
TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF
IN THE WRITINGS OF WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

THESIS

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Abstract

William Burroughs's profane life has been an affront to conventional morality, and his transgressive works have strained against the thematic and formal boundaries of literature. Although he has remained a problematic figure, he is gradually gaining recognition as a literary innovator. This thesis argues that his writings may be understood as technologies of the self, that is, the texts are tools that the writer uses to transform himself.

The Introduction outlines the problems that his writings pose for criticism; provides an overview of critical responses to his work; and demonstrates the appropriateness of Michel Foucault's theory of the technologies of the self as an approach to his texts. Furthermore, it makes a comparison between Burroughs's concerns and similar concerns evident in Foucault. The most prominent of these is a fear of control, and a desire to escape from control. It is argued that this similarity arises from the writers' shared experience of homosexuality in the twentieth century. This experience provokes them to undertake a work of homographesis, in which they attempt to undermine the construction of identity in text, whilst simultaneously reinscribing identity in problematized autobiographical writing.

Chapter One provides a corrective to the critical neglect of Burroughs's homosexuality and focuses on his sexual problematic as a key factor in the development of his literary style. It argues that the writer has an abject imagination that was precipitated by three principal traumatic experiences: his homosexuality, his addiction to opiates, and the accidental shooting of his wife. The chapter examines the way that the writer develops his unique literary style, the routine, in an attempt to express his psychic disintegration. The routine becomes the basic building block of Naked Lunch, serving both as a cathartic release of psychic anguish and as an attempt to subvert repressive social and linguistic structures. The metaphor of the anal aesthetic is introduced

to describe the intersection of linguistic, psychic and political strategies in the texts.

Chapter Two addresses the period subsequent to Naked Lunch, in which Burroughs experimented extensively with the cut-up technique to develop a form of aleatory collage. The chapter argues that the writer hoped that the technique would enable him to transform himself and to discover a new way of thinking, but suggests that its extreme nature both isolated him from his audience and intensified his psychic abjection. Chapter Three follows on from this to argue that the writer responds to the limitations of the cut-up in The Wild Boys by returning to a more intelligible form of writing. This return corresponds with an attempt to inscribe homosexual themes into his work directly. However, the combination of a homosexual agenda and the writer's defence against the identity loss of abjection leads him to assert a radical masculine identity that causes him to perceive women as the chief perpetrators of control. As a result, he rejects women from his mythological system.

Chapter Four suggests that in Cities of the Red Night and The Place of Dead Roads the writer moves away from the radical queer agenda of The Wild Boys in the hope of discovering a form of ethics that avoids the traps of universalized humanism and the harsh "othering" of the queer agenda. The chapter draws a parallel between Burroughs's individualized ethics and Foucault's idea of an ethics grounded in aesthetic self-fashioning. Chapter Five examines The Western Lands, in which the writer confronts death in order to discover the nature of individual value in a normalized culture. Like Foucault, Burroughs believes that the most important task in a limited existence is the dandyistic creation of the self.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

In his experiments with prose Burroughs frequently uses elisions, emphases, sentence fragments and other unusual styles of punctuation. For the sake of consistency, all quotations in which I have elided material are indicated by the use of square brackets, as follows: [. . .]. All other elisions and deviant forms of punctuation are faithful to the original texts. I have also preserved any American variations on spelling.

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Introduction: Technologies of the Self

The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it?

- Foucault "Truth, Power, Self"

So William Seward Hall sets out to write his way out of death. Death, he reflects, is equivalent to a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy.

- Burroughs The Western Lands

William Burroughs is perhaps unique among contemporary writers in his ability to inspire consternation in his critics. Now in his eighty-first year, Burroughs has been writing prolifically for almost four decades, but one feels that his writings have challenged most attempts to incorporate them into academic discourse; a critical language that definitively describes his "anomalous genius" has yet to be formulated.¹ In many respects, his writing attacks the criteria by which literature is traditionally evaluated.

What is more, in spite of his reputation as an addict, as a homosexual, and as the man who shot his wife in the head in a game of William Tell, he has become something of a celebrity. The fact of his survival adds a certain weight to his credibility as an artist and a thinker; for in many respects, and this is central to my thesis, his work is intimately related to his life. Furthermore, the label "writer" does not quite define him. Apart from his explorations of other media, such as painting and film, he has been fashioning something else: a portrait of a life. His artistic products are the material signs of a more fundamental process of self-fashioning. That one's life can be the material for a work of art is not a new idea; it goes

back at least as far as Aristotle. The idea has also been revived in recent studies of two other extraordinary and bewildering men: James Miller's book on Michel Foucault and Alexander Nehamas's study of Nietzsche. Burroughs's works provide us with a psychic self-portrait that is, in a perverse way, a twentieth-century icon.

Jennie Skerl argues that Burroughs's "most important 'work' may be his legend" (William S. Burroughs 2). This comment captures the sense in which Burroughs's artistic works have been a part of a larger process of self-fashioning. Burroughs provides a new take on the American ideal of the self-made man. His literary innovations are part of a larger process of experimentation with himself. Heroin, sodomy, dreammachines, writing: these are the technologies of the quintessential postmodern dandy.

Many critics have complained of the personal obsessiveness of his writing,² but this obsessiveness serves as a psychic ground upon which we can see the self in a dialogue with a number of other factors: the self in its relationship with the environment, the self in its relationship with time and the self in its relationship with text. Will Self appropriately remarks that Burroughs has "offered his own psyche to us as a biopsy" of our "neuronic culture" ("The Courage of His Perversions" 4-5). Burroughs has given himself over to the exploration of the contemporary environment's fusion of technology and self in diverse acts of self-experimentation, both as a test-case of its horrors and as an icon of its possibilities. Burroughs writes in his most recent work: "I am using myself as a reference point of view to assess current and future trends" (My Education: A Book of Dreams 27). Even if Burroughs provides an idiosyncratic point of view from which the century may be evaluated, that he has immersed himself in it cannot be doubted.

His texts' obsessions also point to the way that Burroughs has interacted with time. We will see a pattern emerging of stasis verses change. Much has been made of the postmodern idea of the fluidity of identity; Burroughs mentions it himself: the "illusion of a separate inviolable identity limits

your perceptions and confines you in time" ("Immortality" 132); yet so many of his obsessions remain fixed across his works--consider how the trauma of his wife's death recurs in works spanning from the shatterings of his cut-up novels to the splatterings of his shotgun paintings; consider also the relative persistence of his sexual identity. This seems to indicate certain inviolable elements of identity that persist beyond the impetus to change.

The self's relation to textuality may be seen in the ways that Burroughs has dressed in textual personae as if he were dressing in drag. Yet the persistence of his unique voice is felt everywhere in his texts. No author has attempted to disappear into textuality to the same degree; Barthes's notion of the "death of the author" could have been coined for Burroughs, with his intertextual collage, his cut-up techniques, and his collaborations with other artists. But his authorial identity persists. Indeed, the basic concern of Burroughs's writings is the question of identity: what are the limitations on the self? A question this thesis will consider is whether we can retrieve a "self" from his texts--or whether the texts themselves are, by way of their representational strategies, a problematization of the very concept of a singular, transcendent self.

Burroughs writes autobiographical fictions, and his texts frequently contain authorial personae, but the recovery of the man behind the fictions is always made problematic by the writer's manipulations and distortions of language. Techniques such as the cut-up, an aleatory process that creates random phrases, place the reader in a position of radical uncertainty with regard to the representational function conventionally ascribed to writing. Each fragment of text becomes an affront to the reader's quest for its origin: it could be a blatant plagiarisation of another author's text; it could be a mutation produced by the arbitrary action of the author's scissors; or it could be a phrase recycled from elsewhere in the narrative. Furthermore, the use of multiple personae, the merging of conscious and unconscious states, of fact and fantasy and of science and myth ensure that authorial intention is dispersed into conflicting fragments. Thus the

definitiveness of any assertion is almost always called into question, but the overall effect of these techniques is, paradoxically, to tease the reader with a powerful sense of an authorial presence who is simultaneously powerfully elusive.

Moreover, his radical textual forms are matched by the peculiarities of his enigmatic thought processes, which veer between plausibility and extremity to create a very slippery conceptual terrain. A theme may be rationally developed, suddenly hyperbolically extrapolated, then reworked to reasonableness, much to the reader's bewilderment. In addition, his subject matter is frequently at a tangent to conventional wisdom: altered states of consciousness; the evolution of the human race into a post-human form; or the operations of chance--as symptomatic of a higher order of cosmic organisation based on synchronicity--are a few of his intellectually troublesome concerns.

Furthermore, his interests are frequently an affront to conventional morality: drugs, homosexual sex, anarchistic politics, and a sanguine attitude towards violence are the more spectacular side of this. These repel many readers from his works. He is also paranoiacally suspicious of some of our most cherished beliefs, such as the value of love, and even of life itself. The nihilism of his works, especially of the early works, makes him one of the few writers to have seriously explored Nietzsche's assertion that one should live as an immoralist, "beyond good and evil." Literature is traditionally cherished as a form of moral upliftment: this is a tradition he wilfully subverts.

But he has shown himself to be remarkably prescient, and his concerns, in their quirky and distorted way, have anticipated many important contemporary debates. Among these are the operations of power in the individual and in society, the effects of the technological environment on social organisation and the imprisoning power of a linguistic construction of reality. He ranges over these and other areas with a sharp intelligence and a scientist's understanding of the facts. Indeed, many of his texts employ the conventions of scientific, economic or political discourse to explore valid intellectual

concerns.

However, when Burroughs seems most intellectually sound is frequently when he is most difficult: his more lucid ideas are often lures to ensnare the reader. If "truth" exists, then it is by nature dogmatic. Burroughs's dogmatic, "ex-cathedra" style appropriates the rhetorical forms of truth-telling even as it challenges the possibility of truth. A superb example of this is a polemical line from The Wild Boys: "We intend to destroy all dogmatic verbal systems" (139-140). This employs the brutal efficiency of the dogmatic style in its refusal of dogmatism, and simultaneously traps the reader in a logical double-bind.

Burroughs's mutated text occupies an unsettling grey area between literature and trash, sanity and madness, truth and con, scientific discourse and oracular utterance, clarity and bewilderment. Moreover, it challenges the ways of thinking that traditionally deploy such distinctions. He incorporates into the well-intentioned rational concerns of everyday discourse the violent and irrational elements of its hidden and excluded underside. The experience is something like being caught in a mobius loop, which is created by making one twist in a strip of paper and joining it at the ends. The two sides of the paper are thus made continuous; the loop is a paradoxical three-dimensional shape with only one side. This topological metaphor gives a sense of the ways that Burroughs collapses binary distinctions such as conscious and unconscious, inside and outside or science and myth into a single continuous form. Of course, this is what makes his writing interesting.

These qualities make his writing difficult to assess. The perpetual ambiguity afforded by the interpenetration of conscious and unconscious provides Burroughs with fertile ground for idiosyncratic humour. He is a skilled comic, and frequently provokes the visceral reactions of taboo in his explorations the fine line between hilarity and horror. His nightmares are often very funny. His dead-pan style blurs the boundary between the seriousness of suicide and the impulse to laugh. One of the most common

flaws in critical responses to the works is that many critics fail to find him funny. Perhaps this is because in evaluating the texts one frequently feels taken in. In his attempt to interpret the writing, and to make it intelligible, the critic may begin to suspect that the joke is on him. Part of the fascination of his writing is the way that it undermines the act of criticism.

Critical Overview

Burroughs is increasingly being appreciated as a significant writer, and a substantial body of criticism has begun to develop.³ This has been facilitated by developments in literary theory and changes in moral attitudes. One of the major obstacles to early criticism was the perceived amorality of the works, which was a barrier to his reception by liberal-humanist New Criticism. The works were frequently dismissed on moral grounds. The prime example of this type of criticism is John Willett's scathing anonymous review of Dead Fingers Talk in the Times Literary Supplement in 1963. This initiated the longest-running debate in the history of the paper. Entitled "UGH...", the gist of the review is summed up by the comment: "Glug glug. It tastes disgusting" (42).

Other early critics were not as dismissive, and praised his writing skill and stylistic innovation, but ultimately found the works lacking in humanising qualities. David Lodge objects to Burroughs because he finds him confused and inconsistent. Lodge misreads the nihilistic perversity of the works as a failed moral stance ("Objections to Burroughs" 165). Ihab Hassan, who is more appreciative of the works' innovations than Lodge, believes that they ultimately fail because of the absence of love in Burroughs's cosmology ("The Subtracting Machine" 66). As much as one sympathizes with these perspectives, they tend to obscure the way the writer challenges these terms of analysis. The effect of the morality debate was to lock early critics into positions on either side of the issue. This polarisation was influenced by the terms of the obscenity trial of Naked Lunch, which attempted to establish

if the work lacked socially redeeming qualities. A number of critics sympathetic to Burroughs such as Norman Mailer and Allan Ginsberg defended the book on these terms, with the counter-argument that it did have a moral purpose, and even that it had spiritually redeeming qualities ("Points of Intersection" 6).

Mary McCarthy, the writer who brought the public's attention to Naked Lunch at the Edinburgh Festival in 1962, was one of the few early commentators who concentrated on the literariness of Burroughs's writing. She describes Naked Lunch as a mosaic, and identifies Burroughs's collage techniques as an attempt to create an atemporal text, as if history were being seen from the perspective of space ("Burroughs' Naked Lunch" 35). While she criticizes the grossness of the novel and its tendency toward tedium, she argues that it is redeemed by its humour (37). Tony Tanner provided some of the best early criticism, and was one of the first critics to take the cut-up novels seriously. His attempts to explain the literary use of metaphors such as addiction and the word virus, provided a useful foundation for later studies ("Rub Out the Word" 105-113).

Many critics have drawn on the writer's autobiography in their analyses of his texts. Critics such as Theodore Solatoroff saw the books as social satire written from the underdog's perspective. Solatoroff suggested that Burroughs's spectacular life of drug addiction and involvement in the criminal underworld were factors which positioned him as an outlaw at the margins of society, from whence he could conduct a social critique ("The Algebra of Need" 85-86). The writer's association with the Beat movement prompted critics such as John Tytell and Stephen Prothero to see his writings as a form of spiritual rebellion in the context of social change over the period of the second world war (Naked Angels, "On the Holy Road").

More recently, critics such as Oliver Harris have made more nuanced suggestions about the ways in which Burroughs's fictions have grown out of his personal experience. Harris suggests that Burroughs's sense of isolation and need for emotional contact are reflected in his letters, which became an

important source of material for the novels ("Introduction" 16). Several critics have drawn on psychoanalytic theories for their explanatory force. Most of these have tended to view the writings as symptomatic of some kind of pathology; although not unsympathetic to the texts, the analyses in this vein have made recourse to the notion of psychic disease to account for his problematic sensibility. For example, Alfred Kazin sees Burroughs as "inextricably wired to his adolescence" ("He's just Wild about Writing" 117), and Neal Oxenhandler psychoanalyzes his fictions to suggest that they are the elaborate revelations and concealments of psychic repression. In his words, Burroughs "tries to keep us from learning the truth which he simultaneously wants us to know" ("Listening to Burroughs' Voice" 134). By contrast, Julia Kristeva offers an analysis of the cut-up technique from a psychoanalyst's perspective in her essay "Postmodernism?" which provocatively suggests that experimental texts of this nature may actually rival psychoanalysis in their ability to reveal the workings of the unconscious (138).

Another important trend in criticism placed Burroughs within the context of developments in technology. Marshall McLuhan suggests that Burroughs attempts to "reproduce in prose what we accommodate every day as a commonplace aspect of life in the electric age" ("Notes on Burroughs" 69). Elevating Burroughs to the level of prophet, McLuhan derides traditional criticism as equivalent to "trying to criticize the sartorial and verbal manifestations of a man who is knocking on the door to explain that flames are leaping out of the roof of our home" (73). This vein of criticism has become more developed in the context of the rise of cyberpunk as a distinctive literary genre. Larry McCaffery argues that this brand of fiction has fused punk aesthetics and postmodern theory with technological concerns to provide the definitive literary style of the period. He sees Burroughs, along with Thomas Pynchon and J.G. Ballard, as an important early exemplar of the mode ("Introduction: The Desert of the Real" 2).

Other critics concentrated less on the thematics of the technological environment and more on Burroughs's role as a pioneer in the use of

technology to produce new aesthetic effects. Keith Cohen looks at the cut-up technique as an literary correlative to the potentials of the electronic media and film ("Introduction 5"). Nicholas Zurbrugg goes further to suggest that Burroughs is genuinely opening up previously impossible literary effects by exploring "extra-literary discursive spaces" created by the "new dimensions of technological creativity" ("The Limits of Intertextuality" 254).

With the rise of postmodern theory in the eighties, the radical implications of Burroughs's experimental forms and subversive subject matter were appreciated in a new way, and his works were frequently regarded as almost prophetic in their uncanny resonances with various theoretical discourses. At the same time, the moralistic tone of much of the earlier criticism was modulated, as Burroughs was increasingly recognized as a post-humanist writer. The postmodernist critiques have generally focused on two main areas: the political and the stylistic. In the former category, most writers focus on Burroughs's attempts to break the power of social discourses. Wayne Pounds draws on the idea of Bakhtinian carnival to suggest that Burroughs writes to subvert political control by parodying the discourse "of instrumental rationality that [...] dominates our age ("The Postmodern Anus" 614); David Ayers and Charles Russel look at the paradoxical relationships between linguistic control and resistance in the cut-up novels ("The Long Last Goodbye", "Individual Voice in the Collective Discourse"); and Frederick Dolan examines the later works as exemplars of postmodern techniques of political subversion to suggest that in postmodernism, "writing happens in lieu of action" ("The Poetics of Postmodern Subversion" 559).

Nicholas Zurbrugg, Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg make effective use of postmodern theory to analyses Burroughs's stylistic effects. Zurbrugg uses Burroughs as a touchstone to elaborate the implications of theoretical issues such as intertextuality ("The Limits of Intertextuality"). Skerl's book, while traditional in its approach, is a useful general introduction to Burroughs's oeuvre. She surveys the texts in relation to the theories of

artistic practice which underpin them, and identifies postmodern strategies such as the importation of the conventions of popular fiction into the literary novel (William S. Burroughs).

Lydenberg's study takes a more radical look at the early works and compares their techniques with developments in theory, such as Derrida's deconstruction, Kristeva's intertextuality and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic text. Lydenberg's book provides excellent analyses of the stylistic innovations in Naked Lunch and the cut-up novels, and draws some useful analogies with theoretical texts, but her determination to look at Burroughs as "one who writes" provides a catalogue of effects divorced from social or biographical context, and she does not explore the implications of the similarities between Burroughs and post-structuralism that she has identified (Word Cultures xi).

Some of the most useful criticism has avoided the problems posed by the semantic surrealism of the texts to concentrate on the pragmatic processes involved in their production. Harris examines the limitations of the cut-up technique as an artistic process and relates these limitations to Burroughs's move towards conventional narrative in the later works ("Cut-Up Closure"). James Grauerholz's study of Burroughs's artistic processes depicts him as a literary craftsman ("On Burroughs' Art"). Both studies are useful in that they reveal Burroughs's creative processes without becoming lost in abstract theoretical debates.

Significantly, some of the most important responses to Burroughs have not been in the realm of academic discourse at all. Skerl points out that Burroughs has been appropriated much more readily by other artists than by the academic establishment (William S. Burroughs 98). This is a tribute to the ways in which Burroughs, in spite of the intractability of his texts to criticism, has been a generator of ideas and techniques that have helped fuel artistic production in the latter half of the century. In this respect, he is an avant-gardist in the best sense of the term: he has opened up new territory that has been explored by other artists. In addition to his impact

on other writers, he has influenced musicians, artists, and--something which is rare for a literary writer--the burgeoning pop culture of the last few decades.

His influence on key figures of the Beat Generation, such as Ginsberg and Kerouac, and on the hippy culture of the sixties, is well known (Naked Angels 14), but he also has a place in the genealogies of seventies phenomena such as punk, which adopted his extremist attitudes. His influence became most evident in the eighties and early nineties, with the rise of cyberpunk and postmodern theory, and his presence lurks behind the eighties "rave" culture, with its interest in drugs and electronic music as means of expanding consciousness. Many musicians, video artists and computer programmers are continuing the tradition of his experiments with tape recorders, film and cut-up techniques for creating new aesthetic effects. In this respect, he has outlasted most of his contemporaries.

Significantly, Burroughs's influence is evident in the works of several contemporary writers who write from a sensibility of protest. Among these are a number of feminist writers, such as Kathy Acker, who adopts Burroughs's techniques to develop a punk aesthetic that has resonances with the stylistics of écriture feminine, and writers who have experienced the cultural nightmare of postcolonialism in Africa, such as Dambudzo Marechera in Zimbabwe and Lesogo Rampolokeng in South Africa. These writers appear to have benefitted from Burroughs's non-linear writing techniques and his post-humanist stance of protest. They have developed some of the most fascinating explorations in the genre of "protest" literature.

The Cyberpunks, such as William Gibson, have explored the potential of his poetic techniques for their writings and have developed his ideas on the effects of technology on human identity. Many of their works take their cue from Burroughs and plagiarize his texts, thereby expanding the literary argot of technology which he almost single-handedly developed.⁴ Burroughs has consistently contributed writings to small underground publications, such as "'zines," and has helped in this way to promote the development of a

flourishing literary counterculture. Like his character Hassan-i-Sabbah, who sent secret assassins into the world to achieve his ends, Burroughs seems to lurk behind many developments in contemporary culture.

As this critical overview demonstrates, his work serves as a nexus of concerns and techniques that have helped shape the sensibility of the avant-garde in the latter half of the twentieth century. Burroughs's own response to these critical perspectives has been to suggest that his work is an attempt to "express human potentials and purposes relevant to the space age" ("My Purpose Is to Write for the Space Age" 268). Even if Burroughs does not stand the test of time as one of the twentieth-century greats--and perhaps critical judgement will continue to find his work flawed--there is no doubt that he has made an important contribution to the development of aesthetics by opening up new territory.

This study is in part a response to Lydenberg's assertion that Burroughs independently discovered the kinds of textual strategies being explored in post-structuralist literary theory. Lydenberg provides an extended comparison between his texts and those of literary theorists, but she makes no suggestions as to why Burroughs evolves these techniques. In the terms of her argument, Burroughs appears as a naive deconstructionist whose remarkably astute intuitions enabled him to stumble over the immutable laws of literary theory. This study also responds to McCaffery's argument, which places Burroughs in a similar theoretical context. Unlike Lydenberg, McCaffery provides a possible reason for the similarities between Burroughs and the writers of theory, suggesting that what they share is the experience of the postmodern technological environment ("Introduction: The Desert of the Real" 3). He argues that they develop writing strategies to address issues raised by the impact of technology: the radical changes prompted by our the new technological way of "being-in-the-world" are almost impossible to formulate within the "conventions of so-called 'traditional realism'" (8), and that these writers are attempting to devise new forms that are more adequate to the task. This is a plausible argument. Burroughs's literary techniques are

certainly related to his meditations on the implications of technology, and it is important to place him within this context. However, we need a more nuanced view of the impact of technology on Burroughs's literary techniques, that takes cognisance of the strategic ways in which he uses technologies in the context of his personal problematics. Burroughs's technologies of the self are tools with which the writer attempts to realize a certain form of life.

This life is related to, but not simply congruent with, the various cultural factors that shape the lived experiences of homosexuals in the twentieth century. It is staggering, in spite of the blatancy of Burroughs's homosexuality, that none of his critics have made more than passing comments about this aspect of his writing. The few studies that address the issue either do so to complain that they find it disgusting, or simply mention it as a peripheral issue. Jonathan Willett writes in "UGH..." that the writing "tastes disgusting, even without the detailed but always callous homosexual scenes and unspeakable homosexual fantasies" (42). The words "even without" imply "especially with," and are characteristic of the heightened moral revulsion of homophobia. Moreover, this type of reaction is not limited to the early critics. Consider M.J. LaHood's comment in 1981 about Port of Saints:

The major flaw in the novel is the lack of correspondence between that mirrored world and the one that most men see. The developing psyche is not everyman's; it is the nearly psychotic mind of a sadomasochist homosexual. ("English: 'Port of Saints'" 326)

In LaHood's view, the work fails as literature because it does not correspond to the normalized view of what "most men see." This deviance is the grounds for its dismissal. LaHood continues in this heterocentric mode to suggest that "the piercing epiphanies of the great writer are lacking completely" (326 emphasis added). Moreover, LaHood emphasizes the violence of the "sadomasochist homosexual" as if to suggest that Burroughs is not, as

Burroughs would drily put it, "the right kind" of queer (The Wild Boys 31).

Furthermore, that Burroughs is not "the right kind" of queer explains the absence of gay critical studies of his work, in spite of the proliferation of gay critical studies in recent years. According to Ken Plummer, "(a) century ago, homosexuality was the love that dared not speak its name; now it has become a veritable tower of Babel" ("Speaking Its Name" 3). While Burroughs was to some degree instrumental in that proliferation of homosexual discourse, he has been neglected by gay criticism. Gay critics, it seems, dare not speak Burroughs. In this respect, he is on the margins of a marginal group.

The term "queer" is an appropriate label for Burroughs's approach to homosexual experience. The writer himself frequently uses the term, such as in the title of his second novel Queer, which preceded its adoption by "queer" theorists several decades later. Moreover, whilst "gay" tends to connote a stable, unproblematic, and shared homosexual identity, "queer", by contrast, has connotations of instability, problematization and individual deviance. The latter term is clearly more appropriate to a discussion of Burroughs's writings.

Burroughs's misogyny, his satires on "elegant fags" in Naked Lunch (126), and his threatening gun-slinging persona, make him a problematic figure for a politically-inflected, or a "positive images" style of gay criticism. Burroughs is individualistic, not community oriented. Moreover, his resolutely masculine persona and apparent queer-self-loathing may account for his ready acceptance as a "literary" writer rather than as a "gay" one.

However, recent developments in post-humanist gay criticism provide fascinating points of intersection with his works. Ideas such as deconstruction and the writings of Michel Foucault provide similar strategies to Burroughs's own. Foucault in particular had a similarly individualistic approach to the gay politics, and argued against many of its liberal assumptions and definitions.⁵ In spite of this, since his death, Foucault's work has provided a tremendous amount of conceptual material through which

the politics and theory of gay liberation have been extended and nuanced, to the extent that Foucauldian approaches have become virtually paradigmatic in the field. Could it be, in spite of his problematic homosexuality, that Burroughs deserves more attention in this respect?

I will show that an awareness of Burroughs's homosexuality is extremely important for an understanding of his texts. Moreover, I will argue that Burroughs was addressing in a literary mode many of the issues that Foucault explored in theory. I will suggest that both writers responded to the peculiar imperatives of the lived experience of homosexuality in the twentieth century.

Technologies of the Self

This brings us to the technologies of the self. The term, and the field of inquiry that it represents, provide a conceptual space within which the technological elements identified by McCaffery, and the deconstructive elements identified by Lydenberg, may be explored, not merely as abstract theoretical concerns, but as the products of Burroughs's "self." The term will enable us to examine these concerns as they relate to Burroughs's specificity. Thus Burroughs's postmodern literary techniques will be viewed as a set of strategies that arise out of personal problematics, not simply as the miraculous uncovering of a set of fundamental textual truths. Similarly, the concept of technologies of the self will enable us to place Burroughs's explorations of technology within the realm of his personal experience.

Furthermore, the concept will allow us to explore the implications of the similarities between Burroughs's concerns and those of Foucault, which I have mentioned above. The term "technologies of the self" was coined by Foucault in an eponymous essay that represents a crucial turning point in his intellectual career: a turning point that has similarities with a problematic evident in Burroughs's work. In the essay Foucault shifts his theoretical perspective from a concern with the determining discourses of the epistemological environment to a concern with the self, and the ways in which

the self is able to provide resistance to this determinism so as to undertake a work of self-fashioning. This is not so much a radical shift in his concerns as a change of emphasis. Foucault explains this change in the following way:

Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self ("Truth, Power, Self" 19).

Foucault defines the technologies of the self, as those technologies which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thought, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality ("Technologies of the Self" 18).

The concept is appropriate for this study because it enables us to examine the ways in which Burroughs's work is the exploration of the problematics of the self, especially in its complex interaction with the environment. I will examine five problematics, which are all to some degree interrelated:

(1) It will enable us to examine the ways that Burroughs uses various kinds of physical technologies, from drugs to machines such as Scientology's e-meter, as a form of self-exploration, and to examine the ways that his use of these technologies relates to the broader issue of the self in the postmodern technological environment, and of the self as a machine. (2) Foucault privileges writing as one of the most important technologies of the self. We will see that for Burroughs, writing is an activity, an active form of self-exploration, rather than an uncovering of universal truth. Writing is also a terrain of conflict, within which the self enters into a struggle with the normalizing discourses of the rationality project. (3) We will see that the framing of Foucault's concept in terms of non-ideological techniques

is a strategic intervention into ways of approaching self-hood: this has at base a queer political agenda. A comparison of the themes in Burroughs's writings with the themes in Foucault will show that there are remarkable similarities between the writers, which, I will argue, grow out of their shared experience of homosexuality. (It is perhaps significant that they had very little in common in other respects: for example, they lived in different countries.) It will also be shown that their strategies are similar. (4) We will see that the queer agenda is developed in both writers into a form of ethics that is opposed to conventional morality. This ethic promotes a radical individualism that has as its rationale that one's life may be approached as a process of aesthetic construction. This process is based on the kinds of practices that are described by the term technologies of the self. As these points show, I believe that the concept technologies of the self will enable us to examine Burroughs's writings as the product of a homosexual lived experience that makes strategic assaults on traditional humanist forms of writing so as to promote individual freedom.

At this point, it will be useful to make a brief comparison of some of the shared themes in Burroughs and Foucault, in order to pave the way for an examination of the technologies of the self in greater detail.

The similarities between them are startling. The first, as should be becoming clear, is their interest in technologies. On an experiential level, they both exhibit a powerful interest in a number of practices, physical technologies of the self, that they viewed as techniques of self-exploration. On his part, Foucault was obsessively intrigued by the practices of sado-masochistic eroticism. According to the argument put forward by James Miller in his controversial intellectual biography of Foucault, the philosopher treated S/M as an integral part of his philosophical explorations: Miller argues that the philosopher's thought and his sexual practices are inextricably linked (The Passion of Michel Foucault 268-69).⁶ In addition to his sexual explorations, Foucault explored drugs such as LSD. Interestingly, Miller links Foucault's first experience with LSD, and the

first stage of his sexual explorations in the S/M scene in California, to a turning point in his philosophical project in The History of Sexuality that prompted, among other things, his essay on the technologies of the self (251).

