CHAPTER - II
NEGATIVES AND ABSENCE: A STUDY OF WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS' *NAKED LUNCH*

The publication of William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* in 1959, inaugurates the beginning of the postmodern fiction in America. The new novel attempts to capture the domain of "negatives and absence". The novelist as a narrator does not claim his authorship, for he is presumed to be dead, or simply reduced to a "recording instrument" that generates narratives and also disrupts them. It is in this sense that Burroughs' statement in *Naked Lunch*: "The word cannot be expressed direct .... It can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negatives and absence...," becomes the very defining principle of what makes of the postmodern narrative. Thus "negatives and absence" become the constituting principle of the fiction written during the 1960s.

*Naked Lunch* was published by Olympia, a Paris based publishing house. On publication it was ignored, for no reviewer thought it worth reviewing. After three years of its first publication in France, it was published in the USA by Grove Press, New York. Herbert Gold, with whom Allen Ginsberg had spent an entire evening in Paris in 1958, reading aloud from the manuscript of *Naked Lunch* and attempting to explain it, wrote in *The New York Times* of November 25, 1962:

It happens that Burroughs possesses a special literary gift. 'Naked Lunch' is less a novel than a series of essays, fantasies, prose poems, dramatic fragments, bitter
arguments, jokes, puns, epigrams – all hovering about the explicit subject matter of making out on drugs while not making out in either work or love the black humor of addiction. ⁴

Although *Naked Lunch* was brought before the Massachusetts Supreme Court on obscenity charges in the mid-sixties, while still arousing dismay and disgust in the circle of sophisticated readers, the critical language in which its literary importance was first proclaimed is strikingly moral. John Ciardi describes Burroughs’ early novel as a “monumentally moral descent into the hell of narcotics addiction” created by an author “engaged in a profoundly meaningful search for true values”. ⁵ Allen Ginsberg similarly judges Burroughs’ intention as “moral, like defending the good”, and he lauds the author, for the courage and idealism of his “total confession [of] exactly really what was going on inside his head” ⁶ (*NL* xxxii-xxxiii). Among the most hyperbolic claims is Norman Mailer’s pronouncement: “William Burroughs is in my opinion – whatever his conscious intention may be – a religious writer. There is a sense in *Naked Lunch* of the destruction of the soul […] It is a vision of how mankind would act if man was totally divorced from eternity” ⁷ (*NL* xvi-xvii).

The defense of *Naked Lunch* by Ginsberg and Mailer, if, at one level, point at championing artistic freedom, at another level, then opinions underline the tradition of literary humanism based on a moral vision of the universe, and the place of art in that universe. Whether *Naked Lunch* is condemned as morally bankrupt or admired as a novel of
moral quest, it is being judged within the framework of ethical dualism which dominates Western thought. Burroughs’ detractors have rejected his work primarily on the ground that they find it demoralizing: *Naked Lunch* is denounced as negative and destructive, “on the side of death” rather than in celebration of life⁸ (Wain 21-23; Hoffman 486-89)⁹. Leslie Fiedler criticizes Burroughs for evading his more personal responsibility for social reform by developing theories which locate the source of the world’s problems in a conveniently distant ‘cosmic’ disorder (Waiting 163-71)¹⁰. Repeatedly, Burroughs is denounced as self-indulgent because of the failure of his written work to arouse his readers to moral action in the world.

Many critics who admire Burroughs’ work, have tried in turn to justify it as part of the great moral tradition of Western literature. *Naked Lunch* has been described to pursue the sustaining “monomyth” of the quest through good and evil, through Heaven and Hell¹¹ (Stull and Skerl)¹², or compared to the medieval moral tradition which condemns the sensual realm¹³ (Peterson), or ranked among classic works of satire and didactic reform¹⁴ (McCarthy and Burgess)¹⁵. Anthony Burgess’s response to Burroughs’ work seems to shift depending on the context of the critical debate: he insists on one occasion that Burroughs’ aims are moral and didactic rather than artistic, but then he defends the author against moralistic denunciations with the plea, “For heavens sake, let us leave morals to the moralists and carry on the job of learning to evaluate art as art”.¹⁶ Even those critics who reject moral criteria as inappropriate
for an understanding of Burroughs' work tend to set up alternative hierarchies, placing the ultimate value on such goals as scientific speculation\textsuperscript{17} (Moorcock), the exploration of the senses and "raw experience"\textsuperscript{18} (Creely and Levine)\textsuperscript{19}, the pure exercise of will (McConnell)\textsuperscript{20} or – as in Burgess' case art for art's sake. These alternative goals are inevitably set in rigid binary opposition to moral aims. It is not morality in general which Burroughs attacks, but the structure of hierarchy and opposition which supports moral dualism.

Burroughs himself claims in the "Deposition" to \textit{Naked Lunch} that the infamous Blue Movie sequence is a "tract against Capital Punishment in the manner of Jonathan Swift's \textit{Modest Proposal}".\textsuperscript{21} When he draws this comparison, however, he is "talking to the machine" in its own language, responding to accusations that parts of \textit{Naked Lunch} are merely pornographic – lacking in artistic merit because they are lacking in moral purpose.\textsuperscript{22} While quite a few critics declare Burroughs a successful satirist in the Swiftian mode, David Lodge describes what he considers Burroughs' failure as a satirist. Lodge's objection is that Burroughs narrative "suspends rather than activates the reader's moral sense".\textsuperscript{23} In a later re-examination of \textit{Naked Lunch} he argues that the elimination of a realistic frame for the satire robs us of our "bearings and empirical reality"; the absence of "norms [...] by which its nauseating grotesquerie can be measured and interpreted" makes it impossible for us to "apply the episode [...] to the real world and draw an instructive moral".\textsuperscript{24}
The public has always reacted strongly to Burroughs' work. His books have been either banned as pornographic, or praised as postmodern deconstruction at its finest. Postmodern fiction like *Naked Lunch* does not form a coherent movement, a unified thought process based on a precise theory even though such critics as Ihab Hassan, Jerome Klinkowitz, Masu'd Zavarzadch, Matei Calinescu, and a few others have attempted to theorize this new fiction. Therefore, one might say, speaking of that new fiction, that it is a mess. And it is true that fiction in America today defies all critical ordering and rational interpretation—very often to the despair of the critics. Burroughs has been hailed by the youth movement as a revolutionary, feted as a champion of gay rights, condemned as a misogynist and criticized for his love of weapons and membership of the National Rifle Association. Whatever he writes or says, someone somewhere usually finds it controversial. Though Burroughs' first work, *Junkie*, appeared in 1953, it was *Naked Lunch* that initially attracted a cognoscenti of the avantgarde and hipster to his work. When *Naked Lunch* was first published, its early readers were delighted to learn that Burroughs the man was as extraordinary as his book: a homosexual who had shot his wife and who lived in self-imposed exile in Europe and North Africa.

The narrative entrée in *Naked Lunch*, which condenses most powerfully and economically, the thematic and stylistic strategies of Burroughs' fiction is the story of the Carnival man who teaches his anus to talk. In this bizarre tale, Burroughs dramatizes the problematic
relationship of body and mind, and the role of language in that relationship; the arbitrary violence of language as a system of naming and representation; and the possibility of an ontology and an aesthetics based on ‘negatives and absence’.

