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An Examination of William S. Burroughs' Prose-Poetics, from *Naked Lunch* to the Cut-up Trilogy

Benjamin J. Heal[*]

ABSTRACT

Despite the predominance of poets, for example Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Diane di Prima, John Giorno and Bob Kaufman, among his Beat peers and friends, and frequent references to the influence of poetry on his work through references to the work of Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, Saint-Jean Perce and T.S. Eliot, William Burroughs' primary status as an iconoclast and writer of novels endures. This article considers the poetic features and experimentalism of his work through an examination of his more genre-defying publications, beginning with *Naked Lunch* (1959) and continuing through the Cut-up trilogy (1961-68). Specifically, it will explore the ways in which Burroughs' experiments employ radical prose-poetics to critique conventional forms. Burroughs' direct calls to action with texts such as *Minutes to Go* (1960) and *Electronic Revolution* (1970) can be seen to conflate radical poetic practice with political activism. Indeed, Burroughs' conclusion that "All writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words read heard overheard" (Burroughs and Gysin 32), points to a practical conflation of different forms, practices and genres that connect the page with words heard in real-time. The rhythm, cadence, and syntax of Burroughs' cut-up works demonstrate that they do not employ an entirely aleatory practice, but are carefully arranged, deliberately poetic compositions. This examination of Burroughs' poetic-prose and experimental practice aims to re-situate his works as examples of radical poetic practice rather than apolitical prose experiments.

KEYWORDS: prose-poetry, poetics, revolution, authorship theory, literary collage, Beat Generation

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Benjamin J. Heal, Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan (benheal@hotmail.com).

威廉・布洛斯散文詩學的探究：從《裸體午餐》到「剪貼三部曲」

賀小本*

摘　要

儘管威廉・布洛斯（William S. Burroughs）的同儕與友人中多為詩人，例如艾倫・金斯堡（Allen Ginsberg）、葛瑞格里・柯索（Gregory Corso）、黛安・迪・普里瑪（Diane di Prima）、約翰・喬諾（John Giorno）與鮑勃・考夫曼（Bob Kaufman），他也經常引用亞瑟・蘭波（Arthur Rimbaud）、夏爾・波特萊爾（Charles Baudelaire）、聖約翰・佩斯 (Saint-Jean Perce) 與 T. S. 艾略特（T. S. Eliot）等詩人的影響，然而布洛斯仍以反叛者與小說家的身分為世人所知。本文從他幾部更具跨類型特質的出版作品出發，探討其創作中的詩性元素與實驗精神，從《裸體午餐》（1959）延伸至「剪貼三部曲」（1961-68），特別關注布洛斯如何透過激進的散文詩學手法，挑戰並批判傳統文學形式。布洛斯在《Minutes to Go》（1960）與《Electronic Revolution》（1970）等文本中直接發出的行動呼籲，顯示他將激進的詩性實踐與政治行動主義結合。他在《The Third Mind》中提出的結論：「所有寫作其實都是剪貼。是閱讀、聽聞、偶然聽到的語詞拼貼」（Burroughs and Gysin 32），其更指出在實際操作中，他混合了不同形式、方法與文類，將書頁與即時聽到的語言連結起來。布洛斯的剪貼作品在節奏、韻律與語法上的安排皆表明其作品並非完全隨機的實驗，而是經過細緻編排、刻意呈現詩意的創作。本文旨在重新定位布洛斯的作品，將其視為激進詩性實踐的範例，而非僅僅是無涉政治的散文實驗。

關鍵詞：散文詩、詩學、革命、作者理論、文學拼貼、垮掉的一代

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賀小本，國立中正大學外國語文學系助理教授 (benheal@hotmail.com)。

When Burroughs was asked about the influences on his writing in a 1978 interview with Richard Goldstein, he made the following remarks:

> I'd say Rimbaud is one of my influences, even though I'm a novelist rather than a poet. I have also been very much influenced by Baudelaire, and St. John Perse, who in turn was very much influenced by Rimbaud. I have actually cut out pages of Rimbaud and used some of that in my work. Any of the poetic or image sections of my work would show his influence. (Lotringer 441)

There is a clear tension between his understated role as novelist and his list of poetic influences. Beat poet Allen Ginsberg states in a 1966 interview that "a page of his prose is as dense with imagery as anything in St. John Perse or Rimbaud, you could say that Burroughs is a poet too, really" (Interview with Thomas Clark 320). While Burroughs' obsession with image will be explored in this article, Beat scholar Oliver Harris has drawn attention to the critically neglected poetic aspect of Burroughs' work in his 2005 article "Burroughs is a poet too really: The Poetics of Minutes to Go," where cut-up poetry is contextualized as methodology, and parts of Burroughs' work defined as "poetic prose image writing" (31). This is not the first time Burroughs' work was considered in a poetic context, as Robin Lydenberg's 1978 article "Cut-up: Negative Poetics in William Burroughs and Roland Barthes" regards Burroughs' cut-up texts as enacting a negative poetic violence, filled with distrust of language, a destructive attempt to silence the controlling power of words (414).

Burroughs' interest in using poetry and poetics blended with prose and political satire can be traced to his first attempt at writing for publication, the pre-World War II 1938 collaboration with Kells Elvins, "Twilight's Last Gleamings." The title of this story comes from the "Star Spangled Banner," the US national anthem based on the 1814 Francis Scott Key poem "Defence of Fort M'Henry." The lyrics are interspersed throughout the text as an ironic juxtaposition, the anthem's defiant representation of violent warfare and political ideology of survival is set against the corrupt figures of authority presented in the story (Burroughs, *Interzone* 6-12). This nascent cut-up text sets the tone for Burroughs' experimentation with poetic voice, political polemic and satire that began with *Naked Lunch* (1959) and continued through the cut-

up texts and novels of the 1960s. With cut-ups emerging from the radical movements of earlier decades, such as Dada and Surrealism which arose in the disillusionment following the Great War, to Isidore Isou's 1940s Lettrist movement that saw the most basic unit of poetry as uninterpreted visual symbols and acoustic sounds (Home 13). The Beat writers' own disillusionment resulted in a particularly American sensibility of rebellion, even though this was very much influenced by European ideas and precursors.[1]

In the context of Burroughs' experimentalism of the 1950s and 60s, this article considers the poetics employed in his attempts to disrupt the distinctions between prose and poetry, in terms of his wider radical politics and aesthetics. It will do so by firstly setting out Burroughs' credentials as a poet, then exploring whether Burroughs' texts are really radical by considering whether they challenge traditional forms, then in the third section it will examine more closely Burroughs' political radicalism, before the fourth section considers the importance of performance, sound and noise on his prose-poetics.