Burroughs's explorations with drugs are legendary. His addiction to heroin, his quest for the hallucinogenic drug Yage--which is described in The Yage Letters--and his experiments with almost all available chemicals, have made him something of an authority on drug experience. Moreover, they had a powerful effect on his writing. Not only does addiction become one of the major metaphors of the early stage of his writing, but drugs provoked his explorations of radical stylistic techniques as well (Naked Lunch 7). Burroughs also sought out machines that interact with consciousness. The more obvious of these are his explorations in electronic media, such as tape recorders and film, but he also explored several other marginal technologies, such as Gysin's dreammachine, Reich's orgone accumulator, and Scientology's e-meter.

Both writers' explorations of extreme states through the use of technologies are linked to an enduring interest in identity and power: the ways in which the self acts as a dominating force, or is subjected to the operations of power. Foucault regarded these experiments as a participation in a kind of "limit experience" that allowed one to "desubjectify oneself, to desubjugate oneself," and to "desexualize oneself" by affirming a "non-identity" that was created through the extremity of the experience (The Passion of Michel Foucault 264). Similarly, Burroughs seems to suggest that extreme states could somehow liberate the individual and allow him to enter into a new way of being. As he writes of his experience Yage: it caused the perception of a "place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum" (The Yage Letters 46).

For both of them, new technologies opened up a new frontier that had implications for a new kind of self-hood. I suggest that this interest in new ways of being is related to the problematic sense of self-hood that grows

out of their experiences of homosexuality. The experience of an oppressed, pathologized, deviant self breeds a suspicious attitude towards the way that the self is traditionally conceived, and a sense of entrapment within received definitions, with a consequent desire to escape. Of course, this is to oversimplify their interest in self-transformation. This form of experience addresses issues of general human concern beyond the experience of homosexuality. Also, there are other factors that caused the writers to experience a problematic sense of self, from which they desired to be freed: I will deal with these shortly.

Significantly, extreme states effect a form of desubjectification. There appears to be a powerful tension between the need to establish a sense of self in opposition to societal normalization and the need to abdicate the self-hood as a site of control. Moreover, the felt need to establish a sense of self has the opposite effect: a desire to temper the ego's totalitarian drive. Both Burroughs and Foucault experienced totalitarianism as a personal problematic: they each exhibited a horror of the powers of the self. Further, they were provoked to similar ethical rejections of this power. In an unpublished interview with Miller, Edmund White remarked that Foucault: "was a man deeply attracted to power in its most totalitarian forms, politically and sexually. [...] Throughout his life he struggled against this attraction. That is what I most admired about him" (The Passion of Michel Foucault 281). Foucault's Introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus conveys a similar idea. He suggests that the book's exploration of the concept of "schizoanalysis" made it a "guide to living a non-fascist life" (iv).

Burroughs was similarly attracted to domination. William Lee, Burroughs's autobiographical persona in Queer, expresses his attraction to controlling others: "Think of it: thought control. Take anyone apart and rebuild to your taste" (89). Moreover, in Burroughs's most important statement about the intentions of his work, he expresses this problematic as fundamental to his writing:

I live with the constant threat of possession, and a constant need to escape from possession, from Control. [. . .The threat of control has] maneuvered me into a lifelong struggle, in which I have had no choice except to write my way out (18).

I suggest that this fear of a fixed identity is at the heart of the writers' most powerful common theme: control. The fear of control is related to a realization of their own immense attraction to it. They are both obsessed with the idea of control, both on the level of personal influence over others, and on the level at which control is imposed upon the individual by the larger society. For both writers, one of the most fundamental ways in which control is exercised is in writing itself, and in the conventions of discourse.

Notice that Burroughs's response to control is to write. Indeed, he calls the word one of the chief "instruments of control" (The Job 59). Foucault's earlier works exhibit a similar preoccupation. He describes his interest in his early period as "the technology of domination and power" ("Technologies of the Self" 18). He was concerned with the ways that individuals are subjected to the operations of power through a process of "objectivizing" the subject (18), which is the way in which the subject is translated into an object of study in discourse. His early works explore the hidden operations of power of the humanist discourses that evolved out of the rationality project.

Madness and Civilization, for example, looks at the history of the divisions set up by society between the rational and insane that resulted in the institutionalisation of those who were judged abnormal. This has a parallel in Burroughs's Dr. Benway, who uses mind control techniques and psychoanalytic jargon to control his patients (Naked Lunch 148-157). In Discipline and Punish, Foucault explores the strategies used to bring individuals under the power structures of the state. Similarly, Burroughs parodies the procedures of a "humane" bureaucratic control systems in his descriptions of Annexia (Naked Lunch 31-32). The list could continue: both

writers are concerned with the mechanisms of control imposed by society, and more specifically, with the ways that state power is exercised through language. Foucault's "discourses of domination" and Burroughs's "reality studio" appear to be describing something very similar.

Both writers rebel against these linguistic constructions. Foucault, in his careful and laborious historical analyses attempts to reveal the hidden powers of discourses so as to "emancipate thought from what it silently thinks, and permit it to think differently" (The Use of Pleasure 9). Burroughs, in his wayward distortions of rational thought, and in the cut-up technique, attempts something very similar, albeit more dramatic: to "destroy all dogmatic verbal systems" (The Wild Boys 140), and to find a "new way of thinking [that] grows in [a] hiatus between thoughts" (The Job 91).

The writers have a common tendency to fuse theoretical and literary discourses: Foucault is theorist as poet, Burroughs is poet as theorist. Their texts, regardless of their theoretical or literary concerns, are almost always forms of autobiography, or of self-fashioning, although never in a simple sense. Foucault attempted to maintain an ambiguous identity in writing, as epitomized in his famous comment in The Archaeology of Knowledge, in which he suggests that in the text he prepares "a labyrinth" within which he can "lose" himself: "Do not ask me who I am, and do not tell me to remain the same," he demands, and adds further: "More than one person, like me no doubt, writes in order to have no face" (17). In his multiple personae-- William Lee, the Old Writer, Doctor Benway, William Seward Hall, Kim Carsons, and so on--Burroughs similarly slips into his texts in the guise of "many faces and many pen names" (The Place of Dead Roads 107). But in spite of their labyrinthine textual play, both writers use textuality as a complex form of self revelation: "Each of my works is a part of my own biography," Foucault remarks in one interview ("Truth, Power, Self" 11). This double movement of self-concealment and self-revelation is important, as we shall see shortly.

They replace "writing" in a simple sense with "textual strategies": in

Foucault's labyrinthine text and Burroughs's cut-up, writing is no mere recorder of events, but a test of the individual against textuality. Foucault regards the text as an epreuve, or an ordeal against which the writer pits himself in a process of self-exploration and self-augmentation. Burroughs sees himself as a cosmonaut of inner space attempting to go into text and bring something back. Knitted into these attempts appears to be an approach to the text as a limit-experience, a way of confronting the self with what Foucault, following Heidegger, called the "unthought" (The Order of Things 322-28). I suggest that the intention is to somehow enlarge the human sphere and bring into being a new kind of life. There are two other experiences with which both writers are obsessed, that are both related to the limit: sex and death, which are in many ways related, as I will demonstrate in later chapters. To sum up, what I am suggesting is that Burroughs and Foucault cover a remarkably similar intellectual terrain that has at its heart a problematic of self-hood: the self in relation to the other, the self in relation to the "non-self," and the self in its relation to textuality.

At this point, I wish to introduce two more theoretical concepts which will enable us to explore this idea. The first is Lee Edelman's "homographesis," a post-Foucauldian analysis of the relationship between homosexuality and writing. This will enable us to look at the ways that the writings of both Burroughs and Foucault grow out of a shared political experience of homosexuality. This theory views homosexual identity as a signifier that bears a deconstructive relation to the discourses of the rationality project. The second is Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, which will suggest ways in which the constitution of individual identity is related to a disordering of linguistic structures and a desire to reject the maternal figure.

To some degree, these theories are incompatible. The "constructionist" strategy of homographesis, which looks at the way that homosexuality is constructed by language, and which denies that homosexuality is a stable

given identity, conflicts to some extent with the "essentialist" approach of Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory, which suggests that psychic trauma sets up fixed patterns of thought. This conflict expresses a deeper conflict in this thesis as a whole. For while the main thrust of my argument will be that identity as constituted by language is an unstable and problematic entity, this will be done by assuming that Burroughs and Foucault each has a "self" that is in some way recoverable as an object of interpretation. This contradiction, it seems to me, is at the heart of the homosexual problematic: in spite of the usefulness of the constructionist strategy, is it any more of a "truth game" than the essentialist argument? The homosexual would not struggle against a hostile environment in order to forge a sexual identity if there were not an intensely felt feeling that this was an integral part of himself.

Reading Burroughs's writings as a form of autobiography, one is confronted by the problematic nature of his texts. If his identity is obscured by the text, how can criticism recover it? Ultimately, one can never claim to tell the whole truth in an act of interpretation. I will examine the strategies behind the works to suggest that his deliberate problematizations of language arise from a contested sense of identity. Where possible, I will back up claims about Burroughs's texts with details from his biography. Interpretation can do little more.

Homographesis

Edelman's term "homographesis" is designed to signify the peculiar historical relationship that homosexuality bears to "figures of nomination or inscription" (4). Drawing on Foucault's analysis of the historical development of the concept of "the homosexual" and on Derrida's deconstruction, Edelman's theory suggests that the homosexual identity problematic is directly related to the way that it is constructed by language.

Edelman asserts that it is through writing that the homosexual came to be historically constituted as a singular, and separate, species. Following Foucault, he argues that beneath the will-to-truth of the enlightenment project, with its legal, medical and psychological discourses, which attempted to analyze the nature of homosexual practices, was a heterosexual will-to-power that was gradually constructing "the homosexual" as a discrete biological entity. This process solidified a homosexual identity that was outside of itself, and thereby "other" to heterosexual normality. These discourses were attempting to make the invisibility of homosexuality visible in order to locate it and "treat" it. Edelman quotes Foucault's assertion in The History of Sexuality that in the nineteenth century the homosexual:

became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to bearing a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. (43)

Thus, the homosexual was separated from the heterosexual as an entirely different category of human being. Now, what this achieved was to transform the individual's relation to sexuality so that the contingent nature of homosexual acts became an essentialized homosexual identity. Edelman reformulates Foucault's "discursive shift" in the following way, which incorporates the language of deconstruction. The shift becomes

a transformation of the rhetorical or tropological framework within which the concept of "sexuality" itself is produced: a transformation of the subject's relation to sexuality as contingent or metonymic to a reading in which sexuality is reinterpreted as essential or metaphoric. (8)

Thus the shift achieved by the heterosexual will-to-power was a misreading of the individual's metonymic relation to sexuality as a metaphorical relationship; contingency became essential identity.

This reformulation is extremely useful, because it enables Edelman to suggest that homosexual identity can be "re-read" in its relationship to language. It can be reappropriated as an unstable metonymic relation, rather than as an essential metaphorical one. What this achieves is to place homosexuality in a deconstructive relation to the very notion of essentialized identity itself. Thus, the homosexual can be understood as that figure who, as the product of the rationality project, is also the point of rupture at which its notion of identity falls apart.

I take this further in respect to Burroughs to suggest that his experience of homosexuality becomes the energizing problematic that puts into play the tensions upon which his experimental endeavours are founded. His work is powerfully inflected with the sense of an individual who has been categorized at the disfavoured end of a violent binary opposition. Consider the way that this is expressed in his character Kim Carsons. According to Ted Morgan, the writer's biographer, the details used to describe the fictional character are drawn directly from Burroughs's own experiences as a teenager (Literary Outlaw 32). These cruel comments must have produced a sense of self-loathing in the vulnerable boy, and they are retrospectively rehearsed in the adult writer's memory:

Kim was rotten clear through and he looked and smelled like a polecat [...] When Kim was fifteen his father allowed him to withdraw from the school because he was so much disliked by the other boys and their parents.

"I don't want that boy in the house again," said Colonel Greenfield. "He looks like a sheep-killing dog."

"It is a walking corpse," said a Saint Louis matron poisonously.

"The boy is rotten clear through and he smells like a

polecats," Judge Farris pontificated. (The Place of Dead Roads 24)

Moreover, Morgan's biography relates the homosexual angst of Burroughs's mid-teens at the Los Alamos Ranch School: taunted by his schoolmates and rejected by a boy with whom he was infatuated, he eventually left the school because of intense unhappiness there (51-52).

The nadir of this traumatic experience of teenage homosexual panic was the fear that his diary, which he had left behind at the school in his hurry to leave, and which contained declarations of love for a boy at the school, might be discovered by the other boys. The fear of humiliation prompted him to burn the diary when he eventually retrieved it, "without a glance at the appalling pages" ("The Name Is Burroughs" 8).

Burroughs relates how the experience of the diary was to put him off writing for many years (8). Writing became associated with a humiliating confession of his offensive nature: it was the evidence by which he could be found out. At the same time, the act of writing was associated with a kind of sublimation for the boy, because he used writing in order to control his urge to masturbate (Literary Outlaw 51). The desire to understand himself through writing was in tension with the fear that his texts could be used as evidence of his deviance. I believe that his writing in later life attempts to address this teenage dilemma. The only way that he would be able to write was if he could challenge the terms by which writing is understood. This is the beginning of the writer's version of homographesis, in which the need to write is in tension with the disciplinary dangers of language.

Much of his later writings dwell on the pathos of lost youth, and Burroughs's later career will perpetually reinvent his childhood in terms of romantic boys' adventures. Kim is an interesting example, because his sense of self-loathing is translated into an ability to think. His feelings of unwholesomeness become the impetus for a transgressive mode of thought:

Kim is everything a normal American boy is taught to detest. He is evil and slimy and insidious. Perhaps his vices could be

forgiven him, but he was also given to the subversive practice of thinking. (The Place of Dead Roads 23)

Finding himself at the "arse-end" of the human scale fuels his subversive streak. He appropriates his deviance as a value; and this is what stirs within him the radical doubt, keenly and personally felt at the locus of his identity, that the constructions of discourse are incorrect. The experience of the received definition of the homosexual as deviant causes him to question the ways that definition itself is shaped. His writings become, in effect, an attempt to rewrite that diary, not as a guilty confession, but as a subversive rewriting, on his own terms, of contemporary discourse. He will set out to expose the operations of power in language that have been felt in his lived experience.

Moreover, the sense of a fundamentally flawed linguistic reality prompts him to question the terms of all of reality. Kim's response to the label "unwholesome" is to revel in it, transforming morbid self-abasement into delight in baseness. Kim and his friend would "strip off their clothes and caper around masturbating and turning cartwheels and grinning out between their legs and screaming to the sky: 'SMELL ME!'" (The Place of Dead Roads 27). The affirmation of shit becomes a self-affirmation.

The perception that societal definitions of reality are incorrect will fuel Burroughs's explorations of marginal experiences, such as drugs, madness and of the world of crime. His journal in the Naked Lunch period reveals him casting about for a way in which to reconfigure the terms by which humanity is understood: "My thoughts turn to crime, incredible journeys of exploration, expression in terms of an extreme act, some excess of feeling or behaviour that will shatter the human pattern" ("Ginsberg Notes" 128).

The construction of homosexual identity in the West means that, for the homosexual, the self becomes a riddle that needs to be solved. So the fascination with technologies of the self is related to an attempt to unriddle the self.

Moreover, it suggests that a different basis for human life needs to be

found that does not fall into the traps of humanism. Foucault suggests that morality could be replaced with aesthetics as a form of human interaction. Aesthetics is related to a form of self-fashioning which does not answer to universalized conceptions of the self. Foucault's fear of humanism was that it "presents a certain form of ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom" ("Truth, Power, Self" 15). The normalization of humanist morality is felt from personal experience: homosexuals have been one of its primary victims. But what is the alternative to a dogmatic morality? Foucault suggests that morality should be removed from the public realm and placed as an individual responsibility: the desire to live a beautiful life, without necessarily conforming to any preestablished rules. As he comments in an interview:

The idea of the bios as the material for an aesthetic piece of art is something which fascinates me. The idea also that ethics can be a strong structure of existence, without any relation to the juridical per se, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure. All that is very interesting. ("On the Genealogy of Ethics" 348)

Homosexuals are confronted with themselves as immoralists. This is evident in Wilde's privileging of aesthetics over morality, which has similarities with Foucault's comment. Consider Wilde's comment: "No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy is an unpardonable mannerism in style" (Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century 30). Wilde here is clearly using aesthetics as an assault on morality. The outcome of the need to reject morality, and his distrust of societal conventions, means that the homosexual is confronted with the possibility of being caught up in an extreme ethical nihilism. I believe that this is the situation that Burroughs faces in his early works. As he writes in a journal contemporaneous with early drafts of Naked Lunch: "Why draw the line anywhere? What a man wants to do he will do sooner or later, in thought or in fact" ("Lee's Journals" 78). As I will show in Chapter Four, Burroughs begins to develop an ethic remarkably similar

to Foucault's, which also has as its axioms both individuality and aesthetics.

Moreover, as suggested by the notion of technologies of the self in Foucault's formulation, various forms of technology offer similar possibilities that are similar to those offered by the idea of aesthetics: they open up ways of being that render morality, and its disciplinary effects upon individuals, redundant. Science and technology change the ways in which humans are understood. As Burroughs writes in his early journal: "morality (at this point an unqualified evil), ethics, philosophy, religion, can no longer maintain an existence separate from facts of physiology, bodily chemistry, LSD, electronics, physics" ("Ginsberg Notes" 123). The perception of the human as a biological organism that responds emotionally and intellectually to physical technologies is a powerful antidote to humanism. Like aesthetics in the later work, science performs a strategic function in the early work. It suggests possibilities for rethinking the nature of the self.

Miller's contends that Foucault was attempting to fulfil a great Nietzschean quest to "become what one is;" (The Passion of Michel Foucault 5) this is particularly apt when viewed in the light of the identity problematic which I have begun to outline.

Just as Burroughs inscribes himself in the form of the young homosexual Kim Carsons, homosexual figures throughout his work are depicted as having a deconstructive relation to discourse. I will show in the following chapters how the figure of the homosexual becomes a trope for the operations of Burroughs's non-linear writing strategies. This is most evident in the later novels, in which the act of sodomy becomes the key motif for the introduction of portions of cut-up text. In this way, Burroughs writes the homosexual act as a metaphor for the deconstruction of language.

We need to return to Edelman's argument to consider the implications of this. Edelman draws on Derrida's notion of diff/erence to show that homosexuality occupies the same place in relation to identity that writing

occupies in relation to speech. In Derrida's analysis of Western culture, he argues that writing has been perceived as bearing a secondary, parasitic relation to speech. Speech has been privileged by the West because of the "metaphysics of presence," whereas writing "functions to articulate identity only in relation to signs that are structured, as Derrida puts it, only by their 'non-self-identity'" (10). Writing may describe differences upon which identity depends, but because of the operations of diff/erence, it simultaneously works to de-scribe identity by revealing it as produced by a misrecognition of a "purely relational articulation" (10). Homographesis, then, represents a double operation, through which identity is both described and de-scribed. The inscription of a rigid homosexual identity is the work of the heterosexual social order; the parallel but opposite de-scription of identity is the work of those resistant to this oppressive order. The homosexual stands at the point at which difference is revealed as the misrecognition of diff/erence. I will argue that the "deconstructive" strategies that Lydenberg identifies in Burroughs's writing grow out of the intuitive attempt to reinscribe diff/erence into writing. He is, in effect, inscribing homosexual concerns into writing in order to de-scribe the construction of identity in the West.

I contend that we can see the workings of this theoretical insight both at the level of Burroughs's representations of homosexual acts and at the level of the writing strategies they signify. So, for example, in The Wild Boys Burroughs depicts bands of boys who depart from civilization in order to build a new society on non-linguistic terms, and which is structured around homosexual acts. Importantly, the wild boys are not "homosexuals," but boys from all walks of life who are engaged in an act of rebellion. Homosexuality here is not a sign of sexual difference, but a sign of difference from society as we know it.

Although Burroughs does not make the queer political element of his writing explicit until after the cut-up period, I suggest that the later development of the homosexual as a metaphor for deconstruction serves as a

clarification of the impulses behind radical textual strategies of his earlier works. My reading of Naked Lunch in Chapter One, and of the cut-up novels in Chapter Two, is in part a retrospective one: these texts will be viewed through the lens of the later works for the clarification that these provide regarding Burroughs's earlier, more radical techniques.

Now, if the experience of teenage homosexual panic is one of the basic traumas that establishes Burroughs's problematic relationship to signification, it is not the only one. I believe that there are two other significant traumas in Burroughs's experience which help to shape his aesthetic. The first, and most basic, is linked to the writer's fear of the feminine, and to his fascination with death and excrement. Kristeva's theory of abjection outlines a way that the fear of the feminine and scatological fascination are an integral part of a primitive identity problematic. The second trauma is Burroughs's accidental shooting of his wife, an experience which prompted a radical transformation in his approach to writing. In Chapter One I will examine the ways in which Burroughs's shooting of his wife catalyses the complex of forces that will become the basis of his anal aesthetic.

Chapter One: Teaching the Asshole to Speak

When I become Death, 'Death is the seed from which I grow...

- Burroughs, Dead City Radio

The way people really think is not adequately analyzed by the universal categories of logic.

- Michel Foucault, "Truth, Power, Self"

The act of burning his adolescent diary was symptomatic of the way that Burroughs was trapped in the double-bind of homographesis. On the one hand, he had a strong urge to write, which grew out of the isolating experience of his homosexual desire. The diary provided a space in which he could describe his private feelings and give them an objective form. On the other hand, if discovered, the diary was the incriminating evidence of a deviant sexual identity. This paradoxical situation fuelled the insecurity that was to keep him from sustained writing for nearly twenty years.

Of the few pieces that he wrote in the unproductive years before he started work on Junky in 1949, the skit "Twilight's Last Gleamings", written in 1938, is particularly interesting because it reveals the writer dressed, as it were, in homographetic drag.⁷ Written before his experience of addiction, and before the shooting of his wife, "Twilight's Last Gleamings" establishes the precedence of homosexual concerns in the writer's subversive aesthetic. A collaboration with his friend Kells Elvins, the piece satirizes contemporary America. The scene opens with an explosion on the "S.S America", a passenger liner cruising off the Jersey coast. As the ship starts to sink "The Star-Spangled Banner" blares out from a jukebox. This iconic chorus of American nationalism and courage becomes a savagely ironic refrain, as lines from the song cut into the story: "AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE" echoes over the speakers as the passengers fight for positions in the

lifeboats (7).

Rather than "women and children first," the ship's occupants pursue radical self-interest in the face of disaster. Most notable here is the figure of the captain, who steals a kimono and a wig from one of the female passengers at gunpoint, and slips into a lifeboat disguised as a woman.

There are two homographetic concerns evident here. The first is an implicit attempt to dismantle the constructions of the moral code. The disaster catalyses a situation which highlights the way that standards of conduct frequently mask self-interest. The disaster situation provides the point of rupture that unmasks the captain's will-to-power. When he relinquishes the uniform of his rank for the clothes of a woman, he is merely exchanging one self-serving disguise for another. In spite of their power in everyday life, the trappings of masculine symbolism become useless when conditions for survival change. The captain's cross-dressing reveals the disguised expediency of the supposed responsibilities of his position. In this way, Burroughs attempts to undermine symbolic codes of authority. The second homographetic concern here is the attempt to unwrite masculinity itself. On the face of it, the piece parodies the captain's hypocrisy. But on closer inspection, Burroughs takes a significant amount of glee in putting the captain in a dress. As an authority figure, the captain is an archetype of the heterosexual hero: dressing him in a woman's clothes serves to satirize this role, and to undermine masculinity as a representational construct. This symbolic emasculation places him at the lower end of the male-female binary opposition. If dressing the captain in female clothing amounts to Burroughs's deconstruction of the outward signs of an image of masculinity, in making the captain a coward, he is also deconstructing the idealized heroic role that the masculine is supposed to fulfil.

However, if we see this merely as an attack on the construction of masculinity, we miss the extent to which Burroughs is actually identifying with his cowardly, emasculated character. The degree of identification becomes more apparent in Burroughs's audio performance of a later version of

the skit on Dead City Radio (1990). Renamed as "A New Standard by Which to Measure Infamy", the writer's voice is filled with irony as he intones judgement on the cross-dresser's actions: "A cur in human shape, he jumped into the lifeboat and saved his own skin." The tone of the writer's voice undermines the judgement implicit in the word "cur," and the disvalued position of the emasculated male is clearly valorized: cowardice and cross-dressing are translated into virtues, and survival receives greater weight as a form of wisdom. "Infamy" is thereby loaded with the positive attributes of value implied by the words "a new standard." In his revaluation of the captain's values, and in his identification with the character, Burroughs is effectively putting on a kind of textual drag, a survival strategy that is equivalent to the captain's wig and kimono.

Although this revaluation of infamy is not as clearly emphasized in the early version, this is the seed from which the later version grows. Burroughs's tendency to recycle his texts lends them part of their fascination, as he explores and re-explores possible readings of a powerfully resonant literary construct. Moreover, the repetition of this motif in his career suggests an extraordinary obsession with its themes.

"Twilight's Last Gleamings" reveals an early version of Burroughs's homographetic sensibility. In attempting to de-scribe the logic of heterosexual identity, he laid the groundwork for a reinscription of the homosexual as a deconstructive figure. He is also beginning to explore the possibilities made available by the exploration of the lower end of binary oppositions that is to become the basis of his anal aesthetic. "Twilight's Last Gleamings" is evidence of a thematic precedence in Burroughs's work. Written as it was before his experience with heroin, yage, or the criminal underground, it establishes the theme of cultural critique. But this was a tentative and insecure beginning. It took two major crises to crystallize his sensibility and turn Burroughs into a writer.

The Death of Joan

Most studies of Burroughs's works, such as Skerl's William S. Burroughs, begin with Junky. This makes sense. The writer's autobiographical explorations of drug addiction in Junky lead naturally to a consideration of Naked Lunch, which is similarly preoccupied with addiction. However, the spectacular nature of the writer's addiction tends to mask the homosexual concerns of the novel, which has facilitated critical blindness to this central issue. Moreover, recently published material pertaining to the period prior to Naked Lunch challenges the primacy of drug addiction as a factor in the development of the writer's sensibility. These new materials include Queer, Burroughs's second novel, which was first published in 1985; the early manuscripts collected in Interzone, which became available in 1990; and the fully edited version of Burroughs's letters in The Letters of William S. Burroughs: 1945-1959, which was published in 1993. These texts provide information that is crucial to an understanding of Burroughs's development over this period. Their belated publication goes part of the way to explaining why criticism has presented us with the Burroughs of Junky rather than the Burroughs of Queer, but the rest of the issue we must ascribe to wilful blindness. In order to redress this imbalance, and for reasons of space, I will not examine Burroughs's first novel, but will concentrate on aspects of his second one. Even more than Junky, Queer contributes to an understanding of the forces that motivated the writer of Naked Lunch.

Burroughs's 1985 introduction to Queer is his most important aesthetic statement. The novel was withheld from publication for three decades on the writer's instruction. The novel's introduction suggests that the traumatic memories related to the period it describes were part of the reason for this suppression. He describes the accidental shooting of his wife as the defining moment of his career:

I am forced to the appalling conclusion that I would never have become a writer but for Joan's death, and to a realization of the extent to which this event has motivated and formulated my

writing. I live with a constant threat of possession, and a constant need to escape from possession, from Control. So the death of Joan brought me in contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, and maneuvered me into a lifelong struggle, in which I have had no choice but to write my way out. (18)

This claim raises several important issues that must be addressed if we are to understand his writing and his relationship to it. Burroughs clearly understands writing as serving a purpose beyond the mere production of the literary artifact: it functions as a technology of the self that he uses to work upon himself. It is this struggle of the writer with his text, and the intimate connection between text and psychic necessity, that gives Burroughs's writing its fascinating power. But how does writing serve this function, and how is its use as a technology of the self related to Burroughs's aesthetic? To answer these questions, we need to interpret the effects of the shooting incident on his psyche.

Although there appears to have been real affection between Burroughs and Joan, they did not have an easy marriage. Even at the start of their relationship Burroughs was professing himself to be queer, and he was caustically misogynous (Literary Outlaw 123). In spite of this, they had an active sexual relationship that Joan, at least, seems to have enjoyed. She once remarked that even though he was homosexual, Burroughs made love "like a pimp" (123). Burroughs's interest appears to have been a more intellectual one. Joan was exceptionally intelligent, and Morgan describes their relationship as primarily the meeting of "two remarkable intellects" (123). Although he showed respect for his wife, Burroughs was not particularly affectionate towards her. Later in their relationship they slept in separate rooms, and it appears that Joan would occasionally be forced to seek out affection from her husband (137). As if this were not enough, at the time of the shooting they were both addicts, although to different substances. Joan was hooked on Benzedrine, a form of "uppers" that caused her to see paranoid hallucinations (138), while Burroughs was on "downers," in the form of a

full-blown heroin habit.

The shooting took place in the Bounty bar in Mexico City, September 1951. Burroughs and Joan were with a party of friends. They had all been drinking. As was his usual practice, Burroughs had a gun with him, and he had taken it out. By his own account, he said to Joan, "I guess it's about time for our William Tell act" (194). She placed a tumbler on her head. He fired, missing the glass and hitting his wife in the temple.

The tremendous sense of guilt that Burroughs felt as a result of this incident was undoubtedly one of the most important motivating forces of his writing career. But a sense of guilt alone cannot explain the specific ways that the shooting manifests itself in his work. The incident is a riddle at the heart of Burroughs's sensibility, and a number of problematic issues cluster around it.