Burroughs’ plan in *Naked Lunch* is to expose the repressive duality of body/mind by confusing and combining word and flesh, making the abstract word literal and concrete. In this, Burroughs even has given speech the physical impact of a sound emitted and received by the body’s lower sphere: “This ass talk had a sort of gut frequency. It hit you right down there like you gotta go. You know when the old colon gives you the elbow and it feels sorta cold inside”.

But this strange narrative is not a parable of the triumph of body over mind, a mere reversal of conventional hierarchy. For once the carny man’s brain dies and his “blank periscope eyes” are disconnected (as all junkies’ eyes) from the “seat of libido and emotion”, the anus too seems to fall silent. Language as we know it only persists where there is conflict and the possibility of domination.

In a chapter in *Modes* entitled “The Metonymic Text as Metaphor”, Lodge attempts to reconcile the representative or mimetic function of metonymic discourse (following Jakobson’s paradigm) with the transcendent symbolic structure of metaphor. He argues that while metaphoric texts “point to their status as total metaphors” for the human condition, metonymic texts offer themselves as a “representative bit of reality”. Lodge discovers here an irony which will again ensure the
literary hegemony of metaphor: “[metonymic narrative] is often described as a ‘slice of life’. Yet this phrase ... is itself a metaphor; and we know that it is not possible for the literary artist to limit himself to merely making a cut through reality, as one might cut through a cheese (because) his medium is not reality itself but signs”.27 This is precisely what Burroughs does propose – that reality is represented in signs that signs are objects, and that they can indeed be cut through like a cheese. This operation, which Burroughs pursues systematically in the cut-up novels, is set in motion in *Naked Lunch* not in the interest of representing the world, but in the interest of exposing the illusion of the referential function of language. When Burroughs disrupts the continuity of his narrative, it is to suggest an extension of its boundaries beyond the rules of grammar and syntax, beyond the continuity of objects in time and space.

Metaphor has been described as a semantic impertinence which is subsequently resolved through a new figurative reading; similarly metonymy might be seen as a syntactical impertinence which opens up the possibility of new modes of connection, new juxtapositions. As the narrative of *Naked Lunch* takes us across the country through the monotony of “USA drag”, we move in and out of these disorienting mosaic composites of metonymic details:

A train roar through him whistle blowing ... boat whistle, foghorn, sky rocket burst over oily lagoons ... penny arcade open into a maze of dirty pictures ... ceremonial canon
boom in the harbor ... a scream shoots down a white hospital corridor...

He plummets from the eyeless light house kissing and jacking off in face of the black mirror, glides oblique down with cryptic condoms and mosaic of a thousand newspapers [...] to settle in black mud with tin cans and beer bottles, gangsters in concrete, pistols pounded flat and meaningless to avoid short-arm inspection of prurient ballistic experts.

This is the poetic power of metonymy which Burroughs begins to develop in the mosaic assemblages of *Naked Lunch* and later drives to its limits in his cut-up writing experiments.

In 1959, Burroughs was introduced to what would become the central device in his writing in the 1960s – the cut-up method as discovered by his friend Brion Gysin, poet and painter. Burroughs immediately recognized that he had already served an unconscious cut-up apprenticeship in editing and rearranging the voluminous material that finally yielded the published version of *Naked Lunch*.

What struck both Gysin and Burroughs about the cut-up method was the possibility of using this technique to make the writer’s medium tangible – to make the word and object detached from its context, its author, its signifying function. They wanted to bring, as they put it, the collage to writing. Burroughs had already come a long way in *Naked Lunch* toward making word and image literal, but here the word became a substance that could actually be handled, or more accurately, manhandled. The method itself is simple: “Cut right through the pages of
any book or newsprint ... lengthwise, for example, and shuffle the columns of text. Put them together at hazard and read the newly constituted message. Do it for yourself”.31

In his theoretical explorations of the nature of cut-up writing, Burroughs comes to assert finally that all literature is cut-up. “What is any writing but a cut-up?” he asks.32 For him, as for theorists like Bakhtin, Derrida, Kristeva, and Barthes, any literary text is an intersecting network of many texts, spliced, crossed, and merged. Every writer is perceived as drawing from the language system, selecting and rearranging that material, either intersecting with and appropriating arrangements already made, or scrupulously avoiding or distorting those pre-existing patterns. In either case, the writer proceeds, according to a certain relationship, to the body of language and literary tradition. For Burroughs, the cut-up is merely a device for making this relationship explicit.

The cut-up text might stand as an emblem of what contemporary theorists call ‘intertextuality’, a concept which defines literary works not as autonomous and complete but as elements in a system of relations to other texts. In the intertextuality of the cut-ups these relations are most often shifting and temporary, bringing us into a world without boundary, self, paternity, or ownership. Burroughs dramatizes this indeterminate multiplicity on a literal and scientific level in the genetic cut-ups produced in the “Biologic Courts” of Nova Express. These biological cut-
ups are presented as "tentative briefs" which will then be subject to infinite displacement and variation.

... I was sitting in a lunch room in New York having my doughnuts and coffee. I was thinking that one does feel a little boxed in in New York, like living in a series of boxes. I looked out the window and there was a great big Yale truck. That's cut-up – a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're thinking of.33

The aim of the cut-up, as Burroughs sees it, is to "make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway".34

For Roland Barthes, as for Burroughs, intertextuality extends into our life in the world. In the cacaphony of the intertext which is constantly swirling around us, we are liberated from the sentence, from grammar and logic, from our roles as speakers or listeners, from the opposition of inside and outside. Burroughs was, of course, similarly inspired by Tangier as an embodiment of infinite and shifting multiplicity, "the beauty of this town that consists in changing combinations".35 His own brand of Yage intoxication produced visions of composite cities in perpetual architectural flux, composite races without inhibitions and open to all human potential.36 The intertextuality of the cut-up is discovered in geography, in architecture, and in biological evolution.

In the cut-up novels one still finds the composite sites and the mosaic clusters of *Naked Lunch*, but Burroughs also develops in the later works a more explicit model of the composite writing process. Its
operations range from the crudeness of a “cement mixer” for word and image, to more refined and “technical” maneuvers. Burroughs’ cut-up writing machine clearly generates the activity of intertextual production. Barthes has similarly described the “text” which, in opposition to the traditional literary “work”, produces by means of a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations. [...] the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over”. Burroughs’ cut-ups concretize the ideals of Barthe’s “text”.

The advantage of the cut-up method, as Burroughs sees it is that the “use of scissors renders the process explicit and subject to extension and variations”. Burroughs’ later variation on the cut-up, the fold-in method performed without scissors, similarly “gives the writer literally infinite extensions of choice”. Again, the method is simple: “A page of text – my own or someone else’s – is folded down the middle and placed on another page – The composite text is then read across half one text and half the other”. This method, Burroughs explains, achieves in writing the effects of cinematic flashback, “enabling the writer to move backward and forward on his time track – For example, I take page one and fold it into page one hundred – I insert the resulting composite as page ten”.