I. "A Poet Too, Really"?

The fragmented narrative collage of *Naked Lunch* (1959) rejects conventional narrative form, containing no overarching plot or discernibly sustained genre or style. The Cut-up trilogy (and the other, shorter works published concurrently and collaboratively) take this style and experimental aesthetic further by utilizing the "cut-up" method, a literary technique that stems from artist Brion Gysin's 1959 rediscovery of Dadaist aleatory poetic parlour games, literally cutting pages from books and newspapers and rearranging the words and phrases into new (often poetic) compositions (Miles 362). By elevating the epistolary form in the production of Burroughs' style, Oliver Harris in his book *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination* (2003) understates the centrality of poetry, despite noting that "Ginsberg had already entered quite literally into a reciprocal economy that makes letters into poems and poems into letters" (57). In a 1960 letter to Ginsberg, Burroughs stresses the specifically poetic nature of his cut-up experiments, imploring Ginsberg to try it, stating that it produces "poetic prose image writing like Rimbaud, St. Perse and Your Correspondent" ("Typescript Letter: Burroughs to Ginsberg, September 5 1960"). By comparing directly the fourth section of

[1] See: Mackay and Weidner.

Perse's *Anabasis* (1924) with perhaps the most famous section of *Naked Lunch* one can see the similarities:

> Followers of obsolete unthinkable trades, doodling in Etruscan, addicts of drugs not yet synthesized, black marketeers of World War III, excisors of telepathic sensitivity, osteopaths of the spirit, investigators of infractions denounced by bland paranoid chess players, servers of fragmentary warrants taken down in hebephrenic shorthand charging unspeakable mutilations of the spirit, officials of unconstituted police states, brokers of exquisite dreams and nostalgias tested on the sensitized cells of junk sickness and bartered for raw materials of the will, drinkers of the Heavy Fluid sealed in translucent amber of dreams. (Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 148-49)

> Men, creatures of dust and folk of divers devices, people of business and of leisure, men from the marches and those from beyond, O men of little weight in the memory of these lands; people from the valleys and the uplands and the highest slopes of the world to the ultimate reach of our shores; Seers of signs and seeds, and confessors of the western winds, followers of trails and of seasons, breakers of camp in the little dawn wind, seekers of watercourses over the wrinkled rind of the world, O seekers, O finders of reasons to be up and be gone. (Perse, *Anabasis* 27-29)

Both sections employ a second-person, prose-poetic style, with no formal structure. They are image rich and possess an incantatory chant-like rhythm which gives them a magical or sermon-like religious quality. In the preface of *Anabasis*, T.S. Eliot (the text's translator) wrestles with the issue at hand: " . . . *Anabasis* is poetry. Its sequences, its logic of imagery, are those of poetry and not of prose . . . the system of stresses and pauses . . . is that of poetry and not prose" (11). He is unequivocal about it being poetry. It seems odd that he does not consider the third option, prose-poetry, a blend of the two forms.

Harris shows that Ginsberg's recognition of Burroughs' prose-poetic style is his way of linking it to his own and Jack Kerouac's formal experimentation. Indeed, Harris also leverages Ginsberg's declaration, that Burroughs is "a poet

too," to point out that Burroughs had already been producing prose-poetry, and that it is certainly present in the "Composite City" section of *The Yage Letters* (1963), which was originally part of a 1953 letter (Burroughs, *Letters 1945-59* 514-27). He states:

> A variation upon both the "Villes" of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (1886) and St. John Perse's *Anabasis* (1924), this phantasmagoria, which is motivated by the intense sensual derangement of yagé intoxication, is itself a composite text; for it not only reproduces the elliptical mosaics of imagery and long, densely rhythmic catalogues of Rimbaud and St. John Perse, but does so by recycling and transforming material that appeared earlier in Burroughs' own text. (Harris, "Burroughs" 32)

Despite the allusions to poetry, Harris does not refer to the "Composite City" as poetry or prose-poetry. Poetry is also omitted when Harris writes a list of genres that constitute *The Yage Letters* in his introduction to *The Yage Letters Redux* (2006), describing it as "a work of intriguing genre confusion, even its first part being a hybrid of the comic picaresque tradition, travel writing, the ethnobotanical field report, political satire, psychedelic literature, and epistolary narrative." (Burroughs and Ginsberg, *Yage Letters* xi). By noting the intriguing "genre confusion" Harris is close to acknowledging Burroughs' apparent intention, which is to blur and attack traditional notions of genre. But for Burroughs this is not a literary revolution akin to Walt Whitman's explicit free verse attack on form and content, but rather a more covert, in the shadows expose of the pervasive nature of literary traditions, even within the mid-twentieth-century avant-garde literary scene.

The first publication of material from *The Yage Letters* was in a Spring 1958 edition of the *Black Mountain Review*, a poetry magazine, with material collected by Ginsberg for its editor Robert Creeley.[2] The material used, a choice suggested by Kerouac, is the "Composite City" vision (taken from the July 10, 1953 letter), though presented as "from Naked Lunch, Book III: In Search of

[2] Creeley may well have had an interest in Burroughs' poetics, as he explores the differences between poetry and prose directly in his 1951 essay "Notes for a New Prose", while his review of *Naked Lunch* is glowingly titled "A New Testament". See: Creeley pp. 244-7 and pp. 465-70). Note: I will be using […] to denote omitted words in quotation to avoid confusion with the confusing number of standard ellipses in Burroughs' work.

