizing language, which is precisely one of de-structuring. He proposes to eliminate conventional syntax and punctuation, to have no linking words, no adjectives, and no adverbs, so that only the force of nouns clashing together would be left. The next step, as Swift showed in Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*, would be to eliminate nouns, and communicate simply by holding up actual objects (or not so simply, as Swift saw, since one's vocabulary would have to be carried around on one's back). Swift's joke is the reality of an important aspect of twentieth-century consciousness. When the structure of language is invisible, as it necessarily is for the realist, then it exists only as a glue to hold objects together. Surrealism carried over, perhaps as an unconscious expression of its parody of realism, this invisible function of language; as Aragon said, "the content of a surrealist text is decisively important." The *space* of language is invisible in surrealism, just as the space of surrealist paintings (Dali's for example) is the invisibly "real" space of academic perspective, space as a container. This is why surrealism, to reverse Frost's definition of poetry, is what is *not* lost in translation. The "content" of surrealism consists of the objects it juxtaposes, and thus consists of words themselves as objects. When language is only a glue, its grip on objects can be loosened, and hence, as Roquentin in *La Nausée* says, "things are divorced from their names." Consequently, names themselves are things, are objects to be cut up and shuffled around, "all the

words of the world stirring around in a cement mixer,” as Burroughs says. Surrealism makes the invisible structure of language visible, it carries the objectification of words in realism necessitated by that invisible structure to its inevitable conclusion. This is the sense in which Burroughs is the supreme realist: in the cutup passages of his novels, his world is *there*, it consists of the words on the page. For example,

And love slop is a Bristol—Bring together state of news—Inquire on hospital—At the Ovens Great Gold Cup—Revived peat victory hopes of Fortia—Premature Golden sands in Sheila’s cottage?—You want the name of Hassan i Sabbah to own the unborn? —Cool and casual through the hole in thin air closed at hotel room in London—

Burroughs’ world is one in which objects have become so objective, that is, so one-dimensional, so thin, that they have dropped out of the words they are dressed in, leaving only those words—as objects—behind.

This is why there is no silence in Burroughs’ world (although he strongly desires it, as he states several times), and no shadows. Silence is built into the expressive nature of language, it is built into what R. P. Blackmur calls “language as gesture,” not into language as an invisible structure. Just as there is no expressive synthesis to the body in Burroughs, so there is no expressive synthesis to language, and words are consequently objectified and fragmented. This is how and why they can be exploded, cut up. Words are an image of separate existence, existence in a body, in flesh, which is torment for Burroughs. One of the most striking passages in Burroughs’ work occurs at the end of *The Soft Machine*, when tentative humans are born into separate existence excrementally, and take on the condition of words through their birth:

We waded into the warm mud-water. hair and ape flesh off in screaming strips. stood naked human bodies covered with phosphorescent green jelly. soft tentative flesh cut with ape wounds. peeling other genitals. fingers and tongues rubbing off the jelly cover. body melting pleasure-sounds in the warm mud. till the sun went and a blue wind of silence touched human faces and hair. When we came out of the mud we had names.

This is Burroughs’ version of the Garden of Eden—it is one of the few actually serene passages in all of his novels, even though that serenity is laced with matter-of-fact violence. Eden is the childhood mud of excrement and anal pleasure, and childhood is the only peace possible for bodily existence, since it is polymorphously perverse—“body melting pleasure sounds in the warm mud”—and hence the body hasn’t channeled into its separate existence yet. For this reason the body hasn’t channeled into the separate existences of its individual senses either, and there is “a blue wind of silence.” The Fall consists of emerging from childhood and receiving a name. Analogy then becomes simply repulsive, it can only be enjoyed in regressive fantasy and violence, since a “name” indicates

a bodily existence, a separate existence in flesh: "What scared you all into time? Into body? Into shit? I will tell you: 'the word.' Alien Word 'the.' 'The' word of Alien Enemy imprisons 'thee' in Time. In Body. In Shit."

But the answer that Burroughs proposes for separate existence is to atomize it, to make it *totally* separate, to cut it up, to explode it. It is in this sense that Burroughs, for all of the fantastic nature of his novels, participates in the structures of realism. Realism's function is a separating one, and the primary separations it makes are between the self and the body, and the self and the world. Language is always invisible in realism because the body, which is the anchor of language, has disappeared, in the sense that it is no longer the intersection of self and world. Burroughs fastens upon the necessary fragmentation entailed by draining the cohesive force of the self out of the world of things, out of the body, and out of language. He aggravates that fragmentation, he cuts it up, and hence completes the transformation from the invisible structure of language to the objectification of words, to the making of all words into names, a transformation which enables words to become an image of totally separate existence.