That it is a riddle is perhaps the key to understanding it. For not only is it a riddle to Burroughs himself--as the incident that provokes a lifetime of self-exploration in writing--it is also deliberately constructed as a riddle for the reader. Burroughs's introduction to Queer is a series of feints and counterfeints, ambiguities, red herrings and textual tricks that are designed to render any easy interpretation of the incident hopelessly inadequate. For if a confession explains the truth of an incident, then this is a confession that refuses, finally, to confess. In this sense, it dramatizes an experience that thwarts meaning, as meaning breaks down in the face of a Dionysian impenetrability of Being. His account of the incident is defensively ambiguous: this suggests that Burroughs is attempting to present the effects of the incident as a problem that should not be too hastily resolved by the reader. For this would be to place a restriction on being, and reduce him to a single line of force, of intentionality. Leo Bersani argues that this type of writing undermines the way that language fixes being. Utilizing Nietzsche's concepts of the Dionysian and Apollonian, he suggests that "(t)he Dionysian saves us from the redemptive illusion of the individual; it cancels out, and redeems, Apollo's crime of cutting into

being, of defiguring it with figures, with lines and forms" (The Culture of Redemption 100).

The Ugly Spirit

Burroughs's retrospective explanation for the incident is quasi-mystical. He tells us that he felt a powerful sense of numinosity on the day of the shooting. On that day every event was charged with a special significance, and he felt overwhelmed with grief: "walking down the street I suddenly found tears streaming down my face. 'What is wrong with me?'" (17). We cannot know whether this feeling was a genuine form of prescience, or whether it is the author's retrospective interpretation, that retroactively charges the day's events with special significance, as part of a traumatized response. But what stretches credibility further is Burroughs's belief that on that day he became possessed by a demonic entity, "the Ugly Spirit," which he describes as: "something in my being that was not me, and not under my control" (16).

If we are to interpret cynically the explanation that there was an external force that took possession of him, and more importantly, that took control of his actions, then this implies a bifurcation of his personality into two conflicting forces. One is the author's "self," his ethical, rational consciousness that recoils from the action in horror. The "other" is the killer of his wife. For what this explanation implies is an element of intentionality, or if not quite intentionality, then at least the confirmation by the accidental occurrence of a genuine hostility. The horror of the shooting was that, at least with part of himself, he had wanted to do it. Had it been a mere accident, then it would have been more easily dismissed. Burroughs also does not evade the intentional hypothesis, at least elsewhere in his writings. In "On Freud and the Unconscious" he argues: "Freud says that errors and slips of the tongue are unconsciously motivated. And I agree that errors and accidents are motivated" (93).

The demonic schema, in which the killer is externalized, is extremely important to Burroughs. He rails against psychological explanations "with

their dogmatic insistence that such manifestations must come from within, and never, never, never from without" (16). The vehemence of his tone seems strange in the light of plausible psychological explanations such as the repressed intentionality hypothesis that I have outlined above. Bearing in mind that his is a retrospective explanation, I believe that what this reveals is a determination to exercise a kind of hermeneutic freedom in his understanding of the incident. What we are reading here is a schema, developed over a period of thirty years, that enables the writer to ethically manage the consequences of his action.

What this schema achieves for Burroughs is to set up a dynamic of struggle between himself and a daemonic force. It keeps the conflict of forces in play that a psychoanalytic reading might discharge through an over-easy explanation. Burroughs had studied many schools of psychoanalytic thought prior to the incident, but he had decided that these theories did not make him feel "that much further advanced in his understanding of himself" (Literary Outlaw 73-74). In his essay "On Freud and the Unconscious" he argues that Freud brought the notion of the unconscious to light, but that our ways of looking at the manifestations of the unconscious need to be modified. He believes that the unconscious should be manifested without trying to bring it under the control of the rational:

Freud uncovered the extent of marginal, unconscious thinking, but failed to realize that such thinking may be useful and advantageous. Where Id and Super Ego was, there shall Ego be, is certainly an outmoded objective. [. . .] And I can testify from my own experience that the ego is an artistic liability. The best writing and painting is only accomplished when the ego is superseded or refuted. (88)

What this shows is that Burroughs refuses the kind of knowledge that a psychoanalytic understanding of himself would produce.

Seen in this context, the Ugly Spirit explanation for the Joan's death may be viewed as a metaphor that enables Burroughs to channel distress into

artistic productivity. In a later cut-up text Burroughs produced another accident, one that provided an interpretative clue to the incident, as he explains in the introduction to Queer. He reads the aleatory text as an interpretation of the reason for the monster's actions: "ugly spirit shot Joan to be cause": the spirit caused the tragedy so as to "maintain a hateful parasitic occupation" in the writer's psyche (15). Whether we believe this or not, the daemon certainly caused the need for the writer to write his way out.

Crucially, what this also reveals is that the shooting set a number of powerful unconscious forces into play. Instead of attempting to discipline these forces, to acknowledge them, and to bring them into the realm of ego-consciousness, Burroughs realized that they could be channelled into artistic production. His writing, then, is an attempt to by-pass ego restraint, in order to allow the unacknowledged and unarticulated operations of the unconscious to be released. The artwork becomes the terrain in which the unconscious can be explored without the disciplinary regulation of the ego-control. It also allows the expression of the monstrous motivations that are exterior to the writer's limited ego-knowledge.

But this is not merely a matter of releasing the monster of the unconscious. It is also an attempt to indict the superego function that created the monster in the first place by a process of repression. He understands the responsibility for repression to extend into the realm of societal disciplinary structures, such as the family, the state, and so on. The character William Lee in Queer understands this in terms of bureaucratic structures: "the bureaucrats [. . .] want the same thing: Control. The superego, the controlling agency, gone cancerous and berserk" (90). Rather than merely sublimating the unconscious, then, he wants its sublimation to reveal the mechanisms that created the unconscious in the first place. Control becomes the daemon, and to some extent, Burroughs sees the responsibility for Joan's killing as lying outside of himself.

Burroughs's motivation in writing is not restricted to the problem of the

killing. In his articulation of the need to "escape from possession, from Control," (18) Burroughs links the ugly spirit to the vague set of exterior forces that he categorizes under the term "control." To some extent, this makes sense. If the spirit is viewed as an exterior force that influences the individual, we can define control in a similar way: as the set of external forces that proscribe and limit the individual. When Burroughs describes the Ugly Spirit as "something in my being that was not me, and not under my control" (16), he could be referring to control itself, to those factors that somehow defy the individual's authenticity. The verbal pun here on "control," and the conceptual pun on the notion of exteriority or "other," initiates the workings of a dream logic that links the ugly spirit and control by a process of displacement.

By this logic, then, the Ugly Spirit is control, or at least an element of it. Now, the frightening workings of this logic of control need to be unpacked. Burroughs's works cross-reference each other to become a amalgam of dense and multiple meanings. The term "control" appears in many subsequent works, but it is associated with three main categories: the word; any other individual or corporate body, such as the state, the church, the medical establishment, the legal system, or God; and with "woman."

By making this link between control and the Ugly Spirit, Burroughs is suggesting that the causes of Joan's death were, in addition to the author's own culpability, the exterior forces that restricted him as an individual. The word, the state, the church, and woman, perhaps even Joan herself, caused the bullet to hit its mark. Burroughs's understanding of possession collapses the distinction between inside versus outside even as it sets it up as an opposition:

My concept of possession is closer to the medieval model than to modern psychological explanations, with their dogmatic insistence that such manifestation must come from within and never, never, never from without. (As if there were some clear-cut difference between inner and outer.) (15-16)

In arguing that inner and outer are not clearly distinguishable, he appears to be suggesting that the intention to kill his wife was produced, in part, by his environment. Burroughs's desire to write his way out of possession was an attempt to come to terms with the sum of the forces that constituted the intentional moment. Ultimately, however, in spite of his explanation of the incident, Burroughs distrusts the ability of language to codify exactly what happened. For this reason, he concludes the introduction with a cut-up version of the assertions that he makes in it:

A straightjacket notation carefully paralysed with heavy reluctance. To escape their prewritten lines years after the events recorded. A writer's block avoided Joan's death. Denton Welch is Kim Carson's voice through a cloud underlined broken table tapping. (18)

This is designed to problematize any interpretations that would limit and confine it, and to show that whatever justifications he could make are ultimately verbal markers that cannot approach the reality of the tragic incident.

Queer

The cut-up text shows that meanings ascribed to the shooting are swallowed up by indeterminacy. However, the mixing up of text can also be interpreted as representing the mixture of forces behind the shooting, thereby revealing the interconnectedness of inner and outer. Thus the Ugly Spirit can be read as the spirit of the age. Although it would be reductionistic to suggest that the construction of Burroughs's homosexuality was the sole determining factor of this traumatic moment, it certainly seems to have been a crucial part of it.

The largely autobiographical narrative of Queer details the writer's attempts to woo a young man--who is given the pseudonym Eugene Allerton--with whom he was infatuated whilst on his first trip to South America to find Yage. The novel details the writer's frustrated attempts to gain Allerton's

affections, but he is neither queer nor particularly interested in Burroughs--who takes the persona of William Lee in the novel--as a sexual partner. During the course of the narrative, Lee is going through withdrawal from heroin which provokes a "shocking disintegration" in his personality as it is wrenched from the security of the drug (12), a process in which "everything that has been held in check by junk spills out" (11). The frustration of Lee's unrequited affections compounds the sense of psychic fragmentation he feels. He hopes this will be resolved through contact with another man:

"What have they got that I want, Gene? Do you know?"

"No."

"They have maleness of course. So have I. I want myself the same way I want others. I'm disembodied. I can't use my own body for some reason." He put out his hand. Allerton dodged away. (95)

Lee's overtures are not so much sexual as an attempt to achieve psychic wholeness through narcissistic identification with another male. The implications of this quest for narcissistic identification will be examined shortly, but for the moment we need to consider the significance of the novel's chronological placement in relation to Joan's death. The events recorded took place shortly before the accident. Burroughs had left his wife and children at home in Mexico while he and Allerton explored South America. Queer was written shortly after the tragedy, so it is a retrospective exploration of the events that immediately preceded the accident, an event "which is never mentioned, in fact is carefully avoided" (14).

The urge to write about his queerness is a response to the death. The title itself is a confession to a queer identity, which while certainly not repressed, needed to be displayed in the medium of text as a corrective to the events that led up to her death. Why did he not write about the death itself? Perhaps the proximity of the event made it too painful to do so. Instead, the writer looks at the factors that contributed to the psychic disintegration that led up to the event. He is trying to confront his

queerness directly.

He describes his work on the book as "writing by inoculation" (12). Inoculation infects the patient with a small quantity of virus, which allows him to develop antibodies that provide immunity to further infection. "I achieved some immunity from further perilous adventures along these lines," Burroughs writes "by writing my experience down" (12). In Queer, and in the scatological novels to follow, he appears to be attempting a similar thing: liberating in his texts material that is constrained by the controlling taboos that place frames around discourse. These constraints keep out of civilized speech those things that threaten the integrity of the civilized structure. In effect, he is attempting to sublimate in textuality the suppressions that erupt into being in the horrifying ways of which Joan's death is an exemplar, and of which Burroughs's suppression of his queerness is a possible cause. In releasing this, and the other urges that are the obverse of the historical constructions of the rationality project, he is hoping to regain a kind of purity, or an immunity to control. He made this comment to Jack Kerouac, in which he describes his work as a form of personal catharsis:

I'm shitting out my educated Middlewest background once and for all. It's a matter of catharsis, where I say the most horrible things I can think of. Realize that--the most horrible dirty slimy awful niggardliest posture possible (Literary Outlaw 264)

The kinds of catharsis Burroughs undertakes are far more complex than the simple exposure of his queerness, although, as I have shown, this is one of the crucial initiators of his scatological mode.

The particular form that Burroughs's writing begins to take in Naked Lunch is what he calls the routine. The routine grows out of a desire for contact, and evolves as an identifiable form in Queer. The routine has its roots in the identity problematic, and we will now turn to examine the routine, before turning to the abject horrors of Naked Lunch.

The Routine

Burroughs writes that while it was he who wrote Junky, he felt that he was "being written" in Queer ("Introduction" to Queer 12). A letter written by Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg confirms the way that the act of writing served as a technology of self-transformation for the writer: "Writing the narrative now, which comes in great hunks faster than I can get it down. Changes in my psyche are profound and basic. I feel myself not the same person" (Letters 376). The powerful psychological imperative that motivated him was the need to make contact with another male, so as to solidify in some way his fragmented sense of identity by an act of narcissistic identification. This went beyond the need for mere sexual gratification to a deeper level of psychological yearning. The way that he achieved contact was not so much sexual as verbal, and is related to the loss of the security of junk during the process of withdrawal: "While the addict is indifferent to the impression he creates in others, during withdrawal he may feel the compulsive need for an audience, and this is clearly what Lee seeks in Allerton" (12). The way that Lee makes contact is by making up routines, improvised performances that are designed to be both shocking and humorous with a "frantic attention-getting format" (12). By entertaining Allerton in this way, Lee hopes to gain more than just attention, he endeavours to leave an impression that will solidify his own precarious identity:

What Lee is looking for is contact or recognition, like a photon emerging from the haze of insubstantiality to leave an indelible recording on Allerton's consciousness. Failing to find an adequate observer, he is threatened with a painful dispersal, like an unobserved photon. (13)

The brilliance of the photon metaphor is that it uses the language of quantum physics to evoke the observer's paradox. This suggests that observation transforms the events observed, and Burroughs uses this as an analogy for the way in which he is transformed by the ability to reveal himself in narrative. What it also suggests is that the textuality of the writer's routines becomes

an alternative way for his self-constitution outside of the way that the writer was subsumed by the unitary comforts of junk. The routine, then, is a form of stand-up comedy that liberates the slips and jokes of the unconscious, thereby manifesting the precariousness of the unconscious mind at the same time as it attempts to solidify that mind into the form of a textual imprint on the observer. The text allows for the production of an aesthetic self within the slippages of textual diff/erence that, in spite of its undecidability, is nevertheless a form of contact. But it is also apposite in the way that it captures the precariousness of his psychic state. This state is aptly described by Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, which brings together into a unified theory several ideas which are particularly appropriate to Burroughs: the problematic nature of identity and the need to construct identity in relation to another; the blurring of boundaries that regulate taboo; the revelation of the unconscious in language; the simultaneous production of humour and horror; death; and the inordinate fear of women. Kristeva links these concepts by suggesting that prior to the oedipal phase of psychic development a child experiences the traumatic fear of being destroyed by its mother. In defence, it experiences the urge to destroy the mother figure: an intention that resonates powerfully with Burroughs's shooting of Joan.

Abjection

Kristeva wrote Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection in an attempt to come to terms with the writings of Celine, the French writer whose anti-semitism and fascist sympathies resulted in his imprisonment after the war. In applying her theory to Burroughs I realize the dangers of attempting to "psychoanalyse" the writer through his texts. I do not propose that my analysis will offer a definitive portrait of Burroughs's psyche. Rather, it will suggest a possible explanation of the links between Burroughs's aesthetic practice and his fear of the feminine. I will argue that Naked Lunch's abject waste land of degradation and decay is linked to a repetitive

horror of the feminine: "Bedpans full of blood and kotex and nameless female substances, enough to pollute a continent" (60). The motif of "nameless female substances" is characteristic of abjection, and is particularly characteristic of the imagery of Naked Lunch as a whole.

Kristeva proposes that prior to a child's entry into the oedipal phase, with its initiation into language, it undergoes a process of realising its own subjectivity, and begins to perceive itself as an entity distinct from its mother. She is not, as the child previously thought, part of the child's own self. The realm of the abject is not the realm of the distinction between subject and object, but the border between amorphous selfhood and the realization of selfhood as opposition to another. At the moment of recognition of the mother as a distinct from the child's self, the child rejects the mother, and casts her out in a symbolic act of murder. In doing so, it simultaneously kills itself, since the mother is still somehow consubstantial with itself. This is a pregrammatical phase: the child is neither the "one" of the totality of existence, nor the "two" of a subject versus an object, but something in-between.

Thus the abject is that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (Powers of Horror 4), and it is related to "something maternal" (208). In this sense the abject is pre-phallic. Jacques Lacan's rereading of Freud proposes that the child's entry into language--or, as he calls it, the symbolic--is achieved by its recognition of the phallus as a symbol of power. This symbol provides the ability to make distinctions between terms: it introduces grammaticality and order. Kristeva extends Lacan's theory to suggest that the abject is a realm of a pre-symbolic speech, a rhythmical murmuring that has no grammar. She terms this the semiotic. The semiotic is primordial: it is a pre-symbolic form of speech, that is related to the feminine domain.

Burroughs describes addicts as "drearly sane" ("Appendix" 194). This is similar to the phase prior to abjection: the comfort of junk is like a child's seamless union with its mother. There is no action in this phase, and no excitement. Moreover, as Burroughs describes it, withdrawal is a

"nightmare interlude of cellular panic, life suspended between two ways of being" (Naked Lunch 56). This is the moment of abjection, and bears a similarity to his metaphor of himself as an emergent photon in search of an observer to record it. Caught as it is between the maternal and the structuring principles of the symbolic--a moment between two identities--the abject phase is the area of dreams. At the moment of withdrawal "the longing for junk concentrates itself in a last, all-out yen, and seems to gain a dream power" (56). In his flight into the routine, Burroughs was attempting to find a language that would serve as a new identity, an identity that is perpetually caught between the establishment of the self and its collapse into the mother. Indeed this is essentially a non-identity. This is a refusal of the dreary sameness of junk, and a refusal of a murderous identity.

For the moment, we must return to Burroughs's shooting of his wife. This chance incident could have precipitated a reliving of this primitive trauma. If this is the case, then we can read the shooting as a confirmation of the child's desire to kill its mother so as to establish itself as a self. Not only that, but in murdering Joan, Burroughs enacts the murder of himself that is inseparable from the abjection of the feminine figure. Killing Joan he kills his "better half."

Burroughs certainly believed that he had a traumatic experience as a child with a horrifying female figure. In July 1958 he wrote to Allen Ginsberg from Paris to describe the progress of his therapy there, which he feels is "coming to a head." His therapeutically-induced interpretation of his basic psychological trauma is that as a child he witnessed a miscarriage "by Mary the evil governess." This miscarried baby was "burned in a furnace in [his] presence," and he adds that this was the experience that caused a "murder" to be lodged in his psyche (Letters 393). The "evil" governess and the murdered child that he discovered in the course of his therapy tend to support this theory of his abject sensibility, in which a monstrous female figure is associated with the death of a baby.

Returning to the writer's metaphor of the emergent photon, the important aspect of this metaphor is that the photon needs someone to record it: it is only able to "exist by being observed" (My Education: The Book of Dreams 125). As an emergent photon, Burroughs finds his identity in the recording device of language, which allows the experience of a textual non-self identity. The writer eschews fixed identity in favour of the sliding signifiers of a form of speech that refuses closure, fixity and order: this is the language of the routine, which manifests the sliding of the writer's fragmentary consciousness, and pulverizes the structuring principles of the symbolic. This is enacted both at the thematic level of the collapse of meaning and at the formal level of the agrammaticality of narrative.

Moreover, the non-self identity of abject speech is remarkably similar to the notion of homographesis. The homosexual writes in order to achieve a non-identity at the same time as he achieves a problematized identity in the text. Perhaps the homosexual has an abject relation to discourse, in that he is both other and the same, different, and the sign of diff/erence. Not only abject in relation to discourse, he is perhaps also abject in relation to himself, as an effeminized male in a flight both towards the feminine and from it. He is neither female nor fully male, "throbbing between two lives," as Eliot describes Tiresias in "The Waste Land" (71). Burroughs is four times abject: in his flight from the feminine, in the killing of his wife, in his withdrawal from junk, and in his flight from the constructions of his identity by heterosexual discourse.

The abject is point of collapse of the structuring principles that govern our perception of existence. This applies to any kind of structure: language, identity, government, taboo, and so on. This concept of structure is what Burroughs appears to mean by the word "control." The breakdown of control entails the release of anything that was previously excluded in a society's construction of reality. The horror of the nihilistic destruction of all forms of order ultimately provokes laughter, as Apollo is overthrown by Dionysos. This is a kind of freedom. As Kristeva describes it, the

abject subject is a "stray" who "is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding" (8).

Naked Lunch

Burroughs uses two major metaphors for his abject sensibility: the first is withdrawal from addiction; the second is the anus. While withdrawal is the major metaphor Naked Lunch and the cut-up novels, the anus becomes the predominant metaphor subsequent to this. Its use as a metaphor corresponds to the increasingly political emphasis of his later works, as he begins to map out an understanding of queerness as a politically deconstructive possibility. For Burroughs in this period in his development, the nihilism of the abject sensibility is a kind of freedom. He intuitively associates the deconstructive aspects of the abject with freedom from addiction, and freedom from the oppositional terms of discourse that structure him as deviant. The abject is a way of thinking that exists in a "hiatus between thoughts" (The Job 91). Abject thought is a vivid dream-like sensibility that appears to promise freedom from the controlling need of addiction.

The Algebra of Need

Burroughs believes that anything a person needs controls him. In his thinking, control is linked to addiction, to the oppressive societal structure, and to a form of language that perpetuates this order. The addict's need for morphine is his only motivation, and it is powerful; the addict will "do anything to satisfy total need" ("Introduction" 8). The addict is trapped in "the Algebra of Need" (12), an endlessly mounting equation in which need leads to greater need. The increasing need for junk traps the addict in the junk equation. Junk reduces the addict to a single motivation. His life collapses into the fixed image of his need, like "Willy the Disk":

Willy has a round, disk mouth lined with sensitive black erectile

hairs. He is blind from shooting in the eyeball, his nose and palate eaten away sniffing H, his body a mass of scar tissue hard and dry as wood. He can only eat the shit now with that mouth, sometimes sways out on a long tube of ectoplasm, feeling for the silent frequency of junk. (21)

The opiate replaces the desire for anything else, and the addict is reduced to the image of his need.

Burroughs uses this relatively simple principle to build an entire cosmology. At the time of writing Naked Lunch he extended the Algebra of Need to apply to other areas of life in which the individual was controlled by need, seeing this as "a microcosm of life, pleasure and human purpose" ("Ginsberg Notes" 123). In the cosmology of Naked Lunch different groups vie with one another to gain control of the population: the Senders have harnessed telepathy by means of "biocontrol apparatus" to create a system of "one-way telepathic control" (132); the Divisionists divide and make replications of themselves with the aim of gaining power until there is "one person in the world with millions of separate bodies" (133); and so on. The end result of control is an addiction to control: "It can never be a means to anything but more control....Like junk" (133). The control system replicates itself by various means, but the end result is always the agglomeration of power into bureaucracy and the reduction of humanity to basic need. Thus he universalizes his personal experience to suggest that technologized mass society operates on structures of addiction. The population becomes normalized: uniform in its quest for the satisfaction of its needs.

In opposition to the algebra of need and its production of bureaucratic power is diversity, which is the "human evolutionary direction of infinite potentials and differentiation and individual spontaneous action" (111). Diversity is proposed as a form of health for the human species as opposed to control's thrust towards conformity. Deviance from the norm increases the chance of change, and the writer believes that deviance should be multiplied. But for diversity to be produced, the control systems need to be broken.

In Naked Lunch the writer sets out to describe the operations of control in a narrative style that does not fall into the representational traps of linguistic control. The need for this kind of order, in Burroughs's thinking is a form of addiction. In order to overcome need, the way in which addiction holds the individual within the fixed image of the addicted personality, the writer must undergo withdrawal. He must write to undermine all forms of structure in a nihilistic liberation from language and power.

The form that this takes is in the vividness of the abject, and deconstructive language of the routine, which cut into the junk equation with textual strategies that undermine existing structures. The abject destroys the fixed image of need, to disrupt singular identity and rational coherence. The semiotic unstructuredness of Naked Lunch attempts to deconstruct the way that language operates within the algebra of need. It hopes to induce the excitement of nihilism as a cure for the fixity of societal addiction. Textual unstructuredness allows for multiplicity and a continual process of transformation. This attacks the medium of language with its tendency to codify and produce repetition.

Moreover, in his transgression of cultural construction--which, as I demonstrated earlier, is the codification of human behaviour into rigid patterns of government, behaviour and morality--the writer hopes to achieve a personal liberation. Underlying these strategies is an attempt to free the self from the constraints imposed upon it by the constructions of modernity.

These are the basic strategies of Burroughs's anal aesthetic, which is not without an element of paranoia. In many ways Burroughs's paranoid need to devise a cosmology that allows him personal freedom is reminiscent of Judge Schreber, the subject of Freud's celebrated study of paranoia, who rewrote the cosmos in order to come to terms with his anal desires in a context of extreme social repression (Case Histories 385-470). Fortunately for Burroughs, he is of a different time, and a post-Freudian. Schreber's anal problematic led him to believe that God was transforming him into a woman so

as to claim him as His bride. Burroughs's version is the basis of a transgressive aesthetic.

The Talking Asshole

"The Talking Asshole" is one of the most hilarious and horrifying routines in Burroughs's oeuvre. The intriguing way in which it links bodily topography with textual tropology makes it the perfect metaphor for the anal aesthetic.

Doctor Benway is speaking:

Did I ever tell you about the man who taught his asshole to talk? [. . . .] This man worked for a carnival you dig, and to start with it was like a novelty ventriloquist act. Real funny, too, at first. He had a number he called "The Better 'Ole" that was a scream, I tell you. I forget most of it, but it was clever. Like, "Oh, I say, are you still down there old thing?"

"Nah! I had to go relieve myself."

After a while the ass started talking on its own. He would go in without anything prepared and his ass would ad-lib and toss the gags back at him every time.

Then it developed sort of teeth-like little raspy incurving hooks and started eating. He thought this was cute at first and built an act around it, but the asshole would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights. It would get drunk, too, and have crying jags nobody loved it and it wanted to be kissed same as any other mouth. Finally it talked all the time day and night, you could hear him for blocks screaming at it to shut up, and beating it with his fist, and sticking candles up it, but nothing did any good and the asshole said to him: "It's you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here any more. I can talk and eat and shit."

After that he began waking up in the morning with a

transparent jelly like a tadpole's tail all over his mouth. This 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 gob 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. For a while you could see the silent, helpless suffering of the brain behind the eyes, then finally the brain must have died, because the eyes went out and there was no more feeling in them than a crab's eye on the end of a stalk. (110-111)

Critics have interpreted this strange routine in different ways. Neil Oxenhandler's psychoanalytic interpretation is that it dramatizes a psychic conflict between the writer's anal and oral stages of development, as represented by the clash between the anus and the mouth. The oral stage is associated with the terrifying maternal figure, the "giantess of the nursery" ("Listening to Burroughs' Voice" 144). The threat of the mother figure is that she can withhold the pleasures of the breast at any time, which the child perceives as evidence of her cruelty. This oral stage is thus associated with "psychic masochism" in the writer (143). He attempts to escape the self-destructive urges of this stage by fleeing to the anal stage, which is associated with the "negative oedipus" of identification with his mother, and a homosexual desire for the father-figure (144). Although this reading is one of the few to make a passing reference to the writer's homosexuality, this is referred to only at the level of deep psychic structure without any suggestion either of the writer's conscious awareness of the ideas of psychoanalysis or of a conscious political objective. Nor

does it account for the importance of the role of language in the power struggle between the anus and the mouth.

By contrast, Robin Lydenberg's reading focuses on language as the most important factor in the conflict. In anticipation of Burroughs's assault on the word in the cut-up novels, she reads the routine as primarily a linguistic struggle that dramatizes the violence inherent in language. She argues that the routine displays the mechanisms of power in the linguistic dualism of body and mind: the mind, which is associated with the man's self and his ability to produce language, is oppressive of the body. The routine "challenges the comforting myth that it is language which distinguishes man from beast" (Word Cultures 27). In the early stages, the asshole is at the receiving end of a comedy act. It is the "butt-of-jokes," that demean it and even wish it away; the irony in the showman's name for his act, "The Better 'Ole", is that the anus is regarded as inferior and Other. This establishes the hierarchical division between self and body, and the mouth's ability to use language in a process of naming gives it linguistic superiority. "The carny man's dialogue, as it is initially conceived," Lydenberg writes, "is actually a monologue, ventriloquy operating as the basic weapon of control through language" (26). Ironically, language turns out to be "the easiest mental characteristic for the body to imitate and annex for itself," (27) as the asshole begins to take control of the linguistic function. Eventually the asshole's annexation of language enables it to take control of the whole organism. The end result of this struggle is the reduction of the organism to a single orifice of need that destroys its identity.

Lydenberg sees Burroughs's strategy in the routine as "the production of indeterminacy" which is both "the sign of the disease and the method of its cure" (27). In assigning the powers of speech to the body, speech itself becomes undecidable, like undifferentiated tissue. This is a useful interpretation, and is certainly consistent with the effects of the cut-up novels, and with the non-linear form of Naked Lunch. However, what Lydenberg presents us with is a politics of the word without any motivating force

behind the permutations of the power struggle.

Wayne Pounds's essay similarly sees the routine in political terms, although he understands its politics as taking the form of parody. He situates it in the larger context of Dr. Benway's speech, and reads it as an outrageous discussion of medical efficiency; by reducing the number of orifices in the human body, Benway argues, it can be made more efficient. Thus, the asshole's power is that it can fulfil the excretory function as well as eating and talking: it can "talk and eat and shit" (110). Pounds understands this reduction of the organism through medical intervention as a parody of "an administrative, bureaucratic style" of language, which is the style of instrumental rationality that, as the discourse of our state, dominates our age ("The Postmodern Anus" 614). While this part of his thesis makes sense, and it is close to my belief that Burroughs, like Foucault, is attacking specific political constructions of discourse in the modern era, Pounds's conclusion concerning the motivations for this attack is ludicrous. He argues that Burroughs's rewriting of "the symbolic codes" is designed to "help establish an alternative discourse, and in so doing it takes a necessary step toward the building of a socialist democracy" (628).

Burroughs is definitely not a socialist,⁹ but Pounds does make a valuable point in that he links Burroughs's discourse-attacking strategy to the metaphor of anality, what he calls "the Ur field of anarchy" (617). However, he does not make any connection between the text's political strategy and the writer's homosexuality. For, as I suggested in the Introduction, Burroughs's homosexuality is the site of an identity problematic that initiates his quest to rewrite the constructions of Western discourse. The violence of naming makes it such that Burroughs, as a homosexual, is an asshole. The metonymical link between the homosexual and the anus, means that the asshole may be read as the figure of the homosexual himself, who similarly stands in a deconstructive relation to the bureaucratic discourse of control: Burroughs has the same relation to the world of discourse as the asshole has to the mouth. The asshole's rebellion arises, as Lydenberg points out, from the

mouth's attempt, proceeding from its metonymical relation to the head and to rationality, to subordinate the anus in an effort to establish the security of its own identity. Its construction of the body's topography in terms of a hierarchy in which it sets itself up as the upper end of a binary opposition puts into play a power struggle which ultimately causes the demise of the entire organism.