Yage." The poetic passage would not appear in its original form until the 1975 edition of *The Yage Letters*, largely because it had already been added to the collage form of *Naked Lunch*.[3] It is a passage not just retrofitted for *Naked Lunch* but also *repeated* throughout the Cut-up trilogy, in addition to other key sections and phrases.[4]

While "Howl" has its own earlier history of radical dissent in the face of US conformity and censorship, with a trial in 1957 deciding that the poem had redeeming social importance.[5] In the shadow of that trial, poetry itself was used as a defence in the 1965 Boston obscenity trial of *Naked Lunch*, as Timothy Murphy points out, "Ginsberg was not wrong when he claimed, on the witness stand in the Boston obscenity trial of *Naked Lunch*, that "there is a great deal of very pure language and pure poetry in this book that is as great as any poetry being written in America" ("Intersection Points" 96). The book was initially deemed obscene, marking its status as more radical than "Howl", although the ban was rescinded on appeal in 1967.[6] It remains unclear precisely what Ginsberg means by "pure" language and poetry, except to contrast with the clearly obscene passages, but by doing so he implies that the text is difficult to define, and is resistant to generalizing labels. In this same context of the difficulty of defining text and genres, poet Charles Bernstein usefully defines poetry as "writing specifically designed to absorb, or inflate with, proactive–rather than reactive–styles of reading" (9). This defines the type of writing Burroughs presents in *Naked Lunch* (1959) and the later cut-up texts, in that it is demanding of the reader, it "inflates with" in the sense that the reader is confronted with challenging text that utilizes an array of genre conventions and literary techniques which need to be deciphered, and in the case of the cut-ups the reader is encouraged to *practice* the techniques employed by the text.

Although verse novels exist and are classified as such, such as Vladimir Nabakov's *Pale Fire* (1962), Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986), and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), *Naked Lunch* and the Cut-up trilogy include prose narrative and poetic sections, yet remain defined as novels. Russian formalist theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's attempts, in the 1930s, to conceptualise and define the novel as distinct from the dialogic and heteroglot limitations of

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[3] For comparison see: Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text* p.46 and 91, and Burroughs and Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters Redux* p.52.
[4] Oliver Harris explores these repetitions in his 2006 essay, "Not Burroughs' Final Fix".
[5] See: Morgan and Peters, editors.
[6] See: Goodman; and Birmingham "The Boston Trial of Naked Lunch."

poetry describe a form with the necessary generic fluidity to incorporate innovative poetic language as part of its "spirit of becoming and unfinalizability" (*Dialogic Imagination* 7).[7] In his apparently narrow conceptualisation, poetry emerged as a more single-voiced, monologic form, with the poet, "utterly immersed in [his own language] as a pure and direct expression of his own intention" (285). Indeed, Bakhtin's conception of heteroglossia in the novel, as instances that reveal the differences in "social dialects" present in the modern novel such as the blending and parodying of genres, and the incorporation of poetic forms, can be seen in the content of *Naked Lunch* and the Cut-up trilogy. For example, *Naked Lunch*, begins with a parody of the hard-boiled detective genre, "I can feel the heat closing in" (Burroughs 3), yet the "Do You Love Me?" section of *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962) intersperses and cuts between numerous lyrics taken verbatim from popular love songs, again blurring the genres with experiments in poetic form (*Ticket that Exploded* 48-55).

Would it therefore be more precise to describe Burroughs' texts as examples of "prose-poetry"? In an interview with Philippe Mikriammos, Burroughs responds to a question about poetry stating:

> […] as soon as you get away from actual poetic forms, rhyme, meter, etc., there is no line between prose and poetry. […] I can take a page of descriptive prose and break it into lines, as I've done in *Exterminator!*, and then you've got a poem. Call it a poem. (Mikriammos 16)

Contrary to Burroughs' thinking, poetry and prose are often seen as polar opposites, as Stephen Fredman notes, with "poetry as succinct, essential, transcendent; we think of prose as prolix, descriptive, mundane," but in actuality the two are often closer than assumed (2). Andrew Bennett argues that this fits, "a 'both/and', rather than an 'either/or' logic system" (32). Can the Western "either/or" logic system really be the reason Burroughs' texts are not considered prose-poetry? Through his study of Count Alfred Korzybski's theories of non-Aristotelean logic in the 1940s, Burroughs was acutely aware of this problem, as he states in *The Job* (1989): "The whole concept of EITHER/OR. Right or wrong, physical or mental, true or false, the whole

[7] This understanding of Bakhtin's view of poetry has been disputed, see: Eskin.

concept of OR will be deleted from the language and replaced by juxtaposition, by and" (Burroughs and Odier, *Job* 200). In terms of its particular literary tropes, Fredman argues that prose-poetry texts:

> […] evidence a fascination with language (through puns, rhyme, repetition, elision, disjunction, excessive troping, and subtle foregrounding of diction) that interferes with the progression of story or idea, while at the same time inviting and examining the "prose" realms of fact and anecdote […]. (1)

This reflects the definition of the "prose poem" as conceived by Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé, which is given a special status because it can escape its generic construction. Baudelaire's definition of the prose-poem asks:

> Which one of us, in his moments of ambition, has not dreamed of the miracle of poetic prose, musical, without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience. (Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen* ix-x)

While it is unclear how prose can be musical and lyrical without rhythm or rhyme (Burroughs' aforementioned cut-up of lyrics suggests a way), Baudelaire is clear about his desire to break down the distinction between prose and poetry.

The lyrical dissent that informed Baudelaire's prose-poetry of *Paris Spleen* (1869), in a form described by Marguerite S. Murphy as a "tradition of subversion," was an early influence on Burroughs. An autobiographical fragment about his youth in Burroughs' essay collection *The Adding Machine* (1985) notes his interest in precisely this text: "What I liked to do was get in my room against the radiator and play records and read the Little Blue Books put out by Haldeman-Julius, free-thinker and benevolent agnostic . . . Remy de Gourmont . . . Baudelaire . . ." (Burroughs, *Adding Machine* 493). The Baudelaire book is the "Little Blue Book number 237," *Poems in Prose*, also known as "Paris Spleen" as it contains a selection of English translations of poems from Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris* (confusingly, also known as Petits poèmes en prose) (Krueger 296). Although this somewhat contradicts

Véronique Lane's assertion that "Burroughs never specifically refers to *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire's most vitriolic—and so most Burroughsian—collection of poems" (222), the association of Burroughs' work with Baudelaire's prose-poetic style is apposite. Burroughs' earliest remembered reading therefore demonstrates his knowledge of the problematic relationship between poetry and prose.

Later, it is in his relationship with Ginsberg and Kerouac that the boundaries between poetry and prose begin to be questioned more directly, and it is in the Beat context that it is possible to see Burroughs' work as more radically engaged with conceptions of prose and poetry. Kerouac had already begun, as Regina Weinreich puts it, to "debunk the norm for prose in the act of writing it," in part by defining his method in 1959 with "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose" (2). This was the same year *Naked Lunch* was published in Paris, and it is a curious book—not just because of its genre blurring content, but because it was edited into being by Kerouac, Ginsberg, the poets Alan Ansen and Sinclair Beiles, and the artist Brion Gysin (Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 237-40). It is ostensibly a love-letter to Ginsberg and an attempt at a collaboration, as Burroughs states in a 1954 letter to Ginsberg shortly after his romantic advances were rejected: "Let's get on with this novel. Maybe the real novel is letters to you" (*Letters to Allen Ginsberg* 302). This advances the argument that the work is in some sense a novel, but also that is incorporates poetic writing aimed at (and potentially by) an established poet. In a note in his own introduction to Burroughs' *Letters to Allen Ginsberg*, acknowledging the great poetry of Burroughs' writing, Ginsberg equates Burroughs' letters to "Shakespeare's sonnet sequence to his boyfriend Mr W. H" (8).