In the cut-up or fold in narrative, reading is non-linear, every reading is already a re-reading in which the whole exists simultaneously, sensed almost subliminally by the reader in vague feelings of familiarity, dislocation, premonition. Burroughs’ experiments with narrative deny the
reader all continuity, even that of a narrative persona, and the temporal
dislocations of his style cannot be framed or explained by an omniscient
narrator or by the scope of any single character’s subjective perception.
“It” speaks, language speaks. Everything is always already familiar,
already written, and all sensations of ‘déjà vu’ are reminders of our
predetermined conditioning by language and culture.41

To escape this preconditioning Burroughs extends his discourse
toward the transgression of boundaries, pushing outward the limits of
language and self. Burroughs recognized at once in Gysin’s experiments,
as Terry Wilson puts it, “ways out – out of identity, habit, perhaps out of
the human form itself”.42 In order to extend boundaries or horizons of
consciousness the original lines of demarcation must first be exploded.
So the cut-up begins as an exercise in negativity, as a kind of Dadaist
destruction. It works against the “superstitious reverence for the word.
My God, then say, you can’t cut up these words. Why can’t I?”43 It works
against the notion of the authorship or ownership of words (“Since when
do words belong to anybody. ‘Your very own words,’ indeed!”44 and it
works finally against the book itself in that “it is the representation of
[the] negation [of the book]”.45 Like the intertext, Burroughs’ cut-ups
defy copyright and ownership, transgressing the regulations of boundary
and convention. While the cut-up releases the text from its binding, from
its author, even from its conventional signifying function, it also enables
the text to regenerate, to stretch out into multivalence and a communal
anonymity. The conventional notion of the immortality of literary work is
slightly revised in Burroughs’ claim that a cut-up of even the most familiar text will literally reincarnate the voice and creative imagination of the writer: “Shakespeare, Rimbaud live in their words. Cut the word lines and you will hear their voices”.

Burroughs has used the travelogue format in *Naked Lunch*, where the narrator’s cross-country “USA drag” trip leads similarly across the border and into Mexico. Burroughs originally developed much of the material which constitutes the three cut-up novels in letters written during his travels. While he expresses several times in these letters a desire to relate his adventures clearly and chronologically, his novelistic reworkings of the same material aim instead at confusion and dislocation. The metonymic drive which compels the narrator and the narrative forward is, as in *Naked Lunch* is an intermittent energy of stops and starts. The narrator is repeatedly distracted by the seductive stasis of mindless prelapsarian communities: “Well maybe I would be there still, work all day and after the work knocked out no words no thoughts just sit there looking at the blue mountains and ate and belched and fucked and slept same thing day after day the greatest”.

Burroughs has always been prepared to speak quite openly about his use of drugs for literary proposes, and in 1979 he said: “I didn’t have any experience with opiates until I was thirty years old ... What interested me was what interests anyone who takes drugs – altered consciousness. Altered consciousness, of course, is a writer’s stock in trade. If my consciousness was just completely conventional, no one
would be interested enough to read it, right? So there’s that aspect. Now you may not be doing that for literary purposes at all. You may just be doing it because you want to. But of course, altering the consciousness need not be drug related either. We alter our consciousness all the time, from minute to minute. Altered consciousness is a basic fact of life."

In an interview in 1961, Burroughs commented, “I’m against Capital punishment in all forms, and I have written many pamphlets on this subject in the manner of Swift’s Modest Proposal [...] these pamphlets have marked Naked Lunch as an obscene book [...].” Further discussing the themes of his novels in a 1963 interview, Burroughs said, “Naked Lunch could be described as a science fiction, though it was simply a development of the themes I see running through all my novels.” Naked Lunch contains hundreds of routines, some are extended, others concise, and short exercises. The lunch routine is a classic example where a simple idea – lunch is served – is expanded to finish with the creation of a typically Burroughsian character – Autopsy Ahmed – all in just a few lines:

They just bring so-called lunch... A hard-boiled egg with the shell off revealing an object like I never seen it before... A very small egg of a yellow-brown color... Perhaps laid by the duck-billed platypus. The orange contained a huge worm and very little else... He really got there firstest with the mostest ... In Egypt is a worm gets into your kidneys and grows to an enormous size. Ultimately the kidney is just a thin shell around the worm. Intrepid gourmets esteem the flesh of The worm above all other delicacies. It is said to be
unspeakably toothsome... An Interzone coroner known as Autopsy Ahmed made a fortune trafficking the worm.51

Burroughs proposes freedom from the dogma and conditioned reflexes of living in an authoritarian society. He proposes a society of Johnsoms, but all he saw were shits. Accordingly, he looked for the methods of control which perpetuates this unfortunate state of things, for without them such a society cannot exist. He sees them in the church and in the state and, as a Reichian, he immediately identifies the role of sexual suppression and repression in keeping the population subservient. In a 1965 interview he said: “I feel that sex, like practically every other human manifestation, has been degraded for control purposes, or really for anti-human purposes. This whole puritanism. How are we ever going to find out anything about sex scientifically, when ‘a priori’ the subject cannot even be investigated. It can’t even be thought about or written about. That was one of the interesting things about Reich. He was one of the few people who ever tried to investigate sex – sexual phenomena, from a scientific point of view. There’s this prurience and this fear of sex. We know nothing about sex. What is it? Why is it pleasurable? What is pleasure? Relief from tension? Well, possibly.”52

He also identified another element used in control as simple need. In Naked Lunch he uses the analogy of junkies and their need for junk, as the “algebra of need”. This need is not confined to drugs: “By ‘the algebra of need’ I simply meant that, given certain known factors in an equation, and the equation comprising a situation of absolute need – any
form of need – you can predict the results. In other words, leave a sick
junk in the back room of a drug store and only one result is possible. The
same is true of anyone in a state of absolute hunger, absolute fear
etcetera. The more absolute the need, the more predictable the behaviour
becomes, until it is mathematically certain”. 53 This is a human weakness,
exploited to the full by those in control.

Much of Burroughs’ time was concerned with investigating
Scientology and with perfecting his theory of language. “My basic theory
is that the written word was actually a virus that made the spoken word
possible. The word has not been recognized as a virus because it has
achieved a state of stable symbiosis with the host, though this symbiotic
relationship is now breaking down…”

Is the virus then simply a time bomb left on this planet to be
activated by remote control? An extermination program in
fact? In its path from full virulence to its ultimate goal of
symbiosis, will any human creature survive?

Taking the virus-eye view, the ideal situation would appear
to be one in which the virus replicates in cells without in any
way disturbing their normal metabolism. This has been
suggested as the ideal biological situation toward which all
viruses are slowly evolving. 54

In 1974, Burroughs gave a number of interviews to magazines on
this subject. In Kontexts, he noted if a virus were to attain a state of
wholly benign equilibrium with its host cell it is unlikely that its presence
would be readily detected or that it would necessarily be recognized as a
virus. He suggested that the word is just such a virus. Burroughs said that apes cannot talk because they do not have the vocal cords to produce words. Combating the word virus is obviously an extremely difficult task, as Burroughs demonstrates:

We must find out what words are and how they function. They become images when written down, but images of words repeated in the mind and not the image of the thing itself. Try reading something silently without saying the words subvocally. It’s hard to do. Gertrude Stein’s statement: ‘A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose’, is true only if written down; but Korzybski says, a rose (flower) is, whatever it is, not a rose (word).55

Burroughs points out that there is very little difference between the written word and the spoken word:

We in the West have lost sight of the fact that the written word is a symbol as can be seen very clearly in a pictorial or character language like ancient Egyptian or Chinese. That the word is, in point of fact, an image. If you know a hieroglyphic language, no matter what your spoken language is, you can immediately communicate with anyone in writing because they may have ten different spoken words for that symbol. But the symbol remains the same... So a spoken word is something that refers to a written word.56

It was unusual for Burroughs to run out of material; as he told Gerard Malanga: “In a sense, all my books are one book. It’s just a continuous book... Whenever I publish a book – the book is 200 pages – I’ll usually have 600 which will overflow into the next book. Often I find
that what I’ve decided to put in is not as good as what has been left out [...] I use them in a subsequent book.”