The reduction of the carny man to a crab-like zombie, the self as the burnt-out ruin left over on a linguistic battlefield, is a situation that Burroughs appears to both despise and invite with an attitude of anarchic inclusiveness. The threat that this poses is asymbolicity, the inability to signify, and the extinction of the hierarchical eye/I that sees from the fixed position of a stable identity. But the deployment of the anus as an affront to the constructions of the mouth liberates the writer into a form of textuality that is non-hierarchical, insecure, indefinite, indeterminate. This allows for an experience of a textual identity that has the same qualities. Thus, the anus is not merely an oppositional identity, but a kind of textual non-identity. What this achieves, paradoxically, is to liberate textuality, removing the oral need to "tell the truth" in text. The anal text affirms its own textuality. The writer is able to disappear into his text, and thereby pose himself, within textuality, as the very riddle that textuality wishes to disguise in the violence of its attempt to name, to pin down and to define. Although the man who teaches his asshole to speak ends up a zombie, his death is the death of the cartesian self, a death that liberates the writer into a new approach to text.

The link between the anus and the body is an important one, because the anal text is grounded in the materiality of words. We shall see in Burroughs's use of the cut-up the extension of this, as words become treated like objects that can be physically manipulated in the same way that an artist manipulates pieces of paper in a collage. In foregrounding the repressed physicality of words, Burroughs is able to demonstrate that, when treated as a physical medium, the word becomes indeterminate. The cut-up

reveals the word as signifier liberated from the imperative of correspondence with the truth of the signified. Writing thus becomes a process, grounded in the physicality of the medium, rather than in the abstract truth of the signified. It is no longer a truth but a practice, a technology.

The anal aesthetic, then, is an intentional version of the return of the repressed. By including in writing all that has been excluded in the rationality project, it is the attempt to dismantle the hierarchical structure of discourse by reinscribing into it the terms which have been traditionally disfavoured, in an effort to replace it with a process that is indeterminate and shifting. Burroughs's method is to release the powers of the unconscious side of society's structures--which is expressed in both the personal unconscious and the political unconscious--by putting into his writing the things that have been repressed. As Dr. Benway continues after the talking asshole routine:

That's the sex that passes the censor, squeezes through between bureaus, because there's always a space between, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness, spurting out like breaking boils, throwing out gobs of that un-D.T. to fall anywhere and grow into some degenerate cancerous life-form, reproducing a hideous random image. (111)

Burroughs's routine style allows these hideous images to slip through the cracks of the constructions of rationalist, logical discourse. These cracks are a cultural Interzone: the spaces between the constructions of civilization, which reveal everything that civilization tries to repress. In this sense, Burroughs's routines are necessarily abject.

In Queer, the character William Lee contemplates the possibility of absolute nihilism: "What happens when there is no limit? What is the fate of the Land Where Anything Goes? Men changing into huge centipedes..." (92). Burroughs cannot answer that question. But in routines such as "Word" he attempts to imagine the possibility.

Word

One of the best examples of the purging of linguistic and cultural repression is the early routine "Word," which was later to be incorporated in part into Naked Lunch. "Word" is an attack on civilization that is a superb example of Burroughs's improvisational and unstructured technique:

The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement. 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 pathic [. . .]

This is Revelation and Prophecy of what I can pick up without FM on my 1920 crystal set with antennae of jissom. Gentle reader, we see God through our assholes in the flashbulb of orgasm. Through these orifices transmute your body, the way out is the way in. There is no blacker blasphemy than spit with shame on the body God gave you. And woe unto those castrates who equate their horrible old condition with sanctity. (135-136)

Burroughs incorporates the carnal body into his text in opposition to the "sanctity" that excludes these things. The Word is no longer the figure of Christ as the unitary revelation of truth and the divine, but an amorphous mass that can be "had in any order." The Word has become substance, and the anus has been translated from the merely vile to the site of the sublime. The poetic vitality of this piece is the tone of a tremendous, nihilistic liberation.

Notice that the asshole is associated with the self-loss that we saw in "The Talking Asshole" routine, but here this is directly associated with the moment of revelation. Whereas the carnival man's "eyes went out," the petit-mort of anal orgasm induces a new way of seeing. Burroughs will explore this

possibility in his later work. The private investigator character in Cities of the Red Night, for example, attempts to solve a murder mystery by the utilization of non-linear forms of perception, such as tape recorder cut-ups, which he hopes will enable him to see beyond the surface laws of cause-and-effect to an alternate form of perception.

We have looked at several characteristics of the anal aesthetic: the production of undecidability in text; the release of the repressed; and the ways that these relate to a power relation in which the homosexual figure becomes the deconstructive factor in discourse. I now want to look more closely at the relationship between these things and the way that they are linked with death in the anal aesthetic, to show that death and self-loss are given a potentially positive revaluation as a way of freeing the self, not merely from the constraints of political and social repression, but from the limitations of identity, and even of the self. For death and the anus in Burroughs's fiction become increasingly linked to the idea of singularity, the transgression of a limit that Foucault describes as a point at which existence is "fulfilled by this alien plenitude which invades it to the very core of its being" ("Preface to Transgression" 34). In Cities of the Red Night the anus is transformed into a black hole that sucks in the theatrical props and sets of signification:

His exposed rectum is jet-black surrounded by erectile red hairs.

The hole begins to spin with a smell of ozone [. . .].

Wigs, clothes, chairs, props, are all draining into the spinning black disk.

"ITZA BLACK HOLE!"

Naked bodies are sucked inexorably forward, writhing screaming like souls pulled into Hell. The lights go out and then the red sky.... (283-284).

Whereas this version of the black hole destroys the props of representation, in The Western Lands the anus as a black hole is even more clearly linked to a form of self-loss. In the poem of the Deercat, the "spirit of the black

hole," the hole is linked to self-loss as part of the destruction of natural laws, a "singularity" that "has no human MEEE" (243).

Both Burroughs and Foucault propose a post-humanism in which self-identity is seen as a hindrance to a greater experience of being. For Foucault, the aim was to replace the notion of man with "something that absolutely does not exist, about which we know nothing ... the creation of something totally different" (The Passion of Michel Foucault 336). This was to be a version of the self that was in some way outside of knowledge, and outside of the limitations of any kind of control. As Jonathan Dollimore puts it, "for Foucault the disidentification of the self, which in turn involved a fascination with death itself, was at once political, historical and subjective" ("Sex and Death" 40).

The production of indeterminacy in "The Talking Asshole" routine is such an attempt to challenge the literalization of identity, turning language back upon itself to produce a self that is undecidable. This is not quite the post-modern subject, but the self as a site of contestation. Dollimore elaborates the paradoxical self-assertion versus self-loss of gay subjectivity as follows:

...I cease to be the fixed, tyrannized subject and become--become what? One hesitates here because what one becomes is never secure, never as certain as what the euphoria of self-discovery promises. One becomes something other for sure, yet, equally surely, never the abstract free-floating subject of the postmodern; and this is because, for the gay person, what remains in place is always at risk: psychically, socially, sexually, legally, and in other ways, and probably all at once, inseparably. But still, remarkably, desire enables a self-realization that is also a defiant refusal of self. ("Sex and Death" 40)

The anal aesthetic is the enactment of a self-loss that liberates the self from constraint, it is, as Bersani writes of Nietzsche and the Dionysian "not

a desire for something [but] a desire to be with an intensity that cannot be contained--held in or defined--by a self" (The Culture of Redemption 100-101).

Burroughs's texts enact a continual transgression of textuality's claims to definitiveness. He does this by opening up the cracks in forms of knowledge that attempts to constrain the self.

In "The Examination", the final routine from Naked Lunch that I will consider, and one that is remarkably Foucauldian in its concerns, Burroughs reveals the way that knowledge attempts to fix the individual in the bureaucratic structures of medical and state discourse. The operations of power-knowledge revealed in a routine such as this are the motivating force for both writers' attempts to undermine discourse.

The Examination

This routine dramatizes the ways in which the discourses of rational humanism become weapons of state control. Set in Freeland, Burroughs's version of a Scandinavian social welfare state, it shows the horror underlying the state's compilation of bureaucratic information about the individual, which is presented under the guise of benign benevolence.

Crucial to the state's control is that the individual should have a fixed identity. Carl is summoned to the "The Ministry of Mental Hygiene and Prophylaxis" for an examination. At first he cannot understand why he should be called; he knows of nothing actually "wrong" that should require the state's intervention:

"What on earth could they want with me?" he thought irritably....

"A mistake most likely." But he knew they didn't make

mistakes.... Certainly not mistakes of identity.... (148)

The codification of identity is one of the few "mistakes" that they don't make. The reason for the examination turns out to be an attempt to pin down his sexual identity, which is achieved by a bewildering barrage of pseudo-scientific information relating to sexual orientation.

The examination is conducted by a particularly malevolent Dr. Benway, whose persona shifts between aloof mad scientist, carnival trickster and a house detective performing an interrogation. The doctor's language constructs the issue of Carl's sexual orientation, defines it as a pathology, and then disguises his violent codification of identity as an example of the state's concern for the welfare of its citizens:

We regard it as a misfortune... a sickness... certainly nothing to be censored or uh sanctioned any more than say... tuberculosis.... [. . . .] On the other hand, you can readily see that any illness imposes certain, should we say obligations, certain necessities of a prophylactic nature on the authorities concerned with public health, such necessities to be imposed, needless to say, with a minimum of inconvenience and hardship to the unfortunate individual who has, through no fault of his own, become uh infected.... (150)

Benway's interview is a labyrinthine concoction of accusations and incomprehensible jargon that begin to disturb Carl's perception of reality:

Carl suddenly felt trapped in this silent underwater cave of a room, cut off from all sources of warmth and certainty. His picture of himself sitting there calm, alert with a trace of well mannered contempt went dim, as if vitality were draining out of him to mix with the milky grey medium of the room. (151)

The interrogation produces feelings of paranoia in Carl as Benway's methods are revealed to be tricks designed to extract a confession to a singular sexual identity. For example, the doctor produces a set of pictures of pin-up girls, suggesting he "Pick a girl, any girl, any girl!" (154), and after Carl chooses one he trumps him with the fact that some of the girls "are really boys" (155).

The irony of the routine is that Carl does not consider himself to fall into the category "homosexual" in the first place. The undecidable nature of Carl's experience in the ministry means that when, after a barrage of tests,

obfuscations, interrogations and a confrontation with his "glowering super-ego" (155), his voluntary participation in a homosexual act is revealed, it is uncertain whether it is a fact or whether it has been planted in his brain by a brainwashing process achieved by the examination itself. Benway's scientific analysis of his subject is therefore revealed, not only as a process construction of homosexuality as a concept, and of homosexuality as a pathology, but his science even constructs sexual orientation itself.

Burroughs thus brilliantly satirizes the way that the subject of Western humanism has been constructed as an object of knowledge, and in this process, has become a victim of the bureaucratic control mechanisms of the state. The mechanisms of power-knowledge exposed by this routine dovetail neatly with Foucault's historiographic analysis of the construction of homosexual identity in The History of Sexuality. In spite of the proliferation of information regarding the subject, Burroughs is implicitly arguing, subjects such as this are undecidable. They impoverish our understanding of ourselves and make us vulnerable to the effects of control. The constructions of language are inseparable from the production of control.

Furthermore, the writer perceived his homosexuality as problematic at the time of writing this routine. In a letter to Ginsberg in October 1957, he describes Dr. Benway "creating male and female queers with Enzyme Therapy" (Letters 369). In the same letter he describes a dream in which he meets his "non-queer persona," an adolescent boy who looks at him with hate in his eyes. "And with good reason too," Burroughs writes. "Suppose you had kept a non-queer young boy in a strait-jacket of flesh twenty-five years subject to continual queer acts and talk?" (369). Perhaps Burroughs was wishing for this persona to emerge, because he suggests that at some point, his different personae "will have to arrange a merger" (370). This was certainly a key problem in his continuing psychotherapy. In a letter seven weeks later, he writes: "Have reached a point where I don't seem to want boys anymore. Must have some cunt. I was never supposed to be queer at all. The whole trauma is out now" (378). Burroughs's homosexuality was one of the principal

traumas that he hoped to resolve in his quest to transform himself through writing.

As I have shown in this chapter, Burroughs attempts to by-pass the control mechanism by revealing its effects, and deploys undecidability in his writings so as to problematize the language with which we understand ourselves. Furthermore, I suggested that Burroughs's own identity problematic--his homosexuality, his shooting of his wife, and his addiction--are expressions of an abject sensibility that problematizes the notion of identity itself. In the next chapter I shall examine the cut-up technique as an extreme form of his attempt to liberate himself from language and power, and I will discuss the dangers that this project necessarily entails.

Chapter Two: Cut the Word Lines! (You Can Do the Same with Mind Tape)

I fear we are not getting rid of God for we still believe in grammar...

- Nietzsche Twilight of the Idols

I am here to show you young officers a few tricks that you call "reality."

- Burroughs The Third Mind

Burroughs discovered the cut-up technique shortly before the completion of Naked Lunch, and the ensuing period between 1959 and 1966 was a time of intense creative activity. He produced numerous works in this period, including three cut-up novels: The Soft Machine, The Ticket that Exploded and Nova Express; several shorter collaborative works, such as Dead Fingers Talk and White Subway; and The Third Mind, an artistic and theoretical manifesto, which was co-written with Brion Gysin.

In this chapter I will concentrate on the cut-up novels, which are the writer's most ambitious explorations of the technique. They are among his most fascinating and problematic works. The cut-up hovers on the boundary between science and mythology, between wisdom and foolishness, and between nihilism and a search for meaning. The writer terms the technique "machine age knife-magic" (The Third Mind 31), because it brings the technology of scissors to text in order to cut through its linear, rational structure. In their production of textual uncertainty, their use of technological metaphor, and their questioning of compromised identity, the cut-up novels capture some of the principal preoccupations of the late twentieth century.

In The Third Mind Brion Gysin asks the provocative question: "Who told poets they were supposed to think?" The task of the poet, he argues, is not to think, but to sing, and "to make words sing" (34). In his opinion, words

"have a vitality of their own" and the cut-up lets them "gush into action" (34). In his use of the cut-up, Burroughs achieves a poetic vitality that extends the aesthetic of Naked Lunch. More fragmentary than the previous novel, the trilogy problematizes language even further. However, in spite of the deconstruction of language, behind the radical intertext, perhaps unrecoverable, is the ambiguous figure of the author who laboured to write: who achieves, in his fragmentation of language and in his obsessive poetry of violence and sex, an ecstatic disidentification with the self.

Julia Kristeva argues that the cut-up technique attacks both reason and identity, thereby "unfolding and suspending discursive logic and the speaking subject" (Postmodernism? 139). My focus in this chapter is on the ways that Burroughs uses the cut-up as a technology of the self to transgress the limits of both representation and the self. This is a spiritual quest, in which the writer uses language to explore the boundaries of material and psychic existence. It is also a political one, in which he attempts to undermine the relationship between power and a fixed identity.

A rigid identity both enforces power upon others and is vulnerable to power. Burroughs's exploration of the limits of representation in the cut-up continues his work of homographesis, in which he attempts to dismantle the oppositional logic of language, and the way that opposition fixes identity. But it also brings him dangerously close to the abject.

Genealogy of the Cut-Up

Burroughs was introduced to the cut-up in 1959 by the painter Brion Gysin at the Beat Hotel in Paris. Like Burroughs, Gysin had spent some time in Tangier, which provided a degree of shared experience and a common interpretative framework. He was also a homosexual, and in Gysin, Burroughs found a mentor and friend whose thinking was shaped by similar experience. Gysin's success as an artist in his lifetime was limited, but he had a lively and intelligent mind, and was a powerful conversationalist. His idiosyncratic perspective and his theorizations about art made him a useful

intellectual foil for Burroughs at a time when he was looking for new artistic direction after Naked Lunch. Burroughs gives him credit for many of the ideas that began to filter into his work during this period, and pays tribute to him in his most recent work, calling Gysin "the only man [he has] ever respected" (My Education: The Book of Dreams 7).

As a marginal member of the French Surrealist movement, Gysin was exposed to Dada, so he was aware of the precedent set by Tristan Tzara, who had made an anti-poem by pulling words at random from a hat ("23 Stitches Taken" 14). In an idle moment at the Beat Hotel, Gysin made some accidental cut-ups by cutting newspapers. Finding them amusing, he showed them to Burroughs. The writer was immediately fascinated: perceiving in the fragments of text more than just a joke, he realized that Gysin had showed him a technique that would enable him to extend the work on the word he had begun in Naked Lunch (Literary Outlaw 321). The cut-up provided him with the technology that he hoped would enable him to "shatter the human pattern" ("Ginsberg Notes" 128).

The basic technique is disarmingly simple. As Burroughs explains the procedure, anyone can do it:

Cut right through the pages of any book or newsprint...

lengthwise, for example, and reshuffle the columns of text. Put them together at hazard and read the newly-constituted message.

Do it for yourself. (The Third Mind 34)

This apparent simplicity belies an enormous range of implications that were to fascinate Burroughs's experimental sensibility for several years. His use of the cut-up as a performative gesture of revolt that utilizes randomness to undermine reason places Burroughs in the tradition of Dada. But he goes beyond the dadaistic gesture to explore a wide range of theoretical and aesthetic implications. Moreover, his cut-up novels are unrivalled as a thoroughgoing attempt to utilize random techniques in a sustained literary performance.

Critical Responses to the Cut-Up

The cut-up novels were never widely popular, and they were not particularly well received when first published. While many critics have seen them as exciting literary innovations, others have either dismissed them as incomprehensible, or suggested that they fail on an artistic level. David Lodge falls into the latter category: he argues that the cut-up fails in aesthetic rigour, and that Burroughs's approach is superficial: to "bend the existing conventions without breaking them--this is the strenuous and heroic calling of the experimental artist," he contends, and he believes that Burroughs merely breaks them. He judges this as "too easy" ("Objections to Burroughs" 170).

Theodore Solotaroff praises Burroughs's writing skill, and suggests that at times he breaks up "the syntactical logic of English in order to renovate and heighten its expressiveness," but argues that the cut-up method frequently "lands him in merely a different kind of banality" ("The Algebra of Need" 88). This is perhaps true, because the novels are repetitive and difficult to read. While Solotaroff sees Burroughs as developing the kind of "genuine innovation that keeps the novel alive," he is not sure that the cut-up novels are more than "a brilliantly lit dead end" (89). He is correct that the cut-up reaches a limitation, as I will explore in the next chapter.

Robin Lydenberg reads the novels in the context of post-structuralist literary theory in order to make connections between them. She concentrates on Burroughs "as one who writes" (Word Cultures ix), to suggest that he independently develops ideas such as intertextuality and deconstruction. Her links between Burroughs and theory are persuasive, and there is certainly a link between the strategies of theory and what Burroughs attempts to accomplish in his texts. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of her thesis is that it makes detailed reading of cut-up passages, which demonstrate the high degree of aesthetic control in the writer's use of the technique. This provides a useful corrective to critics such as Lodge who dismiss the works

as merely artistically lazy.

Nicholas Zurbrugg explores the relationship between the cut-up texts and theory in a more interactive way, in that he uses them as a touchstone in his considerations of theory. His essay "The Limits of Intertextuality: Barthes, Burroughs, Gysin, Culler" uses the cut-up technique to critique superficial readings of Barthes's theories of intertextuality. In this way he shows that Burroughs can provide useful points of intersection with theoretical discourse. Similarly, Julia Kristeva uses the texts to critique psychoanalytic theory, and she makes the fascinating suggestion that the cut-up may rival psychoanalysis in its effects ("Postmodernism?" 138).

A number of critics have identified a search for meaning in the novels' description of the post-modern condition. Tony Tanner argues that the works suggest that language has replaced reality, and that "no genuine reality is accessible in present time" ("Rub Out the Word" 109). He also identifies Burroughs's continual desire to be "freed from the conditioning forces" (112). While Tanner admires this radical attempt to escape from control, Ihab Hassan responds to the post-humanist impulses of the works with a cautious corrective. He argues that Burroughs's nihilism is the mark of a concealed utopianism, and detects beneath the "cold rage of obscenity, a piteous respect for creation" ("The Subtracting Machine" 67). He suggests that ultimately "too much is left out" in Burroughs's world view because it excludes nature, love, and society (66). Hassan's reluctance to accept the radicalism of Burroughs's position is understandable; indeed, as I will suggest in Chapter Four, the writer begins to temper the extremism of his position in the later works, and attempts to discover ethical value in the face of extreme nihilism.

Cary Nelson perceives a more extreme agenda in the novels. He argues that Burroughs creates a "radical space" by disrupting the temporal continuity of the text, with the intention of destroying "the self as a structure continuous in time by ravaging and irreversibly transforming our biological existence" ("The End of the Body: Radical Space in Burroughs" 131). The

writer is attempting to destroy the body, Nelson contends, so as to achieve "an outrageous planetary self ecstatically exploding in space" (131). This comes closest to describing the extremism of Burroughs's agenda, and its comic horror.

Sexual Technology

Critics' fascination with the literary-theoretical implications of the cut-up has frequently obscured the parascientific angle of Burroughs's explorations. In his reconfiguration of the subject as an object of control rather than as the transcendent entity of humanist discourse, the writer describes the body as a "soft machine" that is programmed by external input. He theorizes that words produce neurochemical effects in the brain in the same way that drugs do. This idea divorces the word from its effects as a referential unit to consider it in scientific and materialist terms. Burroughs hoped that his ideas would lead to a "precise science of words" that would "show how certain word combinations produce certain effects on the human nervous system". (Job 28).

His fascination with the link between the body and machines provoked an interest in the cult of Scientology. He underwent an extended course of therapy with the cult in the late sixties. Scientology uses a form of polygraph called an e-meter to provide "therapy" for its members. The e-meter passes a low-level electric current through the subject, which supposedly reveals harmful word combinations lodged in the psyche. Once discovered, the machine erases them to relieve mental distress. The church claims that extensive e-meter therapy erases the "Reactive Mind" until the subject attains the state of "clear".⁹ E-meter technology appears to have provided Burroughs with a "scientific" way to manipulate traumatic words lodged within his psyche. As a technology, the e-meter provided a way to explore the relationships between words and the psyche. In this respect, it side-steps semantics to treat language as a biophysical process. Perhaps its appeal was that it provided an approach to words as instruments of psychic

control, and provided a means by which they could be eliminated, without the need to resort to meaning.

A similar link between language and technology influences his approach to the cut-up. Burroughs suggests in The Job that the cut-up puts the writer "in tactile communication with his medium" (28). In other words, the writer can treat writing as a physical technology. The technique collapses literature into science. This, he hopes, will enable him to find a cure for the damage that words do.

According to Allen Ginsberg, Burroughs was particularly interested in the way that the cut-up could be used to de-program sexual conditioning. He relates that this was what first attracted Burroughs to the technique, because he hoped that it would enable him to decondition his "particular sexual thing" which was "being screwed" (Gay Sunshine Interviews 124). Ginsberg says that

the cut-ups were originally designed to rehearse and repeat his obsession with sexual images over and over again, like a movie repeating over and over again, and then re-combined and cut up and mixed in; so that finally the obsessive attachment, compulsion and preoccupation empty out and drain from the image. [. . . .] Finally, the hypnotic attachment, the image, becomes demystified. (124).

I argued in the last chapter that Burroughs's anal aesthetic grows out of his desire to transform himself through textuality, and to liberate his consciousness from control. With the cut-up, he pushes the desire for liberation from control to the point of imagining out-of-body experience: the cut-up provides a way in which he can transgress the limitations of meaning and of the body. Ginsberg, who seems to be one of the few commentators to have recognized the extremism of Burroughs's thinking, suggests that Burroughs used the cut-up technique in a "practical Yankee examination of sensory phenomena" (125), in order to "question sex at the root" (124). He argues that he is one of the "few homosexual theorists who has theorized up

to the point of outside-of-the-body and detachment from sexuality" (124).

Burroughs's fascination with liberation from the body hinges on his understanding of the nature of sexual fixation. He examines the idea in Gay Sunshine Interviews:

What is sexy to an individual human creature? An old film, a film usually laid down in childhood on a reception screen. [. . . .A man] is tied to that little piece of film as the only way he can achieve ejaculation. He may be sick of it, disgusted by it, may even laugh at it--but not while it is going on. [. . . .] That piece of film is quite literally wired to the sex centres of the brain. With electric brain stimulation we should be able to plug into another film. (16-17)

His formulation of sexual obsession as a piece of film is revealing, and I suggest that it relates to his writing as homographesis. That the writer is locked into a particular habitual sexual fantasy implies a personal problematic, which is that this aspect of his psyche controls him. The description of his sexual fixation as a film loop has two implications.

Firstly, as a piece of neurological programming laid down in early childhood, it is repetitive and habitual. Secondly, as a piece of film, it is constructed, an illusion, and as such is not an essential part of his psyche. To develop this further, "sexual technology" provides a way that the writer can transform his fixation, because it provides an external intervention into something that he feels incapable of changing.

Framed in this way, the film loop metaphor is a strategic reformulation of the "problem" of homosexual desire. It is both defining, in that it is obsessive, and completely unimportant, in that it could be changed. Anyone can be sexually conditioned, the writer suggests: heterosexual, homosexual; a person could even be conditioned to "react sexually to an old boot" (17). His advocacy of the possibility that one could achieve a "wider range" of sexual interest both describes homosexual fixation at the same time as describing it (17).

According to Ginsberg, Burroughs's aim with the cut-up is to reach a state of ultimate detachment, where he can

look at his most tender, personal, romantic images objectively and no longer be attached to them. And that's the purpose of the cut-ups: to cut out-of-habit reactions, [. . .] to cut out into open space, into endless blue space where there is room for freedom and no obligation to repeat the same image over and over again, to come the same way over and over again (124).

An intriguing possibility, but in the context of Burroughs's later works, which reveal the same obsessions in largely the same form as they occur in the earlier works, one is forced to wonder to what extent this is a practical suggestion, and to what extent it is a fantasy.

The desire to be free of the self is a recurrent theme in both Burroughs's and Foucault's writing, and a similar idea is picked up by Jonathan Dollimore in his article "Sex and Death". Is this desire to work upon the self an internalized version of the paranoid fear of control? If it is, then it reveals that the homographetic anxiety over the construction of gay identity goes beyond the desire to attack the constructions of discourse, to an attempt to deconstruct habitual aspects of individual mental life. For while Burroughs's attitude to the cut-up holds up the transformation of the self as an intriguing possibility, his desire to do this reveals a sense of entrapment within his psycho-sexual thought processes. He fears control, not merely from the exteriorized threat of homophobic discourse, but by the fact that his sexual fantasies mark him as essentially different from statistically "normal" sexuality. To paraphrase Burroughs, the homosexual needs boys like a junky needs junk.

Not that Burroughs wants to change his sexual orientation, exactly. But the impact of this orientation on his life powerfully reveals that he is controlled by psychic constructions. When asked by the interviewer whether he would change his film, he responds with a defensively qualified negative that contradicts Ginsberg's claims about the primacy of the cut-up's

function:

Well, not my sexual program necessarily. But there are certainly things I'd like to change. I think all of us to a certain extent have been crippled by early conditioning, and there are always traces of that in me that I'd be glad to get rid of. (18)

In spite of this strategic non-essentialism of much gay thinking, in that it promotes the fluidity of identity, and the construction of homosexual identity, the problem remains that gays are in thrall to a deviant cathexis. This is a source of perpetual fascination, and is in many ways oppressive by its very obsessiveness. How far is Burroughs's thinking shaped by this obsession? The need to attack the constructions of discourse, and the desire to be able to transform the self appear to grow from the need to assert the possibility of change. The fear of the disciplinary structures of control, while in many ways fruitful, arises from the inability to control the self: the anus is an internal site of control.

Burroughs's desire for deconditioning is directed as much towards his own psychic structures as it is towards the outside world. As with his use of the e-meter, the threat of control is internalized: harmful words work upon the psyche in the form of psychic distress. Having looked at the way that in the cut-up Burroughs hoped for a technology of self-transformation, I will now examine the way that he uses it in writing.

The Anal Aesthetic

Nelson appropriately suggests that within the cut-up text, "(s)catology becomes eschatology" (127). In my discussion of the anal aesthetic in Naked Lunch, I argued that in the talking asshole routine the writer collapsed the distinction between mind and body to create an undecidable text. In the asshole's appropriation of the word, language was revealed as a bodily function. The cut-up technique makes the physical nature of the word even more explicit. Not simply abstractions, they are material objects that are bound to the page or to the physical medium of the air.

The cut-up thus liberates the signifier from the signified, to treat words as pure signifier. For Burroughs, the fall of man is not the fall from God's grace, but the creation of the Word: "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" (Nova Express 10). The writer's mission was now to "rub out the word," by revealing the ways in which words served as a prison: "Prisoner, come out. The great skies are open. I Hassan I Sabbah rub out the word forever. And the words of Hassan i Sabbah as also cancel" (10). In the cut-up's revelation of the word as material, it unmasked language as "pure illusion" that divorces humanity from directly observed experience. In the novels, Burroughs always attempts to force the reader to look at the naked word directly. He foregrounds the words themselves, and the means of their production, to prevent the reader from looking at the supposed abstractions behind them.

The writer was to apply the cut-up to many situations and texts, with the experimental fervour of a man who has discovered a remarkable machine that he can apply to every situation, and this proliferated ideas and experimentation in other media. According to Oliver Harris, by the time that this period of experimentation came to a close, the writer had over six thousand pages of manuscripts ("Cut-Up Closure" 252), which is a measure of the intensity of his obsession with the technique. Gysin's comment that "writing is fifty years behind painting" provided the link between writing and modernist innovations in the visual media (The Third Mind 34), such as cubism and action painting, but the most important visual precedent for the cut-up was the collage. Words could now be juxtaposed, not according to their semantic content, but by an arbitrary process of physical cutting and patterning.