II. Burroughs Radical Poetics: A Subversion of Form and Genre

Burroughs's predilection for collaboration and use of cut-up randomization and plagiarism techniques all constitute serious attacks on traditional conceptualizations of writing practice.[8] Burroughs' radical approach certainly appears to push for revolution, in the sense of producing profound changes in politics, literary and social conventions. The violently fragmented cut-up texts bring to mind Theodor Adorno's provocative statement that "[T]o

[8] I have examined this issue through considering "Burroughs-as-author" as a function of discourse, pointing to his interrogation of categories of authorship. See: Heal.

write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (202), interpreted by Antony Rowland as the description of a, "new form of poetry which is stylistically […] awkward. The language is necessarily unstable because it engages with the embarrassing struggle […] to forge a language adequate to represent the horror of the holocaust" (58). Adorno's statement is apt with regard to Burroughs' political satires such as "Roosevelt After Inauguration," and the structurally "barbaric" collage and cut-up texts that attack the conventions of prose narrative and authorship by attacking the unstable foundations of language. For Adorno, post-war art could no longer be seen as "purely aesthetic and apolitical," and needed to assert its autonomy to survive: "This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead" (202). This consideration of "autonomous" art suggests political aspects of Western modernist, abstract avant-garde works in the 1950s and 60s became less overt, with increasing experimentation with formal and stylistic elements in works that eschew simple interpretation, with ideas hidden within or embodied by the formal experimentation itself. Roland Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) makes a similar distinction in his response to Jean-Paul Sartre's contention that the socially realist form of committed prose writing is committed precisely because it utilizes conventional literary tropes that are bonded to a "pre-ordained state of language" (79). For Barthes, there is no such state, arguing instead that "colorless" writing [*écriture blanche*], in the context of experimental writing more generally, can be more politically engaged than the didactic or realist prose styles Sartre champions, precisely because of the challenging stylistic choices made (82).

The cut-up texts reveal an attempt to subvert constructions of the literary "work" as Foucault defines it in his 1969 lecture "What is an Author?", "as a complex and variable function of discourse" (118). Foucault posits the author and work as a function of discourse, parts of a much wider body of socially constructing texts and utterances. Kristeva further explores the structure of such discourses, defining them in psychoanalytic terms:

> If there exists a "discourse" that is […] the essential element of a practice involving the sum of unconscious, subjective, and social relations in gestures of confrontation and appropriation, destruction and construction—productive violence, in short—it is "literature," or, more specifically, the text. (30)

Central to her perspective is the relation between reader and writer, and what she terms "a particular type of modern literature," citing as examples works by Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Joyce and Artaud, that highlight a "'crisis' of structuralist criticism and their ideological, coercive and necrophilic manifestations" (15). The work of these writers can also be regarded as part of Burroughs' poetic genealogy, from the prose-poetry and violent surrealism of *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869) to the formal complexity of Mallarmé and Joyce, and Artaud's radical sound-poetry.[9] The cut-up technique can be seen as an example of what Kristeva calls "productive violence," which links the discussion of art and poetic language in directions which converge with Burroughs' experiments in form and genre. Via their plagiaristic theft of other writers' words, cut-up texts invoke questions of "intertextuality," a term first coined by Kristeva and defined as the "transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another" (59-60). This is broader than Roland Barthes' later assertion of intertext as "citations, references, echoes, cultural languages . . . in a vast stereophony" (160). The definition of Kristeva's intertextuality as "transposition," a movement between points, can be applied to Burroughs' assertion in *Naked Lunch* that "this book spill off the page in all directions" (191), through to the physical act of cutting text, the later spoken word recordings and performances of his text, and ultimately his attempts to distort definitions of poetry and prose.

The frequent use of the em dash and ellipses by Burroughs act as violent cuts in the flow of the text, and recall a poetic technique of Paul Celan, which signify the breath and draws attention to temporality, an aspect of the rhythmic quality of the text, as noted by Nowell Smith:

> It is this experience of lyric time that demands a turning of our breath—a turn, moreover, registered physically, and prosodically, as *Atempause*, 'breathpause' (or, in Waldrop's translation, "pause for breath," 48), cutting into silence, cutting silence". (97)

Echoing Ginsberg's experiments with the 'breath-unit' and what Tony Trigilio calls his "mantric poetics," Burroughs' use of breath is a physical response, off the page, signified by both ellipsis and em dash on the page in his work, a visible

[9] I use "genealogy" here with reference to Véronique Lane's study *The French Genealogy of The Beat Generation* (42).

pause often interpreted as silence or simply ignored in reading (189). Yet these pauses are central to the rhythmic quality of the texts, as can be seen in the cut-up "Mao Tze: Ta Ta Kan Kan . . . . Kan Kan Ta Ta . . . (fight fight talk talk . . . talk talk fight fight)". From the ninth line the text features ellipsis and repetition, which give the text a rhythmic sound quality that can be overlooked when simply scanning the page:

> Dim vest of….terminal electric voice of C…. All Ling out of agitated….terminal electric voice of C…all ling out of agitated…terminal electric voice of C….all ling out of Agitated…terminal electric voice of C…… (Beiles et al. 20)

The text is presented as a cut-up of a Sinclair Beiles poem "Stalin". A close reading can offer multiple interpretations, for example, the "Dim vest" can be seen as both the standardization inherent in communism and the suicide vest of resistance, the terminal electric voice the robotic communication of drone-like communists or the coded messages of resistance. The "C," literally floating before an ellipsis, can be the "C" of communism, capitalism or cocaine, the latter of which *is* referred to as "C" in Burroughs' first novel *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* (1953). It can also be the noun "sea" or the verb to "see". The "C" can be stretched across the ellipsis of breath, an imagined border, to a revolutionary "Calling out of agitated," a call for agitation or a calling out of those who are agitating.