Burroughs’ self-portrait in his own semi-autobiographical novels also contributes to the creation of a legend. Although he uses his own experience as the basis for his fiction, he shapes and organizes it to fit an artistic pattern, the writer who has spent a season in hell and returned to tell his story. He often portrays himself as a character, but one devoid of introspection and, therefore, without an inner life. Thus Burroughs is able to objectify himself in his work in such a way as to depersonalize the biographical material and give it mythic power. Yet the part of himself that Burroughs omits from his works, the timebound personality’s intimate feelings and relationships, is the self the biographer seeks to record. Burroughs makes it difficult to draw the line between life and art, and his most important “work” may be his legend which exists somewhere between the realms of fact and fiction, partaking of both.

From the beginning Burroughs wrote in fragments, recording all of the products of his consciousness, whether fact or fiction, “subjective” or “objective”, and encouraged collaboration with other artists through letters, and visits. From the selection, editing and arrangement of the notes came *Junkie, The Yage Letters, Naked Lunch, The Soft Machine, The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express* – all of which are based on Burroughs’ life as a drug addict. For Burroughs, apomorphine is a liberator, freeing the former addict from his body, which has become externalized and alien through the dynamics of addiction. In the novels
written after his cure, apomorphine is used as a metaphor for individual freedom.

The title *Naked Lunch* means “a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork.” And the title was suggested by Jack Kerouac. Burroughs maintains:

I awoke from the sickness at the age of forty-five, calm and sane, and in reasonably good health except for a weakened liver and the look of borrowed flesh common to all who survive the Sickness.... The Sickness is drug addiction and I was an addict for fifteen years. When I say addict I mean an addict to junk (generic term for opium and/or derivatives including all synthetics from demerol to palfium).

If a fictional work is experience sketched or textualized to Burroughs, it holds out the possibility of making ordinary experience extraordinary. As a drug addict he sets himself on the course of moving beyond consciousness. For experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness. To have a hold on the ‘chamber of consciousness’ confessional modes suits the author, for he wants to reveal the facts. Thus “naked lunch” signifies both the act of seeing and what is being seen. Use of the title in the introduction and the preface establishes the ‘naked lunch’ as a process of seeing, and particularly, seeing the naked lunch itself.
William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* is about sickness. The sickness that Burroughs maps out implies a kind of social pathology that is "necessarily brutal, obscene and disgusting". The pathology of the social transparently connects the external with the internal, the conscious with the unconscious. The literary imagination is not certainly redemptive or transcendental, it is agonisingly personal and cultural in that the individual moves through moments of sleep and awakening. The author awakes at the age of forty-five to the naked reality of his existential condition. *Naked Lunch* is also a metaphor of protest. This protest is contextualized in demythologisation of the body. Body's purity is debunked for it is conditioned to capture the provoking states of hallucination under the effect of drug. Doping is privileged not only to underline social protest, but also to test the limits of the body. At the cultural level, *Naked Lunch* symbolises literature as protest. In its anti-cultural stance, the novel relativizes truth in its search of meaning in meaninglessness. Within the body of the book, the naked lunch of human life is portrayed as cannibalism, oral-anal sex, orgasm-death, and caprophagy. "To lunch" is to see the vision but also to be a part of it, for no one can escape the human condition. Only a kind of mental freedom is implied by the act of seeing clearly.

Burroughs chose a montage structure for *Naked Lunch* for three reasons: it is a way to present the flow of consciousness; it is a way to expand the reader's consciousness, and it is an effective satirical
technique. *Naked Lunch* is overtly presented as a record of the writer’s consciousness.

The characters that Burroughs creates are his alter egos; the plot, his inner conflicts; the structure, his actual experience; the texture, his individual perceptions; the themes, his own spiritual quest and discovery. The unusual composition is explained as Burroughs’ stream of consciousness and as a random collection of notes. Furthermore, the introduction and preface state that the novel consists of notes taken during the withdrawal sickness of a drug cure—a paranoid schizophrenic state that gives the surreal visions the status of fact. In his work *Junkie*, withdrawal is considered to have produced uncontrollable sociability and a revelation of distasteful intimacies. *Naked Lunch* is a diary that records experience as it happens, and considers the act of recording as part of the experience.

*The Naked Lunch* opens with a flight from narcotics agents and ends with the shooting of officers, Hauser and O’Brien. The Hauser and O’Brien routine is a miniature masterpiece of pulp detective fiction. Another routine featuring them, “The Conspiracy”, originally left out but now published in ‘Interzone’, provides an alternative ending, but Bill’s protagonist, Lee, was never in any great danger, as Bill told Allen back in 1955:

The meaning of Interzone, its space time location is at a point where three-dimensional fact merges into dream, and dreams erupt into the real world. In Interzone dreams can
kill – Like Bangutot – and solid objects and persons can be as unreal as dreams. For example, Lee could be in Interzone, after killing the two detectives, and for various dream reasons, neither the law nor the others could touch him directly.61

_Naked Lunch_ purports to be a record of a man’s addiction to opiates, his apomorphine treatment, and cure. On the literal level the novel can be seen as the disjointed memories and hallucination of withdrawal. In this novel the quest finally ends in heightened visions of the here and now. Again and again the novel explodes into visionary episodes that reveal the permanent alienation of the disillusioned protagonist who opposes the delusions of addiction with his new insight:

I Don’t Want To Hear Any More Tired Old Junk Talk and Junk Con…. The same things said a million times and more and there is no point in saying anything because NOTHING Ever Happens in the junk world.62

The terms “addiction” and “junk” are not to be interpreted only on the literal level in _Naked Lunch_; they are also metaphors for the human condition. From the former addict’s special angle of vision he perceives that all of humanity is victimized by some form of addiction. The addict’s experience has led to the realization that the body is a biological trap and society is run by “control addicts” who use the needs of the body to satisfy their obsession with power. Thus the narrator can say: “The junk virus is public health problem number one of the world today.”63
The hustling, amoral life-style of the "carny world" of addicts, criminals, and sexual deviants provides the physical, social, and economic environment of *Naked Lunch*. The chief setting is Interzone, an imaginary dystopia described as the "Composite City". It is a composite of all the places that were the scenes of Burroughs' drug quest: the Southern United States, South America, Tangier, and the junk neighbourhoods the world over as described in *Junkie*. Interzone is the modern city as waste land, in which all the cities, peoples, and governments of the world are combined into one huge beehive of commerce, sex, addiction, political manipulation, and rivalry.

Interzone is also described as a single building consisting of bed rooms and a polyglot Market "where all human potentials are spread out". Inhabitants spend their time copulating, shooting up, and making deals in a parody of western capitalist-consumer societies. Sexuality is on the level of pornography, particularly the "blue movie"; all inhabitants are addicted to drugs, sex, or power; and all commerce is on the level of vice and confidence tricks. The economic theories of capitalism's apologists or its Marxist critics are replaced by Burroughs' Algebra of Need, outlined in the introduction. Pyramids of power and wealth are built from man's total need for drugs, sex, or power, and junk traffic supplies the model for all economic and political empires: "Junk is the ideal product... the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy .... The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to the
product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies his client. He pays his staff in junk”.