Moreover, the use of writing as a technology suggested that similar techniques could be applied to other media within which mental processes were given a material form. Thus Burroughs began to apply cut-up techniques to tape recorders and to film in order to explore further the possibilities of

random juxtaposition of word and image. Burroughs, Gysin, and a number of other artists, began to multiply the applications of aleatory techniques to produce a substantial body of work.

They also made numerous theoretical evaluations of the implications of the technique, some of which I will discuss here. The most important aspect of the cut-up as anal aesthetic is that it is grounded in materiality: in the physical word and the physical body. In Burroughs's thinking, these are the limits of experience. Escape from present reality, either political or spiritual, requires that these be shattered. The challenge posed by material existence is the transgression of its limits. The task that Burroughs sets himself in the cut-up novels is to write without being locked into the operations of power inherent in the oppositional terms of language.

Self/Other

Before developing the idea of transgression of limits further, I need to restate the definition of the abject that I gave in Chapter One, when I argued, following Julia Kristeva, that Naked Lunch was informed by an abject sensibility (Powers of Horror 1-2). The traumatic abject situation, in which the child is in a transition period between continuity with the mother and the establishment of the self, results in themes of suffering and horror, and in imagery that is related to boundaries: the blurring of the boundaries of the physical body, the transgression of taboo, and the disordering of identity. The abject finds similar expression in language. If the establishment of the self is related to the symbolic, the structured language of ordered, phallic sentences, the abject "self" finds expression in what Kristeva terms the semiotic: an rhythmical and agrammatical form of language. The appropriateness of this theory to the cut-up novels should be clear: Burroughs's use of the cut-up's to shatter text perpetuates the abject sensibility of Naked Lunch. The collapse of language in the abject is related to the collapse of individual identity.

The concept of the abject will help us to understand both Burroughs's

theoretical thinking and his tropes, which are as compelling as they are contradictory. Significantly, most of his theories about the effects of the cut-up are related to identity, and to the opposition between Self and Other. My intention is not to dismiss Burroughs's ideas, which would be premature, especially in the light of their correspondence with post-structuralist theory, as has been noted by Lydenberg (Word Cultures xi-xii).⁹ Rather, I am attempting to show the way that Burroughs's use of abject language is informed by both psychological and political imperatives.

The two most important ideas in Burroughs's theoretical critique of language are the "Aristotelian 'either-or'" and "Aristotle's is of identity" (The Job 48-49). He suggests that these are "word locks" that have the potential to "lock up a whole civilization for a thousand years" (49). Notice that these terms roughly correspond with "binary opposition" and "the metaphysics of presence", concepts that inform the way that the theory of homographesis deconstructs heterosexual identity logic. Burroughs's deployment of the cut-up technique collapses identity to effectively problematize both of these concepts: thus it serves a political function. But the politics of this collapse are informed by the abject. Consider, for example, the following passage, in which Burroughs cuts up his own words together with phrases from Hamlet and "The Waste Land".¹⁰ The passage is filled with abject feminine imagery:

"What thinking, William? - Were his eyes - Hurry up please its
half your brain slowly fading - Make yourself a bit smart - It's
them couldn't reach flesh - Empty walls - Good night, sweet
ladies - Hurry up please it's time - Look any place - Faces in
the violet light - Damp gusts bringing rain - " [. . .]

"What have I my friend to give you? - Identity fading out -
dwindling - Female smells - Knife in the heart - boy of dust
gives no shelter - left no address" (Nova Express 103)

This text collapses linguistic opposition by fragmenting the subject-predicate structure of the grammatical sentence. It also problematizes the

identity of the author in the way it fuses different texts. (Although the sources in this cut-up are apparent, in other more fragmented passages they are obscure.) The cut-up machine makes random combinations of words from multiple sources to create an intertextual collage that functions as an intentional version of the death of the author. A passage such as this problematizes authorial identity.

Normalization

The cut-up novels function as a critique of the ways that oppositional language invades the individual to construct him within societal terms of conflict. Moreover, discourse invades the individual by way of a process of normalization, in which individual identity is replaced by group identity. Burroughs sees this as a disastrous situation, because it perpetuates opposition between different identity groups.

The way that the cut-up foregrounds the intertextuality of language points to the suggestion that it is not the individual, but language that speaks. In spite of the illusion of original thought, writers merely replicate word combinations that perpetuate the structures of language itself. In other words, the individual is merely a host to the language parasite:

What does a virus do wherever it can dissolve a hole and find traction? - It starts eating - And what does it do with what it eats? - It makes exact copies of itself that start eating to make more copies that start eating to make more copies that start eating and so forth to the virus power the fear hate virus slowly replaces the host with virus copies - Program empty body - (Nova Express 66)

The word virus is one of Burroughs's most powerful tropes. Consistent with the physical nature of the cut-up technique, it suggests that the word is a piece of information similar to viral DNA. It is also a highly appropriate description of intertextuality: language occupies the individual for its own reproductive purposes. Moreover, it suggests that the effect of language is to possess the individual, replacing him with itself. Individuality is

compromised by language which is an occupying "Other Half", which undermines singular identity at the very same moment that it sets up opposition (The Ticket that Exploded 45). In Burroughs's mythology the human organism is merely a "soft machine," a flesh script upon which the virus replicates itself.

In the context of the modern political environment, what this suggests is that individuals are constructed within the terms of an endlessly repeated and unvarying pattern. Information technology in particular perpetuates this pattern; moreover, it exaggerates it, which has the danger of escalating conflict between different identity groups.

The subject's vulnerability to outside control rests on control's ability to manipulate needs. Physical existence is defined by birth and death, and in the interim control exercises power by manipulating both pleasure and pain. Indeed, "sex and pain form flesh identity" (The Ticket that Exploded 99). Extreme sensory experience locks the subject into the flesh, and then the Nova Criminals, the forces of evil in Burroughs's mythology, aggravate the contradictory desires further: "I have said the basic technique of Nova are very simple consist in creating and aggravating conflicts" (Nova Express 155). The Nova Criminals utilize the Nova Weapons of word and image to create fear and loathing within the individual.

Moreover, they intend to escalate conflict on a social level between different identity groups with the insane intention of provoking Nova Conditions, a nuclear holocaust:

Collect and record anti-semitic statements - Now play back to
 Jews are after Belsen - Record what they say and play it back to
 the anti-semites - Clip clap - You got it - Want more? - Record
 white supremacy statements - Play to Negroes - Play back answer -
 Now The Women and The Men - No riots like injustice directed
 between enemies - At any given time position of recorders fixes
 nature of absolute need - And dictates the use of total weapons -
 (155)

The word creates identity and conflict, which leads to further conflict. Oppositional identity is at the heart of the danger of the present time as Burroughs sees it: "And where you have 'TWO you have odor's and nationalism's word" (81). Nationalism is the chief danger, because it not only compromises individual identity, but leads to the mobilization of armies and large-scale weapons technology.

How can the author write against this situation without becoming compromised by his speech? Burroughs believes that by compromising his own identity he is able to move outside of the system. The self cannot be trusted as it is possessed by the language parasite: identity rests within the terms of the system, and is similarly trapped within its structures of opposition. Opposing the language merely replicates conflict, by introducing the self into the oppositional structure: "The Chinese character for 'enemy' means to be similar to or to answer" (155). The only avenue of escape is to introduce random factors. The writer feels that the cut-up achieves this by introducing the factor of "irrelevant response" (The Ticket that Exploded 122). Irrationality provides the only response to the environment that is not simultaneously constructed by its terms.

Although this entails a frightening loss of control over the output of the text, and a loss of self in random factors, Burroughs believes that the self is already lost within the totalitarian structures of normalization. The peculiar abject situation within which the individual finds himself in mass society is that he must submit to the external influence of chance in order to avoid the external influence of cultural determinism and control.

Notice that there are already uneasy contradictions here as to what Burroughs is attempting to achieve. In cutting-up texts, he loses authorial identity within the intertext. By contrast, the viral word threatens identity by replicating itself within the host. On the one hand, the author intends the loss of identity; on the other, the action of the viral word threatens identity. Both situations compromise identity, but in the one instance he wills self-loss, whereas in the other, he fears it.

The novels endlessly rehearse the problematic relationship between One and Other:

I am not two - I am one - But to maintain my state of oneness I need twoness in other life forms - Other must talk so that I can remain silent - If another becomes one then I am two - That makes two ones makes two and I am no longer one - Plenty of room in space you say? (Nova Express 70)

The writer yields to the processes of chance--an abstract Other outside of time--because he hopes that by renouncing his own hold over the text, he will find either a more authentic speech, or silence. He writes: "Other must talk so that I can remain silent" (70).

Space

If the cut-up introduces external factors, how can the subject similarly escape the terms of the present time? Burroughs feels he must avoid the terms of conflict: "Don't answer the machine - Shut it off - " (155), or get out of the system entirely by flight into space. Space is represented by the cut-up, and the implication is that by internalizing the randomness of its structure, the subject can be freed from the word virus and the conditioning of his needs. Cut up the structure of the declarative sentence, the writer suggests, and you will "(g)et it out of your head and into the machines" (The Ticket that Exploded 122).

Of course there is a serious contradiction in Burroughs's use of words to undermine the word. At the end of The Ticket that Exploded the narrator characterizes himself as addicted to writing and as a doctor who can't stop handing out words to other addicts:

Yes sir, boys, it's hard to stop that old writing arm - more of a habit than using - Been writing these RX's five hundred thousand years and sure hate to pack you boys in with a burning down word habit - (146).

The novels repeatedly rehearse a cycle of addiction, in which the addict

experiences contradictory urges: the need for the object of desire, and the need to be freed from that need. Although the writer is attempting to rid himself of the power of these images, to the point that there is "no sex theme and no violence theme, just images" ("Screenwriting and the Potentials of Cinema" (61), he cannot quite escape from the way that his words continue to signify. Consider a character such as the Death Dwarf, a Nova Criminal who is addicted to images and who attempts to addict others:

- The dwarf takes a hypo from a silver case and shoots a pinch of the meal in the main line.

"Images - millions of images - That's what I eat - Cyclotron shit - [. . . .] Now I got all the images of sex acts and torture ever took place anywhere and I can just blast it out and control you gooks to the molecule - I got orgasms - I got screams - I got all the images any hick poet ever shit out - (43)

The forcefulness of this passage rests on the very images that it is supposed to undermine. Although thematically Burroughs suggests that he is attempting to inoculate the reader against image and word control, it is difficult to discern any difference between his text and the "cyclotron shit" of the dwarf's addiction. Part of his strategy may be to multiply contradictions until the text is completely undecidable, but it seems more likely that Burroughs is feeding his own addiction, pretending to destroy images of sex and pain whilst actually perpetuating them in compulsive repetition. As Kristeva suggests, the cut-up pulverizes and multiplies meaning while pretending to play with it or flee from it (Postmodernism? 139). The text becomes a space within which the individual can enact a personalized psychosis. This is exemplified by the following passage, which appears in the guise of a quest for freedom, but which is in fact a rehearsal of the things from which it flees. A cadet from the Nova Police demonstrates the way in which Scientology technology can free the subject from language and the body. The cut-up text becomes "the razor inside":

"Jerk the handle...It sounds like this sir: "Oh my God I can't

stand it...That hurts that hurts that hurts so
 goood...Oooooohhhh fuck me to death...Blow his fucking guts
 out...You're burning up baby...whole sky burning...I'll talk...Do
 it again...Come in...Get out...Slip your pants down...What's
 that?? nurse...the clamps...Cut it off...'with the pics
 sir...popping like fireworks sir...sex and pain words sir...vary
 the tape sir...switch the tape sir...

Now all together laugh laugh laugh... Oh sir we can laugh it
 right off the tape sir... (Nova Express 151-152)

In spite of the idea of space, it is something that the writer cannot
 communicate, except by the ellipses in his text. Alternatively, the writer
 portrays the release from the word and the body in disappointing pastoral
 imagery:

He heard the golden medium and was free of his body - Touched
 hunting horns of the Aeons silver hunters in chariots with
 flowers - picture temples in a land of black food - ghost hands
 twisted together in stone shapes - [. . .] Now thousands of
 voices muttered through him pulling tearing - His body trailed
 the neon ghost writing as the two halves separated and sex words
 exploded into empty space - (The Ticket that Exploded 69)

This is a telling moment, because it reveals the impossibility of the project
 in the terms in which the writer has formulated it. He cannot avoid using
 words to represent his ideas. Moreover, the way that he represents the
 experience of space is that it is little different from the original: "Not
 much different - We are still quite definite and vulnerable organisms -
 Certainly being without a body conveyed no release from fear - " (85).
 Burroughs gestures towards release, but he is unable to transcend the present
 system and still remain intelligible. It turns out that "(1)ife without
 flesh is repetition word for word" (140).

With the cut-up novels, Burroughs hoped to step outside of language to
 create a form of thinking that is "in the hiatus between thoughts" and

outside of the terms of opposition (The Job 29). The writer's exploration of the limits of comprehensible text led to a sense of limitation. He found that he had to temper the extremity of the cut-up novels in order to make them understandable to his readers, and he had to revise them by incorporating more intelligible writing. Ironically, little of the material that I have quoted in this chapter is radically fragmented. - Of necessity, I have tended to examine explanatory, rather than fragmentary, portions the text. Densely cut-up passages tend towards meaninglessness. Burroughs hoped that he might produce a "certain combination of words and images that would lead to silence," but later he suggests that this idea was "over-optimistic." He adds: "I doubt if the whole problem of words can ever be solved in terms of itself" (The Job 51).

The Politics of Abjection

I have suggested that Burroughs attempted to decondition himself from both language and desire in his explorations of the cut-up technique. He hoped that this would enable him to achieve a wordless, desexualized state that was invulnerable to need and to the oppositions of language. This involved the renunciation of authorial control of the work. The cut-up period was to provide useful ideas and techniques that he would continue to explore, but the writer reached a sense of limitation in his explorations, and he returned to more conventional forms of writing in The Wild Boys.

The writer's readiness to explore the limits of signification pointed to an interesting possibility. In abdicating control over his text, and allowing the text to be governed by the operations of chance, the writer allows the Other to speak, and performs an almost heroic abdication of personal power. Although this led to limitations in the communicative sense, his willingness to explore the abject realm of textuality suggests the possibility of a form of writing that compromises itself, effeminizes itself, and abdicates the self, to explore what Kristeva calls "the darkest regions where fear, anguish, and a defiance of clarity originate" (Postmodernism?

141). Burroughs risks his sense of personal identity in order to undermine opposition, identity and rational language.

However, in his exploration of the limits of signification, the writer falls into a trap. Having explored extreme textuality for a period of seven years, he finds that he has lost contact with his readers and reached a literary dead end. His prose is extraordinary, but he is talking to himself. Neither able to communicate nor progress further, he has lost a sense of identity and structure and has fallen into a form of nihilism. Kristeva suggests that writing as an experience of limits is a spiritual activity that takes place without the protection of "religious, mystical or any other justification" (141). But this leads to a desperate need to recover a sense of structure, which frequently takes totalitarian forms. She cites Celine, Pound and Mayakovsky to suggest that experimental writing leads to a quest for

the necessarily phantasmagorical desire to see a particular spirit--that affirmative, positive, unifying, convocational, phallic spirit which presides at any undertaking--incorporated into an ideology or into an institution like a state or a party.

(139)

His exploration of the dangerous abject realm in writing, may cause the writer to risk becoming caught in totalitarian thinking in other areas. Burroughs's abdication of self in the cut-up leads to a resurgence of identity and a recuperation of oppositional structure in his next work. The cut-up novels explored the boundary between the rational and the irrational, but their successor, The Wild Boys falls into the trap of searching for the "phallic spirit" that Kristeva describes. Having effeminized himself in the abjection of the cut-up, the writer dramatically reasserts a masculine identity in his return to narrative.

Chapter Three: The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead

This is the space age and sex movies must express the longing to escape from flesh through sex.

- Burroughs, The Wild Boys

There indeed exists a modern form of sexuality: it is that which offers itself in the superficial discourse of a solid and natural animality, while obscurely addressing itself to Absence [. . .].

- Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression"

Limitations of the Cut-Up Technique

Burroughs hoped that the cut-up novels would liberate the subject from linguistic control by performing a double function: firstly, the cut-up would reveal the linguistic construction of reality as a fiction, and thereby remove the powerful hold of language over consciousness; secondly, it would help to decondition the subject by replacing language structures with the amorphous multiplicity of the cut-up text. But these liberatory ambitions, as intriguing as they must have seemed to the writer, confronted him with a serious limitation. Although the cut-up did shatter language, it simultaneously made it impossible for the writer to communicate.

Oliver Harris suggests that in his writing of the cut-up novels Burroughs experienced a version of the law of diminishing returns ("Cut-Up Closure: The Return to Narrative" 253). The attempt to proliferate word and image in order to undermine their tendency to cohere into structures of opposition, to make them "smaller and smaller, more and more images in less space pounded down under the cyclotron to crystal image meal" (Nova Express 52), led to a situation of stasis (252). Consequently, in 1966 Burroughs experienced writer's block. He found himself with an enormous amount of material, but

with a sense of limitation. The cut-up novels had become something of a dead-end, and Burroughs had lost contact with his readers. As fascinating as they were, the cut-up novels did not reach a wide audience.

Burroughs expresses a retrospective awareness of the problem in an interview in The Job. He suggests that experimental writing is potentially dangerous for the writer, because it can become "a trap [...] when it becomes purely experimental" (55). The danger of extreme techniques is that they alienate the reader. His own experience shows him that "if you go too far in one direction, you can never get back, and you're out there in complete isolation" (55). I suggested in Chapter One that the desire to maintain contact with an audience was one of Burroughs's main motivations in writing: this was the impulse behind the routines of Naked Lunch. His goal subsequent to the cut-up novels was to re-establish contact.

To this end, he spent some time revising the cut-up novels in the hope of making them more intelligible. The Soft Machine, originally published in 1961, was reworked and republished in 1966; the Ticket that Exploded, originally published in 1962, was published in a revised version in 1967. He reduced the amount of undifferentiated cut-up material in these novels and tempered the cut-ups that remained with segments of comprehensible narrative. As Harris points out, the cut-up technique had to maintain a "dialectical relation" with intelligible material if it was to be at all effective (256). Burroughs realized that he could not escape from intelligible narrative entirely, as may be seen in his advice to a fellow writer who had also experimented with cut-up text. He suggests that the writer should avoid letting the cut-up stand alone, but should integrate it with narrative material, because "(t)his potentiates both narrative and cut-ups" (256).¹¹

But if the extremism of the cut-up had to be curbed, this did not mean that Burroughs was prepared to make an unproblematic return to conventional narrative. His sensibility was opposed to the limitations of conventional forms. Although he suggests in The Job that his intention at this stage was to experiment with "conventional straightforward narrative" (55), this does

not imply that he is prepared to write a purely conventional novel. Rather, his intention is to apply what he has learnt from the cut-up experiments to what he describes as "the problem of conventional writing" (55). His subsequent works place greater emphasis on intelligible prose, but none of his later works could be labelled "conventional". Indeed, he continues to explore the cut-up aesthetic throughout his career in repeated attempts to transgress the limitations of conventional modes of representation.

As I suggested in the last chapter, the cut-up technique attempted to shatter the linearity of rational prose in order to dismantle its ideological and representational traps. Language limits communication by placing "word locks" on thought (The Job 49), either in the form of structures of opposition, or in the "is" of identity. These two linguistic functions create the illusion of a fixed identity, which leads to cultural stasis, and to political and psychic control. The task he now faces is to adapt the non-linearity of the cut-up to more readable forms, in order to communicate his message without falling back into the representational traps that he has gone to such great lengths to escape.

Inscribing the Queer

His first attempts to address the "problem" of conventional representation will be the subject of this chapter. To release himself from writer's block he produced three works: The Job (1969), a book of interviews and non-fictional essays; The Wild Boys (1969), a homosexual fantasy; and The Last Words of Dutch Schultz (1970), a novel presented in the form of a screenplay. In an essay written subsequent to these works, he writes that he "couldn't look" at the materials that he had produced during the cut-up period; so he "started writing straight narrative and essays which later found their way into The Wild Boys and The Job" ("The Name Is Burroughs" 14). These are important post cut-up works, because they clarify issues that the cut-up novels had tended to confuse. The Job appears to have provided a space within which the writer could formulate his theoretical ideas more clearly.

They provided an opportunity to reevaluate his aesthetic experiments, and to clarify his political thinking in the context of his literary concerns.

More apposite to this discussion, it appears that The Wild Boys allowed him to address a more intensely personal dimension of his investment in experimental writing. That Burroughs's first post cut-up narrative was a lyrical homosexual fantasy is significant, because this serves to confirm the extent to which the writer's homosexuality was a determining factor in his struggle with language, and in his development of avant-garde writing techniques. Previous critics have not noticed the link between the homosexual theme and the development of the writer's post cut-up aesthetic. Although Jennie Skerl writes that The Wild Boys signals a new myth of "freedom through fantasy" (William S. Burroughs 76), and she suggests that the metaphor of drug addiction is to some extent superseded by the metaphor of sexuality in these later works (77), she does not make a connection between the new system and any particular agenda. The theme of (specifically) homosexuality is more than simply a new metaphor: it is a crucial factor in the writer's return to intelligible writing.

Harris makes the point that Burroughs's return to narrative is "the vehicle for the creation of the autobiographical character of his youth" ("Cut-Up Closure" 260). He suggests that the character of Audrey provided a textual persona in an intelligibly "realistic" fictional universe; the non-linear strategies of the texts could be presented as the subjective experience of the character, rather than as the shattering of the novel form itself. While this is undoubtedly correct, Harris argues that the writer's nostalgic depictions of Audrey are related to his nostalgia for an earlier age of writing (260), and that returning to depictions of his youth was Burroughs's way of signalling his return to an earlier age of writing. However, this point must be pushed further: more than simply returning to the requirements of realistic writing, Burroughs's creation of Audrey signals the writer's attempt to find a way in which he could inscribe the homosexual theme. As I suggested in the Introduction, it is the writer's homosexuality

that provides the point of dissonance from which he is impelled to conduct a work of homographesis, and to rupture structures of linguistic oppression.

Considering the homographetic concerns in Burroughs's writings, it is appropriate that his first attempt at a return to narrative should rework the Nova Myth into a political fantasy in which teenage boys set up an alternative homosexual community. Moreover, this tends to confirm that the cut-up was impelled by homosexual concerns. The cut-up novels envisaged the release from words as a release from societal conditioning, and imagined the attainment of a disembodied wordless state. The Wild Boys repeats this myth, but attempts to represent the nature of a society based on these principles. The wild boys rebel against the manipulative and normalizing discourses of their society; their alternative social organization of small tribal groups is based on wordless communication.

Further, the cut-up has the specific thematic function within the narrative as a technology used by the wild boys to liberate themselves from conditioning. Exposure to the cut-up serves as a form of initiation, or in common parlance, as a "coming out" process. The cut-up as a deprogramming device has a similarity to the homosexual's refusal of negative heterosexual constructions; this enables new terms to be established. The cut-up disrupts the structures of heterosexist discourse, to make the homosexual wild boys the deconditioned subjects that the cut-up novels were designed to produce.

Death and the Reality Set

Before elaborating on the way that homosexual themes are inscribed into The Wild Boys, I want to make a diversion to consider the work published subsequent to it, The Last Words of Dutch Schultz. This novel provides a contrast to the more optimistic narrative of The Wild Boys. Both texts attempt to provide answers to the question implicit in the cut-up novels: if the individual is trapped within the constructions of textuality, what are the possibilities of escape? While The Wild Boys develops this idea in the form of a homosexual fantasy of liberation from control, and imagines an

alternative society, the approach in Dutch Schultz is quite different. Far from suggesting escape, the novel is bleakly deterministic. It gives a negative response to the question of escape, to suggest that the individual is inexorably shaped by the language.

Written in the form of a film script, it develops the metaphor of the reality studio to show the way that Schultz as a character is inseparable from his context as a production of the script. The changes in Schultz's fortunes are plotted by the author in advance: he provides an outline of his character's life story at the beginning of the book. Schultz's career is predestined in the writer's construction of the plot, and takes the form of the inexorable rise and fall of a capitalist's graph (6). His every move has been predetermined by the reality set in which he finds himself:

THIS IS NOT JUST A FILM ABOUT DUTCH SCHULTZ. IT IS A FILM ABOUT DUTCH SCHULTZ AND THE SETS IN WHICH HE LIVED AND OPERATED. [. . . .] THE SETS ARE THE MEDIUM IN WHICH THE CHARACTERS LIVE THAT INEXORABLY MOULD THEIR ACTIONS. WHEN A CHARACTER IS NO LONGER ON SET HE IS FINISHED. (3)

On one level this refers to the character's construction by the text within which he is scripted. But on another level, the text itself represents what Brian McHale identifies as the "ontological boundary" of existence (Postmodernist Fiction 129). In other words, Burroughs's text is the chief metaphor for control: Schultz's relationship to the boundaries of the text is equivalent to our relationship to the boundaries of our own reality set. Time, space and the body place limits on experience.

Burroughs envisages two positions from which the limits of the text may be transgressed. The first is to be outside of the film, as the director, or as the writer of the script: this is the position of the artist. The second is death. Both of these positions are thematically achieved by the cut-up aesthetic, which serves to signify the rupture of the boundaries of the real and of the realist text.

Burroughs privileges the artist as the person who can manipulate the

reality set, but the characters are trapped within it. At one point in the novel a number of characters find themselves "off" set. They become "bored", and they "yawn and fidget" (16). Eric Mottram suggests that this is because they are "addicted to determinist performance" ("On The Last Words of Dutch Schultz" 163). They are unable to generate any action of their own without the script to direct them. Unlike the actors, the writer himself is able to be outside of this universe, and he can issue orders to the characters: "'I NEED YOU AND YOU AND YOU BUT YOU DON'T BELONG ON THIS SET'" (3). The artist is able to manipulate his text; but Burroughs also suggests that he can transform his environment.

Art ruptures the reality script because it creates new terms by which reality is understood. Following the American mystic Don Juan, Carlos Castaneda's peyote magtician, who, significantly, may be Castaneda's fictional creation, Burroughs sees art as a version of sorcery: he writes that to "change our idea of the world is the crux of sorcery" ("Retreat Diaries" 194). Burroughs's writing is a form of protest fiction in that it attempts to reveal the oppressiveness of the environment and to propose alternatives. He believes that it can literally rewrite the world by transforming the way that the world is understood. The avant-gardist impulse towards transgressing the boundaries of textual conventions--and the conventions of life--are part of a sensibility that is resistant to the terms of the present. The cut-up ruptures text; but it also ruptures the world itself, or so the writer hopes, because it challenges language's predetermination of existence.

The second means by which the limits of the reality set may be transgressed is death. Dutch Schultz is based on a real individual by the name of Arthur Flegenheimer, a New York gangster who was shot and killed in 1935 (Literary Outlaw 465). Flegenheimer's delirious last words were recorded by a police stenographer, the transcript of which provided Burroughs with a found object that was a "natural" cut-up. Flegenheimer's words appear to represent fragments of his life in random order. For Burroughs, they

provide a mystical confirmation of the cut-up's ability to breach the boundaries of existence. On the verge of death, Flegenheimer is at the limit; Burroughs writes that "(t)he secrets of life and death hover over these words" (Dutch Schultz 7). The temporal sequence of Schultz's life becomes spatialized by his delirium, and he breaks through the ontological boundary, being liberated from the reality film in death.

In "The Retreat Diaries" Burroughs suggests that Castaneda's mystic Don Juan provides a theory of the way that reality, art and death are linked. He uses the mystic's terms "tonal" and "nagual" to express the relationship between perceived reality and that which lies beyond its limits:

The tonal is the sum of the individual's perceptions and knowledge, everything he can talk about and explain, including his own physical being. The nagual is everything outside the tonal: the inexplicable, the unpredictable, the unknown. The nagual is everything that cannot be talked about or explained; only witnessed. (190-191)

This explanation sheds light on the writer's thematic use of the cut-up: the technique represents the nagual, which is by definition unrepresentable. The cut-up serves as a linguistic version of the nonverbal experience of the visionary mystic. According to Burroughs, our preoccupation with experience of the tonal causes us to shut out the nagual, which surrounds the tonal "like a mould" (191). The tonal is closely related to Burroughs's "reality set" metaphor, because it cuts us off from the spiritual reality that surrounds us in a similar way. The function of the artist is to "make contact" with the nagual, and then to bring it back and capture it in the artwork. This mystical idea suggests one of the reasons why Burroughs is opposed to narrative realism. In his thinking, the artist should be a modern-day mystic. This idea of the nature of art also helps to clarify Burroughs's preoccupation with death. He suggests that the nagual "takes over completely in the moment of death" (191). The artist's role is to access the unmediated nagual, which is death. Schultz's near-death delirium

accesses the nagual, and this makes him an artist. We do not need to subscribe to this idea to see its importance for Burroughs, especially in its relation to the cut-up. The mystical élement of Burroughs's thinking helps explain why his works resist interpretation. By design, they are never merely rational.

Moreover, these ideas provide a link between the writer's queer aesthetic, and his preoccupation with sex and death. Sex, like death, enables the subject to experience the nagual. As Burroughs pithily puts it: "Both sex and death take the subject out of time" (My Education: A Book of Dreams 10). These ideas on sex and death are echoed in Foucault's writing about the modern experience of sexuality. In "A Preface to Transgression" Foucault writes that sex allows the transgression of a limit. This limit "opens violently onto the limitless, finds itself suddenly carried away by the content it had rejected and fulfilled by this alien plenitude which invades it to the core of its being" (34). The "content" of the subject and the idea of an "alien plenitude" are similar to Burroughs's tonal and nagual, and they seem to express a similar dynamic of self-loss.

A number of homosexual theorists pursue similar themes, such as Jonathan Dollimore in "Sex and Death", and Leo Bersani in "Is the Rectum a Grave?". Dollimore suggests that the link between sex and death is "part of [gay] history" and argues this theme should not be ignored in spite of its disturbing nature, because it is central to the modern experience of sexuality, especially in its relation to the constitution of modern ideas about identity:

the strange dynamic, which, in western culture, binds death into desire, cannot be dismissed as pathological or marginal, because it happens to be crucial in the formation of the western subject [. . .]. (36)

Burroughs's linkage of sex, death and the constitution of the homosexual subject seems suggests that he should be located within this tradition; indeed, he appears to have anticipated these developments in contemporary

theoretical thinking about homosexuality.