As with much of Burroughs' work the political lines are blurred, yet the power of the work as a site of resistance seems clear, as the text increasingly tries to "spill off the page" (191). Burroughs' poetic voice expresses what Nowell Smith sees as the most important element of the *politics* of voice: "the way its rhetorics and prosody work the relations between body and speech, physical and political voice, destabilising these categories and staging their destabilisation; this is not easily reducible to any overt political 'content'" (119). The performative use of voice would become increasingly important in the cut-up texts, as Burroughs continues to use poetic techniques and voice to take text, and his revolutionary politics, off the page. The prosodic power of Burroughs' poetics apparent to Joan Didion without recourse to spoken word recordings, as she notes, "[His is] a voice in which one hears transistor radios and old movies and all the clichés and all the cons and all the newspapers, all

the peculiar optimism, all the failure […] Burroughs is less a writer than a 'sound'" (30). Here she underlines the radical political impetus of this contextualized, ironized sound. Indeed, in the unpunctuated 1966 essay "The Invisible Generation," Burroughs notes the importance of sound, stating what "we see is determined to a large extent by what we hear" (6).

Kristeva argues that poetic language foregrounds the "inability of any logical system based on a zero-one sequence (true-false, nothingness-notation)" (70). The thesis is that art expresses the inexpressible, and that poetic language in particular subverts culture (i.e. is revolutionary) because it allows instinct (in psychoanalytic terms) to break down the logic structure of language itself (Bedient 807). Burroughs takes a similar standpoint in discussing the cut-up technique: "Art is making you aware of what you know and don't know you know. That is, the actual facts of perception" (Kramer 96). Kristeva's focus is on the semiotic aspects of poetic language—the tone, gesture or rhythm of the words, rather than their overt, symbolic meaning—which readers are encouraged to uncover for themselves. The semiotics of poetry, then, correspond to poetry's non-explicit expression of meaning, the non-linguistic expressions of meaning that stem from not what they say, but how they say it. This is the importance of the poetic sections of Burroughs' work, that they pull the reader off the page, out of the plot, character, story and into real-world consideration of the operation of language itself. Intertextuality (and Burroughs' work of this period) can therefore be seen as the poetic language Kristeva is describing, a language of otherness that is a total rejection of (mono)logic, either/or thinking, which has the potential to be socially revolutionary.

Naked Lunch, with its particularly incongruous and metaphorical title, uses its revolutionary poetic images, intertextual and cross-genre references, alliteration and rhythms liberally. "The Rube" section contains the following text: "Chicago: invisible hierarchy of decorticated wops, smell of atrophied gangsters, earthbound ghost hits you at North and Halsted, Cicero, Lincoln Park, panhandler of dreams, past invading the present, rancid magic of slot machines and roadhouses" (Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 11). Short and often surreal phrases and images appear throughout the text, breaking any semblance of purely prose narrative. When there is a section of narrative, as in the "Hauser and O'Brien" and "The Examination" sections: "A moment of static, dangling wires, broken connections . . . 'Nobody of that name in this department . . . Who

are you?'" (181). This subtle juxtaposition between the realist narrative of the junky protagonist William Lee having his identity questioned while attempting to ascertain the veracity of the events described earlier and the staccato poetry of the line, "A moment of static, dangling wires, broken connections," demonstrates Burroughs's stylistic shift in clear terms; poetry is invading the novel, and the shift from the sociologically clinical, semi-autobiographical realism of *Junkie* to overt experimentation with poetics is almost complete.

The poetic influence of Arthur Rimbaud also becomes overt in *Naked Lunch*, with echoes of Ginsberg's "Howl". Rimbaud's poem, "The Drunken Boat" serves as a template for sections of the "Atrophied Preface":

> Now I, William Seward, will unlock my word hoard . . . My Viking heart fares over the great brown river where motors put put in jungle twilight and whole trees float with huge snakes in the branches. (Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 192)

Compare with this section from "The Drunken Boat":

> Now I, a boat lost in the hair of bays,
> Hurled by the hurricane through bird-less ether,
> I, whose carcass, sodden with salt-sea water,
> No Monitor or Hanseatic vessel could recover: (Rimbaud 67)

Rimbaud's prose-poem experiments with rhythm in *Illuminations*, a book noted by Barry Miles as one of Burroughs' favorites, bear a close resemblance to sections of *Naked Lunch*, a text that although not cut-up *per se*, is still a collage of parodies, pastiche, styles, references and allusions (Miles 571).

III. Poetry and Politics

Burroughs' prose-poetic experimentation would reach its most politically radical peak with the cut-up project, which was from the outset a poetic movement (like its precursor Surrealism), a point made explicit in the final line of *Minutes to Go* (1960), where the disillusioned Gregory Corso defines it as "uninspired machine *poetry*" (Beiles et al. 63; emphasis added). Notably, Burroughs refers to the cut-up method as "Newspeak poetry" in a 1959 letter to

Allen Ginsberg, a reference to George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949) which makes abundantly clear the simultaneously political emphasis of the cut-up project "Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg, December 2, 1959" (Paul Carroll Papers, Box 2, University of Chicago).

The first page of cut-up novel *Nova Express* (1964) begins with a prose-poetry experiment in counter-discourse:

> Listen to my last words anywhere. Listen to my last words any world. Listen all you boards syndicates and governments of the earth. And you powers behind what filth deals consummated in what lavatory to take what is not yours. To sell the ground from unborn feet forever—
> "Don't let them see us. Don't tell them what we are doing—"
> Are these the words of the all-powerful boards and syndicates of the earth?
> "For God's sake don't let that Coca-Cola thing out—"
> "Not The Cancer Deal with The Venusians—"
> "Not The Green Deal—Don't show them that—"
> "Not The Orgasm Death—"
> "Not the ovens—"
> Listen: I call you all. Show your cards all players. Pay it all pay it all pay it all back. Play it all play it all play it all back. For all to see. In Times Square. In Piccadilly. […]
> (Burroughs, *Nova Express* 80.0/433)

The demand for the reader to "listen to my last words" exposes the structure of the text, while suggesting the impossibility of resistance to the 'all-powerful' dominant forces. The syntax is both rhythmic and resistant to standard poetic form, where for example, the section "pay it all pay it all pay it all back" acts as an anaphoric curse or howl in the mode of Ginsberg that ruptures the text. This Whitmanesque use of anaphora with the repetitive, rhythmic use of the words "listen" (4 times), "not" (4 times) and "all" (9 times), gives the text the feeling of an incantation or sermon, as in a piece of coercive or rhetorically powerful writing designed to be read out loud. Its second-person perspective also gives it a speech-like character. Indeed, it was initially rehearsed in a slightly different form on a recording made earlier than the 1964 publication

(Burroughs 1981). The importance of sound and intonation can be heard on the recording, whereby Burroughs shifts from flat deadpan delivery for the direct address to a parodic higher pitch for the voices of the "boards and syndicates" (Burroughs, *Nova Express* 433). The recording demonstrates that the piece, reminiscent of a hypnosis script, was rehearsed out-loud for its phonetic qualities. Indeed, Burroughs was aware of the power of hypnosis, and that the Church of Scientology had been accused of using it (Miles, *Call* 1079).