The political parties of Interzone seek to rule the world through total physical and mental control of the human race; they are all “control addicts” who oppose individualism and non-conformity. Religious leaders are given short shrift as part of the power elite that manipulates the masses. One short section on religion reduces the great religions of the world and their founders to “The Prophet Hour”, the religion of radio and TV preachers and revivalists’ tents, that is, religion as carnival entertainment. The basic carny social relationship of conman and mark, controller and victim, is the basis of Burroughs’ pop analysis of power and the social order.

The science and art of this world are also drawn from popular culture. The science of Naked Lunch is the popularized scientific knowledge of the mass media (obsessed as Burroughs is with the causes and cures of cancers and viruses) and the pseudoscience of Hubbard’s Scientology, Wilhelm Reich’s orgonomy, and Burroughs’ analysis of addiction and the apomorphine cure. For Burroughs these systems of thought can, like popular art, reveal what is suppressed by currently accepted theories: “Well, these non-conventional theories frequently touch on something going on that Harvard and M.I.T. can’t explain. I don’t mean that I endorse them wholeheartedly, but I am interested in any attempt along those lines.”
In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs transforms the body's addictive nature into an entity called the “Human Virus” or the “evil virus”. The virus lives upon the human host, satisfying its own needs for drugs, sex, or power (the three basic addictions for Burroughs) through demonic possession, which dehumanizes the human being by making him subservient to a physical or psychological need. When addicted/possessed, the human being becomes identical with the virus and regresses to a lower form of life. Numerous transformations in the novel from man to subhuman organism illustrate this hypothesis. The most important episode illustrating this process is the story of “the talking asshole” told by Benway in the central section of the book: “Ordinary Men and Women”. In this story, a man is taken over by one of his bodily functions (the “lowest”) and reduced to “one all-purpose blob”. The episode is brilliantly funny and terrifying at the same time. At the end of the story, Benway points out the moral and puts forth Burroughs’ own views about “the basic American rottenness” revealed by popular culture, and the dangers of bureaucracies, which are like cancers or viruses.

In Burroughs’ mythology, the social structure mirrors the individual process of addiction/possession on a larger scale. The social dynamic of addiction is that of predator and victim, the Algebra of Need: “The face of ‘evil’ is always the face of total need .... In the words of total need: ‘ Wouldn’t you?’ Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do anything to satisfy total need. Because you
would be in a state of total sickness, total possession, and not in a position to act in any other way.\textsuperscript{68} The major social institutions built upon this cannibalistic structure are also viruses or cancers (cancer is said to be a virus in \textit{Naked Lunch}), which takes over the healthy social body and warp it to fill the needs of a parasitic organism, eventually leading the human race to destruction. The orgasm-death of the hanged man, a recurrent image that illustrates the evil of the social system based on the Algebra of Need.

The action of the myth consists of a battle between the forces of good and evil for control of the human individual and the human race. The three conspiratorial parties of Interzone – the Liquefactionists, the Divisionists, and the Senders – seek to rule the world through parasitic possession. They are all “control addicts”. All three parties attempt to make all men conform to a single image reflecting the person or force in control. The Liquefactionists, the party of the far right, plan to liquidate everyone but themselves. Carried to its logical conclusion, liquidation would ultimately eliminate everyone except one man. This party is a parody of modern totalitarianism and racism. Sexually, it is associated with Sadomasochism. The Divisionists, the moderate party, plan to take over by flooding the world with their own replicas, or clones. Again, the goal is domination by one man (and one sex) through eliminating everyone except one set of replicas. This party is a parody of the biblical creation of man, homosexuality, and the conspiracy theory of politics. The totalitarian party of the left is the Senders, whose members attempt
to control everyone through mental telepathy, the greatest evil of all, according to Burroughs. Again, sending must lead to only one man in control of a brainwashed subhuman population. The ultimate Sender or villain of the myth is Salvador Hassan O'Leary, who plays all the villainous roles in the novel under various aliases. Senders are associated with addiction, the totalitarian Mayan civilization, the downward metamorphosis of man to insect, and the use of science for evil purposes—some of Burroughs' major themes. In fact, the Senders are identified as the ultimate enemy, and Sending seems to underlie all the evils of control. Sending is called an addiction, a cancer, and is finally identified as the Human Virus.

The only force fighting these evil parasites is the Factualist party, the fourth party of Interzone. The Factualists are a radical group that represents anarchic individualism, as Eric Mottram first pointed out. Factualist agents attempt to foil the plots of the villains simply by revealing them. In a way, the entire novel can be seen as a revelation, and the two Factualists in the book—Lee the Agent and A. J.—are Burroughs' alter egos. Factualist revelation is equated with the murder of a villain and with the apomorphine cure for addiction. There is a flaw in the Factualist program, however. Since all the agents are human, they are all potential addicts who may succumb at any moment: "all Agents defect and all Resisters sell out". Thus the situation is never resolved; the cosmic battle between good and evil goes on and on, like the continuing
plot of a comic-strip adventure, as Burroughs remarked in an interview with Ann Morrisette.74

Salvador Hassan O'Leary and A. J., mortal enemies representing the controllers and the liberators, are very much alike as characters in that neither has any permanent personality or identity and both assume many similar roles. Hassan and A. J. are not characters, but opposing forces that assume many shapes. Bill Lee, Burroughs' version of himself as addict-writer, is another "character" who barely exists except for his voice and his actions. The persona is even more of a cipher than before, appearing at the beginning and end as the withdrawing addict and Factualist Agent. Lee's voice is that of the hipster-addict, telling stories about his adventures. He has the tone and vocabulary of the carnival barker, the street hustler, or the conman. Lee's actions are those of the Factualist agent: he infiltrates enemy organizations, reveals their plots, and thereby "murders" evil. His unpunished murder of officers Hauser and O'Brien in the last episode is a metaphor for factualist liberation. Because the police are seeking to confiscate his manuscripts as well as his drugs, his gun, and his person, Agent Lee writes *Naked Lunch*, who destroys evil by writing about it.

In using pseudoscience to create a popular mythology, Burroughs is entering the realm of popular literature: popular science becomes science fiction. In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs makes use of the full range of popular literary sources: news media, advertising, and popular fiction in all of its forms (magazines, paperbacks, comics, movies, radio, and
television serials). From all of these and from his own contact with the underworld, Burroughs gains his enviable command of popular speech-vocabulary, idioms and rhythms. From news media and advertising, Burroughs also adopts the goal of writing to change consciousness: "Naked Lunch is a blue-print, a How-To-Book... How-To extend levels of experience".\(^75\)

From the various forms of popular fiction, Burroughs derives his plot, characters, and many characteristic images. *Naked Lunch* draws from the detective story, the gothic tale, older science fiction of the mad doctor variety, and pornography. The popular motifs from these fictions include the secret agent, the alienated private eye, the mobster boss and his gang, the mad doctor and amoral scientific experimenter, monsters, zombies, vampires, body snatchers, space-time travel, secret plots, secret formulas or weapons, intelligent non-human beings, nearly inhuman villains, sadomasochistic fantasies, and other perversions. What all these popular forms have in common is a paranoid view of the world that Burroughs accepts as valid. Popular art, like pseudoscience, reveals what society would like to repress. As Benway remarks at one point in the novel, "there's always a space between, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness".\(^76\)

The new vision of *Naked Lunch* is presented in an experimental form derived from painting, photography, film, and jazz. The basic technique Burroughs chooses to use is juxtaposition, called collage or montage in the visual arts. The overall structure of *Naked Lunch* is a
montage of “routines” that – theoretically – can be read in any order. Burroughs announces this structure in the “Atrophied Preface” when he says, “you can cut into Naked Lunch at any intersection point”, and “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”.