Moreover, these theorists, who are responding to Foucault's theorizations about sexuality and power may provide some of the terms within which Burroughs's writing can be considered. The dynamic of self-assertion and self-loss that informs Burroughs's thinking is specifically linked to sodomy. According to Bersani, sodomy achieves two things. Firstly, it allows the subject to affirm a loss of personal identity by affirming individual powerlessness. As Bersani describes it, it is "the self [that] provides the basis on which sexuality is associated with power," and sodomy provides a means by which "the self is exuberantly discarded" (218). In other words, it releases the subject from the totalitarianism of self and subjectivity. This, Dollimore suggests, is a "kind of death" (37), which seems appropriate to Burroughs's thinking.

Moreover, this disidentification with the self is specifically related to language, and provides a way in which the heterosexual constructions of subjectivity are undermined, because it challenges the very nature of the self. This is particularly appropriate to the way that Burroughs uses the cut-up technique in his later works. At the narrative level, the Burroughsian character's experience of sodomy frequently initiates the cut-up technique's fragmentation of the text. This suggests that sodomy serves as a means by which the self, and its construction within the reality set, are shattered. The cut-up disrupts both the self and its construction, suggesting that the subjective experience of the character achieves a simultaneous deconstruction of discourse. Burroughs's use of the sodomized character as a channel for the cut-up is similar to Bersani's assertion that it may "be in the gay man's rectum that he demolishes his own perhaps otherwise uncontrollable identification with a murderous judgement against him" (222). The issues of sex, death and the deconstruction of discourse are all entwined in Burroughs's novels. The way that these issues are deployed in his texts is a testament to the astuteness of his problematic thinking. Having provided this albeit rather sketchy discussion of a complex

issue, we are now able to turn to consider The Wild Boys, a novel which is appropriately subtitled "A Book of the Dead".

The Wild Boys

Burroughs's first post-cut up work is a nostalgic fantasy about lost adolescence, a dream of liberation, and a deeply misogynous work. Woman and the feminine are radically excluded. The writer makes a sharp division between the genders, asserting that woman serves as the archetype of control, and hence everything from which the wild boys need to escape. My reading of the text takes this as the central issue around which its themes cohere.

This misogyny is related to the author's construction of a stable homosexual identity. After the radical plurality of the cut-up text, the writer is exploring explicitly male homosexual themes, perhaps as a reaction to the loss of a speaking position produced by the cut-up. Linked to his use of words in a representational way, the writer sets out to inscribe a homosexual theme. In doing this, language loses its plurality and becomes an act of discrimination.

A Smiling Boy

Burroughs's return to narrative required that he develop new representational strategies. To this end, he mounts an offensive to produce images of homosexual desire that will compete with hegemonic heterosexual constructions. In the cut-up novels, the writer suggested that sex was a form of social control, and he repudiated desire because of this. In The Wild Boys, the writer liberates desire in an attempt to set up a control system of his own. His realization of the need to use words in a more representational way shifts his attitude towards the usefulness of words, which is reflected in his claim in The Job that "illusion is a revolutionary weapon" (174). In The Wild Boys he sets out to produce revolutionary illusions. The novel deploys an image of a smiling boy to subvert the social order. The boy is the novel's principle icon. The image appears in

advertising campaigns and on merchandising to provoke a worldwide frenzy:

The BOY turned out to be the hottest property in advertising. Enigmatic smile on the delicate young face. Just what is the BOY looking at? [. . . .] The BOY was too hot to handle. Temples were erected to the BOY and there were posters of his face seventy feet high and all the teenagers began acting like the BOY looking at you with a dreamy look lips parted over their Wheaties. They all bought BOY shirts and BOY knives running around like wolf packs burning, looting, killing [. . .]. (144)

The sexualized image of the boy provokes the liberation of repressed homosexual desire, and in doing so, it causes the downfall of modern society. This suggests that the repression of homosexuality is one of the main props of the cultural order. The novel's explicitly pornographic representations of copulating boys are designed to effect a similar liberation in the reader, as the writer sets out to subvert the heterosexual construction of reality.

That the writer's own subversive aesthetic is a product of his reaction against this construction of reality is reflected in the intensely personal way that he presents the liberation of homosexual desire. The autobiographical sections of the narrative refer to the writer's adolescence, the period in which he experienced the sense of personal revulsion that caused him to burn his diary. This was the period in which his own rebellious sensibility began to develop. Like his later incarnation as Kim Carsons in The Place of Dead Roads, the semi-autobiographical figure of Audrey Carsons is a homosexual youth who has internalized the judgements of the elders of his community. As I demonstrated in the Introduction, the phrasing of these judgements corresponds with Burroughs's teenage experience:

Audrey was a thin pale boy his face scarred by festering spiritual wounds. "He looks like a sheep-killing dog," said a St Louis aristocrat. There was something rotten and unclean about Audrey, an odor of the walking dead. Doormen stopped him when he visited his rich friends. Shopkeepers pushed his change back

without a thank you. He spent sleepless nights weeping into his pillow from impotent rage. (32)

Although somewhat melodramatic, this is clearly a depiction of the author's youthful alienation. Alienation makes Audrey a member of the "walking dead": the perspective of the novel is that of someone who has died to the society in which he finds himself, and who fantasizes about the ruination of its suburban security. The hostility of his environment, internalized as a sense of self-loathing, and "impotent rage" means that the child's only avenue of escape is in fantasy fiction: he becomes a "dim sad child breathing old pulp magazines" (32).

The Wild Boys rewrites those magazines as a subversive alternative fantasy. Moreover, the "flatness" of pulp characters is useful, because it provides a way that the writer can depict the effects of deconditioning. The wild boys are inevitably flat, because they have purified themselves of the unhealthy constructions of society. In Audrey's first encounter with a wild boy, what impresses him most, apart from the boy's sex appeal and his gun, is the character's air of detachment:

A boy steps in front of the car and holds up his hand. He is naked except for a rainbow colored jock strap and sandals. Under one arm he carries a Mauser pistol clipped onto a rifle stock. [. . . .] Audrey had never seen anyone so cool and disengaged. (38)

In the wild boy Burroughs has fused pulp fantasy, sexual fantasy and a fantasized image of the deconditioned subject. Deconditioned, armed and alert, the wild boy is a pre-rational primitive as the product of postmodern technology.

The wild boy leads Audrey to a carnival space, populated by half-naked wild boys. This is an erotic experience: "Boys lounge in doorways. Audrey glimpses scenes that quicken his breath and sends the blood pounding to his groin" (39). In this sexualized atmosphere, he notices that the boys are watching "peep shows": booths which show cinematic versions of cut-up

technology. He finds a booth in which he is exposed to the films that Burroughs represents on a textual level as a fusion of image-collage and the cut-up technique:

Red fumes envelop the two bodies. A scream of roses bursts from tumescent lips roses growing through flesh tearing thorns of delight intertwined the quivering bodies crushed them together writhing gasping in an agony of roses. (47)

The implication of Audrey's exposure to the peep show's combination of violent sexual imagery and cut-up technology is that Audrey becomes deconditioned. The film desubjectifies him and initiates him into wild boy society. The peep show serves as a transgressive space that ruptures the oppressive societal construct and validates his homosexual desire.

Just as Audrey is deconditioned by the peep show, the reader is exposed to a similar deconditioning effect through the cut-up. Burroughs suggests in The Job that an author writes with the hope that "his readers will turn into his characters" (56). Like Audrey, the reader is "pulled into the film" (41): the text's non-linearity and pornographic seductiveness are designed to transform the reader, so that he will become a wild boy himself. Subsequent to Audrey's experience at the carnival, the novel is interspersed with passages of sexualized cut-up text entitled "peep-shows". Since there is no character experiencing this at the narrative level, the implication is that the deconditioning effect of the cut-up is directed at the solitary reader.

The most frequently recurring scene in the novel is one in which a boy seduces another in order to penetrate him. The section entitled "A Silver Smile", which takes the form of a repetitive blue movie, repeats the same scene in different versions, cut-up and spliced with mesmeric effect:

"Come over here Johnny. Down on your hands and knees. That's right. Spread your legs apart"...Cold burn on his rectum nuts aching Johnny sighs and looks down at his throbbing cock..."Like that Johnny?"... (89)

Burroughs hopes that by imaginative participation in the act of sodomy, the

reader will experience a similar sense of desubjectification that will release him from his construction as an identity in discourse.

Control

In the cut-up novels the Nova Mob were the chief agents of control. In this novel, the forces of control are women, and the aged denizens of a conservative social order. The political rhetoric of the moral right uses condemnation of drug abuse and homosexuality as a pretext to crack down on the youth: "All over America kids like Johnny are deserting this country and their great American heritage suborned by the promises of Moscow into a life of drugs and vice" (123). The police machine represses the youth on a political level; on a psychological level, they are disempowered by guilt. This is created by the controllers, who use the media to project judgements against them: "What the Narco boys call 'society's disapproval' reflected and concentrated twenty million I HATE YOU pictures in one blast" (35).

Moreover, the novel suggests that this social order is perpetuated by acquiescence to its construction of reality. The Colonel Greenfield sketch illustrates the way that individual identities are constructed within a rigid social hierarchy. Greenfield narrates "interminable anecdotes to the Negro butler" (30), which serve to perpetuate the neat categories of the social order: "Now in the old Greenfield plantation we had house niggers and field niggers and the field niggers never came into the house" (30). The butler listens with an attitude of silent rebellion, but his verbal assent to these values imprisons him within this order as "the right kind of darky" (31). Burroughs is suggesting that conservative representations of reality are aggressive manipulations of the populace, and that assent to their constructions is to perpetuate their control.

The most insidious form of control is directed at the youth, and Burroughs suggests that this is perpetrated by women at the level of childhood conditioning. In his satire on the Green Nun, he suggests that there is a matriarchal will to power behind the "truth games" that construct the

acceptable expression of masculinity. In a routine with remarkably Foucauldian overtones, Burroughs undermines the discourses of psychiatry, religion and child-rearing to rewrite them as a covert female plot to keep the masculine impulse in check. The moral imperatives of these key discourses are revealed as cogs in the matriarchal control system.

Audrey is captured by the Green Nun and held hostage in her convent's mental ward, which is run like a kindergarten. Once inside, he is subjected to an oppressive daily routine, in which patients are forced to play with plasticine and crayons. Patients quickly learn that making crosses and drawings of the Green Nun is the easiest way to avoid censure (28). The nun subjects the patients to an interrogation system that bears a remarkable similarity to Foucault's notion of the imperative to confession and to "truthful" representation of the self that informs the post-Christian Western value system ("Technologies of the Self" 40):

Daily confessions were heard by the Green Nun on a lie detector that could also give a very nasty shock in the nasty places while the Green Nun intoned slowly "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

(27)

Significantly, the control program is designed to remove the male sexual drive: erections receive prohibitive sanction "with a sharp ruler tap from the night sister" (27), and the masculine impulse to progress is curtailed as the nun censures her patients: "Now you know that dream about flying is WRONG don't you? For that you go to bed without your medicine" (27). As an extension of this the nuns present them with images of predatory female sexuality; on a rare walk in the garden they are allowed to "watch a praying mantis eat her mate" (26). If this were not enough, the nun appropriates masculine attributes for herself by putting on "Christ drag with a shimmering halo" and conducts nocturnal visits to the other nun's with a strap-on (27).

Burroughs juxtaposes these parodies of violent political and moral rhetoric, and of the role of women in society, with the poignant note of a boy who has fled home to escape:

Dear Mom and Dad:

I am going to join the wild boys. When you read this I will be far away.

Johnny (123)

While the poignancy of the oppression of homosexual youth is felt everywhere in the text, making it one of Burroughs's most nostalgic and romantic works, the writer achieves his myth of liberation by solidifying an oppositional identity at the narrative level. In order to become wild boys, boys have to flee from woman:

Little boy without a navel in a 1920 classroom. He places an apple on the teacher's desk.

"I am giving you back your apple teacher."

He walks over to the blackboard and rubs out the word MOTHER.

(155)

I will now turn to examine the way that woman fits into the politics of the novel.

Woman as Pervert

The single-mindedness of Burroughs's queer political position in The Wild Boys has a certain warped integrity. Whereas Naked Lunch and the cut-up novels were undecidable texts, The Wild Boys follows the clear agenda: the liberation of male homosexual desire.

Apart from Audrey, who is labelled a "homosexual sheep-killing dog" by one of the senior citizens of St Louis (40), Burroughs does not label his characters homosexual. In this novel, all boys are homoerotically inclined. Even the military units deployed to suppress the wild boy revolt have homoerotic affections: "Crap games on the troopship. The boys are glad to be away from their wives in an atmosphere of rough male camaraderie" (124), and boys who in one scene cheer for the oppressive order will "later appear in wild-boy roles" (125).

Instead of distinguishing his characters along the lines of sexual

orientation, the writer's scheme suggests that homosexual desire is the primary impulse of all adolescent males. As the primary sexual urge, homoeroticism is repressed by the patriarchy in order to condition boys into maintaining the social order. This appears to have been the author's belief at the time of writing, because in The Job he suggests that women have a "vested interest" in maintaining the status quo (121). He argues, in a variation on Reich's theories of repression, that sexual repression distracts boys from political action: "They must stimulate sex and make sex difficult to obtain. In that way they keep people always thinking about it, always worrying about it, and it keeps them from causing trouble" (116).

(The emphasis on adolescence, the time at which sexual urges are at their most intense, suggests, firstly, that it is at this stage that oppression is most keenly felt, as was the writer's experience; and secondly, that this is a time when resistance to sexual conditioning is still possible.)

The suppression of homosexuality proceeds from a larger suppression: the suppression of biological masculinity itself. He suggests that societal control is part of a conspiracy of the "non-dream" which aims to "wipe the dream out of existence" (102). The type of dream that Burroughs envisages is specifically male. He has "scientific" evidence to back this up:

Experiments carried out by Dr Gross at Mount Sinai mental hospital indicate that any dream in the male is accompanied by erection. The non-dream program is specifically directed against the male principle. It is above all anti-sexual and anti-male.
(102)

The progressive elements of the masculine impulse are curtailed by a patriarchal and conservative plot. Despite the dubiousness of Burroughs's thinking, and the paranoia that informs it, this helps to explain the thinking behind the all-male wild boy fantasy.

The writer's abject fear of the feminine and his personal experience of homosexual repression coalesce into a political demonology that has as its

chief scapegoat the figure of the woman. The maternal is that which the male identity has to define itself against. If the cut-up novels tended to pulverize identity to such an extent that the writer abdicated--and lost--his sense of a speaking position, The Wild Boys reestablishes a sense of identity by constructing woman as an oppositional identity. In Chapter Two I suggested, following Kristeva, that the writer's experience of the abject put him in the dangerous position of the need to reassert a "phallic spirit" as a defence against the loss of structure (Postmodernism? 139). This appears to be exactly what has happened here, as the writer asserts a masculine identity contra the feminine. The return to narrative corresponds, in part, to the use of the divisions made possible by representation to make a monstrous discrimination. The reaction to the loss of agency of the cut-up novels is a form of totalitarianism, in which the woman becomes the aberration within a political system.

Ironically, this tends to undermine the disidentification with the self that the author hopes to achieve through sexual imagery and the cut-up. Moreover, the writer sets into play a structure of opposition that is equivalent to the one that distinguished him as a homosexual "other" in the first place. If heterosexual society created the figure of the homosexual as a pervert in order to establish its own sense of identity, Burroughs does the same thing here with woman. He separates woman from himself--indeed, he abjects her--in order to defend his own sense of identity. He renounces woman in order to establish himself. This is particularly appropriate if we consider that the cut-up novels enacted an abject flight from the feminine. With the same intensity that he fled the feminine, he found himself collapsing into it. As Dollimore suggests in "The Cultural Politics of Perversion", it is the sense of closeness of the rejected figure that causes it to be emphatically cast out: he argues that "proximity [. . .] is the enabling condition of a displacement which in turn marks the "same" as radically "other" (184). The writer's femininity, his obsession with sodomy, and his abject sensibility, all make the woman threateningly proximate. This

requires that the woman become a pervert in the writer's system, so that she may become the essential other. Although the writer avoids the issue of heterosexual/homosexual opposition, he achieves this by displacing division according to sexual orientation onto difference according to gender.

Burroughs's rejection of the feminine here seems to suggest that the disidentification with the self advocated by Dollimore, Bersani, and Foucault may actually provoke a resurgence of identity. Self-loss may not be the cure that they seem to suggest, because it is perhaps ultimately threatening to the subject. Perhaps self-disidentification does release the subject from discourse; but this may also lead to the redefinition of the self against an Other. Self-loss may liberate the self as a site of oppression, but it also may provoke the need to create a new sense of self with the oppression of someone else.

Burroughs's need to establish a sense of masculine homosexual identity corresponds with the rise of the gun motif in his writing: wild boys are distinguished by their guns. Burroughs himself is depicted with a gun: in the photograph on the cover of The Job he sits with a rifle slung across his lap. The weapon defends a contested position. The gun is a fetish that replaces a lost sense of self.

The deconstructive and liberatory aspects of The Wild Boys are undercut by a fascistic militarism, and this cause a powerful sense of dissonance. Is the writer attempting to destroy all opposition, or is he attempting to destroy some and set up oppositions of his own, with some "other" lower down in the pecking order? The wild boys' manifesto has just this sense of contradictoriness, both refusing "dogmatic verbal systems" and perpetuating them in a militant manner:

We intend to march on the police machine everywhere. We intend to destroy the police machine and all its records. We intend to destroy all dogmatic verbal systems. The family unit and its cancerous expansion into tribes, countries, nations we will eradicate at its vegetable roots. We don't want to hear any more

family talk, mother talk, father talk, priest talk, country talk or party talk. To put it country simple we have heard enough bullshit. (140)

While his critique of the family, of nationalistic structures and of opposition in language are seductive, they are presented in short, staccato sentences suggestive of marching combat troops.

A Biological Mistake?

Burroughs is obviously a misogynist. But this is part of the problem: his misogyny is so obvious. How can a writer who appears to be so aware of the violence in linguistic structures perpetuate a virulent hatred of women? Considering his intelligence and his knowledge of psychology, one would expect him to be aware that to counteract his own sense of perversion he has constructed the woman as the pervert in his system. This is either pathological, a joke, or it is a trap for the reader.

In his essay "Women: A Biological Mistake" he implies that to call him a misogynist is to be trapped into the structures of naming oneself. "I realize," he writes, "I am widely perceived as a misogynist" (124). He then quotes the Oxford dictionary definition of a misogynist as "a woman hater." He then dismisses the label with yankee sarcasm: "Presumably this is his full-time occupation?" (124). The implication of this is that in calling him a woman hater, one is using the violence of naming oneself, thereby perpetuating his crime even as we accuse him of it.

Burroughs is aware of the naming-violence that he perpetuates, as revealed in The Job, in which he parodies the fixity of his own misogynous position. He reveals its comic-horror as a form of fascism. Blurring the boundaries of scientific discourse and fiction, he slips into the routine mode to caricature himself as a Nazi scientist, Herr Doktor Kurt Unruh von Steinplatz:

It must be noted in passing that the good doctor was not in all respects a tactful man. When asked by the editor of a woman's

magazine what he thought about the "woman question" he replied jovially:

"Vy not cut off the head? Chickens can live so without the head nourished from tubers it is of course the same with womans. So brought to her true purpose of bearing strong male children she finds her simple contentment is it not? I appeal to you as a woman of good will to facilitate my experiments." (100-101)

So he is aware that this misogyny is a position, because of his irony towards it. The suggestion is that all language is a form of violence. The contradiction of Burroughs's position at this time is that he is prepared to inflict this violence even as he critiques it.

A Book of the Dead

The wild boy communities at the end of the novel could be seen as a fantasized version of Foucault's "laboratories of experimentation," the term that he used for the bath houses and sweat shops of the Californian gay community. This is a technological homosexual fantasy, in which erotically-charged boys pursue the masculine dream of repetitive acts of sodomy, power games, weapons practice, cybernetic manipulation and non-biological reproduction in the absence of women. His characters are appalling and beautiful: emptied of both fear and love, they participate in repetitive acts of narcissistic sexual recognition. For Burroughs, this is the dream that women have proscribed, perhaps by their very existence.

Yet it is a dream that can be pursued by the dead only. In the novel's last section, "The Wild Boys Smile", the first person authorial narrator breaks through the boundary of the "realist" text and enters the world of the wild boy fantasy. He is connected to a machine that is driven by the act of sodomy. With the dissociation of sex, the text fragments into cut-up. After the jump, the narrator sees his discarded clothes "in a corner covered with mould" (175). A wild boy hands him a trademark jockstrap, and he is initiated into his adolescent dream of a land of the dead.

In The Wild Boys Burroughs attempted to develop strategies by which he could represent the homosexual. However, the limited perspective of the homosexual trapped him within a one-dimensional misogyny: he created the woman as a pervert in his system. This led to the totalitarianism of a rigid oppositional identity, which the writer both parodied and perpetuated. In the next chapter I will examine the first two works of Burroughs's later trilogy, Cities of the Red Night and The Place of Dead Roads, which suggest that the writer attempts to temper the radicalism of his subjective queer agenda. Although he continues to pursue a queer perspective, he attempts a more complex mythology which reserves a space within it for women who are not monsters.

Chapter Four: The Anal Ethic

All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence.

- Foucault, "Truth, Power, Self"

The mark of a basic shit is that he has to be right.

- Burroughs, The Place of Dead Roads

Cities of the Red Night (1981), The Place of Dead Roads (1983) and The Western Lands (1987) comprise a loose trilogy of works that represent Burroughs's major output in the eighties. In the interim period he had published numerous shorter works, including Exterminator! (1974), The Book of Breeething (1975) and Blade Runner: A Movie (1979). Although these works are noteworthy-- especially The Book of Breeething, which is a fascinating attempt to translate words into images through the use of hieroglyphics--I will not consider them. Rather, I will direct my attention to the three later novels, which are his most ambitious post-cut-up works. Each novel raises issues appropriate to Burroughs's contested queer position and to his anal aesthetic as I have defined it. Indeed, the usefulness of this particular approach to his writings becomes apparent, in that it helps to address some of the confusion that has hampered previous criticism. Moreover, the novels provide a point of comparison with Foucault's later work, especially with regard to his shift in emphasis from the forces of control to a concern with the self. The Western Lands will be addressed in my concluding chapter, while in this chapter I will consider the first two novels of the trilogy. I will draw a comparison between the writer's respective attempts to lay a foundation for a post-humanist ethics, and suggest that this serves as a justification for the furtherance of a concern with the self.

The Magical Universe

Before proceeding with an analysis of Cities of the Red Night we need to consider the dominant motif of the later trilogy: the Magical Universe. The term is dense and suggestive, and is prone to the semantic slippage that characterizes Burroughs's use of language. Nevertheless, it will be useful to isolate key elements of this central idea.

Jennie Skerl suggests that the magical terminology in Burroughs's later works function as vivid and unusual tropes that enliven the fiction. She suggests that "for Burroughs, the occult is another pseudoscience--like Scientology--that provides alternative realities and good 'copy' (William S. Burroughs 77). Although this is correct, the magical metaphors are much more resonant than this view implies. Burroughs himself stresses the centrality of magical ideas in his work. In the essay "My Purpose Is to Write for the Space Age" (1984), he writes that The Magical Universe is "(p)erhaps the most basic concept" of his writing (268). He defines the Magical Universe as "a universe of many gods, often in conflict" (268), which suggests a new theory of the word, and ideas of conflict, multiplicity, and magic itself. These require some elaboration.

Firstly, the idea allows the writer to redevelop his theory of the word. The hope of the cut-up novels had been the release from the word. He hoped to find a new space in which the individual could be free of linguistic conditioning. But this became a representational dead end, and this prompted his exploration of narrative in The Wild Boys. Corresponding to the writer's use of words in a representational manner, the idea of the word as a virus becomes less dominant. In his newer model, the word is no longer a simple one-way control system in which the human organism is a flesh script upon which the word mercilessly replicates itself: it is no longer merely language that speaks. The writer now believes that he can use the word as a tool for his own purposes.

Secondly, the word is a site of conflict. Like the viral word, the magical word reproduces its effects in the world: writing is analogous to

casting spells. Since the tradition of magic in the West is based on the idea that words are the tools of power, Burroughs's use of the term is appropriate to this tradition. The innovation of the magical word concept is that the word can be used in a positive way as a site of resistance against control systems. The writer no longer perceives linguistic control systems as the absolute power that he did in the earlier works. His view at this time is that words are used by diverse forces in perpetual conflict. Cities of the Red Night contains the suggestion that "(a)ll religions are magical systems competing with other systems" (101). The novel suggests that the Christian church is attempting to maintain dominance, and the revolutionaries in the narrative attempt to provide alternative systems to Christian doctrine that challenge its dominance: "It is our policy to encourage the practice of magic and to introduce alternative religious beliefs to break the Christian monopoly" (101).

The writer now perceives language as a weapon that is deployed by diverse forces in a shifting process of conflict. This is a significant innovation on his theory of communication in The Wild Boys. Burroughs shifts from the simple model of males reacting against societal conditioning to one in which there are multiple agendas in dynamic relationship with one another. This is an important point, because it allows the writer to reconfigure his myth of liberation in a more complex way: the radical queer agenda of The Wild Boys is tempered by a more "realistic" idea, in which there are diverse kinds of oppression and multiple lines of conflict. Thus Cities of the Red Night incorporates the oppressed peoples of the third world and--in a radical shift from the earlier novel--it takes account of the oppression of women. Burroughs suggests that people cohere into groups according to their own interests, and according to the expression of the will-to-power of a particular group. I will develop these ideas shortly in my analysis of the novel, but there are two more elements of the Magical Universe idea that must be developed.

The first of these is not made explicit by the writer, but is implied in

the magical theory. One of the axioms of the occult tradition is that microcosm mirrors macrocosm. In other words, the structure of the universe is replicated in the structure of the self. This means that Burroughs's magical universe not only provides a more nuanced explanation for the dynamics of the external world, but also provides a new model for the nature of the subject. The conflicting and diverse forces in Burroughs's new cosmology are mirrored in the individual psyche. Like the external world, the subject is the locus of a continual process of conflict and change. Neither static nor unitary, it consists of a set of forces in perpetual tension with each other. The individual has neither a single fixed identity nor even a necessarily single personality. Conflict takes place between different elements of the personality as much as it takes place between the subject and the external world.

The second idea, which follows from the first, is that the forces of control have the effect of shaping the psyche: they become a part of it. Burroughs is no longer hoping for the unrealistic possibility of an entirely authentic self freed from all forms of conditioning that he pursued in the cut-up period. Rather, external forces are seen to be integral to the shaping of the self. The self is in a process of struggle both with and against the environment. Conflict is an axiom of existence. Furthermore, the author celebrates this conflict. Although a novel like Cities of the Red Night proposes imaginary solutions to the political and social problems of our time, these never reach the status of utopian ideals. Conflict is simply there, inherent in existence. Social situations may change, even for the better, but conflict will not disappear. Conflict is a dynamic of existence, both a source of creativity and a source of destructiveness. As the author puts it, "an ideal society would be a static society, and any such society is an evolutionary dead end" (267). Conflict is essential to activity and transformation.

As I have shown, the Magical Universe idea is extremely suggestive, and provides a more complex model than we saw in the earlier works. The idea is

also appropriate to his use of writing as a technology of the self. The text does not merely have a complex mimetic relationship with the world, but also with the processes of the author's own psyche. Skerl suggests that in his later work Burroughs treats writing as a process, what she terms an "artwork" (97). Rather than simply exploring in these novels a single overarching idea, the writer enters into writing as a process. He starts with a set of propositions and a set of techniques, but these develop and are transformed as the work progresses.

Skerl also makes the point that for Burroughs, writing is a form of "(p)sychic exploration" that occurs "within his fictions, not outside them" (91). The progression of the text is not the unitary expression of an integrated mind but the continuing battle between conflicting elements of the self in an attempt to extend the self. Writing is a work on the self, and is part of a process of becoming.

Burroughs adds to his definition of the Magical Universe to suggest that in this model "(t)he paradox of an all-powerful, all-seeing God who nonetheless allows suffering, evil, and death, does not arise" (268), an extremely Nietzschean idea. Moreover, this links Burroughs's treatment of writing as a process to the idea that the ultimate source and authority of existence is the self. Art, as Burroughs practices it, is a contribution to the Nietzschean tradition, because art replaces religion as the fundamental spiritual activity of man after the death of God. Revelation from above is replaced by exploration down below. Art, like magic, is a pagan system.

To illustrate his idea that there is no all-seeing God who has a unitary truth, Burroughs imagines two Gods with limited perspectives discussing the latest events, in this case a famine:

"We got a famine here Osiris. What happened?"

"Well, you can't win 'em all. Hustling myself." (268)

This suggests that writing is a process of "hustling" in which no ultimate resolution is possible, and no final truth. All that one can do is respond to an unfolding and complex situation.

In his Magical Universe concept Burroughs provides an effective metaphor for his new approach to his explorations as an artist. In Naked Lunch he exploded the form of the novel. Instead of the perspective of the eye as the site of revelation, he proposed the anus as the expression of being-in-the-world: "We see God through our assholes in the flash-bulb of orgasm" ("Word" 136). The cut-up novels treated the word as material substance without any necessarily transcendent structure. The Wild Boys explored the writer's unfettered homosexual will-to-power. In the later trilogy, Burroughs realizes that as the god of his world, the artist is free to create.

Cities of the Red Night

Criticism of Cities of the Red Night is characterized by the contradictory interpretations imposed on the work by its critics. Paul Abelman, for example, complains that the text's complexity defies interpretation: "(there is) nothing necessarily wrong with employing intertwining plots that are all part of a master concept. But the subversive question kept surfacing in my mind: was there a master concept?" ("No Jokes" 85). Rather than seeing this as Burroughs's point, Abelman provides an unthinking response to the text.