The cutup, or more exactly being cutup, accounts in part for the experience of *time* in the world of Burroughs' novels. Time, like other aspects of that world, exists at two polar extremes, the first of which is "explosion," being cut out of a context, the experience of total transportation out of oneself, out of a location, out of materiality. This is the temporality of flying and of release, it is ejaculation, the experience of being emptied, the experience of weightlessness. What one is emptied of, of course, is corporeality: "the soft bones spurted out in orgasm leaving a deflated skin collected by the guards." This is why ejaculation is so often associated with flying. Boys masturbate in roller coasters, on high wires, in planes, or simply while flying through the air—"boys swing from rings and bars jissom falling through dusty air of gymnasiums." The drug experience, too, is a "high," and being high is flying, exploding, often it is an actual experience of leaving the body: "I project myself out through the glasses and across the street, a ghost in the morning sunlight, torn with disembodied lust." When this experience exists *in* the body, it is temporality as frenzied activity, the body flinging itself in all directions, each organ at the pitch of its activity and pushing at its walls, eyes popping, throat screaming, arms and legs thrashing. This is temporality as overflow and overreach, the temporality of fire or of water as a fountain:

This book spill off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes and the slamming steel shutters of commerce, screams of pain and pathos and screams plain pathetic, copulating cats and outraged squawk of the displaced bull head, prophetic mutterings of brujo in nutmeg trances, snapping necks and screaming mandrakes.

At one polarity, temporality is thus the experience of boundlessness, specifically a release from the boundaries, the gravity, of the past.

At the other polarity, time is a being completely bounded, a being trapped, specifically by the body and by the decay of the body. If at one extreme, tem-

porality can be seen orally as screaming, at the other it is orally a being devoured: "This Sex Skin is a critter found in the rivers here wraps all around you like a second skin eats you slow and good." Decay consists of this devouring as an action the body performs on itself, that is, as the growth of the body over itself. The most explicit instance of this occurs at the end of the story of the talking asshole in *Naked Lunch*, when the anal function seizes control over the body and literally devours it:

After that he began waking up in the morning with a transparent jelly like a tadpole's tail all over his mouth. The jelly was what the scientists call un-D.T., Undifferentiated Tissue, which can grow into any kind of flesh on the human body. He would tear it off his mouth and the pieces would stick to his hands like burning gasoline jelly and grow there, grow anywhere on him a glob of it fell. So finally his mouth sealed over, and the whole head would have amputated spontaneous . . . except for the *eyes* you dig. That's one thing the asshole *couldn't* do was see. It needed the eyes. But nerve connections were blocked and infiltrated and atrophied so the brain couldn't give orders any more. It was trapped in the skull, sealed off.

The result is "one all-purpose blob," the body sunk into its own weight. If time at one polarity is a being emptied, at the other it is a being filled, a filling itself and spreading into itself of the body. Thus, weightlessness at one polarity becomes a total surrender to weight at the other, flying becomes falling, and being high on drugs becomes coming down. Temporality as fire and as a fountain becomes temporality as a stagnant pool and as inorganic matter; the latter is Burroughs' definition of a virus—"the renunciation of life itself, a *falling* towards inorganic, inflexible machine, towards dead matter." Temporality as exploding becomes temporality as the settling of debris after explosion. This "settling" can be seen in one of the frequent devices that Burroughs uses to modulate his prose. After describing a frenzied activity, he elongates the description, he flattens it out and allows it to echo through the narrator's unconscious. The effect produced is rhythmically exactly like the aftermath of an explosion:

The scream shot out of his flesh through empty locker rooms and barracks, musty resort hotels, and spectral, coughing corridors of T.B. sanitariums, the muttering, hawking, grey dishwater smell of flop-houses and Old Men's Homes, great, dusty custom sheds and warehouses, through broken porticoes and smeared arabesques, iron urinals worn paper thin by the urine of a million fairies, deserted weed-grown privies with a musty smell of shit turning back to the soil, erect wooden phallus on the grave of dying peoples plaintive as leaves in the wind, across the great brown river where whole trees float with green snakes in the branches and sad-eyed lemurs watch the shore out over a vast plain (vulture wings husk in the dry air).

This kind of rhythmic settling represents the settling of Burroughs' world as a whole, as it descends into the flat, shadowless, and timeless consciousness of cutups in the later novels. In sum, if the first polarity of time in Burroughs represents the release of time from the boundaries of the past, that is, explosion, then "settling" as the second polarity represents a return to those boundaries, and a total release from the possibilities of the future.

The moment in Burroughs at which these two polarities intersect is the moment of his most recurring image, the "orgasm death." The most common manifestation of this is hanging; the hanged man in Burroughs always ejaculates at the moment of death, an act which combines the weightlessness and transportation of the body at the pitch of its activity with the sudden grip of the body's own weight, and its falling into the death of that weight. When time has been separated into schizophrenic polarities, as it has in Burroughs' world, then only a totally violent act can hold time together, and that act is the "orgasm death," "the whole birth death cycle of action." Burroughs' obsession with this image is a desperate attempt to overcome the frightening schizophrenia of his world, an attempt that is self-defeating the more it is returned to, not only because its violence feeds that schizophrenia, but also because it fragments time into islands of repetition, it separates time into purely exclusive moments, repeated orgasm deaths, which are "exclusive" in that they are related neither to the continuity of the past nor the becoming of the future. This is, finally, the result of Burroughs' polarization of time; temporality now lacks a past, it is total explosion, and now lacks a future, it is "settling," and it now lacks a past and a future, it is "orgasm death." Temporality thus falls apart into discrete components, it doesn't ripen or become.