The work as a whole exhibits this organic and improvisational pattern. *Naked Lunch* begins with the factual and autobiographical introduction, which explains the author’s addiction and cure, and the first routine, which recapitulates the biographical journey of *Junkie*. From this base, the novel moves into fantasies of addiction and control, building up to the central routines: “The market”, “Ordinary Men and Women”, “Islam incorporated and the parties of Interzone”, “The Country Clerk”, and “Interzone”. This group of routines in the heart of the book contains the most detailed, concentrated descriptions of Interzone, its inhabitants, and the mythic plot, as well as Burroughs’ most wide-ranging social satire. The remaining routines return primarily to the themes of addiction and control, but with the added themes of escape and rebellion. The later routines also include more collage sections than those in the first half of the book. *Naked Lunch* ends with an autobiographical preface that discusses quite directly the novel’s technique and metaphors and a clinical appendix that lists and discusses drugs mentioned in the novel. Thus the work is framed by factual, autobiographical sections that address the reader directly, guiding him into and out of an extraordinary text. Although the routines can stand alone and the form is a montage, the
order is not random. There is an overall psychological pattern, an order of increasing complexity in the use of experimental technique, and a didactic frame.

Burroughs makes no attempt to create artificial situations or to construct an elaborate plot. The text is simply a record of the writer’s consciousness at the precise point of writing, with breaks, mood changes, unpleasant fantasies, mad humor, all described as they flash into his consciousness. Writing thus folds upon itself as consciousness does:

There is only one thing a writer can write about: What is in front of his senses at the moment of writing .... I am a recording instrument.... I do not presume to impose “story”, “plot”, “continuity” .... In sofaras I succeed in ‘Direct’ recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function.... I am not an entertainer....

Burroughs in this sense joins the ranks of “garrulous” American authors such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, whose literary output adds up to a map of the authors’ consciousness, recorded over a period of years or even decades. It is confessional literature at its absolute, since it can work only if it is completely honest. Burroughs further maintains:

“Possession” they call it .... Sometimes an entity jumps in the body – outlines waver in yellow orange jelly – and hands move to disembowel the passing whore or strangle the nabor child in hope of alleviating a chronic housing shortage. As if I was usually there but subject to goof now and again .... ‘wrong! I am never here ....’ Never that is ‘fully’ in possession, but somehow in a position to forestall ill-advised moves.... Patrolling is, in fact, my principle occupation ....
No matter how tight security, I am always somewhere ‘Outside’ giving orders and ‘Inside’ this straight jacket of jelly that gives and stretches but always reforms ahead of every movement, thought, impulse, stamped with the seal of alien inspection.  

Nietzschean echo is very clear in these lines. Following Nietzsche’s utterance that “I was there, I saw it” the writer becomes a witness to the whole process of writing itself. He moves not only through his consciousness but through an intersubjective domain. As a postmodern writer, Burroughs appears in a variety of alter egos and sometimes addresses the reader directly. In the Burroughsian universe, this is a position of tremendous responsibility, because writers make things happen, after all: “In the beginning was the word”, and the universe itself was written into existence. Even allowing for what the various alter egos get up to in his texts, Burroughs’ work can now be seen as a continuous autobiography of his ideas: the shifting planes of areas of interest are interconnected in a complex web like a three dimensional grid that his mind moves around in. Since we get a map of his own thought process, the very act of describing it is confessional. It means that Burroughs can jump from a fictional character to a piece of scientific theory without disturbing the structure of his work. He can move from the written word to the painting, tape recording, even to acting in films, and it is all part of a narrative in which the artistic self moves on in misrecognition of itself through ‘fictions’ of the self.
Naked Lunch portrays a reality that is unusual and absent. It proclaims the essential absurdities of life and reduces it to a series of cruel and often pointless charades. Time, place, plot and characters are not important in the narrative except narrative effects – effects which are important for their disruptive traces, and hidden meanings.

Burroughs portrays reality in such a way that the connection between religion and the state forms one of the themes of his work. Naked Lunch contains attacks on Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. It was Christianity that created the illiberal conditions which caused Burroughs to live outside the United States for 25 years, and it usually receives the full force of his criticism. When asked about Christianity, he said: “I’m violently anti-Christian. It was the worst disaster that ever occurred on a disaster-prone planet, the most virulent spiritual poison .... Fundamentalists are dangerous lunatics. There’s really no place for them in an over-crowded life boat. They’re a menace.”

Burroughs perceives in the linguistic function of representation a violence similar to that at work in the restrictive process of naming. The postulate that all literature is metaphorical – the world is the tenor, the text is the vehicle – seems at first quite reasonable. David Lodge suggests, for example, that all drama is metaphorical because “it is recognized as a ‘performance’ .... We are spectators not of reality but of a conventionalized model of reality”. To rephrase this in less innocent terms, one might argue that whether on stage or on the written page, mimetic representation is a performance, which displaces and underrides
reality with the equivocation of metaphorical “likeness”. In the Carny man story in particular, Burroughs reveals the poetical danger and violence of all performance or imitation. For instance, in the fates of the Carny man and Bubu, performance is never innocent in *Naked Lunch*, it eventually replaces life itself, the imitation absorbing and devouring the original.

Burroughs perceives representation as a lethal symbiosis which reduces the world to a “copy planet”, a false and lifeless imitation. In this ersatz universe, language is never to be trusted; all “documents are forgeries by nature” and all history is fiction. A knowing voice warns the reader in *Nova Express*, “You notice something is sucking all the flavor out of food and the pleasure out of sex, the color out of everything in sight?” The mysterious force at work here is representation itself, the alien and empty signifier absorbing the life out of the signified. For Burroughs, the relationship of word to world is not only arbitrary but destructive, carrying within it the violence of all language functions, of all binary structures. Burroughs proposes that reality is signs, that signs are objects, and that they can indeed be cut through like a cheese. This operation, which Burroughs pursues systematically in the cut-up novels, is set in motion in *Naked Lunch* not in the interest of representing the world, but in the interest of exposing the illusion of the referential function of language.

There is an accumulation of material objects in *Naked Lunch*, a cluttered mosaic, a chaotic encyclopedia of things, but they whirl by us
so quickly that they never acquire the weightiness of materiality as we find it in Balzac, Dickens, or Flaubert. The concreteness that anchors Burroughs' text is the literalness of absence, a materiality of loss: the disappearance of the sick or aged disposed of in jungles or death-dealing sanitariums; the absence of legs lost to gangrene infection; the absence of sound ("Silent Wings of the Anopheles Mosquito"); the absence of transcendent meaning ("TV antennas to the meaningless Sky"). This absence of any central or transcendental signifier, an absence which marks the nature of all discourse, finds in the language of *Naked Lunch* a peculiarly concrete representation.