However, this particular novel appears to cause consternation among even its more astute critics. A few sympathetic readers have attempted to do the texts justice by fusing an awareness of their formal innovations with attempts to elucidate their themes. Skerl, for example, sees the novel as a continuation of Burroughs's "second mythology," which she believes is more positive than his first, and is based on the idea that the writing enacts a positive process of "freedom through fantasy" (189). Steven Shaviro similarly highlights the self-conscious fictionality of Cities of the Red Night, although his reading of the text is more pessimistic. He argues that it enacts a series of self-contradictory illusions that self-destruct:

Burroughs' discourse encompasses contradictory exigencies of obsession and freedom, replication and mutation, disaster and utopia, satire and celebration, unity and duality, reality and

illusion, death and life. Each of these terms is conditioned and contaminated by its supposed opposite. ("Burroughs' Theatre of Illusion: Cities of the Red Night" 197)

Shaviro worries that Burroughs ultimately affirms both "disaster and failure" as necessary components of the possibility of freedom (207), and he appears to balk at his conclusion that there is "no epistemological foundation beneath the parodic play of illusion" (203).

By contrast, Wayne Pounds reads Cities of the Red Night as a political parody. Rather than seeing it as a nihilistic play of illusions, Pounds suggests that the text has a revolutionary function. He follows Bakhtin's theory of carnival discourse, to argue that the novel uses popular fictional forms to liberate language from the "authoritarian word of official culture" (615). He introduces the concept of the "Post-Modern Anus"--an idea I used in my discussion on the anal aesthetic in Chapter One--to suggest that the asshole is a surrogate mouth that gives "a voice to the silent and excluded" (616). Pounds understands the "silent and excluded" to be the working class peoples of the third world. Although he is correct in noticing an effort to "rewrite the symbolic codes and establish an alternative discourse" to the discourses of Western humanism, he is plainly wrong when he asserts, somewhat ingenuously, that Burroughs's novel "takes a necessary step towards the building of a socialist democracy" (628).

If the one reading sees the novel as a completely illusory text, the other overdetermines it as a revolutionary construction. In fact, Burroughs's magical theory of writing takes both ideas into account, in that it suggests firstly that the text is illusory, and secondly that it can transform consciousness through illusion. However, the illusory nature of the text does not free it entirely from having a mimetic function: Burroughs does refer to problems in the "real" world in his writing.

The novel's dynamics become clearer when considered in the light of the sexual problematics that I have been developing. The figure of the homosexual is an important factor in understanding of the work, because it is

a relatively stable thread along which its strategies develop. My reading of Cities of the Red Night sees it as a continuation of the subjective queer politics of the earlier work, but with an interesting difference: the extremist position of The Wild Boys is tempered by a more complex view. His previous works have attempted to identify the oppressive forces that have shaped his experience as a homosexual and an addict. In his later trilogy, I suggest that Burroughs is attempting to find an ethical foundation that does not fall into the trap of normalization produced by the apparently objective truth of the discourses of humanism. At the same time, he is attempting to avoid the simple nihilism of a discourse of pure illusion.

A Narrative Collage

Cities of the Red Night furthers the exploration of the narrative mode that Burroughs began in The Wild Boys. However, in line with his new model of the Magical Universe, it is more sophisticated in its form and its themes. The writer draws on the conventions of popular fiction to pursue three major plot lines. The first is a detective story, in which Clem Williamson Snide, a "private asshole" (44), sets out to solve a missing person case, only to find himself drawn into a world of black magic and hanging rites. The second is a pirate narrative, in which the homosexual narrator Noah Blake signs on to a pirate ship and is drawn into a cosmic conspiracy. The third is a science fiction story about time travel and human mutation. These conventional formulae set up the terms of the plot and provide a degree of narrative momentum. The detective narrative, for example, provides a series of clues and the promise of a resolution. However, as the novel progresses, the hope of simple resolution becomes frustrated, as the writer begins to weave the stories together: the narratives merge and intersect, characters switch identities, and the reader begins to experience a sense of interpretative vertigo.

Burroughs achieves this effect by redeploying the idea of the text as a film. The writer signifies shifts with economical rhetorical devices of film

shots and theatre sets: "a painting on screen" (284); "scene with a jungle backdrop" (24); and so on. The filmic metaphor for text is one that Burroughs has explored in various forms since the cut-up novels: in the film-loop determinism of Dutch Schultz and in the camera eye shifts of The Wild Boys, to name only two. The strength of the idea is that it refers backwards in time to the accumulation of filmic metaphors in Burroughs's previous works, so that ideas like the reality studio, the determinism of the set, the illusion of reality and the reality of illusion, and so on, crowd in to the experience of the text without the need for theoretical elaboration.

The writer problematizes the linearity of narrative--and, by extension, unitary truth--by applying the collage principle at the narrative level: he cuts up scenes instead of sentences. By using a larger unit, he avoids the extreme incomprehensibility of the cut-up technique, and maintains a sense of moment-by-moment coherence, at the same time as producing narrative indeterminacy. His basic unit of text here could be called a "shot," a unit of time and space that supplies a momentary conceptual framework for the reader. The shot is usually presented in visual terms. Once a shot has been established, the writer is free to cut it in with any other shot, to dissolve shots into one another, to speed them up with moments of cut-up, and so on. This is reasonably effective, and the writer achieves a fair balance between momentary clarity and general incomprehensibility. The effectiveness of this technique makes this Burroughs's most successful attempt at narration.

The overall effect of this text is remarkably similar to the experience of a dream. Each moment is strongly felt, and appears to have a significance, exactly what that significance is, as always, is elusive. Incidents and clues proliferate to make the apparent reality of any particular moment always problematic. Audrey, Burroughs's autobiographical persona, experiences his passage through the narrative as if it were a dream:

(H)e encounters blanks in his memory like trying to recall a dream that hovers just out of reach on the edge of perception, skittering away as you try to grasp it, erasing memory traces

with a little broom that fades out, in turn wiping away
 footprints in distant sand. (254)

In representing the dream-like state, Burroughs problematizes unitary truth. But lest the text's indeterminacy be overdetermined, the main effect of the self-reflexive fictionality of Burroughs's texts is to point to the authorial consciousness behind it: both to his thinking, and to the process of writing. As the text moves towards its conclusion, the figure of the writer as the manipulator of the fiction becomes a frequent one, and the principal characters are revealed as surrogates of the author function. For example, the semi-autobiographical character of Audrey takes on the role of the author near the end of the novel, to write the last scene (284-285). In depicting the writer, Burroughs emphasizes the act of creation itself.

The Anal Aesthetic

The novel is not simply the self-destructive "theatre of illusion" of Shaviro's analysis, because at the same time that it attempts to de-scribe language, it continues to inscribe homosexual themes. As Pounds has pointed out, the text's problematization of representational strategies proceeds from the figure of the anus (616).

This is established in "The Health Officer", the first narrative section, which initially establishes the style of narrative realism. Farnsworth, the medical officer, is faced with a catastrophic situation, in which the population has been overwhelmed by plague. He moves about his district dispensing opium to survivors in order to ease their suffering, but the situation is hopeless: "He simply did what he could and left it at that" (18). He is rendered with a degree of psychological interiority, and is "a man so grudging in what he asked of life that every win was a loss" (17). But the realist conventions of the text begin to break down when Farnsworth is sodomized by his native guide. The sexual act takes his mind out of his present space and time location; he feels a memory "surfacing in his body," the memory of an artwork, a "figure, about two feet long, of a reclining man.

The man was naked, the right knee flexed, holding the body a few inches off the ground, the penis exposed" (23). The sexual act prompts the aesthetic imagination which releases him, at the moment of orgasm, from the representational conventions of the realist narrative, propelling him into the carnival mode that anticipates the direction of the rest of the novel:

[. . .] a hoarse hissing sound was forced from his lips and light popped in his eyes as his body boiled and twisted out scalding spurts.

Stage with a jungle backdrop. [. . . .] When the lights come up Farnsworth is wearing an allegator suit that leaves his ass bare and Ali is still fucking him. As Ali and Farnsworth slide offstage Farnsworth lifts one webbed finger to the audience while a marine band plays "Semper Fi". Offstage splash. (24)

The act of sodomy signals the collapse of the apparent realism of the realist narrative--it becomes nothing more than a "stage with a jungle backdrop"--and Farnsworth is released into the text as a theatrical illusion.

Similarly, the anus informs the illusory nature of the detective narrative. Clem Williamson Snide is a "private asshole" (44). The asshole replaces the eye as the site of perception, which makes it unsurprising that the detective story proceeds by proliferation and confusion rather than by gradual revelation of the truth. Snide conducts his investigation by cutting up clues into his tape recorder: this technique enables him to intuit the hidden meanings behind the obvious facts of the case. The cut-up texts serve to suggest that the truth is much more confusing than a conventional detective story would allow. As Pounds suggests, the name Williamson "designates the presence of one of the avatars of the author" (618): Snide's mission is ultimately to forge the book that we are reading. Again, the anus is associated with the text's non-linear writing strategies and the tricks of representational illusion that frustrate simple narrative development.

I will cite one more example of the way that the anus functions as the site of the problematization of meaning. Towards the end of the novel scenes

flash past in rapid succession, which removes any secure sense of time and space and intensifies the sense of illusion. A character gets onto the stage of a high school play dressed as Pan. He begins to play pipe music and his "exposed rectum [. . . .] begins to spin with a smell of ozone and hot iron" (283). Eventually all of the text's props drain "into the spinning disk" (284), which is now a black hole, into which time, space and the illusions of the text all collapse.

We are familiar with the way that the anus serves as a trope for textual illusion and the undecidability of meaning, as it has done in Burroughs's fiction since Naked Lunch. We are also familiar with the way that this is an attempt to undermine the humanist discourses that have shaped the writer's experience: one that proceeds from his contested homosexual position. Is there any development on this theme in the later work? Although his techniques have developed, the actual strategy appears to be a reasonably consistent one. More than the non-linear mode itself, it is the representational conventions within which it is situated that have been subject to the greatest degree of change. Ironically, by this time it is the more traditional elements of Burroughs's work, within which he locates these strategies, that point to his changing intentions. In spite of the obsessive problematization of meaning in his texts, it is the ground that is supposedly problematized that reveals the development in his thinking.

Queer Pirates

In the pirate section of the narrative Burroughs rewrites the popular genre of the boys' adventure story in personal terms. By appropriating the conventions of this typically male genre, he provides another resistant reading of an artifact of mass culture. The heterosexual conventions of the genre are undermined, such that male bonding becomes homoerotic romance. The writer folds the normalized discourse of mass culture into personal space, and then folds personal space back into the world of discourse, with the effect that he provides a representation that undermines the monopoly of the

heterosexual version. In effect he inscribes the homosexual into the realist narrative to provide a space in which the figure of the homosexual may be read.

The egalitarian homosexual commune is presented as an ideal community. David Bergman identifies the egalitarian commune as a frequent motif in homosexual writing (Gaiety Transfigured 139-162). Burroughs here develops on the idea of recognition between males as an idealistic basis for human interaction. The gay community in this text is not as radically transformed as that in The Wild Boys. Burroughs here presents a more hopeful view of normal social interaction. In one of the novel's more idealistic moments, the pirates spend a day exploring an island, eating and fornicating in happy communion. At the end of the day they witness "the green flash" (69), a meteorological event that links their boyish adventures to a sign of hope for the future.

The alienation of the homosexual boys from mainstream society is expressed in the words of Noah Blake: "I think we have come from another world and have been stranded here." Blake has left the prosperity of his father's business in search of a space in which he can express his individuality, for "what use is wealth if I must conform to customs that are as meaningless to me as they are obstructive of my true inclinations and desires?" (64-65). One senses in slightly mawkish moments such as this that Burroughs is wearing his heart on his sleeve. The sentiment expressed here informs the whole work, in its expression of the desire to live with "companions of your choosing" (12).

Ted Morgan writes that in the pirate section of this novel Burroughs was attempting to "reclaim models of masculine behaviour for the gay community" in order to "rehabilitate the limp-wrist image" (Literary Outlaw 592). This is perhaps true, because when the captain of the pirate ship is accused of being an "effeminate dandy", he kills five of the ringleaders to force them to "revise this opinion" (73). In spite of this aggressive masculine incident, the writer's representation of homosexuals in the text allows for a feminine element that was starkly absent from The Wild Boys. The wild boys

were the extreme products of a fantasized post-humanist homosexual community, devoid of language, social conditioning and metaphorically "dead." The boys in the pirate narrative play games, camp around, and are reasonably tolerant of women. This is part of the ethic of diversity that informs the work.

Moreover, the writer appears to incorporate masculine and feminine impulses into an idea of balance between the two forces. While the masculine and the feminine are in perpetual conflict between processes progress and stasis, time and space, there is a sense that this conflict is considered to be productive here. The forces are valuable in themselves, and each serves to temper the other. Consider the frequent occurrence of the sodomite tableau, such as the one between Farnsworth and his native guide that I discussed in the section on the anal aesthetic. When he was sodomized, Farnsworth stepped out of the realism of the narrative into the play of illusions. The act of sodomy introduces a dynamic of masculine and feminine forces, simultaneous self-loss and reassertion of self. In Burroughs's fiction, the sodomized male always ejaculates. Sodomy effeminizes; ejaculation restores masculinity. The two forces are simultaneous and opposite, in tension with one another.

Unlike The Wild Boys, which was a flight from the feminine, Cities of the Red Night suggests that the masculine and the feminine interpenetrate. For example, the text is informed by an ideal of progress; but progress is always mixed in with stasis. Noah Blake's function on the pirate ship is as a gunsmith, and much of the pirate narrative is informed by his gradual refinement of weapons technology that will aid the revolution. But the temporal progress effected by Noah's ideas is achieved by atemporal aleatory techniques. An example of this is when Noah conceives of the idea of exploding cannonballs:

As Hans fucks me, the drawings seem to come alive belching red fire and just as I go off, Chinese children set off a string of firecrackers against the door and I see a huge firecracker blow the library to atoms as a gob of sperm hits the book six feet

away. (120)

From this moment of revelation, he is able to develop the basic technology that enables the pirates to win the war. Space and time interpenetrate in a literary version of Einstein's space-time continuum.

At the close of the novel the writer similarly claims to have evolved a form of weapons technology: he describes his novel as a firecracker. But the evolution of literary technology could lead to holocaust, if progress is taken too far:

I have blown a hole in time with a firecracker. Let others step through. Into what bigger and bigger firecrackers? Better weapons led to better and better weapons, until the earth is a grenade with the fuse burning. (286)

The writer affirms progress, but also affirms that progress leads to a position in which the forces are out of balance: this leads either to a readjustment of the forces and continuing conflict, or to disaster. The will-to-power leads to totalitarianism.

Women

Fictionality permits licence. If nothing is true, then anything is permissible within text. For Burroughs, this is useful, because it suggests that he is free to represent anything, regardless of the limits placed upon thought by cultural prescription. The text is a space in which any idea, no matter how morally or politically unacceptable, may be expressed. It is perhaps ironic, then, that in Cities of the Red Night, in spite of the writer's self-conscious foregrounding of the novel's fictionality, he has tempered this freedom.

I argued in the Chapter Three that Burroughs's radical misogyny in the period of The Wild Boys was several things: the animosity of a homosexual position; an expression of the writer's fear of the maternal figure; a provocation to our cultural hostility towards women; and an elaboration on the idea of the feminine as representative of stasis and death. Moreover,

Burroughs's misogyny was related to an attempt to externalize the feminine aspect of his homosexuality. The writer construed woman as radically Other in order to create distance where there was a powerful sense of proximity. Ironically, this required a process whereby the woman was treated as the pervert in his system; this was analogous to the process of "othering" on the part of a heterosexist society that caused his homosexual conflict in the first place. Cities of the Red Night continues in this vein with characters such as the Countesses Gulpa and de Vile, who are monstrous female figures at the roots of a cosmic conspiracy. However, the novel contains an important exception, which reveals an attempt by the author to temper the extreme misogyny of the earlier work.

In the character of Hironnelle de Mer, who joins the pirate revolution against Spain, Burroughs presents, for the first time in his literary career, a woman's point-of-view. Under other circumstances Hironnelle de Mer would avoid associating with these pirate characters, who she considers to be "all puto queer maricones" (106). However, she joins their revolution as a mid-term necessity, because she is forced by her circumstances to "side with all enemies of Spain" (106). When seen in contrast with The Wild Boys, the writer reveals a more objective approach to women. That he actually represents a woman as a "realistic" character with an alternative point of view and differing objectives from the queer pirates is, in the context of Burroughs's writings, a strange innovation.

However, this is in accordance with the idea of diversity that is apparent both in the Magical Universe Concept that I elaborated earlier, and in the structure of the novel's plot. The revolution against the colonial power takes the form of a united front of homosexuals, oppressed people of the third world, and women. As the writer describes it:

In Cities of the Red Night I parachute my characters behind enemy lines in time. Their mission is to correct retroactively certain fatal errors at crucial turning points in human history. I am speaking of biologic errors that tend to block man's path to his

biologic and spiritual destiny in space. I postulate a social structure offering maximum variation of small communes, as opposed to the uniformity imposed by industrialization and overpopulation. (268)

The novel provides a critique of the present by rewriting history. (This idea has resonances with Foucault's rewriting of the history of thought.) Laying aside for a moment the more radical aspects of his statement about man's destiny in space, the chief concept here is one of diversity: small, multiple communes reflecting differing interests. This is opposed to the "uniformity imposed by industrialization and overpopulation." Burroughs's scheme is directed against the large nation-state, represented in the narrative as the Spanish colonial power.

The state structure as Burroughs perceives it normalizes the population, and polices individual life to limit the range of human expression. Intolerant of difference, this structure reproduces itself in normalized opinion. The notion of scale is important here, because small communes provide an alternative to a largely uniform population, as well as allowing for the possibility of difference and diversity. Moreover, conflict is kept within the bounds of smaller communities, as opposed to warring nations. Where The Wild Boys laid this normalizing function squarely at the feet of women, this novel suggests that it is partly due to the structure of the nation state, and partly due to a human mutation in the distant past. In a slight variation on Burroughs's science fiction creation myth, radiation emanating from a black hole causes the release of a plague virus that mutates the inhabitants of the Cities of the Red Night (36-37). A science fiction version of the Tower of Babel, the virus causes the mutation of the inhabitants into different races, and infects them with the word. Significantly, the word virus finds its most virulent expression in the newly-created white race. In linking the word to white people, Burroughs is suggesting that the progress of Western history, which is the history of the word, has resulted in the colonialism, the oppression of women and the

oppression of homosexuals.

Of course, the word is as usual linked to woman: like Eve, the word is the "other half" that came with the knowledge of the word in the garden of Eden (265). But Burroughs has separated the woman of his myth from literal woman. I am not suggesting that this means that Burroughs has become a feminist. Rather, I am attempting to show that the writer's representation of women in the text is linked to an ethical quest, in which he tempers his queer agenda by representing diverse forces in shifting states of conflict.

But this is part of a larger problem. Burroughs is attempting to integrate an objective ethical element in this work as opposed to the simply subjective catharsis that we saw in The Wild Boys and Naked Lunch, which makes Cities of the Red Night his most "politically correct" work. This perhaps accounts for the novel's wider popularity relative to the rest of his output, but it is also disappointing. This is not what one expects from a writer whose works derive much of their subversive energy from being defiantly and outrageously cathartic.

I detect a sense of frustration here, in that the writer has come up against a difficulty that has been present in his work from the start. He is opposed to objective morality, which his experiences of homosexuality and drug control have revealed as hypocritical and controlling. Thus he does not feel at liberty to present a version of the Articles of Captain Mission--which I will discuss in the next section--as a viable structure of ethical existence. But at the same time, he appears to feel the need for a form of ethics. In spite of the apparent fictional nihilism of Cities of the Red Night, I believe that the writer is in fact searching for a way out of nihilism, and is searching for a way out of the moral aporia within which he finds himself. How can he propose an objective standard of morality without slipping into the same kind of humanism that he has found so oppressive?

The Articles

The liberal tenets of Burroughs's revolutionary pirates are based on the Articles of Captain Mission. While the writer appears to endorse the ideals behind this fixed set of propositions, he also radically problematizes them. Based on ideas such as the freedom of religion, freedom of sexual practice, and freedom of association, the Articles provide for the establishment of small, diverse communities that Burroughs proposes as a solution to "freedom from the tyranny of government" (12). However, as demonstrated by the case of Captain Mission himself, whose "initial desire to better adjust the affairs of mankind" resulted "as in quite usual in the more liberal adjustment of his own fortunes" (9), Burroughs cannot accept that rational principles of freedom result in the actual practice of freedom. Such principles may fuel a revolution, but they eventually serve merely to entrench the position of the new elite.

Rather than a new age of freedom, these principles institute a new age of power. For Burroughs, power, not social justice, is the determining factor in human interaction. Thus even the pirate narrative, whose queer pirates represent the author's own aspiration for political freedom, become tyrants when they achieve the position of power. Brutality replaces idealism. The idealistic queer community of the earlier part of the novel enforces its own perspective on the conquered colonials, to become a form of colonialism in reverse. Once Noah Blake has entrenched his position of power, he orders the bloody and arbitrary execution of his opponents, including the priests and the women. His thoughts after the act indicate the corruption of power: "I am become the bad karma of the Inquisition, I am allowing myself also the satisfaction of a measure of hypocrisy like the slow digestion of a good meal" (170). The Articles, the very tenets of liberation, become the brutality of law when dissidents refuse to accept them. The law as a universal principle does not effectively contain the will-to-power.

In anticipation of my discussion of The Place of Dead Roads, I want to point out the similarity of Foucault's thinking with regard to programs of

change. Foucault doubts that these programs provide any guarantee of social justice, and he suggests that "even with the best of intentions, those programs become a tool, an instrument of oppression" ("Truth, Power, Self" 10). He points to Rousseau and Marx as examples, to show the ways in which their utopian ideals were undermined by the brutalities of the French Revolution and Stalinism respectively. His suspicion of these programs is the reason that he refuses to offer any kind of program for the future. In another interview, he suggests that his "point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous." ("How We Behave" 62). Burroughs and Foucault share a radical mistrust of even seemingly-positive schemes. Consequently they both advocate the need for a flexible and paranoid wariness of power.

Burroughs does not trust the goodness of human nature, but sees humans as motivated by power. Man "arose on the plains of Africa," he argues in The Job, "because he was a killer" (67). Although at the end of Cities of the Red Night he holds out the hope for some kind of change that would enable "a few" to "get through the gate in time" (287), in his thinking this would entail something as drastic as the mutation of the species. However, in spite of the apocalyptic overtones of the text, the idea of diversity seems to inform it at all levels, as a form of solution to the totalitarianism of any one particular power. Conflict cannot be eradicated--there is little sympathy between Hironnelle de Mer and the pirates--but it can be tempered by keeping it at a small scale. Self assertion leads to totalitarianism, and Burroughs is attempting to find a way out. The writer attempts to formulate a provisional answer to this question in the next novel of the trilogy.

The Place of Dead Roads

Burroughs writes that The Place of Dead Roads serves as a sequel to Cities of the Red Night, by "clarifying and reiterating similar themes" ("My Purpose is to Write for the Space Age" 267). The writer has simplified the storyline, and streamlined his concerns. Although Cities was formally ambitious, the

sequel is arguably the better work. It does not struggle with the representational constraints of the complex narrative structure; nor does it bother to provide the kinds of corrective to his homosexist impulse that the ethic of diversity appeared to demand in the earlier novel. Although it perpetuates a similar idea, it does not attempt to work it out at the formal level. The return to a subjective speaking position, as opposed to the more objective one in the earlier novel is significant, because it enables him to clarify an ethics of the self, as opposed to a universalized ethics, which he was impelled to undermine at the narrative level.

Moreover, in his shift away from the narrative conventions of Cities of the Red Night, he is not compelled to represent diversity at the narrative level. Burroughs is here able to speak more clearly in his "own" voice. He returns to a more subjective narrative point of view. The novel is set mainly in the Wild West, and uses the props of the popular western as a backdrop for his attempt to rework the libertarian problematic. The setting is familiar territory, and Burroughs is more at home with details of set and character that make the novel rich in detail and characterization. Shelving the formal demands of the earlier work, the writing has a greater personal expressiveness. Much more "autobiographical" than the earlier work, the text is non-linear to the extent that it reads like the ramblings of a slightly senile Southern uncle, with a twisted sense of humour and a predilection for guns, filth, copulating boys, theories about space travel and a loathing for Bible Belters.

However, in spite of these ramblings, the writer elaborates his ideas more directly. Kim Carsons, Burroughs's teenage alter ego, who "looked like a sheep-killing dog and smelled like a polecat" (24), joins the Johnson family, a worldwide organization of honourable thieves that is in a battle against an invasion of the Venusian "right virus" and which plans to set up a program for travel in outer space. This is told in picaresque fashion; routines develop and spin off without radically confusing the basic narrative. Burroughs uses Kim as a medium, and presents his ideas through Kim's thought

processes, as well as allowing himself the freedom of direct authorial address, without any narrative justification. These direct assertions of opinion and theory are typically dense and aphoristic, but they provide anchorage points within the fluidity of the narrative. Burroughs is a master of the suggestive aphorism, and their presence here is one of the strengths of the text.

Moreover, the subjective nature of the work allows the author to inscribe himself. In addition to the youthful persona of Kim, the writer points more directly to his function as author. The multiplicity of the text emanates from the figure of the author, who lives in his creations and becomes multiple through them. Thus, although there is a powerful authorial presence, it is never a simple one. The writer is self-conscious about the way that he creates an authorial self, and he has come to realize the power of text as a simultaneous revelation and problematization of the self:

"William Seward Hall...he was a corridor, a hall, leading to many doors [. . .] the man of many faces and many pen names, of many times and places" (107).

The writer has realized the extent to which writing serves him as a technology of the self. For not only does it permit him a degree of self-revelation and the power of communication, but it also provides him with the mask of text, in which he can problematize the disciplinary "truth" of a unitary self. The author is expressed in his creations, in many characters, thoughts and situations. Like the Wild Fruits of the novel, who use technology to make clones of themselves, the writer is able to clone himself in his fictions. Moreover, he achieves a form of immortality in that he comes alive in his readers: "the immortality of the writer is to be taken literally. Whenever anyone reads his words the writer is there" (45). Burroughs has travelled a long way from the anguish of the fear of revelation of his teenage diary.

Moreover, he sees the writing as a form of self-fashioning, in which he is able to transform both himself and his environment:

individuals beyond any real justification of their nature as a threat to the community. Rightness is one of the chief instruments of control over individuals, and takes the form of concepts that allow for the intervention of other people's affairs. It includes the discourses of individuals, churches and the state.

In his attack on the foundations of family values, Burroughs rewrites the classic scene from the Western, in which the Old Western patriarch states his final exhortation to his son. In his dying words to Kim, Mr. Carsons gives him this solemn advice: "Stay out of churches son. All they got a key to is the shit house. And swear to me you will never wear a lawman's badge" (19). This sly inversion of the tenets of conventional morality is designed to shock the reader out of habitually moralistic thought patterns. A statement such as this reveals Burroughs's ability to provoke hilarity and outrage at the same time as he makes an elegant point. The strength of The Place of Dead Roads is that it restores the outrageous humour of the writer's sarcastic authorial voice. That we have returned to the writer's scatological mode is also signalled by his attacks on women, as he mounts an offensive, to identify women as the primary perpetrators of rightness:

[Right viruses] are more at home occupying women than men. Once they have the woman, they have the man she cohabits with. Women must be regarded as the principle reservoir of the alien virus parasite. Women and religious sons of bitches. Above all, religious women. (92-93)

At least Burroughs cannot be accused of attempting to be entirely right! In criticising the idea of rightness, the writer has given himself the liberty to use politically incorrect provocation. Moreover, he makes his point without resorting to the essentialism of The Wild Boys, because in the figure of Salt Chunk Mary, a Johnson who is at the heart of the organization, he presents the figure of a woman who minds her own business.

Indeed, this is the basic tenet of what I have termed Burroughs's anal ethic. This is neatly and outrageously summarized in the aphorism "Mind Your

Own Business." Minding one's own business is the writer's solution to the problem of public intervention in the private realm. It addresses both the way this takes place through discourses perpetuated by public institutions, and the way that these discourses come alive in the prejudicial behaviour of individuals. The ability of an individual to mind his own business is what identifies him as a Johnson. This is Burroughs's best--and wittiest--response to the problem of control.

Moreover, this is not merely an nihilistic position, because Burroughs develops the character of the Johnson into a loose code of conduct:

A Johnson honours his obligations. His word is good and he is a good man to do business with. A Johnson minds his own business. He is not a snoopy, self-righteous, trouble-making person. A Johnson will give help when help is needed. He will not stand by while someone is drowning or trapped under a burning car. (7)

Rather than the system of rules contained in the Articles of the previous work, Burroughs here proposes a mode of personal conduct. The Articles became the tyranny of law, an ideal that the writer felt the need to undermine. The Johnson represents a minimalist and almost chivalric code that removes the burden of conduct from the realm of the objective, public and truthful, and places it in the personal realm. This is a form of nihilistic ethics.

At once important and slightly banal, this idea arises from the paranoid fear of external influence that has defined Burroughs's experience as an addict and a homosexual. When seen in the light of the writer's history of struggle with the traps of objective "truth," with the sense of imperative imposed by the time on the need to confess to a singular nature, the Johnson is a figure that succeeds in eschewing convention as a form of restraint, or truth as a form of constraint, without losing an ethical perspective.

Foucault and the Johnson Family

In my introduction I suggested that the writings of Burroughs and Foucault have in common the theme of the fear of control, and that they react against the constraints placed on the individual by the scientific, governmental and moral discourses of modernity. Having elaborated on the ideas behind Burroughs's anal ethic, I am now able to provide another comparison between Burroughs's thinking here and Foucault's concern with the technologies of the self.

Foucault describes his project in his last two books, The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self as being to write "a history of the ways in which pleasures, desires, and sexual behaviour were problematized, reflected upon, and conceived in Antiquity in relation to a certain art of living" ("The Ethics of Sexuality" 256). He termed the various practices that people employ with the aim of self-transformation the technologies of the self.

Similar to Burroughs's concern with the ways that the environment attempts to impose modes of life upon the individual, Foucault addresses his study to the possibility that there are different ways of conceiving of the self, and different forms of approaches to the self, from those made available by the modern environment. In particular he addresses the manner in which humanist discourse of humanism tends to universalize the nature of the individual, and the ways in which the individual should approach himself: "What I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom" ("Truth, Power, Self" 15). His later work was an attempt

to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. (10)

The social technologies of power, including both discourses and institutions, have the effect of "objectivizing" the subject ("Technologies of the Self" 18), with the result that thought became normalized, and the range of human

possibility became restricted.