The importance of utterance, and intonation, is a focus of Valentin Voloshinov's work. Intonation "lies on the boundary between the verbal and the non-verbal, the spoken and the unspoken" (69) and, crucially, has a "dual social orientation" (72), towards the listener. The listener relates to the speaker as a member of a social class, through a matrix of unspoken social evaluations. It is this aspect of Burroughs' poetics, the concern for the intonation of each line, that demonstrated to the reader that they are part of the architectonic structure of the text—and the more semantically abstract cut-ups, and overtly rhythmic, poetic sections further expose the reader-author structure.

Burroughs' cut-up texts are political in that they can be seen as attempts to expose what he terms the "reality film," in sense of the constructed, authorised version of reality as reinforced by those mysterious figures he imagines are in control, as he states in *The Ticket that Exploded*:

> The reality film has now become an instrument and weapon of monopoly. The full weight of the film is directed against anyone who calls the film in question with particular attention to writers and artists. Work for the reality studio or else. (171-72)

Indeed, when Burroughs uses the reality film structural metaphor he insists on the physicality of discourse, its ability to manifest and change real situations, and on the possibility of resistance by using cut-up techniques. The call to destroy the reality film that echoes through the cut-up texts points to the fact that this is not a reference to an imagined, singular propaganda film shown to audiences to ideologically control them. As Daniel Punday states, "the film is reality itself, and there is no audience outside of it. We do not watch the reality film; we are part of it" (40). To try to break through this layer of false reality, Burroughs resorts not to subtlety, familiar forms and genres, or direct, didactic philosophising, but rather a prose-poetic mix, or "shuffle cut" that has at its

centre a need to connect with the reader, for the words to have power, meaning and above all, be memorable (*The Ticket That Exploded* 172). Psychological studies have found that poetry is more memorable than prose, due to temporal organization and rhythmic structure (Tillmann and Dowling).

In underlining the existence of many voices, and therefore genres, in *Nova Express*, Harris reinforces its poetic qualities by identifying "the convulsive beauty of a surrealist poet" (x). In highlighting this heteroglot, intertextual nature of the text, Harris also alludes to Bakhtin's insistence on the importance of the "architectonic form" of the text, that is as what he terms "a focused and indispensable non-arbitrary distribution and linkage of concrete, singular parts and aspects into a finished whole" (Morson and Emerson 139). It is fascinating to see that in Burroughs' textual heteroglossia there is an interplay between both the architectonic (understandable, "concrete" narrative and dialogue that gives the whole its structure) and the more prosaic, sections of abstract image poetry. Seeing the text from this perspective one can begin to see the radical potential of its poetics at work; the poetics and politics are both hidden in plain sight; *Nova Express* is not a novel nor a work of poetry, rather it fits ambivalently in-between, with its many voices subverting any attempts to fix its genre in traditional forms, with even the basic structure subject to cutting and montage. Michael Sean Bolton has rightly alluded to this as a deconstruction of material context in terms of narrative and critical theory, albeit without a close examination of the formal conceits of Burroughs' text (53-54).

Naked Lunch can therefore be seen to have inaugurated a new type of composite, poetic-prose text. It is propelled with an unconstrained musicality that bears comparison with that other key Beat text of jazz inspired poetry, Ginsberg's "Howl". A major source of poetic-prose references in *Naked Lunch* is the chapter "Atrophied Preface: Wouldn't You?" In Howard Brookner's film *Burroughs: The Movie*, Ginsberg mentions the poetic nature of the *Naked Lunch* section that includes the refrain, "Motel . . . Motel . . . Motel . . . ":

> Over the broken chair and out through the tool-house window whitewash whipping in a cold spring wind on a limestone cliff over the river . . . piece of moon smoke hangs in china blue sky . . . out on a long line of jissom across the dusty floor . . .
> Motel . . . Motel . . . Motel . . . broken neon arabesque . . . loneliness

> moans across the continent like fog horns over still oily
> water of tidal rivers . . .
> Ball squeezed dry lemon rinderpest rims the ass with a knife
> cut off a piece of hash for the water pipe-bubble bubble-indicate
> what used to be me . . . (188)

By comparing this directly with sections of "Howl," the similarities become apparent and it becomes clear why Ginsberg found it so memorable. The "Motel" refrain immediately recalls the "Moloch" anaphora, while the long line cadences are strikingly similar:

> with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and
> cock and endless balls,
> incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in
> the mind leaping towards poles of Canada & Paterson,
> illuminating all the motionless world of Time between,
> Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns,
> wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of
> teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree
> vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan
> rantings and kind king light of mind (Ginsberg 10)

The imagery has much in common; the moon appears in both pieces, as do drugs and genitalia, and the "neon arabesques" of Burroughs's piece echo Ginsberg's "neon blinking traffic light". It is as though Burroughs is constructing a pastiche of "Howl," while stressing his own sense of isolation at that point in his life. Timothy Murphy notes that these poetic sections act to glue disparate sections together, and are more "poetic or even musical than novelistic in that they operate through evocative, impressionistic, or imagistic intensity rather than logical or causal extension" ("Intersection Points" 193). This approach is problematic in that there is a tendency to dismiss such sections as musical interludes between the main events (as Murphy does), rather than see them as centrally important ruptures in the text, examples of the subversion of literary convention.

Marking the centrality of poetry during this period of Burroughs' writing, the first explicitly cut-up publication, *Minutes to Go*, is a specifically *poetic*

collaboration between Burroughs, the artist Gysin, and two poets; Sinclair Beiles and Corso. It does not contain a co-signed manifesto or statement of intent, although that has not stopped many critics from reading the first cut-up, Gysin's "Minutes to Go" as a manifesto of sorts (Beiles et al. 3-5). This opening section is, ironically, not a cut-up *per se*, as despite being written in stanzas it reads as perfectly understandable linear prose. Gysin notes the debt the method owes to Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara, whose 1920's "Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love" provides instructions on how to make a poem by randomly picking newspaper clippings from a hat (4).