This paradoxical convergence of concreteness and absence reflects the technological mysticism of Burroughs' fiction, his scientific belief in what he calls "non-body experience". Burroughs suggests, again parenthetically, that some drug intoxications are actually "space time travel": "(It occurs to me that preliminary yage nausea is motion sickness of transport to yage state .....)" Thus, the material reality of the body's response (nausea) corroborates the experience of travel outside the body. Later in *The Job*, Burroughs argues that drugs are unnecessary, that the mind can open up space travel simply by leaving "verbal garbage behind". He clearly sees the three modes of travel — by NASA, by drugs, and by the controlled manipulation of silence — as equivalent. For Burroughs, literalness asserts not only the material facts of life in the body, but the literal possibility of escape from that body.
Burroughs' philosophy and aesthetics of absence leads to a new way of thinking, a way which protects the integrity and will of the individual from the dualistic and hierarchical "mind locks" of western thought: "It is no oceanic organismal subconscious body thinking. It is precisely delineated by what it is not. [...] There are no considerations here that would force thinking into certain lines of structural or environmental necessities".\textsuperscript{93} The strategy is clearly a negative one: "The first step is to stop doing everything you 'have to do'. Mock up a way of thinking you have to do. [...] Now mock up some thinking you don't have to do. [...] Wind up in you don't have to think anything".\textsuperscript{94} One recognizes here the deconstructive tendency to perceive sign, story, identity, or meaning as a deferred presence in which everything is, as Burroughs puts it, "delineated by what it is not". While conventional narrative, as Barthes argues, tries to "impregnate the void of what it silences by the plenitude of what it says,"\textsuperscript{95} Burroughs narratives repeatedly expose that void, accentuate that silence. His texts reveal that the true substance of writing is the hiatus it frames, the absence or gap it creates by displacing presence, reality, truth. This is the negative aesthetic.

In Burroughs' work, then, the absence or emptiness that is language is made literal and concrete. We must learn, he warns, to "stop words to see and touch words to move and use words like objects."\textsuperscript{96} Not only must words become tangible (and thus controllable) objects, the entire manipulative system of western language and thought must be
made visible. This is, in a general sense, the goal of much contemporary theory which, as Said describes it, “makes visible what is usually invisible in a text”. For Burroughs, the problem is presented more dramatically as the necessity of escape from a blinding addiction. To kick the habits of Western discourse, to achieve the “total exposure” of all cultural addictions, one must follow the command to “see smell and listen”. If the word is made an object, a fact, a body, if it becomes external and visible, we can “see the enemy direct”. The alternative is to be trapped in body and word forever: “LISTEN LOOK OR SHIT FOREVER /.../ IN THEE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD /.../ COME OUT OF THE TIME WORD THE FOREVER. /.../ ALL OUT OF TIME AND INTO SPACE. /.../ THE WRITING OF SPACE. THE WRITING OF SILENCE. LOOK LOOK LOOK”. 

Dream-time reality is not the only weapon in Burroughs arsenal. In Junky, Lee the Junkie wises up and finds he has been conned. In Naked Lunch, Lee the junkie becomes Inspector Lee of the Nova Police – a character that is further developed in later books, particularly Nova Express. The observer sees many of the situations in Naked Lunch from different viewpoints (youth and age, junkie and cop), which are liable to be subdivided into multiple characters, each with a different view: “As I was saying before I was interrupted by one of my multiple personalities ... troublesome little beasts”. It is not only Lee who has been wised up, The Naked Lunch also intends to educate the reader. As Bill says towards the end of the book:
Naked Lunch is a blueprint, a How-To Book ... How-to extend levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall ... Doors that only open in Silence ... Naked Lunch demands silence from The Reader. Otherwise he is taking his own pulse..."\textsuperscript{101}

Most of the critical works on Burrough treat both his personal life and the idiosyncratic mythology that he creates his fictions as cultural, sociological, or psychoanalytical artifacts. His depiction of the underworld of drugs, sex, and petty crime and his exposure of the insidious power of bureaucracy, technology, and the politics of war elicit what is essentially a moral response from most critics. Burroughs is either condemned for the "unspeakable" content of his fiction or championed for his courageous and clear sighted quest for individual freedom. While these issues are surely important, they have overshadowed the significance of Burroughs' stylistic accomplishments. Burroughs evolves toward the more daring mosaic style of Naked Lunch (1959) and then to the overtly radical "cut-up" techniques of The Soft Machine (1961), Nova Express (1964), and The Ticket That Exploded (1967). In Naked Lunch, Burroughs has already begun his attack on the conventional structures of metaphor and morality which he sees dominating Western thought. In this novel, the treatment of the body, of poetic image, and of narrative structure are all predominantly metonymic characterized by reduction, fragmentation, and a relentless literalness. Refusing to be trapped within the binary oppositions of inside/outside, self/other, subjective/objective, Burroughs negotiates with care this Scylla and charybdis of experimental writing. He develops detached,
precise, scientific methods of observing and recording the world around him; he introduces chance as a factor in composition; and he embraces an ideal of contact and collaboration not only with his readers but with “many writers living and dead”.

The deep irony of Burroughs’ legal and literary status, then, is that *Naked Lunch* is most often translated into the very language and thought systems it challenges. In the “Atrophied Preface”, which appears provocatively appended at the conclusion of *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs himself gives a blunt summary of his novel which calls into question the rhetoric of his defenders and attackers alike: “Abstract concepts, bare as algebra, narrow down to a black turd or a pair of aging cajones”. What becomes increasingly explicit in Burroughs’ later work in the cut-up novels is that he is more interested in science and technology than in “abstract concepts”, and he is more committed to the obliteration of the author and the “authority” of language than to making a “total confession” of “what was going on inside his head”.

From within the context of conventional literary humanism, Lodge assumes that “empirical reality” and moral “norms” form the unquestionable basis of all perception and interpretation of the world. Such notions are, in fact, expressions of a particular pattern of dualistic thought which measures good against evil, reality against fantasy, word against world. Lodge reasons, like Seltzer, that a satiric moral intent would “justify” or “account for” Burroughs’ text. Such explanations enable the traditional critic to resolve any transgressions against moral,
empirical, or even aesthetic norms. Arguing that *Naked Lunch* is confused, uncontrolled, and at best an interesting failure, Lodge obscures the possibility that the ambiguity of *Naked Lunch* results from Burroughs' deliberate intention to confuse and undermine those moral norms and aesthetic conventions which claims the status of "empirical reality" and "norms".

Burroughs' purpose is not to incite reform, to measure inappropriate action against a set of empirical norms, but simply to reveal a more naked truth. As Allen Ginsberg has described Burroughs' method:

The method must be purest meat
and no symbolic dressing,
actual visions and actual prisons
as seen then and now.

A naked lunch is natural to us,
We eat reality sandwiches.
But allegories are so much lettuce.
Don't hide the madness.¹⁰⁴

("Reality Sandwiches", 40).

Nevertheless, the instinct of the humanistic critic confronted with Burroughs' writing is to dress it up as allegory and moral satire, to distance and defuse the novel by making it a mediating or disposable code serving a more abstract and therefore less threatening message.

The real scene you pinch up some leg flesh and make a quick stab hole with a pin. Then fit the dropper 'over, not in' the hole and feed the solution slow and careful so it doesn't
squirt out the sides…. When I grabbed the Rube’s thigh the flesh came up like wax and stayed there, and a slow drop of pus oozed out the hole. And I never touched a living body cold as the Rube there in Philly.¹⁰⁵

Burroughs does not pursue the attack on junk and drug addiction through the whining manipulation of his first version of the scene, but straight ahead, in tactile connection with “the real scene”. The hyped-up description that is “put down” in the rhetoric of moral outrage and disgust in the first part of the routine is part of the addiction itself, part of the attraction of the addiction. In his flattened, monosyllabic revision of the scene, Burroughs is trying to take the thrill out of junk, just as he tries to take the thrill out of sexual violence in the Blue Movie scene. For it is this thrill which creates a need strong enough to drive one to barter “raw material of the will”.¹⁰⁶

The literalness – mathematical, scientific, naturalistic, supernaturalistic – which pervades Burroughs’ prose style is part of his campaign for free literature from morality and symbolic rhetoric, to seize for it the independence of the sciences: “A doctor is not criticized for describing the manifestations and symptoms of an illness, even though the symptoms may be disgusting. I feel that a writer has the right to the same freedom. In fact, I think that the time has come for the line between literature and science, a purely arbitrary line, to be erased.”¹⁰⁷

This scientific or technical voice often intrudes abruptly in Naked Lunch, breaking in on the tone of a passage or the development of some
farcical and fantastic situation. Very often these intrusions are made concrete in their own right by Burroughs’ use of parentheses which represent visually the splicing in of a different voice in the text. Once again it must be stressed that these intrusions do not represent the hierarchical domination of one voice over another, but a surgical attack on all structures of hierarchy, continuity, and control.