Time in Burroughs takes one step beyond the spatialization of time in realism, but a step that realism makes inevitable. Time as a line, or a series of converging and diverging lines, that is, time as the plot and reified continuity of realistic fiction, hardens and becomes brittle for Burroughs, so that it shatters and exists as a series of discrete, atomistic points or moments (as it exists, for example, for Descartes). If "reality" is addicting, as Burroughs claims it is, then the proper time of realism is the time of the addict, which is atomistic, discontinuous time. As one psychologist, Von Gebstattel, puts it, "the addict, having lost the contextual continuity of his inner life-history, exists therefore only in punctate fragmentation, at the moment of illusionary fulfillment, that is, discontinuously." Burroughs' warnings against junk (as well as his warnings against the "orgasm death") are thus warnings against "reality" and the control over temporality which reality imposes by repetition. Junk is image, and "the image past molds your future imposing repetition as the past accumulates and all actions are prerecorded and doped out and there is no life left in the present." But despite his own warnings, Burroughs' world is most completely his world when it exists as pure repetition, that is, when it is cut up. The cutup world is the final condition of time, as we have already seen that it is of space, in Burroughs: it is atomistic time, time as a series of separate instantaneous flashes, time objectified and shattered into pieces, and hence no time at all. This is why

the completely bizarre becomes, finally, the completely monotonous in Burroughs (I refer to his later novels, especially *Nova Express*). Realism which has been amputated into pure fantasy, and therefore into an ultimate realism, simply repeats itself if it exists only by virtue of being amputated. Time in the cutup world of Burroughs is the same as what Erwin Strauss calls manic time: "The manic always does the same, experiences the same, and in the medium of experientially immanent time moves nowhere." Burroughs' world is precisely this: a movement toward immobility, toward frozen space. He arrives at this immobility from a very different route than, say, Beckett's characters. He imposes explosion, and Beckett imposes catatonia. But the result is finally the same: a "real world which consists of words as physical entities on the immobile space of a book's pages.

In so many ways, Burroughs' world represents a direct attack upon the world of realism. "I have said the 'basic pre-clear identities' are now ended," he asserts in *Nova Express*, and indeed the concept of the world as "identity," and of characters as "identities," is destroyed by Burroughs. But Burroughs' destruction of reality is accomplished with the very tools of reality, not only with junk, but with scissors. The result is an object-world whose pre-confusion, whose non-identity *is* its "identity," and whose schizophrenia is precisely the accelerated schizophrenia of the real world. There is no "plot" in Burroughs' world, but its frozen space is similar, for example, to the frozen space of Fielding's world, to the extent that the permission Fielding grants the reader in *Joseph Andrews* to skip chapters, becomes in Burroughs the permission to "cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point." Burroughs' novels thus become diabolical maps, maps whose surfaces have been so intersected with conflicting directions, so cut up, that they are unreadable, they are maps of Hell. Even the "conflicting directions," that is, the sense of surrealistic contradiction in Burroughs, are finally neutralized by a cutup world, a world existing in pieces which can't relate to each other enough to contradict. I should mention that this is more true of the two later novels, *Nova Express*, and *The Ticket That Exploded*, than it is of *Naked Lunch* and *The Soft Machine*. In *The Soft Machine* Burroughs makes his best use of cutups by establishing with them a dynamic rhythm of cohesion and fragmentation which becomes the experience of the novel. In the later novels, however, cutups come to seize their own space, to have less to do with other sections of the novels, except as waste bins to catch those sections when they drop. They become stagnant pools of amputated language and space through which the reader has to wade.

The amputation of language and space becomes also, at its extreme, an amputation of the body. Although the body in Burroughs is reified into two principles, an "organic" and a mechanical one, it is the mechanical which is the final condition of the body, since even purely organic life, the body as blob, eventually swallows itself, and falls into mineral existence, into death. Thus, the objectification of the body in realism becomes in Burroughs a total dismemberment of the body, an explosion of it into separate existence, into pieces whose parts are all equal to each other and equal to any other object in the vicinity.

This is the final condition of realism: schizophrenic atomism, living in pieces, in a world of pieces. Burroughs' world is the "real" world broken down into the components that Democritus began "reality" with, into atoms. Cutups finally strip away all the illusions Democritus talked about, they tear objects out of any context they may have created in combination, and give their pure context back to them, so that "in *reality*," as Democritus says, "there are only Atoms and the Void."