The first contribution by Burroughs to appear in *Minutes to Go*, "Open Letter to Life Magazine," stands in stark contrast to the formulaic journalism of its namesake (Beiles 9-10). The poem's fragmented syntax and rhythmic patterns create a sense of expressive wholeness, separating it from prose. Burroughs's other cut-ups in the collection are visually striking, often presented in stanzas with fragmented syntax and rhythmic patterns. There are two cut-ups of Rimbaud, underlining the essentially poetic focus of the method, but moreover the cut-up project further radicalizes his poetic and political project, which is presented by a band around the outside of early editions was "*un règlement de comptes avec la Littérature*" [a settling of scores with literature] (Beiles xxii).[10] Furthermore, "Open Letter to Life Magazine", has a title that references the freedom of the letter form that Burroughs used in constructing *The Yage Letters* and elements of *Naked Lunch*, giving a sense of freedom from its "open" designation, while the reference to and contrast with *Life Magazine*, with its focus on formulaic non-fiction journalism, stands in clear juxtaposition with the poetic phantasmagoria presented by this first cut-up. The poetics are foregrounded by the lack of any identifiable narrative voice. Rather it is marked by a sense of rhythm that can be better seen if restructured into units as follows:

> Sickle moon terror nails replica in tin ginsberg
> Replicas of squaresville –
> grey piebald pigeons
> pointedly questioned, mimic each other (Beiles et al. 11)

[10] For more on this, and the text's history and importance see Harris' introduction to: Beiles, *Minutes to Go Redux*.

While it is difficult to know the precise semantic stress intended for each syllable, a cursory analysis gives the following: The first line uses two anapaests, a tribrach and two spondees, the second line has a tribrach followed by a molossus. The third line has a dactyl followed by an iamb. The final line uses a tribrach, a trochee, an anapest and an iamb. All of which appears random, but the overall arrangement of broken syntax punctuated by em dashes, and the use of repetition (replica/replicas, and the repeated anapests) gives each unit of rhythm a sense of expressive wholeness, which separates it from prose writing; these lines look and sound like poetry. It also works in terms of poetic imagery; a Gothic vision of "tin ginsberg[s]," robotic squares lined up like pigeons, mimicking each other. This is the vision of America the Beat writers were rebelling against—perhaps unsurprising given this is a cut-up of Paul O'Neil's 1959 *Life Magazine* article attacking the Beats—but its metaphorical and poetic quality does not point to random assembly or prose writing. In this first publication after *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs is clearly experimenting with poetry.

The recording of "Thing Police Keep All Boardroom Reports" on the 1965 album *Call Me Burroughs* captures Burroughs' carefully intonated reading style. The text, taken from the last page of *The Soft Machine*, demonstrates Burroughs' surrealist poetic style, replete with Emily Dickinson-style dashes and complex meter:

> Think Police keep all Board Room Reports—And we are not allowed to proffer The Disaster Accounts—Wind hand caught in the door—Explosive Bio-Advance Men out of space to employ Electrician in gasoline crack of history—Last of the gallant heroes—"I'm you on tracks, Mr. Bradly Mr. Martin"—Couldn't reach flesh in his switch—And zero time to the sick tracks—A long time between suns I held the stale overcoat—Sliding between light and shadow— (*Soft Machine* 182)

In addition to evoking *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* via the "think police," itself subject to a confusing slant rhyme that conflates the Orwellian "Think Police" of the text with the more alienesque science-fiction of the "Thing Police" of the title, the dashes, in evoking the temporal falling away in Emily Dickinson's poetry, also denote the cuts, where a word or phrase has been reassembled into a new composition. On the recording they seem to be simple parenthetical

pauses, however, in the context of a novel they are a strange addition, and the reader is faced with a challenge in interpreting their meaning. Their indeterminacy reflects the deliberate openness of the text's meaning, and hence the difficulty in defining its genre.

IV. Control and Disruption: The Impact of Sound and Noise

Burroughs interest in using repetition and prosody may be explained by the fact that he was searching, as with his search for the "telepathic" mind-control drug "yagé" in *The Yage Letters*, for a (hypnotic) means to alter or otherwise control his audience, specifically by utilizing the more memorable form of poetry in his texts.[11] In *Naked Lunch* the narrator describes Benway's voice in hypnotic terms: "Benway's voice drifts into my consciousness from no particular place . . . a disembodied voice that is sometimes loud and clear, sometimes barely audible, like music down a windy street" (Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 25). Edward D. Snyder's 1930 study *Hypnotic Poetry*, although very outdated, examines the possibility that some poems have a trance inducing effect:

> Would not Poe, were he living today, recognize that the "rhythmical creation of beauty" by which the poet approaches "supernal beauty" is sometimes, in reality, the skillful combination of rhythms and other psychological stimuli which produce the state of light trance so often experienced by the patient in the hypnotic clinic and by the religious mystic in his solitary chamber? (15)

Snyder's hypothesis also makes a key point about performance, in that to produce these effects poetry needs to be read aloud. Recalling the need for the text to be taken beyond textuality in Kristeva's formulation of the inter-textual, this is another central aspect of Burroughs' cut-up poetic practice that included transmedial forays into film, tape recordings and live performance.

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[11] There are several studies that explore the poetics of hypnosis, for example see: MacMillan. Burroughs mentions the telepathic quality of the drug in an April 22, 1953 letter to Allen Ginsberg: *Letters of William S. Burroughs* (60).

In 1962, he appeared at a cut-up performance event called "La Bohème" in Paris, which Gysin describes: "In La Bohème we had some very strange things that we did along that line: reading poems off shuffled cards along with tapes running and stuff like that" (Miles 406). In 1972 French Sound poet Henri Chopin released a cut-up recording, via his *OU* magazine, of Burroughs' 14th and 15th February 1965 reading at the East End Theatre in New York, as presented by "The American Theatre for Poets, Inc."[12] Clearly Chopin and The American Theatre for Poets, Inc. considered Burroughs' work at that time poetry. Burroughs must also have felt this a good outlet for his work, as the element of performance would come back to his work in the late 1970s with many more public readings. In a 1964 interview with Eric Mottram, himself editor of UK journal *The Poetry Review*, Burroughs states that the cut-up method involves careful construction in *musical* terms, "This method, of course, is used in music where we are moved continually backwards and forwards on the time track by repetition and rearrangements […] what does a writer do but choose, edit and rearrange materials at his disposal" (58). This consideration demonstrates the prosodic qualities considered in Burroughs's construction of his poetic compositions, and recalling the opening section of *Nova Express* in addition to the wider transmedial cut-up experiments, it is evident that they were intended to be *heard*.