Although the images in *Naked Lunch* are often surprisingly lyrical, nostalgic, and evocative, they are always weighted down and literalized by death, decay, stagnation.

Carl talked to the doctor outside under the narrow arcade with rain bounding up from the street against his pant legs, thinking how many people he tell it to, and the stairs, porches, lawn, driveways, corridors, and streets of the world there in the doctor’s eyes... Stuffy German alcoves, butterfly trays to the ceiling, silent portentous smell of uremia seeping under the door, sub urban lawns to sound of the water sprinkler in calm jungle night under silent wings of the Anopheles mosquito. (Note: This is not a figure. Anopheles mosquitoes ‘are’ silent.)

The stern “Note” which asserts the literalness of the mosquito image is far more than an anti-metaphorical affectation. It equates the rhetorical evasion, which would domesticate the mosquito’s silent threat of death into a mere “figure” with the evasion of death and disease in the conversation between Carl and the German doctor. The contempt, disinterest, and hypocrisy which characterize the doctor’s treatment of Carl’s “native” friend are based on the avoidance of truth: “Saying
without words: 'Alzo for the so stupid peasant we must avoid use of the word is it not? Otherwise he shit himself with fear. Koch and spit they are 'both' nasty words I think?' He said aloud: 'It is a catarro de los pulmones'. Such rhetorical evasion is designed to distract us from the obscenity, the unthinkableness of human mortality.

In response to this evasion, Burroughs returns us always to the hard facts of time, of life in the body: the sequence of the junky's days strung together on the thread of blood which flowers in the needle, the orgiast's days strung together on the thread of semen discharged by a hanged man into a black void, and the lives of all "human animals" tied to the "long lunch thread from mouth to ass all the days of our years".

Throughout Naked Lunch nostalgic images, memories of places, objects and actions associated with innocence and youth are punctuated by parenthetical details evoking death, silence, and decay. Evocative "train whistles" and adolescent dreams are reduced to images with no personal vibrations, no moral or sentimental impact; nostalgia and sentimentality approach silence, emptiness, a cold transparency. In that transparent landscape suddenly the evasive veil of sentiment is torn aside and we see clearly the inexorable progress of human mortality: "Time jump like a broken typewriter, the boys are old men, young hips quivering and twitching in boy-spasms go slack and flabby, draped over an out house seat, a park bench, a stone wall [...] twitching and shivering in dirty underwear, probing for a vein in the junk-sick morning, in an Arab café muttering and slobbering". Reality is not the lubricious flow
of days or words but the startling and unpredictable jump of the broken typewriter.

In the midst of the characters' dazed wanderings in *Naked Lunch*, the narration comes into focus unexpectedly in moments of intense clarity: "Something falls off you when you cross the border into Mexico, and suddenly the landscape hits you straight with nothing between you and it, desert and mountains and vultures; little wheeling specks and others so close you can hear wings cut the air (a dry husking sound), and when they spot something they pour out of the blue sky [...] down in a black funnel". Here is the direct naked seeing Burroughs' prose aspires to – and what it sees is no comforting vision of transcendence but a harsh and ugly mosaic of aggression, violence, life feeding off of life, life falling to icy death "through air clear as glycerine". The negative mosaics of *Naked Lunch* in which Burroughs juxtaposes scattered fragments, remnants, the detritus of the world, are motivated by this desire to defy and exhaust meaning, to starve out the language parasite and leave no symbolic residue.

Like Sontag, Ihab Hassan sees silence and literalness as central elements in our contemporary aesthetics. He associates Burroughs with a "literature of silence [which] manages to deny the time-honored function of literature [...] it aspires to an impossible concreteness" ("Silence" 76). Among those "time honoured functions of literature" denied by Burroughs are its functions as a medium for transcendent metaphorical meaning and as a vehicle for moral dualism. But the literature of silence,
as practiced by William Burroughs, is not only a literature of denial and destruction but of liberation. "Behind the appeals for silence", Sontag argues, "lies the wish for a perceptual and cultural clean slate [...] the liberation of the artist from himself, of art from the particular artwork, of art from history, of spirit from matter, of the mind from its perceptual and intellectual limitations". Like radical theory, Burroughs' fiction offers a glimpse into the space beyond limits, into an open realm which lies "beyond man and humanism".
NOTES AND REFERENCES


30. Mary McCarthy traces the scientific definition of the term “mosaic” which appears so often in *NL*: “a plant-mottling caused by a virus”. She goes on to describe Burroughs’ planetary perspective in which “history shrivels into a mere wrinkling or furrowing of the surface, as in ... one of those pieced-together aerial photographs known in the trade as (again) mosaics” (*Writing* 45). The mosaic style of *Naked Lunch*, for McCarthy, is directly linked to Burroughs’ scientific and science-fiction vision, the vision which will dominate the cut-up novels.


38. *TM*, p. 32.


41. Burroughs draws this notion from Wilhelm Reich’s theories about human orgasm in Reich’s *The Functions of the Orgasm*, (New York: Noonday Press, 1971).

42. *Research – 40.*

43. *TM*, p. 3.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 34.


46. *TM*, p. 32.


60. *NL*, p. xii.


67. *NL*, pp. 133-34.


73. Ibid., p. 41.
74. Ibid., p. 41.
75. NL, p. 224.
76. Ibid., p. 133.
77. Ibid., p. 224.
78. Ibid., p. 229.
79. Ibid., p. 106.
80. Ibid., p. 121.
81. Ibid., p. 144.
82. Ibid., p. 169.
83. Ibid., p. 177.
84. Ibid., p. 221.
85. Ibid., p. 221.
86. Ibid., p. 61.
91. *NL*, p. 110.

92. Jennie Skerl explains Burroughs’ position as a recognition that we cannot get rid of body and word but we can regulate them (72). Burroughs describes in the *Rolling Stone* interview the “optional” position he eventually takes in regard to flesh as well as language: “The more precise your manipulation or use of words is, the more you know what you are actually dealing with, what the word actually is. And by knowing what it actually is, you can supersede it” (Palmer 53).


Critics are divided on the significance of the shock effect of Burroughs’ work. Lionel Abel argues that “nowadays” the only way for some people to feel in touch with reality is by means of shocking images like those in *Naked Lunch* (109-12); and Ronald DeFeo, writing nine years later, dismisses the novel as trash because social and legal changes have removed its “shock value” (150-53). On the other side of the issue, Clive Bush argues that through Burroughs’ work we learn that “our incapacity to face [Conrad’s ‘The horror! The horror!’] may exist in proportion to its power over us” (128). In other words, Burroughs’ aim is not to shock us but to defuse the shock effect, the horror effect, of certain images.


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