To counteract this tendency, and in opposition to the concept of universal morality, Foucault deploys the concept of ethics. In his terms, morality is a system of rules in the objective domain--including discourses of law, the state, medicine and so on--whereas ethics is the domain of the self. He argues that morality has attained the status of a truth that should be criticized, and that the self may be conceived differently from the ways imposed by convention.

His historical analysis of practices of the self is designed to show that the Christian tradition, and the post-Christian secular tradition, are founded on an imperative to know oneself (19). This imperative to "know yourself" required that the individual discover the truth about himself in order to act in a moral way. Foucault argues that the demand for truth that places an emphasis on external definition could be replaced with a practice that emphasizes the individual's relationship to the self. To replace the command "know yourself" he suggests the alternative "take care of yourself" (19). Caring for the self is seen as an ethical practice that allows the individual to explore, and to work on his being, without the imperative to search for a truth about the self, or for a singular nature. The purpose of knowing the self is to live a moral life. By contrast, the ultimate aim of caring for the self is to live a beautiful life. As Foucault describes the emphasis of this approach: "we have to create ourselves as works of art" ("On the Genealogy of Ethics" 351).

Foucault writes that the modern person is "inclined to see taking care of oneself as an immorality, as a means of escape from all possible rules" ("Technologies of the Self" 22). He is arguing for the rejection of rules from above, or for the rejection of received definitions, but he is not arguing for irresponsibility. He suggests that as a basis for behaviour, taking care of the self implies a sense of social responsibility. In this respect, he analyses Plato's discourse with Alcibiades, in which Plato informs the younger man that he must learn to take care of himself, in the

form of personal training, before he can aspire to public office. His ability to govern is directly related to his degree of self-care (23-25). The emphasis here is placed on the young man's need to care for himself. His usefulness in the social sphere is an extension of the way in which he has cared for himself. The personal and the social are not discontinuous, but part of a continuum, like a fold.

On an impressionistic level, there is a remarkable similarity between this idea and Burroughs's anal ethic. Considering that the writers shared a similar concern with control in their earlier works, they appear to reach a similar conclusion in their later works about the way that the self should be conducted. Both are concerned with the way that the public sphere demands conformity in the private sphere, and both suggest that the private sphere is the most important aspect of one's interaction with the world. Thus Foucault's injunction "Care for yourself" is thematically, as well as semantically, almost identical to Burroughs's demand "Mind Your Own Business". Both aphorisms are directed against interference in the private realm.

In a similar way to Foucault's suggestion that a private ethics does not rule out a responsibility to the public, Burroughs suggests the character of a Johnson. In response to both the fear of control, and to the normalizing discourses of modernity, they each propose a version of a nihilistic ethics. Both writers see practices of the self as more important than conforming to an external code, and both of their arguments are an attempt to justify a way of thinking in which the individual may explore unorthodox approaches to the self. Furthermore, Foucault's suggestion that the self should be conducted on the basis of an aesthetics of the self is to some degree mirrored in Burroughs's writings. As I suggested earlier, The Place of Dead Roads foregrounds the writer's attempt to create himself as a problematic figure in writing. That Burroughs's textual persona is a problematized persona, that challenges the truth of a knowable self, or a singular identity, makes it remarkably similar to the aestheticization of the self that Foucault is

suggesting. Foucault argues that practices of the self should be linked to "the practice of creativity--and not authenticity" ("How We Behave" 65).

The Space Program

If the Johnson family is Burroughs's version of an ethics of the self that is resistant to normalization, this is only one thrust of the novel. He pushes beyond this merely political formulation to suggest something much more radical. In a typically vertiginous extrapolation, the novel moves beyond the ethical idea of diversity to make a quasi-scientific suggestion that humanity itself has ceased to evolve: "Kim knew he was in a state of arrested evolution: A.E. He was no more destined to stagnate in his three-dimensional animal form than a tadpole is designed to remain a tadpole" (43).

In spite of his Johnson ethic, Burroughs has a biological vision of human interaction, and believes that man is fundamentally a killer. Conflict and violence are integral to existence. He believes that individuals will always pursue selfish ends when the expedient presents itself. Moreover, he believes that conflict is healthy, because it produces competition and change. Burroughs's holds a Darwinian view of survival of the fittest, and he cannot envisage a bland utopia in which political and social problems have been solved. He suggests that this idea is "the fatal error of utopians" (108), because it attempts to remove the productive conflict from existence. He argues that humanity needs conflict, change and difficulty in order to be happy: "Happiness is a by-product of function in a battle context" (108).

The Johnsons are not simply a representation of an ideal ethics that resists normalization; their "function" is rather to set up a space program that will facilitate the evolution of humanity. Further, the Venusian Right Virus is not simply a trope that critiques a normalized moral discourse, but an enemy that the Johnsons must fight and kill to achieve their ends. Burroughs admonishes the reader: "You are a shit spotter. It's satisfying work" (140). Shit spotters are deviants, such as eccentrics, gays or members of ethnic minorities that, to "normal" society, represent the Other. Shit

spotters move into a town and judge the reactions of the townsfolk. Anyone who reacts negatively is deemed to be infected with the virus. "Then the Shit Slaughter units move in..." (141) *

Burroughs suggests that viral rightness not only creates oppressive prejudice, but it creates stagnation in the community, which hinders progress:

Over the hills and far away to the Western Lads. Anybody gets in your way, KILL. You will have to kill on your way out because this planet is a penal colony and nobody is allowed to leave. Kill the guards and walk. (182)

Violent scenes such as this are the logical extension of Burroughs's belief in the usefulness of conflict to motivate activity. Burroughs's ethical stance is not so much undermined by cartoon violence such as this, as it is revealed in its extreme form. Nonetheless, this aggression becomes extremely unsettling, because as seductive as his ideas frequently are, he never lets the reader off lightly. The reader is never sure at which point he should stop taking the writer seriously. Does Burroughs viciously intend this, or is he being theatrical? At what point do we draw the line between the writer's ideas and his fantasies? To the same degree that the text seduces us with intriguing ideas, it also alienates us. The routine form pushes reasonableness into hyperbole, so that we are never certain of our position in relation to his text. Perhaps Burroughs's intention is to produce conflict in the reader, which in his thinking would be a source of creativity and change. Perhaps he is attempting to challenge our conditioned sense of morality. Perhaps also he hopes to continually problematize the reader's relationship with the text, in order to challenge the ways that we make interpretations.

However, the basic tenets of Burroughs's later trilogy are clear. The writer hopes to provoke a transformation in the way that the world is perceived in order to "expresses human potentials and purposes relevant to the Space Age" ("My Purpose Is to Write for the Space Age" (268). His ideas

are opposed to conformity and to the normalization of the ways that we approach ourselves. His basic ethic is the experiment, and in this respect he is similar to Foucault. Both writers suggest that the self should be transformed into something completely different, through the use of technologies of the self. This theme is related to their fear of humanism. As Foucault puts it: "I think that there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future than we can imagine in humanism as it is dogmatically represented [. . .]" ("Truth, Power, Self" 15). Both writers appear to believe that with the death of God, man has only himself with whom to experiment. Foucault argues that from the idea that the self is not given to us, "there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as works of art" ("On the Genealogy of Ethics" 351).

In the next chapter, I will examine the last work in the trilogy, The Western Lands, in which Burroughs faces death in a search for the value of his life. In this process, he comes to the conclusion that the greatest value is the ability to create something that did not previously exist.

Chapter Five: The Dandy

[Burroughs is one of] the great homosexual writers of our culture...

- Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act"

Still we wore the dandy uniform, like the dress uniform of a distant planet long gone out.

- Burroughs, The Western Lands

Burroughs continues his search for an ethical foundation in The Western Lands, the last novel of the trilogy. In Cities of the Red Night the writer proposed an ethic of diversity, and in The Place of Dead Roads he attempted to develop a form of nihilistic ethics based on the Johnson Family's code of conduct. By contrast, in The Western Lands he avoids the issue of the way that the self relates to others, and similarly avoids attempting to define an ethical code of conduct. Instead, the writer focuses on himself as the object of his enquiry. More specifically, he explores the idea of personal value, and relates value to his activity as an artist.

In this chapter, I will analyze The Western Lands in order to show the way that the writer's vision of art in the work develops his anal aesthetic. In its emphasis on the themes of individuality versus normalization, and of creativity versus past conditioning, it attempts to critique the way that knowledge becomes universalized in discourses such as humanism, and attempts to promote the quest for an alternative mode of perception: this is the aesthetic mode itself.

The aesthetic provides a challenge to the individual to resist universalized views of human nature. Aesthetics operates in opposition to rigid constructions, laws, and what Foucault called "universal necessities in human existence" ("Truth, Power, Self" 11). Treating his life as an aesthetic production, the individual must refuse received definitions and

take responsibility for his creation of himself as a work of art. Burroughs suggests that this is the fundamental approach to modern life.

The writer tempers his homosexual theme in this work, and he writes at one point: "And the boys? Even lust is dead" (256). However, the novel is informed by a similar strategic homographetic impulse to provide alternative, experimental, individualized narratives in opposition to universalized truth.

As we shall see, this approach has resonances with Foucault's approach to self, which is similarly anti-humanist and anti-universalist. Moreover, both writers reveal a shift in emphasis in their concerns. No longer merely concerned with control, they examine ways in which the individual may address his existence in a positive way so as to produce something out of it.

Fundamental to the aesthetic is the idea of transgression. The way that the individual provides alternatives to established modes of perception is by transgressing them in order to reveal their limits. Moreover, in its attempt to transcend material existence, at the same time as being inevitably defined by it, the aesthetic is inextricably linked to death.

The Western Lands

This is Burroughs's most elegiac and personal novel. The writer shifts his emphasis from autobiographical personae of his youth to speak as an old man: the novel's central character is "old writer" himself. He depicts himself as bound to the present, as an old man in his house with his cats, moving around his work space, rearranging his things "until each object had felt the touch of his hand" (29). Robin Lydenberg appropriately describes this novel as "Burroughs's most intimate self-portrait" ("El Hombre Invisible" 234).

Burroughs writes that "(f)orty years ago" the old writer had published a novel "that made a stir" (1). Since that time, however, he has developed a "disgust for words that has accumulated until it choked him" (1). For this reason, he has abdicated from attempting to write. However, although he mistrusts words, and the ways that they confine existence, he begins to see visions of words, cryptic messages that prompt him to sit down and write

again.

This self-reflexive emphasis on the activity of writing is a key to understanding the work. The fantasies in the novel takes are always grounded within the persona of the writer who imagines them. The focus on the artist as a limited individual is an anti-universalist strategy, because it particularizes the way that the events in the text proceed from the writer himself. In directing the reader's attention to the writing process, Burroughs makes the artist's activity his principle theme.

The authorial voice frequently interjects into the fantasized scenes of the narrative. The writer supplies details of his progress in writing as he improvises the text. He describes the moments at which he experiences inspiration, despair, confusion, writer's block and dead ends--"I realize that my whole approach to HIS has been faulty" he writes (203); or: "The idea lay fallow until this morning" (178) or: "That's a cut-up or a dream sequence from 1963 Tangier. It didn't meaning anything at the time. Still doesn't" (172)--and so on. The novel is full of bizarre fantasies, but we are continually drawn back to the persona of the "old writer" who is in the process of creating them. He attempts to entertain the reader with the outrageousness of his imagination, and recycles well-worn jokes that have become funnier with the familiarity of repetition. But he is also attempting something more profound. The novel is a self-conscious portrait of a man fully rooted in the present of his time of writing, who at that very same moment is attempting to push himself beyond limits of the present in an act of the imagination.

The Fixed Image

The problem with the modern world is that it does not promote the dream. Instead of entering into the dream, people cling to a fixed image of the present, like rock apes clinging to the Rock of Gibraltar (258). Burroughs satirizes the modern inability to see beyond the present as an inability to face death. Clinging to the body is to be trapped into the "mummy system"

(160). People who are unable to face death cling onto the body in the hope of prolonged life. This is a cowardly system that requires little effort, and it is the expression of a herd mentality. Mummification becomes commercialized as mummies are mass-produced:

Three hours and twenty minutes from Death to Mummification: an hour to gut it out good, an hour in the drying vats, an hour in the lime-cure vats, internal organs stashed in tasteful vases, wrap it up and store it in the communal vaults, which are carefully controlled for humidity and temperature and patrolled by armed guards at all times. (161)

Furthermore, attachment to the physical body leads to a vampiric control system, as the wealthy feed off "fellaheen blood and energy" to finance their addiction to life (164). The mummy is a fragile form of immortality, and lasts only as long as the limited resources needed to sustain it (164). This depiction of spirituality as mass-produced to order expresses Burroughs's loathing of normalization.

The horror of this situation is that by clinging on to the security of what already exists, the individual becomes determined by someone else's dogmatic system. This is a "One God Universe (OGU)," in which everything is predetermined by an omnipotent God. This lack of conflict removes all need for striving, because there is no room for activity by definition:

Because He can do everything, He can do nothing, since the act of doing demands opposition. He knows everything, so there is nothing for him to learn. He can't go anywhere, since he is already fucking everywhere, like cowshit in Calcutta. (113)

Since everything is in God's hands, there is no need for individual effort. The believer's faith excuses him from the need to face the meaningless of limited existence, and absolves him of the responsibility to take his life into his own hands. Burroughs views modern life as a spiritual desert because individuals have lost their ability to dream; that is, they have lost the ability to become creators in their own right, and to operate according

to individualized modes of perception:

What happened here? Nothing happened. Cause of death: totally uninteresting. They could not create event. They died from the lack of any reason to remain alive . . . decent Godless people.

You need your dreams, they are a biologic necessity and your lifeline to space, that is to the state of a God. To be one of the Shining Ones. (The Western Lands 181)

Burroughs is suggesting that the individual must respond to his environment in a creative way in an attempt to push himself beyond it. Creative activity is the antidote to normalized culture, and the only hope of freedom from being imprisoned in a pre-existing system. Indeed, the creative act is directed against the dogmatism of received definition. Creativity demands tremendous effort and self-sacrifice:

These magical visions are totally devoid of ordinary human emotion and experience. There is no friendship, love, hostility, fear and hate. There are no rules, no series of steps by which one can be in a position to see. Consequently, such visions are the enemy of any dogmatic system. (241)

Indeed, the aim of these dreams is to shatter dogmatic systems, and to challenge natural law.

Burroughs structures his novel around a quest to find the Western Lands, which is the land of dreams. He deploys the character of Joe the dead, a Natural Outlaw (NO), whose aim is to break the laws of the physical universe: "To the NO, breaking a natural law is an end in itself: the end of that law" (30). The Natural Outlaw epitomizes the transgressive aesthetic because he takes transgression as an end in itself. Any form of transgression creates new possibilities by altering the limits of the present. To find the Land of the Dead, Joe must cross the Duad, a river of excrement, which represents the filth of human material existence. His aim is to disrupt the natural laws of cause and effect, and to replace them with synchronicity, thereby rising out of time and into space, transcending the deterministic universe into dream,

where everything is possible. All of these metaphors are different versions of the same idea, which is the longing to escape from the flesh in a form of death, an idea which has informed Burroughs's work since the cut-up novels. However, in this text the writer makes explicit the way that death is related to transcendence of the terms of the present. The value of this transcendence is that it produces a work of art.

Value

Value rests upon the quality of one's dreams. This is the ethical thrust of the novel which is, as Frederick Dolan points out, probably based on "Nietzsche's reassessment of rank and severity in the context of a Christian equalizing culture" ("The Poetics of Postmodern Subversion" 542). Burroughs suggests that true immortality can only be attained by tremendous effort, and there are no set principles that may be followed to achieve it. The pilgrim has to define his own path, and his success is judged by the integrity and power of his efforts. The Western Lands will be attained only by individuals of unmistakable quality, and Burroughs imagines this in terms of qualitative coins that confer upon the bearer the right of access to the Western Lands. These include "Kindness Coins [. . .], Tear Coins, Courage Coins, [and] Johnson Coins" (238). The most important coin is the Integrity Coin, which is related to the degree of integrity with which one strives to refuse the terms of the present.

This idea appears paradoxical, because it suggests that quality rests in the disavowal of standards of quality. What makes the artist valuable is his ability to face the absence of value. Burroughs believes that in this refusal of accepted terms the artist confronts the void: this enables him to create something new. What characterizes the dream is that it refuses to deny the absence of value, at the same time as taking value to itself. In a typically gnomic statement, Burroughs proposes that if an artist confronts the void, he transcends it: "If you face death, for that time, for the period of direct confrontation, you are immortal" (191).

There is a tension in the novel's idea of the artist's function. On the one hand, his task is to inscribe the void, the absence of transcendent value. He has to refuse systems that provide dogmatic moral or intellectual answers. On the other, in his ability to face the void, the artist discovers the most basic value that there is, which is the ability to create something new in the face of absence. As the writer defines the task of the artist in My Education: The Book of Dreams, the "function of the painter is to observe and make visible in paint something that did not exist until he observed it" (124). The aim of the creative act is to make a representation of the dreams themselves. The dream is both the sign of the void and the marker of the individual's attempt to transcend it in an act of creation.

Foucault suggests that our age is characterized by its "essential, permanent, obsessive relation [. . .] with death" ("What Is Enlightenment?" 40). In the absence of a centre, death becomes the centre around which existence oscillates. In The Western Lands, death is Burroughs's principal preoccupation. His aim in the novel is "to write his way out of death" (3), which implies that in confronting his own mortality and the absence of a meaning in life, he will create it. Moreover, when he writes that "death is equivalent to a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy" (3), he does not mean that he must search for transcendent value or for a moral code in order to become spiritually whole: these established values are a form spiritual bankruptcy by the novel's own definition. Rather, he means that meaning must be perpetually disvalued, in order to keep the void in view, as a space into which one can move. In other words, he must become spiritually bankrupt in the conventional sense, refusing meaning and value, in order to affirm death as the highest value that there is.

Foucault propose a similar myth of transcendence of the present through a confrontation with death. For Foucault this is the essential modern attitude, which consists in "recapturing something that is not beyond the present instant, not behind it, but within it" ("What Is Enlightenment?" 39). In denying a centre of value, both writers suggest that the eternal must be

captured within the present, by continually disavowing the terms of the present. This dynamic of entry into death in order to transgress the limits of the present is a preoccupation with the attempt to promote a radical individualism. Confronting the absence of meaning, the individual projects a individualized vision in an act of creation. However, this form of transgression seems impossible. Is it possible to write oneself out of the terms of the culture?

Conditioned by the Present

To some extent, Burroughs's project is doomed from the start because he cannot transcend the terms of the present. As has been the case since the cut-up novels, the writer is not able to escape the way that his terms are conditioned by the culture from which he is trying to free himself. The novel progresses through a series of repetitions, in which a character dies, only to find himself alive again a few moments later, and the ultimate limit is never reached. In spite of the textual mutations and surreal situations that the writer creates along the way, he cannot find the new mode of perception that he hopes for, and "the faster you move the more it looks the same" (116). The reader's interest in the novel is sustained by the writer's search for a miracle of transcendence, and he continually invokes the "God of the Long Chance, the impossible odds" that will provide the revelation that will enable him to escape (114).

But by the novel's close, the old writer is still a product of his time, and has failed the task he has set himself, because he remains trapped within the terms of language. His personality consists of nothing more than "bits of old songs, stray quotations, fleeting spurts of purpose and direction sputtering out to nothing and nowhere" (255). Like the British in the novel, the chief exemplar of the stale fixed image that is not open to challenge and danger, the writer cannot change. As he writes in conclusion: "British we are, British we stay" (268). In spite of the non-linearity of his text, and the ambiguity of his assertions, the writer is necessarily caught within the

terms of language, and the bankruptcy of spiritual death. He does not escape the limitations of narrative, nor the terms which he had hoped to undermine. By the novel's close he has given up: "Well, there isn't any transport out. There isn't any important assignment. It's every man for himself. Like the old bum in the dream said: Maybe we lost" (252). To have reached the Western Lands he would have had to cross the Duad. But in acknowledging that he cannot cross it, he reaches a moment of acceptance. His response is to say: "Let it flow!" In this act of acceptance, and perhaps of abdication, he experiences "a flash of joy" (257).

The closing line of the text epitomizes the way that the writer is trapped within the terms of the culture. He appropriates a line from T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land": "Hurry up please. It's time" (258). This is the closing call of the English pub, and signals the advent of death. But as it is Eliot's line it, it only serves to confirm the way that Burroughs is merely recycling the language.

The Dandy

In the context of the writer's desire to transcend in the novel, the unoriginality of this line is appalling, because it is the sign of abject failure. However, the writer has given the line a new inflection in the context of his text, in that it signals the end of his own narrative. Moreover, in his ability to entertain the reader's attention in the novel's duration, he has achieved a form of immortality. Even in his inability to transcend the terms of his culture, he has possibly passed the test of the creator.

Burroughs has failed to find the Long Chance, but he has effected a lateral manoeuvre, in that he has placed the stamp of his own personality onto modern culture. He has created himself as a post-modern dandy, and has finally become what he is: an old man with his cats in Midwestern suburbia, spinning yarns for his readers. He could not beat the hyperreal system of contemporary culture, but he could enter into it, to become hyperreal

himself. Images of Burroughs have proliferated in recent times--on the covers of his books, on tape cassettes and in movies. He has become yet another term in the information system, something that he both predicted and has been unable to overcome.

And yet, although co-opted by his culture, he remains a sign of resistance within it. In another appropriation from an Eliot poem, he imagines himself as Prufrock, but as an affirmative version of the originally neurotic character. As Prufrock, Burroughs has mustered the bravado to wear the dandy's clothes. A police patrol car slows down to scrutinize him, but these agents of control do not consider the eccentric old man a threat, and one of the police men describe him as "Just an old fuck with his trousers rolled." The writer's response is both defiant and pathetic: "At least I dare to eat a peach" (253). This is as resigned as it is campily subversive.

The appropriation from Eliot is significant, because it highlights the difference between the two writers. In The Waste Land, Eliot is extremely bleak in his realization that his text merely provides a point through which his culture continued to circulate. It seems significant that he fled from embracing this experience into traditional Christianity. Burroughs would perceive this as a surrender to the dogmatic system of the fixed image, and his own approach is quite different. Even in the light of his inability to transcend, he affirms his attempt. In eating the peach, he suggests that he embraces material existence, and continues to face death. This is an appropriate image of the anal aesthetic.

Following Baudelaire, Foucault suggests that the true dandy is the character who can extract from the transience of fashion a representation of death. He is the one "who knows how to make manifest, in the fashion of the day, the essential, permanent, obsessive relation that our age entertains with death" ("What Is Enlightenment?" 40). This suggests that the dandy brings into the terms of the present time a representation of its limits, which serves the purpose of providing a critique of the limitations of the present. Thus although Burroughs does not transcend the text, he reveals the

way that transcendence is impossible. In doing this, he affirms the limit as a limit that still needs to be transgressed. This opens the way for further exploration. Foucault calls this the will to "heroize the present" (41).

This is the "attitude of modernity," in which

the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is. (41)

In providing a critique of the limits of the present time, Burroughs is not liberated from its terms. However, as Foucault suggests, this experience "compels him to face the task of producing himself" (42). Burroughs, in the "dandy uniform, like the dress uniform of a distant planet long gone out" (253), provides just this representation of the limits of experience, and a faces a similar imperative of having to create himself within his works.

This is the aesthetic mode, which strives as far as possible to transgress the limits of existence in an unending struggle to create something new. The attempt at transgression always brings one back to a heightened perception of the present. This is not simply an aesthetic act, but also a political one. Foucault follows Kant to suggest that in searching for a way out, and in refusing accepted definitions, humanity reaches the state of "mature adulthood" (49). It is this sense of responsibility for the self that refuses external definition that both Burroughs and Foucault are attempting to describe.

Conclusion: Truth Games

In the course of this study I have argued that Burroughs's novels should be read in the context of his experience of homosexuality in the twentieth century. As a central concern of his work, this is an area that has been seriously neglected by critical responses to his texts. Moreover, I have argued that the writer's homosexuality is one of the most important factors in the development of his unique and problematic sensibility. By way of

comparison with similar themes in Foucault, I have suggested that Burroughs's textual strategies are a complex response to the construction of the homosexual subject in twentieth century discourse.

Both writers suggest that society tends to exert control over the subject by strategies of normalization, which are effected through various technologies of domination and power. Although this has particular relevance in a technological society which uses mass media to circulate normalized images, the most threatening technology of domination is language itself. Language, by the nature of its apparent referentiality to the world, serves as a "reality studio", which sets up terms that limit the ways in which human experience is thought. Moreover, language tends to construct the individual as an object of truth, and as a fixed identity who is subjected to the operations of power. This is most clearly the case with the homosexual.

In response, each writer treats writing with suspicion, and attempts to foreground the artificiality of language by undermining its apparent truths with "truth games" of their own, by refusing to allow an unproblematic correspondence between what is written and what is true. To this end, the writers tend to present their texts as constructions, in order to reveal the constructed nature of reality and to provide alternative constructions of their own.

The problematic powers of language requires that the writer treat writing as a technology of the self. It is treated as a process rather than as a revelation, and as an exercise against which the writer pits himself in order to transform himself. For Burroughs, this takes the form of continual attempts to "write his way out" of language. Writing is perceived as a test, and as a part of a process of becoming, rather than as a revelation of being.

Moreover, the theme of the technologies of the self appears to be an attempt to keep open avenues through which human possibility is thought. As received ideas are suspect, and as the terrain of human possibility entails the absence of a higher authority, this idea encourages experimentation in order to promote the exploration of new modes of being. This is a theme that

has carried over into both writers' experience, as epitomized by Burroughs's explorations into the effects of drugs and other technologies of the self.

The problem posed by the removal of external authority as the basis for the practice of the self appears to have prompted the explorations of forms of ethics, which were attempts to rethink the relationship between the subject and the public sphere. Both writers suggest a radical individualism, in which the individual is able to pursue technologies of the self without the need either for received definitions, or for public censure. This is proposed in the light of a certain responsibility on the part of the individual to the public sphere. However, the crucial aspect of this is that ethics must proceed from one's work upon the self, rather than being imposed from outside. Following on from this, both writers suggest dandyism as an approach to the self, in which the self becomes the site of an aesthetic elaboration. The freedom of the aesthetic is a corrective to the restrictions of moral or legal spheres of knowledge. The aestheticized self perpetually struggles against the culture of normalization both to reveal the limitations it imposes upon being, and to present alternatives to it.

By definition, the concept of the aesthetic must remain undefined. It is directed specifically towards promoting an attitude of exploration, and encourages the discovery of new ideas and new ways of thinking, and therefore it cannot prescribe what these should be, nor can it propose a program for the ways that these should be discovered. Rather than proposing a fixed idea--which would merely rehearse humanism's tendency towards universalisation--it serves as a defence of, and as an exhortation to, the attitude of discovery. This experimental attitude is essentially avant-gardist, and is perhaps encapsulated in the challenge that Foucault borrows from Kant: "dare to know" ("What Is Enlightenment?" 35).

To the extent that the aesthetic is a reaction against control--and the way that control manifests itself in the form of limitations placed upon thoughts, upon ways of being, and upon identities--it is also a political formulation.

Endnotes

1. The term "anomalous genius," coined by Oliver Harris ("The Magus" 36), is one of the best descriptions of Burroughs's unsettling sensibility.
2. For example, Thomas Disch writes of The Cities of the Red Night that "Mr. Burroughs has eliminated from his book everything incidental to the central task of spinning and respinning the same yarn--characterization, wit, stylistic graces, anything that might detract from the erotic fantasy of death by hanging" ("Pleasures of Hanging" 14).
3. The introduction by Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg to William S. Burroughs: At the Front: Critical Reception, 1959-1989 provides a useful overview of the critical responses to Burroughs, to which I am partially indebted.
4. Burroughs is widely acknowledged as the seminal figure in the cyberpunk movement. The editors of Semiotext(e): SF write: "We daresay EVERY contributor to this volume owes something to 'Uncle Bill,' whose voluminous and still-expanding corpus represents THE major stylistic breakthrough of the last quarter-century" (204); and Larry McCaffery argues that "it should hardly be surprising to discover that the work of William S. Burroughs had a profound impact on both punk music and cyberpunk fiction" ("Cutting Up: Cyberpunk, Punk Music and Urban Decontextualizations" 305).
5. See, for example, The Passion of Michel Foucault 253-254.
6. A number of gay critics reacted angrily to Miller's book. David M. Halperin, for example, argues that it:

purports to 'explain' Foucault's thought by tracing its origin to the 'truth' of his sexuality, thereby combining authoritative psychological/biographical knowledge with the power of normalizing judgement in a single gesture whose effect is to strengthen the very disciplinary controls that Foucault's whole

life was dedicated to resisting. ("Bringing Out Michel Foucault"
71)

While Halperin accuses Miller of policing Foucault's memory, Miller contends that Halperin is attempting to police discourse about Foucault to an even greater degree, in the interests of a gay political agenda. See Miller's response to Halperin, in which he argues that his was a valid attempt to open up debate about Foucault ("Policing Discourse: A Response to David Halperin" 98).

7. Burroughs frequently resurrected the piece, with minor variations, in his later works and public performances. See, for example, Nova Express 105-109.

8. In his essay "The Hundred Year Plan" the writer makes his position on democratic systems plain: "Limit the right to vote [. . . .] The whole majority rule farce is a door through which the unworthy enter" (122).

9. Although Burroughs was fascinated with Scientology, he was probably what the organization would call a "squirrel," that is, someone who uses their ideas without conforming to their doctrine. The implications of the use of a polygraph or lie detector by the Scientologists was not lost on Burroughs. The control that the church could wield over its subjects could be devastating. Burroughs says that he quit when he realized that the organization was a religion (Gay Sunshine Interviews 14).

10. There are formal parallels between "The Waste Land" and Burroughs's cut-up technique, but the similarities appear to run deeper than this. In her article "Eliot's Abjection" Maud Ellman suggests that Eliot's poem is "one of the most abject texts in English literature" (181).

11. Harris here cites a letter by Burroughs to Claude Perlieu, 4 May 1967, University of Kansas ("Cut-Up Closure" 256).

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