This consideration of the relation between transmission and reception in sonic terms recalls Kristeva's revolutionary, transpositional/intertextual poetics. Bernstein notes that nineteenth-century poems (such as the modernist texts to which Kristeva refers) often address a lover, the gods or the poet her/himself which produces an effect of deflection in the reader—of overhearing rather than direct address; an "absorption" which can be countered by direct address (32). This mode is central to so much of Burroughs' work, from the unsubtle "Gentle reader, we see God through our assholes in the flash bulb of orgasm" (*Naked Lunch* 191) to the speech-like opening of *Nova Express*: "Listen to my last words anywhere" (1).

Electronic Revolution (1971), one of Burroughs' most didactic and political texts, contains visual cues embedded in the text, which is a revolutionary call to use tape recorders to resist "establishment mass media" (14). Firstly, the theories expounded include Burroughs' postulation that the written word is a virus, and in his concept of an electronic revolution a virus is

[12] See: Birmingham "Valentine's Day Reading."

"a very small unit of word and image" (*Job* 14). Burroughs' word viruses are defined as tape recordings of speech and sound, cut and spliced to create dramatic effects, much like his own cut-up tape experiments. Therefore, Burroughs' understanding of word virus is as transmedial poetry, sound poetry designed to achieve practical, revolutionary political effects. An example of this occurs via a subliminal poem spliced into the more didactic text of *Electronic Revolution*. Words written in capitals become signs that symbolise a viral infection of the prose text, and if taken out of the body of text it becomes a politically powerful poem:

> MY GOD THEY'RE KILLING US
> BLOODY WEDNESDAY A DAZED AMERICA COUNTED 23
> DEAD AND 32 WOUNDED, 6 CRITICALLY.
> LET'S GET OURSELVES SOME CIVVIES
> "HERE ME IS"
> "THE SIXTH WILL PROBABLY BLOW YOUR HEAD OFF"
> THIS IS IT
> TO SURVIVE
> END OF THE WAR GAME (*Job* 174-203)

There are clear poetic effects such as the enjambment between the second and third lines, which adds emphasis to the word "DEAD" and, along with the syllabic similarity of the final lines, is evidence that this was intended as a hidden poem. One can read the poem as a reflection on the figurative existence of the revolutionary writer, who is "WOUNDED […] CRITICALLY" by critics and reviewers and the need for camouflage (CIVVIES) to survive the "WAR GAME," likely referencing Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of the language game, which Burroughs references in *Naked Lunch*, a point noted by R.G. Peterson in his article "A Picture Is a Fact: Wittgenstein and The Naked Lunch." The text describes using recordings to create specific subliminal effects, and the embedding of this poem is an attempt to create a subliminal effect within the text itself.

The juxtaposition of capitalized and non-capitalized words in the text has the effect of creating a dissonance, where each text distorts the other. Another example of textual noise employed by Burroughs is his aforementioned disruptive use of ellipses and dashes. Such forms of textual violence create a

cognitive disruption and dissonance which can be seen as a form of "noise," which as Jacques Attali states, functions, "as a force of interruption, one that announces, through its unmistakable agitation, a violence that always takes aim at the social order. In response […] systems of law and control are at pains to monitor, capture and manipulate the intrusiveness of noise" (68). As Timothy Murphy similarly points out, "Cut-ups were a form of practical demystification and subversion that could uncover the ideology at work in the political lines of the media." ("Exposing" 39). In Murphy's sense defining Burroughs' use of poetic elements embedded in prose, in *Electronic Revolution,* as "cut-up" is too broad and vague and *random* for what Burroughs is attempting. Rather he is attempting a radical and covert counter-discourse, a "counterrecording" as he writes in "The Invisible Generation," in order to expose the Reality Film, and in effect find new recruits for his revolution.

V. Conclusion

Poetry is frequently present in Burroughs' writing style, while poets and poetry inform his radical politics. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" appears prominently in *Naked Lunch*, with Burroughs' narrator making clear that he is speaking about "Coleridge *the poet*" and later presenting a political reading of the power relation between the Mariner and the Wedding Guest that mirrors the relation between writer and reader, a relation that Burroughs wished to explore and exploit politically (72-73; emphasis added). The political drive of the poets Burroughs references; Coleridge's dissenting politics, Rimbaud's "derangement of the senses," the noble diplomacy of Perse, and Baudelaire's prose-poetry and interest in revolution, all intersect in Burroughs' work. His textual poetics fulfil the post-World War II imperatives Bernstein presents as a response to Adorno's statement of such poetry's necessary "barbarity; it must attempt to dismantle the grammar of control and the syntax of command. This is one way to understand the political content of its form" (202). Despite all this it is apt that Burroughs' published book-length works remain uncomfortably classified as novels, still making their political and philosophical statement against generic "either/or" distinctions, dissolved into the fluid, dialogic, heteroglot novel form conceived by Bakhtin, ever-threatening to destroy not only the system of genre, but our contemporary understanding of the form of the "novel" itself.

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CONTRIBUTOR

Benjamin J. Heal (賀小本) is an Assistant Professor of American Literature in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan. He earned his PhD in English Literature from the University of Kent, UK. Dr. Heal is a leading scholar in Beat Studies. His research focuses on transnationalism, experimental literature, and transmediality, with a particular emphasis on the works of William S. Burroughs and Paul Bowles. He has published numerous articles and book chapters on topics including: William Burroughs and the 'cut-up' technique, the works of poets ruth weiss and Harold Norse, the influence of jazz on Beat literature, and transatlantic literary connections. His forthcoming monograph, *Transatlantic Crosscurrents*, explores European influences on the works of Paul Bowles and William S. Burroughs. Additionally, he is working on a revised edition of Burroughs' 1981 novel, *Cities of the Red Night*. Dr. Heal is the Vice President of the European Beat Studies Network (EBSN). He has held visiting positions at Academia Sinica, University of Texas, and King's College London, where he is currently researching Eric Mottram and the British Poetry Revival. Beyond his academic work, he is also a poet and musician.